

# Ohr Yisrael

The Light of Israel

by

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(1810-1883)

Founder of the Mussar Movement

English Translation

*In Memory of Avraham Chaim ben David*

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

[1] The Rambam, may his memory be for a blessing, in the third chapter of *Shemonah Perakim* wrote, and this is his language: "The Sages of old said that the soul has health and sickness, just as the body has health and sickness. And the health of the soul is that its disposition be such that it constantly performs good and appropriate actions. And its sickness is that its disposition be such that it constantly performs bad and reprehensible actions. And just as bodily invalids, when they know their sickness, will ask physicians and inform them what needs to be done, and they will warn them, so too, the invalids of souls need to ask the wise men, who are the physicians of souls, and they will heal them with the craft by which they heal the character traits of the soul." Thus far his words, examine there. And similarly, the Rambam wrote in the second chapter of *Hilkhot De'ot* to attribute the sickness of the soul to the sickness of the body, examine there.

[2] And behold, just as in the processes of the body's well-being and its affairs, its vitality, health, and structure, it is already known that in general from generation to generation, human strength grows weaker. Until our generation, which through our many transgressions, health has diminished and weakness has prevailed, known are sickness and suffering from every plague and every disease, encompassing a great number of people. Behold, just so it is in

the processes of the soul's well-being; it, the life of the soul, will not stand firm in its place. Generation after generation, the spiritual state grows poorer, the soul's health increasingly deficient, struck and afflicted by the sickness of the soul, their number increasing from time to time.

[3] Indeed, whereas in past generations, over the span of an entire generation, from fathers to sons' sons, a change in the state of Torah and reverence was perceived relative to the preceding generation, now, in this last generation, alas, due to our many transgressions, over the course of but a few years, a new spirit has swept over it, carrying on its wings a multitude of transformations and countless changes. Already, a great alteration is seen and recognized in the weakness and laxity of the soul, in Torah, reverence, and the service of God, blessed be His Name, for they are diminishing and waning, until this evil time, when the maladies of the soul have encompassed almost all flesh. May God have mercy.

[4] And when we survey with the eye of discernment the state of Torah and Yirah in general, in which of them the malady of the soul has more greatly prevailed to cause harm, eye to eye we shall see that there is no comparison between the weakness of Torah and the feebleness of Yirah. For behold, despite all the affliction that has befallen our holy Torah, the degra-

dation of its value and the desolation of its gates, nevertheless, the promise of the Giver of Torah, blessed be His Name, is that His testimony will not be forgotten from the mouth of the seed of Jacob. It is this that has stood us in good stead even today, for the voice is the voice of Jacob, heard from the houses of study, and the gates of Zion, distinguished by Halakha, are open wide. And thus, praised be God, are found pure of heart, who support it with the Lawgiver, with their staffs.

**[5]** However, truly, awe has descended wondrously, from the heights of the heavens to the hidden depths of the station, in a manner exceedingly dreadful. With nothing to restrain and nothing to abandon, with no support and no prop, the ways of awe are desolate, the gates of Divine service are barren. Sins have multiplied exceedingly, evil character traits rule with all might and strength. They will corrupt and make abominable every good portion in the inheritance of God. They will inflame and burn the foundations of awe and service. Those who speak slander have prevailed, those who fear sin are despised. The one who turns from evil is raging. Falsehood clothes itself in the mantle of righteousness, and truth is absent from the earth.

**[6]** Furthermore, observe that what was formerly in Israel, where Torah and reverence were whole together, like twin gazelles, they clung together and did not separate. All possessors of Torah were also adorned with the pearls of reverence; in proportion to their wisdom was also their reverence. Behold now, because of our many transgressions, the bundle has almost been rent asunder, the bonds have been severed, and the connection that binds them together has been cut off. And ultimately, in the absence of reverence, Torah too will fade away, Heaven forbid, may the Lord have mercy.

**[7]** Indeed, concerning the ailments of the body, in contrast to the multiplying diseases, the wisdom of medicine is broad and has risen to prominence. The wise physicians labor con-

stantly to expand the scope of its activity, to understand and to gain insight into the roots of the diseases. And by virtue of discerning wisdom and experience, they discover from time to time new remedies that were not known before. So numerous are those who diligently study the wisdom of medicine; as the diseases have multiplied, so too have physicians and remedies multiplied.

**[8]** Indeed, the portion of the lives of souls and their ailments is not like these. The sick multiply, the diseases intensify, the weaknesses strengthen, the paths of healing are sealed; there are no physicians and remedies, no healer and balm, no cure and recovery.

**[9]** "Were it not for the Lord who was with us," let Israel now say. "Were it not for the Lord who was with us," let those who fear the Lord now say. For by the Lord's compassion for His people, behold, even in this last generation, He sent us the Teacher of Righteousness, a faithful shepherd, a savior and master, to revive a great multitude with the life of the soul, to heal the sick and the wounded, to cure the ailments of souls, and to restore them to life. Indeed, this is the esteemed, the brilliant, the great Rabbi, the foremost luminary of our generation, the pious and humble master, the light of the world, renowned to the ends of the earth, our master and teacher, Rabbi Yisrael of Salant, may his righteous soul be remembered for generations. His greatness, his righteousness, his piety, his humility, and his holiness are already known and famous throughout the world.

**[10]** And behold, more than he was a Gaon and a Chasid, he also merited and caused the multitude to merit, to a very exceptional degree. For he illuminated the eyes of the House of Israel with his Torah and his reverence for God, and he labored and toiled all his days to establish the falling booth of reverence for God, and to raise its horn, to connect it to the Torah as it was in Israel in former times, to heal the sicknesses of souls, and to return their hearts to our Father in Heaven. With the sweetness of his

lips, he turned many away from sin, and satisfied every afflicted soul with the reverence for God, blessed be His Name.

**[11]** He established many disciples, and devoted his soul to them to guide them, to teach them the way of God and the knowledge of understanding, to plant and to root in their hearts the fear of God and upright and pleasing character traits, and to instruct them in the ways of serving God, blessed be His Name.

**[12]** And above all, these are His mighty deeds and awesome acts, for He devised wondrously and magnified understanding, to justify the multitudes for generation after generation, to bring a healing balm and a remedy for the ailments of souls, to restore them to life, through the wondrous strategy of studying Mussar with heartfelt emotion. For He balanced and investigated, and taught knowledge to the people, wisdom and ethics, a comprehensive salve and cure for the sickness of the soul, and to be saved from the fear and snares of the evil inclination. To establish fixed times each day to study books of reverence and ethics, with a sincere heart, with fervent lips, with a voice that arouses sorrow and sadness, and the stirring of the soul. And indeed, this study, salvation and healing in its wings, reverence for God and righteous humility in its wake, teaches man wisdom and knowledge, righteousness, justice, and uprightness. And every proper, precious, and desirable trait.

**[13]** And behold, our master, the Gaon, the pious, the holy of Israel, may his memory be for a blessing, whom God sent before us as a pillar of fire, to illuminate the eyes of the House of Israel with Torah and fear of God, and opened to us the gates of light, through the method of studying fear of God and Mussar. He dedicated his life to this, all his days, to establish the remedies of this study of fear of God and Mussar with profound engagement, and to lay paths for it among the upright of heart who possess understanding, and likewise to give it momentum among the people, to broaden the custom in this matter, whereby many will traverse

it, and knowledge and fear of God will increase among Israel. And he stirred the world in this, as is known and famous, and God's desire succeeded in his hand, and from Heaven he was granted the merit to grant merit to the many in this, and to bring about salvation in the land for the life of the soul. For through this tested remedy of studying fear of God and Mussar, many have been uplifted and have also gained strength, in the fear of God and desirable character traits. And it shall be for them as springs of salvation, the salvation of the soul, whether little or much, each person according to his worth and disposition, and thus the knowledge of the fear of God will increase among Israel.

**[14]** And behold, "Great are the righteous in their death" (Talmud, Berakhot 18a), for just as there is no number to the legions whom he benefited during his life, so too, even after the Ark of the Covenant has been hidden away, and a pious one has vanished from the earth, his intentions and his good thoughts, which he thought concerning his people, to benefit and enlighten them with understanding in the fear of God, blessed be His Name, have not vanished. For every action of a righteous person is for the life of the soul. Blessed be God, it remains with us for survival until this day. And although the dust has returned to the dust, and the eyes of flesh shall not see him, nevertheless, his spirit still walks among the living, and the light of Israel has not been extinguished, the light of his Torah, his fear of God, and his good path of ethical conduct, striving, shining, and still illuminating today, to enlighten the eyes of the pure of heart, the upright of heart, in the fear of God and His service, blessed be His Name.

**[15]** For among the great of his disciples who took refuge in the shadow of his teachings, and drank his waters that flowed from the Holy, and merited to stand before him and receive from him the way of God, they upheld his path, the path of holiness, and labored to disseminate the Torah of their master and his good path of ethical instruction, to merit the masses, to draw souls to the study of reverence for God and eth-

ical instruction, and to quench them with living waters which they drew from the Holy One of Israel, of blessed memory, from the words of his wisdom and his ethical teachings in reverence for God, may His name be blessed. And blessed is God, for the study of ethical instruction has been established as a statute in several great yeshivas, and in several assemblies of Torah scholars, to set aside a brief hour each day, to ponder books of reverence and ethical instruction, to learn to revere the honored and awesome God.

**[16]** And likewise, a spark of the light of Israel and His holiness shone, to illuminate also the face of the East, in the holy place, Zion and Jerusalem. For even there, in holiness, were found some remnants whom the Lord calls, from the disciples of his disciples, dwellers in tents of Torah, those who cause her war to sit at her gates, and they established among themselves the holy path of the study of reverence and ethical conduct. And upon their ways shone her light, that the forces in Torah may grow strong, and pure reverence for the Lord.

**[17]** And behold, our master, the Gaon, the pious one, may his memory be for a blessing, was a flowing stream, a source of wisdom and knowledge, of fear of God and intellectual ethics. One's ear would never be filled with hearing the ways of his wisdom and his understanding in the service of God, blessed be His Name, and the admonitions of his ethics, from whose lips honey dripped, sweet words that heal the soul. However, we were not privileged that his holy words be written by him with a pen of iron and lead upon a tablet, for he never wrote in a book, neither the ways of his wisdom in the majority of his Torah, nor the depth of his understanding in the fear of God and His service. Even concerning the matter of learning fear and ethics, the object of his spirit's desire and the thought of his heart, he wrote nothing except the essay of the Letter of Ethics, which has been printed several times, and it all revolves around the path of learning ethics. Likewise, the two discourses printed from him in the book

*Tevunah*, which carry from his words lofty and guarded matters in the wisdom of fear and the ways of character traits, and there he speaks but a little also concerning the matter of learning fear and ethics.

**[18]** Therefore, in days and years past, I set my heart to search with a thorough search, perhaps I will find something of his holy words concerning the fear of God. And especially concerning the study of fear [of God] and ethics, I labored, and with God's help, I found a hidden treasure from the holy handwriting of my master, of blessed memory. These were isolated letters, few in quantity but great in quality, which he wrote to his students and close associates, to strengthen their hearts in the fear of God, and in the study of fear [of God] and ethics. They are precious hidden treasures, more valuable than pearls.

**[19]** And for this reason, I, the writer, who am one of his disciples, and merited to stand before him, to pour water on his hands, and to serve him as a servant before his master, and he also drew me very close, and I merited to constantly hear words of the living God, clearly emanating from his holy and pure mouth, concerning the ways of reverence for God and His service, may He be blessed, the admonitions of his ethical teachings in general, and specifically concerning the study of reverence and ethics, which he proclaimed righteousness in a great assembly, and which he expounded particularly before his disciples, and likewise he singled out discourse before remnants of his disciples, whom he knew to be vessels fit to receive influence, and he gave his soul for them, to single out discourse with them, and to guide them to teach them the way of God. Likewise, I set my heart to contemplate his holy service, along with his righteousness, his piety, and his cherished attributes, and the eyes of the light of Israel and his holy one were illuminated.

**[20]** And therefore, I have found it incumbent upon myself to redeem His inheritance, and to gather the multitude of His holy letters, which

are scattered and dispersed, so that they may be arranged and preserved, and to disseminate them throughout the world with the help of God, for numerous and manifold benefits, as we shall mention them one by one.

**[21]** Since His holy words are cherished by the House of Israel to an unparalleled degree, and all yearn to drink thirstily from His words, and the Epistle of Mussar from him has been printed many, many times, therefore I have seen fit, without vow, with the help of God, to bring to light also His holy letters, wherein all who seek the will of God, blessed be His Name, will rejoice, and all the upright of heart will delight therein.

**[22]** B) Indeed, as it is today, thanks be to God, there are many who adhere to the study of reverence (yirah), who have not seen the wondrous light, the light of Israel and its Holy One, and who hear his words regarding the obligation of this study only from hearsay. Therefore, these letters will serve as eyes, for they will spread a radiant light upon his understanding, his perspective, and his resolve concerning the study of reverence and Mussar. For he has grasped the beauty of its value and its efficacy, and its immense benefit, to a very great extent, for it is sun and healing in its wings, to hasten salvation and to cleanse the sicknesses of souls. Through it, the world will be saved. And indeed, the foundation of the benefit is precisely the study accompanied by the soul's engagement. Likewise, the obligation of its study is a comprehensive obligation that applies to all souls without exception. And every person who merits to awaken and to rouse, and to guide people to the study of Mussar, his reward is with him and his deeds before him, to be among those who justify the multitude, who will shine with the light of life, and like stars forever and ever will they gleam. And all the matters which I have written in my treatise, "Sha'arei Or" (Gates of Light), concerning the foundations of the ways of studying reverence and Mussar, which we merited to hear from a holy mouth, the reader will find scattered here and there within his holy

letters.

**[23]** Besides the several insights found in his letters regarding the ways of serving God, may His name be blessed, they ignite flames of fire with the fear of God, may His name be blessed, and they inflame the hearts towards the study of reverence and ethics. They penetrate the kidneys and the heart, even though his pen is the pen of a swift scribe, and his tongue is a tongue of astonishing learning. And whoever reads his holy words with attention, his soul will be moved with the fear of God, and his heart will be drawn to the study of reverence and ethics.

**[24]** From the abundance of his letters, we learn and take ethical instruction, to what extent our Rebbe, of blessed memory, dedicated his soul to bring merit to the masses. For even when he was far away, he did not forget to be gracious to the soul in distress, nor did he hide the light of his countenance. He did not neglect to write letters, and to hasten his words to his disciples and his close associates, to strengthen their hearts in the fear of God, may He be blessed, and in the study of reverence and ethical conduct. Likewise, to rouse and awaken them to bring merit to others along with them, to strengthen weak hands for the study of reverence and ethical conduct, and to support faltering knees. So that they may learn to fear God, may He be blessed, and walk in His ways all their days.

**[25]** There are indeed several reasons that sometimes cause a person's heart to turn away from this precious study of the study of reverence and ethics. Even more so, they can cast opprobrium and deficiency upon the sacred things of Heaven, and even draw a crooked judgment upon them. As it is written in the book *Divrei Yehoshua*, Ma'amar 1, Chapter 7, and this is his language: "Indeed, the things that prevent a person from tasting and seeing the goodness of this study of ethical study are seven, etc." And the seventh impediment is envy. For many will be found who hinder this study with sufficient claims, for one who has not used it suf-

ficiently and is not compelled by it, and all the more so for one who has not tasted its flavor and has not seen its light. For his heart will incline to their words, which they will disguise. And in truth, all their claims do not proceed from the insight of their wisdom, but rather spring from the corrupt source of envy, whose flames are flames of fire, and it is strong as Sheol. And is it true that the envy of scribes is good for increasing wisdom, but not for diminishing it, for implanting reverence in the hearts of people? But not for abandoning it. Thus far the language of his pleasant words.

**[26]** And to this end, behold, the person who has already tasted the precious flavor of this study, the study of Mussar, will enlighten and understand of himself that it is a desirable treasure in the dwelling of righteousness, a tree of life that heals the soul, and there is in it no entanglement or crookedness. And he will not listen to the voice of whisperers, nor will all the winds in the world move him from his place. However, the person who himself is devoid of the ways of knowing the essence of the study of awe and Mussar, for he has not tried it, nor has he seen in its light, will not recognize the grace of its value and its effect, nor will he understand the nature of its virtue. And when he hears words of slander about it, who is there who will cast a blemish upon it, and cover it with words? And like one who throws sparks, he will stand astonished and silent, and will not know how to judge a judgment. Behold, for this person, these writings will be as eyes, to see the sun that shines in the midst of the heavens, to understand and to be enlightened that the obligation of the study of Mussar in all its details, proceeds from a holy place, from the Mighty Shepherd, the Crown of the Crowned Ones, the Righteous, the Pious, and the Humble, the Light of the World, the Holy One of Israel, may his memory be blessed.

**[27]** The Sages of Kabbalah and the Sages of Inquiry, in their parables, liken the world in its entirety to a roaring sea with its multitude of waves, and the human body to a ship sailing in the heart of the sea. This is explained in the Holy

Zohar, Parashat Vayakhel, and in the commentary of the Gra, of blessed memory, on the Book of Jonah. And to praise in the book the aspect of the world, "The world is a raging sea, of great depth," etc.

**[28]** Let us understand with discernment, for just as schools have been established for this wisdom, the craft of seafaring, to teach the captain the way of a ship in the heart of the sea, to guide a great vessel across many waters, even in times of storm and tempest, so too this small vessel, sailing in the heart of the sea of the world, requires great and profound wisdom to navigate it smoothly, lest it lose its way, and to guard it from every disaster and misfortune. For the sea is raging, and a spirit of tempest and storm, from the storm of the evil inclination, is blowing strongly. The waves of desires and corrupt character traits rise above like a flood, and the vessel is pushed among rocks of stumbling and reefs. These are the many trials wherein the vessel can easily capsize and drown in the depths.

**[29]** And behold, like a ship's captain, who directs a great vessel, filled with thousands of people, whose course is set upon the great sea, who has been schooled in this wisdom from his youth, and before whom all the stars of heaven and their paths have been revealed, knows and recognizes the stormy winds, to steer the ship against them, and has grown old in the ways of the sea, that only he can give a way upon the sea, and a path through raging waters, and how much more so when a great tempest is stirred upon the face of the sea and its waves rise high, and the ship loses its way, tossed and moved within the breakers of the sea, for then all the passengers lift their eyes, only to the captain, for he will save it from the flood of many waters, and guide them to their desired destination. But is it possible that a person will come who has not learned this wisdom like him, and moreover, if he cannot even steer a small fishing boat, that he will come to compete with the captain, to unfurl a sail and mast, to move the hearts of the passengers, to manage the ship according to his word:



**[30]** So it is with the journey of this small vessel, sailing in the heart of a raging sea. Behold, our Master, the esteemed and righteous Gaon, may his merit protect us, is like the captain, skilled and experienced in this wisdom from his youth, to navigate the ship through the tempests of the sea, by the miracle and strength of the wisdom of reverence and ethics, which he labored and toiled in all his days. He knows and recognizes the winds blowing from the storm of the evil inclination, to guide the ship against them without disaster. And he has already grown old in the ways of reverence and ethics, and he provides us, in this raging sea, a path to save the ship from the flood of many waters, lest it sink into the depths of desire and evil character traits, like lead in mighty waters, through the study of reverence and ethics. Now, who can contend with this giant among giants? Indeed, it is only to him that we lift our eyes, to hear his voice and his counsel, and by his light we shall set out and go, to follow him in the path of uprightness, in the good way of his ethics, to learn to fear the honored and awesome Lord, and to walk in His ways for our good all the days.

**[31]** And behold, since the collection of these sacred letters is small in quantity and not enough for a book, I have resolved to add to them many supplements, so that they will eventually form a book. And all of them will be directed towards one goal: to awaken the hearts to the fear of God, and to the study of reverence and ethical conduct, and these are they:

**[32]** To his holy collection of letters, I have added some matters which we heard from his holy mouth, and likewise I have appended the two articles printed from him in the book *Te-vunah*, and also the *Igeret HaMusar* [Letter of Ethics], so that all his words in his holy handwriting may be united. And likewise, two letters from the teacher of the great, pious Rabbi [Rabbi Yisrael Salanter] of blessed memory.

**[33]** To make known a little from the much of the greatness of the wisdom, fear of God, righteousness, and piety of our master, the holy Is-

rael, may his memory be for a blessing, and his path and conduct in holiness, and how many of his holy words concerning the ways of God and the attributes, and at the end will also come a little from the merit of his teacher, the great luminary, the holy of God, our honored master, Rabbi Yosef Zundil, may his memory be for a blessing, from Slonim.

**[34]** 3. A lengthy discourse on the study of reverence (yir'ah) and ethics (musar), which I have composed in my humility. It concerns the obligation to study reverence in general, to explain that its foundation lies in the holy mountains, in the words of our Sages, of blessed memory, and in the words of several Geonim and Hasidim. It also addresses how its path has been concealed, and likewise, the entire endeavor of the righteous one, the holy one of Israel, of blessed memory, concerning the study of reverence and ethics. What did the righteous one accomplish and what did he innovate? And all its processes and details which we received from a holy mouth. And how the study of ethics became renowned in the world in the name of the holy one of Israel, of blessed memory.

**[35]** D) Various essays on reverence and ethical conduct, and the paths of repentance, which I have prepared in my humility, and which may be of benefit to those who seek the will of God, blessed be His name.

**[36]** All these matters shall be called by their appropriate names. Behold, all the words of my master, of blessed memory, his collected letters, and his other holy words, shall be called "Ohr Yisrael" (Light of Israel). And the matters pertaining to his way and his holy conduct shall be called "Netivot Ohr" (Paths of Light).

**[37]** And concerning the matters that have emanated from me, behold, my treatise on the study of reverence (yirah) and ethics (musar) shall be called "Sha'arei Or" (Gates of Light), and the treatises on reverence and ethics which I have prepared shall be called "Kochvei Or" (Stars of Light).

**[38]** And may it be the will before our Father in Heaven, that the light of Israel shall be a light for eternity, and many shall walk by its light in the path of its good ethical teachings. May knowledge and the fear of God increase among Israel, and may its light continue to shine until the day is established, when the entire earth shall be filled with knowledge, to fear the honored and

awesome God, and may we merit to serve Him as one, together with all of Israel, united. These are the words of his student, who writes on Monday, the 23rd of Tevet, the year 5660, here in Kovno.

**[39]** Yitzchak, son of the Rabbi, the esteemed [title] Moshe of Lazer, formerly a Rabbi in the royal city of Petersburg.

## Chapter 2

# Shaarei Ohr – Gates of Light

12 Chapters

### Shaarei Ohr – Chapter 1

שערי אור -- פרק 1

**[1]** Regarding the study of awe and ethical conduct

**[2]** Our Master, the Gaon, the Pious, of blessed memory. He wrote in one of his letters, and this is his wording: All things in the world are composed in their emergence into light from cause and effect, etc. Every cause is caused by the cause preceding it, etc. Ultimately, there is no effect without a cause from which the effect is born, etc. And there is no cause which is not born from the causing cause, etc. Thus far his pure wording.

**[3]** And behold, this is known and understood by every wise of heart and discerning person. For according to the measure of the greatness of the preciousness of each surrounding thing, so is the ultimate purpose. Likewise, according to it, the operative causes that surround and bring about the fulfillment of the ultimate purpose will increase or grow. And for this reason, when the service of God, blessed be His Name, is the most desired, precious, and honored ultimate purpose that can be found in the world, for

its sake God, blessed be His Name, prepared all of creation in general, and man, the choicest of creatures, in particular. Therefore, let us attain understanding and pursue knowledge, what are the operative causes that surround, so that from them will be born the sublime and precious ultimate purpose:

**[4]** And when we delve into the Divine Word from the Books of Scripture, and what is accepted among us from the words of our Sages, of blessed memory, we find that the primary cause for all Torah and Divine Service is the fear of God, may His Name be blessed. And this is the pivot and the center around which all the steps of a person's walk will revolve – all his actions, his deeds, his stratagems, and all the ways of his conduct with God and man. And this is the foundation and root of all Torah and commandment. King David, peace be upon him, said, "The beginning of wisdom is the fear of God." And Solomon, his son, said in his wisdom, "The beginning of wisdom is the fear of God." And thus he concluded the Book of Ecclesiastes: "The end of the matter, all having been heard: Fear God, and keep His commandments; for this is the whole duty of man."

**[5]** And our Sages, of blessed memory, said in the Gemara, Yoma, page 72b: "What is meant

by the verse, 'Why is there a price in the hand of a fool' (Proverbs 17:16)?" [The verse is then applied to] "Woe to the enemies of the Torah scholars who are occupied with Torah but lack the fear of Heaven. See there." And in Chapter 3 of Avot, we learned: "Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa says: Whoever's fear of sin precedes his wisdom, his wisdom endures. And whoever's wisdom precedes his fear of sin, his wisdom does not endure." And in Berachot (page 33b), Rabbi Yochanan said in the name of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai: "The Holy One, blessed be He, has in His treasury nothing but an 'ark' (storehouse) of the fear of Heaven." And even more so, our Sages, of blessed memory, said in Shabbat (page 31a): "Any person who possesses Torah but lacks the fear of Heaven is like a treasurer to whom the inner keys were entrusted, but the outer keys were not given to him, so he cannot enter." And Rashi explained: "The fear of Heaven is like..." Thus, if one is God-fearing, he becomes scrupulous to guard and to perform [the commandments]. But if not, he does not care about his Torah. See there. And it is understood from this that the fear of Heaven is the outer key, with which one opens the gate to God, the gates of Torah and Divine service.

**[6]** Indeed, what is the essence of the fear of Heaven? Which is the key to open the gates of righteousness. It is the cause for serving God, blessed be His Name, to fulfill the Torah and the commandment. It is known that there are two aspects in the fear of God, blessed be His Name. And the sages of fear and Mussar refer to them by name: the fear of punishment and the fear of exaltation. See in the book *Chovot HaLevavot*, Chapter 6 of the Gate of Love of God, and its wording is: "And fear is on two faces..." One of them is the fear of His punishment and His trial... And the second is fear for His honor and His exaltation and the greatness of His might... See there. And similarly, it is written in the book *Mesillat Yesharim*, Chapter 24, which states its wording: "There is the fear of punishment. And this is the first kind. And there is the fear of exaltation, and this is the second kind..." The fear of punishment, in its simple sense, is that

a person fears transgressing God's command because of the punishments that are for transgressions, whether for the body or for the soul... And the fear of exaltation is that a person distances himself from sins and does not commit them for the sake of His great honor, blessed be His Name.

**[7]** And behold, within the category of fear of punishment, there is also the fear of the loss of reward for a mitzvah. For just as one must fear the punishment of His blessed Name, so too must one strengthen in his heart the love of the true reward, above all the desires of this world, to be yearning and longing to behold the pleasantness of God. This is the good hidden for the righteous, in return for the reward of their mitzvot, which no eye has seen. And to fear the loss of this great reward, God forbid.

And similarly, within the category of awe of exaltation, there is also the love of God, blessed be His Name. For these two are almost of one kind. And as explained in Sotah (page 31a), Rava said to those two students who were shown in a dream, etc., "You are both completely righteous Sages. One [acts] from love, and one from fear." However, despite this, the level of love is greater than that of awe of exaltation. And as explained there: It is taught, Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar says, "Greater is one who acts out of love than one who acts out of fear," etc. See there.

**[8]** Indeed, although the ultimate goal of the fear of God is certainly the high level of awe-inspired reverence, it is known that the fear of God is the beginning of knowledge, which is the fear of punishment. And the holy Hasid, Rabbi Chaim Vital, may his memory be a blessing, wrote in the preface to the holy book *Etz Chaim*, and this is his language: "And whoever comes to purify and draw near, the first of all is the fear of God, to attain the fear of punishment. For the awe-inspired reverence, which is the inner fear, they will only attain through greatness of wisdom." Thus far his words, examine there. And behold, the wise of reverence have written something greater than this: that

without the fear of punishment, one cannot ascend at all to the supreme level of awe-inspired reverence. And similarly, the Gaon Rabbi Meir Leibush Malbim, may his memory be a blessing, wrote in his commentary on the Torah for the portion of Yitro, and this is his language: "Indeed, the wise of heart have already explained that it is impossible to immediately reach this great level, to fear awe-inspired reverence. And it is necessary that we first fear the fear of punishment, and from it we ascend to the exalted level, which is awe-inspired reverence." Thus far his words. And similarly, our master, the Gaon Rabbi Yitzchak Blazer, may his memory be a blessing, wrote in his *Igeret HaMusar* (Letter of Admonition): "That the faith that hovers within us, that God judges to give to a person according to the fruit of his deeds, this is the first of our steps towards His blessed service." Examine there.

**[9]** The reason for the matter is, beyond the simple explanation, clear to every wise heart: it is impossible to ascend to the heights of spiritual levels in a single leap. The path to acquiring great discernment must be gradual. Initially, one must fear His punishment, and thereafter, one must also fear the greatness of His blessed Name.

There is another principle within this concerning the ways of reverence. For it is explicitly stated by an early authority who preceded the Rambam in the Laws of the Foundations of the Torah, Chapter 1, regarding the ways of reverence: that there is the reverence of punishment and the reverence of loftiness. This is his wording:

"And we have found in the Torah two verses. The one indicates that reverence leads to the performance of all the commandments, as it is said, 'And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you...' (Deuteronomy 10:12). And the second indicates that we were not commanded with all the commandments except so that through them we might arrive at reverence, as it is said, 'And the Lord commanded us to do all these statutes...' (Deuteronomy 6:24)."

The resolution between them is that reverence has three extremities. The first extremity is its beginning, and it precedes all commandments. For one who fears the king will not transgress his words. And concerning this, it is said, "Whoever's fear of sin precedes his wisdom..." (Pirkei Avot 3:17). The second part is the end of reverence, and it is the true reverence. A person will not attain it except after performing all the commandments. And when one reaches this level, they will transition from it to the level of love, for love will never exist except after reverence.

**[10]** The explanation of this matter is as follows: It is known that the components of Divine service are two. One is the component of action, which is the fulfillment of the Torah and the commandments in practice, by turning away from evil and doing good. The second is the manner of service in the purification of thought. And there are many levels within this. Indeed, the foundation of Divine service, without which it is impossible, is the fulfillment of action in practice. And through the fulfillment of the entire Torah and the commandments, one is called a servant of God, blessed be His Name. And he is beloved and cherished before the Omnipresent. And the purification of thought is only for the perfection of the service. And as was elaborated upon this in the book *Nefesh HaChaim*, see there.

**[11]** And behold, the fear of punishment has its foundation in the animalistic or natural soul. For the essence of the power of fear is also planted in every living creature. And therefore, even when a person follows the perversity of his heart, afflicted and struck by his transgressions and sins, it is not beyond him to possess this fear, the fear of punishment. And for this reason, this fear precedes all the commandments. For it is truly a cause to consume iniquity and seal sin, and to be fearful and trembling to observe the entire Torah and every commandment.

**[12]** Indeed, the lofty level of awe of the Exalted One. This is the complete knowledge and intellectual recognition to fear and tremble

from the greatness of His blessed Name. Behold, the material desires and the reprehensible character traits, and the idols of transgressions and rebellions, are a veil separating them from the sacred. And as long as one does evil in the eyes of God, transgressing His covenant and rebelling against His blessed Will, one cannot bring this great awe into oneself, nor can one reach this level in any matter. This is only possible when one detaches oneself somewhat from one's physicality, and casts off from oneself one's soiled garments – the vanities of the world and the contemptible desires. And one refines one's dross from corrupt character traits, and sanctifies oneself from the impurity of the body, to guard and fulfill the entire Torah and commandment in practice. Then one will be able to bear wings, and soar on the wings of awe of the Exalted One, to understand and comprehend the truth of His blessed Name's exaltedness, to fear and tremble from the dread of His exaltedness and the splendor of His glory, and to ascend to the heights of levels, to love Him and to cleave to Him, blessed is His Name.

**[13]** It is found that the high level of awe of the Exalted One and love of God, blessed be His name, are brought about by the performance and observance of all the Torah and the commandment. However, the performance of the Torah and the commandment itself, in action, is brought about solely by the first cause, which is the fear of punishment.

**[14]** And behold, the fear of the Blessed God, may His Name be exalted, besides being a cause for observing and fulfilling all the Torah and the commandment, is itself an ultimate end. For it is the positive commandment, "You shall fear the Lord your God." And all who enumerate the commandments have counted it among the 613. Behold, even concerning the ultimate purpose of the commandment, the Rambam, may his memory be for a blessing, wrote in *Sefer HaMitzvot*. For this positive commandment is the fear of punishment. And examine there what he wrote, and this is his language: "Commandment 4 is that He commanded us to be-

lieve in His fear, may He be exalted, and to be afraid of Him, and not to be like the heretics who walk according to the stubbornness of their heart and in defiance. But rather, we shall fear His punishment at all times. And this is His saying, 'You shall fear the Lord your God.'" Thus far his words. Examine there.

**[15]** However, it appears that his intention is not to negate the lofty level of awe of the Exalted One from this verse. For at the beginning of Chapter 2 of the Laws of the Foundations of the Torah, he wrote: "This honored and awesome God, it is a commandment to love Him and to fear Him, as it is said, 'You shall love...' and it is said, 'You shall fear the Lord your God.' And what is the way to His love and fear? When a person contemplates His wondrous deeds and creations, etc., immediately he loves, etc. And when he considers these matters themselves, immediately he recoils backward and is frightened, and knows that he is a small, lowly, dark creature, etc. See there." And indeed, this is the way of the awe of the Exalted One.

However, it appears that this positive commandment, "You shall fear the Lord your God," truly encompasses all aspects of fear. For knowledge dictates that one must fear and be apprehensive of Him, blessed be His Name, both the fear of punishment and the awe of the Exalted One. Likewise, wherever our Sages, may their memory be blessed, have mentioned "fear of Heaven," both are included under this name. However, each instance is according to its context.

**[16]** And in any case, regarding what our Sages, of blessed memory, stated: "For fear of Heaven is like external keys," as mentioned above. And this is by way of cause. To be fearful and trembling to guard and to do, according to Rashi's explanation, as noted above. Without a doubt, the intention is concerning the fear of punishment. For this is the primary cause from which the observance of the deed in practice will revolve. To guard and to do and to fulfill all the words of the Torah and the commandment.

And as I have written in the aforementioned earlier explanation, that the beginning of fear is the fear of punishment. And it leads to the performance of all the commandments. And this is what our Sages, of blessed memory, stated in Pirkei Avot: "Whoever's fear of sin precedes his wisdom, his wisdom endures," as mentioned above.

**[17]** And from the outcome of the matter, we shall gain understanding. From what our Sages, may their memory be for a blessing, likened in their wisdom: "Fear of Heaven is like keys." To open with them the gate to God, the gates of Torah and Divine Service. It is understood from this that just as it is impossible to open a closed door with iron and brass locks without a key, so too is it impossible to open the gate to observe, do, and fulfill all the words of Torah and Mitzvah completely, without having in one's hand the key of fear of Heaven. And even if one possesses Torah, he will not be moved to fulfill it, without first being laden with his fill of the fear of God, blessed be His Name.

**[18]** For behold, our master, the Gaon, the Pious, may his memory be for a blessing, wrote in his ethical epistle a clarification of the matter between the approaches. Regarding the essence of the evil inclination and the good inclination, what are they? Is the evil inclination the force of impurity in man that leads him to transgressions, and the good inclination is the force of holiness in man that leads to good? Or is the evil inclination the force of man's desire, which looks towards everything that is pleasant for the moment, and the good inclination is the force of sound intellect that foresees and observes what will result, etc.? And he raised in this that which appears clearly, that both approaches are correct. The evil inclination is the force of desire, and there is also within it the spirit of impurity. And likewise, the good inclination is the sound intellect that sees what will result and foresees from afar, and there is also the spirit of holiness in man. See there.

**[19]** And thus, by virtue of man being dust

from the earth, his heart inclines towards material desires: to eat and to drink and to rejoice; to covet wealth and riches; to love honor and dominion; to don haughtiness and pride to elevate his heart; to delight in carnal pleasures; in every base trait and every contemptible desire.

**[20]** And yet, the inclination of his heart is only evil all day. This is the evil inclination, originating from the spiritual essence. Whom the wisest of all men, in his wisdom, describes in a most awesome vision. As a great king, who surrounds a small city. This is the body with its multitude of forces. And he dedicates war upon it, to conquer and capture it. And as it is written in the book of Ecclesiastes 9:14: "A small city, and few men within it, and a great king came against it, and surrounded it. And built great siege works against it. And there was found in it a poor wise man, etc." And our Sages, may their memory be blessed, expounded in Nedarim, page 32: "A small city, this is the body. And few men within it, these are the limbs. And a great king came against it and surrounded it, this is the evil inclination. And there was found in it a poor wise man, this is the good inclination."

**[21]** It is self-evident that man must always be prepared for battles. With desire, and with the spiritual inclination. Now, with what shall he restrain the spirit of his desire, which is always raging like the roaring of the sea with its waves, ready to swallow a great abyss, for all the desirable things of the world and for the pleasures of mankind? And with what shall he bind the heavy war against the spiritual inclination? This is the great king, the mighty hero, and the revered one, who is free from all preoccupations. He has no wife or children. He does not worry about finding sustenance for his household. Even the vanities of time do not trouble him. And he fulfills his mission and his duty, for which he was created by the will of the Creator, blessed be His name, with all proper diligence, without laziness or slackening of hands. But man, who is weak as a worm, burdened with much preoccupation and labor, which confuses

his mind and corrupts his intellect, falls asleep in the lap of idleness, struck with blindness and a bewildered heart, by means of base desires. How shall he stand against it in the bonds of war, and not fall prey at its feet? Only through the fear of the Lord and the dread of His punishment, blessed be His name, which is a strong refuge and a high fortress, by which one can be exalted against every enemy and avenger. For fear has strength in its power to bind the fetters of his desire and the stubbornness of his heart, lest it break forth to consume and destroy. And likewise, to be his right hand, to bring the clamor and tempest of the inclination to silence, and to emerge from the war like a victorious hero.

**[22]** All of this the wisest of all men will reveal to us within himself. For indeed, the fear of God is like arrows in the hand of a mighty warrior to fight against the ruler. As it is written there (Ecclesiastes 11:9): "Rejoice, young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth. Walk in the ways of your heart and in the sight of your eyes. But know that for all these things God will bring you to judgment." Our Sages, may their memory be for a blessing, expounded (Shabbat 63a): "Up to here are the words of the evil inclination. From here onwards are the words of the good inclination." Observe there. And this is to say: What was stated, "Rejoice, young man," etc., these are the words of the evil inclination. And what was stated, "But know," etc., these are the words of the good inclination.

**[23]** Here the wisest of all men will clarify for us the nature and essence of this war. Its clamor and all its tumult. For the evil inclination will stand on a siege, the head of the tooth of the rock, the fortress of desire, which overlooks all the desirable things of the world and its pleasures. And the good inclination will turn to another side, and encamp opposite it. It will stand on the hill of awe, which gazes upon the heights of the heavens, in fear of His blessed Name's retribution. This one [the evil inclination] will spread a net to trap him in his desires, saying to him, "Rejoice, young man, in your youth, and

walk in the ways of your heart and in the sight of your eyes. Set delights for your soul, and sweet honey to your palate. And do not look behind you." And this one [the good inclination] will destroy the net with the strength of awe, for he will call to him in the name of the Lord, the God of judgment, and say to him, "Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, for He exacts vengeance and repays. And He will bring to judgment all that is hidden."

**[24]** Indeed, we have observed thus. For even if a person is full and overflowing with the fear of God, behold, the war is prepared before him. For is not the essence of the war the war of desire against fear? And only through the strength of fear can he be empowered to achieve victory and to drive back his enemies. However, if his heart is empty, awakened and void of the fear of God and the dread of His retribution, blessed be His Name, then all hope is lost before him. To stand in the battle lines without a bow and arrows, without a sword and spear. For even if the good inclination cries out, shouts, and its throat is parched from screaming all day, know that for all these things God will bring you to judgment. It will be like the voice of one crying in the wilderness, and there will be no one to hear him, since the fear of God is not before his eyes. He will not fear the terror of the judgment, nor will he be afraid of the dread of the reckoning.

## Shaarei Ohr – Chapter 2

### שערי אור -- פרק 2

**[1]** Indeed, this key of reverence for Heaven and fear of His blessed Name's punishment, from where will it be found? For such a sacred stone will not be found rolling in every street. All passersby will not find it. Nor will any person's hand attain it easily. For it is hidden in the secret of its tent. And around it is a wall, a bolt, and doors. It is shut and locked with bolts of iron and copper. It is hidden from the eyes of many, and they know not its place.



**[2]** For behold, the ways of this fear, of the fear of Heaven and the dread of His punishment, blessed be His Name, are unique in their kind. They are distinct and separate from all other kinds of fear that dominate the world, such as the fear of flesh and blood, or from other calamities of the world. In these cases, fear is natural. Where knowledge and intellect dictate that one must fear and be afraid of something, then by means of knowledge and intellect alone, terror and dread will fall upon a person. For the fear will come to him by necessity, and the senses will be activated without volition. In all the chambers of his heart, he will feel trembling and quaking, and his fear will be evident even on his face. And although it is within a person's power to restrain and suppress his fear, and to act without regard for his fear and dread, as we see in experience, for sometimes out of necessity a person will endanger his life, to walk in dangerous paths and the like – even in doing this to himself, all his bones will tremble from quaking and shivering. For concerning the fear itself, a person has no control over his spirit to imprison it within him, and there is no wisdom or counsel against it, to divert it from his mind and to remove it from his heart.

**[3]** Indeed, the ways of reverence are not like these. For the reverence of Heaven and the fear of His punishment, may His Name be blessed. For this reverence is not inherent in human nature. And faith, knowledge, and the paths of intellect will not bring reverence to penetrate into the chambers of the heart, nor will they affect the senses in any way. As the ways of experience teach us. For behold, a person, with his understanding and intellect, knows and believes that the Lord, may He be blessed, watches and observes all the deeds of humankind, and nothing is hidden from His sight. And likewise, that God will bring into judgment all his deeds, [counting] the number of days of his life, to give to each person according to his ways and the fruit of his deeds. And as the reward of his hands will be done to him. Whether he walks in darkness in the valley of the shadow of death, where many evil and ter-

rible judgments are prepared for him there. Or whether he merits the light in the light of life, to delight in the Lord with eternal pleasures and bliss. However, do these paths of faith truly correspond with the steps of a person's walk and his conduct with God and man?

**[4]** And all this is because this fear, the fear of Heaven, which stems from the power of faith and the paths of intellect, is not inherent in human nature. Nor do the sensory faculties perceive it. Consequently, the fear of God is not before his eyes. He does not fear the dread of judgment, nor is he frightened by the terror of the verdict. He has no dread surrounding him from the fear of terrible and awesome punishments. Even the dread of death does not terrify him. He does not tremble from the piercing heat of its sword, nor does its terror fall upon him. Even at the time he commits some sin and transgression, trembling does not seize him, nor does panic cover him. For he carries out his actions with a correct spirit, in tranquility, peace, and with a settled heart, without any alarm. Likewise, even spiritual bliss, eternal pleasantness and delight, does not capture his heart. Even when he performs a commandment, his soul is not moved, nor does he rejoice in its reward as one who finds great spoil. And similarly, he does not grieve when it is missed.

**[5]** Unless a person sets his heart to labor diligently in seeking the fear of God, wisdom, and ethical instruction, his labor and toil will stand him in good stead. So that he may be able to attain it and establish it within his soul, that the fear of God, blessed be His Name, be spread upon his countenance, and upon all the chambers of his heart. And from the dread of His punishment, blessed be His Name, all the pillars of his being shall tremble, and all his senses shall perceive the fear of God, blessed be His Name, and feel dread and trembling. And likewise, to love and desire spiritual bliss above all worldly desires, and to fear the loss of the great reward. And as our Sages, may their memory be blessed, said in Berachot (fol. 33a), "Everything is in the hands of Heaven except the

fear of Heaven.” Behold, then, it is within a person’s power to attain this fear, the fear of God, blessed be His Name.

**[6]** However, this vision is the essence of the spirit of human beings in the ways of the fear of God, blessed be His Name. It is a hidden wonder and a concealed riddle. First, what is this wondrous vision? Why, in truth, is the fear of God and the dread of His punishment, blessed be His Name, not implanted in the heart of the believing person by nature, without any effort or toil whatsoever, like all the ways of fear from the occurrences of the world, where fear comes by itself in the heart of man out of necessity? And why is the portion of that terrible fire, which blazes in the depths of the abyss with no extinguisher, which consumes from soul to flesh, diminished from the fundamental fire of this world, which is but one part out of sixty of the spiritual fire?

**[7]** 2. The sum of matters is not hidden from man’s eyes, for the eyes of God, blessed be His Name, watch over all a person’s ways, and likewise all his future affairs. Arise for judgment before the throne of the righteous Judge, and all the awesome judgments of God, which are a great abyss. And despite all this, they do not affect the senses, and one does not feel in his heart the awe of Heaven and the fear of His punishment. If so, what more can be gained by this effort to attain the fear of God, blessed be His Name? We have not found its like in the ways of the world. In the ways of fear, from every evil occurrence, for that which reason judges that one ought to fear and be afraid, behold, fear will come of itself, necessarily, without any effort at all. And that which knowledge, from the ways of reason, does not act to instill awe and dread, no effort or stratagem will be of any use at all. And if so, from where will fear be found? And how can it be attained, even through effort and toil?

**[8]** And so it is wondrous. For behold, the ways of the nature of fear are varied and change according to the dispositions of human nature.

There is a person who, by his innate nature, is fearful and tender of heart, fearful even of the sound of a fluttering leaf. Even very distant occurrences and misfortunes will startle him and disturb him from his tranquility. And there is a person who, by his nature, is brave of heart and mighty of spirit, who fears not even the roar of a lion and the cry of a panther, and is not afraid, except when he understands and discerns that a close danger threatens him. And similarly, there is an attitude towards fear that is connected with a person’s knowledge and intellect. For the wise man, his eyes are in his head; from afar he flees from a wicked snare, and he hastens his future, to hasten his escape from the trap of snares. And the fool walks in darkness, his eyes are covered from seeing, and his heart from understanding. He will not see nor contemplate evil, until the snare is spread out at his feet.

**[9]** Indeed, the understanding is thus: that the ways of reverence, of reverence for Heaven and the fear of His chastisement, blessed be His Name, should correspond to a person’s conduct in his ways of fearing the vicissitudes of the world, according to his disposition and nature, and according to his understanding in worldly wisdom. And even though the essence of reverence for Heaven is exceedingly weak, and has no value or comparison with other ways of fearing the vicissitudes of the world, nevertheless, it is fitting that there should at least be a visible and discernible difference in the reverence for Heaven among people of various types: the wise or the foolish, the fearful and tender-hearted or the strong-hearted. And to our astonishment, we see through experience that reverence for the Lord, blessed be His Name, has no correlation whatsoever with the ways of fearing the vicissitudes of the world. It is not bound by a person’s nature and disposition, nor by the understanding of his heart and his wisdom in the ways of knowledge. Therefore, in the ways of conduct of reverence for Heaven, there is no advantage of the wise over the foolish, nor of the fearful and tender-hearted over the strong of spirit and great of heart, for one spirit is upon

them: "Peace, peace to the distant and to the near," and there is no fear.

**[10]** Indeed, the explanation of the matter, in my opinion, is as follows: For the spirit of human beings in the ways of the fear of God, blessed be His Name, is truly loftier than human intellect and more exalted than any thought. For only from the hand of God does one gain understanding. And as we shall explain with God's help. Behold, the Rambam, may his memory be for a blessing, in Chapter 5 of the Laws of Repentance, wrote concerning the matter of free will that is in man's hand. This is a great principle, and it is the pillar of the Torah and the commandment. For there is no one who compels him, nor decrees upon him, nor pulls him towards one of the ways. Rather, he himself, from his own will and his own mind, inclines towards whichever way he desires. And examine there what he wrote, and this is his language: "If God had decreed upon man to be righteous or wicked, or if there were something that pulls man from his essential nature, etc., what place would there be for the entire Torah? And by what judgment and what law would the wicked be punished, or the righteous be rewarded with good, etc." Thus far his words. Examine there.

**[11]** And according to first principles, it is greatly perplexing. After the Blessed Name of Hashem has ordained punishment for transgressors of His commandments, and established just judgments for doers of iniquity, it is true that the measure of punishment increases if one does not heed the voice of Hashem, nor pay heed to His awesome judgments. However, what place is there for the reward of a commandment? Is it not ultimately the case that one is compelled by the fear of punishment to incline oneself towards the path of good? And what does it matter if a person has no internal compulsion or attraction from their inherent nature, if the dread of punishment compels them? And what greater compulsion can there be than this, to walk in the path of the good? If from yesterday, folly is prepared, its fire deepened, its blaze widened, and Sheol below rages to receive him,

to swallow him into its belly, and the burning coals of the world terrify him. If so, where is free will? And what place is there to reward the doers of good?

**[12]** However, with the ways of experience, which our eyes see in the progressions of the ways of reverence for God, blessed be His Name, this wonder is easily resolved. For indeed, this reverence for Heaven is not naturally in the heart of man. He is entirely devoid of it. He has no dread surrounding him from the fear of terrible punishments at all. The netherworld below will not stir him. The Day of Judgment and the verdict will not startle him. The valley of weeping will not frighten him. And whoever labors to attain reverence for God, blessed be His Name, and this reverence compels him to walk in the path of the righteous, behold, this reverence too is his portion and the fruit of his labor. And from His hand this came to him, and he is worthy of reward in righteousness and justice.

**[13]** And with this, the solution to the hidden riddle is found, from the progressions of the ways of awe. Of the awe of God and the fear of His punishment, blessed be His Name. This awe is not naturally in the heart of man, like other kinds of fear of the afflictions of the world. And man is entirely devoid of it, and it is far from his innermost being. And likewise, from where will this awe be found in a soul that labors to seek it? For it is wondrous in our eyes, as mentioned above. For all this is truly elevated and sublime beyond human intellect, for it was from God that this came. And all is by His will, blessed be His Name.

**[14]** It is known that the ultimate purpose of man's creation in this world is for his own benefit in his hereafter. To inherit eternal life, everlasting delight, and eternal honor. To delight in God and to enjoy the radiance of His Divine Presence, for he will come to his reward in the World of Recompense, for the labor of his hands and the fruit of his toil in Torah and Mitzvot. And as it is written in the book Mesilat Yesharim, Chapter 1, see

there. And for this, God, blessed be His Name, has placed free will in man's hand, so that his actions shall be subject to his knowledge and his will, with no one compelling or drawing him to either of the paths, the good or the evil. So that through his choice of the good path, he will merit to come to his reward.

**[15]** Indeed, when the Blessed God established law and judgment, to give to each person according to his ways and the fruit of his deeds, to reward the doers of good, and also to punish the wicked according to his wickedness. And therefore, if the fear of the Blessed God and the dread of His punishment were naturally implanted in the heart of man, then the very nature of his fear would compel him to do that which is good and upright, lest he be overtaken by God's wrath and His awesome judgments. And this would be a detriment to the law of free will. And consequently, his reward would also be diminished. The Holy One, Blessed be He, who is the source of goodness and kindness, desired that free will be in the hands of man in the utmost perfection, in order to expand the scope of man's reward to the fullest extent possible.

**[16]** Therefore, just as the creation of man is with wondrous wisdom, the spiritual connection within the physical, the structure of his body and the multitude of its forces, so too is it from the wisdom of the wonders of creation. For just as among the multitude of numerous forces, like a measured flock, which are within the body, the Creator, blessed be His Name, placed within him the natural force of awe, to fear and be afraid of every evil thing. His wisdom, blessed be His Name, decreed to limit the boundary of the force of awe, and to remove from man's nature his dread and fear of His punishment, whether for the body or for the soul. And likewise, the dread of all things that could be a cause to compel him towards His service, blessed be His Name, such as the dread of the fear of death and the like. So that the choice may be free in his hand.

**[17]** And since this is so, for the entire mat-

ter of the negation of awe, the awe of Hashem and the fear of His punishment, blessed be His Name, is inherent in human nature, it is beyond human intellect. It is rather a spiritual matter, a decree from the Most High, from His wisdom and His ability, blessed be His Name. If so, then truly, no wisdom, counsel, or stratagem would have been of any avail to draw His awe, blessed be His Name, towards him, and to bring it into his heart. And man would have remained naked and empty, and his heart hollow from the awe of Hashem, blessed be His Name.

**[18]** Indeed, ultimately, behold, fear [of God] is a necessary thing for man. For the fear of God is the beginning of knowledge, and it precedes his wisdom. For by its strength, a person can overcome the great war, which is the war of the evil inclination. And the fear of Heaven is the fear of punishment. It is the outer key, by which one opens the gate to God, to guard and fulfill all the Torah and the commandment. And as the holy Maharsha, of blessed memory, wrote: "For one who comes to purify himself and to draw near, the first thing of all is the fear of God, to attain the fear of punishment, as mentioned above."

**[19]** For this reason, Supreme Wisdom saw fit to place the very essence of awe of Him, blessed be His Name, into man's hands, subject to his choice. So that it shall be within his understanding and under his control, and he shall be master over it according to his will: whether to fear Him, blessed be His Name, and the dread of His punishment, or to refrain. For just as in His wisdom and power, blessed be His Name, He withheld from human nature the awe and fear of His punishment, so too, in His power, blessed be His Name, He opened a door of hope before man, and placed within him a spiritual strength, whereby he can reawaken his awe of Him, blessed be His Name, if it be his will to seek the fear of God, and to labor and toil to attain it. And thus, free choice is in his hand. For if he wishes to be indolent, slumbering in the rear, he will remain according to his nature, awake and empty of the fear of God, blessed be His Name, and will walk in darkness, with no

light in the ways of Torah and Mitzvah. Indeed, if he wishes to seek the fear of God, wisdom, and ethical instruction, and to labor to search for it like hidden treasures, then he will find it. And the fear of God, blessed be His Name, and His judgments will be continually before his eyes, and under the shadow of her wings he will find refuge, to fulfill all the Torah and Mitzvah.

**[20]** And in any case, whether man is inherently devoid of the fear of God, or whether man has the capacity to attain His blessed Name's fear, for it comes into a soul that labors to seek it. This is not a matter of natural causality in the ways of intellect, but rather a spiritual matter, and it is from the hand of God. And all is by His blessed Name's will. This matter, upon which the rod of choice rests over the lot of fear, that the very essence of fear will be in his hand, whether to fear or to cease, is beyond human intellect. But is anything too wondrous for God?

**[21]** And now, since the essence of awe [of God] is entrusted to man's choice, man's reward shall be great and abundant in two ways.

1. The fruit of the labor of awe. For since it is not naturally present in man's heart, and he must labor greatly to seek it and attain it, and it is known how arduous this service is, and there is no end to all his toil, so too there is no end to his reward.
2. From the aspect of choice. For even if all the Torah and the commandment are merely the fruit of awe, and they are necessarily brought about by its power, nevertheless, the very essence of awe itself is the fruit of his choice. A complete choice, free according to man's knowledge and will. For without awe, there is no force compelling or obligating him at all to attain it, as is understood. And now, even all the Torah and the commandment that man performs, even though they are necessarily brought about by the power of awe, nevertheless, they are counted towards the portion of choice. For they are brought about by the primary cause, the fruit of his choice in the awe of the Holy One, Blessed be His Name, which is a complete and free choice, as stated above. And now, behold,

his reward is with him, and his recompense before Him in righteousness and justice.

**[22]** I have found again in the book *Chovot HaLevavot*, in the fifth chapter of the Gate of Discernment, that he wrote, and these are his words: "And afterwards, consider the trait of shame with which man has been uniquely endowed. How great is its merit and how abundant is its benefit, etc. And it is a great wonder that man has been imprinted with shame towards his fellow men, etc. But he has not been imprinted with shame towards his Creator who constantly watches over him. This is so that he will not be compelled in his service of Him, and the obligation of his reward for it will be weakened. However, we are obligated to be ashamed before the Creator through the path of discernment, etc. And our knowledge of His awareness of our revealed and hidden matters, etc." Thus far his words.

Behold, then, even in the matter of awe of the Exalted One, which is shame before His blessed Name, the aforementioned pious one wrote above that it would have been fitting for shame before the Creator, blessed be His Name, to be found in man's nature, just as shame towards his fellow men is found in his nature. Only the Creator, blessed be His Name, in His wisdom, prevented shame before Him, blessed be His Name, from man's nature. This is so that he will not be compelled in his service of Him, and the obligation of his reward for it will be weakened, as stated above.

If so, then all the more so in the matter of fear of punishment, which is close to being felt, it would have been fitting for his fear and dread of His punishment, blessed be His Name, to be found in man's nature, just as the awe and fear of any bad thing is found in his nature. However, indeed, His wisdom, blessed be His Name, decreed thus: to remove from man's nature his awe and fear of His punishment. This is so that he will not have any compulsion in his service of Him, blessed be His Name, and there will be a diminution in the portion of free will. And consequently, his reward will also be diminished, as

mentioned above.

**[23]** And from the output of our words, we shall gain understanding. Also concerning the matter of awe of His sublimity, which is known to be within man's capacity to attain this level, to fear His great sublimity and to be ashamed before Him, blessed be His Name. This has no entry in the ways of intellect by which it can be attained. And even though the aforementioned pious one wrote that we are obligated to be ashamed before the Creator, blessed be His Name, by virtue of His consideration of our revealed and hidden matters, as mentioned above. Who does not know that the Holy One, blessed be He, His glory fills the entire earth, and nothing is hidden from His sight. And despite all this, man is utterly devoid of shame before Him, blessed be His Name. If so, what benefit is there in consideration and understanding in this matter? And moreover, as the aforementioned pious one wrote, that the Holy One, blessed be He, in His wisdom, prevented shame before Him, blessed be His Name, from man's nature. If so, what power does man have to attain it? However, it appears that this too is merely a spiritual matter, as mentioned above. For just as the Creator, blessed be His Name, in His wisdom, prevented shame before Him, blessed be His Name, from man's nature, so too in His wisdom, He placed power in man's hand, that he may attain the awe of His sublimity and shame before Him, blessed be His Name, when it is his desire and will to seek it.

## Shaarei Ohr – Chapter 3

### שערי אור -- פרק 3

**[1]** This is what our Sages, may their memory be blessed, stated in the Gemara (Berakhot 33b): Rabbi Chanina said, "Everything is in the hands of Heaven, except for the fear of Heaven." As it is stated, "And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear..." (Deuteronomy 10:12). Look there.

And at first glance, this is very perplexing. What have our Sages, may their memory be blessed, conveyed to us in this? Is not the matter of free will one of the fundamental principles of the faith? And this is a great pillar, the foundation of the Torah and the commandment. For if free will were not in man's hands, there would be no place for the entire Torah and commandment, nor for reward and punishment, as the Rambam, may his memory be blessed, wrote in Chapter 5 of Laws of Repentance, as mentioned above.

However, this is the intention: that indeed, the entire Torah and commandment are certainly entrusted to man's intellect and his free choice. For when one fears God, and when he does not fear Him, the observance of the Torah and commandment in practice is within his free choice.

Indeed, He conveys to us that even the very essence of the fear of Heaven is placed under the wings of free choice, even though this is contrary to the ways of intellect, as mentioned above. For how can fear be under the control of the will? However, thus has His wisdom, blessed be His Name, decreed.

**[2]** And thus, it will be understood in this matter what our Sages, of blessed memory, stated there: "The Holy One, Blessed be He, has nothing in His treasury except a treasure of fear of Heaven." And as it appears from this, for fear of Heaven is a very exalted level, surpassing all else. But wherein lies its great power? And according to what was mentioned above, it will be well understood. For surely, the ultimate purpose of free will is that it be complete, utterly free choice, without any element of compulsion in the world at all. Now, one who has already acquired for himself fear of Heaven, behold, this fear will compel him to chart his courses in a good way and a well-trodden path of righteousness. However, when fear of Heaven is not inherent in man's nature, and it is only subject to the hand of free will, if he desires to labor to seek it, then, in the absence of fear, who compels him regarding the fear itself to labor to attain it? This is the advantage that fear of Heaven has over all Torah and Mitzvah. For all Torah and

Mitzvah are borne upon the wings of fear. But upon which wing is fear itself borne? Is it not that there is no one who forces or compels at all to attain it, as mentioned above? And it is only complete, utterly free choice, dependent solely on man's knowledge and will. And therefore, its power is exceedingly great and exalted, for "The Holy One, Blessed be He, has nothing in His treasury except a treasure of fear of Heaven."

**[3]** And with this, let us gain understanding, to comprehend the words of the Sages and their insights. What our Sages, of blessed memory, said on Shabbat: "Any person who possesses Torah but lacks fear of Heaven is like a treasurer to whom the inner keys were given, but the outer keys were not given." Rashi explained thus: "If he is God-fearing, he will be diligent to guard and to act. But if not, he is indifferent to his Torah." And it seems very perplexing. For what reason did our Sages, of blessed memory, mention a treasurer in the parable? What is the connection of a treasurer to the subject of the parable? Is it not that any person in his house and within its walls, if he only has keys to the inner chambers, but not keys to the outer chambers, he will not be able to enter the house? And they could have simply said: "A parable of a person who has the inner keys, but does not have the outer keys." And what is the connection of a treasurer to this?

**[4]** However, it appears that our Sages, of blessed memory, wisely understood. To mention in the parable a treasurer for a very deep intention. To awaken a person to the labor of reverence. For behold, any man who rules in his house and within his walls. If he does not have keys to the outer chambers, will he stand outside? And the chambers will remain locked and will not be opened. Surely necessity will compel him to strive to obtain keys to open the house. Or he will break down the bronze doors, and even break the iron bolts. However, it is not so with a treasurer appointed by others over the house. If they have not given him keys to the outer chambers, what will compel him to labor to strive to obtain keys? Or to break down the

locks? And thus it may be that the gate will remain closed and will never be opened, and he will not enter into the house.

**[5]** And for this reason, as our Sages, may their memory be blessed, wisely likened the fear of Heaven to the outer keys, to open with them the gates of Torah and Divine service. And one who lacks the fear of Heaven is like one who has no outer keys to open the house. Let us not say that in any case he will surely not remain outside. And necessity will compel him to labor to acquire the key of the fear of Heaven, to open the gate to God. For this is not the case. For the fear of Heaven is the key to open the gate; that is, the cause for observing all of Torah and the commandments. And one who already possesses this key of the fear of Heaven, with it he will open the gates of Torah and Divine service, for it will compel him to be fearful and trembling to guard and to do. However, if he does not possess the key of the fear of Heaven, without fear, what will compel him regarding the key of fear itself, to acquire it? For it is merely a free choice dependent on his understanding and his will. And thus, if he does not set his heart to seek it, it may be that this key of the fear of Heaven will never be in his possession. And the gates of Torah and Divine service will remain shut fast with an iron lock and will not be opened. And for this, they likened it to a treasurer to whom the outer keys were not given, who has no necessity to seek keys or to break locks.

**[6]** The ultimate purpose of the matters mentioned above. One must imbue the meaning of the verse in Parashat Nitzavim: "Life and death I have placed before you, the blessing and the curse, and you shall choose life." And according to primary intellect, this is greatly perplexing. For behold, the definition of choice is that a person selects one thing from among other things, through observation and contemplation. Like one before whom portions are laid out, and he examines them, distinguishes, and contemplates them, and chooses the good and the beautiful, each portion good and choice. And

for this, the matter of choice applies only between things that are nearly similar in their quality, concerning which there is a matter for contemplation and distinction, in order to choose the good and the beautiful. But one who takes whatever comes into his hand, or in matters that require no distinction at all, like between gold and stones, or between a cup of fine wine and a threshold of poison, this is not under the category of choice at all. And therefore, it is perplexing, what is the matter of choice between life and death? Also, what need is there to say, "and you shall choose life"? What man would have life and death in his hand and not choose life?

**[7]** However, the Scripture will reveal to us this hidden secret, one of the wonders of creation in the ways of reverence. First, that man, by his nature, will be devoid of reverence for God, blessed be His Name. Second, that despite all this, man has the capacity to cultivate for himself reverence for Him, blessed be His Name, through his desire and will to labor in seeking it. Even though both of these are contrary to the ways of intellect, as mentioned above. For behold, since life is bound to the path of Torah and commandment, and death is bound to the path of iniquity, let man not think that he will surely, by his nature, love life and pursue it, and fear death and flee from it. Therefore, the Scripture informs us that it is not so. For the Creator, blessed be His Name, in His wisdom, has withheld from man's nature the dread and fear of His punishment, and likewise the dread of all things that could compel him to His service, blessed be His Name, such as the dread of death and the like. And thus, life and death are equal in man's nature. And if the spirit of his desire carries him to follow the sight of his eyes, he will also go in the path of death and neglect the goodness of life.

**[8]** This is what the verse states: "Life and death I have set before you." For it is known what our Sages, may their memory be blessed, said: There is no gift less than the value of a *perutah* (the smallest coin). For a thing that has no

significance cannot be described as a gift. And all the more so for something that has no value whatsoever. And even if every person is afraid to touch it, for it is death and a destroyer, the name "gift" would not be attributed to it. For who would accept it? And without an acceptor, there is no gift. Therefore, if reverence for God were inherent in human nature, to fear the dread of His punishment and to turn away from the path of death, there would be no need to say, "Life and death I have set before you." For death would not be considered a gift at all. For man would only love and accept life, which is the way of the Torah and the commandment. And death, which is the way of transgression and desire, he would cast away like a menstruous woman. And without an acceptor, there is no gift. However, since His wisdom, blessed be His Name, decreed to remove from human nature the awe of His judgment and the fear of His punishment, and for nothing to frighten him, even the dread of death would not startle him.

**[9]** And therefore the verse states, "Life and death I have set before you." For I am giving both of them. Even death will be considered a gift, just like life. For man will also love the desirable and the lustful, even though its end is the ways of death, and its steps support Sheol.

**[10]** Indeed, let not a person despair. If His blessed Name's wisdom decreed thus, to remove awe from human nature, and life and death are equal in a person's eyes, who can oppose it? And if he loves the path of death, how can he hate it?

**[11]** And concerning this, Scripture states, "You shall choose life." For the love of life is within your power. Indeed, the Holy One, Blessed be He, has opened before man a door of hope, to attain His reverence, may His Name be blessed, along with the love of life and the hatred of death, through the principle of choice. That is, when one desires to choose the good, to look, to contemplate, and to discern between the happiness of the destiny of life – the life of this world and eternal life, with everlasting par-



adise and honor – and between the bitterness of the destiny of death, with its awesome judgments. Then you will understand the reverence of God, and you will choose life, to love it and to cleave to it.

**[12]** In accordance with these matters, the words of our Sages, of blessed memory, will illuminate for us in their book, and their language is as follows: "For it is stated, 'Life and death I have set before you, the blessing and the curse.' Lest Israel say, 'Since the Omnipresent has set before us two paths, the path of life and the path of death, let us walk in whichever we desire,' it is taught, 'You shall choose life.'" Thus far their words. This statement astonishes the heart. How could it enter one's mind that a person would have permission to walk in whichever path he desires? Where is all the Torah and the commandment that Israel received from Mount Sinai? Furthermore, how does this argument arise from the fact that the Omnipresent set before them two paths?

**[13]** However, these are the matters. For since the path of Torah and Mitzvah is the ascending road to the good of life, and the path of evil from the house of iniquity is a pathway to death, then it would seem natural for man to love life and fear death. And then every person would chart his course on the path of Torah and Mitzvah, the pathway of life.

However, since the Holy One, Blessed be He, withheld this from human nature, for even the path of death can be pleasant and sweet to him, for thus the verse states, "Life and death I have set before you" (Deuteronomy 30:19), for even death is a significant gift, as mentioned above. If so, what is in his power to do? It is the *Ma'amar* (utterance/command).

Perhaps Israel will say: Since the Place (God) has set before us two paths, the path of life and the path of death, let us walk on whichever we desire. That is, since both paths are in the nature of a gift, for even the path of death is a significant gift to man, and he will also love and accept it willingly, then let us walk on whichever

we desire.

That is, if man desires to walk on the path of death, what power does he have to conquer his desire and incline it towards the path of life? Regarding this, it is said: "The Torah teaches, 'And you shall choose life'" (Deuteronomy 30:19). That is, that despite all this, the love of life and the hatred of death are within your power. For if you choose according to the principle of choice, to labor to contemplate and discern between them, between the path of life and the path of death, then you will understand the difference between the fate of life and the fate of death, and you will choose life.

## Shaarei Ohr – Chapter 4

### שערי אור -- פרק 4

**[1]** Indeed, after the fear of Hashem, may His Name be blessed, and the dread of His punishment, is removed from human nature, and it does not come except through a diligent soul that strives to seek it, as mentioned above. Now, what will be the judgment of the labor that a person will labor to find that precious treasure, and to attain the key of the fear of Heaven?

**[2]** Indeed, when we gain understanding in the words of our Sages, may their memory be a blessing, we find that the foundation of diligent effort in the ways of acquiring reverence for God is to seek wisdom and ethical instruction. This involves calculation, knowledge, and contemplation of all matters from which the fear of God, blessed be His Name, branches forth. Examples include reward and punishment, providence, and the abundant goodness and kindness of God, blessed be His Name, towards His creations, and the like. And although faith and knowledge alone do not accomplish things, nor do they yield their fruit to make an impression on the soul of man to fear God, nevertheless, contemplation of all the aforementioned matters possesses great strength. It has the power to

achieve great and fortified deeds, to bestow an abundance of the fear of God upon all the faculties of his soul. It will enter him like water and like oil into his bones, and the fear of God will be before his eyes always, and all his senses will be imbued with the fear of God.

**[3]** Our Sages, may their memory be for a blessing, have already taught in Chapter 2 of Avot: Rabbi says, "Be meticulous in calculating the loss of a mitzvah against its reward, and the reward of a transgression against its loss." Similarly, they taught at the beginning of Chapter 3, there, Akavia ben Mahalalel says, "Contemplate three things, and you will not come to commit a transgression: From where did you come? From a putrid drop. And where are you going? To a place of dust, maggots, and worms. And before whom are you destined to give an account and reckoning? Before the King of kings, the Holy One, Blessed be He."

Now, what is this reckoning and contemplation that our Sages, may their memory be for a blessing, recalled, stating that through it one will not come to commit a transgression? Is it not the case that this knowledge is not hidden from the eye of every living being? Who does not understand the reward of a mitzvah and the loss of a transgression? And who does not know that man's foundation is from dust and his end is to dust, to be food for maggots and worms? Likewise, that the Lord, blessed be His Name, will bring to judgment everything hidden. And despite all this, we see that it does not make an impression on the soul of man, to fear the Lord, to walk in His ways, and to turn away from evil. For the evil of man is great upon him, and his iniquities pass over his head.

**[4]** Indeed, without a doubt. For this accounting and contemplation is profound intellectual reflection. With a sincere heart and sensory imagination, in each of the aforementioned methods of accounting, for each and every one there are many accounts. And see in the Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim, Siman 229, "One who sees a rainbow says..." And it is for-

bidden to look at it excessively. And see there in the explanations of the Gra, and this is his language: "Excessively. Tur and R"i [Rabbi Yitzchak Luria] that one must see enough to recite the blessing. And the term 'contemplation' [histaklut] implies much deliberation." Thus far his words, see there. And for this reason, also what the Tanna [Sage] said, "Contemplate three things..." This contemplation is certainly profound deliberation with deep intellect and even more so, reflection upon the three things mentioned above. And likewise, there is no doubt in the matter. For this contemplation, not by one or two times, a day or two, will make an impression on a person's soul, to fear the Lord and not to come to transgression. And especially one whose heart is a heart of stone and hard as flint. Indeed, day by day, let him contemplate the three things mentioned above, each according to his state of disposition, occupation, and character traits. Thus he will increase and thus he will decrease.

**[5]** Let us not be astonished, nor let us be bewildered by the sight. For after the substance of matters has been established, its origin, the remembrance of its beginning and its end, and the judgment and the decree, have not been hidden from human perception. And despite all this, one should not be affected by it; one should not be dismayed, nor should one's heart grow weak. What will contemplation give, and what will it add, when one has already known, almost by oneself, the totality of the matters even before this?

**[6]** However, it has already been clarified above that all of this is truly elevated and sublime beyond human intellect. And just as the Creator, blessed be His Name, in His wisdom and might, set a limit to the power of awe in man, and by His nature withheld from him His dread and the fear of His punishment, blessed be His Name; so too, in His wisdom and might, blessed be His Name, He placed within man the power to return his awe to Him, blessed be His Name, through the strength of his labor and exertion, if he desires to seek the fear of Hashem,

wisdom, and instruction.

**[7]** This is what our Sages, of blessed memory, stated in the Gemara, Bava Batra, page 78a: "Therefore, let those who master their inclination say, 'Come, let us calculate, come and let us reckon the world's account. The loss of a mitzvah against its reward, and the reward of a transgression against its loss.' See there. And as it appears from this, for only those who master their inclination, who have already conquered the war with their inclination before them, to rule over it, they are able to offer sound counsel, to reckon the world's account. And so it is written in the book Mesilat Yesharim, Chapter 3, concerning this statement. And this is because this true counsel, they cannot give it nor see its truth, except for those who have already emerged from under the hand of their inclination and have mastered it." Thus far his words, see there. And at first glance, it is very surprising, what wisdom and understanding is there in this counsel? For it appears to be a simple matter, understood by every person. For the reckoning of the loss of a mitzvah against its reward, and the reward of a transgression against its loss, is good counsel and a stratagem against the evil inclination, to turn away from evil and do good.

**[8]** However, this is the matter. For truly, the truth of these matters is evident and known to every person even before the reckoning. Let a person not say to himself in despair, "Indeed, I know everything and believe in everything. And behold, I understand and am enlightened. The reward of a commandment and the loss of a transgression have not been hidden from me. And despite all this, the fear of God is far from my innermost being. And what benefit do I have from calculations?"

**[9]** However, those who master their inclination, whose hands have already been trained for battle, to fight the ruler – which is the war of the inclination – they know through the ways of experience that it is not so. For faith and knowledge alone, without will and without careful consideration and understanding, will not bear any

fruit. However, when a person wills to seek wisdom and ethical instruction, careful consideration and understanding – and there is no consideration without contemplation – to think the calculation of the world, of the reward for a commandment and the loss of a transgression, with contemplation of all its details, with this strength a person can prevail to conquer the war and to be a master of his inclination. And therefore, only those who master their inclination, who have already conquered the war before them, they will be able to give counsel and to teach wisdom and understanding. Come, let us consider, come and let us calculate the calculation of the world, as mentioned above.

**[10]** And behold, since a person has no mastery over his spirit, to restrain the multitude of intrusive thoughts that fill him from the emptiness of the vanities of the world and the preoccupations of time, and to divest his thought from all matters of material vanities, to sit alone and be silent, and to deepen his thought in contemplation of the ways of reckoning, beyond the reckoning of the world. Even though there are many reckonings for the fear of God, and a person does not know the ways of reckoning, what is there to seek reckoning and knowledge, and in what should one think and contemplate? Therefore, it is necessary that the observation and contemplation of the aforementioned ways of reckoning be through reading and pondering in a book, memorizing by mouth and reviewing the sayings of our Sages, of blessed memory, scattered throughout the Talmud and Midrashim and the Zohar HaKadosh, which speak extensively of all those matters, beyond the reckoning of the world, and of the things that Akavya ben Mahalalel thought, and of other reckonings of the soul. And then his heart will warm, and his soul will be moved and stirred, and he will don awe and fear, dread and trembling, shame and submission before the Creator, blessed be His Name. This is what our Sages, of blessed memory, said in the Jerusalem Talmud: "Whoever has not tasted the taste of Aggadah has not tasted the taste of fear of sin."

**[11]** And for this reason, the Sages, the luminaries of generations, the pious ones, who came after the Sages of the Talmud, devised a wondrous plan to magnify and exalt the wisdom of reverence and ethical conduct. And they composed complete books on this wisdom. They gathered and collected, like sheaves in a threshing floor, all the writings and all the sayings of our Sages, of blessed memory, scattered throughout the Talmud, Midrashim, and the Zohar HaKadosh, and the words of the Kabbalists, which speak in general of the reverence of God, and touch upon each character trait in particular. And all the deeds of the steps of the exalted holy ones, and their ways of sacred service, and all the miracles and wonders that occurred to them, for it is God, blessed be His Name, who fulfills the will of those who fear Him. For from them we learn wisdom and ethical conduct, to fear God and to walk in His ways. And likewise, they added to these all the ways of reverence and self-accounting, whose foundations are in the paths of intellect.

**[12]** And like the book *Chovot HaLevavot* (Duties of the Heart). *Sefer Chasidim* (Book of the Pious). *Sefer Goren Nachon* by Rabbi Shlomo Gabirol. *Sefer HaYashar* by Rabbeinu Tam. *Shaarei Teshuvah* (Gates of Repentance) and *Sefer HaYirah* (Book of Awe) by Rabbeinu Yonah. *Sefer Orot Chaim* by the Ra'ah (Rabbi Yitzchak Alfasi). *Sefer Orot Tzadikim* (Paths of the Righteous). *Sefer Menorat HaMaor* (The Lamp of Light). *Sefer Magid Meisharim* by Maran the Beit Yosef. *Sefer Tomer Devorah* by the Ramak (Rabbi Moshe Cordovero). *Sefer Reshit Chochmah* (Beginning of Wisdom). *Sefer Charadim* by the pious Mohar'a Azkari. The books of Moharal of Prague. *Sefer Sha'ar HaKedushah* (Gate of Holiness) by the holy pious Mohar'ch Vital. The holy *Shla* (Rabbi Isaiah Horowitz). *Sefer Or Tzadikim* by the pious Mohar'm Papirash. *Sefer Yesod Yosef* by the pious Mohar'y of Dubno. *Sefer Mesillat Yesharim* (Path of the Upright). *Sefer Nefesh HaChaim* (Soul of Life). *Sefer Yesod VeShores HaAvodah* (Foundation and Root of Service) by the pious Mohar'a Ziskind of Grodno. And other similar

books of Mussar.

**[13]** The essence of the matter is this: Just as in the great apothecaries' shops, where all kinds of medicines for the ailments of the body are found, so too have the pious Gaonim, the authors of books of reverence and ethics, provided us with all the medicines and all the excellent remedies for the sickness of the soul.

**[14]** Indeed, it is self-evident. Just as all the apothecaries and all the medicines in the world cannot benefit the ailments of the body, if the sick person does not wish to seek a cure for his illness, and will be lazy and refrain from accepting the medicines and remedies, for whatever reason it may be. So too, all the books of reverence and ethical instruction in the world cannot benefit in cleansing the cure for the ailments of the soul, if the person refrains from studying and contemplating them.

**[15]** And behold, the holy pietists, the authors of books of reverence and ethics, did not place upon their hearts to include in their books. Regarding the obligation of study in books of reverence and ethics. For is this not the principal matter? And to teach the knowledge of wisdom and ethics. Concerning the study of reverence and ethics. How so, that this study is a proven remedy for every sickness and every affliction of the soul. And likewise, that it is a holy obligation upon every person. To adhere to the study of ethics and not let go. To establish fixed times for this. To study in books of ethics and to meditate upon them.

**[16]** For their actions testify to their thoughts. Regarding the obligation to study books of Mussar. For why did they toil and labor to compose their holy books? Is it not self-evident that their entire intention was that through their books, one would meditate and learn, to fear the honored and awesome God, to walk in His ways, to love Him, and to cleave to Him, blessed be His Name.

**[17]** However, in truth, there is no need for

signs or wonders, for this matter is a primary rational principle. For this wisdom of studying Mussar will revive its possessor with life of the soul, and can also heal it from its sickness. Is it not known that the greatest love that can be found in the world is a person's love for himself? All his toil throughout the numbered days of his life is only for himself. And all his desire and longing, all the days of his being on earth, is only to satisfy his physical body. And there is no end to all his labor, for his soul will not be satisfied with its good. All sorrow and pain that befall him will not allow him rest or quiet. Even all the wealth of his house he will give for his soul, only to remove from himself his affliction and his pain. And even more, every person worries about his soul, to prepare for himself a future and hope for the time of his old age when his strength is depleted. For it is weak today to be redeemed, and soon the sun will set. To be well even then, and to live a life of rest, pleasure, and tranquility, even though he will no longer have desire for those days.

**[18]** And if so, is it conceivable that a person would be concerned for his soul and his body only until the time of his departure? And this is until the last moment of his days. And as for what will be with him in the moment after that, after the separation of the soul from the body, he will not be concerned at all and will leave it to chance? Indeed, every person among the faithful of Israel knows, believes, understands, and is enlightened that even if the vessel is broken, he will not escape. For there is nothing between the last moment and the moment after that, except merely the shedding of a garment. And this person himself lives even after that, only that he sheds and dons another form. And as the great and pious Rabbi, may his memory be for a blessing, wrote in one of his letters in this language: For the body of man is not but the garment, and the power of man, the faculty of feeling pleasure and pain, is alive even after the shedding of the garment. Thus far his words.

**[19]** Even though it is known that our Sages, of blessed memory, with their holy spirit, had in-

sight into the secret of the soul and its affairs, the body's relationship with the soul is like the lame man and the blind man. For even after the pitcher is broken at the spring, and the dust returns to the earth as it was, nevertheless, the soul and the body, just as they sinned together while alive, so too in their death they shall not be separated. And just as together they desired desire and delighted in goodness, so together they will approach judgment, and both as one will receive the recompense of their sin together.

**[20]** And this too is known: that one hour of punishment in the spiritual world is more bitter and terrible than all the severe sufferings in this world. Likewise, one hour of spiritual satisfaction in the spiritual world is elevated and sublime beyond all the pleasures and delights of this world's life. If this is so, then this person, whose entire desire and longing throughout all his days is only to seek his own good, how is it possible that he should not also worry for himself, for his soul and his body, concerning what will be with them in the end, at the time when it will be impossible for him to do anything then? For the body will rest in its proper rest, and the spirit will return to God who gave it.

**[21]** And this, indeed, is a primary principle. For when a person habituates himself to set regular times for studying books of awe and ethical instruction, which remind him of many reckonings from the world's accounting, these will not grant him respite until he prepares a refuge and escape for his soul and his body. And after it is known that studying books of awe and ethical instruction is a proven remedy for the sickness of the soul, then, just as it is impossible for a sick person with bodily ailments, at a time when the gates of healing are open before him freely and without cost, to be healed if he is lazy and refrains from taking the medicines to save his soul from descending into the pit, so too it is unbelievable for one afflicted and smitten with the ailments of the soul to abandon his soul to the grave and his body to ruin, and not endeavor to seek a cure for his sickness in the study of books of awe and ethical instruction,

which have salvation and healing within their wings.

## Shaarei Ohr – Chapter 5

### שערי אור -- פרק 5

**[1]** However, in recent generations, several brilliant scholars and pious individuals have seen fit to concern themselves with this matter. They have publicized the sacred obligation to study books of reverence and ethical instruction in clear terms. Likewise, it is an obligation upon every person to set aside a specific time for this study each day.

**[2]** The Gaon and Hasid, Rabbi Yisrael of Shklov, of blessed memory, author of *Urim v'Tumim*. In his book *Ya'arot HaDevash*, Part 1, Drush 5, he wrote, and this is his language:

"The main thing is that every person should study. Whether a Talmid Chacham or an Am Ha'aretz, man or woman, one page each day from books of Mussar. Each person according to their concern, whether from the *Shla"h* or other books of Mussar. And likewise, that which is in the Ashkenazi language. For there are many books in the Ashkenazi language that contain very great Mussar. Fortunate is the person who contemplates them. And this will be for a person truly like a fortified wall, so that they will not be easily captured by old age and foolishness, for there are many stratagems. Thus far his words."

And likewise, he wrote there in Drush Hespel, year 5607 (1847), and this is his language:

"And likewise, anyone who is called by the name Yisrael. It is incumbent upon them to read every day, evening and morning, a few pages from books of Mussar, which are a great praise to God, printed, etc. And it is also a duty, as I did last year. And without a vow, to do at this time: to study with young students and householders. Before I begin to study with them a les-

son in Gemara or Poskim, to study with them one page from the *Shla"h*, which he wrote in *Tochachat Mussar*. And may it not be, due to our many transgressions, that the young men are lacking in reverence, and follow the vanity of the world, etc. And the man for whom these things are, studies daily in the aforementioned books. Then he will discern how much he has sinned against his soul and how many evils he has done. And he will be fearful of the word of God, to turn away from evil and do good. Thus far his words."

"Furthermore, there, 'Who is the man who desires life of the soul? Let him be diligent day by day in the book of *Tochachat Mussar*, etc.' And if you do so, I guarantee you that your hearts will be opened to the roots of reverence, to fear the countenance of the awesome God. And you will not easily sin with a haughty spirit. Thus far his words."

**[3]** Indeed, in the book *Mesillat Yeshtarim*, the ways of acquiring all the character traits that the Tanna Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair considered are written. For each trait, he wrote its ways of acquisition, which is contemplation and reflection, each according to its subject. See there. And indeed, we have already written that the ways of reflection and contemplation for us are only through study in books of reverence and ethics. For who can restrain the multitude of disturbing thoughts that fill the void of the world? And who will turn his heart to thoughts of self-accounting? Indeed, he also wrote explicitly in some places. See there in the chapter on the way of acquiring caution, Chapter 4, where he wrote the following words: "However, the specific way that leads to this is contemplation of the substance of the service that a person is obligated in, and the depth of the judgment upon it. And this will come to him from studying the deeds written in the holy books, and from studying the sayings of the Sages, of blessed memory, which awaken [one] to this." Thus far his words. And see there in the ways of acquiring purity, Chapter 12, and these are his words: "Indeed, the true means to acquire purity is the

constancy of reading the words of the Sages, of blessed memory, whether in matters of halakha or in matters of ethics, etc. And similarly, in matters of character traits, the reading of the ethical treatises of the early authorities or the later ones is essential for him.” And in the preface to the book *Mesillat Yesharim*, he wrote: “For the benefit derived from this book does not come from reading it once, but rather the benefit comes from reviewing it and constancy.” Thus far his words. See there.

**[4]** And so too wrote the aforementioned pious one, concerning the contemplation of awe and ethical instruction. For it is necessary that this be done every day, for at least one hour. See in his book, *Derech Etz Chaim*, he wrote, and this is his language: “Is it not so that man, for the majority of his days, stands occupied with thoughts of his business, the concerns of fleeting life? And why should he not set his heart, even for one hour, to this as well? To truly think: What is he, and why did he come into the world? Or what does the King of kings, the Holy One, Blessed be He, desire from him? And what will be the end of all his affairs? This is the most great and powerful remedy that can be found against the [evil] inclination, and it is easy, and its effect is great, and its fruit is abundant. That man should stand every day, for at least one hour, free from all other thoughts, to think only about this which I have said. And he should ask in his heart: What did the first ones, the fathers of the world, do that the Lord so desired them? What did Moses our teacher, peace be upon him, do? What did David, the Messiah of the Lord, do, etc.? And he should answer with his intellect: What is good for man all the days of his life? To do likewise, and it will be good for him.” Thus far his words.

**[5]** And in the book *Ma’aseh Rav*, he wrote in the name of the Gaon and Tzaddik, may his memory be for a blessing: “Study books of Mussar several times each day.” And likewise, in the letter *Alim L’Trufah* which he wrote to his wife from his journey to the Holy Land, he wrote there, “Thus said the Holy One: And in

my books there are proverbs with Ashkenazi language, for the sake of Heaven, that they should read every day, etc. And also, the book of Kohelet (Ecclesiastes) they should read before you, for there he expounds on the matters of this world. And other books, etc. And I also warn my son-in-law concerning all this, etc. And you shall study Masechet Avot, and especially the chapters of Avot D’Rabbi Natan. And Masechet Derech Eretz precedes the Torah, etc.” Thus far his words.

**[6]** And in the book *Birkei Yosef* by the Gaon Rabbi Chaim David Azulai, of blessed memory. In Siman Aleph, he wrote that it is proper to set aside time to study books of Mussar, etc., because all the great ones, etc. And I have accepted that the seasoning for the evil inclination is the admonition of Mussar, the sayings of our Sages, of blessed memory.

**[7]** The Gaon and Chasid, Moreinu HaRav Yisrael mi-Lisa, of blessed memory, author of *Chavos Da’as*. Wrote in his holy testament, and this is his wording: “I hereby warn you to set aside a daily lesson in books of Mussar, for due to our many transgressions, our heart has become like a heart of stone. And from the merit of studying books of Mussar, the heart will soften.” Thus far his words.

**[8]** The Gaon and Chassid, Moreinu HaRav Chaim zt”l, wrote in his book *Nefesh HaChaim*, Sha’ar 4: “It is fitting for every person to prepare himself at all times before he begins to study. To reckon a little with his Creator, blessed be His Name. In purity of heart with the fear of God. And to purify himself from his transgressions through reflections of repentance, etc. And likewise, in the midst of study, permission is granted to a person to pause for a short while. Before the fear of Him, blessed be His Name, extinguishes from his heart. Which he accepted upon himself before beginning the study. To contemplate anew, for a short while, the fear of God, etc. However, he did not permit engaging in contemplation and acquiring fear, except according to what he weighs with his intellect,

according to his nature and his situation. That this is the time he needs and it is essential for him to engage in acquiring fear and ethics. See there. And behold, from this, every person can infer. How much time is necessary for him. To reckon with his Creator in purity of heart with the fear of God, blessed be His Name.”

**[9]** The Gaon and Chassid, Maran Rabbi Yisrael Zatzal, in the book *Yesod v'Shoresh Ha'avodah*, in the Gate of the Spark, wrote as follows: "And it is known and simple from the books of the God-fearing and Mussar, that from the diligence of his study in them, the plant of exceedingly pleasant awe will enter a person's heart, and the awe of Hashem will increase, etc. And this matter does not require support to sustain it, for it is simple that through the study of the books of the God-fearing and Mussar, a person will come to diligence in study, etc. And this is his language in *Zohar Chadash*: 'It is necessary for a person to know, etc. From where does he come and to where will he go, etc. And how is he destined to stand in judgment before the King, etc.' Behold, it is explained that it is incumbent upon a person to investigate and know the judgment and the punishment of the upper world, etc. And all of this a person will find in the books of the God-fearing and Mussar. Also, from the study of the books of the God-fearing, a person will also come to the level of Chassidut in all matters of His blessed service, and also to straight middot and straight customs that are found in the books of the God-fearing. Therefore, it is a very, very great obligation upon a person to study the books of the God-fearing and Mussar every day, at a fixed lesson. And also the Ari Zatzal strongly warns a person to study books of awe and Mussar every day, and not to miss even one day from this study."

**[10]** And in the book *Chut HaMeshulash* (The Triple Cord). This is the genealogy of the Gaon and pious Rabbi Mordechai Sofer, may his soul be sanctified, author of the responsa book *Chatam Sofer*. It was compiled by his grandson, the Gaon Rabbi. He wrote there, from the path of the aforementioned Gaon and pious one, in

holiness. And his words are: "The beginning of wisdom is the fear of God," etc. Therefore, he taught before them, first and foremost, a lesson from the book *Chovot HaLevavot* (Duties of the Heart). In order to ignite their hearts with the fear of God. And almost all his ethical teachings and practices were from the words of this holy book. And so he desired that his students engage with it in their youthful years. So that they may establish for themselves one path in the service of God, blessed be He, etc. And likewise, he said to his students that they should study the book *Menorat HaMaor* (The Lamp of Light). For there are well-collected the aggadic words of our Sages, may their memory be a blessing, etc. And he was accustomed to say to his students: Believe me, on the day that I do not study from a book of Mussar, I feel within myself a cooling in the fear of God. Thus far his words.

**[11]** And the Gaon, the Tzadik, author of *Chayei Adam*, in the laws of Yom Kippur, wrote, and this is his language: "And it is fitting for every person... And it is self-evident that it is an absolute obligation upon every person to study every day from the books of Yirah (fear/awe of God). Whether a little or whether much. For this is a greater obligation than all other study. And even if, because of this, one ceases from studying a chapter of Mishnayot or from other study. For what does the Lord your God ask of you, but to fear Him? And as it is stated in the Mishnah, 'If there is no Yirah, there is no Torah,' etc." Thus far his words. Examine there.

**[12]** And behold, it is excellent what the aforementioned Gaon wrote. For a person's heart will not be harmed by his studying books of Mussar. And to the eye, it might seem that through this, one might neglect the study of a chapter of Mishnayot, or other studies. For in no way will any harm come to the study of Torah through the study of Mussar. For when a person's heart is stirred to fear Hashem, he will further add strength to the study of Torah, to increase the time of study. For a person will find many available times for the study of Torah, and to economize from idle hours.



**[13]** And so honored is it. For I found in the book *Maggid Meisharim*, attributed to our master the Beit Yosef, at the end of Parashat Behar, what the Maggid warned him, and this is its wording: "And you shall read *Marganita d'Ve Rav* every day, etc. And also, you shall read one reading from the book *Chovot HaLevavot* to subdue the evil inclination and to humble its power, etc. See there."

And behold, *Marganita d'Ve Rav*. This is what is brought in the book *Reishit Chochmah*, in Sha'ar HaYirah, Chapter 12, and this is its wording there: "Further, concerning matters of departure and accounting, I found from a manuscript, *Marganita* of Rabbi Meir, etc. For what benefit is it to a person, whose end is to depart from the world forever, etc. See there."

And this is what was written in the book *Maggid Meisharim* there, that the Maggid said to our master the Beit Yosef: "And remember what the Rabbi said in his *Marganita*: 'What benefit is it to a person,' etc." And see there in the book *Reishit Chochmah* the words of the *Marganita* at length, for they are simple words of ethical instruction concerning matters of departure and accounting.

**[14]** And behold, let every reader of these words, what the Maggid warned our master the Beit Yosef, grasp it with awe and trembling. If the cedar which is in Lebanon, the pious and holy master the Beit Yosef, whose greatness of piety and holiness is known, and that he did not cease for even a single moment from contemplating words of Torah, as explained there in the book *Maggid Meisharim* in several places, and the greatness of his stature, for the angel of God spoke through him. And despite all this, the Maggid commanded him: to read every day *Marganita D'Vei Rav*, which are simple ethical words concerning departure [from this world] and reckoning. And likewise, to read every day the book *Chovot HaLevavot*, to subdue the evil inclination and humble its strength. What will the hyssops on the wall answer? From now on, can any man justify his way, whoever he may be, and exempt himself from the daily study of

ethics, truly?

**[15]** And the pious, accepted Rabbi Mordechai Papirash, of blessed memory. In the book *Or Tzaddikim* he wrote, and this is his language: "And read every day one reading from the book *Chovot HaLevavot*. And the Maggid said that it is good to study it. And it appears to me that in his time the book *Reishit Chochmah* was not [as prevalent/important]. And now, do not move from it." Thus far his language.

**[16]** And our master, the Gaon, the Pious, may his memory be for a blessing, used to say that we find even the Sages of the Talmud used this remedy: to repeat verses of awe and the vanities of this world. As is explained in Sanhedrin, page 7a: When Rav was young, he saw a dung heap behind him. He said, "If his peak were to ascend to the heavens, he would be lost forever." Mar Zutra the Pious, when he was carried on a festival Sabbath, would say thus: "For strength is not forever, nor is a crown for generation after generation." And examine there the commentary of Rashi on "If his peak were to ascend to the heavens..." He says, "So that his mind would not become haughty over him, he would say this." Examine there. And behold, this is the foundation of the study of Mussar: to repeat by heart words of Scripture or sayings of our Sages, of blessed memory, concerning awe and ethical conduct. Indeed, for the holy ones, the masters of the Sages, it was sufficient if they merely mentioned once with their lips any verse that belittles the matters of this world; their souls were immediately impressed, so that their minds would not become haughty. However, for us, it is necessary to repeat such verses and sayings of our Sages, of blessed memory, which inflame the heart, several times, until they make even a small impression in our hearts, even concerning one aspect of the trait of arrogance, so that our minds do not become so haughty.

**[17]** And in the book *Shaarei Teshuvah* by our Rabbi Yonah, Gate 3, he explains what the verse in Proverbs 1:2 states: "to know wisdom and in-

struction.” His words are as follows: “The skill in action and the abandonment of transgressions are called wisdom, as it is stated, ‘for that is your wisdom and your understanding.’ And after one learns and knows the commandments and what the transgressions are, one must learn the disgrace of transgressions and the loss and ruin found in them, in order to distance one’s soul from them. And to admonish oneself with the remembrance of punishments, and to discipline others. And this knowledge is called instruction. And to those who admonish, it is pleasant to learn to know this.” Thus far his words. Examine there.

## Shaarei Ohr – Chapter 6

### שערי אור -- פרק 6

**[1]** Here we have assembled a company of great scholars and holy, accepted Hasidim, who warned greatly concerning the study of books of reverence and Mussar. For it is a holy obligation upon every person to set aside time to study books of reverence and Mussar every day. And some have even exceeded this measure, studying books of Mussar twice every day, evening and morning. And in the name of the great, pious scholar, may his memory be for a blessing, it was written to study books of Mussar several times every day. And there are great scholars and Hasidim who instituted the study of Mussar in their Yeshivot, great Yeshivot dedicated to God, to study books of Mussar with the students of the Yeshiva. And besides this, behold, all the great scholars and Hasidim who labored to compose books of Mussar – their work testifies to their opinion and outlook regarding the matter of studying Mussar. For was not their entire intention that through their books, people would ponder and study, in order to fear the Blessed Holy One, may His Name be blessed, to love Him, and to cleave to Him.

**[2]** And when we gain understanding and contemplate with insight, for behold, all the

Geonim and the Chasidim mentioned above, who warned greatly concerning the study of Mussar, they lived in a former time. And they lived in a generation filled with knowledge of Hashem through Torah and reverence. Almost all the people, from the smallest to the greatest, were among the faithful of Israel, for their spirits were truly devoted to God. The sciences were still foreign in those days, and all their wisdom was nothing but wisdom and knowledge of Hashem, blessed be His Name. And therefore, Torah and the service of Hashem, blessed be His Name, were of a very high degree. The Sages of the Torah and the God-fearing ones inherited honor and greatness, splendor and praise. They did not envy the boasters then, nor the doers of iniquity, but rather they envied the fear of Hashem all day long. The spirit of the new era, which they today call the spirit of the times, was not yet seen or heard in the land, except for the spirit of knowledge and the fear of Hashem. And despite all this, those Geonim and Chasidim found the study of Mussar to be a necessary and indispensable matter for man, to be the foundation of the soul’s life.

**[3]** And what is more, even after the many days and the changing of the times, new things have come to pass in the land. Behold, there is a wind, and behold, there is a noise. And behold, a great wind comes in a storm and tempest, and it touches the corners of the House, the House of the Lord, and the tents of Jacob. The Torah and the Divine Service tremble from their place. Their foundations begin to crumble, and their pillars are shaken. The glory of the Torah has been profaned, and the testimonies of reverence have been brought down. The righteous are abandoned, and those who turn from evil are swept away. The God-fearing will hide in the clefts of the rocks. They will diminish and become fewer from day to day, and from time to time, like garments, they will change and pass away. A multitude of transformations and a host of changes, in the state of the Torah and the Divine Service of the Blessed God. And it has descended lower and lower, backward. And if so, how terrible is the obligation of studying Mussar,

to awaken and stir the reverence of God within man, so that all the winds in the world will not move him from his place.

**[4]** And similarly, what the Gaon, the pious, our master Yonatan, may his memory be for a blessing, author of Urim V'Tumim, wrote. For he was accustomed to study books of Mussar with his yeshiva students, young men. And he wrote, so that the young men would not be lacking in reverence due to the many transgressions, and would not follow the vanity of the world, as mentioned above. Behold, truly, how glorious and how esteemed is this matter: to guide the youth in the study of Mussar, so that the saplings, in their youth, may be raised in the fear of God, may His Name be blessed. And if the aforementioned Gaon, the pious, said this in his generation, a hundred and fifty years ago, a time when Torah and reverence stood at a high level, and he already recognized the spirit of the youth, for they are easily swayed and tossed about, wherever their spirit desires to go, like trees of the forest bending before the wind. And therefore, he advised uprightness, to guide them in paths of righteousness, with the study of Mussar, so that the young men would not be lacking in reverence and would not follow the vanity of the world. Rather, Torah and reverence would be with them, complete together. And similarly, the Gaon, the pious, Maharam Sofer, may his memory be for a blessing, followed his example, instituting the study of Mussar in his exalted yeshiva, as mentioned above.

**[5]** Now, what shall we say and what shall we speak? When we observe with the eye of discernment, what is the difference between the spirit of those generations and the spirit of this generation? How great and how awesome is the obligation to establish the study of Mussar in all the great Yeshivot, to implant their roots in the fear of Hashem, may His name be blessed, and in every proper character trait, while their branches are still tender, and they shall be like a fruitful vine in Torah and the fear of Hashem, may His name be blessed, and upright character traits.

**[6]** And behold, in the Gemara, Bava Batra, page 8, our Sages, of blessed memory, expounded: "And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, this refers to a judge, etc. And those who justify the multitude shall be like the stars forever and ever. These are teachers of children, etc." And Rashi explained, "Teachers of children are those who justify the multitude, for they teach and educate them in a good way." Thus far is his language. Behold, Rashi, of blessed memory, added to the teaching, that they educate them in a good way.

**[7]** But to our astonishment, we see what we did not anticipate. For this precious remedy, the study of books of reverence and ethical admonition, which the pious sages of Mussar have prepared for us, to cleanse and heal every sickness and every affliction of the soul, its foundation is in the holy mountains, in the words of our Sages, of blessed memory, and also in the paths of intellect. And how many geonim and pious individuals have greatly warned about the study of books of reverence, as mentioned above. Behold, this precious study is forgotten as if dead from the heart. A cloud of concealment and a thick fog covers it. And its fate is like the fate of a poor but wise man, who by the strength of his wisdom is able to save a small city from the hand of a great king who surrounds it to capture it. And concerning him, King Solomon, peace be upon him, said in his wisdom in Kohelet 9:14-15: "There was a small city, and few men in it; and there came a great king against it, and besieged it, and built great bulwarks against it. Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city; yet no man remembered that poor man." And so is the fate of this precious study of books of reverence and ethical admonition, which has salvation and healing in its wings. And it has the power to save a person's soul from the hand of Sheol, forever. And despite all this, no one pays attention to remember this precious remedy, by which one can be saved with eternal salvation. Whether it be the busy people burdened with troubles, or those who sit before God in the

tents of Torah, they do not concern themselves for their souls, to set aside a brief hour each day to study books of reverence and ethical admonition. Even though this study of books of reverence is itself the very essence of Torah.

**[8]** And so, their good thought and their desirable intention, of the pious Geonim, the authors of books of reverence and ethics. Who toiled and labored to sanctify the masses, to clear the path and straighten the way for the service of God, blessed be His Name. To learn wisdom and ethics, counsel and understanding, reverence for God and righteous humility, and every correct character trait. It is almost as if they were cast into futility, for their holy books lie in a corner, with no one seeking or searching for them. Except for remnants whom God calls. And only some of them were translated into the spoken language, so that the common people and women could read them. Indeed, since then, external books in this language have proliferated, swarmed, multiplied, and become mighty. It is almost as if books of ethics ceased to be circulated even among the common people. And so, the neglect in the study of reverence is great, and it has almost been eradicated from under the heavens.

**[9]** And when we investigate to know the cause of the matter, from whom this evil stems: this precious study of ethical books, which teaches man wisdom and knowledge and fear of God, righteousness and uprightness, and every precious and desirable trait – why is it so abandoned and forsaken, and has no currency among the living? Indeed, we find that besides the impediments which were mentioned in the book of the words of Joshua, which prevent man from tasting and seeing the goodness of this precious study (see there), there are still other causes for this, which wall off its path with hewn stone, so that no man's foot may pass through it. And these are fundamental [obstacles], both physical and spiritual.

**[10]** This is the material cause. For the study of Mussar is in the nature of a remedy for the sick-

ness of the soul. And necessarily, there must first arise within the heart of man the recognition to know that the soul is very sick. And after that, the desire and the will to seek a cure for his sickness. And this is to seek the will of God, to draw near to His service, blessed be His name. And for this very purpose, many calculations are required from the calculation of the soul. And without Mussar, there is no calculation and no knowledge. And from where will this recognition and this awakening be born within him in the first place, without the study of Mussar, and without arousing and awakening?

**[11]** This is the second point, regarding the essence of the virtue of studying Mussar. Although it encompasses many calculations, it is known that its foundation is the soul's reckoning from the fear of punishment, to calculate the reckoning of the world. For is it not true that man is appointed upon the earth? Just as he came, so shall he depart. As he came out of the womb naked, so shall he return to go. And to remember the days of darkness, for they will be many. And that the God of Justice will call to account all that is hidden. And as our Sages, may their memory be blessed, taught at the beginning of Chapter 3 of Avot: "Consider three things..." Behold, the study and contemplation of these matters, at first glance, are a path of sorrow and sadness. And all of man's desire and longing is to be in joy and good-heartedness always, to remove worry from his heart, and to banish grief from his flesh, and to live in tranquility. And therefore, he will not desire to even touch the edge of studying Mussar, without his heart becoming distressed and his spirit embittered.

**[12]** However, the truth is not so. For this remedy, which is the study of Mussar, its beginning is bitter and its end is sweet. For when a person accustoms himself to study books of Mussar, then with his eyes he will see and with his heart he will understand. For what joy does this bring? And it is in vain to close one's eyes from seeing evil, which will befall him in the end of days, and to walk like a blind man in darkness,

after there is no escape or refuge to be saved from this. And as our Sages of blessed memory said in Chapter 4 of Avot: "Willy-nilly you die, and willy-nilly you are destined to give an accounting before the King of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He." And conversely, he will rejoice in his portion and exult with awe, for his eyes have been opened to know good and evil, to see what is to come, and to confront evil with all that is possible.

**[13]** However, the spiritual cause is simple. For this is the counsel of the *yetzer* (inclination/evil impulse). He is the great king who surrounds the small city, which is the body with its multitude of forces. He builds sieges upon it to conquer and capture it, and his net is spread over all living beings. And since only the fear of God is like arrows in the hand of a mighty warrior, to fight the ruler and to stand against him in battle arrays. And the study of *mussar* (ethics/discipline) is that which influences an abundance of the fear of God. For on this account he stands before man as Satan, by the way of studying reverence and *mussar*, so that he may walk in darkness and without light. And in his great folly he will stray, in the absence of wisdom and *mussar*, in the absence of reckoning and knowledge, of what was and what will be in the end. And thus it is easy for him to trap human beings in his net like fish of the sea, and like gathering abandoned eggs, with no rescuer and no savior.

**[14]** And even more so, for it is from the machinations of the Evil Inclination, its cunning and its stratagems. For even when its right hand prevails over man, to trap him in its snare, to lead him astray from the path of good, to lead him on crooked paths without direction, and to rule over him with great dominion according to its will. And even if many years have already passed, and thus they have been consumed and gone by, nevertheless, he is still always afraid and fearful, and is not secure with man. For indeed, a spirit is in man, and the choice is in his hand. And lest he open the eyes of his intellect, and desire to emerge from the upheaval, for he will repent and regret the evil, and save

his soul. And then all its labor will ascend in vain. For therefore it will place upon him seven eyes, and will appoint guards over him, to guard him from the path of the Tree of Life, to guard his heels, and to count the steps of his feet, lest he flee and escape from its hand like a bird from a snare.

**[15]** And indeed, how can one be surprised? By what means is its power so great to restrain the human spirit? To guard it lest it stir and shake itself free from the dust of its materiality. To awaken it to emerge from the depths of mire towards the dawn of hope. Indeed, this is understandable in light of what is written in the book *Mesillat Yesharim*, chapter 2, and its words are as follows: "But behold, this is truly one of the stratagems of the evil inclination and its cunning: to make its service burdensome and constant upon the hearts of human beings, so that they will have no room left to contemplate and observe in what way they are going. For it knows that if they would only pay a little attention to their ways, surely they would immediately begin to be comforted from their deeds, etc." And this is akin to the counsel of the wicked Pharaoh, who said, "Let the labor be heavy, etc." He strove to distract their hearts from all contemplation, by the power of the continuous, unceasing labor. Thus is the counsel of the evil inclination, truly, concerning man.

**[16]** And behold, the pious one, may his memory be for a blessing, was silent and did not elaborate. Regarding the matter of the burden of "service" upon the hearts of human beings. What is this "service"? However, it appears that this encompasses two things. First, the care and preoccupation with the affairs of this world. The necessity of finding sustenance for one's household. And the pursuit of luxuries. For man is immersed in this preoccupation with all his heart and soul. To gather and accumulate matters. And to increase possessions and acquisitions. And there is no end to all his toil. For this desire has no measure, and this longing has no limit. And as our Sages, may their memory be for a blessing, said: "No man dies and half his

desires are in his hand. He has a hundred [units] and seeks two hundred, etc.”

**[17]** The second is man’s preoccupation with his inclination. As our Sages, may their memory be blessed, said in Yoma, folio 35b: “I was beautiful, and I was preoccupied with my inclination...” (See there). For there is nothing that preoccupies a person and confuses his mind like the preoccupation of the inclination, which incites him to follow vanity, in the ways of his heart and the sight of his eyes, wherever the wind of his desire carries him to go. And his base traits lead to destruction and ruin. And from these two – the preoccupation with the affairs of the world and the preoccupation of the inclination – man is struck with blindness and a stunned heart. He is placed as if within a sling’s pouch, his head upon him like a wheel, and his heart is whirling. His eyes are covered from seeing, and his heart from understanding. This is the heaviness of the service upon the hearts of the children of man, as the aforementioned pious one wrote.

**[18]** And in any case, since all the toil of the evil inclination, its cunning and its stratagems, is to cast a slumber upon man, and to guard him lest he open the eyes of his intellect to know good and evil, and to awaken to bring forth his soul from its confinement. For it burdens his service with constant pressure upon his heart, until there is no room left for him to contemplate and to observe his ways. And as it is written in the book *Mesillat Yesharim*, as mentioned above. And from this it is self-evident that the study of Mussar is like a painful thorn in the eye of the evil inclination. For through this, all its counsel will be thwarted, and all its wisdom will be swallowed up. For indeed, the fruit of the study of Mussar is the ways of accounting from the accounting of the world, and contemplation in the fear of God, blessed be His Name. And even if man sets his heart to set aside a time each day to study books of reverence and Mussar, then in vain does the guardian labor to guard from him the path of the Tree of Life. For when his soul is imbued with the fear of God, and he contem-

plates his ways, he will destroy the trap and cut down the enclosures. And the path will be open before him to flee and save his life like a gazelle from a hand, to repent for his wickedness, and to return to God, blessed be His Name. For this reason, it is self-evident that the evil inclination will rise against the study of Mussar with great strength and a mighty hand, and will not refrain from taking all means to turn man’s heart away from the study of reverence and Mussar, whether with ancient, scorched arguments, or with other ways prepared before it, to block its path and to fence its routes with hewn stone, so that no man’s foot may pass through it.

**[19]** Indeed, there is nothing that can stand before the ways of wisdom. Through his wisdom, man can agitate even the lion from its thicket and capture it in a trap. He can also catch the great serpent with a hook. And how much more so can one capture a heart of flesh, drawing it with the cords of awe and ethical discipline, for its own good all its days. Therefore, supporters stood at its right hand for the study of awe and ethical discipline, to uphold and assist it with wisdom and counsel. It would not have been so complete and decisive, for every good and beneficial thing is supported only by the cords of counsel and strategy. Thus, the builders always labored, for Torah and for testimony, to uphold and assist it. However, concerning this sublime matter of the study of awe and ethical discipline, a profound silence and tranquil quietude has settled. Without any stirring or awakening, there is no one to grasp it, and no one to support its destiny, neither by word nor by deed. There is no widely recognized vision, no reprover in the gate, and no herald of righteousness in a great congregation to say: “This is the way, walk in it. Eat from the fruit of the lips of the books of awe and ethical discipline, and let your eyes behold, and your soul live. So that you may turn away from the netherworld, and be satisfied with the eternal delights of honor and bliss.”

## Shaarei Ohr – Chapter 7

### שערי אור -- פרק 7

**[1]** Indeed, there is a time and season for every matter. So too, the time has come to revive this precious treasure: the study of reverence (yirah) and ethical conduct (musar) from the heap of dust. So that it may become springs of salvation, to bring life to a great multitude in the life of the soul. For it is for this reason that, in God's compassion for His people, the light of Israel and His host, His cavalry and His foot soldiers, dawned. This refers to our master, the Gaon, the Great, the True Hasid, the Holy One of Israel, may his merit protect us, from the city of Salant. And in his youthful days, he poured water at the hands of a holy and awesome man, our master, the Gaon, the Great, the Hasid and the Humble, the Light of the World, the Holy One of God, revered, our teacher Yosef Zundel, may his merit protect us. He who is known by all by his name, Rabbi Zundel Salanter. A beloved disciple of the Gaon, the Great, the Hasid, the Leader of the Exiles, our master Chaim, may his merit protect us, from Volozhin. And our master, the Gaon, the Hasid, the Holy One of Israel, may his merit protect us, served his master in holiness. And he received from him the ways of reverence (yirah) and ethical conduct (musar) and the service of God, blessed be His Name. And he poured water at his hands for many years. Until his master, the Gaon, the Hasid, our teacher Yosef Zundel, mentioned above, journeyed to dwell in honor in the Holy City of Jerusalem, may she be rebuilt and established speedily.

**[2]** And behold, to recount here the entire account of the greatness of the Gaon, the pious Rabbi Yisrael Ziv, of blessed memory, mentioned above. All the strength of his righteousness, his piety, his humility, and his holiness, which our ears heard from the holy mouth of my Rebbe, of blessed memory. He would always recount great and wondrous things about the virtues of his teacher, the Gaon, the pious one mentioned above. The breadth of the ac-

count is too short to contain it. And a mere fraction thereof the reader will see in the preface of my Rebbe, of blessed memory, to the book *Ha'Tevunah*, in the margins of the account there, in the words beginning, "And I will pour water by the hand of my teacher, the Rabbi, Rabbi Yosef Zundel, may he live and be well, who resides in Jerusalem, may his life be long and his days be many." And until now I have not reached his ankles, he was, etc. I have elaborated somewhat on the virtue of this great person, a light of the world, according to my estimation, etc. Thus far the words of my Rebbe, of blessed memory. See there. And likewise, I saw in one letter from his holy handwriting, my Rebbe, of blessed memory, who wrote, and these are his words: "When I served my teacher and my rabbi, the Gaon, the righteous one, etc., Rabbi Yosef Zundel, may his memory be for a blessing, mentioned above, for several years. And I knew the greatness of his righteousness, exceedingly so, to the amazement of the wise. I found, etc., for according to my estimation, I have not found a servant of God, blessed be His Name, like my teacher and my rabbi mentioned above." Thus far the words of my Rebbe.

**[3]** And behold, the Gaon and Hasid, the aforementioned Rabbi Yisrael, the teacher of our master. His holy practice was to study books of Mussar daily with great contemplation. Likewise, he would review verses of awe and love. And concerning the sayings of our Sages, of blessed memory, that inspire awe and Mussar. And many times he would go outside the city into the field to study and review words of awe and Mussar. And similarly, on the holy Shabbat, during the winter nights, the aforementioned Hasid was stringent with himself not to study by lamplight, and he would study by heart. And then he would also review words of awe and Mussar, to prepare himself for all the days of the week with character traits and matters that he would need, according to his situation, to strengthen and exert himself in them. And similarly, I saw in a letter that the aforementioned Gaon and Hasid wrote to his son, may he live, in his holy handwriting. And this is his holy word-

ing: "And always repeat verses of Divine Providence, trust, and salvation, such as 'Hope in the Lord; be strong and let your heart be courageous' (Psalms 27:14), 'My eyes are always toward the Lord, for He will pluck my feet out of the net' (Psalms 25:15), and the like. And then you will walk securely, and the salvation of the Lord is as swift as the blink of an eye,' and so forth." Thus far his words. And without a doubt, he received the path of studying Mussar from his teacher, the Gaon and Hasid, Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin, of blessed memory.

**[4]** Our Master, the Gaon, the Pious, the Holy of Israel, may his memory be for a blessing. In the dew of his youth, his head reached the heavens. The sun of his understanding shone sevenfold. And already then he was renowned as a mighty Gaon, the glory of Israel. And when he drew near to the Holy One, blessed be He, to his Master, the Gaon, the Pious, Rabbi Yitzchak of Shklov, mentioned above, and he would constantly enter and exit in his presence like a member of the household. He would contemplate his Master's ways and his service in holiness. And he would count the steps of his feet. And when his Master would walk in the field to study and review words of reverence and Mussar, our Master would follow him in secret, to contemplate and hear his good words of Mussar. And the Gaon, the Pious, Rabbi Yitzchak of Shklov, mentioned above, saw and contemplated that this pleasant blossom would grow like a cedar in Lebanon. And the light of Israel would be an eternal light, and his light would shine to the ends of the earth. His love for him was wondrous. And he spread from the radiance of his righteousness and his way in holiness. And he saw fit to command him concerning the study of Mussar. And I personally heard that once he said to him in this manner: "Israel, study Mussar, and be God-fearing." These words descended into the chambers of his heart like an arrow from a bow. And he began to follow in the paths of his pious Master, to also study daily books of reverence and Mussar. And his soul was greatly moved by the fear of God, blessed be His Name. And there awoke in his heart a

spirit of purity and a holy emotion, to rise above the desires of the time, and to seek the favor of God, blessed be His Name. And to strengthen himself in Torah and the fear of God together. And with the greatness of his genius, he delved deeply and broadened himself also in the wisdom of reverence and Mussar. And he toiled and labored to understand and to gain insight into all the ways of serving God, blessed be His Name, and in the rectification of all character traits. And like a surging spring, he flowed and passed through Torah and righteousness, piety, humility, and fear of sin. And while he was still young in days, many already joined him, to find shelter in the shadow of his guidance, and to hear from him words of his wisdom and his understanding in reverence and the service of God, blessed be His Name. And already then he began to cause the multitude to merit. And so he went and grew, until he grew greatly. And from the abundance of his Torah and his reverence, he influenced his generation, and even more so his many disciples, for he gave his soul for them to elevate them in the way of God, and to plant within them pleasant plantings: the fear of God and straight character traits. He merited and caused the multitude to merit, and he raised the horn of Torah and the fear of God in the world. And it was a miracle when his name went forth to all the ends of the earth, as the leader of the exiles, the glory of the world, and as a pious, humble, righteous one, the foundation of the world.

## Shaarei Ohr – Chapter 8

### שערי אור -- פרק 8

**[1]** Indeed, when our master, the Gaon and pious one, may his memory be for a blessing, delved deeply into this wisdom of studying reverence and ethical conduct, and saw that it was good, to enlighten the masses with them. Then, with the divine wisdom within him, he balanced, investigated, and perfected this wisdom



of studying ethical conduct. He prepared it and also thoroughly examined it. He improved it and made it complete. And so, he set his heart to magnify and glorify it, to prepare it and to support it with righteousness and integrity, to establish paths for it among the people, and ways of walking among the living. And these are the matters which he enacted, did, and taught knowledge, in the foundations of the ways of this wisdom.

**[2]** The essential obligation of studying awe and ethical conduct—as our Master, of blessed memory, observed and perceived with discerning insight. Regarding the spiritual state of the generation, that it is in a state of evil, awe descends wondrously, and the service of God diminishes. The character traits become agitated. And due to life's necessities, which increase from time to time, man becomes entangled in a thicket of many preoccupations, and new trials renew themselves daily. And the great war is the war of the evil inclination, which becomes increasingly difficult for man. And the hand of the evil inclination grows strong to turn the war back and forth upon him. And thus he saw and proved the entire good hidden within the study of ethical conduct. For it has a spiritual essence to bring about salvation within the land. For salvation and healing are in its wings, to hasten deliverance and to heal the wound and the affliction, for the sickness and maladies of souls, to restore them to life. And no one strengthens themselves with it; no one supports its fate; and no one holds onto its right hand. And its memory is almost forgotten.

**[3]** And therefore, one should elevate himself like a lion and like a leopard. To do great deeds. And raise his voice like a shofar. To call out at the head of crowds. And to expound in assemblies. To publicize the obligation of studying Mussar for the masses. For there is no wisdom, and no understanding, and no counsel, to hasten escape from the snare of the evil inclination. Which lies in wait at every corner. To spread a net for man's feet. To trap him in a trap. Unless through the study of reverence (Yirat Shamayim)

and Mussar. And even for the person who has already been trapped in the snare and caught in the net, there is no hope for him. To turn from evil to good without the study of Mussar. And thus he made known and publicized the goodness of studying Mussar and its essence, the grace of its value and its unique quality. For it is like the dew of revival, which has the power to breathe a spirit of life into dry bones from Torah and Mitzvah. And to form upon them skin of reverence for God, may He be blessed. And likewise, to turn a heart of stone into a heart of flesh. And under a spirit of perversity, to renew within him a right spirit.

**[4]** And for this reason, since the snare of the evil inclination is spread over all sentient beings, therefore the study of Mussar is a binding obligation incumbent upon all souls, without exception. From the great Rabbi who sits on the throne of judgment, to the laborer who works at the mill. From man to woman. Like a scholar, like an ignoramus. Like a youth, like an elder. Like a rich man, like a poor man. Like the despised, like the honored. Like one who fears God, and like one who does not fear Him. All are obligated to set aside times to study books of reverence and ethical instruction.

**[5]** And so it was with our Rebbe, may his memory be for a blessing. He would go about and proclaim loudly, in the name of studying reverence and ethics. Like a watchman for the House of Israel, to awaken and rouse people to this study. For from it come forth life. For "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." And so he taught knowledge, wisdom, and ethics to his disciples, never wearying nor tiring from doing good. And so he gathered and disseminated practices, for the sake of studying ethics, to broaden the custom in this matter, which many would traverse. And knowledge and the fear of the Lord would increase among Israel. And he shook the world with this, as is known and famous, until it became known throughout the world as an obligation to study reverence and ethics, in the name of our Rebbe, the holy one of Israel. And this sacred service, he did not

cease from the dew of his youth until his last day.

## Shaarei Ohr – Chapter 9

### שערי אור -- פרק 9

**[1]** (2) The Ways of Benefit from Study, and this is the study of Mussar with emotional engagement. Our Rebbe, of blessed memory, in his wisdom, changed the face of Mussar study. He clothed it in a different form. And whereas previously, even one who sometimes studied some books of Mussar, the style of this study was with the taste and melody of studying Gemara and Poskim, or with contemplation and observation alone. However, our Rebbe, of blessed memory, taught understanding and knowledge, that the fruit of benefit from the study of Mussar is twofold. (1) This is the knowledge and enlightenment in the wisdom of reverence. To know the way of God, blessed be His Name, to understand and be enlightened in the ways of His service. For this is great and deep wisdom. And as it is written, "Behold, the reverence of the Lord, that is wisdom." And our Sages, of blessed memory, said in Shabbat, page 31, "Behold, one." See there. And as the pious one elaborated on this in the book Mesilat Yesharim in the introduction. See there. (2) This is the arousal, that through the study of books of Mussar, his heart will warm, and his soul will be moved, and his spirit will be humbled. And reverence for God, blessed be His Name, will be aroused within him.

**[2]** And behold, for the perfection of knowledge, there is no difference in what manner or subject one studies. And even contemplation alone is good. However, for the ultimate acquisition of awe, to be aroused through study to fear the Lord, blessed be His Name, behold, in the style of study as mentioned above, salvation is still distant. To bring the fear of the Lord into one's heart, and to make an impression on

his heart. For by knowledge alone, man is not chastened. For the sum of matters is that from the fear of the Lord and the dread of His punishment, blessed be His Name, knowledge was not hidden from him even before the study. And despite all this, the fear of the Lord is far from his innermost being. And as our Sages, may their memory be blessed, said in Shabbat, page 31: "What is written, 'This is their way, their folly is in them, they know...' (Psalms 49:14). Perhaps you will say it is forgetfulness on their part..."

**[3]** And to this end, for the ultimate acquisition of awe (Yirat Hashem), it is necessary that the style of study in books of Mussar be with the stirring of the soul, with a sincere heart, in a sorrowful voice, with burning lips. To expand the idea through sensory imagery, for the power of imagery is very beneficial for Mussar, to awaken the soul with the sensation of the limbs, to draw within it matters known from the punishments of the body and soul. Just as we see with the power of musical instruments and the voice of song, with which a person's soul is stirred and his spirit is awakened, both to joy and to sorrow. So too, when a person reads the discourses of our Sages, of blessed memory, and books of Mussar, which inflame the hearts with the awe of God, blessed be His Name, in a voice of grief and sorrow, and with the stirring of the soul, then his heart will burn within him, and his soul will rage and tremble, and all his senses will be stirred, until the words strike root deep within the thoughts of his heart, to bring the awe of God into his being. And even if at times the study of Mussar brings him to a state of agitation, and his eyes shed streams of water, and he gives his tears like the dew of Hermon, then a new spirit will be given to him, and the awe of God will enter him like water and like oil into his bones.

**[4]** (3) And therefore, it is good to review a statement of awe and ethical instruction [mussar] several times. Especially when one arrives at a statement of our Sages, of blessed memory, or other words of ethical instruction, from which he feels his soul will be moved, and which will

penetrate the chambers of his heart. He should review and repeat it with emotion, many, many times, until it is engraved upon the tablet of his heart, and as frontlets between his eyes. Then, even when he walks outside, and when he lies down on his bed, this statement will ring in his ears like a bell, and will not depart from his memory.

**[5]** And our master, the Gaon, the Pious, may his memory be a blessing, himself, would study books of Mussar with great and immense wonder. And in a very pleasant voice, he would stir sadness. And sometimes he would repeat one statement with such wonder, many, many times. And whoever heard his voice, their heart would melt and become like water. And even in his old age, and the elders of the wise scholars, as long as they grow old, etc. And this man was holy and awesome, and his soul had almost detached from its physicality. Despite all this, he did not cease from studying and contemplating books of Mussar, with very immense wonder. And sometimes he would weep a great weeping.

**[6]** (4) Just as the pious individuals who authored books of awe [of God] gathered and compiled all the pronouncements of ethical instruction pertaining to awe in general, and likewise those that relate to each specific character trait. So too, when a person senses within his soul that a particular trait has become most corrupted within him, he should focus his attention and heart upon it to heal its ailment. He should repeatedly review the pronouncements of awe and ethical instruction that specifically relate to this trait until he is restored and healed. Similarly, even with his desirable character traits, if he is sometimes faced with a trial that requires him to conquer his inclination, he should hasten his escape from the tempest of inclination by studying the ethical instruction that relates to this specific matter, until he conquers the war. However, the study of ethical instruction pertaining to the awe of God in general, to contemplate the reckoning of the world, upon this one must constantly return and repeat.

**[7]** (5) The study of Mussar is a duty incumbent upon a person. One must establish regular times for this. One should study with the soul's arousal. Without a great interruption of time between the studies. This is almost a natural reason why Mussar study sometimes does not achieve its required effect. Due to long interruptions of time, without even a small awakening in between. So too, there is also a spiritual reason. It is the transgressions that dull a person's heart, and it becomes like a stone, God forbid. Its primary remedy is the study of Torah, and also prayer with humility, and through this his heart will soften, to be moved by words of admonishment, awe, and Mussar.

**[8]** The person preoccupied with his business, whose affliction is great and whose time is short, and how much more so his Torah study. You have established times for Torah. It is the primary concern before him. Therefore, at the very least, dedicate time to study Mussar books on the holy Shabbat with soul-stirring emotion. And also, study Mussar books for a brief period a few times a week. Even for a few minutes, so that the impressions that are born will not be nullified by the length of time from one holy Shabbat to the next.

## Shaarei Ohr – Chapter 10

### שערי אור -- פרק 10

**[1]** (5) The Fear of Punishment. My teacher, the Gaon and Pious One, may his memory be for a blessing. In his ethical ways, he did not engage in grandiosity and wonders, nor did he elevate his discourse to lofty levels concerning the realms of the fear of exaltation and the love of God, blessed be His Name. Rather, the righteous one adhered to his path of holiness in most of his ethical teachings solely from the fear of punishment. For this is the beginning of knowledge, and the first step towards serving God, blessed be His Name, to turn away from

evil and do good. As my teacher, may his memory be for a blessing, wrote in his ethical epistle, see there. Its foundation is in the holy mountains, in the words of our Sages, of blessed memory, who taught in Chapter 3 of Avot: "Contemplate three things, and you will not come to commit a transgression: Know from where you came, and to where you are going, and before Whom you are destined to give an account and reckoning, etc." And for this reason, the teaching of ethics from the fear of punishment will be more beneficial to the soul of man than all the balm of Gilead.

**[2]** And we have already written above that one of the reasons that prevent a person from studying Mussar, and blocks its path, is because its foundation is the fear of punishment. The ways of accounting for one's end, the day of his reckoning, the place of his rest, the judgment and the accounting, the depths of the Refaim, and the belly of Sheol. And at first glance, contemplating these matters is a path of sorrow and sadness. And all of a person's desire and longing is to remove worry from his heart, to live in tranquility, and to always be joyful and good-hearted. And therefore, he will turn his path away from this manner of study, because he does not wish to bring to mind at all the remembrance of his end, lest terror seize him, and lest it disturb his peace, for it will sadden his heart.

**[3]** And it is also wondrous. For behold, besides the fact that a person does not set his heart to labor in acquiring the ways of awe and the fear of His blessed Name's punishment, behold, it is even more wondrous. For even the multitude of causes and occurrences, God forbid, that arise in the world, which frighten every heart and make every soul tremble, and from which, even without words, the intellect dictates that a person should be affected, and his heart should soften and fear to fear the Lord, blessed be His Name. And despite all this, it makes no impression on his soul at all. This is because a person, with intention and will, strives to forget from his heart and to divert his attention from anything that could lead him to sadness.

**[4]** And so we see clearly. For if, God forbid, some sudden event occurs, may the Merciful One protect us. Like fish caught in a net. It is human nature to investigate and inquire thoroughly. Whether the matter is truly correct. And whether there was not some natural cause involved. And when even the slightest cause, however remote, is discovered, that it is possible to attribute the event to this, it will bring satisfaction and serve to blind the eyes. For it will calm his spirit and his mind will rest in this.

**[5]** This is the teaching of man, and this is his way. However, this is great folly and foolishness. And our Rebbe, may his memory be a blessing, already offered his parable concerning this. For it is likened to a man who by nature is afraid of sounds and lightning. And when he hears a terrible thunderclap in the heavens and is seized by fear, he hides himself under blankets and covers, and stops his ears from hearing, thinking that by so doing, no harm will befall him. So what is the benefit of closing one's eyes from seeing, and one's ears from hearing, and one's heart from understanding, the evil that will befall him in the end of days from the fruit of his deeds? After which there is no escape and no refuge to be saved from this. Even if the fear is broken, he will not escape. For where from the spirit of God will he go? And from His presence where will he flee? And as our Sages, may they rest in peace, said in Chapter 4 of Avot: "Against your will you die, and against your will you are destined to give an accounting before the King of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He."

**[6]** Indeed, here is the essence: that a person should shake off his external [focus] from the study of reverence and ethics. Lest the path of sorrow bring him down. This is but a false illusion. And all this is because he did not persevere in this study. However, when one accustoms himself to study books of reverence and ethics, then he will gain insight and understand that the matter is not so. And he feared in vain a fear for several reasons.

**[7]** For it is not according to the primary intel-

lectual faculty. For immediately when a person reads books of reverence and ethical instruction, his heart will burn within him, and his soul will be moved by the fear of God, blessed be His Name. And all the pillars of his body will tremble. For through the sins that have calloused a person's heart, the heart becomes like stone, hard as flint. So much so that even when he reads books of ethical instruction, and the awesome sayings of our Sages, of blessed memory, concerning the fear of punishment, he will feel but little. He will study and not be greatly aroused. Only after many days, and after he has poured much water upon his soul through the study of ethical instruction, will the spirit of reverence for God, blessed be His Name, aspire within him. And his uncircumcised heart will be humbled, and his soul will awaken to emerge from the murky depths, to the threshold of hope.

**[8]** Even when the study of Mussar makes an impression on one's soul, and one is filled with awe of Hashem and fear of His retribution, blessed be His Name, even then one should not add sorrow to it. And my Rebbe, of blessed memory, used to say regarding this: Just as a valiant soldier serving in the army, though burdened with much labor, and even when he sins and transgresses and bears his iniquity – for he will receive his punishment from those who strike him with a rod according to his wickedness, numbered – nevertheless, we do not see him going about dejected with sadness and anger. Rather, he will rise from the ground, wipe the tears from his eyes, and immediately return to his service and his burden. And he will brighten his countenance. This is because the duty of service incumbent upon him is always a heavy load, which does not allow him to divert his attention and think thoughts that are neither helpful nor beneficial. Rather, he will strengthen himself to improve his work in the matter that has been assigned to him.

**[9]** Thus is the matter concerning our service of God, blessed be His Name. For when a person studies and reads in books of reverence and ethical admonition, and his heart is stirred to rev-

erence God, blessed be His Name, and he understands and comprehends the great service incumbent upon him, to fulfill all the words of the Torah and the commandment, and to walk in His ways, blessed be His Name. Behold, reverence will drive away from him every thought, and will compel him to be strong as a lion, and to serve the Creator, blessed be His Name, without ceasing.

**[10]** When a person habituates himself to study books of awe and ethical instruction, then his eyes will be opened to see also the great reward of those who do the will of the Blessed One, His Name. And the good hidden for the righteous, which no eye of prophet or seer has seen. And therefore, when he acquires the awe of the Blessed One, His Name, it will necessarily make an impression upon his soul to change his ways for the better, whether a little or much. And then it will be the opposite: for he will rejoice in his portion and exult with trembling, that his eyes have been opened to know good and evil, and to see what is born. And awe will give him strength and might, and the great reward will assist him, and the hope to further improve his way, and to save his soul from the darkness of the thick clouds of the depths of Sheol, to the light in the precious light of life and eternal delight. It will renew his strength, and a right spirit will renew within him.

**[11]** And yet, the man who is fearful and tender of heart, and does not wish to approach the books of Mussar at first due to fear of punishment, behold, before him lies a vast expanse of other ethical teachings and admonitions to reach out and grasp the Tree of Life, the reward of a mitzvah from the World to Come. Likewise, the ethical teachings from the paths of intellect, such as from His blessed Name's providence over man, guarding and sheltering him at every moment, and His abundant goodness, compassion, and kindness. And the pious one, the author of *Chovot HaLevavot* (Duties of the Heart), arranges concerning this two gates: the Gate of Examination and the Gate of Divine Service. And all of this will suffice to illuminate a per-

son's eyes, to understand and to gain wisdom, to draw closer to His blessed Name's service.

**[12]** Let not a person's heart despair when he studies Mussar and is not moved, and his soul finds no impression to change his ways. Let him know with certainty, even if the impression is not revealed to the eyes of flesh, the eyes of intellect see. With the passage of time, with the abundance of study, from the accumulation of hidden impressions, he will be transformed into another person. His desires will be restrained, lest they break forth excessively, and some will even be nullified. Experience will testify with a simple observation, regarding the student of Mussar, whether he has learned a little, etc. With greater elevation he will rise above his peers in his thoughts and all his conduct. All this is from the words of my Rebbe, of blessed memory, in a letter.

**[13]** However, when the Master, of blessed memory, elaborated on wisdom and ethical admonition concerning the fear of punishment, specifically regarding spiritual punishment, he stated that it is exceedingly, exceedingly awesome, and transcends all human conception. It is like when we observe through magnifying lenses, which enlarge everything a thousand thousand times. Thus, regarding stars that appear as tiny dots, through the magnifying lenses they will seem to our eyes much larger. Yet, in truth, there is no comparison to their greatness, for there are stars that are vastly greater than the Earth. So it is with the essence of spiritual punishment. Even with all the powers of imagination, by which a person might conceive the magnitude of the punishment's bitterness, they will not reach its ultimate reality, as it truly is awesome.

**[14]** And therefore, our Rebbe, may his memory be for a blessing, used to say: Indeed, as a matter of business, it is worthwhile and beneficial for a person to set aside times throughout his days to study for a brief hour each day books of awe and ethical instruction. For these, too, are the very essence of Torah, even if they only

bear fruit. For over the course of his entire life, he will refrain from committing one sin. For he will be prevented from speaking one instance of slander, or any other forbidden speech. Or from one hour of neglecting Torah study, and the like. And as the great and pious scholar, may his memory be for a blessing, also wrote in the epistle "Alayim L'Trufah" concerning the severity of punishment: And his words are: "And for every idle word, one must be cast from the end of the world to its end." And all of this is concerning superfluous words. But concerning forbidden words, such as slander and mockery, etc., for these one must descend very, very deep into the netherworld. And it is impossible to estimate the magnitude of the suffering and troubles one endures for even one word. See there. And in any event, if a person refrains from even one word, and he is spared one hour of punishment in the spiritual world, it will be a success unparalleled in this world. And thus, behold, it is a good and beneficial business for a person to study books of ethical instruction throughout his days, even merely to refrain from one sin. And how much more so, for through the study of ethical instruction, without a doubt, how much slander will he cease to speak, how much mockery, how many idle words will he refrain from. How many hours will he add to Torah study, and the like.

## Shaarei Ohr – Chapter 11

שערי אור -- פרק 11

**[1]** (9) A Dedicated House for the Study of Mussar—Our Master, the Gaon, the Pious, of blessed memory, expounded and established this. For to fully realize the benefit of the ways of studying Mussar, it is necessary that there be a dedicated place for it, set apart and distinguished solely for the purpose of this study, namely, the study of Mussar. And there, many Mussar books will be found in abundance, and its gates shall always be open. And there, many,

and likewise the complete, will gather. And every person whose heart is moved to study Mussar books shall enter this house. And according to the state of his illness in the service of His blessed Name, so shall he set his heart to study books of awe and Mussar with soul-stirring emotion, each person according to how he knows the affliction of his heart and his suffering. And our Master, of blessed memory, personally strove to build here a House of Mussar, with the help of generous hearts. And it stands firm, praised be the L-rd, to this day. And our Master, of blessed memory, himself would always come to the House of Mussar to study Mussar books, with great and mighty emotion, as was his holy way. Sometimes he would come at the usual time for the public, to convene there, that is, after the Mincha prayer. And sometimes he would come to study in solitude, at a time when no one else was there.

**[2]** And behold, there are those who will pose a deep question: What is the need for a special house for the study of Mussar? Is it not the case that anyone who desires to study books of Mussar will not be prevented from studying in his own home or in the study hall? To this, I shall provide a fitting answer and response, to make it clear to all the benefit of a special house for the study of Mussar. For it is a counsel deep from the heart of a wise and pious man, like our holy Rabbi Yisrael, may his memory be for a blessing. For it is a cornerstone and a foundational principle for strengthening the entire structure.

**[3]** Every intelligent person in awe of God is obligated to acknowledge that the study of Mussar is essential for the life of the soul. And although the Geonim and the pious warned about this, as mentioned above, our eyes see clearly that this study has almost passed away and is gone from the world. For no one takes it to heart to set aside times for the study of Mussar. And not many are wise enough to understand and comprehend the nature of this study and how necessary it is. And even one who has never studied books of Mussar in his life will not find himself lacking anything. Only our Rebbe, of

blessed memory, restored it to its former glory and publicized throughout the world the obligation of studying Mussar. And therefore, it is self-evident that much wisdom and counsel are required to draw hearts to this study, to clear the path before anyone who desires to study books of reverence and Mussar, and to straighten the way, removing from it every obstacle and impediment. To this end, a special house for the study of Mussar is hereby established. This is the greatest stratagem to draw souls to this study, and it is the path of righteousness, and it is greatly needed for several reasons:

**[4]** Even a person who has already heard and knows, and whose heart is inclined towards this study, namely the study of Mussar, should therefore seek out a place for it. Especially since the primary benefit is to learn in a manner that is effective through the stirring of the soul, as mentioned above. Is it possible that he should sit to study in his home, with his household members surrounding him? Or study in the Beit Midrash, where his study with soul-stirring will disturb those studying Gemara and Halakhot, and they, in their study, will disturb him from studying Mussar? And what if, at times, the study of Mussar awakens him to weeping, and his eyes stream with rivers of tears? Will he not be ashamed and covered in disgrace to engage in it? Likewise, sometimes he may not even have books of Mussar. This is not the case when there is a special house for this, where there is no Satan and no impediment, and all is prepared with many books of Mussar. Likewise, studying with soul-stirring is customary there. There, every person can study books of Mussar with as much soul-stirring as his soul desires, with no one to prevent or hinder him. And also to awaken lamentation and moaning, like ostriches and daughters of the ostrich, and to shed tears without restraint.

**[5]** Since most people are entirely devoid of this knowledge and of the ways of study, and have not accustomed themselves to it from time immemorial, who will awaken and rouse them? And who will teach them the path of study? It is

therefore necessary to expand this practice by means of a special place for the study of Mussar. There, many, and indeed the complete, will gather at an appointed time to study books of Mussar. And it will be that everyone who enters the house and hears the voice of sorrow and sadness, the voice of contemplation and reflection, concerning the sayings of our Sages, of blessed memory, and the awesome words of Mussar from the fear of God, which make every soul tremble, their heart will melt and their spirit will be humbled. And a desire will seize them to emulate their deeds, and to study as they do. Indeed, the Rambam, of blessed memory, has already written in Chapter 6 of Hilchot De'ot, and this is his language: "The way of man's creation is to be drawn in his opinions and actions after his peers and companions. Therefore, a person needs to associate, etc., and sit beside the wise, so that he may learn from their deeds." See there.

**[6]** Regarding the commandment to study Torah, whose obligation is known to all, you have established times for Torah study; this is the beginning of a person's judgment. Nevertheless, every God-fearing individual who establishes times for Torah study should strive to strengthen his resolve, so that no incident or accident, such as a distraction or laziness, may override it. For such a person, even if he can study at home, he should choose a place in the House of God, to go and study in the House of Study. So that habit will become a dominion. And a wise person will further acquire strategies to strengthen his appointed time for study, by connecting himself in his study to the community, who will study at a set time. And moreover, this neglected study, the study of reverence and ethics, whose obligation is hidden from view, and in the eyes of many is considered merely permissible. And the person whom his heart inspires to establish times for this study, behold, a light wind will pass, carrying all his resolutions on its wings, and its tracks will not be known. And therefore, how awesome and how necessary it is to strengthen it with firmly planted nails, through a dedicated house for the study

of ethics, and a set time for the community. And the person who accustoms himself to go to the House of Ethics, behold, habit will guide him, and reverence will support him, so that the appointed time for this will be a fixed law that will not be transgressed, like a faithful peg that will not be moved.

**[7]** This house, bearing the seal of the House of Mussar, will itself proclaim the obligation of studying Mussar to the masses. It will call out from the tops of the highest places. In the streets, it will raise its voice and utter its pronouncements: "Who is the man who desires life, the life of intellect, so as not to drown in the depths of desire? Or who is the man afflicted with a sickness of the soul, and desires to seek a remedy for his malady? Turn into my tent; all the balm of Gilead is found with me. Seek me and live." Even every passerby will remember that this place is designated for the path of life, the admonition of Mussar. Thus, when there is a dedicated house for the study of Mussar, a place appointed for the masses, even those who, for various reasons, do not go to the House of Mussar, will at least have it as a reminder to study for themselves.

## Shaarei Ohr – Chapter 12

### שערי אור -- פרק 12

**[1]** (1) To bring merit to the multitude through the study of Mussar—as our Rebbe, may his memory be for a blessing, championed the study of Mussar. For it is a Tree of Life, a healing for the soul. It teaches man understanding and knowledge, reverence for God and righteous humility. Counsel and wisdom. It girds him with strength, might, and valor for the war against the evil inclination. And this indeed is the counsel that was advised to restore the return of reverence for God, blessed be His Name. And through it, the world will be saved with the salvation of the soul. And therefore, he considered the reward of this mitzvah to be great: to



draw hearts closer to the study of Mussar. It is that which ascends on high, and there is no end to its reward. And for this reason, he would rouse and awaken his students and close associates to pay attention and heart to gain understanding, to bring merit to the multitude, to stir and awaken their hearts to the study of reverence and Mussar.

**[2]** Our Rebbe, of blessed memory, elaborated greatly at the end of his Iggeret HaMussar, on the immense value of the matter of bringing the multitudes to merit the study of Mussar, and on his great reward. And this is his holy wording there: "Therefore, let a person set his heart to bring the multitudes to merit, to awaken them to contemplation of reverence and Mussar, etc. Thus, let him hold with all his might to the study of Mussar, so that many may wander within it, and the reverence for God may increase. And the merit of the multitudes shall be attached to him, etc. And how greatly shall this commandment grow in a person's eyes, to set his heart and soul to guide human beings to the study of Mussar, to save their souls from the lowest depths. And as our Sages, of blessed memory, stated (Shabbat 151a): 'Whoever shows mercy to creatures, is shown mercy from Heaven.' And there is no greater mercy than to mention and awaken human beings to the study of reverence. The person who awakens to this shall have a fitting portion in all that is born from this, to delight in eternal Eden, which no eye has seen. Human intellect is weary to encompass and to know well the quantity and quality of the merit of the multitudes, which accompanies a person from this seemingly trivial matter. The effort is little, and the reward is great, beyond value and measure. And therefore, let a person set his eye and the strength of his intellect to this great matter, if he is a person of soul."

**[3]** And similarly, in his letters which he would write to his students and close associates, to strengthen their hearts in the fear of God and in the study of Mussar, he would rouse and awaken their hearts regarding this, to bring merit to the many. To strengthen the study of

Mussar with all strength and might. And this is his pure language in one of his letters: "A good rebuke openly..." (Proverbs 27:5). "I have come to rebuke you and to urge your high honor, that you should strive with all your might, each according to his intellect and his concern, to strengthen the study of Mussar with all strength and might..." Do not let this matter be light in your eyes, to bring merit to the many, to awaken them to the great war, which is the war of the *yetzer* (evil inclination), which will not arise and will not be without the proper study of Mussar. Thus far his words.

**[4]** And in another letter he wrote, and this is his language: "And for this, the beginning of our endeavors is to strengthen the weak hands. To guide them to the school of ethical study with understanding and knowledge, etc. And in this, it is a simple remedy and its fruit is abundant. Who is the man who desires life? To be among those who cause the multitude to merit, who shine like the stars, and their righteousness will never be erased. Let him seize this commandment in its time. For who knows what will be born tomorrow? And if not now, when? And through this, we too will be built up to refine the thought, to conquer the inclination and its desires. And he who comes to teach, finds himself taught." Thus far his language.

**[5]** How lofty are His ways, and how profound are His thoughts, that He devised to benefit His people, to enlighten them with the fear of God, blessed be His Name. And how trustworthy are His words. Indeed, it is well known how our Sages, of blessed memory, expounded on the merit of one who causes the multitude to merit. But in what matter can a person attain this level? For through admonition and rebuke, it is a difficult matter to extract the precious from the worthless. And how much more so to turn many from sin. For besides the fact that the re-prover must first be truthful with himself, as our Sages, of blessed memory, said in Bava Batra 61a, "Strive and strive, be truthful with yourself," etc. Indeed, without this, even if he multiplies words like sand, he will have no listeners. For

who will lend an ear to words of admonition, to abandon his way? However, to awaken and stir the hearts of people to the study of Mussar, this is a broad field for causing the multitude to merit with little effort. For it is easy to capture hearts for this study, for reason dictates that it is a necessary matter for the life of the soul.

**[6]** Furthermore, consider the ways of righteousness and kindness. To pity and have compassion for the poor. Indeed, to grant him a little at a time, constantly. For the giver, his effort will be burdensome. And the recipient will not be satisfied to his fill. For who can fulfill a person's needs, which he lacks? However, the one who is wise concerning the downtrodden, will see to support the hand of the poor man, so that he may be able to engage in some business for himself, so that from the fruit of his labor he may eat and be satisfied. And this will be counted as charity for the giver forever. So it is with the matters of life, to constantly impart instruction and reproof. This is something avoided by the one who reproves, and by the one who receives reproof, as mentioned above. However, the one who is wise in the fear of God, will see to incline hearts towards the study of reverence and instruction. And then they will reprove themselves, and from the labor of their souls they will be satisfied with the goodness of the fear of God, to fulfill the Torah and the commandment. And also blessings will crown the teacher, who showed them the way, so that he may have a portion and inheritance in all the merit of the deed, and he too will eat from the fruit of their actions.

**[7]** Indeed, to draw souls towards ethical study requires great wisdom and understanding. To impart knowledge to them and grant them discernment to judge justly, concerning the precious treasure of ethical study. For it is a precious stone, a delightful treasure in the dwelling of righteousness. And there is nothing twisted or crooked within it. Likewise, one must first perfect oneself in the ways of character traits, and particularly in the trait of patience. Then one will gain understanding and the will of God

will prosper in his hand. And so, our master, the Gaon and pious one, may his memory be for a blessing, wrote in one of his letters, and this is his pure language: "The subject of drawing hearts to ethical study. Through ethical instruction you shall be founded, and through patience you shall be strengthened. And with wisdom you shall shine forth, and grow like a flower." Thus far his words. And similarly, in several letters, he teaches knowledge, how to draw souls to the study of reverence and ethics, and to incline them towards true perfection.

**[8]** And behold, just as our master, the Gaon, the pious, may his memory be for a blessing, wrote in his ethical letter in this language: "And how greatly this commandment will grow in a person's eyes, to set his heart and soul to guide people to the study of Mussar, etc. The person who arouses this will have a proper portion in all that is born from this, to be refined in eternal Eden, which no eye has seen, etc." And similarly, he wrote in one letter, and this is its language: "Who is the man who desires life, to be among those who cause the multitude to merit, who will shine like the stars, and their righteousness will never be erased? Let him seize this commandment in its time, etc."

**[9]** From now on, we can understand and contemplate. How mighty is the strength of that tree. He is the Master, the Gaon, the Pious, the Holy of Israel, may his merit protect us. How great and how awesome is his merit. For besides the greatness of his righteousness and his piety, behold, who has merited and caused others to merit more than him? To guide people to the study of Mussar. For he is indeed the head, who from his youth began to call out loudly in the name of the study of reverence and Mussar. For from it are the outcomes of life, the life of the soul. And until this day, we walk in his light. And all the talent for action that was born from the study of Mussar until today, behold, it has a portion and an inheritance in this. And so it shall be forever.

**[10]** And behold, my master, may his memory

be for a blessing, once said to his students, concerning the study of Mussar which he disseminated in the world: that a place was granted to him from Heaven to fortify himself in this. And as is explained in the words of our Sages, of blessed memory, in Chullin, page 6, "and he crushed the copper serpent, etc." – perhaps Asa came and did not destroy, etc. – rather, a place was granted to him, etc.

**[11]** And may it be the will before our Father in Heaven, that the spring which emerged from beneath the Holy One, Blessed be His Name, the Holy One of Israel, of blessed memory, shall not

cease, and its waters shall not deceive. And may it be a flowing stream of the fear of God, Blessed be His Name, in the streets, streams of water.

**[12]** My words have concluded, which I have called by the name Shaarei Ohr (Gates of Light). This is the gate to God; the upright of heart shall enter through it. They shall go forward and illuminate their eyes from the light of Israel and His holiness.

**[13]** These are the words of his student, Yitzchak, son of the Rabbi, our master, Rabbi Shlomo, of Lazd.



## Chapter 3

# Ohr Yisrael – Light of Israel

8 Chapters

### Ohr Yisrael – Chapter 1

אור ישראל -- פרק 1

**[1]** The first five letters. These are what my master, of blessed memory, wrote at the beginning of his arrival from Vilna to Kovno in the year 5609 [1849]. To his disciples and close associates in the city of Vilna.

**[2]** My beloved friends, I shall begin to speak

**[3]** The aim of my will, which I have always presented before you, is for you to give your hearts to them and to contemplate them with understanding: Does my tongue speak truth? For a moment, my words would enter your ears. And in a short while, they would be gone. They entered through one ear and went out through the other—this is nothing but the habitual deficiency of not giving heed to matters pertaining to reverence and ethical conduct, but rather acting according to unbridled desire, according to the inclination of the will, like the actions of an animal. Do you not see in the known custom that pervades the world? To give thought and contemplation to all material matters. The merchant with his wares, how much contemplation will he employ before executing a transaction?

Whether to do or to refrain. He will think within himself and consult with his trusted friends. He will investigate the details, seek out the place of error, until he brings the matter to light according to his ability. So too in the study of the Holy Torah, each according to his worth. He should examine and contemplate it to reveal its hidden treasures, and to innovate new insights and to unravel complexities, not to skip over it in a single glance, to definitively decide a matter with a conclusive ruling.

**[4]** Not so in the ways of Mussar, wherein contemplation involves searching through all of a person's paths and deeds, to guard against the inclination of the will, and against the evil inclination that hinders and prevents every good and elevated matter, which is necessary and obligatory for the attainment of awe [of God]. And good Mussar and conduct will not arise without great stratagems, to bind the instruments of the intellect to this [purpose] until it makes a strong impression in the heart to give strength and might to the external limbs: to bring the elevated matter to fruition, so that the base physical desires, envy, and contemptible honor do not restrain it. And in all this, a person's indolence is great, for it will be a burden to him if he dedicates even a short time to this. Until even the cancellation of time will be counted for him

[as a benefit].

**[5]** Now, what is to be done? The war is prepared, the inclination [yetzer] lies in ambush, desire wanders, the character traits [middot] are agitated, and the instruments of war are absent. Can an instrument perform its function without being willed to do so? Thus, there is no hope of escaping the snares of death unless we grasp the instruments of war, the matters of awe [yirah] and ethical discipline [musar].

**[6]** And for this very reason I spoke, "Do this, and it will be good for you" — the man who is preoccupied with everything he turns to, errs. His affairs proceed darkly, his strength and intellect are bewildered, given over to the prisons of worry and confusion. This consumes all human strength. And it will be that if a person approaches him, saying, "Have I not shown you a light? If you do this thing according to the correct estimation, you can gain thousands upon thousands of gold dinars, and the matter will not trouble you much from your comings and goings and your affairs, and you will not need to spend much time on it" — surely a wise heart will give heed to this with great strength and might. All the powers of understanding will be poured out until he implants this matter firmly in his heart as a true and established thing. To set aside a little time for this with broad contemplation, to seek for himself companions of like mind who will assist him in this, he will not be concerned about a slight annulment of honor and patience.

**[7]** Indeed, we are like this today, afflicted with affliction of the soul. Our transgressions have passed over our heads, each person according to his worth. We have strayed very far from the center for which we were created, and from the purpose for which one comes into this physical world, to prepare for his hereafter. And now, we have seen a bright light shining to purify the multitude, to strengthen weak hands in the study of Mussar, to give counsel and strategy to establish a proper practice in this matter, until the arrogance that hovers over this subject is over-

come. To say and to boast: "Behold this person, how strong is his hand in the wisdom of reverence and Mussar, that from a motive of 'not for its own sake' he will come to 'for its own sake'." If the Lord will crown our ways with success, there is no limit to how great will be the worth of the one who is born [into this practice], and through this we too will be built up, whether we partake little or much.

**[8]** Therefore, you shall set a fixed time on the holy Shabbat to gather together at a specific hour, to contemplate and understand how to cultivate character. The city's great men, after whom many will flock for the study of Mussar, you shall speak with gentleness and with settled understanding, without jesting or frivolity. You shall assess a person's strengths and weaknesses, and by what means one should be disciplined and by what means restrained for this one. Do not decide the matter with a single glance. Divide the work amongst yourselves, with a little time and without the burden of labor, for "that which is gathered by hand will increase" (Deuteronomy 14:25), indeed, with quiet knowledge, in a wise and proper settlement. Each man shall strengthen his fellow, and loosen the foolishness of his heart, he shall nullify the laziness of his habit, with proper conduct and with gentleness, each one shall guard his friend's honor, with gentleness and patience, to follow the majority without stubbornness or dispute. And thus, Mussar will be properly established within your souls, as your very selves.

## Ohr Yisrael – Chapter 2

### אור ישראל -- פרק 2

**[1]** My brothers and my friends, indeed, I have revealed this previously: that a person who is afflicted and crushed by the vanities of this world, whose livelihood is strained and whose labor is great, finds no solace in any of his affairs. When a proper path awakens within him, a path that

holds great hope of finding a way forward, to thereby quiet the spirit that oppresses him from his thoughts – surely he will not rest nor be still until he establishes the plans of his heart as a steadfast peg that will not waver. For who is so foolish as to walk in darkness, when a bright light shines before him, and not hasten his actions to draw near to it?

**[2]** Thus we are today, in the currents of our soul's affairs, to prepare provisions for our hereafter, to turn away from the netherworld of spiritual thought and shame of face, in the eternal world that will never falter. We are afflicted by illusory desires; the honor that removes a person from the world envelops us, and after it we shall go and in its footsteps we shall emerge, confusing our minds and exhausting our strength to prepare its sufficiency, nullifying us from Torah, which is our life and the length of our days in this world and the World to Come. It robs us of the commandments and every precious quality, leading us to sins and transgressions that reach the heavens. Where shall we flee for help, and to whom shall we turn, if not to the study of Mussar, which disciplines a person to remember his end? For he will not live forever in this lowly world; we are but sojourners in this life, to engage in our appointed service, so that our reward may be paid in our true place. Now, what honor shall we inherit in this foreign world, which passes like a shadow and will be seen no more?

**[3]** Indeed, these are the extremities of the paths of ethical conduct. It is a clear light, yet we walk in darkness, following our base, lowly, and despised physical desires. How then shall we not hasten our actions to draw near to this study, to establish for it faithful foundations that shall not waver, lest misfortune befall it, Heaven forbid, and this sublime idea be extinguished? For this reason, it is most fitting to strengthen it with firmly planted nails, to set regular times for it in all circumstances, between Mincha and Maariv. And let each man strengthen and urge his fellow to devise stratagems so that the appointed time for this may be certain and not

lacking. And if one man should be incapacitated, or perhaps become an obstacle to another, Heaven forbid, then it is proper to oversee this matter, to seek counsel and stratagem to bear with his foolishness and to entice his heart with gentle words, each according to his way and his intellect. And through this, the ethical discipline will be established with a faithful peg.

**[4]** To accustom oneself to this wisdom, whose paths diverge into two directions: one, to inflame the souls through the purification of thought, in these sublime studies, to learn with burning lips, with correct reasoning, with a broad conception to expand every matter, and to bring it near through proximate analogies, until the heart is inflamed, whether a little or much, which can then give strength to prepare the limbs, to bring forth every good deed in its proper measure, whether by will or by force.

**[5]** And the second is the wisdom of the world, to be able to see the consequences, to oversee from the beginning before the days of trouble arrive, to prepare counsel and strategy, how to manage oneself and others, and to diminish the matter to lighten the trial, until the awe of desire grows. And this is the entirety of man: to strengthen the awe and weaken the desire through ethical instruction and wisdom. To this end, how wondrous it is, if we have a subject upon which the study and habituation in ethical instruction and wisdom will revolve. This subject is to draw hearts closer to the study of ethical instruction, for by ethical instruction it is founded, and by patience it is strengthened, and by wisdom it will blossom and its flower will grow.

**[6]** And by this, if we are to be people of strength, let us not leap to anger against our fellows, asking why their heart is closed to understanding the nature of this study. Rather, let us say, surely foolishness also prevails over us in many matters. By this, let us engrave in our hearts and accustom ourselves to the attribute of patience and humility of spirit, so that we do

not elevate ourselves above others.

**[7]** The depth of the idea is to prepare counsel and strategy, how to discipline oneself with appropriate words, to draw oneself closer to our Father in Heaven. This will add strength to ourselves, to awaken to discipline ourselves in many matters, to draw our souls closer to the service for which we were created, for our own good.

**[8]** And even more so, when we delegate our work to men, so that each one may excel in his specialized area. This one will admonish him with the language of instruction, and this one will draw him near with a radiant countenance; this one will strengthen him with the fervor of his pure heart, and this one will bind him with his righteous strategies and the required wisdom. How awesome is this habit of establishing every teaching and every correct trait, to remove the many trials that arise for man, matters of saving lives and the like, where suddenly, abruptly, man may become exceedingly wicked, and without hope, God forbid. Indeed, if we accustom ourselves to have our matters acted upon by many, each according to his way and his area, how easy it is to establish everything with little effort and small expense, to revive many souls, and to sustain a full world. The wisdom of the world is to ease the trial and to diminish the matter, until reverence prevails. This requires broad explanation with many examples, the likes of which are not found in books of Mussar. Thus, each man, according to his understanding, will draw from it. If you will give your heart to this trial, without an oath, if God wills, we will speak more of this.

## Ohr Yisrael – Chapter 3

### אור ישראל -- פרק 3

**[1]** My beloved! Behold, I have considered it just, that my initial words should suffice to awaken your hearts to the strengthening of

this study, which is the study of Mussar. For this study of Mussar is not like all other studies. There is no study whose obligation encompasses all souls. Women are exempt from the study of Torah; those who toil and lack knowledge in dire distress, God forbid, there is much room to exempt them. Each person, according to their circumstances, will be absolved from their obligation. This is not like that; rather, the more it expands for a person, so too will the obligation grow and so too will it increase.

**[2]** This study is not a limited obligation for every soul, without exception. For the war is spread over all speaking creatures; it is the war of the evil inclination and its stratagems, the desires of man and his deeds, which ensnare him in their nets, lest he have no recovery, God forbid. For man almost leaps to excess without restraint for his spirit, to bring forth every evil and abominable act in the sight of the sun. Woe! What shall we do for the day of reckoning, when the Lord will judge all living beings, the deeds of man and his stratagems? With what shall we gird ourselves with strength and might to stand against this mighty war, if not with this study, the study of Mussar, to purify the thought a little, to ignite the heart, and to place our future in our heart, so that it may be a shining light for us, by whose light the outer limbs will walk, and with their strength will wage their war for the sake of truth and justice, for this is the entire fruit of our aspiration. It is only for the outer limbs to guard them from every evil affliction and sickness, both in character traits and in laws, which can only be restrained by strength and much habit.

**[3]** Indeed, who can restrain them, who can subdue them, who can spur them on to all that is good and beneficial, if not the study of Mussar? To break the heart [of ego and base desires], and to purify it somewhat from its defilement, to awaken the correct understanding to this war – which is the forceful subjugation of the limbs – to guard oneself from every evil affliction and sickness. And by this, for all that is still inherent in man, the war will increase upon



him, and the obligation in this study of Mussar will be magnified. And behold, now the days are not good, the war intensifies; thus, the obligation has grown.

**[4]** And behold, as my ear has taken hold, you are languid in this matter. For this reason I said, is not the wisdom of Mussar merely an expansion of simple and revealed matters? And this is not good, except to expand upon what the discourse is concerning the first letter.

**[5]** When we survey our desires and our cravings, the foremost among them is the lust for this illusory life. This desire is fixed in the depths of our hearts like a faithful peg. And all that we possess, we give up for our souls. We are uncertain, we do not know our end. We have no one to rely on in this matter except our Father in Heaven, who desires our life so that we may serve Him in truth and faith, and whether for our reward in this vain world, if we have not found favor in His eyes. And now, if we search our condition, we are very far from the center of life. Our service is not to Hashem. Most of the time we walk in darkness, to fill our bellies, to quench our lowly and contemptible desires. And in addition to this, with sins and transgressions beyond measure, the little righteousness we have is broken like the shards of a lute, without sight and without knowledge of the straight and up-right path.

**[6]** And for this reason, we find no solace from the Almighty, Blessed is He, in our lives, for everything follows the majority. And if we are to receive a small reward for our righteousness, it is enough to warrant disgrace and wrath. Who knows our standing in this matter? Perhaps our transgressions have outweighed our righteous deeds. For our deficiencies in imagined desires, which we lack, stem solely from the impulse of our will's inclination. And if we were to regress to a level far beneath us, who knows if it would not greatly outweigh all our righteous deeds? And all our life is heavenly mercy, and by a miracle we stand. And perhaps a miracle does not occur every day. And for this reason,

if we deeply contemplate this matter with much reflection, that in every moment, "he who does not learn is guilty of death" (a paraphrase of a Talmudic concept, likely referring to *Pirkei Avot* 4:13 or similar), and there is no hour when death does not stand, God forbid, before our eyes—by what means shall we find a remedy for these desires of ours, this desire for life, which burns within us like a burning fire, to arouse heavenly mercy, if not by dedicating ourselves to gather, whether little or much? For God, the Mighty, does not despise, and in His image we live, and through their merit we shall stand for length of days.

**[7]** And what shall we do, for we are impoverished, lacking the means to sustain Torah and its students? Therefore, we shall seek matters to strengthen weak hands, to awaken them with knowledge and understanding towards the study of Mussar, which is prepared as a cure for the sick of soul, to learn and to teach, to guard and to do all that is stated therein, so that there may be a good hope for our future. For all who cleave to life have assurance, if they walk in Mussar, to transform from evil to good, and to bring forth the precious from the vile. And the good Lord will strengthen our hearts, if we are among those who cause the multitude to merit, through whom no sin comes.

**[8]** Now let us look with a penetrating eye: Can a person walk without legs? Can a person perceive without eyes? Similarly, Torah and Divine service cannot be established for a person weakened by the afflictions of the evil inclination, except through the study of Mussar.

**[9]** Now let us search our ways and investigate. We are sick from every side and corner. Desire and honor entangle us; theft and injustice surround us. Pride and anger, envy and meticulousness – these are our ways. The tongue will rule over us without restraint. And why do we not flee to the house of physicians? Perhaps we will find some remedy and cure for our wounds. For who is a foolish, heartless person who does not seek a remedy for his illness? This is noth-

ing other than the counsel of the Evil Inclination, who is skilled in his wars. For he is a man of war from his youth. The vanities of time do not restrain him as they do us. And all his aims are only to remove from us the tools of our warfare, which is the study of Mussar. And thereby he binds us before him, and there is no savior.

**[10]** From this, we shall learn and take His ways as our model: to firmly adhere to ethical discipline and not to falter, to cultivate and glorify it, to clothe it in the guise of simulated desire, so that the desire that is not for its own sake may dominate it. From this, pure desire for its own sake will come. And whoever honors his matter, it is a sign that it is not a vain thing for our lives as this day. So that we may teach ourselves to conquer our desires, and out of love for our fellow, to incline them towards the ways of God and His Torah, with justice, judgment, and uprightness, and every precious quality. And through this, we shall find favor and good sense in the eyes of God and men.

**[11]** You, my friends, please grant me favor in this: to inform me who are those who walk in integrity, and who are the slothful ones, whose beloved desires their peace and their welfare.

## Ohr Yisrael – Chapter 4

### אור ישראל -- פרק 4

**[1]** My beloved friends! I am now coming to fulfill my promise from before. To expand the discourse on worldly wisdom, the words of the world that are necessary for the wisdom of Mussar. And without it, the service [of God] becomes burdensome, its lightness unknown. For the ailments of the soul are desire and error, they are its obstructors. Desire burns and inclination flares, to purify the impure which is called impure. At the time of rendering judgment and accounting for the fruit of a person's deeds. To repay a person according to his way. And as his hands have wrought, so shall it be done to

him. For even though the Torah is given to humankind to interpret its matters according to the aim of human intellect, it is not subdued so that we may act within it according to our desires, based on the paths of our will. It is an abomination; it will not consent to return an answer to those who ask us for justice and to judge us with uprightness.

**[2]** To what end have we been foolish in all our ways? Who will teach us the straight path? Desire, honor, envy, and victory spread their wings over all the faculties of our minds and all the foundations of our intellect. Indeed, fear [of God] rules over all. It restrains desire with the might of its hand, so that it does not transgress its boundaries, except for the necessary and permitted use. And when [desire] inclines, it casts its arrow upon the face of man, to frighten him in all his words, to look here and there, until he naturally winnows the chaff and the wind blows it away. But if we turn our faces towards fear [of God], to make it a firm foundation and a touchstone in all our actions, we will not attend to anything else. Will not our service [of God] stand far off? For we have seen, if we have not heard, and experience teaches, how exceedingly difficult it is for a person, in whose heart a faithful peg is fixed, for the fear of God to be spread over the nape of his stiff neck. And if he labors in it sufficiently, not even a fraction of it will wander in his thoughts compared to the prevailing desire, and what strength can it give compared to the confusing and dancing inclination within us? And it is like a jest to establish all its schemes.

**[3]** To this end, let a person labor to place truth before our eyes, and let simplicity be a lamp to our feet. Let us delve deeply into it, so that we may not be bewildered, constantly searching for our deeds and the fruits of our thoughts, until the hidden depths of our hearts are revealed to us. Then we shall be ashamed and humiliated to exchange falsehood for truth, and to clothe the foundations of transgression with the raiment of righteousness, walking like one blind in darkness, who knows not what he will stum-

ble upon.

**[4]** It is indeed fitting to deepen understanding in the ways of the world, which proceed with deception, and the fruit of every human endeavor is to ensnare souls with a snare. Each person according to his path: the fool, with the tinkling bells of foolishness, will give gold in exchange for it; he who desires food and drink will ensnare with his net. And to whatever he desires, he will attach it with the flattering jests of the round cake. He who desires illusory honor, his desire is his net. And flattery will capture him, to grant to every person the direction of his desire, that which will be within his power to do. Thus, every human, according to his path, will be ensnared, and the deceivers will lie in wait for the disposition of his soul, to know and to understand by what means they will be permitted to fulfill the extent of their desires. These are the ends of their paths, and who can sustain all their ways? The canvas is too short to contain.

**[5]** This too is a characteristic of man in his worldly affairs: to be wise in seeing what is born of each matter, to see to rectify each thing before the evil comes, as much as is within his power. The affairs of the world themselves will teach man their matters and their processes. And each person, according to his inherent disposition, so will its wisdom be established in his hand. And the stumbling block is within man's hand, and if he does not give room to his foolishness, so will his wisdom grow. And habit and experience rule in every matter. And therefore, if innocence is strong so that our feet do not falter, how good it is if we use the ways of God in these matters, to be wise in knowing the nature of our soul, in what we can be strengthened to incline our heart to the service of the Holy One, to lighten the trial. And fear will give strength and might, and one will strengthen his fellow. The wisdom of the world lightens the burden, and fear will assist us. We shall fear and tremble from every evil occurrence and sin, and therefore from afar we shall flee from a wicked snare.

**[6]** My pen is too short to contain my thoughts,

and in this, give to the wise and they will grow wiser still. The engagement with the ways of Divine Service, these will teach a person its course. And even more, person shall teach his fellow, and to integrity they will be guided, and in a fortress they will be held, not for the sake of acquiring honor, but only for the sake of truth and righteousness. And to the disposition of his soul, he shall secretly incline his heart towards reverence and Torah! And a stumbling block shall be a lamp illuminating to stand upon the truth. Then shall dawn our righteousness. If we shall indeed skim over the face of the world to understand the inner workings of man and his deceitfulness, which will clearly stand before us. Joined to the established integrity. This, by its strength, can banish every strange thing and incorrect thought, along with the assisting reverence. And therefore, the end of the matter is to adhere to the ways of ethics, and to deepen and understand how to utilize the wisdom of the world, to strengthen the ethical and not to destroy, God forbid. And without stratagems there is no wisdom, and without study, wisdom is not found. And therefore, study shall be to draw souls closer to the ethical and to establish in the wisdom of the world, along with reverence and the strength of integrity.

## Ohr Yisrael – Chapter 5

אור ישראל -- פרק 5

**[1]** We are creatures of the Blessed Holy One, awaiting His kindness, hoping for His mercy. In what shall we merit in the eyes of our Master, and in what shall we find favor before Him, may His Name be blessed? If not by a slight imitation of His ways, and of His attribute of goodness, which is spread over all creatures, without any prior cause for this, but rather simple mercy, without any instigator. So too, we should rush to the aid of the weak, without being asked and without any instigator. Indeed, what is our strength? Our help is like vanity. Evil has bro-

ken forth, and wickedness has prevailed. There is no escape and no refuge, unless we enter stealthily to thwart the counsel of the wicked, and with understanding, we shall fulfill our desires to conquer evil, by the imprisonment of righteousness, by the chains of the attributes, and by the distancing of desires. This is the foundation of the matter, to build precisely upon it. Indeed, who will prepare the material, and who will bring forth the matter to its deed? In man, there is no [such capability]. Reason and understanding are also lacking. And with this, we shall return backward. How can those who fear God in Israel be so? Why is the remedy and the cure so far away? Those who fear God, they shall put on strength to conquer evil in the snare of its desires. And what will restrain them? They are prepared for every desire of their heart to establish their plan. Will the body prevent them? And if shame and disgrace confuse them, will they be called those who fear God? If so, these are the ways of the Torah. Indeed, this is the beginning of the word of God: lest one dry up from the scoffers, and sow afar the desirable things of the world and its vanities. And with this, understanding and feeling will oppose each other.

**[2]** And for this we shall seek peace and pursue it. To know the source from which fear [of God] originates, and from where it comes, whether from daily habit, or from study with knowledge and understanding. The sense testifies that knowledge and intellect have no rest, and they have no part in the fear of God. Even from afar, do not stand. And for this, the words of the sense are righteous and do not deceive. And what will the thought of intellect add, if its power did not rule over the foundations of fear? Indeed, who will not understand that the sense is a prepared vessel to receive all forms, and with the change of form, the sense will change. If through stratagems one endeavors to connect intellect to fear, even the sense will change, in the eyes of one who helps and supports.

**[3]** And for this, the beginning of our endeavors is to strengthen the weak hands, to guide them to the academy of ethical study, with under-

standing and knowledge, with a sincere heart, and with fervent lips, and to revisit the sayings of our Sages, of blessed memory, which inflame a person's heart, each according to his deficiency which he lacks. And if the Lord will be with us to carry out our deeds, and we shall be able to stand, then how correct is this matter for every person who desires the closeness of the Lord, to be diligent in the matter, to remove and nullify every impediment and obstruction with appropriate and beneficial stratagems.

**[4]** There is one thing that heals every affliction and grievous sickness, the afflictions of the limbs and of the souls. For even when habit aids in reverence and in Torah, without the study of Mussar, the desired goal is very far removed. The corrupted character traits, the war of the evil inclination, for which we came into the world from nothingness – where will it be found? Only to the will will our strengths turn. And what shall we say now, when habit opposes reverence, if we do not turn to the remedy of Mussar? There is no place for the service of God, and almost despair in the matter.

**[5]** And in this, there is an easy remedy and its fruit is abundant. Who is the man who desires life, to be among those who cause the multitude to merit, who will shine like the stars, and whose righteousness will never be erased, to illuminate with the light of life? Let him seize this mitzvah in its time, for who knows what a day will bring forth? And if not now, when? And through this, we too will build ourselves to focus the thought on conquering the inclination and its desires. And bring to teach, find to teach. First of all, to recognize man's conscience. What is his aim, his desire, and his will? And how far he is from the goal of truth for which he was created. By what shall he restrain his desire to incline him towards this complete service, the labor of studying Mussar, to be a foundational basis to fight a mandatory war, the war of the inclination, whether by restraining the limbs, to do the opposite of the will, and also by focusing the thought, to subdue the heart a little, whether by reviewing the sayings of our Sages, with gen-

tleness and contemplation, or by deepening the intellect in broadening the subjects, according to the inclination of nature and its habit, what these matters have established. For their obligation is a net upon all who have the spirit of life in their nostrils. To fight his war, and in his hand is the choice, to conquer the war, to incline his limbs towards true perfection.

## Ohr Yisrael – Chapter 6

### אור ישראל -- פרק 6

**[1]** The author of Mesillat Yesharim, in the preface of his esteemed work, began by stating that he would only write simple and well-known matters, see there. As I do not have Mesillat Yesharim before me at this moment, so too I will not write only that which has been said and repeated many times. For Yom Kippur, besides its great commandment, which carries the penalty of *karet* and more, etc., it is of great benefit to a person to save him from many profound and elevated troubles. These troubles are such that a person himself, the person that we have no power to define except as "I"—this "I"—this is the one who speaks, this is the one who thinks, this is the one who desires, this is the one who strives to attain his desire. He is hidden within the material substance of the body, and when its powers cease—that is death—this "I" is still alive and its powers are active. Stripped from the physical world, it is the connection of the soul, it is the "I" with the material, the body, in a condition where this "I" is capable of suffering and pleasure, of good for it or for ill, of terrible and awesome suffering, or of wondrous pleasure beyond compare. These are far higher than the suffering and pleasure for which this "I" is capable in this world, while it is bound to the body. This suffering and pleasure depend on the person's conduct, this "I" in this world, in his observance of the commandments of God, blessed be His Name. In his fulfillment of His commandments, blessed be His Name, the per-

son, this "I," will attain great pleasure, and in his transgression of His commandments, blessed be His Name, he will attain terrible suffering.

**[2]** For every type of transgression, its recompense of punishment is distinguished by its quality from its counterpart, according to the judgment of the Blessed One, His Name. In every specific detail of the transgression, people are distinguished from one another in the reception of their punishment, according to their nature and their situation in this world: rich and poor, wise and foolish, diligent and naturally lazy, and many, many other distinctions. That same person – he is the individual "I" in that specific part of the transgression itself, distinguished in its punishment according to the variation of his situational nature, from a state of tranquility to a state of agitation, from the nature of tranquility to the nature of agitation, from the nature of quietude of thought to the nature of confusion of thought, and many other varying states. And whatever opportunity presents itself to a person to guard himself from transgression, whether it be not to commit a transgression, or not to neglect the performance of a commandment, so too will his punishment increase. And in every aspect and degree that is divided from heavy to light – where there is a lighter [transgression] than it, and there is a heavier [transgression] than it – so too will the punishments be divided, from great suffering to small suffering. The great [suffering] is in relation to that which is smaller than it, and the small [suffering] is in relation to that which is greater than it.

**[3]** And when a person observes with the eye of his understanding, or by inquiry from one who understands more than he, concerning the specific transgression that is incumbent upon him, to what extent the obligation of its observance extends according to the Torah, whether it is to refrain from committing a transgression, or not to neglect a commandment, according to the degree of severity in observance—for there is a distinction between what is of Torah origin and what is Rabbinic, and so forth—it is a primary,

self-evident principle that the punishment will be greater in proportion to the severity of the prohibition of the transgression. And thereafter, he will proceed further and see, even at first glance and in the flow of thought, that there are many levels, far greater than his own situation, from the level of obligation for observance, from the lighter to the heavier than it. And according to these levels, many distinctions are divided into very many parts and degrees, so too will his punishment increase ever so greatly. The heart of an understanding person will tremble greatly, even without deep contemplation and delving into the ethical teachings.

**[4]** This is the matter that is within our power to clothe with the statement of Scripture in Psalms 94: "Happy is the man whom You discipline, O Lord, and whom You teach from Your Torah." This means that through the afflictions of this world, one will be saved from severe and bitter punishments, as mentioned above. And how will a person know – even if he knows that he will be punished, at least in a general overview – to know that it is exceedingly great and awesome for man, this passing "I" – he and "whom You teach from Your Torah," as mentioned above in words that are few in quantity but great in quality, for those who delve deeply into them.

**[5]** And with this, the Ten Days of Repentance are days of action, to see and improve our ways for the coming year in peace, as our Sages of blessed memory stated: "The intermediate [people] are suspended and stand from Rosh Hashanah until Yom Kippur; if they merit, [they are inscribed]..." (Rosh Hashanah 16a). And just as a person in this world has two states before him, one is not in his hand – this is man's desire to be full and overflowing with the needs of this world. The second is that which is in his hand, according to the measure of his situation, to fulfill his desire and the needs of this world. And the more a person is diminished in his situation in this world, the more he will strive to attain his desire. The pauper who begs at the doors strives more, and his labor to obtain a little money or food is not burdensome or strange

before him, compared to the householder. The destitute [strives] more than the intermediate, the intermediate more than the wealthy. Why? Because, in addition to his necessity, he will also receive more pain from the prevention of a little food, etc. The destitute, in terms of his suffering from what he lacks – the destitute [suffers] more than the householder, etc.

**[6]** Thus, man, in the aspect of his service to the Blessed God, has two aspects before him, both of which are in his hand. The first is at all times, each according to his choice, to be full and overflowing in his service to the Blessed God. And also during the Ten Days of Repentance, it is in man's hand to transform himself into another person, to be righteous for the coming year in peace. The second is the aspect according to the situation in his service to the Blessed God at all times, and particularly during the Ten Days of Repentance, the primary foundation is to observe and contemplate his ways, and to see to guard, at the very least, the easier part of it according to his situation and his awe. And through this, he will be saved from the more severe part of that transgression, as mentioned above.

**[7]** And I shall open my mouth with a parable, concerning the study of Mussar, which is sometimes to go to the House of Mussar, which is a simple matter. And the study of Yirah (awe/fear of God) is a duty upon a person. And perhaps there will be some analogy to other matters pertaining to His blessed Name's service. Going to the House of Mussar is a simple matter, even for one preoccupied with his affairs, especially on the holy Shabbat. Indeed, it is known that the study of Torah, Gemara, or Poskim, is greater and a greater obligation on Shabbat, for one preoccupied with his weekday affairs. And for this reason, it is good to place the Beit Midrash below, or a room adjacent to the study of Gemara, as mentioned above, so that there will not be opposition to the study of Mussar, which is distant from the regular Beit Midrash for everyone, to the study of Gemara, as mentioned above, which is primary and Mussar is secondary to it.

**[8]** The study of Mussar is a duty incumbent upon a person, and even more so upon one preoccupied with their affairs, whose illness in the service of the Blessed Name is great. Indeed, it is not a simple matter to employ the remedy of Mussar study against a potent illness that requires great remedies.

**[9]** For we observe in the faculties of man, concerning the intellect, that all learning in its inception is in a clear state, and proceeds with difficulty. When a youth begins to study Hebrew, to learn to pronounce the words at first, how much his teacher will labor with him to illuminate the letters before him, and thereafter to connect a complete word. Throughout this, the youth will conduct himself with great seriousness in reading the letters and words. Afterwards, when he acquires the necessary habit according to his disposition, he will read fluently without any deliberation at all. This is what is called by researchers of the human soul's faculties, clear or dim faculties [klar und dunkel]. So too, in the faculties of psychic impression, there are clear [klar] and dim [dunkel] faculties. The dim ones are stronger and exert their effect with a slight arousal, with a strong hand. Man's love for his offspring is dim, and most of the time it is not keenly felt by man himself. Yet with a small arousal, it ignites within him like a burning fire. Man's desires are the dim ones, which without some arousal, are hardly felt, and therefore their power to rule over man is great.

**[10]** The study of Mussar has its foundation and beginning in the discernment of choices within the soul's stirrings. Therefore, in most instances, it is not powerful enough to contend against the strong, "dark" inclination. However, just as in intellectual study, clear study always makes an impression on the "dark" aspect, without which the studies would not need to be born in their complete "darkness" to be known with relative ease, almost without contemplation. This is on the condition that there is no great interruption of time between the clear studies, so that the impression of the "dark" does not become emptied and nullified. For

then, the study the second time will be the beginning, and so on infinitely. Likewise, in emotional stirrings, every stirring makes some impression on the "dark" aspect. And when many emotional stirrings are connected to one matter, without a great interruption of time between them—that is, through small awakenings between them, just as in intellectual study, a little Torah between the clear study—then the "dark" soul-powers are born, which are strong in bringing forth their action.

**[11]** Thus, in the study of Mussar, if a person dedicates himself, according to the state of his spiritual ailment in the service of the Blessed Name, to Mussar study with the soul's engagement, without great intervals between studies, and with a slight awakening between studies, from this will be born dulling forces to help against the rampant desire. And behold, it is not a simple matter for one preoccupied with his affairs, and his ailment is great, and his times are short. And what is more, his Torah study, "You have set times for Torah," is the primary concern before him.

**[12]** Indeed, to go on the holy Shabbat to the house of Mussar, to study Mussar with the stirring of the soul [a branch of the primary Gemara study mentioned above], and also to run a few times during the week for a light hour, almost even a few minutes, so that the dim impressions from the length of time from one holy Shabbat to another will not be nullified, it is very easy to do, and its fruit is abundant to be beneficial for acquiring a quality of strengths against desire, at the very least to rule to "turn away from evil and do good" in the light qualities before a person, which are more severe and damaging qualities for a person – this is the ego, more and more in his true living world.

**[13]** It is good to ensure that one can easily enter the "House of Mussar" [i.e., engage in ethical study and self-reflection] at any time of day or night, without hindrance or difficulty. For whenever a person feels inclined to turn to the House of Mussar for even a few moments, there should

be no obstacle from the side of the House of Mussar itself. This is almost the natural reason why ethical study does not achieve its required effect: the long intervals without even a small awakening in between. Likewise, there are also spiritual reasons, namely transgressions, which can dull a person's heart, making it like a hollow stone. Its primary remedy is the study of Torah, and also prayer with humility. Gather, please, in a group of ten; study Mussar first, or let one person lecture, and afterwards pray together concerning the spiritual inclination [i.e., the yetzer ha'ra, the evil inclination].

**[14]** The most widespread obligation incumbent upon a person is the study of Torah for its own sake. Or, at the very least, in the disposition of performing it for its own sake. Just as with a commandment performed not for its own sake, is it permissible to perform and fulfill it without the disposition of "for its own sake," so too with Torah. And regarding the custom of Israel to study in a manner other than how one studies for its own sake, such as the primary goal of knowing the necessary laws of life, which is the first obligation for the youth and the young married man, it is because the first foundation is the capacity for study, for which one is very capable according to the custom. And there is no need to elaborate on this at present, but I have hinted at it slightly so that the reader will not err in my words.

**[15]** The study in Torah, which is called "study," is to study with sharpness of intellect [giftig], where each person firmly holds onto their reasoning. Is "lishmah" (for its own sake) the tranquility of the spirit, whether according to his words or according to his colleague's words, to be equal in his eyes? And these are almost opposing matters. Therefore, our Sages, may their memory be blessed, taught us how to conduct ourselves, as they stated in Kiddushin (fol. 30a): "Even a father and his son, a teacher and his student, who are engaged in Torah study in one gate, become enemies to each other, and they do not move from there until they become lovers of each other," as it is said, "And love in

a storm," etc. (See there). The initial enmity is the aspect of studying with sharpness of intellect [giftig], as mentioned above. The eventual love is the aspect of "lishmah," where each person nullifies their own opinion to follow the majority or the greater one, or to stand firm in their own opinion, as Beit Shammai did, according to their words, etc. (Yevamot fol. 14a), according to the principles explained in the Gemara and the decisors on this matter. Indeed, in the conduct of affection and friendship, this is the aspect of "lishmah." To uphold the truth, this is the aspect of "limud" (study), for each person to state and strengthen their reasoning that appears correct in their eyes. And peace is the aspect of "lishmah," "Love," (Yevamot fol. 72b).

**[16]** Thus, too, in all contemplation pertaining to the service of the Blessed One, may His Name be exalted, such as overseeing the Torah study for the children of the poor, the contemplation is a facet of the Torah itself. For what is the Torah? It is the study to know His will, may His Name be exalted. Similarly, in all contemplations, which are the contemplation of how His will, may His Name be exalted, is to be conducted in this commandment, these are branches of the facet of Torah. And it is necessary, at first, to have sharpness of intellect, and in the end, for the sake of [serving] Him, for each person to peaceably and amicably set aside his own opinion to follow the majority, as mentioned above. The contemplation of how to conduct oneself in the order of matters pertaining to His service, may His Name be exalted, makes it easy to observe the facet of [serving] Him. And a person must accustom himself to see that it will be in the facet of [serving] Him. Experience will teach him that in the study of Torah, the deficiency is greater if something is lacking in the facet of study than in the facet of [serving] Him. And a person must incline more towards the facet of study. But in the other contemplations, the deficiency is greater in the lack of the facet of [serving] Him, and a person must incline towards the facet of [serving] Him. For this reason, a person should set his heart and soul to see that the contemplations in His ser-



vice, may His Name be exalted, will be in the facet of [serving] Him. This matter is easy to fulfill. But in the absence of the facet of [serving] Him, the transgression is great and weighty, for it would lead, Heaven forbid, to issuing a crooked judgment in conduct contrary to His will, may His Name be exalted.

**[17]** The service of the Blessed One, His Name, which is most weighty for a person, is honest dealings in faith. It is concerning this that a person is questioned—this is the "I"—first, when he comes to be judged for his conduct (Shabbat 31a). The inclination of the mind is that if a person transgresses a type of sin in the category of the "light," whose punishment is more severe than a sin in the category of the "weighty," then also the very commission of the sin in the category of the "weighty" will enter into the category of the "light" because even if it were light before him, he would still transgress it. And similarly, in the performance of good deeds, whatever is more weighty for a person to fulfill, his reward will be magnified, as our Sages, may their memory be blessed, stated: "According to the pain, so is the reward." And by this, in performing that commandment in the category of the "light," it will also enter into the category of the "weighty" because even if it were weighty before him, he would still fulfill it.

**[18]** Perhaps to this, our Sages, of blessed memory, alluded (Sukkah, page 53a): "In the future to come, the Holy One, Blessed be He, will bring the evil inclination... To the righteous, it will appear as a high mountain, and to the wicked, it will appear as a strand of hair..." (See there). For to the righteous person who fulfills even the weighty matters, it will be shown that even the lighter matters will be included within the weighty ones. And to the wicked person who transgresses even the lighter matters, it will be shown that even the weighty matters will be included within the lighter ones. Therefore, one should seek to conduct business dealings with faith, at the very least in the lighter matters.

**[19]** Indeed, the error of Talmudic study, etc. It

is good to set a measure for studying Choshen Mishpat, and householders should come sometimes to this and sometimes to that. For each section is almost easy to explain on its own. And the householders should ponder how the law is applicable today, for the dealings have changed. And this is almost the beginning of knowledge in studying Choshen Mishpat, to know and understand how they are applicable today. And through this, householders will be able to inquire and investigate with those who grasp the Torah, how to fulfill what occurs before them, at least in the simpler aspects, each according to his situation and his fear of Heaven.

**[20]** And herein lies the atonement for transgressions on Yom Kippur, which is contingent upon repentance. The abandonment of sin is exceedingly weighty. Let a person not cease to prepare for Yom Kippur, at the very least in the lighter aspects. This means engaging with the Ten Days of Repentance concerning matters of repentance, at the very least in the lighter aspects. This involves going to the house of Mussar at night, when one is free from one's affairs, to study Mussar with emotional engagement of the soul, almost every night. From this will be born some degree of receptivity [a "darkening" or "dimming" - *dunkle*] for the reception of Mussar study, without an oath, at the very least on Shabbat HaKodesh (a supplement to studying Gemara, as mentioned above), and to run [to study] a few times a week. At the very least for a few minutes, so that the interruption of time does not extinguish the impression of this receptivity, as mentioned above. And to accustom oneself to reflect upon one's ways, to feel and discern between the light and the heavy. This, at the very least, will assist one in observing the Torah and the Mitzvah in the lighter aspects. And one will come to the state of a penitent on the coming Yom Kippur, may it be for our good. At the very least, in accepting the abandonment of sin in the lighter aspects. And in this, one who comes to purify himself, may the Holy One, Blessed be He, assist him to ascend from level to level in fulfilling the Torah

and the Mitzvah, even in the heavier aspects, for the good of man – he – the "I" – in his eternal world.

## Ohr Yisrael – Chapter 7

### אור ישראל -- פרק 7

**[1]** All things in the world are composed in their emergence into light from a cause and an effect. The attainment of produce from the field is an effect, stemming from numerous preceding causes: sowing, plowing, and so forth. A person's acquisition of money is an effect, stemming from various causes: commerce, wages, and the like. Every cause is itself an effect, stemming from the cause that precedes it. Sowing in the field is the primary cause for the growth of produce, and it is an effect stemming from the human sower. The human's sowing is an effect stemming from the cause of his desire, whether to attain the produce, or to attain wages for his sowing, and so forth. Ultimately, no effect is born without a cause, and no cause exists that is not itself born from the cause that effects it, until the First Cause, the self-existent Cause, which is the Divine.

**[2]** Regarding the ways of man, for the needs of his earthly body and soul, the attainment of wealth, the attainment of honor, and the like, their primary cause (in the eyes of the flesh, not intellectually, for everything proceeds from the true First Cause) is his own will, which arises spontaneously. From this, subsequent causes are generated, which are causes for further effects, until his will is brought to light, or through another person who arouses it, whether by compulsion or by enticement, to awaken his desire and will. This is the primary cause (in the eyes of the flesh) for man, which is born and revolves from another person, who possesses causes that led to this, to awaken a primary cause for another:

**[3]** Now let us return and see, what will be the

primary cause that a person will awaken to oversee his deeds, and to contemplate ethics in the month of Elul (this matter also pertains to the entire year concerning his service of the Blessed One, His Name). Is there not a natural inclination for this, as there is for earthly matters? Our ancient Sages, may their resting place be Eden, trembled over this matter. They relied on Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer and instituted the blowing of the Shofar in Elul, and this was the primary cause to awaken a person from his slumber and the vanities of his preoccupations, to oversee his deeds, as the verse states (Amos 3): "If a Shofar is blown in a city, and the people do not tremble."

**[4]** Indeed, it is known that an effect cannot be born except from a cause similar to it; a heavy effect cannot emerge from a light cause.

**[5]** And by this, this matter, the sounding of the Shofar, was the primary cause for the person immersed, both internally and externally, in the service of the Blessed Name. And a slight cause would awaken him to oversee himself in a more elevated aspect. But what shall we say and speak, and what shall we do now, when we are immersed, both internally and externally, in the vanities of worldly preoccupations, and the heart is dulled and hard as flintstone? Will the slight awakening before us make an impression on the strong stone?

**[6]** Indeed, if we do not draw the cords of the *yetzer* (evil inclination) upon ourselves, without realizing that we are turning light into darkness, saying of the light that it is heavy—the matter is clearly evident. For to go sometimes to the house of *musar* (ethical instruction) in Elul is a very easy matter, and despite the great preoccupation, there is time for this without toil by day or by night, which will suffice for us as a cause for the sounding of the *shofar*. And when a person goes to the house of *musar*, it is a great and awesome cause by which difficult and heavy consequences can be brought forth.

**[7]** This is a saying of our Sages, blessed

be their memory, in Kiddushin (folio 30): "If this scoundrel encounters you, draw him to the House of Study." There are different Houses of Study at times. One House of Study is occupied with matters pertaining to honest commerce. Another House of Study is occupied with matters concerning the eating of kosher food and the like. The Torah's remedy for the *yetzer* (evil inclination) is both general and specific. The general principles of Torah, when one is engaged in them, are a shield and a protection. The specific, and indeed the primary, aspect is the Torah pertaining to honest commerce. For the toil of our mouths, the Torah pertaining to it. And for every specific matter that the scoundrel encounters a person with, let him go to the House of Study pertaining to that specific matter. And for this reason, the study of Mussar, which is greatly needed in Elul, is necessary. Its fruit consists of two things:

**[8]** The one is physical, wherein the person and his household dependent upon him are in great danger. At the time of the Great Judgment, which is the time of the sounding of the Shofar on Rosh Hashanah, when the person is remembered and judged for his deeds. And he, at this time, is likened to a High Priest when he enters the Holy of Holies, as our Sages, of blessed memory, stated (Rosh Hashanah, page 26): "The Shofar on Rosh Hashanah, since it is for remembrance, is likened to the inner [sanctuary]." See there.

**[9]** And how should the heart of a person who loves himself and his household dependent upon him tremble? (Even though the eyes of flesh see that people go out to righteousness without preparation and awakening of awe and ethical instruction) to improve his way, and at the very least to break his spirit with a broken heart, which is the primary foundation, to be a shield against the great danger that hovers, as our Sages of blessed memory stated in Rosh Hashanah (p. 16a): "Every year its root is at its beginning," etc., this is the broken heart. And as they stated of blessed memory there (p. 26a): "On Rosh Hashanah, the more a person's mind

is subdued, the more he ascends." See there.

**[10]** Indeed, "For everything there is a season" (Ecclesiastes 3:1), and "man does not know his time" (ibid. 9:12). This applies especially to a time of misfortune, when it suddenly befalls him, without the necessary preparation to fashion a shield and armor, to guard against that which is the awesome Day of Judgment. For even our fleshly eyes see that, God forbid, almost every Rosh Hashanah, even the young men are judged unto death, while other people of their age are saved. And this is because the Holy One, Blessed be He, bears His anger until the appointed time before Him, which is a unique time for every individual.

**[11]** And just as the power of imagination is beneficial for ethical improvement, let a person imagine for himself: if he were the High Priest and had to enter the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement, how exceedingly fearful he would be for his soul, lest some misfortune befall him, God forbid. So too should one strengthen his faith – the faith of our Sages, our masters, the sages of the Talmud, may their memory be for a blessing – who ruled and ceased the ram's horn [on Rosh Hashanah], because "a prosecutor does not become a defender." Although one enters the sanctified synagogue adorned in golden vestments, indeed, the horn, since it comes for remembrance, and a person remembers and is judged for all his deeds, is like the High Priest entering the Holy of Holies. And the matters are as they truly are, and a person's heart trembles greatly, greatly, when he deeply contemplates this awesome matter.

**[12]** The second is the soul. Let man know that the Holy One, blessed be He, is long-suffering even with His own, and yet, when man himself acts contrary to the will of the Torah, which is contrary to His will, blessed be His Name, he will surely be punished. For man's body is merely the garment, and the human faculty that perceives pleasure and pain is that which lives on even after the garment is shed, and is capable of attaining pleasure and pain. From the obser-

vance of Torah and commandments, the person himself who observes will experience immense and wondrous delight above and beyond. And from the commission of a transgression or the neglect of Torah and commandments, the person himself who transgresses will experience great and terrible suffering, which will cause him to groan in his end with no escape, unless he prepares a refuge for himself at the time he sheds the garment, which is the soul's connection with the material.

**[13]** Yom Kippur is exceedingly good, a day of forgiveness and atonement. There have not been good days for Israel like Yom Kippur (end of Ta'anit). We have nothing better than it, if we were to make the proper preparation for the rectification of our ways. For Yom Kippur atones with repentance, which is the abandonment of sin. Indeed, even a little is exceedingly good; it is invaluable in matters of this world, to see, at the very least, that there will be some resolution for the future on Yom Kippur.

**[14]** And we have no more profitable trade, than to prepare oneself in the study of Mussar, and to contemplate how to improve one's ways, until one arrives at some resolution for the coming Yom Kippur. And for every small detail, even the smallest, that a person prepares himself with, to magnify the significance of his Yom Kippur, there is no measure and no adequate explanation for the success of his soul to be saved from many and guarded troubles, and we have no greater profit than this.

**[15]** Herein shall a person set his heart and soul, to yoke together these two matters, and to bind them through the connection of body and soul. Initially, he shall break his heart from the dread of the physical judgment, for it is awesome, and his life, and the lives of his household, and his needs are dependent on this. And from this, he will come to mend his ways, and it will be beneficial for the Day of Atonement. Indeed, the vile one is the evil inclination that hates and lies in wait for man to dull his heart. If it [the inclination] encounters you, draw it to

the study hall that belongs to this, which is the House of Mussar. If it is a stone, through the study of Mussar (which is the Torah for the dulling of the heart), it will be erased, as mentioned above.

**[16]** Throughout the entire year, the primary cause [of spiritual well-being] is the fear [of God] planted in the heart of the believer who knows in general that his end will be bitter and evil if he abandons the Torah and commandments of God, blessed be His Name. However, when desire corrupts him, let a person accustom himself to studying the Poskim [halakhic authorities] (not to neglect his fixed study sessions, as it is not permitted to tear down a synagogue, etc., as stated in Bava Batra, page 3). And when he reaches a ruling relevant to him, he should study it from its source, and delve deeply according to his intellectual capacities. This act creates a possession within his soul to guard it, almost more than the contemplation of fear. However, he should not cease from the contemplation of fear either, for "If there is no Torah, there is no fear; and if there is no fear, there is no Torah" (Avot).

**[17]** And for the sickness of despair, upon seeing that the desire is great before him, and there is no sickness like despair – let a person know that every transgression is divided into different aspects. There are those from which it is difficult for him to refrain, and there are, within that very same transgression, times when it is easy for him, or in different situations. For example, regarding the nullification of Torah study, the aspect differs between Shabbat and weekdays, between a time of distraction and a time of leisure, from a state of a distracted mind to a state of a clear mind, and so forth. And in all the details of transgressions, a single transgression is divided into different aspects according to the person's state and disposition. Not all times are equal, and not all dispositions are equal. And whatever is easy for a person in some aspect to refrain from the transgression, his punishment increases greatly, as our Sages of blessed memory stated in Menachot (page 43b): "His punish-

ment for white is greater than his punishment for blue," etc. See there.

**[18]** And for this reason, a person should accustom himself to fulfill the verse from Proverbs: "If you seek her like silver..." (Mishlei 2:4), to observe the workings of the body's needs and to take from it a parable and a metaphor for his soul. For indeed, concerning the body's needs, how does a person labor arduously all day to obtain what his body requires, even if it is but a trifle? And how should it not be weighty before a person to exert himself in his distress, God forbid, to seek and to see how to alleviate his illness? And why do we not do likewise for our soul, to at least strive to fulfill the easy commandments before us, and to guard against the easy transgressions, which will save him from severe and bitter suffering, God forbid? And in this, there is no room for despair before a person, if he sets his heart and soul to attend to the management of the body's needs, to utilize it for the needs of the soul. Indeed, from the desire and the search to fulfill the commandments in their completeness, such as the study of Torah and the like, and to guard completely against transgressions, one should not let his hand rest.

**[19]** Thus, also in Elul, even though the time is short, one should endeavor to study a concise book, such as *Sha'arei Teshuvah* by our Rabbi Yonah, and the like, which speaks about almost all the roots of commandments and transgressions. And when he reaches a matter that pertains more to him, he should endeavor to study it in depth, according to the powers of his understanding and according to the situation of the short time. And he should endeavor to divide it into different aspects, as mentioned above. And from this, there is hope to arrive at some aspect of this transgression on the Day of Atonement for a complete penitent, for the acceptance of abandoning the sin. In the easier aspect before him, a true acceptance whose greatness of its merit for his good in this world and the world to come is beyond measure.

**[20]** For we see with our senses, that which is almost natural for a person to guard, it becomes easy for him to fulfill it even if it is difficult for him. And in these places, there are differences. In our land, it is easy for a person to guard the Sabbath, and he will stand almost in his trials. And in Ashkenaz, to achieve Sabbath observance is more difficult, to guard almost from all service of God, blessed be His name. And therefore, study with contemplation and depth makes a great impression on the soul of man, until it becomes ingrained in his soul, and he will guard almost without any moral instruction, and he will stand even in trial. The study of Torah with contemplation and depth in the law that is necessary for man, this is the foundation for its observance.

## Ohr Yisrael – Chapter 8

אור ישראל -- פרק 8

**[1]** Midrash Rabbah, Vayikra, Parashah 2: "New things as well as old, my beloved, I have kept for you." Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are the "old." Amram son of Kohath and all the righteous who were in Egypt are the "new." The fellowship of Moses, and the fellowship of Joshua, and the fellowship of David and of Hezekiah are "old." The fellowship of Ezra, and of Hillel, and of Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai, and of Rabbi Meir and his colleagues are "new." And concerning them it is said: "New things as well as old." (Pesachim 116a) Rabban Gamliel used to say: Whoever does not mention these three things on Passover has not fulfilled his obligation, and these are: Pesach, Matzah, and Maror. And Rashi's grandson (Rashbam) explained that this means one has not explained their reason. And with these commandments, permission is certainly given to investigate and inquire into their reasons. And one should consider why Maror is ordered after Matzah, when the actual event occurred in reverse, and according to the reason, the cause of Maror should precede it.

**[2]** Our Sages of blessed memory said in Kidushin (folio 40a): "A person should always view himself as if half is guilty and half is righteous." And sometimes, a person clearly sees that it is not so, either for good or otherwise. Indeed, the Rambam of blessed memory wrote in Laws of Repentance, Chapter 3: "Each and every human being has merits and transgressions. He whose merits outweigh his transgressions is righteous, and he whose transgressions outweigh his merits is wicked," etc. And this weighing is not according to the number of merits and transgressions, but according to their magnitude. There is a merit that is equivalent to many transgressions, etc., and there is a transgression that is equivalent to many merits, etc. And the weighing is only done in the knowledge of God, the Knower of all knowledge, and He knows how to balance merits against transgressions. Thus far is his language. See there.

**[3]** Indeed, there are many distinctions within the matter, which greatly magnify the value of merits and transgressions. We shall explain one distinction somewhat. For it is known that the commandments are evaluated according to the suffering involved in their observance, as our Sages, may their memory be blessed, stated: "According to the suffering is the reward." Therefore, sometimes a person performs one commandment at two different times, which are equal in their material aspect. Yet, in terms of the suffering involved in their observance, there are thousands of distinctions between them. This is because every matter can be divided into fine and numerous parts. The distinction of suffering changes according to the form of their performance. For example, consider one who studied for one hour at one time. His mind was then clear for study; his nature did not oppose it. He did not feel suffering in his soul, or at least very little, during his study. At another time, the matter was the opposite. The study was like a burden upon his soul; his suffering was greatly intensified. Although the material aspect of studying for one hour is the same, the form has changed immensely, to a great degree. And similarly with all matters, no hour is like an-

other in terms of its form. Therefore, even if his actions are performed without change in their material aspect, nevertheless, in terms of their form, the difference between them is a great distance.

**[4]** And similarly, concerning transgressions, their punishment will vary according to the measure of the difficulty in abstaining from the transgression. And the less difficult it was to abstain, so much the greater will be its punishment, as our Rabbis, may their memory be for a blessing, stated in Menachot (fol. 43a): "It was taught: Rabbi Meir used to say, 'The punishment of Lavan is greater than the punishment of Techelet' (a parable, see there)." And for this reason, also concerning transgressions, even though for every transgression a person will be punished, whether in this world or the next, nevertheless, the punishment will vary according to its form. And that same transgression, when a person commits it at a time when it is easy for him to refrain from the transgression, so much the greater will be its punishment. And according to this, also concerning transgressions, a person may sometimes commit one transgression at two different times, which are equal in their material aspect. And despite this, their punishments will vary in thousands of ways, according to the measure of the variation in the form of abstention from the transgression, how it was.

**[5]** From this, a person should contemplate, if he dedicates his attention to a matter and deeply ponders it – how great is the quality of the punishment for transgressions, whether by doing what the Torah forbade, or by refraining from doing what the Torah commanded to do. When he contemplates the Torah according to the law transmitted to us from the Gemara and Poskim, to what extent its obligation reaches to fulfill it, whether by doing or by not doing, to resist the suffering that would be born from its fulfillment. And if he then transgresses, he will certainly be punished with a much greater punishment, in opposition to the suffering he would have had if he had fulfilled it. For this is the prin-

ciple of the exchange of punishment, to warn a person to guard himself for this reason from that which he was commanded, which will be much more than the suffering of guarding the commandment. And afterwards, he should observe how many thousands of aspects his small suffering in guarding the matter is multiplied by. And according to this, his punishment will be multiplied a thousand thousands of times.

**[6]** These matters will strike root in a person's heart, if he sets his mind to delve deeply into the study of Torah, each according to his measure, to know the obligation to oppose suffering, and especially in matters pertaining to him. For almost every person has particular obligations pertaining to him according to his disposition and situation. Some have a greater necessity to delve deeply into the laws of Talmud Torah, and some into the laws of usury, and some into the laws of fraud and the like.

**[7]** How very ancient are these matters during the Ten Days of Repentance, to find a way, even a little, to abandon sin, which is the primary foundation, the cornerstone. And it is difficult to find a way in ordinary matters. However, when a person deeply contemplates his affairs in all their details, regarding the light and the heavy [sins], it becomes easy for him to accept upon himself a lasting resolution, to guard it in the category of the light [sins] before Him, which in itself will be considered a distinct category. And through this, he will be almost easily absolved from the majority of his transgressions, for the transgressions of a light nature are far more numerous in their quality, as mentioned above.

**[8]** It is found, therefore, that we can generally divide the commandments and transgressions into the category of "light" and "heavy," with many particulars in between, as mentioned above. Sometimes a person errs in this, thinking that a matter is for him in the category of "heavy." This is beneficial for a person, in the manner of a commandment, to increase his reward, and in the manner of a transgression, to lessen his punishment. But it is not so, for some-

times the matter is heavy for a person, not due to the state of his innate disposition, but rather because the *yetzer* (evil inclination) has drawn it upon him, and the matter has become heavy before him. Or, the *yetzer* has drawn him to another matter, from which the heaviness has also arisen in this matter. This is because the faculties within a person are intertwined and dependent on one another. In such a case, it will not be counted for the person in the state of "heaviness," but rather in the category of "light," since he himself, by his choice, has drawn the evil upon himself.

**[9]** And similarly, for good. Sometimes it will be easier for a person to perform a commandment not because of a good disposition from his birth or the like, but rather through what he has acquired – fear [of Heaven], discipline, and habit in this matter, or in a matter connected to it. And then, he will consider it a weighty matter, even if it is easy for him, and his reward will be much greater. And therefore, the quality of the commandment and the transgression, whether they fall under the category of the weighty or the light, and how and in what specific way, cannot be truly known by anyone. And the words of the Rambam are true, that God, blessed be His Name, knows how the commandments and transgressions are weighed.

**[10]** And we can further elaborate on this matter with the words of our Sages, of blessed memory, in Tractate Sukkah (folio 53b): "In the future, the Holy One, blessed be He, will bring the evil inclination... To the righteous, it will appear as a mountain, and to the wicked, it will appear as a strand of hair..." See there. And the matter is astonishing, for what is this change? Indeed, it is the very thing we have spoken of: that the wicked, who drew the inclination upon themselves, it was certainly very difficult for them to conquer their inclination. And they think that even though they will certainly be punished, it will only be to the extent of severe transgressions. But in truth, the matter is not so, since by their choice they drew the inclination upon themselves. And from this, the matter be-

came heavy before them. And therefore, it appears to them that the evil inclination, in their case, is in the category of a strand of hair, contrary to their imagination.

**[11]** And likewise, the righteous who, through habituation, have made the service of the Blessed One, His Name, a delight for themselves, are accustomed to receive reward only in the category of "light" matters. But this is not so, for since it is born of their own choice and from their own side, the "light" matters are considered "heavy," and their reward is greatly increased. For this reason, they are shown as a mountain:

**[12]** And how greatly the heart of man will tremble, when he contemplates well his state and his condition, who knows how many thousands of considerations will be counted against him towards the consideration of lightness, from the side that he drew upon himself heaviness through his choice, as mentioned above, and his punishment will be much, much more than he imagines. According to these words, we can give form to the Mishnah in Avot: "You are destined, whether you like it or not, to give an accounting and a reckoning." That is to say, an accounting according to the state of man, and a reckoning of what his state would have been had the inclination not drawn upon him, and the matter would have been much easier for him.

**[13]** It is found, therefore, that one who magnifies the aspect of the commandments, meaning the aspect of weightiness, diminishes the aspect of transgressions. And one commandment, in this aspect, is equivalent to several

transgressions. For this reason, in Egypt, where there was an aspect of supreme weightiness, they were at an elevated level and merited miracles and wonders. This is the meaning of the verse, "And their cry went up... from the service." This means, why was their prayer accepted, which is a lofty level? Because it was from the service. And the commandments, in their quality, ascended above the transgressions, even though they were few in number.

**[14]** And with this, the unleavened bread (matzah) is the resultant effect, and the bitter herbs (maror) are the cause of the servitude. This is understood even though in the act of causation, the cause precedes the effect. However, in the narration of the matter, it is the reverse: first, they recount the effect, and afterward, its cause. Thus, matzah, and afterward maror. And behold, in Egypt, they were in a state of heaviness opposite the Patriarchs, and likewise in the Second Temple period opposite the First, therefore these are new states, a higher state; this is "new and also old."

**[15]** And with this, we too shall say, the study of Mussar is easy from its own perspective to study at times, when its time is arranged, with the soul's stirring. Indeed, it is new; for this reason, it will enter with a sense of weight. Cling to it and do not release it, and your reward will be abundant. Please inform me if my words have reached you, and may you be blessed with a good year according to your good soul and the soul of your beloved, who seeks your peace, Yisrael, on the eve of Rosh Hashanah, 5670 (1909).



## Chapter 4

# Iggeret HaMusal – The Mussar Letter

### The Famous Ethical Epistle

**[1]** Man is free in his imagination, and bound by his intellect. His imagination leads him astray on the path of his heart's desire, and he is not deterred by the certain future, when the Lord will call him to account for all his deeds, and he will be disciplined with severe judgments. Let not another be ensnared because of him; he alone shall bear the fruit of his sin. He is one, the doer of transgressions and the one punished. It is bitter, let man not say, "This is a sickness, and I shall bear it."

**[2]** The afflictions of the world are indeed distressing, especially in comparison to the punishments for transgressions. The soul of man is repulsed to such an extent that a day is counted as a year. Woe to imagination, this evil enemy! It is in our hands, within our power to distance it. When you lend a listening ear to intellect, to understand the matter of truth, to consider the reward of a transgression against its loss. And what shall we do? Imagination is a rushing stream, and intellect will drown, unless we carry it in a ship, which is the feeling of the soul and the tempest of the spirit.

**[3]** In all matters and affairs, there is a general principle and a specific detail (or types, kinds, and individual instances). If there is no general principle, there is no specific detail, for there is

nothing in the specific detail that is not already in the general principle. However, a general principle can exist even without a specific detail being manifest. Therefore, the beginning of every matter is the general principle, and from it the specific details will be drawn.

**[4]** Now let us observe our service incumbent upon our Creator, blessed be He. Is it not a matter, what is the general principle from which we draw the particulars?

**[5]** Without knowledge and without understanding, we shall recognize that the faith that hovers within us, that God is a judge, to give unto each man according to the fruit of his deeds—(if his way is evil and bitter, he shall be chastised with evil punishments, whether in this world, or in the World to Come, the eternal world, man shall not know its measure, how greatly it shall rise above, in quality and in quantity. And if his actions are pure and upright, conversely, he shall be called blessed, with elevated pleasures in this world, and even more so in the World to Come, in a paradise wondrously far beyond human intellect and feeling)—this is the beginning of our steps towards His blessed service.

**[6]** This is the statement of our Sages, of

blessed memory (Makkot 24a): Habakkuk came and reduced them [all the commandments] to one, "But the righteous shall live by his faithfulness" (Habakkuk 2:4), and so forth. And the statement of our Sages, of blessed memory (Bava Batra 91a): "Therefore, the proverb-makers say, 'Come, let us reckon'" (Job 21:17, interpreted), the loss of a mitzvah against its reward, and the reward of a transgression against its loss.

**[7]** Indeed, to our sorrow and heart's anguish, this collective power lies hidden within us, concealed in the depths of the heart, unseen by the outside, unless we attend to cultivating the soil of our hearts by expanding our ethical contemplations. Otherwise, this collective power will not extend its tendrils to bind the limbs with the bonds of awe. And from this generality, the particulars will not be drawn to guard themselves from transgressions that arise. We stumble at all times into transgressions that reach to the heavens, in sins of the tongue without restraint to our spirit, and in matters of commerce excessively, and in the nullification of Torah above all. And in general, in almost all the limbs there is no perfection, for the one who discerns well according to his worth, "for whoever is greater than his fellow, his inclination is greater than him" (Sukkah 52a), and he stumbles into lofty and elevated transgressions, which even if we are considered blind to the darkness of our hearts, their magnitude is not perceived (in contrast to the transgressions of the masses). Only if we observe them through the instruments of vision (a magnifying glass makes a thing very large, which appears small to our weak sight, like the stars whose size is greater than the earth, and they appear as small dots, and through magnifying instruments they appear somewhat larger, and in truth there is no measure to their greatness. So it is with this matter), that is, correct intellect, according to the faithful Torah, we find them much more severe in their quality, with greater loftiness and greater strength.

**[8]** This is the matter which we can infer from the words of our Sages, of blessed memory

(Yoma 9b): The First Temple was destroyed, why? Because of three things that were found within it: idolatry, forbidden sexual relations, and bloodshed. But the Second Temple, wherein they were engaged in Torah study, observance of commandments, and acts of loving-kindness, why was it destroyed? Because baseless hatred was found within it. Rabbi Yochanan and Rabbi Eliezer both said: Regarding the former [sins], their transgression was revealed, and their end was revealed. Regarding the latter [sins], their transgression was not revealed, and their end was not revealed. (The matter is that the transgression of the former was revealed, being severe sins in the eyes of the beholder, with no regard for understanding. But the transgressions of the latter are not seen except by one who observes very closely and scrutinizes the great severity of their [sins], which are exceedingly great, branching out into numerous profound transgressions without any restraint, may the Merciful One save us.) etc. And the Amoraim asked there: Are the former superior or are the latter superior? And they replied: Cast your eyes upon the capital city that returned to the former [people] and did not return to the latter. This is the matter we spoke of above, that the greater one is than his fellow (as in the Second Temple, wherein they were engaged in Torah, etc.), his yetzer hara is greater, and it causes him to stumble into profound sins. These are known to the intelligent person concerning the truth, the magnitude of their quality to do evil.

**[9]** Now, in whatever state a person finds himself, what shall he do? The day of death is completely hidden; it will come suddenly, and God will reckon every deed that he has done. The count of the days of his life, not one of them will be missing. And the end will be more bitter than death, with no escape or refuge to be saved. This is the meaning of the verse (Ecclesiastes 9:4): "For whoever is joined to all the living has hope, for to a living dog it is better than a dead lion." As our Rabbis, may their memory be for a blessing, expounded: For as long as a person is alive, he has security and hope to do

repentance. But once he has died, his hope is lost, etc.

**[10]** If this is so, then as long as our soul is within us, let us hasten and quickly pave our way toward good. Indeed, by the stumbling block, the path before us will be smoothed. We shall not be terrified of the day of death, even if we mention it with our mouths, as our Sages, of blessed memory, stated (Shabbat 30b): "Perhaps you will say it is forgetfulness..." Even if our eyes witness the death of people like ourselves, we shall not give strength to our soul to return with all our heart to our Creator, before Whom we will ultimately come for judgment, and He will contend with us concerning all the evil of our deeds. This is contrary to the verse (Ecclesiastes 7:2): "It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, for that is the end of all mankind, and the living shall take it to heart." This is nothing other than the abundance of transgressions that have darkened our hearts and made them like stone, as our Sages, of blessed memory, expounded (Yoma 39a) on the verse (Leviticus 11:43): "And you shall not defile yourselves with them, and become defiled by them." Do not read "and become defiled" (v'nitmetem), but rather "and become darkened" (v'nitmetmetem)... And therefore, our transgressions are also hidden from us, and we do not perceive them quickly, as our Sages, of blessed memory, stated (Kiddushin 40a): "When a person commits a transgression and repeats it... it becomes permissible to him." And they surround us for the day of judgment, as our Sages, of blessed memory, stated (Avodah Zarah 18a): "Transgressions that a person tramples under his heel... they surround him..." Now, has our hope been lost? Heaven forbid, there is no solace for us, Heaven forbid!

**[11]** One thing we have found: wisdom, and it is not a craft. Let us speak a little, and we shall find relief.

**[12]** Let us give attention to contemplating the matter of transgressions, and we will see that they are of two types: The first stems from un-

restrained desire, to love what is pleasant in the moment, without considering the outcome, even if it will be bitter in the end. We find its parallel even in worldly matters: the foolish person, and especially one weakened in his intellect, will love to snatch and eat what is pleasant to his palate, and forget that this will lead him to a severe illness. Therefore, our Sages, may their memory be for a blessing, said (Avot): "Any wise person who sees the outcome." This is the statement of our Sages, may their memory be for a blessing (Sotah 3a): "A person does not commit a transgression unless a spirit of foolishness enters him." And all of man's effort in serving the Blessed One is to think and contemplate with the fear of God, with dread of His punishment, through the books of Mussar and the Aggadot of our Sages, may their memory be for a blessing, until he hears with his ears and almost sees with his eyes the great punishment, in quantity and quality, standing before his eyes, as our Sages, may their memory be for a blessing, said (Sanhedrin 7a): "Let one always see a judge" (meaning, one is liable to stumble, and this applies to every person. To guard against evil occurrences, against severe transgressions) "as if Gehenna is open for him from beneath." And if a person does this and his heart understands, he will repent and be healed.

**[13]** Indeed, great is the evil of man on earth; none seeks justice, nor contemplates in the fear of God, to set aside appointed times for the labor of reverence, to draw forth waters of understanding from the faith hidden and concealed in the secret places of the heart, to expand it and to support it, to give it strength and might, to place the office upon its shoulder, to rule over the limbs lest they transgress its boundary and act according to the Torah. This is the second category. We have not found a parallel to this matter in the affairs of the world; there is no person who has troubles looming before him, who does not take time to think thoughts to save himself from them. Therefore, neither is desire its cause. This transgression is a wonder, and this is its wondrous name: without any regard to contemplate the fear of God and the disci-

pline of His punishment. Such transgressions cannot be of the first category, for desire alone is not sufficient to be their cause. Rather, they stem from the spiritual impurity that envelops man to cause him to sin, and especially in sins of speech, for what advantage does the owner of the tongue have, as our Rabbis of blessed memory stated (Arachin 15b)? See there.

**[14]** Herein we find a resolution to the matter between the approaches concerning the evil inclination and the good inclination, what they are. The first approach is the well-known one, that the evil inclination is the force of impurity within man that leads him to transgressions, and the good inclination is the force of holiness within man that leads him to good. This is the approach of most of the great composers. The second approach is that the evil inclination is the force of man's desires, which are drawn to whatever is pleasing to them at the moment; it gathers it into its domain and cleaves to it with love. And the good inclination is the sound intellect that looks ahead and perceives what will result; it is the awe of the fear of God, blessed be His Name, and His severe judgments for the multitude. It chooses that which is beneficial, to subdue desire, so that one may ultimately delight in a wondrous pleasure whose glory is beyond description. For we see at all times that man's affairs are varied; each one is more attached to a different transgression. Some whose sin is greater in the nullification of Torah than in honest business dealings and giving charity, and some are the opposite. And so it is with all transgressions; no person is like his fellow. If the evil inclination were merely the force of impurity that tempts him, why would it not ensnare all people equally (unless we consider their roots on high)? However, if we say that the evil inclination is the force of desire, this is correct, for man's desire depends on his temperament (his birth and his constitution, his hour and his circumstances), and the temperaments of people vary; therefore, their sins also vary. But even in this, it is not possible. For our eyes see people committing great transgressions, for which their desire does not account so much.

And sometimes desire contradicts it, as, for example, a person who greatly desires and yearns for illusory honor, yet his soul recoils from the honor of a mitzvah, and the like. This is nothing other than the spirit of impurity that confuses him to do evil, even against his vain desire.

**[15]** From this, it is clearly seen that both approaches are correct. The evil inclination, it is the force of desire, and also there is in it a spirit of impurity. And likewise the good inclination, it is the correct intellect (which has not been corrupted by transgressions and desires) that sees what will result, and also there is a spirit of holiness in man.

**[16]** And behold, in both aspects, there exists in man a corporeal and a spiritual [element], akin to the matter of man's own creation, physical and soulful. The corporeal is visible to the eye of flesh, and the soulful is known from the actions and matters of the body. Man's stratagems and schemes to sustain the soul within the body are solely within the body itself, to support it with good foods and excellent protections from all harm and evil affliction. And by this, he will preserve his soul in his body. There is no natural entrance (according to spirituality, according to truth, the essence of preserving the soul in the body depends solely on the soul itself, according to their service to their Creator, blessed be His Name) to devise a stratagem for the soul to sustain it within the body. For one does not see and does not feel it [the soul] alone, and what will he do with it?

**[17]** Thus, in the service of God, blessed be His Name, the primary strategy for strengthening the good inclination, according to both approaches, is based on the fact that it is the force of holiness and sound intellect (which has not been corrupted), and for repelling the evil inclination, which is the force of impurity and desire. This depends on the physical aspect, to nourish it with good sustenance, which is the contemplation of awe and the ethical teachings that stem from the pure Torah.

**[18]** This is the statement of our Sages, of blessed memory (Bava Batra 16a): Job sought to absolve the entire world from judgment. He said before Him, Master of the Universe: You created the ox with cloven hooves, You created the donkey with solid hooves; You created the Garden of Eden, You created Gehenna; You created the righteous, You created the wicked. Who can impede Your actions? And what did Job's companions answer him? (Job 15:4) "You would nullify reverence and diminish speech before God." The Holy One, Blessed be He, created the evil inclination, and He created the Torah as its antidote, etc.

Herein, our Sages, of blessed memory, have taught us that the antidote of the Torah is the reverence that stems from it, as stated in the verse (mentioned above): "You would nullify reverence." This is a tangible aspect, perceptible to the eye of flesh, the cause of its remedy for the sickness of the soul, if a person directs his heart and soul towards the reverence of the Torah. This is, in general, to know and understand from the Torah that for every transgression there is a tremendous and awesome punishment, and for every commandment there is a very elevated reward.

In particular, and this is the principal matter, one must learn the Torah pertaining to each individual transgression: the Torah of pride for pride, the portions of the Torah concerning honest dealings for matters between man and his fellow in the affairs of the world and the like, and similarly for every commandment and every transgression, its specific Torah.

**[19]** The sublime and essential aspect of applying the Torah's remedies for the afflictions of the *yetzer* (evil inclination) is to study with vigor and deep contemplation, thoroughly, the laws of the transgression itself, the *halakha* with all its ramifications. For our eyes see many transgressions from which a person refrains by nature, and he will not transgress them even when pressured to do so by some matter. Yet, there are transgressions more severe than these, and this same person will transgress them with ease.

For example, a large portion of our brethren, the Children of Israel, almost all of them, will not eat without ritually washing their hands, even when they are very hungry and suffering. But concerning the severe prohibition of *lashon hara* (evil speech), they will easily transgress it, even without great desire. And now we see that the essence of guarding oneself from transgression is merely to make the habit (the guarding) natural for a person. Therefore, even if this person strives to walk in the ways of *mussar* (ethical/spiritual discipline), to exert himself in guarding against *lashon hara* with all his senses and thoughts as is fitting, nevertheless, as long as his nature and habit have not changed in this regard, such that he has no natural inclination to speak *lashon hara*, he will more easily transgress *lashon hara* than he would eat without ritually washing his hands. And so it is with all types of transgressions, all according to the person, the time, and the locale, for not all locales are equal in this matter, but rather they differ in their concerns. Each locale has other transgressions from which one is easily guarded and which are naturally distant from them. And this is known: that the change of nature is born only from much study and habit. Therefore, the primary foundation and the correct pillar for preparing oneself for guarding against transgressions and performing the *mitzvot* (commandments) is only extensive study in the *halakha* pertaining to this transgression or this *mitzvah*, and particularly in meticulous, thorough contemplation. For this study creates a strong possession in the soul, so that the transgression becomes naturally distant from him.

**[20]** Similarly, in our regions, praise be to God, the prohibitions of *nevelot* (carrion) and *tereifot* (non-kosher animals) and their like are ingrained in the souls of the Israelite, to the extent that no person needs to force his nature and desire to distance himself from them, for they are abhorrent to him. Indeed, God forbid, it would never occur to any seller of kosher meat to be remiss in inquiring of the *moreh tzedek* (teacher of righteousness) upon finding anything that carries a

suspicion of *tereifot* in the internal organs, even if at times this would result in a significant loss for him. Fear of Heaven is in his nature and habit, God forbid he would be wicked and cause Israel to stumble.

**[21]** But alas, due to our many transgressions, in business dealings, it is the opposite: most people do not examine themselves for even a suspicion of theft or oppression. This is before their fellow man demands it, and among them are those who, even after the demand, will resort to cunning stratagems or brazenness. Is it not so that in the Torah, all are equal: "this you shall not do" and "this you shall not do," according to the matter of the Torah and its laws? And "flesh in the field that is *treifah* you shall not eat," "you shall not eat any carcass," or "you shall not oppress your fellow," and the like. And just as it is ingrained in the soul of Israel that all types of *treifot* are equal to him, and whatever the teacher declares to be *treifah* is distant to him, and he acts according to the Torah, so too in monetary matters: is it not so that whatever, according to the Torah, belongs to his fellow is considered theft, and he transgresses "you shall not steal"? And we see that, due to our many transgressions, even those who study, and almost even the God-fearing, are not sufficiently careful regarding this "you shall not do," for which Yom Kippur and even death do not atone.

**[22]** Indeed, if a person dedicates his heart and soul to diligently study the laws pertaining to monetary matters, according to his level of understanding in Gemara and Poskim, and especially if the focus is on the category of prohibition and permission, to know how to guard oneself from theft (even if he does not initially observe it, because the desire in this area is great, and the matter is also distant from civic habit), how great is its power to gradually implant a significant trait in the soul, until prohibitions and permissions, and matters pertaining to money, become equal in his eyes.

Similarly, if a person, Heaven forbid, has stum-

bled into a transgression that the world is not accustomed to, such as adultery and the like, as our Sages, of blessed memory, stated, "Few are the [forbidden] relations," and his inclination has become so strong that it appears to him as permissible, Heaven forbid, his primary remedy (besides contemplating awe and Mussar from the Aggadot and Midrashim of our Sages, of blessed memory, and Mussar books pertaining to this) is to diligently study the laws pertaining to it, especially with the intention of acting upon them. This will gradually bear its fruit, giving strength to the soul to guard oneself somewhat from the lowest depths, at the very least from committing the transgression with the intention of provoking God.

\*) In its initial stage, one should utilize that which his inclination does not strongly compel him towards. As we find in the Gemara (Chullin 4a) regarding one who transgresses for the sake of appetite: the chametz that was in his house on Passover and violated the prohibition of "You shall not see," he exchanges it after Passover to mitigate the prohibition (as Rashi explains there). We rely on this, that he certainly acts thus.

And how should we not be ashamed, and how should our hearts not melt like water, when we see the lowliness of our souls compared to the earlier generations, where one who was a convert in the past, who kept chametz in his house on Passover, had a natural inclination to mitigate the prohibition in that specific matter, where he had no desire. And in our generations, due to our many sins, we fall into the category of provoking God, with transgressions we are accustomed to, and we do not pay attention to exchanging our desires for them to mitigate the prohibition, and our wickedness is great, like one who provokes God, Heaven forbid.

And we see that even the Halacha has changed in this time, as the Beit Yosef wrote (Yoreh De'ah, Siman 2, Se'if Katan 2), and his words are: "A convert who eats carrion for appetite, and it appears that now in our time, one who is suspected of eating carrion for appetite, we do not eat any food from him, lest there be a suspicion

of prohibition for any sacred matter.” (Meaning, he is suspected of doing so even if not for appetite, even though previously he was only considered to eat for appetite). And all the more so, we do not give him a checked knife to slaughter and eat from his slaughtering (which was permissible according to the Gemara’s ruling). And one who does this, is considered a convert for the entire Torah.

...until you can give strength, through extensive engagement with the laws pertaining to habitual transgressions, to acquire a different nature, so that it will not enter one’s mind to transgress them, even if the matter becomes difficult.

**[23]** And behold, in the seasonings of the Torah for the evil inclination, there is yet another spiritual dimension (whose cause the intellect and human senses are weary of recognizing). It is the statement of our Sages, of blessed memory (Sotah 21a): “Torah, at the time one is engaged in it, it causes success...” And there is no distinction as to which words of Torah one is engaged in; it will save him from sin. If one is engaged in the matter of an ox that gored a cow and the like, it will save him, even from slander and the like, even though these are not related to each other. Rather, the spirituality of the Torah will guard him.

**[24]** And behold, if we observe with a penetrating eye, we will see that our strategies for centralizing the healing of the evil inclination are only on the physical plane, which is the contemplation of awe and the study of the laws as mentioned above. For the second healing, which is the spiritual plane, comes about naturally, and therefore it is called an incidental healing. For the commandment to study Torah is a distinct positive commandment in itself, dependent on its parameters as explained in the laws of Talmud Torah, how to conduct oneself in it regarding worldly matters. It makes no difference in its conduct how much a person’s inclination overcomes him, whether a little or a lot, and a person must constantly study to fulfill the commandment of Talmud Torah properly, even if his incli-

nation does not overcome him (see our words in our previous article). And it is not within his power to study more than his obligation. And when he fulfills the commandment of Talmud Torah properly, its spiritual healing is naturally drawn to his inclination, in whatever manner it may be.

**[25]** Indeed, the physical aspect, which is contemplation in the fear of God and the study of Halakhot (Jewish law), is a self-remedy. And a person must conduct themselves with it, in the manner of treating a physical ailment, where according to the severity of the illness, so is the extent of the remedy in quantity and quality. So too, with the ailment of the soul, this remedy will be established according to the severity of the illness. As long as one’s inclination (yetzer) strongly attacks him, so is the necessity to increase in contemplation of fear and the study of Halakhot, as mentioned above. And if a person does not utilize the physical remedy, then even the spiritual one, which is the study of Torah, will not give its full strength against the spiritual inclination (yetzer hara), according to the design of man’s creation, where the action of the spiritual, which is the soul, is dependent on the state of the physical, as mentioned above.

**[26]** And behold, the enemy that lies in wait for man is the evil inclination, which acts upon him to make his heart like stone, so that he will not feel his great sins, so that he will not see his deficiency, and his hands will not achieve effectiveness, to contemplate with awe of God, to seek a cure of salvation, which is a physical cure.

**[27]** To this, let a person set their heart: to bring merit to the many, to awaken them to contemplation of reverence and ethical conduct. For a person’s eyes are open to others, to know and recognize their deficiencies, and that they are greatly in need of ethical guidance. So too, let him hold with all his might to the study of ethics, so that many may wander within it, and the reverence for God may increase, and the merit of the many will be dependent upon him. And from this, gradually, the study of ethics will

guide him in the path of righteousness, and this is a remedy both physical and spiritual, as our Sages, may their memory be blessed, stated (Yoma 86a): "Whoever brings merit to the many, no sin comes through him."

**[28]** And how greatly this commandment will grow in a person's eyes, to set his heart and soul to guide people to the study of Mussar, to save their souls from the lowest depths of Sheol. And as our Sages, may their memory be a blessing, stated (Shabbat 151a): "Whoever shows mercy to creatures, mercy is shown to him from Heaven." And there is no greater mercy than to remind and awaken people to the study of Yirah (reverence/fear of God), for then their eyes will see, and their ears will hear, and their hearts

will understand the magnitude of the stumbling block before them, and they will lament their end. To return to God, blessed be He, to turn away from evil and do good, whether a little or much. The person who awakens to this will have a rightful portion in all that is born from it, to delight in eternal Eden, which no eye has seen. Human intellect is weary to encompass and fully comprehend the quantity and quality of the commandment of the multitudes, which accompanies a person from this seemingly trivial matter. The effort is little, and the reward is immeasurable and without limit. Therefore, a person who possesses a soul should set his eye and the power of his intellect to this great matter.



## Chapter 5

# Netivot Ohr – Paths of Light

### Additional Teachings

**[1]** The Extremities of the Paths of our Master, the Gaon and Pious One, of Blessed Memory, and his Conduct in Holiness

**[2]** Indeed, I shall not come here to recount the events of the life of our master, the Gaon, the pious, may his memory be for a blessing. Nor all the times that passed over him, in the manner of writing a biography. For I have found no desire in this. Rather, I shall proceed for my purpose, for the sake of the task before me: to bring to light, with the help of God, his holy letters. In reverence for God and the study of Mussar. I have found it in my heart to make known a little from much, from the greatness of his wisdom, his reverence, his righteousness, and his piety. And his path and his walk in holiness. And likewise, some of his holy words of wisdom and Mussar, in the straight paths of God. So that the generations may know that he walked from a holy place, from the Mighty Shepherd, the Gaon of Gaonim, a righteous, pious, humble, holy one of Israel, may his memory be for a blessing. Even though his ways were lofty and his thoughts deep, to ascend and to understand in the service of God, blessed be His Name. Therefore, his ways and his deeds in holiness shall be as eyes for all who seek the will of God, blessed be His Name. May the God-fearing learn his way and walk in his paths. And may all the House

of Israel follow him, to walk the path of uprightness in his good path of Mussar. And to grasp even the tips of the branches of his ways, his deeds, and his attributes.

**[3]** We have already written above. For when our Master, may his merit protect us, was still in the dew of his youth in the city of Salant, the height of his intellectual prowess and the depth of his wisdom and understanding rose to an exceedingly awesome pinnacle. And he was already known then as a mighty genius, the glory of Israel. And behold, in those days the methods of study and contemplation were still of a different style than they are now. For the custom was to twist and debate only within the confines of the text itself, with additions and novellae. Also, the books of the Ashkenazi Geonim, who opened gates of light for us in the ways of study, were not at all common in our land then. And when the light of Israel dawned like the morning, a new light shone upon the ways of study and contemplation in Halakha. For he began to present Torah novelties and debates, blending the entire Talmud Bavli and the Tosafot like a potent mixture with extreme sharpness. And he showed wonders, at which the great men of the time were astonished by this great vision.

**[4]** For some years, his wife was engaged in commerce to bring sustenance to their home, while he sat securely in Torah and Divine service. Afterward, for various reasons, her livelihood ceased. And our Rebbe, of blessed memory, was still young. At that time, he was called by the dignitaries and esteemed individuals of the city of Vilna to come and dwell with honor among them, in the capacity of a Rosh Mesivta (head of a yeshiva). And when necessity compelled him, and he was unwilling to accept the yoke of rabbinate, he agreed to their request and accepted this position. There, he delivered daily lessons of great wonder, with immense sharpness, to the astonishment of the heart. And in a short time, he moved his dwelling place to the suburb of the city, Zarechcha. In the study hall there was a gathering of great Torah scholars of Israel, from the city's inhabitants and from other places. And at his initiative, more Torah giants were added, most of whom later sat on the seats of judgment in the communities of Israel and became the luminaries of the generation. And our Rebbe, of blessed memory, taught Torah there abundantly, delivering daily lessons before them. There he opened his treasury and demonstrated his strength and mighty hand in all branches of the ways of study and contemplation: both in sharp pilpul (dialectical analysis) and in the methods of peshat (plain meaning), and in the depth of halakha (Jewish law). Likewise, he taught the ways of study for practical application, and performed wonders in extracting novel legal insights.

**[5]** And from the great men and sages of the city, they would sometimes come there to hear his great wisdom. And all of them trembled from the awe of his greatness and the splendor of his genius. Thus were his teachings disseminated from the mouths of the rabbis. For in the study halls of the city, they would engage in discussions concerning his novel Torah insights, which he would utter daily. And a man of faith told me that once, the great and mighty Gaon, our teacher and master, Rabbi David Luria, of blessed memory, from Bychawa, happened to be in the city of Vilna. And he would some-

times go to hear the Torah of our Rebbe, of blessed memory, in his public lectures. And he spoke in extremely great terms about the depth of his intellect and the sharpness of our Rebbe, of blessed memory, which he was unwilling to commit to paper.

**[6]** Indeed, to recount here all the strength of his righteousness and piety would be beyond my knowledge. I do not know how to begin to enumerate his mighty deeds, for he was awesome beyond all praise. I shall merely present a tiny fraction of it here. And behold, I shall speak in general terms. Just as he was a genius of the world in his wisdom and Torah, so was he a light of the world in his righteousness and piety.

**[7]** It has already been stated with the book above. For when our master, may his merit protect us, was still in the dew of his youth, he drew close to holiness. He was our master, the Gaon, the truly pious one, the holy one of God, honored, the light of the world, our teacher Yosef Zundil, may his merit protect us. Famous in everyone's mouth by his holy name, Rabbi Zundil Salanter. And the aforementioned Gaon and pious one bestowed upon him from his spirit, from the radiance of his righteousness and his holy path. And he awakened his heart to the study of reverence and ethics. And when he began to follow in the footsteps of his pious master, to also engage in this, to seek wisdom and ethics, reverence for God, and humble righteousness. His heart was taken, and his soul was greatly impressed with reverence for God. And so he continued, adding strength and courage. Until he acquired for himself heavenly reverence, with every excellence of preparation, beyond all wonder. The fear of judgment, and the dread of the verdict, and the fear of punishment were constantly before his eyes. And as our master, may his merit protect us, wrote in a letter of ethics: For what our Sages, may their memory be for a blessing, said in Sanhedrin, page 7: A judge should always see himself as if a sword were placed between his thighs, and Gehenna were open beneath him. This is not exclusively for a judge who is the one

judging; rather, every person must guard themselves from a bad encounter, from grave transgressions. They only said "judge" to indicate one who is liable to stumble. And this great reverence which he acquired for himself through the power of studying ethics was a lamp for his feet, and cleared the way before him for the service of God, blessed be His name. And it brought him to all the virtues, perfections, and desirable character traits in the world.

**[8]** In the first days of his youth, when his heart was moved to seek the will of God, Blessed be His Name, he delved deeply into the wisdom of reverence, to understand and gain insight into the ways of serving God, Blessed be His Name. To find the straight path and the upright way that would guide him in every detail. The beginning of his sacred service was to labor diligently in the study of Torah for its own sake, in a lofty dimension. With his wisdom, he saw and was convinced that following the desire for study for its own sake could sometimes lead to crooked judgments. It could weaken the passion to labor on the capacity for study, to sharpen the intellect and become very wise. And also, a change in the order of the methods of study, not according to the order necessary for each person according to his worth and the development of his talents. Both of these together – the weakening of passion and the change in order – could cause great damage to the perfection of wisdom. And therefore, our Rebbe, may his merit protect us, would speak at great length about this to his great disciples, to warn them not to stray from their paths. And to show that the capacity for study, to become more wise, to acquire an understanding heart, to sharpen the intellect and straighten it, and to gain mastery in all areas of Torah, is also necessary for each person for himself in the service of God, Blessed be His Name. And the more one adds wisdom and knowledge, so too can one add perfection in the ways of serving Him, Blessed be His Name.

**[9]** And similarly, he set his heart upon the matter of pilpul and sharp intellectual analysis, which many geonim and pious individuals from

previous generations greatly warned against deviating from. Rather, [the goal should be] to innovate true Torah. And my teacher, of blessed memory, labored and toiled greatly in this matter, to seek what constitutes the judgment of true Torah. Until he ultimately decided to permit the use of pilpul without apprehension. And as he himself wrote in the preface to *Sefer Ha'Tevunah*. And examine there that he initially elaborated on intellectual matters concerning the judgments of true Torah. And after this, he wrote, and this is his language: "One thing which the sages of Mussar distanced from entering the congregation of Israel is pilpul. And in my opinion, the matter is reversed..." The second [reason] is that the hand of experience strongly influenced me in my youth, when I was forbidden from studying Mussar and its judgments. I resolved to subdue my inclination... to completely abandon the matter of pilpul. And only to the truth shall my gaze be directed... While walking in this state, I observed with a penetrating eye that the desire to demonstrate my intellectual prowess transgressed the boundary of truth and led my intellect astray to bend the truth to my will. Then I said, it is better for me to permit myself without apprehension to use pilpul, just as our Sages, of blessed memory, permitted it for sharpness, so that my intellect may be free... Examine there.

**[10]** Thus, in his youth, when his heart was elevated in the ways of God, and the strength of his righteousness was like the might of a wild ox, it entered his mind to adopt the path of separation, to be hidden among the vessels, as one concealed. Not to separate himself from the ways of the world and from people, but rather to conceal his wisdom, his deeds, and all the ways of his conduct from the eye of every person, so that people would not recognize him and would not know his essence at all. And to seek for himself a place to dwell where he could reach his goal. And he had already begun to make preparations for this. And behold, as is known to those who are favored, this wondrous path of separation is very close before those who seek the will of God, blessed be His Name, to acquire

great perfection in the service of God, blessed be His Name, and to ascend to high and exalted levels, even in the ways of spirituality. And how much more so for a man like him, with the strength of his wisdom, his genius, and his great awe:

**[11]** However, to affirm that through this path of separation, it would be impossible for a person to achieve success for the sake of God and His Torah, to exert his strength to benefit others as well, to extract the precious from the worthless and to bring merit to the masses, therefore he set his heart to delve deeply into this matter, until he decided that this is not the way God desires for a person whom He has endowed with wisdom, and whose refuge is the fear of God, and who has a noble spirit to act for salvation through God's Torah and His fear, blessed be His Name, to sit securely in solitude and to focus only on bringing merit to oneself. Furthermore, considering the state of the generation, the one who is wise in the fear of God should not remain silent at this time. Just as in the pursuits of this world, it is forbidden for a person to dedicate all his labor solely for his own benefit, for the world is built on kindness, to bestow of his goodness also upon others, and to enlighten the poor. And as it is written in the preface to the book *Nefesh HaChaim*, in the name of the great and pious Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin, may his soul be sanctified, whose words were always that man was not created for himself, but to benefit others to the extent of his ability – see there. So too, in the path of life in the World to Come, one should not seek to gather and encompass all spiritual happiness solely for oneself, and to say, "Peace be upon my soul." Rather, one should increase the glory of Heaven, to pity and have compassion also for the creatures, to incline their hearts to fear God and to walk in His ways. Then he was comforted and turned back from his thought, and began to undertake actions for Torah and for fear [of God], and to bring merit to the masses.

**[12]** And so strong was his conviction in this matter, that when he resided in the city of Vilna,

an incident occurred where a certain man was perceived as having a hidden path. He was engaged in the craft of felling trees. People sensed that he wore *tefillin* all day, and his lips were constantly murmuring [prayers or Torah], and the like. Many greatly desired to investigate the hidden aspects of this man to understand his nature. They came to our Rebbe, may his memory be blessed, to request that he investigate this man and ascertain the content of his affairs. Our Rebbe, may his memory be blessed, replied to them in this manner: "Behold, a man who is supremely elevated in wisdom and fear of sin, I do not believe that at such a time he would conceal himself and be hidden away in the vessels [i.e., secluded], to sit alone and meditate, without concern even for the generation. It may be that he is a scholar and a righteous man. Now, when people do not recognize him, and he is discreetly hidden, and has no dealings with anyone, behold, he is exceedingly fortunate, for his service is in the highest secrecy, and it is easy for him to serve God, blessed be His Name, with wholehearted service for its own sake, and to engage in Torah study for its own sake. Now, what concern is it of ours to investigate and inquire into his affairs, and to publicize his essence to the masses, and to deprive him of this precious quality of service and Torah study for its own sake?"

**[13]** The yoke of rabbinat he never accepted upon himself, from certain hidden desires he possessed. However, he did not teach this path to his disciples. For, in general, he held that the matter of instruction in our generation is the fundamental lifeblood of the Torah's religion. Thus, he wrote in one of his letters, and this is his language: "A matter that stands at the pinnacle of the true world is to give heart to strengthening the state of instruction in Israel, upon which the foundation of religion rests, to instruct the people in the deeds they shall do, and the path of Torah in which they shall walk, etc." Thus far his words. And so, in particular, he would guide his great disciples to give heed to perfecting themselves in the studies of the ways of instruction, to be ready for the opportune time.

**[14]** Some of his greatest disciples, whose spirits were imbued with imagination, thought that if it were within their power, they would refrain from all toil and hardship, and dedicate their days to holiness for God, without taking upon themselves the yoke of rabbinate. They asked him about his words and his counsel: "Would this be Torah for its own sake, to learn the Torah of the rabbinate?"

**[15]** Our Master, may his memory be for a blessing, answered them with the sweetness of his lips. There is no greater *lishmah* (for its own sake) than this. Indeed, you have erred in your imagination. Do not deceive yourselves in vainly straying. For you can withstand the test. Indeed, when the hour, God forbid, presses you from the necessity of livelihood for your household, all your counsel will be swallowed up. And then, not only will necessity compel you to accept upon yourselves the yoke of teaching, but even if you are not yet complete and perfected in fulfilling all the ways of teaching, it will not be beyond your ability to enter yourselves into this yoke of teaching. For necessity rules over all. And when this will be, in any case, we find that the purpose of study is not for the sake of rabbinic authority. Only when it will be out of necessity, as mentioned above, whether one is perfected for teaching or not. Behold, study for the ways of teaching can be *lishmah*, so that when the time comes, when necessity compels him, he will not cause the many to stumble, God forbid, and he will be included in what our Sages, of blessed memory, said in Avodah Zarah, page 19: "Many have fallen because of this: a student who has not reached the level of teaching and teaches." And there is no greater *lishmah* than this.

**[16]** His service in holiness, concerning the portion of Torah between man and the Omnipresent, was both in turning away from evil and in doing good. He was with great caution and alacrity to fulfill all the words of the Torah. It was customary on his lips, as it is written: "If you seek her like silver, etc., then you will understand the fear of the Lord, etc." And he would

say that the principle is that the service of God, blessed be His Name, should be according to the ways of the affairs of the world. And he would show many examples from the ways of business to use them for caution and alacrity in the service of God, blessed be His Name. Once, he sent a telegram from the city of Emel to Vilna to his son-in-law, the Gaon, may his memory be for a blessing, on the 13th of Nisan, concerning the checking for chametz in his room.

**[17]** Regarding the fulfillment of the positive commandment of an olive's bulk (*kezayit*) of matzah to fulfill the obligation on the first night. It was what appeared to us as stringency in the matter of guarding. And there was a certain man who would harvest with his hands a few stalks for the sake of the commandment. And he would dry them and thresh them, and after threshing, he would place them in a small box. And he would keep it in his house, in his treasury. And before Passover, they would grind them with a hand mill and make a little flour. To fulfill the commandment with it on the first night. And how much labor was involved in this! And sometimes also a considerable expense, according to his means. And I saw in one letter, which he wrote while he was outside the land, to one of his close associates, concerning the preparation of the guarded [wheat] for the commandment of matzah. And this is his pure language: "I kindly request from your honor's Torah to forgive [my request] for making a little guarded [wheat] for the Passover night on my behalf, etc. Do not be stingy at all with the expense required for this. For this is to me like the etrog, in which there is no stinginess." Thus far his language. And in another letter from another year, he wrote in this language: "Do not spare the expense, even for a few rubles of silver. The positive commandment of matzah is no less than the positive commandment of the four species." Thus far his pure language.

**[18]** Guarding his mouth and tongue from forbidden speech, such as slander and the like, he was exceedingly careful. And although his mind was engaged with people, he was nevertheless

also careful regarding idle talk. Once he admonished one of his close associates concerning matters of speech. He said to him in this manner: Regarding slander, you cannot say to me, "Remove the beam" [from your own eye] and the like. And it seems also regarding idle talk. And if the Rebbe, of blessed memory, in his humility, said "it seems," then without a doubt he was very careful in this matter.

**[19]** Once, the Rebbe was conversing with one of his close associates in mundane matters and with a cheerful countenance. A certain God-fearing disciple heard the flow of their conversation and it seemed to him like idle chatter. Once, the disciple spoke with the Rebbe about the nature of vain talk. He mustered the courage in his soul to ask the Rebbe about the judgment of the words he had spoken then with that man. The Rebbe, in his humility, did not take offense at his question. He replied, "This man was exceedingly bitter of soul. And it was a great act of kindness to gladden his sorrowful soul, and to divert his worry and his sadness from him. Now, with what shall I be able to gladden his heart? Shall I discuss with him matters of awe and ethics? Surely, only with pleasant words concerning worldly matters. And from this we can judge how much he weighed his words on the scale and balance of the fear of God."

**[20]** I will remember and recall. Once, in the idleness of my youth, I went with him to converse in the field behind the city. I, upon whom his awe was very great, from such great awe, never spoke with him as one speaks with another person, to converse with him, to tell him matters. Rather, I would always make my ear like a funnel to hear the sweetness of his words and sayings. But I had a certain intention then. I told him a certain story about worldly matters, as is natural to speak. He asked me, "Did you have any intention in what you told me, or were you without intention?" I began to tell him my intention. He interrupted me and did not wish to hear. He said to me, "You do not need to justify yourself. What is the difference to me? I only wish to awaken you regarding vain matters."

**[21]** Behold, just as we have merited to see the visions of Israel, and to constantly contemplate its ways, its deeds, and its movements, therefore, according to our estimation, [a person] has not walked four cubits in idle thought concerning Torah or fear of Heaven.

**[22]** Through the ways of character traits, he labored and toiled greatly from his youthful days. By the power of the wisdom of Mussar, and by the power of study and habituation, until he elevated himself to a very high level, and perfected all his faculties and character traits, until he subdued before him all good and desirable character traits to be for him like an enduring nature.

**[23]** The desire for wealth and the lust for honor, which is like a net spread out over almost all of life. He was almost entirely free from them, even to the very last extent. For he never accepted upon himself the yoke of rabbinate. Therefore, he was always tossed about under hardship and poverty. No lack ever saddened him in his days. It was never heard from him that anything was omitted from his mouth in the flow of his words concerning his material condition.

**[24]** When the Tabernacle of His Glory was in the city of Vilna, he earned his livelihood there by giving lessons. And after, due to a reason known to his descendants, he left the city and moved his tent to the city of Kovno. The honored members of the community appointed him to manage the affairs of the city. And he accepted a reward for this. And in the middle of his years, he left this position. And then he was compelled to benefit from others. And his sustenance was provided to him through one of the select individuals, from his great disciples. And concerning this matter, that righteous man regretted it all his days. For besides the fact that he adhered to the principle of the Rambam (Maimonides) in Chapter 4 of Pirkei Avot, that a scholar should not benefit from the honor of his Torah, he feared and trembled even more for his soul, lest the world be mistaken about him, and he be a thief in his hand. And concerning this,

he would constantly sigh and regret.

**[25]** Once, a great Rabbi, one of his close confidants, happened to visit his home during a meal. The Rebbe said to him, "Perhaps your honor would like to taste something. You may taste it, for it is kosher food." The Rabbi asked him to solve his riddle. The Rebbe replied with clarity of his tongue: "With me, it is possible that the food is not kosher, for it is stolen in my possession. However, I have already acquired it through a change of action. And before your honor, it is kosher food."

**[26]** Throughout the entire span of his wife's life, the sustenance of his meager income came into her possession. He himself knew nothing of all that transpired, and scarcely ever looked upon the form of a coin. And in his old age, when his wife passed away, he found in her estate a sum of money which she had saved from her dough. And since he had been accustomed to benefit from others, he did not touch a single penny of this for himself, nor did he give any of it to his descendants. He only distributed it to charity.

**[27]** Our Master, may his merit protect us, did not accept a gift from anyone. Even afterwards, when he was compelled to benefit from others, aside from his meager sustenance which came through one of his select disciples, as mentioned above, he accepted no gift. I know this from several instances where many wished to benefit him with a certain sum, and he did not accept in any way. And even afterwards, when his wife passed away and he remained alone, if he had wished to leverage his strength and accept, he could have lived and supported himself with honor. However, he restricted himself in his sustenance and clothing to the utmost ability to accept hardship in his scarcity, so as not to benefit greatly from others.

**[28]** A man of faith from the city of Königsberg told me. That during the last winter of his life, when the Rebbe, may his memory be blessed, was in the city of K.B., a certain wealthy indi-

vidual from the ends of Ashkenaz, one of those who fear and tremble before the word of God, came to visit. He visited the honored Rebbe in his home. When he observed his dwelling and his manner of living, he wished to benefit him to an excessive degree. But the Rebbe refused to listen and did not accept it in any way. When the wealthy man later prayed in the study hall, he observed that the Rebbe was wrapped in a very old and worn tallit. He asked the Rebbe's acquaintances and close associates to speak to him, urging that he at least accept a small gift from him, as he wished to buy him a new tallit for the mitzvah, of the best and most select quality. The aforementioned man, who told me these things, was constantly entering and exiting the Rebbe's house, and he was sent on this mitzvah mission to persuade and discuss with the Rebbe about this matter. He spoke at length to him, saying that a beautiful tallit is also a mitzvah. In the course of the conversation, the man said to him, "I too go around with an old tallit. If God grants me some profit, I would first buy a beautiful tallit." The Rebbe replied to him with clarity, "If God grants me some profit, I too would buy a beautiful tallit." In the end, he did not accept it in any way.

**[29]** Even in his death, he did not enrich himself, and left his wealth to others. As is related in Gittin, page 47. For it is stated there: "When he passed away, he left behind a small pouch of coins. He did not enrich himself, and left his wealth to others." See there. And behold, a small pouch of coins is a small thing. And as is explained in Gittin (page 12): "A small pouch of coins is a small gift." However, our Rebbe, of blessed memory, did not leave his sons even a small pouch of coins, nor any books. For he did not wish to benefit from others to purchase books. And he used borrowed books. And nothing remained from him, except an old, worn tallit and his tefillin.

**[30]** In the attribute of honor, he almost reached the attribute of equality that the pious author of *Chovot HaLevavot* (Duties of the Heart) mentioned: that praise and blame should

be equal in his eyes. And he once said about himself that in this attribute, he had a philosophical path: that the ways of honor should be despised and loathsome in his eyes. Nevertheless, he fled from honor with all his might. In the early years, when the excessive use of titles was not yet so widespread, he would be displeased if he received a letter with lofty titles. And he would hide them, and did not want to look at them. Only later, when the phenomenon of titles became widespread to a great extent, he no longer paid attention to this.

**[31]** When a great person comes to the city, and a distinguished Rabbi (Admor) comes to visit him in his dwelling, he does not look at the custom prevalent in the world, that the guest initially greets the host. Rather, he immediately hastens himself to go to the dwelling of the guest to bestow upon him the proper honor. And likewise, because of any matter that is required of him, he will not refrain from going to the house of any person.

**[32]** I myself saw, when I was a Rav in one place for a period of time, that a great and honored person was also called there by name. The Rav needed him for some matter of heavenly concern. And he went to his house a few times. The aforementioned great person, besides not receiving the Rav at first, did not conduct himself with the proper *derech eretz* (proper conduct/etiquette) to return the visit to the Rav in his dwelling. Some of the dignitaries of the community were very angered by this matter, for they considered it a diminishment of honor. Also, that the Rav went to him at first. One dignitary spoke with the Rav about this way of his, and also about why he went to him at first, and moreover, why he went to him a few times, after he did not return the visit. Afterwards, the Rav spoke with me privately about this and about the spirit of people. And as he spoke, he became exceedingly moved. And he said to me, "In no way can my mind grasp what this matter is. Who goes first to greet [someone]? And whether he returns to visit me or not. In my eyes, it is like the laughter of youths, especially

when I need him for some matter." And so he expanded his speech with wisdom and with great and mighty emotion, until I was astonished at the sight of his great agitation.

**[33]** Regarding the attribute of humility, just as was his greatness, so too was his humility. And all his ways, his words, and his movements were in reverence of God and in righteous humility. It is impossible to commit to writing and it cannot be etched by the stylus of man. In the aspect of serving God, blessed be His Name, he did not consider himself to be anything. And in his discourses, which he particularly delivered before his students, as this was his way to speak with emotion in order to stir and awaken the hearts, behold, streams of water flowed from his eyes regarding his spiritual state.

**[34]** Also in his outward appearance, in his garments. He did not distinguish himself in them according to the custom of the distinguished individuals who are notable in their attire. For he would go dressed like all the multitude of the House of Israel and like any ordinary person. So that he would not draw the eye of an observer upon himself. And therefore, when he was on the road or in a place where they did not know him, and he himself did not make himself known, it was not at all apparent that he was a distinguished individual. And people did not sense him, except that he could not conceal the light of his pure countenance, whose wisdom and reverence illuminated his face with the light of the countenance of a living King.

**[35]** In his old age, he used to call himself an "old pauper." His saying, which was always on his lips, was: "What does an old pauper need with the vanities of the world?" A man of faith from the city of Königsberg told me that when he was ill there, during his final illness, and his sickness intensified, many of the esteemed and honored members of the community constantly came to visit him. They observed that in the room where he lay, there stood a large, very loudly ticking grandfather clock. They consulted together to remove the



grandfather clock from this room and place it elsewhere. The Rebbe, of blessed memory, heard them whispering together. He rebuked them, saying, "What are you seeking? He is an old, sick pauper. What is it to you that a grandfather clock ticks in his ears? Would you also say to pave the outside with straw and stubble?"

**[36]** It is known that among the foundations of the ways of humility is the negation of the trait of being strict and overlooking one's own grievances. As our Sages, may their memory be blessed, said in Shabbat, page 31: "A person should always be humble like Hillel, and not be strict like Shammai." (See there). Similarly, it is explained in Sota, page 40, where Rabbi Abbahu said: "At first, I used to think, 'I am a humble person.' But when I saw Rabbi Abba from Acco, who said one thing, and his father said another thing, and he was not strict, I said, 'I am not a humble person.'" Thus, it is clarified that among the foundations of the ways of humility is to not be strict at all.

**[37]** And therefore, our master, may his memory be for a blessing, with his great humility, was also distinguished in this trait of negating stringency and overlooking transgressions. To an astonishing degree, as we have learned from several wondrous incidents that occurred to him with people who caused him distress, and his conduct towards them. And even more so was his holy way: if someone sinned against him, if they caused him some harm, or distressed him, he would immediately strive to find an opportunity, perhaps he could do some good for him and repay him with kindness, to recompense evil with good. And he would say that this is a positive commandment from the Torah, "Cleave to His ways," and as our Sages, may their memory be for a blessing, said in Sota 14b, "After the Lord your God shall you walk." And is it possible...? Rather, it means to walk after the attributes of the Holy One, Blessed be He. See there. And behold, when we contemplate the ways of His attributes, may His Name be blessed, behold, when a person commits a transgression, even in this moment that he

rebels against the will of the Holy One, Blessed be He, the Holy One, Blessed be He, does good to him and bestows life upon him, for without His influence it is impossible to exist even for a single moment. And so too, a person must conduct himself with this attribute towards one who angers him and causes him distress. And our master, may his memory be for a blessing, conducted himself with this attribute, so that the upright may learn his way in practice.

**[38]** Once, my master, of blessed memory, offered his students a reasoned piece of advice regarding the trait of meticulousness. To accustom oneself to overlook the transgressions of others. To cast out from one's heart the mud, hatred, and resentment towards one who has wronged them. And he himself employed this stratagem in his youthful days.

**[39]** Indeed, in the Talmud, it is stated in several places that one has nothing against another except for complaints. For example, in Bava Metzia, at the beginning of the chapter "HaSocheir et HaUmanin" (He who hires laborers), when one deceives the other. They have nothing against each other except for complaints. And similarly, there on page 78 and on page 52, examine there. And it seems puzzling why it is necessary to mention complaints at all. It would have been sufficient to say that there is no monetary claim against him. For complaints, one would certainly have from himself.

**[40]** However, the explanation of the matter is as follows: The concept of *tar'umot* (grievances, complaints, resentments) is a *kefida* (strictness, resentment) and *tina* (bitterness, rancor) in the heart. Now, concerning transgressions between man and his fellow, if one person sins against another, even if it is only with words, one must appease and pacify him, as explained in the Gemara, Yoma, page 87a. As long as he has not pacified him, according to the law, it is permissible for him to have *tar'umot* and *kefida* against him. Only, if his fellow has pacified him, the forgiver should not be cruel in refusing to forgive. Similarly, if one person sins

against his fellow with words concerning monetary matters, even if it is indirectly (*grama*) and he is exempt from monetary payment, nevertheless, it is permissible for him to have *tar'umot* against him. However, for a person to have *tar'umot* and *kefida* against his fellow for naught is a very great sin. In any case, just as a monetary claim is a matter of law, whether according to the laws of the Torah he is obligated to pay, so too a claim of *tar'umot* is also a matter of law, whether it is permissible to have *tar'umot* against him according to the law. This is what our Sages, of blessed memory, meant when they said, "He has nothing against him except *tar'umot*." This means that he has no monetary claim against him, but it is permissible for him to have *tar'umot* against him. And this is what they said in Bava Metzia, there: "If the householder said concerning four [people]... what is the purpose of *tar'umot*?" See there. And this is the case where the householder spoke concerning four. They are not permitted to have *tar'umot*.

**[41]** And behold, it is like in a monetary claim. If a person has a monetary debt owed to him by his fellow, and he forgives the debt. Behold, forgiveness does not require an acquisition (*kinyan*). And if he later regrets it and demands his debt from him, it is outright robbery, since he has already forgiven him the debt. Likewise, if he has a claim against his fellow for some sin that his fellow sinned against him, for which, according to the law, he is permitted to have grievances and resentment against him. However, if his fellow appeased him and he forgave him, behold, if nevertheless he harbors resentment and bitterness in his heart towards his fellow, it is a grave sin. For he is demanding from his fellow that which he has already forgiven him.

**[42]** Therefore, this is the counsel advised for the attribute of meticulousness. If a person sins against another by word or deed, he should immediately forgive him with a full mouth. And if afterward he still harbors resentment in his heart against him, he should consider with himself that it is a great transgression. Just as one

would demand payment of a monetary debt that he has already forgiven, which is understood by all to be outright robbery, so too if he is meticulous with his fellow concerning some transgression for which he has already forgiven him.

**[43]** Our Master, of blessed and holy memory, in the splendor of his wisdom, sought and found hidden treasures in the attributes of the Holy One, Blessed be He. He clung to them, to walk in their path. As an example, I will relate a wondrous incident. Once, a great Rabbi, one of his acquaintances and intimates, came to his home. After they conversed together for some time, the aforementioned Rabbi took leave to depart. Our Master, of blessed and holy memory, also prepared himself to leave his home. The aforementioned Rabbi observed and noticed that Our Master was holding a sum of money. "What is that in your hand?" the Rabbi asked him. Our Master replied, "This money belongs to a certain scholar, and I am going to deliver the money to him." The Rabbi asked him, with astonishment, "Why should you trouble yourself? Could you not send it by messenger?" Our Master answered, "In my opinion, I am obligated to do this myself, according to a ruling in the Talmud." The Rabbi, who was Our Master's brother-in-law, said to him plainly, "If there were any such ruling in the Talmud concerning this, I too would know it." Our Master replied to him humorously, "Perhaps in your Talmud this is not found. But in my Talmud, it is written thus." The aforementioned Rabbi implored him to explain this riddle.

**[44]** Our Master, may his memory be for a blessing, answered him. Behold, our Sages, of blessed memory, in Yevamot, page 78a, expounded upon the verse: "And there was a famine in the days of David, three years, etc. And David sought the face of the Lord. And the Lord said, unto Saul, and unto the house of blood, etc." Unto Saul, because he was not mourned according to halakha. And unto the house of blood, because he slew the Gibeonites. And the Gemara asks: It is stated that He sought unto Saul because he was not mourned

according to halakha, and it is stated that He sought because he slew the Gibeonites. And it is further stated: If Reish Lakish said, what is written: "They sought the Lord, etc. Whose judgment is His work, where His judgment is, there is His work." And Rashi explained: "Where His judgment is, in the place where a person is judged, there his righteous deeds are recalled." See there.

**[45]** We observe a wondrous matter in the attributes of the Holy One, Blessed be He. For precisely at the time when He visits a person's transgression upon him, He also recalls his deeds of righteousness. Behold, from the death of Saul, which was the beginning of the reign of King David, peace be upon him, until the end of David's days, the Holy One, Blessed be He, did not demand of Israel what was lacking in Saul's proper burial. Only when it was His will, may His Name be blessed, to visit Saul's transgression for having slain the Gibeonites, did He also recall his deeds of righteousness and demand what was lacking in his proper burial.

**[46]** And this is the matter. I demand of the sage mentioned above. One thing which, to my knowledge, he does not properly fulfill. And since it is a commandment to cleave to His blessed attributes, may His Name be exalted. Therefore, when I demand of him his transgression, I must also mention His Torah. And grant him this additional honor. Even though at another time I would not have done so. But now I will find it my duty to do this. For where His judgment is, there is His work.

**[47]** Now let us contemplate how lofty are His ways, and how profound are His thoughts in the fear of God, to find this desirable attribute within His blessed Name's attributes. And after this, to govern one's spirit to cleave to this attribute, and to act accordingly in practice. And in the way of the world we see, that whoever has grievances against his fellow concerning some transgression, whether it is in a matter that affects him personally, or even if it affects Heaven, all his Torah and his righteous deeds will no

longer be remembered.

**[48]** And in a metaphorical manner, I say: For there are those who invert this attribute. That is, when his deed is there his judgment. For example, one has grievances against his fellow concerning some sin and transgression. And when he is required to do him a kindness and to mention his praise, then he recalls his transgression. To withhold from him kindness entirely, or to be stingy with his praise. For in his deed is there his judgment. His ways of conduct and his behavior, in the realm of interpersonal law, were with the utmost caution and alacrity, to excel and to be exceedingly wondrous. Both in abstaining from evil and in doing good. All his ways he would weigh with a scale and the balances of justice. In the realm of Choshen Mishpat, as in the realm of Orach Chayim and Yoreh De'ah. And he showed wonders, many examples, according to the judgment of the Torah, how a person stumbles in the sin of theft, and matters of damages, and ancient things.

**[49]** Behold, when my master, of blessed memory, would sometimes give a letter of recommendation to some poor person, and afterwards people would come and inform on him, saying that this person is not worthy of receiving a letter, for he does not conduct himself properly and his ways are not upright. Now, according to the custom in the world, in such a case, they would immediately seek stratagems to retrieve the letter. But my master was not afraid and did not waver. He would say, "Indeed, I gave the letter to him as a gift, and it is his. Now to take the letter away from him would be outright robbery."

**[50]** Once, while he was sitting with his students, the discussion turned to righteous individuals whose words are heard in Heaven, and concerning whom it is fulfilled, "You decree a thing and it is established for you" (Job 22:28). One of them related that he knew of a righteous man who, when people would encounter him and vex him, would strike them with the whip of his tongue, and his curse would befall them.

And all his words were fulfilled; not a single pebble fell to the ground.

**[51]** Our Master, of blessed memory, said about this with clarity of his tongue: For a person who is at such a high level, whose words can make an impression, how very necessary it is to be vigilant, to guard his tongue and his lips, to utter no evil thing from his mouth. For it is easy for him to become a person who causes harm. For what is the difference if one harms with his hands or harms with the whip of his tongue? To strike his fellow in secret, by the power of a decree from on High.

**[52]** And from these matters, we can stand and contemplate the disposition of the soul of the Rebbe. His thought and his outlook on the ways of conduct concerning interpersonal relationships. It is indeed known from experience that sometimes even the great among the God-fearing stumble and are ensnared. For in the heat of their anger towards people who have wronged and harmed them, they send forth the whip of their tongue and desire to punish them severely with the might of the Most High. And let this matter not seem strange in our eyes, for such is the nature of human beings. And just as in blessing, there is one who fears God, who by nature is stingy and clutches his hand from giving from his own to pity and have mercy on the poor. However, from Heaven, He will not be stingy in pouring out abundant blessing upon him. And so it is with cursing; even a man who fears God, who in the heat of his anger towards one who has provoked and distressed him, will not touch him for evil, not even with a little finger. However, from Heaven, He will rain down snares and brimstone upon him. But in truth, this is not the path God has chosen, for it is not good to punish the righteous. And examine the Tosafot in Berachot, page 7, the passage beginning "Hahu Tzedoki," examine there.

**[53]** Therefore, how wondrous and how glorious are the character traits of the Rebbe, of blessed memory, who considered it as if he were harming a person even with the might of

the High Heavens. And therefore, we did not see such miracles from the Rebbe, of blessed memory. For his tongue was like refined gold. And he was exceedingly careful not to utter anything evil from his mouth, Heaven forbid, even against one who had wronged him and caused him distress. But this miracle we did see from him: for whoever wronged him and provoked him, his custom was to immediately endeavor to find a way to repay him good for evil, in order to cleave to His blessed Name's attributes, as mentioned above.

**[54]** Thus, one who engages in matters between person and fellow, in the ways of improvement and acts of kindness. Let him be exceedingly diligent and zealous. He sometimes set aside the attribute of saintliness for the sake of acts of kindness. When a hardship-stricken person came before him to seek his counsel, he would dedicate his heart to deeply contemplate the matter he wished to rectify with good advice. I saw with my own eyes that once, a poor man, afflicted by hardship and lacking sustenance, came to him. He poured out before him the bitterness of his speech and the sorrow of his heart. He declared that he had no other recourse but to travel through towns to preach in assemblies. However, even this was beyond his reach, for he was not skilled in the art of preaching, nor could he satisfy the listeners' desires. Therefore, he requested a favor and kindness from our Rebbe, of blessed memory, to teach him some sermon. And our Rebbe, of blessed memory, did not withhold from him his desire. He granted him the request he asked, and taught him some sermon, and even reviewed it with him two or three times.

**[55]** Thus, he did not hesitate to go himself to the home of one of his acquaintances, for the sake of some benefit or kindness for another. Even rain and snow did not prevent him, nor did they stand as an obstacle in his path. This is as our master, of blessed memory, wrote in the book *Tevunah*. For when it pertains to the benefit and enjoyment of one's fellow, the obligation is laid out to act contrary to withdrawal,

to go out into the marketplaces and the streets of the city to seek to fulfill the good of one's fellow. And all the more so, the good of the many, etc. See there.

**[56]** He would tremble and be greatly awestruck before a bitter and distressed person. And likewise, before a pauper who begs at the doorways, for he is broken in spirit, and God is with the crushed.

**[57]** It is known that among the ways of betterment and acts of loving-kindness is to receive every person with a pleasant countenance, especially one who is weary and burdened, and to speak to them with gentleness. As is explained in the book *Reishit Chochmah*, in the Gate of Awe, Chapter 12, from the words of our Sages, may their memory be blessed, and this is its wording: Rabbi Yossi said, etc., "When a person departs from the world, it is not enough that he is startled by the Angel of Death, etc., but rather he is asked: Did you engage in Torah and in acts of loving-kindness? And did you enthrone your Creator morning and evening? And did you enthrone your fellow with a tranquil spirit, etc." See there.

Indeed, this service of enthroning one's fellow with a tranquil spirit, and showing them a radiant countenance, is especially weighty when the person is, God forbid, immersed in worry and fear, their face is troubled, and their heart is not with them. And my teacher, may his memory be blessed, said: For sometimes, even due to spiritual worries and fears, a distorted judgment can arise in the ways of character traits. As in the Days of Awe, the person who is laden with the fear of God, and full of dread and apprehension of judgment, may consequently exhibit a deficiency in their conduct towards their fellow, whom they ought to enthrone with a tranquil spirit. And at such times, it is often easier to stumble into anger and the like. Even though, in truth, at this very time, one ought to straighten their ways even more in the paths of character traits, to satisfy their fellow's desire. The reason for this is that a person is not accustomed

to giving heed to matters pertaining to awe and ethical conduct, but rather proceeds according to their habitual course, according to their natural inclination.

**[58]** And our Rebbe, may his memory be for a blessing, related that in the dew of his youth, when the study of Mussar captured his heart and made a profound impression upon him to contemplate the ways of the fear of God, one evening before Yom Kippur, as he was going to the Beit Midrash to pray the Maariv service, he encountered a man, one of the great God-fearers. The dread and terror of judgment were visible and evident on his face, and tears were on his cheeks. Our Rebbe asked him to tell him something he needed. But the God-fearer, from the greatness of his sorrow and his dread, answered him nothing at all. Our Rebbe, may his memory be for a blessing, said in this manner: "As I passed by the man, I thought in my heart: 'What am I obligated and guilty of, that you, who are a God-fearer, should fear and tremble from the Day of Judgment? What concern is this of mine? Surely, you are obligated to answer my question with a tranquil spirit, for this is among the ways of goodness and acts of kindness.'"

**[59]** His conduct with his children and offspring was exceedingly wondrous. Behold, the nature of a father's love for his offspring is such that it has caused many a fall. For this love blinds the eyes of the discerning and distorts their path. For this love has bribed them to render a crooked judgment. Behold, our Master, of blessed and righteous memory, subdued this nature before him, to the point that he made no distinction between his offspring and others, neither in material matters nor in spiritual matters, apart from what is obligated by law. And these matters are ancient.

**[60]** One of his sons was a respected merchant. He almost never asked him about the goings-on of his business, nor about the fate of his situation. But when he would come in the mornings to his father, the Rebbe, may his memory be for a blessing, to inquire about his well-being, he

would only ask him if he was setting aside fixed times for Torah study.

**[61]** Also, behold, one of his sons. Who for a time had not seen his face for several years. And when he came to him, he was not moved at all. And he gave him a greeting with composure, as if he had seen him recently.

**[62]** When one of his descendants was pressed by dire circumstances, he did not exert himself on his behalf. This was when he did not exert himself on his own behalf.

**[63]** And what is even more wondrous is that even if he himself was devoid of all worldly desires – of lust, greed, honor, and so forth – nevertheless, concerning that which pertains to others, he would know and feel every human longing, desire, and aspiration regarding worldly matters and their fullness. For as our master, of blessed memory, wrote in the book *Tevunah* in this manner: "And what is even more weighty in the aspect of rectification is concerning the character traits, for this is a great principle in character traits: that most good character traits are only in what pertains to the person himself. But in what pertains to his fellow, the obligation is to employ with all one's might their opposite. For example, fleeing from honor is a precious trait, etc. However, in what pertains to his fellow, our Rabbis, of blessed memory, said: 'Who is honored? He who honors the creatures.' Asceticism, which is a sublime elevation for the exalted, is only in the aspect of the person for himself. But in what pertains to the benefit and enjoyment of his fellow, the obligation is to employ the opposite of asceticism: to go out into the marketplaces and the streets of the city, to seek to fulfill his fellow's good, and all the more so the good of the many, etc. Therefore, a person must labor to acquire within himself both a thing and its opposite, etc. See there."

**[64]** How pleasant are His holy words. And how beautifully he expounded. And likewise, he beautifully fulfilled. And therefore, in the ways of character traits, he transformed like wax under

a seal, between what concerned himself and what concerned his fellow. He himself was utterly devoid of the trait of honor, to the utmost extreme, as mentioned above. And despite this, he was exceedingly careful to honor creatures with the customary courtesies of honor. When passing through any city, he would go to visit the city's rabbi in his dwelling to bestow honor upon him. And it has already been stated above that he would not be lazy to go to the house of one of his acquaintances, for the sake of some benefit or kindness for another, as mentioned above.

**[65]** Behold, trust (Bitachon) is a very precious and important quality. And the Sages, of blessed memory, have already stated in *Sukkah*, page 48: "Rabbi Eliezer the Great says, 'Anyone who has bread in his basket and says, 'What shall I eat tomorrow?' is merely among the small of faith.'" (See there). However, this is certainly only concerning what pertains to the person himself. But with regard to his fellow man, heaven forbid that this quality be employed against him. For it is his obligation to be concerned for his fellow man, regarding what he will eat tomorrow, and even for many days. Likewise, concerning matters of God, whether it be Torah or reverence (Yirah), one must exert all effort. And one should not employ the quality of trust (Bitachon) in these matters.

**[66]** I know a wondrous matter. Regarding one subject which my master, of blessed memory, saw and proved. For after very many years, a twisted judgment can emerge, to cause weakness in some matter of God. And one immediately begins to worry about this. And so one toiled and labored in this matter, all the duration of those many years, and there is no end to all his toil. And all this was in secret; only select individuals knew of it. And the Most High, Who knows all hidden things, and Who rewards well those who fear Him, to Him are revealed all his toil and labor.

**[67]** His path was like one walking in much water, and his footprints were not known. For he

was accustomed to being hidden, accustomed to being concealed. He concealed, with all his might, the greatness of his Torah and his righteous deeds. And although, indeed, the breadth of his intellect and the depth of his sharpness could not be hidden, at the time when he was required for the benefit of the public, and especially at the time when he taught Torah to multitudes and delivered lectures. However, when he mingled with the great Torah scholars, he would hide himself away, and conceal his wisdom in every possible way. And therefore, even the essence of his expertise could not be truly known. When he would sometimes speak words of Torah, and mention something from the words of some *Tosafot*, we heard from him that he would almost always say: "Recently, I chanced upon the words of the *Tosafot*."

**[68]** This alone I have heard with my own ears. For once I was a guest with him in one place on the holy Shabbat. And this was in the winter, during the days of the month of Tevet. My master, may his memory be for a blessing, was sleeping in his room. And I was in the adjacent room. Due to some reason, the candle in his room went out. And only the light of the gas lamp shone from outside through the window. My master stirred in the middle of the night. And sat on the chair by the window. And began to study by heart, in the Gemara, Bava Batra, page 79, in the sugya of "Mo'alim B'han U'vameh She'betochan," etc. And he studied, as is customary, the words of the Gemara and reviewed the words of the *Tosafot*. And thus he sat in one place, and reviewed with a very pleasant and sweet voice, almost until the morning light.

**[69]** According to what appears, he also knew much in the hidden matters, for he also possessed books of Kabbalah. And sometimes he would search by candlelight to obtain some book of Kabbalah. However, in his holy way, he did not speak a word about this with anyone, and therefore his tracks in this matter are unknown to us.

**[70]** Once, a great Rabbi, one of the luminar-

ies of the generation, came to my vicinity with a new book he had printed, and they did not know each other. The Rebbe, may his memory be blessed, went first to visit the aforementioned Gaon in his dwelling to inquire about his well-being. The aforementioned Gaon presented his book to the Rebbe and asked him to examine it. The Rebbe replied, "Forgive me, but my comprehension is not light, and it is a heavy matter for me to examine the book." This answer did not satisfy the aforementioned Gaon. Indeed, after the aforementioned Gaon lingered for some weeks, and during that time they met together several times, it came to pass that the aforementioned Gaon came to know the Rebbe somewhat, his disposition of spirit and his holy way.

**[71]** And it came to pass before the departure of the aforementioned Gaon, that many of the dignitaries of the city came to receive from him the blessing of farewell. The aforementioned Gaon said to them concerning the Admor [a title of reverence for a spiritual leader] in this manner: Concerning the Gaon, Ohr Yisrael, I say as the Midrash says concerning King Saul, may peace be upon him: "For the Holy One, Blessed be He, said to the ministering angels, 'Behold a creation that I have created in My world, according to the custom of the world...'". So too, I say, "Behold a creation that the Holy One, Blessed be He, has created in His world." Behold, all strive and labor to make known in the world their nature and their greatness. Furthermore, they are concerned and fearful lest, God forbid, the world be lacking some further knowledge of their essence and value. But the Gaon, Ohr Yisrael, labors with wondrous diligence to conceal from humankind his greatness and his wondrous powers.

**[72]** Our Rebbe, may his memory be for a blessing, would sigh and grieve greatly over the breach of the generation, over the decline of Torah and reverence, for wonders had occurred. Once, on Simchat Torah, they observed him, for his countenance had fallen. They asked him about this, saying, "Is this not Simchat Torah,

and one must rejoice in the joy of Torah?" He answered them with the sweetness of his lips, "Behold, if a person has some joy and some sorrow together, from two separate matters, it is inevitable that the joy that gladdens his heart from one aspect will somewhat dispel his worry and sorrow from the second aspect. However, when the joy and sorrow are from one and the same matter, like one who has a beloved son, who has ascended greatly in all desirable virtues, and whose father's soul is bound to his soul, and he rejoices greatly in him. And if it happens that this cherished son becomes dangerously ill, God forbid, is it possible that his joy in his son will dispel his worry and sadness from his illness? Rather, it is the opposite, for every time the memory of his beloved son and his desirable virtues comes to his heart, his sorrow and anguish are doubled."

**[73]** Thus, today we must rejoice in our holy Torah. However, in contrast to this, feelings of sorrow will arise, for due to our many transgressions, the Torah is, God forbid, dying. Its students and those who fulfill it will diminish and decrease from day to day. And for this reason, the more a person increases the joy of his heart in our holy Torah, the more feelings of sorrow and grief will awaken within him regarding its terrible state, for it is descending wondrously backward. Indeed, despite all this, [the Sages] greatly spoke sweet words of pleasantness, explaining how, even with all this, there is room for joy.

**[74]** Upon him is fulfilled, "And all the peoples of the earth shall see that the name of the Lord is called upon you, and they shall fear from you." His likeness, his form, and the radiance of his countenance were exceedingly awesome. Although the Lord, blessed be His name, bestowed upon him a gift of grace and beauty, for he was exceedingly handsome in form, nevertheless, his wisdom and his awe of God illuminated his pure countenance with the light of the face of the Living King. Especially at the time when he deepened his thought on any matter, whether in Torah or in the awe of God, his soul

almost detached itself from its physicality, and his pure countenance would burn like a flame of fire. Then his radiance was exceedingly awesome, like an angel of the Lord, to the extent that people trembled to approach him. And one who did not see it with his own eyes cannot possibly have a conception of this, for a divine spirit was poured out upon his face, like the sun rising in its might. He never allowed an artist to draw upon the canvas the image of his form, for he did not desire this in any matter.

**[75]** And behold, more than he was a genius and a pious man, he also merited and caused the multitude to merit to an exceedingly great degree, whether in general, he elevated the banner of Torah and the fear of God in the world, and especially in our regions. And whether in particular, in every place where his holy presence resided, he wrought a mighty deed upon his acquaintances and intimates, and each one according to his worth received spiritual benefit, whether little or much. This was either through his sermons, which from the dew of his youth he always delivered publicly, and his words were hewing flames of fire with the fear of God, and his lips dripped honey, sweet words of pleasantness, a balm for the soul, and from his mouth he brought forth pearls. Or it was through that which was fulfilled concerning him, "and all the peoples of the earth shall see," etc., for whoever contemplated his ways, his deeds, and his character traits, his soul was exceedingly impressed, and it made an impression upon his heart to fear God, blessed be His Name.

**[76]** A man of faith told me: While he was in one city, he happened to encounter a certain distinguished and renowned individual, an elder and a man of respect, who was God-fearing. The conversation turned to matters concerning the Master of our Torah, of blessed memory. The man grasped his beard and said to him, "Believe me, whatever measure of fear of God, may His name be blessed, is found within me, it is from the holy one of Israel, of blessed memory, whose close associates I was privileged to be in his youthful days."



**[77]** Especially did He bestow of His spirit upon His disciples, who sheltered beneath His shadow and found refuge in the shade of His hardships. For from the dew of his youth, while he was still young in days, many great Torah scholars already joined him, to bask in the shadow of his guidance and to hear from him words of his wisdom and his understanding in the fear of Hashem and His service, blessed be His Name. And from his greatest disciples, whom he knew to be vessels ready and fit to receive his influence, he devoted himself to them even more, to converse with them exclusively, and to teach them the ways of Hashem and desirable attributes. And to elevate their understanding of wisdoms in Torah and pure fear of Hashem.

**[78]** Besides his public discourses in the synagogues of the people, he also lectured privately before his disciples. The foundation of his discourses was not to expound verses and reconcile midrashic statements, but rather things that he conceived and pondered from his heart: profound investigations into the ways of serving God, blessed be His Name, and concerning reward and punishment, and the paths of character traits. And when he lectured for several hours, he would sometimes clothe some idea in the eloquent language of Scripture or some saying of our Sages, of blessed memory. The power of his lips was exceedingly awesome. In almost all his discourses, reward and punishment were never absent from his mouth. And therefore, he revived many souls with the life of the soul.

**[79]** And here I shall mention from the order of his discourses before his disciples. Behold, when we were privileged to stand before him in this holy community, there was a long period when the Rebbe, may his merit protect us, was secluded throughout the days of the week in separation and solitude. In the city of Aleksot, near here, across the Niemen River. And only on every Shabbat Kodosh would he come to his home here in the city. And then, from his disciples who were closest to him, a complete group

of ten would go to him once every week, to his place of solitude. And after we prayed Mincha, the Rebbe, may his merit protect us, would wrap himself in a tallit and begin to discourse before us with reverence for God, blessed be His Name, as was his holy custom. And sometimes he would discourse for several hours. And in the middle of the discourse, he would begin to utter words of persuasion, stirring [us] from spiritual matters, with immense emotion until our hearts melted. And he would weep very greatly. And he would awaken and rouse us to prepare ourselves to seek mercy from Him, blessed be His Name, concerning spiritual matters. And therefore, in the midst of the awakening, he would first say some verse of praise for the Place [God], and afterwards some verses of mercy, such as "Return us, O Lord, to You..." and "Create for us, O God, a pure heart..." And we were with him to pray together as a congregation for the evil inclination, the spiritual inclination, to remove the heart of stone from our flesh and to purify our hearts to serve Him in truth.

**[80]** And my master, may his memory be for a blessing, would uphold this prayer. This is a very elevated matter in spirituality. And its foundation was according to the words of our Sages, may their memory be for a blessing, in Rosh Hashanah, page 18, and in Yevamot, page 49. For it is stated there, "Scripture says, 'Who is like the Lord our God, in all that we call upon Him?'" (Deuteronomy 4:7). And it is written, "Seek the Lord when He may be found" (Isaiah 55:6). And it is explained there, "Here, when praying alone; here, when praying in a congregation." And when does one pray alone? Rabbi Kahana son of Avuhu said: These are the Ten Days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. See there. And it is explained from this that the power of communal prayer throughout the entire year is equivalent to the time of the Ten Days of Repentance, concerning which the prophet said, "Seek the Lord when He may be found," etc. And therefore, when a complete congregation of ten God-fearing individuals directs their minds to pray together concerning the evil inclination, the spiritual one, this is a very elevated

matter, and you can accomplish much.

**[81]** And so, once, when my master, may his memory be for a blessing, was away from the Land during the High Holy Days, in a letter he wrote to his disciples and close associates, to awaken their hearts regarding preparation to stand in judgment on the Day of Judgment before the Throne of the Righteous Judge, he wrote in the middle of the letter, and this is his holy language: "Indeed, what is to be done about the iron wall that separates—it is the spirit of impurity that clings and corrupts the spirit of man, etc.—it is one thing—as experience also teaches us—it is to pour out the soul to God, blessed be His Name, in a minyan. To pierce a small hole in this iron wall. It is a small and simple thing, and its fruit is great. And since I am now a wanderer from my place, and I do not have ten people at my disposal, I am hereby reminding you, and urging you, at a time when it is available to you and still within your power (Shabbat, page 151a) to gather in a minyan as mentioned above, etc." Thus far his words.

**[82]** And what surpasses all is that he merited and caused the multitude to merit through the study of reverence (yirat Shamayim) and ethical conduct (mussar). For indeed, although many geonim and pious individuals composed books of reverence and mussar, so that one might study and contemplate them to fear God, and likewise many geonim and pious individuals exhorted the study of books of reverence and mussar, nevertheless, this study did not gain traction among the living, and its memory was almost forgotten, until the dawn broke with the light of Israel and His saint, of blessed memory. He restored the crown to its former glory and publicized throughout the world the obligation to study reverence and mussar. And from Heaven, they merited him to cause the multitude to merit through this, and to bring salvation within the land for the life of the soul, as explained at length in the introduction, and likewise in my discourse on the matter of studying reverence and mussar.

**[83]** And behold, our Master, may his memory be for a blessing, whatever he considered to be the will of the Blessed God, His Name, nothing prevented him. And Satan did not stand in his way. And moreover, to benefit the multitude. It is known that in his old age he wore out his feet to the city of Paris, to rectify there something which he considered would be a merit for the multitude. And he was rolled there under great pressure, in siege and in distress, because he accepted no gift there from any person, only that which was sent to him from our land, his meager sustenance. And due to the expense of dwellings there and other necessities of life, he lived in one narrow room, unbelievable that it was within human capacity to be there. And likewise, he was lacking in other necessities of life. And all this he suffered because of the will of the Blessed God, His Name.

**[84]** I heard from his holy mouth, for he told me that when he was in Paris, he once slipped his feet and fell down the stairs, seemingly from two flights. And when they lifted him from the ground, he almost had no breath left. And the blessed God, may His name be exalted, performed a miracle for him, and after days he returned to his strength. When he told me the incident, he said to me in this manner: "My heart did not fall within me, and I did not fear greatly. For when I reside in Paris, I have no personal involvement, except for the will of the blessed God, may His name be exalted. Paris cannot harm me."

**[85]** Behold, these are the extremities of his ways in holiness. For who can recount His glory? And all the deeds of a righteous person while he is still alive. May those who fear the L-rd learn his way and walk in his paths, and grasp the edge of the brilliance of his deeds and attributes. The one writing his words is his disciple, trembling and awestruck at the remembrance of His holy Name.

**[86]** Isaac, son of the great Rabbi Moshe, of blessed memory, of Lazd.

**[87]** And this is what my friend and companion, the Rabbi, etc., Rabbi Naftali Amsterdam, may he live long, wrote to me from here, a native of Salant. He is one of the great disciples of our master, the Gaon, the Chasid, may his memory be blessed. Regarding the teacher of our master, the Gaon, the Chasid, the holy one of God, honored Maran Yosef Zundil of Salant, may his memory be blessed. And this is the wording of the aforementioned Gaon. Behold, what our master, may his memory be blessed, wrote in the preface to the book *Tevunah* on the margins of the *Yeriyah*. "And I poured water through my teacher, Rabbi M. Yosef Zundil, who resides in Jerusalem, may he be blessed with long life." And until now, I have not reached his ankles, etc., so that the householders may hear and walk in his ways. Behold, here on the margin, our master has shortened the account of his teacher, the Chasid, Rabbi Yosef Zundil, may his memory be blessed. And as he wrote there, "I have elaborated somewhat on the greatness of this great man," etc. And although in brief words are encompassed many of his virtues and righteous deeds, this is in general. But in particular, our master would elaborate on the stories of the deeds of this man. From his deeds, his righteous acts, and his piety, to an astonishing degree. For the wonders of his righteous deeds would astound all who heard them.

**[88]** His dwelling and residence was in our city, Salant. Once, they found him at night, mending a stone pavement with his own hands on a street that was dirty with mud and mire, out of honor for his mother, who always walked and passed there on her way to the Beit Midrash. So, once, they found him standing by the small door in his courtyard. In his hand were a hammer and nails, and he was striking the nails with the hammer with alacrity. It was later known the reason for this endeavor: because the lock had become damaged and was closing by itself, so that the poor who go from door to door would not be able to open the door. And this is contrary to the Gemara in Bava Batra, page 7, which states that a gatehouse is an elevation, and so forth. This is [a reference to the principle]

that one who has a key, etc.

**[89]** Thus, many tales of his piety, similar to these, were told of him, to an astonishing degree. And just as great were the strengths of his righteousness, his asceticism, and the love and awe that burned within him internally, so too was the magnitude of his labor to walk in humility, lest they recognize anything about him externally. To the extent that ordinary people, who did not know him, judged him by their outward perception to be a simple man.

**[90]** For he did not derive sustenance from Torah study. He accepted from the world as was customary. Rather, he earned his livelihood by the labor of his hands, and lived in straitened circumstances. And he did not have a fixed livelihood. Sometimes he took on a student, and sometimes he engaged in some trade. To the city of Emel, in the nearby town of Pryzhyan. And in between, he would travel to study in seclusion for the duration of a year. Once, he traveled to study in seclusion in the city of Mir, and he studied Torah there for a full year. And he studied Torah out of necessity, at an expense of two gold coins per week.

**[91]** Thus they recounted of his great humility, to the extent that it astonished and bewildered all who heard. When he traveled back from the city of Mir to return to his home and city of Slonim, it happened that he traveled together in a wagon with merchants who were going to the city of Grodno for their business. These men did not know or recognize him, and in their eyes, they considered him a simple, poor, unlearned person. The merchants were not God-fearing people, and the entire journey they mocked him and made many jokes and jests at his expense. It happened on the journey, at an inn, that the aforementioned pious man lay down to sleep on some bench, in the manner of the most lowly poor. The aforementioned merchants, in their lightheartedness, whispered together, "Behold, this lowly poor man is sleeping. Let us bring a lit candle close to his beard to burn a little of his beard hair." And so they did. And when

this pious man felt it in his sleep, suddenly they heard a voice speaking from his mouth, saying, "A little more," for the great humiliation that he was receiving from them stirred great joy within him. They were almost seized with trembling and alarm. Indeed, despite all this, they paid no heed, and the entire journey they laughed and mocked him without restraint. The merchants arrived at the city of Grodno and settled there for their business.

**[92]** And the pious Rabbi Yisrael, mentioned above, returned to his city and began to engage in some business. And in the course of days, he was also called to the city of Me'emel. Once, the merchants in the marketplace encountered the aforementioned pious Rabbi. And behold, he was speaking and sharing intimate secrets with a very great and esteemed man, and the people were astonished, each one to his fellow. And when they investigated further, it became known to them that this was the brilliant pious Rabbi Yisrael, holy of God, honored. And they came and prostrated themselves before him and asked him to forgive them for what they had done to him on his journey with them. And he granted their request and forgave them, but on the condition that they accept upon themselves not to mock or jest at any person for all the days of their lives. And thus he always conducted himself, fleeing from honor to the utmost extreme. And there are still stories of his attribute of humility that the scroll is too brief to contain.

**[93]** Thus he labored and toiled in the attribute of trust (Bitachon). And they recounted from him awesome and wondrous deeds of the attribute of trust that he employed, and he achieved things even beyond nature, which astonished all who heard them. Such and such great and wondrous things were told of him, of the strength of his caution and the intensity of his piety. And so, our Rebbe, of blessed memory, would also recount details of his actions. How he acted with immense meticulousness and great contemplation, and words of piety that do not enter the hearts of men. For exam-

ple, once he was speaking with people during the days of Hanukkah, and within the conversation, they mentioned something sorrowful in their story. He said to them, "Hush! For one must not mention anything sorrowful on these days, since our Sages, of blessed memory, prohibited Hanukkah days from eulogy." And so it was with every matter. And as it is written in the book Mesilat Yesharim, that this is the essence of piety that our Sages, of blessed memory, described: to bring pleasure to one's Creator, to understand one thing from another, to do the will of one's Maker.

**[94]** Once, he was walking through the gardens and fields of Israel. As he passed by the fields and gardens, they observed him place his finger on his nose and press it hard. They were astonished by this. Afterwards, they understood the reason for the matter. This was because his way in all study was to seek the knowledge of practical application, as he wrote with understanding there in the introduction. And behold, our Sages, of blessed memory, said in the beginning of Bava Batra: "It is forbidden for a person to stand in his fellow's field when it is standing with its crops." And Rashi explained: "Forbidden... so that he does not harm him with the evil eye." See there. And since it is sometimes impossible to be careful without looking for a moment, and behold, in Berachot, page 55, they said: "Whoever enters a city... and is afraid of his evil eye, let him look at the tip of his left nostril." See there. Therefore, he made this regulation in any case.

**[95]** Furthermore, he did not neglect to fulfill the commandment: "Make for yourself a teacher and acquire for yourself a friend." As is known, there was a brilliant disciple of the great Gaon, the pious one, head of all the exiles, Maran HaRav Chaim zt"l of Volozhin, and he would always travel to him and receive from him his path in holiness. And after the great Gaon, the pious one, Maran HaRav Chaim zt"l, was taken to the heavenly vaults, and then the greatness of the piety of the great Gaon, head of all the exiles, Maran HaRav Akiva Eiger zt"l, was

heard of. The pious one, Maran HaRav Yitzchak of Dvinsk, wore down his feet to the city of Poznań, to contemplate the ways of righteousness and piety of the aforementioned Gaon, the pious one, and he sat there for some time.

**[96]** Indeed, I have elaborated on the story of the Hasid for two reasons. The first is that it was written with understanding, so that the world may hear the deeds of this man who lived in our generation and walk in his ways. And the second is so that the world may know the merit of studying Mussar, and the full extent of its power and what it accomplishes. For behold, it is a clear matter that all the strength of the righteousness and piety of this exalted man stemmed solely from the study of Mussar, which he utilized and labored in with wisdom, from this study. To repeat, again and again, some verse or some aggadic statement of our Sages, of blessed memory, with great contemplation, as my Rebbe, of blessed memory, related about him.

**[97]** I, the writer, remember in my youth in the city of Salant, after the departure of the pious Rabbi Yitzchak of Shklov, of blessed memory, to the Holy City. And I saw with my own eyes several papers in his pure handwriting, which recounted the questions he asked his teacher, the Gaon and pious Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin, of blessed memory. Also, wondrous tales from his teacher, the aforementioned Gaon and pious one. And I saw there that he asked his teacher, the aforementioned Gaon and pious one, at the time of his departure from Volozhin, which books of Mussar are good to study. And he replied to him in this language: "All books of Mussar are good to learn. However, the book *Mesillat Yeshtarim* shall be your guide."

**[98]** Now we shall return to the honor of the sanctity of our master, Rabbi Yisrael, may his merit protect us. Behold, when he was in the days of his life, in the strength of his greatness and his genius, he began to pour water on the hands of his master, the pious Rabbi Zundel, may his merit protect us. And only from him did

he receive this great wisdom and study, this is the study of Mussar. To study and review many sayings of our Sages, may their memory be for a blessing, and books of Mussar with great contemplation. And he served him and accepted him upon himself as a preeminent master. And he would say that he [his master] established him on his feet in the service of God and the path of holiness. And when his master the pious one traveled to the Holy City, our master traveled to accompany him three parasangs, as is the law of accompanying a preeminent master.

**[99]** And behold, our master, may his memory be a blessing, told us that when he heard the voice emanating from his teacher, a command to study Mussar, it descended into the chambers of his heart like a burning fire. And he began to engage also in this study. And we must contemplate what fruit the study of Mussar bore in that pious man, our master, may his memory be a blessing, whose name went forth as a light unto the world in the lands. We all saw with our own eyes the strength of the might of his righteousness and his piety, the purity of his heart and his holiness. Indeed, in his awesome deeds, from which he did not divert his attention from the service of God even when speaking with people. Indeed, in his good character traits, almost above nature, such as hatred of illicit gain and honor, and likewise in the trait of kindness and benefiting people. And likewise in all the good character traits, humility, patience, and the like. And all his righteousness and his mighty deeds, in actions and in character traits, the cause for this was only this study of Mussar. And from this, the generation with understanding should contemplate to cleave to this wisdom of the study of Mussar. Thus far is the language of the Rabbi, Rabbi Naftali Amsterdam, may he live.

**[100]** And behold, regarding what the aforementioned Rabbi Moharnatz wrote. For the pious man, the teacher of the aforementioned Admor, was not outwardly recognizable as a person of elevated status. In my youth, I heard from

the world-renowned Rabbi Moh' Gershon Amsterdam, of blessed memory, from Vilna. He did not know the aforementioned pious man. However, one time the aforementioned pious man happened to come to the city of Vilna. And he brought a letter from one of the people of Salant to the aforementioned Rabbi Moh'G. And he stood at the entrance and handed him the letter. The aforementioned Rabbi Moh'G thought of him as a simple person, like one of the wagon drivers and the like. And he wished to reward him for his trouble. He called him into the room. And he handed him a cup of brandy and asked him to drink. It is self-understood that the pious man did not refuse. For whatever the householder tells you, do. And he drank a lit-

tle brandy. After that, Rabbi Moh'G said to him, "Are you not from the city of Salant? How is the pious man, Rabbi Zundil?" And he answered him as he answered. After that, the aforementioned Rabbi Moh'G began to converse with him at length about the aforementioned pious man. And he began to stammer in his answer, to diminish his stature. From the words, it arose in his heart. Perhaps this is the pious man. As he had heard by hearsay. For he was not recognizable at all. Rabbi Moh'G said to him, "Tell me the truth, what is your name?" He said to him, "My name is Zunda." Rabbi Moh'G said to him, "May God fulfill the desires of those who fear Him. May it not be recognizable about you at all."

## Chapter 6

# Kokhavei Ohr – Stars of Light

11 Chapters

### Kokhavei Ohr (Stars of Light) – Chapter 1

כוכבי אור -- פרק 1

**[1]** Discourses on the Fear of God and the Paths of Repentance

**[2]** Indeed, the fear of Hashem is wisdom.

**[3]** Berakhot, page 28a. Our Rabbis taught: When Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai fell ill, his students came to visit him. When he saw them, he began to weep. His students said to him, "O lamp of Israel, O pillar of the right, O mighty hammer, why do you weep?" He said to them, "If they were bringing me before a mortal king, who is here today and gone tomorrow, and if he were to become angry with me, his anger would not last forever, and if he were to imprison me, his imprisonment would not be eternal, and if he were to kill me, his killing would not be with the sword of fire – even so, I would weep. And now, when I am being brought before the King of kings, the Holy One, Blessed be He, who if He becomes angry with me, His anger lasts forever, and if He imprisons me, His imprisonment lasts forever, and if He kills me, His killing is with

the sword of fire – how much more so should I weep! Furthermore, there are before me two paths: one of the Garden of Eden and one of Gehenna. And I do not know which way I am being led, and should I not weep?" (See there).

And behold, what he said, "Furthermore," is a superfluous statement. For why should he mention the path of the Garden of Eden?

**[4]** Indeed, it is established and complete in the counsel of all upright hearts. For true and enduring judgment. For a person's deed shall be recompensed to him. To punish severely those who do iniquity. And to give reward to doers of good. Also, all governments have laws and judgments, systems of punishments, against all who transgress law and morality. And likewise, portions of reward for every good and upright deed. However, this is self-evident. That reward and punishment are in one action. That is, that one receives reward for doing a thing. And likewise, punishment if one refrains from doing it. It is almost a precluded matter, for the matter of reward is attributed only for doing some deed that is not obligatory upon him. And the judgment of punishment is for refraining from fulfilling his obligation. For necessarily, there is no hope of reward for one who fulfills the purpose of his obligation. Or refrains from doing iniquity.

And there is no punishment for one who refrains from doing a good deed.

**[5]** Indeed, the judgments of the Lord are not thus with His creatures. For all His ways are judgment, punishment or reward. For God is a Judge, giving to each person according to his ways and the fruit of his deeds. For those who transgress His will, blessed be His Name, many harsh and terrible judgments are prepared. And for those who do His will, blessed be His Name, a very great reward is destined for them.

**[6]** And to this, indeed, there is a distinction. Between one who must give an accounting and reckoning for his deeds before a mortal king, whether he performed his service faithfully. And between what every person is destined to give an accounting and reckoning for his deeds, before the King of kings, the Holy One, Blessed be He. For the judgment before a mortal king, behold, the merit or the obligation is limited only to the paths of punishment. For if he is found meritorious in his judgment, he will be clear of punishment. And if he is found liable in the judgment, he will be punished. However, he has not lost any reward. For even if he is found righteous in his judgment, he has no hope of receiving reward, other than the negation of punishment. But it is not so with the judgment of man, the accounting and reckoning for his deeds, which he is destined to give before the King of kings, the Holy One, Blessed be He. For the distinction between merit and obligation is between a terrible and awesome punishment, and between a very great reward. For if he is found meritorious in the judgment, he will delight in the pleasantness of the Lord with the souls of the righteous in the Garden of Eden. And if he is found liable in the judgment, they will lead him with the workers of iniquity to Gehenna. Thus, it is found that besides the bitter punishment, he has also lost the great reward that was prepared for him had he been found meritorious in the judgment.

**[7]** This is what Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai said. And not only that, but there are before me

two paths, one of the Garden of Eden and one of Gehenna, and I do not know, etc. This means that when someone is brought before a mortal king to give an accounting of his deeds, there is only one path before him: either punishment or the negation of punishment. But there is no hope whatsoever of receiving a reward. However, when one is brought before the King of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He, are there not two paths before him? One of the Garden of Eden and one of Gehenna. And if he is found guilty and they lead him to Gehenna, will he then not delight in the pleasantness of the Lord in the Garden of Eden? It is found, therefore, that his punishment is twofold.

**[8]** And what Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai said, "And I do not know in which direction they are leading me." Behold, this will awaken another wondrous ethical lesson. For it would seem surprising: Why did Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai tremble with all this trembling? For even if there is in his possession some sin and transgression, behold, the gates of repentance are not locked. And it will not be impossible for him to repent and be forgiven. However, it is known that all our holy Sages, may their memory be for a blessing, fulfilled the entire Torah. And no sin or transgression ever came into their hands. And how greatly our Sages, may their memory be for a blessing, elaborated in Bava Batra, page 134, regarding the stature of Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai, that he did not neglect Scripture, Mishnah, etc. See there. And in truth, he did not perceive in his soul any sin or transgression at all.

**[9]** However, that which causes one to recoil in fear from one's flesh is solely due to the depth of Divine Judgment. As our Sages, may their memory be blessed, stated in Pesachim, folio 54a: "Seven things are hidden from humankind, and these are: the depth of Divine Judgment, etc." Rashi explained in another phrasing: "the future depth of Divine Judgment." This is because human intellect and understanding are insufficient to encompass the true clarification of the Judgment and accounting for all his deeds. For the



depth of the clarification of the Judgment and the accounting belongs only to God. As our Sages, may their memory be blessed, said in Avot: "He is the One who understands, etc." This is what Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai trembled with all the trembling, and it was from the fear of the depth of Divine Judgment. For even if he is righteous in his own eyes, and he does not perceive any sin or transgression within himself, yet who has entered the counsel of the Lord and discovered the divine investigation? The many accounts that will be sought from man.

**[10]** This is what Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai said: "And I do not know where they are leading me." This means that if a person himself knew and understood how to calculate his account and his judgment, where his face would be turned, and where they would lead him – whether on the path ascending to the Garden of Eden from the beginning, or the path that leads down to the depths of Sheol – he would not worry so much. If his deeds were pure and upright, he would rejoice in his portion. And if he knew that he had somehow erred in his way, he would return to the Lord and He would have mercy on him, and he would rely on His mercy, for He is abundant in forgiveness. However, since it is not within a person's capacity to calculate his account and his judgment, and therefore he does not know where he is being led – for truly, it is possible that they will lead him to the Garden of Eden, especially since he is not aware of any sin or transgression within himself at all – yet, according to the depth of the judgment and calculation from Above, it is possible that he will not fulfill his obligation of serving Him, blessed be His Name, and they will lead him on the path of Gehenna. If so, then it would also be surprising for him to be able to perform *teshuvah* (repentance).

**[11]** From the narration of this incident, one can learn ethical wisdom concerning the fear of punishment and reward. How the holy ones of those times were fearful and trembling of the spiritual punishment of Gehenna. And how they were solicitous of the loss of reward. For with

all the trembling that Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai trembled, it is far from the understanding that he was afraid, God forbid, of being judged in Gehenna for twelve months, as is the judgment of the wicked. Rather, it appears that he was afraid and trembling of being judged there even for a brief moment. And as explained in Bava Metzia, page 85a: "Rabbi Zeira, when he ascended to the Land of Israel, fasted one hundred fasts..." He then fasted another hundred "so that the fire of Gehenna would not control him..." (See there). Behold, the language "would not control him..." clearly indicates that it was only a slight control, for he desired that the fire of Gehenna would not control him at all. And similarly, Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai was afraid that he would not see the face of Gehenna even for a brief moment. And for this he trembled with great trembling and wept. And even though all of this was only a doubt for him, as he said about himself: "And I do not know in which direction they are leading me."

**[12]** And it has already been clarified that what Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai mentioned, concerning the path to the Garden of Eden, is as follows: When there are two paths before him, either to the Garden of Eden or to Gehenna. And if they lead him on the path to Gehenna, then besides the punishment, the reward is also lost. For he will not then delight in the pleasantness of the Lord in the Garden of Eden, as mentioned above. We find, therefore, that he was apprehensive even about the loss of a slight, fleeting reward, which, if he were in Gehenna, would prevent him from delighting in the precious pleasantness and Eden of the Garden of Eden.

**[13]** The foundation of the matter is this: For the spiritual punishment and reward, both are exceedingly great and awesome. Regarding spiritual punishment, Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman, may his memory be for a blessing, wrote in his book *Torat Ha'adam* in the Gate of Reward. And this is his wording and its essence: It is clarified from the words of the Sages, etc., that Gehinnom is the place of judgment to punish sinners in their souls, with sufferings and an-

guish that have no parallel in this world. This is because the sufferings of this world are in a base, coarse body, with dull sensation. And that suffering is in the pure and refined soul, etc. Thus, the soul's sensation in its sufferings is exceedingly great compared to the body's sufferings, due to its great sensitivity and the purity of its creation, etc. Thus far his words, examine there. And similarly, regarding spiritual reward, our Sages, may their memory be for a blessing, taught in *Avot*, Chapter 4: "One hour of spiritual delight in the World to Come is better than all the life of this world." And for this reason, even the punishment of one hour is exceedingly awesome. And likewise, the loss of reward for one hour is an exceedingly great loss.

**[14]** And behold, with all the weakness of a person's sensation regarding spiritual punishment, even more so will his sensation diminish regarding spiritual reward. For a person has a more vivid conception of punishment than of reward. This is because punishment is closer to the senses. And when we believe in the tradition of our Sages, of blessed memory, that punishment is like burning coals of a blazing fire, there is a conception for the human soul, from the element of physical fire. What is a burning fire that consumes from soul to flesh? It is not so with the spiritual reward of the World to Come, which is to delight in the pleasantness of the Lord and to enjoy the radiance of His Divine Presence. The human soul has no conception of this, for there is no likeness of it in the pleasures of this world. And for this reason, a person would choose for himself to forgo much of his portion in the World to Come from the reward of his commandments, so that it will be a present for him against the punishment of his few sins in the World to Come, to be saved from the burning coals of a blazing fire.

**[15]** Indeed, truly the reward for a commandment is that which ascends much higher than the punishment for a transgression. For a good measure is abundant. And when there is any commandment and transgression that are equal in their quality, as the Holy One, blessed be

His Name, knows how to compare them one against the other, and as the Rambam, may his memory be for a blessing, wrote in Chapter 6 of *Hilchot Teshuvah*. And if they are weighed together on scales, the reward of the commandment and the punishment of the transgression, behold, the reward will be much heavier in weight than the punishment.

**[16]** And for the purpose of understanding and conceiving the magnitude of spiritual reward in relation to punishment, we can offer a faithful illustration. Behold, it is known that there is no equivalence or comparison between the negation of pleasure and the endurance of pain. Every person would readily forgo much pleasure in exchange for enduring a small pain. Therefore, the pleasure that would atone for enduring pain must be such that it is equivalent in the person's estimation to enduring some pain and suffering for the sake of subsequently enjoying the pleasures of mankind. Necessarily, this pleasure must be exceedingly great. And thus, in matters of this world, its good and its evil, its afflictions and its pains, its pleasures and its delights, there is nothing in reality that is good enough to atone for evil. For in exchange for severe and bitter suffering and great pains, no one would accept any ransom. And all the pleasures and delights of this world would be despised by him.

**[17]** And behold, in *Chagigah*, page 15, our Sages, may their memory be blessed, related that after [Acher] went out to evil ways. When Acher passed away, they said: "He will not be judged in this world, nor will he come to the World to Come." He will not be judged in this world because he engaged in Torah, and he will not come to the World to Come because he sinned. Rabbi Meir said: "It is better that he be judged and not come to the World to Come." He said: "When will I die, so that I may ascend smoke from his grave?" When Rabbi Meir passed away, smoke ascended from Acher's grave. Rabbi Yochanan said: "A strength to be little his teacher, etc." He said: "If I grasp him in someone's hand, he will throw him from me." He

said: "When will I die, so that I may extinguish smoke from his grave?" When Rabbi Yochanan passed away, the smoke from Acher's grave ceased.

**[18]** And when we come to calculate, we find that from the day of Rabbi Meir's passing until the time of Rabbi Yochanan's passing, it was approximately one hundred and forty or one hundred and fifty years. For Rabbi Meir was considerably older than our Holy Rabbi. For Rabbi Meir was among the disciples of Rabbi Akiva, as explained in Yevamot, folio 62. And on the day Rabbi Akiva died, Rabbi was born. And as explained in Kiddushin, folio 72b. And similarly, our Holy Rabbi lived for many years, exceptionally so, up to one hundred years. It is found that at the time of Rabbi's passing, many decades had certainly already passed since the time of Rabbi Meir's passing. And behold, Rabbi Yochanan lived for more than ninety years after the passing of our Holy Rabbi. For after Rabbi's passing, Rabbi Afas served as head for two and a half years, and after him Rabbi Chanina ben Chama for ten years, and after that Rabbi Yochanan served as head for eighty years. And all this is explained in the order of the reception of the Ra'avad and in the book Yuchasin, see there. And all the long period from the day of Rabbi Meir's passing, when the smoke rose from his grave, until the time of Rabbi Yochanan's passing, which is approximately one hundred and fifty years, the smoke did not cease from his grave. And he was judged in the fires of Gehenna, until Rabbi Yochanan saved him through his merit.

**[19]** It is found that it was worthwhile before another. To be refined in the blazing fire of Gehenna, like the refining of silver, for approximately one hundred and fifty years. But only in order to merit thereafter to delight in the pleasantness of the goodness of the World to Come. And if Rabbi Yochanan had not saved him through his merit, who knows how much longer he would have been judged? And all this too was only goodness and kindness from the Creator, blessed be His Name, through the

merit of Rabbi Meir, who pleaded for mercy. For from this world to the next world, there is no judgment.

**[20]** And from this, we can understand and gain insight. What is the great delight of the World to Come compared to the reward of Torah and Mitzvot? For its sake, it is worthwhile and valuable for a person to bear and endure severe and bitter sufferings in the depths of Sheol, to be refined in the terrible flame for very many years, as mentioned above. But only for the sake of afterward meriting to delight in the precious pleasantness and eternal delight of the World to Come.

**[21]** And behold, in Tractate Tamid, Chapter 4, it is stated: "Ten things did Alexander the Great ask the elders of the South, etc. They said to him, 'Who is called wise?' They replied, 'A wise person is one who sees what is born.'" And the commentator explained: "Sees what is born" means one who understands from his heart what is destined to happen, the events that are destined to come, and guards himself against them. Thus far is his language. And behold, what they said, "A wise person is one who sees what is born," encompasses all matters and affairs in the world. Indeed, it is self-evident. For even if a person sees what is born in all his ways and affairs, yet if he does not open his eyes to see what will be with him in the end of days, to be concerned with saving his soul from the hand of Sheol, and to inherit eternal life and precious, everlasting Eden, we cannot call him by the name of wise; rather, a fool and an ignoramus.

**[22]** It is known that the foundation of the fear of God is derived solely from the ability to perceive the outcome. As our Sages, may their memory be blessed, stated in Chapter 2 of Pirkei Avot: "Weigh the loss of a mitzvah against its reward, and the reward of a transgression against its loss." Similarly, they said there at the beginning of Chapter 3: "Contemplate three things, and you will not come to commit a transgression: Know from where you came, where

you are going, and before Whom you are destined to give an accounting.” And indeed, following this premise, as the elders of the Negev said: “What wise person is one who sees the outcome?” It is thus found that the ultimate purpose of wisdom is solely the fear of God. For whoever fears God and turns away from evil is the wise person who sees the outcome. Thus, King Solomon, peace be upon him, said in his wisdom: “A wise person fears and turns away from evil” (Proverbs 14:16). And this is what is written: “Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom” (Job 28:28), for there is no one as wise as one who fears God.

## Kokhavei Ohr (Stars of Light) – Chapter 2

כוכבי אור -- פרק 2

**[1]** And the enlightened shall shine like the radiance of the firmament, and those who justify the many, like the stars forever and ever.

**[2]** Indeed, if it is true that the reward for the commandments ascends on high in the spiritual world, for one hour of spiritual delight is more precious there than all the days of this world. However, how good it would be if every person were assured, at least, that the reward for his commandments, whether little or much, would be preserved for him to receive in the World to Come. And for this reason, even though “there is no righteous person on earth...” (Ecclesiastes 7:20), nevertheless, every person should be full of hope. For after he receives his full judgment for the bundle of his sins, ultimately he will come to his reward in the World to Come, for the fruit of his deeds, to inherit the reward of his commandments. However, in truth, just as one must fear the punishment for his sins to save his soul from the hand of Sheol, so too must one be concerned for the reward of his commandments, that it not be lacking for him in the World to Come. For sometimes a person receives his

world in this world.

**[3]**

**[4]** One should be astonished and marvel at what our father Abraham, peace be upon him, said: “I descended into the fiery furnace and was saved.” Did he not descend into the fiery furnace to be burned for the sanctification of His Name, blessed be His Name? And when the Holy One, blessed be He, performed a miracle for him and saved him, then according to primary reasoning, this miracle should not diminish the reward for his having surrendered his soul for the sanctification of God’s Name, let alone the reward for other commandments. Rather, it is the opposite: for what the Holy One, blessed be He, did for him, a great miracle by saving him from the fiery furnace, this will also serve as a sign and a wonder of how great is His power, and how beloved and cherished he is before God. And if so, how great and perfected will be his reward in the future to come. Yet, we see before our eyes that our father Abraham, peace be upon him, was afraid, lest he received in this miracle also the reward for his commandments. And even with his being saved from the war of the kings, he was afraid, lest he received all his reward and have nothing for the future to come.

**[5]** And likewise, one should contemplate the repentance of the Holy One, Blessed be He. For He said to him, “All that I have done with you in this world, I have done with you gratuitously.” However, one who does not merit gratuitous kindness, behold, even in such a manner, one who wishes to give their life for the sanctification of His Name, Blessed be He, and the Holy One, Blessed be He, will perform a miracle for him and save him in whatever way possible. It will be deducted from his merits.

**[6]** And behold, our Sages, of blessed memory, also trembled regarding this matter, concerning the acceptance of His world in this world. Behold, in Sanhedrin, page 101a, Rabba bar bar Chana said: When Rabbi Eliezer fell ill, his students came to visit him, etc. They began to

weep, and Rabbi Akiva was laughing. They said to him, "Why are you laughing?" etc. He said to them, "This is why I am laughing. As long as I saw my Rabbi that his wine did not spoil and his flax did not suffer blight, etc., I said, 'Heaven forbid, perhaps my Rabbi has accepted his world [reward in this world].' And now that I see my Rabbi in suffering, I am happy." Rabbi [Eliezer] said to him, "Have I lacked anything from the entire Torah?" He said to him, "Our Rabbi taught us, 'There is no righteous person on earth,' etc." And Rashi explained, "He accepted his world" means he received all his reward. See there.

**[7]** From this wondrous story, one must understand and gain insight that the matters are as they are stated literally. For even the greatest among the great is sometimes not assured. If he has not received his reward for his commandments in this world. For behold, if Rabbi Eliezer the Great himself said about himself thus, that he feared lest he had received his reward. It would have been possible to think that this was a path of exaggeration, out of great piety and humility. However, are not these words spoken by Rabbi Akiva about Rabbi Eliezer the Great? That he was distressed, Heaven forbid, lest Rabbi Eliezer had received his reward. From this, it is revealed and clear that the matters are as they truly are.

**[8]** And why should one be astonished? Can it enter the mind that Rabbi Eliezer the Great, the sage who resembled an angel of God, and like one of the heavenly host on high, would receive his reward in this world? This is Torah, and this is its reward. And what of our father Abraham, peace be upon him, who was fearful lest he had received his reward in this world? However, the matter is that sometimes a single sin causes all this, to punish him, to pay him the reward for his commandments in this world. And all the more so according to the depth of the judgment and reckoning from Above, which is hidden from the children of man. And this is among the hidden things belonging to the Lord our God.

**[9]** This is what Rabbi Eliezer Akiva said: "Have

I lacked anything from the entire Torah?" And it seems how this relates to Rabbi Akiva's response. However, this is the matter: that the very act of accepting His (God's) dominion in this world is what causes some sin. And therefore, he said, "Have I lacked anything from the entire Torah?" And Rabbi Akiva said to him, "Our Rabbi, you have taught us that there is no righteous person on earth..."

**[10]** And with this, let us gain understanding in the words of Midrash Rabbah, Parashat Chayei Sarah, which states: "When Rabbi Abbahu passed away, thirteen rivers of perfumed oil flowed for him. They said to him, 'These are the rivers of perfumed oil [that flowed] for you.' He said to them, 'For you, you said, "For Abbahu." But I said, "In vain have I labored; my strength I have spent for emptiness and vanity. Truly, my judgment is with the Lord."' Thus far the words of Midrash Rabbah.

And at first glance, it is very surprising what entered Rabbi Abbahu's mind, that he labored in vain and spent his strength for emptiness and vanity. Did not our Sages, of blessed memory, say, "Faithful is your Employer to pay you the reward of your labor"? However, this is the matter: For behold, all the desirable things and goodnesses of this world are emptiness and vanity, void and formless. Therefore, whoever accepts his reward for his Torah and his commandments in this world, it is found that all his labor and toil was to receive a paltry reward of emptiness and vanity.

**[11]** And behold, as it appears, the Holy One, Blessed be He, bestowed upon Rabbi Abbahu also from the goodness of this world. For he was favored and honored in the eyes of Caesar, as explained in Chagigah, page 14, see there. And he had great honor in the king's court, as explained in Ketubot, page 17. When Rabbi Abbahu would come from the academy to Caesar's house, Caesar's handmaidens would go out to meet him and unfasten his sandals. His teacher who was with him, and the spokesman of his people, [called him] "Torch of Light," etc.,

see there. And for this, Rabbi Abbahu was always anxious for his soul, lest his merits be diminished with the vanity and emptiness of illusory honor and the like. And when Rabbi Abbahu died, and they showed him thirteen rivers of amber, he said, "All these are Abbahu's, and I said, 'In vain have I labored; for emptiness and vanity have I spent my strength,' etc." And this is to say that he thought he had received the reward for his labor and toil with the vanity and emptiness of the desires of this world.

**[12]** After these matters, how greatly the heart of man will tremble when he contemplates his state. For each person, according to his worth, his transgressions are abundant beyond measure. And who knows to what extent he will bear and suffer in the World to Come, for the bundle of his transgressions? Behold, even after this, when he will be refined like the refining of silver, and all his transgressions will be purged, and the time will come to receive the reward for his commandments, behold, besides the fact that all his righteousness is like a garment, few in meager quantity and thin in quality – for the perfection of a commandment is on two aspects: First, the excellence of the deed, that each commandment should be according to the laws of the Torah and the boundaries of its judgments. Second, the purity of the thought, that it should be with an intention desired solely for the sake of God. And who can say, "I have done everything according to the Torah, and I have purified my heart"? And after all this, who knows how much his meager merits have been diminished for him in this world, whether little or much, or perhaps, God forbid, he has received his entire world – a matter about which the Patriarchs of the world trembled, as mentioned above. For every person is constantly burdened with the kindnesses of the Creator, blessed be His Name, and His goodness, which the eye sees eye to eye. And what of the hidden miracles as well, as it is written, "To Him who does great wonders alone."

**[13]** We have found one, a single commandment, exalted and sublime in its value, whose

reward is exceedingly great. Furthermore, with it, a person will be assured that his righteousness will stand forever, to receive its reward in the World of Recompense, which is the World to Come, and its reward will not be diminished in this world. This commandment is to be among those who justify the multitude, meaning to cause the multitude to merit, as a just accounting is found with the help of God.

**[14]** Indeed, in the Gemara, Yoma, page 86a, are explained the four categories of atonement that Rabbi Yishmael expounded. If a person transgressed a positive commandment and repented, [this is one category]. If he transgressed a negative commandment and repented, repentance suspends [the sin], and Yom Kippur atones. If he transgressed [a sin punishable by] *karet* or the death penalty decreed by the court and repented, repentance and Yom Kippur suspend [the sin], and suffering purifies. However, one who has desecrated God's Name in his hand, repentance has no power to suspend, nor Yom Kippur to atone, nor suffering to purify. Rather, all of these suspend [the sin], and death purifies. See there. And it would seem surprising why suffering has no power to purify. After all, even what they said about death purifying, this is certainly the suffering of death, God forbid. If so, why would suffering in his lifetime not purify?

**[15]** Indeed, the root of the matter is that sometimes a person receives the reward for his commandments in this world, and likewise, that suffering purifies a person's transgressions. This is explained in Kiddushin, page 40, where Rabbi Elazar ben Rabbi Tzadok said: "To what are the righteous likened in this world..." Thus, the Holy One, Blessed be He, brings suffering upon the righteous in this world so that they may inherit the World to Come, and so on. And "To what are the wicked likened in this world..." Thus, the Holy One, Blessed be He, bestows goodness upon the wicked in this world in order to cast them out, and so on. And it would seem perplexing, given that the reward and punishment that will come to a person in the World

to Come from the fruit of his deeds are both exceedingly wondrous and awesome, for the reward is a wondrous delight where one hour of spiritual contentment is superior to all the days of this world, and likewise, the pain and bitterness of one hour of punishment is superior to all the severe sufferings in this world. From this, it is perplexing how it is possible to pay the reward for a commandment in this world, in proportion to their great reward in the spiritual world, or to purify transgressions in this world through suffering, in proportion to the great punishment in the spiritual world.

**[16]** Indeed, so has His blessed Wisdom decreed, and so is the measure: for true recompense is only in the spiritual world, and there lies the great reward for those who do His blessed will, and the awesome judgments for the perpetrators of iniquity. However, if the Holy One, blessed be He, repays a person his reward or punishment in this world, the measure of punishment and reward is diminished by many thousands and tens of thousands of degrees, and it is a very small part compared to the reward and punishment in the spiritual world. And for this, in reality, one can purify his sins through the sufferings of this world, even though in the spiritual world there is no measure to the greatness of their punishment. Likewise, to diminish the reward of commandments through the good things of this world, even though for the World to Come there is no measure to the greatness of their reward. It is a great evil for a person if he receives the reward for his commandments in this world through trivial and lowly good things, and a great good to purify his sins through the sufferings of this world.

**[17]** And behold, there is certainly a just accounting for this: the measure of the portion of punishment and reward when it is in this world, versus the punishment and reward when they are in the World to Come. It is found that just as the punishment for a sin in the World to Come is according to the quality of the sin, and the greater the sin, so too the punishment will be greater; similarly, if the sin is purified in this

world through suffering, it is also according to the value of the sin. And just as the sin will grow and the punishment for the World to Come will increase, so too, in opposition to it, to purify the sin in this world, one will also bear and suffer the sufferings of this world more. For according to the value of the punishment in the World to Come, so will be the measure of the portion in this world; so it will increase and so it will decrease. And so it is in the matter of the reward for the commandments, for according to the quality of the commandment and the greatness of its reward in the World to Come, so too, if one receives its reward in this world, it is according to the value of its reward in the World to Come.

**[18]** This is what our Sages, of blessed memory, stated: "But one who has desecration of God's Name upon their hands, repentance has no power to absolve, nor suffering to purify. Rather, all these are suspended, and death purifies." For indeed, desecration of God's Name is an exceedingly great sin, far exceeding all other transgressions. As is explained in the Gemara in Yoma, mentioned above, the punishment for the sin of desecration of God's Name in the World to Come is exceedingly awesome and terrible, surpassing all punishments for transgressions. Therefore, to purify this sin of desecration of God's Name in this world through suffering is impossible. This is because, according to the measure of the portion of the great punishment in the World to Come, there are no such sufferings in this world that would have the power to purify the sin. For all the sufferings that are placed within the framework of nature, which a person can endure and remain alive, do not measure up to the required portion according to the calculation of the great punishment in the World to Come. Thus, for the sin of desecration of God's Name, only death purifies. For the sufferings of death, may God protect us, which is the separation of the soul from the body, are exceedingly terrible. Its essence is hidden from the eye of all living beings. There is no comparison to such sufferings when a person is alive. Therefore, only the sufferings of death, may God

protect us, purify the sin of desecration of God's Name, because its quality ascends to the calculation of the punishment in the World to Come.

**[19]** And behold, in the Gemara, Tractate Yoma, it is stated: "What is the case of desecration of God's Name (Chillul Hashem)?" Rav said: "For example, if I were to take meat from a butcher and not pay him immediately." And Rashi explained: "And when I delay payment, he says about me that I am a thief, and they learn from me to be lax regarding theft." Rabbi Yochanan said: "For example, if I were to walk four cubits without Torah and without phylacteries." And Rashi explained: "For example, I... and not everyone knows that I have weakened from my study, and they learn from me to be idle from Torah study." Thus far his words. Examine there. It is found that the definition of Chillul Hashem is one through whom people learn to be lax regarding any commandment. And it is self-evident that all the more so if one were to perform an action, to turn people's hearts away, to be lax regarding one of God's commandments, and his actions or words bear fruit, this is a greater Chillul Hashem.

**[20]** And since the transgression of desecrating God's Name (Chillul Hashem) is one by whom people are caused to belittle any commandment, it is self-evident that conversely, one who is a cause by whom people are caused to honor and cherish any commandment even more, this is the sanctification of God's Name (Kiddush Hashem). And all the more so, one who toils in action to bring merit to the multitude, to draw their hearts to the service of God, blessed be His Name, to observe and fulfill the Torah and the commandment, to turn away from evil and do good, for this is complete sanctification of God's Name, the opposite of the sin of desecrating God's Name. And consult the book Sha'arei Teshuvah by our Rabbi Yonah concerning the sin of desecrating God's Name, and his words are as follows: "And even for this sickness, although there is no cure, if God, blessed be He, helps him to sanctify His Torah before people, etc., his sin is removed by the great

merit of the action, which is the opposite of the action by which he acted foolishly and by which he sinned." Thus far his words, consult there.

**[21]** And behold, just as the transgression of desecrating God's Name (Chillul Hashem) is greater than all transgressions, so too, in contrast, the commandment of sanctifying God's Name (Kiddush Hashem), as mentioned above, is greater than all commandments. Likewise, just as the punishment for the transgression of Chillul Hashem surpasses all punishments for transgressions, so too the reward for the commandment of Kiddush Hashem surpasses all rewards for commandments. And it has already been clarified above that the reward for a commandment surpasses the punishment for a transgression in value, if they are weighed together, for the attribute of good is multiplied. Thus, the reward for Kiddush Hashem surpasses in value the punishment for the transgression of Chillul Hashem. And therefore, since our Sages, may their memory be blessed, have said that there is no power in suffering to atone for the transgression of Chillul Hashem, and as has been explained, because of the magnitude of the transgression, there are no such sufferings in this world that would be capable of atoning for the transgression. For all the sufferings of this world do not amount to the portion in value of the great punishment for this transgression in the World to Come. If so, then all the more so, the reward for the commandment of Kiddush Hashem, as mentioned above, cannot be matched by any of the good and desirable things of the vanities of this world, for all the good of this world is insufficient to amount to the portion in value of the great reward for this commandment in the World to Come.

**[22]** This is what the verse states: "And those who justify the multitude, like the stars forever and ever." This phrase, "forever and ever," appears at first glance to be unclear. If it means that the reward is eternal, then the reward for all commandments is indeed eternal. However, the matter is this: with the reward for all commandments, one is not assured of them, for it



remains for him forever and ever. That is to say, the reward will be preserved for him for the World to Come, because perhaps he will receive their reward in this world through fleeting temporal benefits. But it is not so with the reward of those who justify the multitude. Necessarily, the reward will be preserved for him for the World to Come, where it is truly forever and ever. For just as the sin of desecrating God's Name has no power in the sufferings of this world to atone for the sin, as mentioned above, so too the commandment of justifying the multitude, which is the sanctification of God's Name, has no power in the benefits of this world to diminish the reward. And necessarily, the reward will be preserved for him for the World to Come. And this is what is meant by: "And those who justify the multitude, like the stars forever and ever."

## Kokhavei Ohr (Stars of Light) – Chapter 3

### כוכבי אור -- פרק 3

**[1]** And you, O mortal, say to the House of Israel: Thus you have said, "Our transgressions and our sins are upon us, and by them we waste away; how then shall we live?" Say to them: "As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live." (Ezekiel 33:11) And Rashi explains: "Thus you have said" – therefore, you are not desirous of returning, for you assume that repentance will not benefit you.

**[2]** Indeed, it is not to be wondered at concerning the spirit of that generation, who greatly sinned against the Lord and did evil in His eyes. And the Lord, blessed be His Name, sent them His servants the prophets, day by day, morning and evening, and they refused to listen and return to the Lord, blessed be His Name. This is because the inclination of man's heart is evil from his youth, and the evil inclination crouches

at the entrance, sin. However, concerning this, every heart should be astonished, after it has already been explained that they repented of the evil, and their hearts inclined to return to the Lord, blessed be His Name. Only the lack of faith in repentance stood before them as an adversary, and they did not wish to return to the Lord, blessed be His Name, for they supposed that repentance would not benefit them. And it is greatly perplexing what they saw that led them to mock the angels of God and deceive His prophets, seeing that all the prophets from the beginning prophesied in the Name of the Lord concerning repentance: If the Children of Israel return from their evil way, all their sins and transgressions will be forgiven and will no longer be remembered.

**[3]** And when we gain understanding, we will be even more astonished, when we contemplate the spirit of the generations and the difference between them and us. It will become known that faith, in general, is weak in our hands, and even more so in matters pertaining to man in material concerns, such as providence and trust. And what our Sages, may their memory be blessed, said in Bava Batra, page 10, that a person's sustenance and deficiencies are decreed from Rosh Hashanah, and likewise what they said, may they be blessed, "A person does not touch what is prepared for his fellow, not even the width of a hair," and other sayings similar to these – behold, faith in this is meager and weak with us.

**[4]** How very wondrous it is that in all matters pertaining to the ways of repentance, this belief is exceedingly strong in a person's heart. He believes with complete faith that the Holy One, Blessed be He, forgives and pardons those who repent from transgression. This is even as our Sages, of blessed memory, stated in Kiddushin, page 40: "Even a completely wicked person his entire life, if he repented in the end, his wickedness will not be recalled to him." And similarly, as they stated: "Let a person return until he is crushed, until the utter crushing of the soul." Furthermore, a person believes more than is

truly the case, believing that even with a slight repentance, if he returns to God and confesses his sin, all his transgressions will be forgiven. And what is more, on the Day of Atonement, if he afflicts his soul with fasting and confesses his sin, and is confined all day in the House of God in prayer and supplication, he believes with complete faith that God, may His Name be blessed, will atone for him, to purify him from all his sins, and all his transgressions He will erase like a cloud and like mist.

**[5]** How awesome is this transformation! That generation reached the level of being comforted for their evil, and they were filled with a desire to return to God, blessed be His name. Yet, they lacked faith that repentance would benefit them, and therefore they did not want to perform repentance. But we, impoverished and weak in faith, have no comfort for our ways. And despite all this, our faith in the ways of repentance is very strong. Even though repentance easily avails to forgive all of a person's sins, is there now in reality anyone who would consider returning to God, blessed be His name, and yet have their heart become an obstacle, because their heart is weakened from believing in repentance?

**[6]** Behold, in Pesachim, folio 118a, Rav Huna said: The Israelites of that generation were of "small faith" (mekitanei emunah). And as Rabbah bar Mari expounded: What is written, "And they rebelled against the sea at the Red Sea" (Va'yamru al yam b'Yam Suf)? It teaches that Israel rebelled at that time, saying, "Just as we are ascending from one side, so too the Egyptians are ascending from another side." The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to the Minister of the Sea, "Cast them onto the dry land," etc. And Israel came and saw them, as it is said, "And Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the seashore" (Va-yar Yisrael et Mitzrayim met al sfat hayam). Thus far the language of the Gemara. Look there.

And behold, Rav Huna did not come to negate the Israelites of that generation, for they were not entirely devoid of faith. Rather, they were of

"small faith" (mekitanei emunah), meaning they did not possess faith in its completeness. And it requires clarification: What is the definition of "small faith"? Also, why did Israel rebel at the sea, saying that the Egyptians were ascending from another side?

**[7]** Indeed, it appears that the perfection of faith is to believe in God even in matters that contradict the ways of reason. This is the way of the great ones of faith, for they believe in God and in His prophets, even in what is elevated and sublime beyond human intellect. However, the characteristic of the lesser ones of faith is that they only believe what faith aligns with the ways of reason. But if faith contradicts the ways of human reason, their faith weakens to believe in it. This is as it is written in the Book of Kings (II 7:1): "And the man of God spoke unto the king, saying, 'Thus says the Lord: Tomorrow about this time shall a measure of fine flour be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria.'" And the captain answered the man of God, and said, "Behold, if the Lord would make windows in heaven, might this thing be?" And he said, "Behold, you shall see it with your eyes, but shall not eat of it." And it was so unto him. For his intellect was too limited to comprehend how this thing could be.

**[8]** And behold, what Israel said: "Just as we ascend from one side, so too the Egyptians ascend from another side." Their faith in the ability of the Blessed Holy One, may His Name be blessed, did not weaken. For this was not contrary to the ways of intellect. They believed that the Holy One, Blessed be He, does whatever He desires, and there is none who can deliver from His hand. However, it is known that the Children of Israel in Egypt were at a very low level. As our Sages, may their memory be blessed, said: "These worship idolatry, and these worship idolatry." And therefore, for them, this was contrary to the ways of intellect, that the Holy One, Blessed be He, would destroy an entire nation for their sake, to eradicate them from under the heavens, and to drown them all in the sea. And for this reason, even though Moses

our teacher, peace be upon him, told them, "As you have seen the Egyptians today, you shall never again see them," nevertheless, faith in this was shaky in their hands. This is because they were of weak faith, unable to believe with the faith of a craftsman in that which is contrary to the ways of their intellect. And this is the reason they said, "Just as we ascend..." etc.

**[9]** This is what is written in the Torah: "And the Lord saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore... and they believed in the Lord and in Moses His servant." It is not clarified what the nature of the faith was that they had in the Lord and in Moses His servant, nor in what way their faith was strengthened at the sea, more than all the signs and wonders that the Lord performed before their eyes in Egypt.

However, the matter is that in truth, Israel of that generation were among the "small of faith" (meketanei emunah). This means that their faith was weak in believing what is contrary to their intellect. Indeed, the signs and wonders that the Lord performed in Egypt were not contrary to the ways of intellect; rather, they demonstrated the Lord's power.

But when they came to the sea, and Moses our teacher, peace be upon him, told them, "For what you have seen the Egyptians today..." [referring to the Egyptians pursuing them], this was contrary to the ways of their intellect, for the Holy One, Blessed be He, would drown them all in the depths of the sea. And therefore, they said, "As we ascend from this side..." [implying doubt about the miraculous salvation].

However, afterward, when they saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore, and that not a single word of all that Moses our teacher, peace be upon him, had spoken fell to the ground, then their eyes were opened to understand and to gain insight. They realized that it is not for man to enter the counsel of God, nor for human intellect to ascend to the heights to find a divine portion. And then, faith was established in their hearts to the utmost degree, to believe in

the Lord and in Moses His servant, even in that which is elevated and sublime beyond human intellect.

This is what is written: "And Israel saw... and they believed..." For initially, they were "small of faith" and said, "As we ascend..." But when they saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore, then they believed in the Lord and in Moses His servant.

**[10]** And behold, the foundation of repentance is that the Holy One, Blessed be He, accepts those who return and forgives and pardons their iniquity. This is contrary to the ways of intellect, even to forgive and pardon one sin. And how much more so what our Sages, of blessed memory, said in Kiddushin: Even a completely wicked person all his days who repented at the end, his wickedness is not recalled to him, as mentioned above. This is very strange from the ways of intellect, as is understood.

**[11]** Indeed, the distance of repentance from the paths of intellect is contingent upon the quality of the person's recognition and discernment regarding the gravity of sin, how great is the culpability of transgression in rebelling against the will of God, blessed be His Name. For whoever does not feel and discern, and does not consider the very act of sin and transgression to be such a great culpability, will not find the foundation of repentance to be aligned with the paths of intellect. For when the very sin is not accounted in his eyes as a great culpability, and the Holy One, blessed be He, is merciful and gracious, why would He not forgive and pardon those who return from iniquity and sin?

**[12]** However, to the extent that a person increases in recognizing and discerning the weight of the severity of transgression, and in understanding and comprehending the magnitude of the evil and the great guilt of sin and transgression, in defying the will of God, blessed be His Name, the King of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He, so will the foundation of repentance be more so towards the paths of intellect.

**[13]** The true apprehension of the gravity of sin and transgression is attained by man only through the knowledge of His exaltedness and His great glory, blessed be His Name. This is as written in the book *Mesillat Yesharim* (The Path of the Upright) in the explanation of "fear of sin." Regarding the fear of sin as a path of awe of the Exalted One, it is that man distances himself from sins. He refrains from them not for his own sake, but for the sake of His great glory, blessed be His Name. For how could the heart of flesh and blood, lowly and despised, permit itself to do something against the will of the Creator, blessed be He and exalted be His Name? Indeed, this fear is not so easily attained, for it is born only from knowledge and understanding, to contemplate His exaltedness, blessed be His Name, and the baseness of man. Thus far his words.

**[14]** And therefore, when a person reaches this level of knowing His blessed Name's exaltedness, he will then understand and comprehend the great evil and immense guilt of sin and transgression. For a lowly and despised mortal will find his heart willing to defy the will of the Blessed One, the King of kings, the Holy One, Blessed be He. And when he truly recognizes the guilt of sin, the foundation of repentance will seem very strange to him, contrary to the ways of intellect, as mentioned above. However, despite all this, if he is among the great in faith, and his heart is whole in faith to the utmost degree, believing with the faith of a craftsman even that which is contrary to the ways of intellect, then "the righteous shall live by his faith" (Habakkuk 2:4). This is what the Holy One, Blessed be He, promised us through His servants the prophets: "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the LORD, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon" (Isaiah 55:7).

However, if he is among the small in faith, his faith will weaken regarding that which is contrary to the ways of intellect. It is possible that his heart will indeed falter from believing in

the foundation of repentance, for the Holy One, Blessed be He, forgives and pardons those who repent. Similarly, one who does not recognize and discern the guilt of sin and transgression, even if he is among the small in faith, will believe in the foundation of repentance, since there is nothing for him that is contrary to the ways of intellect.

**[15]** And herein we find the resolution of the matter. Regarding that generation of the prophet Ezekiel, they said, "Our transgressions and our sins are upon us, and by them we waste away," etc. It may seem perplexing why they lacked faith in repentance, and why they were of the opinion that repentance would not benefit them, as mentioned above. Furthermore, what is the matter of the difference between them and us? Why are we complete in this faith of repentance to the utmost? Indeed, this is the matter. For that generation lived still in the time of the Temple. Their eyes saw the Holy, and the Sanctuary, and the glory of God dwelling within the House. And therefore, they had an apprehension of His exaltedness and the splendor of His glory, blessed be His Name. And as a sign of their great apprehension of His exaltedness, blessed be His Name, is what our Sages of blessed memory said in Tana D'vei Eliyahu: For the prophet Ezekiel said to the elders of Israel, "Do repentance." They said to him, "We are ashamed," etc. See there. Behold, how awesome is this feeling of shame before Him, blessed be His Name, because of the magnitude of their sins, to return to Him, blessed be His Name, and to ask of Him pardon and forgiveness. And behold, this shame is a great aspect of the ways of awe of the Exalted One, as is known.

**[16]** And in any case, when they had the perception of His blessed Name's great loftiness, even so, they did not have the strength to stand against the evil inclination. Indeed, they recognized well the magnitude of guilt for sin and transgression, for it is awesome. And when they had the recognition of the guilt of sin, therefore the matter of repentance was strange to them

from the ways of intellect. And concerning the ways of faith, they were among the lesser in faith, for their faith was weak to believe what is contrary to the ways of intellect. And therefore, they also did not believe that repentance would benefit them to forgive all their transgressions, and if they would return from their way, they would surely live.

**[17]** Indeed, it is not so with us. For because of our many transgressions, we are lacking in the feeling of fear of punishment, which pertains to every person in his soul and his flesh, and is close to being felt. And how much more so is the fear of His exaltedness, blessed be His Name. We are entirely lacking in this feeling. And therefore, we do not at all recognize the magnitude of guilt for sin and transgression. How great and awesome it is, and yet the essence of the sin appears very light in our eyes. And for this reason, the matter of repentance is not at all in accordance with the ways of reason for us. And nothing will seem strange in our eyes. And therefore, even among those of weak faith, whose faith has weakened to believe in what is elevated and sublime beyond their intellect, even so, they believe with complete faith in the ways of repentance, that the Holy One, blessed be He, forgives and pardons those who return from iniquity, for this does not seem strange to their intellect at all.

**[18]** Indeed, even though we are distant from the feeling of awe of His blessed Name, to discern from this the magnitude of the guilt of sin and transgression, we can nevertheless find a just accounting with the help of God, from the punishments of transgressions and the chastisement for iniquity. For from this we can recognize what is the guilt of sin and transgression in rebelling against the will of the King of Kings, the Holy One, Blessed be He. For behold, our Sages, of blessed memory, said in Eruvin, page 19: Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: What is the meaning of the verse, "They pass through the Valley of Baca, they make it a spring; the early rain also covers it with pools" (Psalms 84:7)? "They pass" refers to people who transgress the

will of the Holy One, Blessed be He. "The Valley of Baca" is Gehenna, which they deepen for themselves. "They make it a spring" means they weep and shed tears like a flowing spring. "The early rain also covers it with pools" means that they justify the judgment upon themselves, and say before Him, Master of the Universe: "You have judged justly, You have acquitted justly, You have convicted justly. You have decreed justly, Gehenna for the wicked..." (See there). And it would seem very surprising: What is the greatness if the wicked in the world to come, where the evil inclination has no dominion, justify the judgment upon themselves and give righteousness to God?

**[19]** The verse states in Parashat Ha'azinu: "The Rock, His work is perfect, for all His ways are justice. A God of faithfulness who is without iniquity, righteous and upright is He." (Deuteronomy 32:4).

According to primary intellect, it is very surprising to attribute to the Holy One, Blessed be He, a descriptor of the negation of deficiency. For is not "deficiency" itself a deficiency? The descriptor of the negation of deficiency is merely a glory for flesh and blood. And as it is written, "The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity..." (Zephaniah 3:13).

However, the Lord, Blessed be His Name, is the source of perfection. How can we attribute to Him a descriptor of the negation of iniquity? Does the Judge of all the earth do injustice?

**[20]** Indeed, it is established and complete in the counsel of all inhabitants of the world, for true and enduring judgment. To punish all perpetrators of wicked iniquity according to their wickedness. All governments have limiting laws and judgments, portions of punishments against every transgressor of law and morality. However, even though the principle of punishment is a matter agreed upon in the world, the quality or quantity of punishment for each sin and transgression is merely a matter of agreement and estimation of understanding. This is because there is no scale to weigh the spirit of

the iniquity or the punishment. To weigh in the balance the quality of the punishment against the spirit of the iniquity. And therefore, the quality of punishment is merely a matter of agreement. And thus, the judgments of punishments are not equal among all governments. For each government will establish laws and judgments of punishments for every sin and iniquity, as it deems good and right in its eyes, according to their estimation of understanding. And sometimes, the punishment for an iniquity will be according to the will of the ruler, as they desire, to inflict a severe punishment or merely a light punishment.

**[21]** And in any case, since there is no scale and balance to weigh the transgression against the punishment, so that they would be aligned together. Therefore, it is naturally impossible for human intellect to determine the extent of the punishment in proportion to the value of the transgression. And thus, in the ways of judicial proceedings, there can sometimes be some injustice and a crooked judgment in the quality of the punishment. This is because human intellect does not possess the ability to equate the quality of the punishment with the transgression, so that they would be aligned together. For example, one is punished by his sin with some punishment for a limited duration. Is there a scale and balance for the duration of the punishment? Or does human intellect have the ability to limit the duration of the punishment in proportion to the value of the transgression, not one day less or more? And if so, necessarily there can be some injustice in the judgment. However, what power does mortal man have? And since he is compelled to punish the transgressors, the judge has only what the eyes of his intellect see.

**[22]** Now let us turn our attention to the judgments of the Blessed God. For He gives the wicked evil according to their wickedness. And what of the World of Reward, where many terrible and awesome judgments are prepared for the doers of iniquity, to refine them with flaming fire, like the refining of silver. Shall we also

ask, where is the scale and the weight to weigh the quality of the punishment against the spirit of the transgression? Shall we also say, God forbid, that the punishment is merely a matter of estimation and agreement, or as it is His will, Blessed be His Name, to punish every sinner and transgressor to whatever extent? And if so, then it is also possible for injustice to exist within the framework of judgment, as mentioned above. God forbid that the Judge of all the earth should be so! But that which is impossible for flesh and blood, shall it be surprising for God to do anything? To weigh the spirit of the transgression and the punishment. Without doubt, there is a scale and balances of justice in God's hand to place the transgression in one pan, and in opposition, the punishment in the second pan. And together they shall be borne on scales, so that the quality of the punishment is precisely weighed against the quality of the transgression, even to the extent of a hair's breadth.

**[23]** And already the Rambam, may his memory be for a blessing, wrote in Chapter 3 of Hilchot Teshuvah, and this is his wording: "Every single human being has merits and transgressions. Whoever has more merits than transgressions is righteous. And whoever has more transgressions than merits is wicked, etc. And this weighing is not according to the number of merits, but according to their magnitude. There is a merit that is equivalent to many transgressions, etc. And there is a transgression that is equivalent to many merits, etc. And only in the wisdom of the God of wisdom is it weighed. And He is the One who knows how merits are arranged against transgressions." Thus far his words, see there. Now, is it within the power of human intellect to have any conception of the nature of the weighing of the quality of merits and transgressions, such that one merit would outweigh a sum of many transgressions, and likewise one transgression against many merits? Indeed, the Holy One, Blessed be He, is All-Powerful. And nothing is surprising to Him. So too, this weighing of the quality of punishment against the transgression is in the wisdom

of the God of wisdom. And He is the One who knows how to arrange the measure of punishment against the transgression, and that the scales of the balance will be equal, one against the other.

**[24]** This is what is written in the Torah: "The Rock, His work is perfect, for all His ways are justice; a God of faithfulness who does no wrong." The intention is not to attribute a quality to Him, for the Holy One, Blessed be He, who judges all the earth, will not do wrong. Indeed, even the remnant of Israel will not do wrong, how much more so the King of kings, the Holy One, Blessed be He. Rather, the intention is: Because in the ways of judgment among flesh and blood, when there is no such scale and measure in reality to weigh the punishment against the sin, then even if the judges judge justly, nevertheless, injustice may necessarily occur in the judgment, as mentioned above. And therefore, the verse says, "The Rock, He is a God of faithfulness and does no wrong." This is because He is omnipotent, and in His hand are the scales and balances of justice, to weigh the sin with the punishment. And He knows how to set the quality of the punishment against the value of the sin, and that the pans of the scales will be balanced against each other, even to the thickness of a hair.

**[25]** And with this, we shall attain understanding to comprehend what our Sages, of blessed memory, have stated: "Even blessings shall envelop the teacher." For they justify the judgment upon themselves and say before Him, Master of the Universe, "You have judged justly," etc., as mentioned above. And this is because in this world, man does not recognize the magnitude of the guilt of sin and transgression. Therefore, if a person were to see with his own eyes the terrible judgments in the valley of weeping, and the great and awesome fire burning there in the depths of Gehenna, which consumes soul and flesh for every sin and transgression, he would not comprehend it. For there is a scale and a measure for this, and the awesome punishment is precisely aligned with the guilt of the sin.

However, he would think that the punishment is something arbitrary, and that it is the will of God, blessed be His name, to punish for every sin and transgression with a very great and awesome punishment, and perhaps the punishment is seventyfold for his sin.

**[26]** Indeed, there, in the World of Truth, the wicked know and recognize the gravity of the guilt of sin and transgression, in defying the will of the King of Kings, the Holy One, Blessed be He. How great and exceedingly awesome it is! There, in the World of Truth, they know and understand that the bitter punishment is not something arbitrary from the will of God, Blessed be His Name, to punish them severely for their sins. Rather, there is a scale and balances of justice in the hand of God, Blessed be His Name, and on scales they will bear together the transgression and the punishment. And the great and awesome punishment is precisely weighed against the guilt of the sin, down to a hair's breadth. And this is what they say: "Master of the Universe, You have judged justly," etc. "You have well ordained Gehenna for the wicked and the Garden of Eden for the righteous."

**[27]** And from this, we can derive an understanding. For from the judgments of punishment and admonishment for transgression in the spiritual realm, we can comprehend and recognize the gravity of guilt for sin and transgression. For since the Rock is a God of faithfulness and there is no injustice, and the punishment is meted out with measured precision in proportion to the transgression, as mentioned above, and since we believe in the tradition of our Sages, of blessed memory, that the punishment in the spiritual realm for transgression is exceedingly terrible, incomparable to any suffering in this world, and as Ramban, of blessed memory, wrote in Sha'ar HaGemul, from this we can understand how great is the guilt of sin and transgression, for which a person receives a punishment that is exceedingly great and terrible. How awesome is this thought for one who delves deeply into it!

**[28]** And behold, in the Gemara, Nazir, page 23a, it is taught: "A burnt offering, their separation..." And when Rabbi Akiva would arrive at this verse, he would weep. And what... you say is similar to this matter. "And he did not know, and he is guilty, and he shall bear his iniquity." And if one intended to bring in his hand the flesh of a lamb, and the flesh of a pig came into his hand... the verse says, "and he shall bear his iniquity." If one intended to bring in his hand the flesh of a pig, and the flesh of a pig came into his hand, all the more so! And behold, this is a moral admonition, to know and to recognize the value of the guilt of a deliberate sin, more than the sins of error, even if he did not know, and he is guilty, and he shall bear his iniquity.

**[29]** To expand upon this matter, let us gain understanding and contemplate the words of the Ramban, may his memory be for a blessing, in his commentary on the Torah, Parashat Vayikra. What he wrote there concerning the reason for the sacrifices, and this is his language: "Because the actions of human beings are completed by thought, speech, and deed. The Blessed Holy One commanded that when one sins and brings a sacrifice, he should lay his hands upon it, corresponding to the deed. And he should confess with his mouth, corresponding to the speech. And he should burn the innards and kidneys in the fire, which are the vessels of thought and desire. And the legs, corresponding to the hands and feet of man which perform all his work. And he should sprinkle the blood on the altar, corresponding to his blood in his soul. So that a person, in doing all these things, should consider that he has sinned against his God with his body and with his soul. And it is fitting for him that his blood be spilled and his body burned, were it not for the kindness of the Creator who took a substitute from him. And this sacrifice atoned, that his blood should be in place of his blood, and his soul in place of his soul. And the choicest parts of the sacrifice correspond to his limbs, etc. See there."

**[30]** How awesome is this matter! For even

when a single soul sins inadvertently, without knowledge, it would be fitting for a punishment where its blood is spilled and its body is burned. But because of the Creator's kindness upon him, by his doing *teshuvah* (repentance), he brings his substitute as a sacrifice, so that his blood is instead of his blood, and his soul instead of his soul, and he is forgiven. However, without *teshuvah*, the aforementioned punishment remains upon him. And if this is the punishment fitting for an inadvertent sin, that its blood is spilled and its body is burned, then how awesome is the punishment fitting for a willful transgression, one who sins with knowledge and with intent! For certainly, there is no value or comparison in the weight of an inadvertent sin, as opposed to the value of the guilt of a willful transgression.

**[31]** And behold, one of the things a person lacks is the recognition of the value of transgression and the magnitude of the punishment, even for an intentional sin. And how much more so for sins of error. Therefore, when a person stumbles unknowingly, it is almost as if it is not counted as anything in the person's eyes. To take it to heart and worry about it. How wondrous is this matter! When we contemplate the spirit of the generation in the days of our Sages, of blessed memory, even among the common folk of Israel, how great was the value of the substance of sin in their eyes, even for sins of error.

**[32]** For behold, in Chullin, folio 41a, in the Mishnah there: "One who slaughters for the purpose of a burnt-offering, his slaughter is invalid. One who slaughters for the purpose of a sin-offering, his slaughter is valid." And it is said in the Gemara: "One who slaughters for the purpose of a sin-offering" - Rabbi Yochanan said: "They only taught this in the case where one is not obligated to bring a sin-offering. But if one is obligated to bring a sin-offering..." And Rashi explained: "They only taught this in the case where one is not obligated to bring a sin-offering, because people would not say, 'Now he is setting it aside,' for a sin-offering does not come by way of a vow or a freewill offer-



ing. And the Rabbis did not consider that perhaps one who sees it might think he is obligated to bring a sin-offering, because it has a certain renown, that one who commits an offense unintentionally does not conceal it, so that he may be ashamed and it may be atoned for." Thus far his words.

**[33]** And it is explained from this that our Sages, may their memory be for a blessing, had a simple principle: that anyone who stumbled even in an unintentional sin was concerned with achieving atonement for his transgression. And therefore, he would not conceal the sin and would want many to know of it, so that he would be shamed and it would be atoned for him. Now let us consider how terrible is the difference between them and us. One. In their time, even the masses of the House of Israel, even one who stumbled in an unintentional sin, was concerned for his soul to achieve atonement.

**[34]** Two. For one who stumbles in an unintentional sin, would be ashamed and mortified if people knew of it. And so great was the stumbling of an unintentional sin in terms of shame and disgrace, that one who sinned unintentionally and his sin became known, the sinner would be so embarrassed, to the point that he considered the shame and disgrace to be atonement for the sin.

**[35]** Now let us contemplate the value of an unintentional transgression in our eyes. First, whoever stumbles into an unintentional transgression, who will take it to heart to seek atonement? If only a person would awaken to seek atonement for intentional transgressions. Second, who would be ashamed because of an unintentional transgression? If one stumbles into an unintentional act in one of the prohibitions of Shabbat, such as the prohibition of *borer* (separating) and the like, would they be ashamed to tell this to another? Indeed, they would not be ashamed, nor would they know disgrace. This is because an unintentional transgression is not considered at all as disgrace or shame. And a person would not be diminished in their stand-

ing at all because they stumbled into an unintentional sin.

## Kokhavei Ohr (Stars of Light) – Chapter 4

סוכב' אור -- פרק 4

**[1]** In the Gemara, Rosh Hashanah, page 16a, in the Mishnah there: "On four occasions the world is judged... On Rosh Hashanah, all inhabitants of the world pass before Him like *benei maron*." As it is said, "He who forms the heart of them all..." And in the Gemara there, page 18a, it states: "What is meant by *benei maron*? Here they translate it as *benei imrana*. Reish Lakish said: like the ascents of Beit Meron. Rav Yehuda said in the name of Shmuel: like the legions of the House of David." Thus far the language of the Gemara.

And Rashi explains: "*Benei imrana* - like sheep that are counted for tithes and emerge one after another through a narrow opening, as they cannot exit all at once. *Like the ascents of Beit Meron* - the path is narrow, and two cannot walk side by side, for the ravine is deep on both sides of the path. *Like the legions of the House of David* - and thus they were counted emerging one after another when they went out to war." Thus far the language of Rashi.

**[2]** And behold, from Rashi's explanation it appears that for all the Amoraim who explain in the Gemara what "like the sons of Maron" means, the Tanna's intention in this matter, along with the subject of the parable, is merely to say that all who enter the world do not pass before the Blessed Place all at once. Rather, they pass one after another, like the sons of Maron. If like the sons of Imrana, if like degrees between the heights, or like the soldiers of the House of David.

**[3]** And it would seem very surprising. What need is there for the Tanna to explain such a

simple matter with a parable? That all the inhabitants of the world pass before Him, blessed be His Name, one after another. Which is like the parable of the sons of Maron, who pass one after another. Who would not understand this? What is "one after another"? And the Tanna should have simply said on Rosh Hashanah, "All the inhabitants of the world pass before Him one after another." Indeed, the Tanna grasped his parable in a place where they are compelled to go one after another. Like the sons of Imrana, where the opening is small and they cannot exit all at once. Or like the ascent of Beit Meron, where the path is narrow and two cannot walk side by side.

**[4]** Indeed, here is the foundation of the matter: that all who come into the world pass before the Blessed Holy One, one after another, like the sons of Maron. One must understand and comprehend the reason for this. What is the ultimate intention in this, and to what purpose is it? Is it difficult for God to pass all who come into the world before Him together?

**[5]** Indeed, it appears that there is a very profound intention in this. And all of this is from His blessed Name's wisdom, and His great mercies and kindnesses. That they find favor in His eyes, to clear the way before them, to set for them a good end and hope on the awesome day of judgment. For the foundation of judgment and justice, whether it be for punishment or for kindness, depends greatly on this order, on what passes before Him, may His Name be blessed, one after another, and as will be explained before us with the help of Heaven.

**[6]** For behold, in the Gemara, Rosh Hashanah, page 8a, Rav Chisda said: "A king and the public – the king enters judgment first. As it is stated, 'to do the judgment of His servant...' What is the reason? ...And if you wish, I will say: lest the king's wrath be turned back. And Rashi explained: 'lest the king's wrath be turned back' – because of the sins of the public."

And behold, even if it is true that even before the public enters before the Blessed Holy One

for judgment, all is revealed and known before Him, may His Name be blessed. All of man's thoughts and his schemes, and the deeds of a man's steps. And He knows the deeds of them all.

**[7]** Indeed, because the Lord, blessed be His Name, established with wisdom the entire order of judgment and justice, akin to earthly royalty. To set a specific day on which He will sit on the throne of judgment to judge nations. And every deed of man, which is written in the Book of Remembrance, will be brought before Him. And already the liturgical poet has established the order of the Day of Judgment in "Unetanneh Tokef," etc. And He writes and seals, and counts and numbers. And You will open the Book of Remembrance, and from it will be read, etc. And similarly, there are several accusers and defenders. And even though the Omnipresent, blessed be He, knows every hidden thing, and nothing is concealed from His sight. He is the Understander, He is the Witness, and He is the Judge. Indeed, all of this is with a known intention before Him, blessed be His Name, that the order of judgment and justice should be conducted akin to earthly royalty.

**[8]** And for this reason, behold, before the congregation enters before Him, blessed be His Name, for judgment, even though He knows the deeds of them all, nevertheless, His knowledge, blessed be His Name, which encompasses all deeds, does not produce an impression. And wrath does not yet rule, until He sits upon the throne of judgment, and understands all their deeds in judgment. Then, indeed, the wrath of God will rise because of the sin of the congregation.

**[9]** And so, on Rosh Hashanah, the awesome Day of Judgment, which is a statute of remembrance to be accounted for, every spirit and soul. And creatures are accounted therein, to be remembered for life and for death. For the memory of all creation, and the remembrance of all deeds, comes before Him, blessed be His

Name. And He examines the deeds of them all. And therefore, if all the inhabitants of the world were to pass before Him, all together, and the Creator, who fashioned their hearts together, understands all their deeds. And if the transgressions of the community are great, foremost, and their sins are heavy, then the anger of God will be kindled because of the transgressions of the community. And before His wrath, who can stand? And from the heat of His anger, who can arise? And it will be as the righteous and the wicked are seized, God forbid, in the thicket of God's fury, which will rise up, God forbid, without remedy.

**[10]** And therefore, it was from His blessed Name's wisdom, and His abundant compassion and great kindness, to cause all the inhabitants of the world to pass before Him, each one after the other. And thus, when His blessed Name's knowledge encompasses all the deeds of humankind, His wrath will not be aroused until they have passed before Him for judgment, as mentioned above. And therefore, His blessed Name's wrath, from the transgressions of the totality of all the inhabitants of the world, cannot encompass and surround them all. For who and who will pass before His blessed Name, from the first until the last who will pass last? Behold, whoever passes before His blessed Name first is fortunate. For his path is exceedingly successful compared to one who passes after him. For each one can bear from His blessed Name's wrath only from the transgressions of all those who have already preceded him in passing before Him. But not from the evils and sins of those who pass after him, as mentioned above.

**[11]** And behold, even one sin has the power to leave an impression. As it is written, "One sinner destroys much good." And how much more so all the sins of one person! Therefore, each one of the inhabitants of the world who will pass before Him, blessed be His Name, on the Day of Judgment, behold, he falls from that which has already preceded him to pass before Him. And so he is more fortunate than one who will pass after him, for each one's transgressions have

been added to what preceded him. And you can make some impression to add to the wrath of the one who passes after him, as mentioned above.

**[12]** Indeed, after the order of passing before Him, may His Name be blessed, much depends on the foundation of judgment and justice. Whether for punishment or for kindness, as was mentioned above. For the way of all who pass before Him, may His Name be blessed, is initially successful, for they are exceedingly hidden from the wrath of God. Now, what is the order of the path of all who come into the world before Him, may His Name be blessed? Who will merit to pass first, first? And who will go last, last? For behold, their path is evident before God.

**[13]** Indeed, this is truly so. What the Mishnah states in Rosh Hashanah, "All inhabitants of the world pass before Him like a flock of sheep," etc. The intention is not to explain by way of a parable. That they pass one after another. For this is like a flock of sheep that go one after another. For this is a simple matter, and does not require a parable or eloquent phrasing. Rather, the intention is concerning the order of their procession, of all inhabitants of the world before Him, blessed be His Name, one after another. Who will be first to pass before Him, blessed be His Name, first, first? And who will be last? And concerning this the Mishnah said, for the order of their procession, of all inhabitants of the world, one after another, is like the parable of a flock of sheep when they go one after another.

**[14]** And behold, if indeed, it is generally understood of itself, that one who is pleasing before God, and finds favor in His eyes, blessed be His Name, He passes him over first and foremost, to shield him from His wrath, so that he may have good hope for life. However, in detail, who are they who find favor in His eyes, blessed be His Name, to acquit them in judgment? Indeed, behold, when we pay attention to contemplate the foundation of those who are acquitted in judgment, we find that they are of three categories:

One: They are those who are acquitted by the strict letter of the law. Two: They are those who are acquitted by the attribute of mercy, due to some merit. Three: They are those whose cause is hidden, only that such is the will of God, blessed be His Name, to have mercy upon them, even though they are not deserving.

**[15]** Indeed, in the Gemara, Rosh Hashanah, page 16a, Rabbi Kruspedai said in the name of Rabbi Yochanan: "Three books are opened on Rosh Hashanah... The perfectly righteous are written and sealed immediately for life. The perfectly wicked are written and sealed immediately for death. The intermediate are suspended and stand from Rosh Hashanah until Yom Kippur. If they merit, they are written for life..."

And the Ran wrote: From the fact that it says "intermediate," it implies that the "righteous" mentioned are those whose merits outweigh their transgressions. And the "wicked" mentioned are those whose transgressions outweigh their merits. If so, this presents a great difficulty, for how many righteous people are written for death? And how many wicked people are written for life?

Rather, the essence of the matter is as Rabbi Yitzchak the Elder of Trani, may his memory be blessed, wrote: That "righteous" and "wicked" are stated in the context of a legal judgment. Those individuals who are found to be innocent in the judgment due to some merit are called "perfectly righteous" here. They are perfectly righteous in this judgment, even if their transgressions outweigh their merits. And similarly, those righteous individuals whose merits outweigh their transgressions, when they are found liable in the judgment, even due to a minor transgression they committed, are called "wicked" in relation to this judgment. And "intermediate" refers to those individuals whose case is examined and weighed from Rosh Hashanah, and they are suspended and stand until they tip the scales in their favor.

**[16]** Indeed, even though sometimes perfectly righteous individuals are obligated to judgment

due to some minor transgression, and likewise, perfectly wicked individuals merit in judgment because of some merit, this is only an exception to the rule. There is a righteous person who perishes in his righteousness due to some minor transgression, and there is a wicked person who prolongs his wickedness due to some merit. However, generally speaking, we must believe that the foundation of judgment and decree, especially on Rosh Hashanah, is certainly based on the majority of deeds. As explained in the Gemara, Kiddushin (page 40): Rabbi Elazar ben Rabbi Shimon says, "Since the world is judged according to its majority, and the individual is judged according to his majority. If he performed one mitzvah, fortunate is he, for he has tipped the scales for himself and for the entire world towards the side of merit." Rashi explained, "According to this, a person should consider himself as if he is weighed... If he performed one mitzvah, his merits are found to be decisive, and he is found to be righteous." See there.

Similarly, the Rambam, may his memory be for a blessing, wrote in Chapter 3 of Hilchot Teshuvah, and this is his wording: "Each and every human being has merits and transgressions. He whose merits exceed his transgressions is righteous. And he whose transgressions exceed his merits is wicked." And just as a person's merits and transgressions are weighed at the time of his death, so too, every year, the transgressions of each person in the world are weighed with his merits on the festival of Rosh Hashanah. He who is found righteous is sealed for life, and he who is found wicked... and the intermediates are suspended until Yom Kippur." And see there in Kessef Mishneh.

**[17]** And in any case, here is the general principle of judgment. It is according to the weighing of transgressions against merits. Whether one is righteous before the Omnipresent or wicked. For he whose merits outweigh his transgressions, and he is righteous in his deeds, he is vindicated in judgment. And he whose transgressions are more numerous than his merits,

he is wicked in his deeds and liable in judgment. And behold, all the writings are full of this. For the righteous, by his righteousness which he has done, shall live. And the wicked, by his sin, shall die. And if a wicked person turns from his ways and lives. However, there is an exception to the rule, for sometimes even a righteous person perishes in his righteousness and is liable in judgment because of some minor transgression. And there is a wicked person who is vindicated in judgment because of some merit, as the Ra'an wrote:

**[18]** It is found that those who are acquitted in judgment are of two categories. One is one whose merits outweigh his transgressions, who is considered righteous before God. And even more so, a completely righteous person, without any sin or transgression at all, is acquitted by dint of the law, for "by his righteousness, which he has done, he shall live." The second is one whose transgressions outweigh his merits, who is considered wicked before God, or even completely wicked. And nevertheless, he is acquitted in judgment by dint of mercy, for the sake of some merit.

**[19]** And behold, the first division consists of the righteous and the pious. And as the Holy One, Blessed be He, watches over all His beloved ones, and His eye is upon those who fear Him, to save their souls from death. And for this reason, on the awesome Day of Judgment, when all inhabitants of the world will pass before Him, may His Name be blessed, one after another, behold, He will draw the righteous and the pious near to Him. To cause them to pass before Him first, so as to shield them from the wrath of the Holy One, Blessed be He. And whoever is more righteous in his deeds, him He will cause to pass before Him, first, first.

**[20]** This is what our Sages, of blessed memory, expounded regarding the intention of the Mishnah, "like the sons of Maron." For it is like the sons of Imrana. And as Rashi expounded, like sheep that are counted for tithing. And they emerge one after another through a narrow

opening, as they cannot exit all at once. For behold, it is known from the nature of animals that when they are confined in a pen, and when the opening is revealed before them, they hasten to go out. And if the opening is narrow, such that they cannot exit all at once, they push one another to draw themselves closer to the opening to go out. However, ultimately, who will go out first? Indeed, this is self-evident. For the healthy and strong sheep, with their strength and might, will exert themselves. They will turn right and left and strive to be the first to exit. And the weak sheep, lacking strength, will remain for last.

**[21]** And so it is on the Day of Judgment. For all beings of the world will pass before Him, blessed be His Name, one after another. And each one would desire to be the first to pass. This is like the following parable. For behold, the righteous and the pious are the mighty ones from of old. And as they said, may peace be upon them, in Berachot (fol. 17): "Hearken unto Me, O mighty of heart, who are far from righteousness." The entire world is sustained by righteousness, but they are sustained by strength... And Rashi explained: by the merit that is in their hands. And the sinners and the transgressors are the weak ones. And as Rashi explained at the end of Parashat Teitzei: "All those who are weakened after you." Those lacking strength due to their sin, for the cloud would cast them out. And so it is on the Day of Judgment. Behold, the righteous and the pious come with strength, by the power of their deeds. And as the Tosafot wrote there: For this is what the liturgical poet established in the piyyut "Zichronot" for the second day of Rosh Hashanah, which begins "Efchád." And they came "with strength unto You." And for this reason, behold, the righteous and the pious, who possess strength with might through the power of their good deeds, will strive to pass first. And each one, according to the strength of his deeds, will pass first, first. And the weak ones, lacking strength due to their sin, will pass last, last. This is the subject of the parable of the "sons of Maron" like the "sons of Imran."

**[22]** The second division is for those people whose transgressions outweigh their merits. And they are only granted mercy due to some merit. Now, although the hand of human intellect is too short to discover the Divine decree, to understand and comprehend the essence of the merit that can stand by him on the Day of Judgment, to incline his judgment towards kindness for revival. However, when ultimately a person is granted mercy, the intellect dictates that the foundation is that the person should be worthy and deserving of being shown mercy. And this is according to his preparation, his concern, and his fear of the Day of Judgment. So too will the attribute of mercy be aroused on his behalf for compassion.

**[23]** And herein lies the beginning of the matter: preparation. For one should precede himself to make preparation while there is still time. And as is the custom in the world, for whoever is caught in the entanglement of some legal matter, even one concerning monetary affairs, and how much more so concerning capital cases, then according to his fear and dread, so too from many days prior he will begin to worry about hastening a way of escape for himself from the snare of traps, so that he may be vindicated in his judgment. And how much more so is man's judgment on the awesome Day of Judgment, before the throne of the Righteous Judge. And the early ones relied on Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer and instituted blowing the Shofar from the first day of the month of Elul. And likewise, there are those who increase their recitation of Selichot and supplications from the first day of Elul. And as the Tur, Orach Chayim, Siman 581, writes all this, see there. For this reason, how exceedingly necessary it is for a person to precede himself from the first day of Elul, upon hearing the sound of the Shofar, to make some preparation. And since, due to our many sins, the heart is hardened and has become like stone and hard as flint, therefore one should endeavor to set aside times to read and contemplate books of reverence and Mussar with the stirring of the soul, so that his heart may soften and his spirit be broken from the awe of the Day

of Judgment. And each one, according to his worth, should endeavor in the quality of action and to change his ways of conduct for the better. And likewise, the request for mercy in prayer and supplications.

**[24]** This preparation, wherein a person anticipates himself, to worry many days before the Day of Judgment arrives, so that his heart may soften and his spirit may be humbled. And to instill within him the fear and dread of the Judgment, and to make some impression upon his soul, to engage in the merit of deeds and the seeking of mercy. Even if it does not suffice to tip the scales of merit over transgressions, and to merit from the side of strict justice, nevertheless, it has the power to arouse mercy from the Source of Mercy, and to incline his judgment towards kindness for revival. This is not the case if a person himself forgets his poverty, and distracts his mind throughout the entire month, and he himself does not feel or worry at all because of the Day of Judgment, which is a statute of remembrance for the visitation of every spirit and soul. Lo, there is no room, God forbid, for mercy.

**[25]** This is what our Sages, of blessed memory, further expounded concerning "like the mighty ones of Maron." For Reish Lakish said, "like the superiority of the crossroads." For behold, according to the custom of the world, in a place where a great multitude of people gathers, and all turn towards one goal to achieve their objective, as in the courtyard of the thoroughfares where a great multitude of people comes to request travel permits. And each one desires to hasten to achieve his wish first. Behold, it has been established as a fixed law and custom that whoever arrives first will achieve his objective first. And therefore, in order to maintain order, all who come will stand in one line, one after another, so that whoever arrives first will be closer to the center, to achieve the objective of his desire first.

**[26]** And so it is on the awesome Day of Judgment, when all inhabitants of the world will pass

before Him, blessed be His Name, one after another. And whoever merits to pass first, first, is a successful person, as mentioned above. And behold, not all will come together at one time to stand for judgment before the throne of the righteous Judge. For some will come early. And as soon as they hear the sound of the Shofar at the beginning of the month of Elul, they will worry and prepare themselves to stand before the throne of judgment. And thus they will engage in this preparation all the days of the month. And there are those who will delay going; days of the month will pass, and they will not pay any attention at all, until the days of the Day of Judgment approach and draw near. And there are those who will delay even further until the last day before the Day of Judgment, then they will pay attention.

**[27]** And for this reason, even if those who are early and those who are late, in relation to their circumstances, their deeds will be weighed. Nevertheless, at the time when all the inhabitants of the world pass before Him, blessed be His Name, one after another, the intellect dictates that those who are early to come, and have already prepared themselves for many days, and are waiting and anticipating being ready to stand for judgment, they will pass before Him, blessed be His Name, first. For the attribute of Mercy will clear the way for them to pass first. And moreover, when the order of judgment and justice is like earthly royalty, and it is already an established law and custom in the world, that whoever comes early will attain the goal of his desire first. And therefore, each one, according to the value of the priority of his preparation to stand before the throne of judgment, will pass before Him, blessed be His Name, first, first.

**[28]** This is what our Sages, of blessed memory, expounded. For "like the ascent of Maron" is like steps between Maron. For the path is narrow, and two cannot walk side by side. For the chasm is deep on both sides of the path. And by necessity, they are compelled to walk one after the other. Now, on such a path, who will go forward and who backward? Indeed, it is

self-evident. For whoever is prompt to arrive will go first, first. And those who are delayed in arriving will necessarily follow them according to the time of their delay in arriving. And so it is in the order of passing before Him, may His Name be blessed, on the Day of Judgment. Behold, in this manner, all who come into the world will pass before Him, one after the other. For whoever is prompt to arrive, as mentioned above, will pass first. And according to the promptness of the preparation to stand before the Throne of Judgment, so too will they pass, first, first. This is the subject of the parable of "like the ascent of Maron" as steps between Maron.

**[29]** The third division. These are those who merit through compassion, without any known merit. It is simply the will of the Blessed One to have mercy upon them, even though they are undeserving. For behold, in Berachot (folio 7a), Rabbi Yochanan said: "Three things Moshe requested from the Holy One, Blessed be He, and He granted them to him..." He requested to be shown the ways of the Holy One, Blessed be He, and He granted him... And Rabbi Meir disagrees, for Rabbi Meir said: "Two were granted to him, and one was not granted to him." As it is stated: "And I will show favor to whom I will show favor, even though he is not worthy. And I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, even though he is not worthy." And Rashi explained: "To show him His ways" - the custom of His judgments. "To whom I will show favor" - upon whom My compassion will be stirred for a moment, even though he is undeserving. See there. And behold, what was said: "And I will show favor... even though he is not worthy" - this is by His will, without any merit whatsoever. For if it were from some merit, this would not be new. Rather, it is because within the attribute of His judgments, the Blessed One, His Name, also possesses a hidden and concealed way of governance, which He did not reveal even to the master of all prophets. For sometimes His compassion is stirred for a moment, even upon one who is not worthy and undeserving.

**[30]** It is found that thus it is also on the Day

of Judgment. There are those who merit [divine favor] through mercy, because such is the will of the Blessed Name, to be gracious to them and to have compassion even though they are not deserving. And therefore, when all the inhabitants of the world pass before the Blessed Name, one after another, behold, this division too: those whom it is the will of the Blessed Name to have compassion upon, even though they are not deserving, they shall pass before the Blessed Name first.

**[31]** This is what our Sages, of blessed memory, expounded further in the intention of the Mishnah, "like the warriors of Beit David." And like the soldiers of the house of David. And as Rashi expounded, for thus they were counted, going out one after another when they went out to war. And behold, their marching order was undoubtedly according to the commander who was in charge of the army. Indeed, it was only as it arose in His will at that time. And He commanded who should go first and who should go last. And so it is in the order of presentation before Him, blessed be His Name, on the Day of Judgment, one after another. There is one division which is without discernible reason or order. Rather, according to whatever is His will, blessed be His Name. To favor and to show mercy even to one who is not worthy and not deserving. Thus they will be brought before Him first. And this is the subject of the parable of the warriors of Beit David:

**[32]** And what is more relevant to practice is the intermediate division. As our Sages, of blessed memory, stated, "Like the sons of Meron" is like the ascents of the House of Meron. And as has been explained, whoever hastens himself to come to the Day of Judgment, to prepare himself for the judgment and the verdict, so too will the Blessed Name pass before him on the Day of Judgment, first by first.

**[33]** The foundation of preparation is to awaken and stir within the heart the fear and dread of judgment and justice. For this fear and

dread does not enter a person's heart quickly, except through toil and effort. And as we wrote in the essay "Sha'arei Or" (Gates of Light), section 2, the pathways of reverence for God and the fear of His punishment are distinct and separate from other types of fear related to natural inclinations, which a person perceives with their senses without any toil or effort. Look there. Now, that which surpasses all is the desire for life. And concerning natural inclinations, even upon a remote doubt of danger to one's life, all that one possesses will be given for one's soul. However, it is not so with the spiritual pathways. Behold, a person believes that Rosh Hashanah is the Day of Judgment, on which creatures are reviewed to be remembered for life or for death. And despite all this, their senses do not perceive this fear of danger.

**[34]** This is what our Sages, of blessed memory, stated in Avodah Zarah (19a): Rabbi Alexandrei proclaimed, "Who desires life? Who desires life?" All the world came to him and said, "Give us life!" He said to them, "Who is the man who desires life... Keep your tongue from evil... Depart from evil and do good... There is no good but Torah..." And similarly, it is found in Midrash Rabbah, Parashat Metzora. It is a story about a certain peddler who used to travel through the towns near Tzipori, and he would proclaim and say, "Who wants to buy the elixir of life? I will sell it to him..." And see there that he also showed this verse: "Who is the man who desires life... Keep your tongue from evil..."

**[35]** And it would seem very perplexing. To what purpose did Rabbi Alexandrei proclaim, "Who desires life?" or the peddler who would proclaim, "Who desires to purchase the elixir of life?" And afterwards, they said to them, "It is explicitly written in Psalms, 'Who is the man who desires life...'" Who would not know this verse? What ethical teaching could there be for those who heard his words? Even when the entire world was with him, and they said, "Give us life." And he said to them, "The verse, 'Who is the man who desires life,' is known to all." And it would seem to many to be like a jest.



**[36]** Indeed, what they did was a profound counsel. To impart to them understanding and intellectual ethics. Behold, Scripture says, "Who is the man who desires life...?" And it seems, when the desire for life is very great, why would a person not fulfill all the words of Scripture, in order to find life and goodness? Indeed, it would have been possible to offer an excuse, if a person saw it empirically, that whoever guards his tongue from evil, etc., will live and prolong his days, and the wicked will not prolong his days like a shadow. Then every person would fulfill the words of Scripture for the sake of the desire for life. However, it is not so at all. For there is a righteous person who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked person who prolongs his days in his wickedness. Therefore, a person's hands may weaken from engaging in this remedy. But in truth, this is not a valid argument. For in any case, it is certain that the words of Scripture are truth. However, there are exceptional cases that are outside the general rule. And in any case, it is a very close matter. For life is in the hand of the tongue, and the Torah is a Tree of Life, in its plain meaning. And behold, in the remedies of natural ways, a person does not refrain from doing for himself, even things that are a remote possibility, and even things that are contrary to the ways of intellect.

**[37]** This is what Rabbi Alexander taught the masses regarding intellectual ethics. For when he proclaimed, "Who desires life?" the entire world flocked to him, saying, "Give us life!" And undoubtedly, they thought that he possessed some natural substance, whose tasters live, attain merit, and long life. But behold, this is great folly and foolishness. Is there, in the reality of nature, any substance that gives life, other than the Tree of Life which was in the Garden of Eden from the beginning? Likewise, the peddler who proclaimed, "Who desires to purchase the elixir of life?" Is there an elixir of life in the world? Indeed, when the desire for life is very great, man will believe even in falsehood and be led astray. And when Rabbi Alexander proclaimed, "Who desires life?" even though it was like a jest, is

it within man's power to give life? Nevertheless, you, the entire world, came and said, "Give us life!" Regarding this, he said to them, "Who is the man who desires life...?" meaning, when you err in your imagination that I possess some natural substance, you will believe in falsehood and be led astray, and you will say, "Give us life." Behold, here is life from the spiritual paths: "Who is the man who desires life...?" which is something very close. And why do you refuse to accept this remedy for the desire for life? And similarly, the peddler, when they came to buy the elixir of life from him, which is like a jest as mentioned above, he said to them, "Who is the man who desires life...?" as mentioned above.

**[38]** Indeed, even if the fear of God and the dread of His punishment are not easily perceived by human senses, nevertheless, through effort and exertion, man has the capacity to attain this fear and to establish it within his soul, just as with other forms of natural fear. As explained in my discourse there, look there. Therefore, even the dread and trepidation of the Day of Judgment of Rosh Hashanah, when man sets his heart to labor in seeking it, his labor and exertion will stand him in good stead to attain it. And this trepidation, great is its strength and might to draw one closer to His blessed service, and to change his deeds for the better. The foundation of this is the study of Mussar with emotional engagement and sensory visualization, for the power of visualization is very beneficial for Mussar.

## Kokhavei Ohr (Stars of Light) – Chapter 5

סוכבי' אור -- פרק 5

**[1]** Seek Hashem when He can be found; call to Him when He is near.

**[2]** The Rambam, may his memory be blessed, wrote at the beginning of Chapter 3 of Hilchot

Teshuvah, and this is his wording: "Each and every person has merits and transgressions. He whose merits outweigh his transgressions is righteous. And he whose transgressions outweigh his merits is wicked. Half and half is intermediate, etc. A person whose transgressions are more numerous than his merits dies immediately in his wickedness, as it is said, 'Because of your abundant transgressions, etc.' And just as they weigh, etc., so too each year, the transgressions of each person in the world are weighed against his merits on the festival of Rosh Hashanah. He who is found righteous is sealed for life. And he who is found wicked is sealed for death. And the intermediates, they are suspended until Yom Kippur. If he repented, he is sealed for life, and if not, etc." Thus far his wording. Examine there.

[3] And behold, his words are from the words of the Gemara on Rosh Hashanah (daf 16a). For they said there, "Three books are opened on Rosh Hashanah..." "The perfectly righteous are written and sealed immediately for life. The wicked are written..." "The intermediate ones are suspended and stand from Rosh Hashanah until Yom Kippur. If they merit, they are written for life; if they do not merit, [they are written] for death." See there. And behold, the Ran, may his merit protect us, wrote that from the fact that it says "intermediate ones," it implies that the "righteous" that it mentions are those whose merits outweigh their sins. And the "wicked" that it mentions are those whose sins outweigh their merits. And if so, this is a great difficulty, for how many righteous ones are written for death, and how many wicked ones are written for life? Rather, the essence of the matter is that the righteous and the wicked are mentioned in the judgment. See there.

[4] However, it is clarified from the words of the Rambam, who interprets the words of the Gemara according to their plain meaning. For the righteous are those whose merits outweigh their transgressions. And the wicked, of whom it is said, are those whose transgressions outweigh their merits. And the intermediate are

those whose deeds are balanced equally, half and half. And just as it is written, "A person whose transgressions outweigh his merits immediately dies in his wickedness," etc. And similarly, what is written, "Thus, every year, they weigh," etc. "Whoever is found to be righteous is sealed for life, and whoever is found to be wicked," etc. "And the intermediate," etc. Inevitably, the righteous, the wicked, and the intermediate are as he initially wrote: that this is one whose merits exceed his transgressions, or his transgressions exceed his merits, or half and half. And this is what is weighed, etc. And it is similarly clarified from the words of the Ra'avad in the Hasagot and the Kesef Mishneh there, that they understood the Rambam's intention in this way. Examine there.

[5] Indeed, regarding what the Rambam wrote, that the *beinonim* (intermediate individuals) have their judgment suspended until Yom Kippur. If they have performed *teshuvah* (repentance), they are sealed for life, and if not, etc. Now, what he wrote, "if they have performed *teshuvah*," etc., according to first principles, is very perplexing. For behold, a *beinoni* is one whose deeds are equally balanced between merits (*zkhuyot*) and transgressions (*avonot*). It follows that he lacks only one *mitzvah* (commandment) to tip the scale of merits over the transgressions. And if so, even if he does not perform *teshuvah* at all, he can easily be vindicated in judgment. For by means of one *mitzvah* that he performs to tip the scale of merits, he is found to be a *tzaddik* (righteous person) and is sealed for life. And this is also explained in the Gemara, Kiddushin (page 40a): "Our Rabbis taught: A person should always consider himself as if he is half guilty and half righteous. If he performs one *mitzvah*, blessed is he, for he has tipped himself to the scale of merit," etc. And examine there the commentary of Rashi, the words beginning "according to," "a person should consider himself as if he is balanced," etc. "If he performs one *mitzvah*, behold his merits are decisive, and he is found to be a *tzaddik*," etc. Behold, then, that a *beinoni*, by performing one *mitzvah*, tips the scale of merits and

is found to be a *tzaddik*, as mentioned above.

**[6]** And behold, in the words of the Gemara it is explained that the intermediate [individuals] are suspended and stand from Rosh Hashanah until Yom Kippur; if they merit, they are inscribed. For life, etc. It is possible to truly explain that what our Sages, may their memory be blessed, said, "if they merit, etc.," refers only to the fact that through one mitzvah that he performs, the scale of merits is tipped, so that he will be found righteous, as mentioned above. However, the Rambam, who wrote, "If he repented, he is sealed for life," as mentioned above, it seems very surprising. For even without repenting, he can merit in the judgment through one mitzvah that he adds until Yom Kippur to tip the scale of merits. He is found righteous and sealed for life, and like one whose merits outweigh his sins on Rosh Hashanah, even without repenting, he is righteous and sealed for life.

**[7]** Behold, it is known that besides the judgment and reckoning of a person for his transgressions and sins, behold, it is added to his iniquities. Behold, he is held accountable for the prevention of repentance, in that he does not set his heart to return to the Lord, blessed be His Name, from all his sins which he has sinned. And as it is written at the beginning of the book Sha'arei Teshuvah by our Rabbi Yonah, and this is his language: "And know that the sinner, when he delays returning from his sin, his punishment becomes very heavy for him each day. For he knows that the wrath will go out against him. And he has a refuge to flee to. And the refuge is repentance. And he stands in his rebellion, and he is in his evil, and it is in his power to exit from the upheaval. And he does not fear because of the anger and the fury. Therefore, his evil is great." Thus far his language.

**[8]** And so it is written in the book *Reishit Chochmah*, in Chapter 1 of the Gate of Repentance, and this is its language: "And since the merit of repentance is so great to atone for all that a person has done, etc., it is not fitting for

a person to be negligent in repenting. For His right hand is outstretched to receive those who return, and the gate is open forever. And whoever does not repent, his punishment is great in the World to Come. And our Sages, may their memory be blessed, likened in the Midrash on Kohelet, concerning the verse, 'And the eyes of the wicked shall fail, and escape shall perish from them' (Job 11:20), a beautiful parable regarding the matter of repentance. They said: A parable of a band of robbers who rebelled against the king. He captured them and imprisoned them. What did they do? They dug a tunnel and escaped. There was one among them who did not escape. In the morning, the king found him. He said to him, 'Fool! The tunnel was before you, and you did not escape?' Thus the Holy One, Blessed be He, said to the wicked: Repentance is before you, and you do not return. This is what is written: 'and escape shall perish from them,' etc." Thus far is the language of the book *Reishit Chochmah*.

**[9]** One should further contemplate the punishment of one who delays in returning in repentance. From what our Sages, may their memory be blessed, stated in Yevamot (fol. 48a): "Why [did they not enter the Land of Israel]?" Some say, "Because they delayed themselves from entering under the wings of the Divine Presence." Rabbi Abbahu said, "What is the verse? 'The Lord will repay your deeds... which you came to take refuge.'" And Rashi explained, "Which you came" means "that you hurried and did not delay." From this, one can learn how much a person needs to hasten to return in repentance before Him, blessed be His Name. For behold, a Noahide has no specific obligation to bring himself under the yoke of Torah and commandments. And even so, we state, "Why [did they not enter]?" "Because they delayed." And how much more so for Israel, who have already accepted the Torah and the commandments upon themselves. Behold, one who has strayed from the Torah of the Lord and His commandments, and has distanced himself from Him, blessed be His Name, how greatly his punishment will be intensified if he delays in return-

ing to the Lord, and tarries in entering under the wings of the Divine Presence and drawing near to Him, blessed be His Name.

**[10]** Indeed, although the obligation to repent is perpetually incumbent upon a person, and the sinner, when he delays his return from his sin, his punishment becomes exceedingly heavy each day, as written in the book *Sha'arei Teshuvah* by our Rabbi Yonah, and as mentioned above. However, the obligation to return before Him, blessed be His Name, is even greater during the days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, and even more so on Yom Kippur itself. For there is a great distinction between the obligation of repentance incumbent upon a person throughout the days of the year, and the obligation incumbent upon a person to repent during these days, and even more so on Yom Kippur, for several reasons, as will be explained.

**[11]** A) Although the obligation of *teshuvah* (repentance) is intellectually understood, and as it is explained in the Midrash, so said the Holy One, Blessed be He, to the wicked: "Repentance is before you, and you do not return." Nevertheless, throughout the rest of the days of the year, there is no specific positive commandment (*mitzvah aseh*) for *teshuvah*. However, on Yom Kippur, it is a positive commandment from the Torah to return through *teshuvah*. As it is written in the book *Sha'arei Teshuvah* by our Rabbi Yonah, the second gate, the path of *hei* (the letter H). And this is his wording: "And it is a positive commandment from the Torah to awaken a person's spirit to return through *teshuvah* on Yom Kippur, as it is said, 'From all your sins before the Lord you shall be purified.' Therefore, the verse warned us that we should be purified before the Lord through our *teshuvah*. And He will atone for us on this day to purify us." Thus far his words. And similarly, the Rambam, may his memory be for a blessing, wrote in Chapter 2 of *Hilchot Teshuvah*, and this is his wording: "Yom Kippur is a time of *teshuvah* for all, for the individual and for the community. And it is an end of forgiveness and pardon for Israel. Therefore, all are obligated to perform

*teshuvah* and confess on Yom Kippur." Thus far his words.

And it is known that not all commandments are of equal weight. And it is self-evident that this positive commandment of *teshuvah* excels in its quality above all else. And likewise, the severity of its nullification is great. And in any case, we learn from this that one who did not perform *teshuvah* even on Yom Kippur, his punishment is doubled and redoubled, for he has also nullified the great positive commandment, "Before the Lord you shall be purified."

**[12]** It is known that the reward for the commandments is assessed according to the difficulty of their observance. As our Sages, may their memory be blessed, stated in Avot, Chapter 5: "According to the pain, so is the reward." Likewise, the punishment for the neglect of commandments will also be calculated according to the weight of the service required for the observance of the commandment. For the easier it is to fulfill a commandment, the greater is the sin of its neglect. This is explained in the Gemara, Menachot (fol. 43b): "It was taught: Rabbi Meir used to say, the punishment for *lavan* [white] is greater than the punishment for *techelet* [a specific blue dye]." The Gemara then provides an analogy to a king, etc. (See there). The reason for this is that since the commandment of *lavan* is easier to fulfill than that of *techelet*, its punishment is greater.

Now, concerning the punishment of the sinner who delays returning from his sin, our Sages, may their memory be blessed, in Midrash Rabbah, offered an analogy: To a band of robbers who rebelled against the king. They were captured and imprisoned. What did they do? They dug a tunnel, etc. The king said to the foolish one, "A tunnel was before you, and you did not escape?" So the Holy One, Blessed be He, says to the wicked: "Repentance was before you, and you did not return," as mentioned above. This is self-evident. For this too depends on the weight of the service involved in the ways of repentance, until his repentance reaches acceptance before Him, may His Name be blessed.

**[13]** And behold, in the Gemara Rosh Hashanah (daf 18 and Yevamot daf 49), [the Sages] juxtaposed verses. It is written: "Who is like the Lord our God, whenever we call upon Him?" (Deuteronomy 4:7). And it is written: "Seek the Lord while He may be found" (Isaiah 55:6). And Rashi explains, the implication is that He is not found [at all times]. So far his words. And we learn: "This applies to an individual, and this applies to a community." (Rosh Hashanah 18a). And it is challenged: "An individual, when is He found?" (Rosh Hashanah 18a). Ravah bar Avuha said: "This refers to the Ten Days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur." (Rosh Hashanah 18a). And Rashi explains: "And an individual, when is He found for him? As it is written, 'while He may be found.'" So far his words. And the Rambam, may his memory be for a blessing, wrote in Chapter 2 of Hilchot Teshuvah, and this is his wording: "Even though repentance and supplication are beneficial for the entire world, during the Ten Days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, it is especially beneficial and is accepted immediately. As it is said: 'Seek the Lord while He may be found.'" So far his words.

**[14]** It is explained that the opportune time for a person to repent is during the days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. This is because the Holy One, Blessed be He, is present and close at that time. Therefore, the paths of repentance are easier for a person then. For repentance and supplication are most beautiful and are immediately accepted at that time. As the prophet said, "Seek the Lord when He may be found; call upon Him when He is near." This is not the case throughout the rest of the year, for then the service of the paths of repentance becomes burdensome for a person, until his repentance is accepted favorably before His throne of glory, may His Name be blessed. This is because throughout the year, the Holy One, Blessed be He, is not present and close to the person, and one must labor more diligently in the paths of repentance. Therefore, one who does not repent during these days, when the Holy One, Blessed be He, is present and close

and repentance is immediately accepted, and even on Yom Kippur, which is a time of repentance for all, and the end of forgiveness and pardon for Israel, his transgression becomes greater and his sin heavier.

**[15]** Let us gain understanding and reflect further. On the great obligation of *teshuvah* (repentance) during these days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. To return before God, blessed be His Name, to regret one's transgressions. And to ask before Him, blessed be His Name, for absolution and forgiveness. For behold, in the Gemara, Yoma (fol. 87a), it is stated: When Rabbi Zeira had an issue with someone, he would go and study before him, and present himself to him, so that the matter would leave his mind. Rav had an issue with a certain butcher. He did not go before him on the eve of Yom Kippur. He said, "I will go to appease him." Rav Huna encountered him. He said to him, "Where are you going, master?" He said to him, "To appease so-and-so." He said, "Father is going to kill a soul." He went and stood over him. He was sitting and splitting a head. He raised his eyes and saw him. He said to him, "Father, you go; I have no issue with you." While he was splitting the head, a bone slipped and struck him on the skull, and he killed him. Thus far the language of the Gemara. And Rashi explained: "He presents himself before the one who sinned against him, perhaps he will ask for forgiveness from him, and he will forgive him." "He went and studied." "He transgressed and studied." And from three times, many times. "With the butcher." The butcher sinned against him. "Rav was going to kill a soul." "Now he is punishing him with death." "He broke the head." "He breaks the bones of the head of an animal." "Its skull was split." Thus far his language.

**[16]** And one must understand from where this source and root stems. Regarding this path of piety that Rav and Rabbi Zeira took. For according to the law, one who has offended his fellow, even with words, must go and appease him. And if he is not appeased the first time, he must go a second and a third time. However,

the one who forgives should not be cruel in refusing to forgive. As explained in the Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim, Siman 606, see there. Indeed, what Rav and Rabbi Zeira did was that if someone had sinned against them, they did not go to them to appease them and ask for forgiveness. Rather, they themselves would initiate and approach the sinners who had sinned against them. So that when they would be close to the place of the sinner, perhaps when the sinner saw them and would not need to exert himself, it is possible the sinner would consider asking them for forgiveness. How great and how awesome is this path of piety! And where is the source and root for this? And also, what Rav did by going to the butcher – at first glance, it also seems like a degradation of Rav's Torah honor.

**[17]** Indeed, it appears that the foundation of these ways of piety is from the attributes of the Holy One, Blessed be He. For so does His Name, Blessed be He, conduct Himself with this piety towards Israel. And just as it is a positive commandment to cleave to His attributes, Blessed be His Name, therefore Rabbi and Rabbi Zeira also conducted themselves in the ways of this attribute.

**[18]** Indeed, I have brought above the words of the Rambam, may his memory be for a blessing, which he wrote in Chapter 2 of Hilchot Teshuvah, in this language: "Although repentance and supplication are beneficial always, during the ten days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, they are especially beneficial and are immediately accepted, as it is said, 'Seek God when He may be found.'" Thus far his words.

And one must understand, seeing that repentance and supplication are beneficial always, for the gates of repentance are not locked, and there is nothing that stands before repentance, what is truly the reason for this matter, that during these days the Holy One, Blessed be He, is more present and closer than at any other time of the year? And if it is in order to make the ways of repentance easier for a person during these days, because He, may His Name be blessed,

is present and close, then repentance and supplication are especially beneficial and are immediately accepted.

However, it is surprising: what is the significance of this, if the sinner who has strayed from the Torah of God and His commandments, and has rebelled against His will, may His Name be blessed, must exert himself and labor more with the ways of repentance until his repentance is accepted before Him, may His Name be blessed?

**[19]** Indeed, we see in the foundation of the matter that this is from the attribute of His blessed Name's compassion and loving-kindness. And this is the matter: Because when the Holy One, Blessed be He, is not found [accessible], then the labor of the ways of repentance becomes burdensome before a person, until his repentance is accepted favorably before His blessed Name's throne of glory. And He, blessed be His Name, knows our inclination is only evil all day. And with this, the person's own nature, which is too much for him. And therefore, lest the sinner be unwilling to trouble himself greatly, to go far, and to toil in the ways of repentance. And thus he will retreat and refrain from doing repentance, to return before Him, blessed be His Name, and to ask for pardon and forgiveness. And when the Holy One, Blessed be He, has compassion on the soul of the sinner, lest he perish in his wickedness. And for this reason, in these days, from Rosh Hashanah until Yom Kippur, which is before the day when repentance is obligatory for a person, which is a time of repentance for all and an end of pardon and forgiveness for Israel, the Holy One, Blessed be He, behaves with loving-kindness, and He makes Himself found and close to the person. And thus, by His being found and by His being close, and the repentance is accepted immediately, certainly the sinner will give heed to his heart to return with complete repentance before Him, blessed be His Name, and to ask for pardon and forgiveness for his transgressions.

**[20]** It is found that the ways of piety of Rav and Rabbi Zeira, who presented themselves to those who had sinned against them and drew near to them, were so that perhaps by being close to the place of the sinner, the sinner would take it to heart to ask them for forgiveness and pardon. This is truly the attribute of the Holy One, Blessed be He. For so does His Name, Blessed be He, conduct Himself with this attribute of piety towards the sinner. For when a person sins before Him, Blessed be His Name, even though He, Blessed be His Name, is not found and is not near, the obligation is upon the person to labor greatly with the ways of repentance until his repentance is accepted before Him, Blessed be His Name, even when He is distant. Indeed, lest the sinner not wish to trouble himself greatly and refrain from returning, as mentioned above, therefore the Holy One, Blessed be He, makes Himself found and near to the person, so that by His being found and by His being near, the sinner will take it to heart to return in repentance and to ask from Him, Blessed be His Name, for forgiveness and pardon. And therefore, Rav and Rabbi Zeira also presented themselves to those who had sinned against them, to cleave to His attributes, Blessed be His Name.

**[21]** From this, we shall gain understanding, wisdom, and ethical instruction. Regarding the obligation of repentance during these days, and even on Yom Kippur itself, when we contemplate the ultimate outcome for the butcher, what befell him. For he was punished with a very severe punishment. For indeed, if the Rabbi had not gone to the butcher, even if the butcher had refrained from going to the Rabbi to appease him and ask for his forgiveness, or even if he had happened to encounter the Rabbi and did not ask for his forgiveness, in any of these cases, the butcher certainly would not have been punished with such a severe punishment. However, it was due to the Rabbi's piety and humility in going and presenting himself to the butcher that he encountered him. And as Rabbi Huna said, "My father went to kill himself." For indeed, according to the ways of reason, when the butcher

saw the Rabbi before him, he should have been awestruck by this and fallen at the Rabbi's feet and asked for his forgiveness. However, when the butcher hardened his neck and stood in his rebellion, and did not ask for his forgiveness, therefore the butcher was severely punished, for his evasion caused his downfall and his destruction.

**[22]** And so it is written in the *Chiddushei Maharsha* that the butcher was punished because he sinned against the Rabbi and should have appeased him. However, what he wrote there further, that he also showed disrespect to the Rabbi by calling him by his name, is not correct. For Rabbi Yochanan said, "Abba is going to kill himself." And how would Rabbi Yochanan have known that the butcher would still call the Rabbi by his name? Furthermore, in *Tosafot Yeshanim* it is written that "Abba" was a form of respect, like "My father, my father, the chariot of Israel." For if not, how would Rabbi Yochanan, his student, have called his teacher by his name? Examine there. And necessarily, the main point is that the butcher was punished because the Rabbi went to him, and despite all this, he hardened his heart and stood in his rebellion and did not appease the Rabbi. And this is what Rabbi Yochanan said, "Abba is going to kill himself," because he thought it was a likely possibility that the butcher would stand in his rebellion and not seek forgiveness from the Rabbi.

**[23]** And now, after it has already been clarified that the ways of piety of Rav and Rabbi Zeira, who presented themselves to those who had sinned against them and drew near to them, this is truly the attribute of the Holy One, Blessed be He. For so He, may His Name be blessed, conducts Himself with this attribute during the days of repentance, to be found and close to man. So that by His being found and by His being close, man will set his heart to return before Him, may His Name be blessed, to regret his transgressions and to seek pardon and forgiveness, as mentioned above.

**[24]** It is found that if a person nevertheless

hardens his heart, and strengthens his spirit, and refrains from returning to Him, blessed be His Name, even on the Day of Atonement, which is the end of forgiveness and pardon for Israel, he is indeed making a void, like the action of the butcher before the master. And behold, he is, Heaven forbid, returning a word before the Holy One, blessed be He, Who is present and close to him. As the butcher said to the master, "Go away from me; I have no need of you." And if the sin of the butcher against the master is so great, and how much more so if a mortal being were to do such a thing against the King of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He, how heavy is his sin, and how great is his guilt, and how terrible will be his punishment, Heaven forbid. How awesome is this thought for one who delves deeply into it.

**[25]** This is what the prophet said: "Seek the Lord when He may be found; call upon Him when He is near. Let the wicked forsake their way, and the unrighteous their thoughts; and let them return to the Lord, and He will have compassion on them, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon." (Isaiah 55:6-7)

Our Sages, may their memory be blessed, said that these are the days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. The intention is not to teach that on these days, when the Holy One, Blessed be He, is present and near, they are most suitable for repentance and supplication. And therefore, it is good and beautiful then to seek the Lord and for the wicked to forsake their way.

Rather, the intention is that on these days, when He is present and near, the obligation upon man to seek the Lord and for the wicked to forsake their way becomes greater. For it is the attribute of mercy and kindness of the Holy One, Blessed be He, that on these days He is present and near to man, so that because He is near, man will take it to heart to return to Him, may His Name be blessed.

This can turn into a great burden and stumbling block of sin for man, if man refrains from return-

ing in repentance despite all this. This is like the deed of the butcher with the great one, as mentioned above. And this is what was said: "Seek the Lord when He may be found." For the obligation is upon you to seek the Lord when He is present and near, as mentioned above.

**[26]** And from this, we can gain understanding to comprehend the words of the Rambam, may his memory be for a blessing. What he wrote: "And the intermediate [person] has their judgment suspended until Yom Kippur. If they have repented, they are sealed for life, and if not, etc., as mentioned above." This phrasing, "If they have repented, etc.," at first glance appears very perplexing. For indeed, an intermediate person is one whose deeds are balanced. And if so, even without repenting, they could merit in the judgment. If they merely add one mitzvah to tip the scales of merit, they are found to be righteous and sealed for life. And it is like one who is found to be righteous on Rosh Hashanah, whose merits outweigh their transgressions; even without repenting for their transgressions, they are sealed for life.

**[27]** Indeed, in accordance with what was mentioned above, his words will be understood clearly. For the distinction between the righteous (tzadik) and the intermediate (beinoni) is the time of judgment and decree. For the righteous person merits in the judgment on Rosh Hashanah. And the intermediate person remains suspended, and their final decree is on Yom Kippur. For the essence of Rosh Hashanah is merely the day of judgment and decree. However, on Rosh Hashanah, there is not yet a greater obligation of repentance upon a person than at any other time of the year. And even though the day has already been sanctified, and the Holy One, Blessed be He, is present and close, as mentioned above. Nevertheless, there is still time before Him to repent until Yom Kippur. And therefore, one who is found to be righteous on Rosh Hashanah, whose merits outweigh his transgressions, merits in the judgment and is sealed for life. And even if he does not subsequently repent on Yom Kippur as well, he



has already merited in the judgment.

**[28]** However, one who is a *beinoni* (intermediate person) on Rosh Hashanah, whose deeds are balanced, cannot merit acquittal in the judgment. He remains suspended, and his final verdict is determined on Yom Kippur. By then, the obligation of *teshuvah* (repentance) has arrived, as a positive commandment from "Before Hashem, you shall be purified" (Leviticus 16:30). Thus, one who has not repented even on this day, Yom Kippur, which is a time of *teshuvah* for all and an end of atonement and forgiveness for Israel, and when the Holy One, Blessed be He, is present and near, as mentioned above – behold, the prevention of *teshuvah* alone on this holy day is a very great and terrible sin, in addition to all his transgressions. And the Rambam has already written in Chapter 3 of the Laws of *Teshuvah* that the weighing of merits against transgressions is not according to number but according to their magnitude, etc. There is a transgression that is equivalent to many merits, as it is said, "and one sinner destroys much good" (Ecclesiastes 9:18).

**[29]** And for this reason, behold, the judgment of the intermediate person is finalized on the Day of Atonement. If he does not perform *teshuvah* (repentance), it will not benefit him to add even one *mitzvah* (commandment) to tip the scales of merit. For in opposition to this, behold, the great transgression of preventing *teshuvah* on this day outweighs the scales of transgressions. And who knows how heavy its weight is, against how many, many commandments without number. This is what the Rambam wrote: "And the intermediate person, his judgment is suspended until the Day of Atonement. If he performed *teshuvah*, he is sealed for life, and if not, etc." For since his judgment is finalized on the Day of Atonement, there is no wisdom and no counsel to merit in the judgment by adding any *mitzvah* or *mitzvot*. For on this day, *teshuvah* is the one thing. If he performed *teshuvah*, he is sealed for life, as mentioned above.

**[30]** And behold, the Ra'an wrote that what our

Sages, may their memory be blessed, said regarding the righteous, the wicked, and the intermediate, refers to the judgment. Those individuals who merit in the judgment due to some merit are called completely righteous here, for they are completely righteous in this judgment, even if their transgressions outnumber their merits. Similarly, those who are judged and found liable in the judgment, even due to a minor transgression they committed, are called wicked in relation to this judgment. And the intermediate are those individuals whose judgment is examined and weighed from Rosh Hashanah, and they remain suspended until they tip the scales themselves towards merit or liability from Rosh Hashanah until Yom Kippur. Thus is his language. And behold, what he wrote, "until they tip the scales themselves towards merit," this too is due to some merit that is added to them from Rosh Hashanah until Yom Kippur. For just as a wicked person can merit in the judgment on Rosh Hashanah because of some merit, so too the intermediate, whose judgment is examined and weighed from Rosh Hashanah and remains suspended until Yom Kippur, can merit in the judgment from Rosh Hashanah until Yom Kippur because of some merit.

**[31]** Indeed, according to what has been mentioned above, it appears that there is a great difference between them. For the essence of the merit that suffices for a person to be acquitted in judgment on Rosh Hashanah, it may be that such merit will not suffice for him, if he is a *beinoni* (intermediate person), to be acquitted in judgment on Yom Kippur. For behold, on Rosh Hashanah, the obligation of *teshuvah* (repentance) has not yet fallen upon the person any more than throughout the entire year. However, one who is on Rosh Hashanah a *beinoni* in judgment, whose sentence is balanced and is suspended and pending until Yom Kippur, then the obligation of *teshuvah* has already fallen upon him. And if he refrains from returning through *teshuvah* even on this day, behold, the prevention of *teshuvah* will also be an addition to his sins. And although, despite all this, there is a possibility to be acquitted in judgment because

of some merit, indeed, who knows the essence of the merit that is required then?

**[32]** After these matters and this truth, one must contemplate two things. First, how necessary it is for a person to precede himself in caring for his soul while there is still time, in the days of Elul, before Rosh Hashanah. To occupy himself with the skill of action, to improve his ways and deeds, and to be laden with Torah and Mitzvot, so that he may merit in the judgment on the day of Rosh Hashanah, as mentioned above.

**[33]** Second. For it is not for man to know his judgment and his decree. And perhaps he is among the *beinonim* (intermediate individuals) and his decree has not been finalized on Rosh Hashanah. And it is suspended and pending until Yom Kippur. And therefore, one must engage in the ways of *teshuvah* (repentance) with all one's ability. For how awesome is the matter that the Rambam wrote: "And the *beinonim*, it suspends it until Yom Kippur; if he performed *teshuvah*, he is sealed for life." Behold, even one who is found to be righteous on Rosh Hashanah – meaning his merits slightly outweigh his transgressions – even without performing this *teshuvah*, he merits in the judgment and is sealed for life. Nevertheless, concerning the *beinoni*, the matter was not suspended based on whether he was found righteous until Yom Kippur. That is to say, he would add some commandment to tip the scales of merit. Rather, he wrote: "if he performed *teshuvah*, he is sealed for life," as mentioned above. This is because the *beinoni*'s final decree is on Yom Kippur, which is a time of *teshuvah* for all, and an end of forgiveness and pardon for Israel. And the Holy One, Blessed be He, is present and near. And if he refrains even then from performing *teshuvah*, behold, he is acting like the butcher with the great one, as mentioned above. And therefore, it is difficult to fill the deficiency of refraining from *teshuvah* with added commandments. And there is no counsel except to perform *teshuvah*, as mentioned above.

## Kokhavei Ohr (Stars of Light) – Chapter 6

כוכבי אור -- פרק 6

**[1]** For this commandment which I command you today is not beyond you, nor is it far away. For the matter is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart, to do it. (Deuteronomy 30:11-14)

**[2]** The Ramban, may his memory be for a blessing, wrote in his commentary on the Torah: "For this commandment is the *teshuvah* (repentance) mentioned there in the portion. 'And you shall return it to your heart.' And 'you shall return unto the LORD your God.' For the matter is not wondrous and distant from you. Rather, it is very close to you to do it at all times and at every hour. And this is the meaning of 'in your mouth and in your heart to do it' (Deuteronomy 30:14), that they confess their sin and the sin of their fathers with their mouths, and they return with their hearts unto the LORD, and they accept upon themselves the Torah for generations.' Thus far his words, see there. And in the book *Reishit Chochmah*, Chapter 1, from the Gate of Repentance, he brought the words of the aforementioned Ramban, that this commandment is *teshuvah*. And he wrote, may his memory be for a blessing: 'And in my opinion, the verse 'for the matter is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart to do it' refers to: in your mouth, the confession of matters that need to be confessed; and in your heart, the acceptance of *teshuvah* in one's heart and the abandonment of sin, etc.' See there."

**[3]** And behold, it is known that the fundamentals of repentance are these: forsaking the sin and acceptance for the future, and likewise, regret for the past. And according to this, one must say: that regret is included within the category of confession, as it is written, "with your mouth." For whoever confesses, certainly he regrets. And forsaking the sin is included in what

is written, "and in your heart," meaning the acceptance in the heart. However, despite all this, there is a need for a reason why the Scripture detailed confession and acceptance in the heart, and not the fundamental aspect, which is regret. And likewise, not the fundamental aspect of forsaking the sin.

**[4]** Furthermore, from the simplicity of the verse: "For the matter is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart, to do it." It appears that repentance is a very easy matter, since it is only in your mouth and in your heart. However, is it not known how arduous this service of the ways of repentance is? For "let the wicked forsake his way, and the man of iniquity his thoughts." And to find solace for what one has sinned. And how much more so for one who has sinned greatly, how difficult it is to conquer his inclination and abandon his evil way.

**[5]** Indeed, it appears that the verse, "For the matter is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart, to do it," speaks truly only of the components of repentance concerning confession and acceptance in the heart. It does not at all encompass the principal matter of abandoning the sin and regret. And likewise, that repentance is truly a very easy matter.

**[6]** Behold, the foundation of repentance. As our Sages, may their memory be blessed, stated in Pesachim (fol. 54a): "For this is among the seven things that were created before the world was created." Its foundation is to be forgiveness for sinners and pardon for transgressors. And this is the fundamental benefit of repentance. And as it is written at the beginning of the book *Sha'arei Teshuvah* by our Rabbi Yonah, and this is his wording: "Among the kindnesses that the Holy One, blessed be He, has bestowed upon His creatures, for He prepared for them a path to ascend from the pit of their deeds, and to flee from the terror of their transgressions, to save their souls from destruction, and to turn away His wrath from them. And He taught them and warned them to return to Him, should they sin against Him, because of His great goodness

and uprightness. For He knew their inclination, as it is said: 'Good and upright is the Lord; therefore He teaches sinners the way.' And even if they have greatly transgressed and rebelled, and acted like treacherous traitors, He has not closed the doors of repentance before them, as it is said [Deuteronomy 30:2] '...and you shall return to the Lord your God...' (See there).

**[7]** Indeed, the goodness and kindness of the attribute of *teshuvah* (repentance) to pardon and forgive those who return from transgression surpasses all else. For were it not for the attribute of *teshuvah*, behold, anyone who sinned would have their iniquity inscribed forever, and their sin would not be erased. And behold, as is known, the punishment for sin is exceedingly awesome and terrible. And as Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman (may his memory be for a blessing) wrote in *Sha'ar HaGemul*, see there. Therefore, since there is no righteous person on earth who does good and does not sin, every person would be destined for Sheol and the pit. And even more so, one who has multiplied transgression and rebellion, and has already laid down paths of sin and transgression, would be compelled to bear and suffer very evil and terrible judgments, to be refined like the refining of silver in the furnaces of Sheol. Now, through the attribute of *teshuvah*, behold, it is in the hand of each one to shake off all their iniquities.

**[8]** Indeed, what does the Holy One, Blessed be He, demand of man in exchange for the great favor of the forgiveness of sin? And what is repentance, by virtue of which He will forgive and abundantly pardon? Let us contemplate the words of the Rambam, may his memory be for a blessing, in Chapter 2 of the Laws of Repentance. For all his words on repentance are words of Halakha (Jewish law), and this is his wording there: "And what is repentance? That the sinner forsake his sin and remove it from his thoughts, and resolve in his heart not to do it again, as it is said, 'Let the wicked forsake his way...' (Isaiah 55:7). And likewise, he should regret what has passed, as it is said, 'For after I turned, I regretted' (Jeremiah 31:19). And

the Knower of secrets should testify concerning him that he will never return to this sin, as it is said... And one must confess with his lips and state these matters that he has resolved in his heart."

**[9]** And behold, the Rambam here considers four things. One: forsaking the sin. Two: he resolves in his heart not to do it again. Three: and thus he will console himself for what has passed. Four: and it is necessary to confess with his lips, etc.

**[10]** And truly, they are two that are four. For to the abandonment of the sin is also attributed the acceptance for the future. That he will resolve in his heart that he will not do it again. For even if the sinner abandons his sin, and will not sin anymore, behold, as long as he does not accept upon himself in his heart, also for the future, that he will not return to this sin, and the Knower of secrets will testify concerning him that he will not return to this sin forever, this is not repentance. And his transgression will not be forgiven, even if he does not return to this sin anymore.

**[11]** And similarly, concerning the essence of regret, confession should also be related. For along with the essence of regret, there is also a need for verbal confession, to confess with one's lips. And behold, even though confession encompasses other matters as well, as the Rambam wrote at the beginning of the Laws of Repentance, nevertheless, confession should be related to regret. For behold, our Sages, of blessed memory, said in Yoma (folio 87a), "For surely we have sinned" is the essence of confession. See there. And similarly, it is written in the book Sha'arei Teshuvah by our Rabbi Yonah, what he wrote: "One who confesses and abandons [the sin] will be forgiven." For regret and confession are included in "confesses." For one who confesses is one who regrets. See there.

**[12]** And behold, there are two fundamental principles of repentance. These are regret and, moreover, the abandonment of sin. This is not

a simple matter, for the service is arduous: to conquer one's inclination, to abandon one's evil path, and to observe all the Torah and the commandment. Indeed, the two particulars that relate to them, namely, confession of deeds and the resolution for the future not to sin again, are simple matters. For after one abandons his sin and regrets his transgression, it becomes easier for him to make the resolution for the future and to confess with his lips, as is understood.

**[13]** Indeed, when we gain insight and comprehend with understanding, we will find that repentance is always a very simple matter. For even the two fundamental principles of repentance, the abandonment of sin and regret, are not considered at all a weighty matter in the ways of repentance. This is because they are not to be attributed at all to the account of repentance, whose foundation is the forgiveness of sins and transgressions. For the abandonment of sin is not something that stems from the attribute of repentance which the Holy One, Blessed be He, created in His world, to accept those who return and to forgive and pardon those who have strayed. For even if the attribute of repentance did not exist in the world at all, and the Holy One, Blessed be He, did not forgive and pardon those who return, the sinner would nevertheless be compelled to abstain from his sins and to guard and fulfill all the Torah and the commandment.

**[14]** The matter is true, for the prophet said: "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the man of iniquity his thoughts; and let him return unto the LORD, and He will have compassion upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon." (Isaiah 55:7).

But is it only for this reason that the wicked forsakes his way? Is it solely because He abundantly pardons? If the Holy One, Blessed be He, did not forgive and pardon, would the wicked have no need to forsake his way? Would he have permission to be wicked, to heap transgression upon sin, and to walk in the stubbornness of his heart forever?

Is it not known that for every sin and iniquity,

man will be punished with a very severe and bitter punishment, surpassing all the sufferings of this world? Even if his days were as the days of a tree, or even if man lived a thousand years and sinned in all of them, behold, God will bring to judgment the count of all his deeds, not one thing missing. And the Holy One, Blessed be He, will not leave even a minor sin unpunished.

It is found, therefore, that even if the principle of repentance did not exist in the world at all, to provide forgiveness for sinners, the sinner would still be compelled to forsake his way, lest he perish in his wickedness. And because there was no remedy for the past, would he abandon his soul to the grave also for the future?

Indeed, if the sinner is compelled to forsake his way, as mentioned above, nevertheless, the Holy One, Blessed be He, in His compassion, along with the forsaking of sin, accepts the penitent and abundantly pardons iniquities and sins that have already been committed, sinned, and transgressed. And in any case, we cannot attribute repentance as being burdensome because of the forsaking of sin, seeing that the forsaking of sin is something absolutely necessary for man, even without the foundation of repentance.

**[15]** And so it is the foundation of regret. This is not an issue that arises from the power of repentance. For behold, regret is from the ways of intellect, drawn from the power of contemplation. And as it is written in the book *Sha'arei Teshuvah* (Gates of Repentance) by our Rabbi Yonah, and this is his language: "The first principle is regret. His heart will understand that it is evil and bitter that he has forsaken God. And he will bring to his heart that there is punishment, vengeance, and recompense for transgression, etc. And he will say in his heart, 'What have I done?' etc. And I did not fear admonishment for transgression and from the evil judgments, etc." (See there). Now, if the attribute of repentance did not exist in the world to forgive and pardon transgressors, this reckoning would not be before a person's eyes, to regret his evil deeds and to say in his heart, "What have I done? How did

I not fear admonishment for transgression and from the evil judgments?" And perhaps even with greater intensity he would regret his transgressions if he thought that he was irrevocably corrupted, unable to be repaired, and that he was also despairing of hope of being saved from the flames of Gehenna. And even more so, after the abandonment of sin is a necessity for man, as mentioned above, it follows that when he abandons his sin, to turn from evil and do good, he would certainly regret the past.

**[16]** Indeed, the matters that follow stem solely from the power of repentance. These are the two particulars of repentance, relating to regret and abandonment of sin. That is, the acceptance for the future, and the confession with one's lips. For these are additional matters for the penitent, by divine command, arising only from the foundation of repentance.

**[17]** The acceptance in the heart for the future. This is the essence of abandoning sin. Even if the attribute of repentance, which involves the atonement of transgression, did not exist at all, the sinner would still be compelled to abandon his sin, as mentioned above. However, he would have no need to accept any commitment for the future, other than to be vigilant at all times against every sin and transgression. Indeed, with the attribute of repentance that the Holy One, Blessed be He, has prepared for the sinner, to forgive and pardon those who have turned from iniquity, it is a condition of repentance that it is not enough that the sinner abandons his way and ceases to sin further. Rather, he is obligated to accept in his heart also for the future, and to resolve in his heart that he will not do it again. And He Who knows the hidden things will testify on his behalf that he will never return to this sin.

**[18]** And likewise, regret. Behold, the essence of regret. Even if the attribute of repentance, which is the atonement of sin, did not exist at all, one would still regret his evil deeds. For it is evil and bitter to have forsaken the Lord, as mentioned above. However, he would not con-

fess his transgressions. But with the attribute of repentance to forgive and pardon those who have turned from transgression, the Holy One, blessed be He, commanded the sinner, when he turns from his sin, to also confess with his lips, and this is a positive commandment. And as the Rambam wrote in Chapter 1 of the Laws of Repentance, and this is his wording: "All the commandments in the Torah, whether positive or negative, if a person transgressed one of them, etc., when he repents and turns from his sin, he is obligated to confess, etc., as it is said, 'When either man or woman commits any sin, etc., they shall confess their sin which they have done.' This is the confession of words. This confession is a positive commandment, etc." Thus far his words, examine there.

**[19]** And from all that has been mentioned above, it is found that the essence of repentance is a very simple matter. For behold, the two fundamental principles of repentance are the abandonment of sin and regret. Although it is indeed a difficult matter to conquer one's inclination and abandon one's path, this is not specifically due to the foundation of repentance. For even if the attribute of repentance did not exist in the world at all, to forgive and pardon those who have transgressed, the abandonment of sin would still be a necessary matter for a person, lest they be lost in their wickedness. And if so, it is not possible to say that repentance is a difficult matter because of the abandonment of sin. Likewise, regret has no connection to the foundation of repentance, which is the remission of sin. For even apart from repentance, one would regret their transgressions, after their heart understands that there is a recompense and retribution for sin. And even more so, one would regret it, if they were also despairing of hope of being saved from punishment.

**[20]** Indeed, the two particulars of repentance, which relate to regret and abandonment of sin, are the confession of deeds. And likewise, the acceptance in the heart not to sin again. These come by the command of the Omnipresent only by the power of the foundation of repentance,

as mentioned above. However, behold, they are truly easy. For after the sinner is compelled to abandon his sin in any case, as mentioned above, and likewise to regret his transgression, it is again an easy matter for him to accept upon himself for the future, to resolve in his heart not to do it again, and likewise to confess also with his lips.

**[21]** This is what the verse states: "For this commandment which I command you today, it is not hidden from you, nor is it far away," etc. For the matter is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart, to do it. And according to what was mentioned above, it will be explained. For in your mouth, it is only confession of words. And similarly, in your heart, it is only acceptance in the heart. And this is because the verse speaks from the foundation of *teshuvah* (repentance) for the atonement of sin. Behold, the abandonment of sin and regret. This is not a matter that is only from the power of *teshuvah*. For even without the attribute of *teshuvah* to accept the penitent, and to grant forgiveness and pardon for their transgression, the abandonment of sin would also have been a necessary matter for man. And similarly, regret, as mentioned above.

**[22]** Indeed, what the Holy One, Blessed be He, demands of the sinner and commanded him, is solely by virtue of the attribute of *teshuvah* (repentance). And this is confession of deeds and acceptance in the heart. This is truly a very simple matter, as mentioned above. And this is what is said: "For the matter is very close to you." For what you need to do, solely by the power of *teshuvah* for the purpose of atonement for sin, is very close to you. And it is easy for you to do it, for it is only with your mouth and in your heart to do it. This means only confession of deeds, and the acceptance for the future, as mentioned above.

**[23]** From the output of our words, one must gain understanding and awaken to return to the Lord, blessed be His Name. When a person contemplates reward and punishment, for it is

exceedingly awesome, human intellect is too short to reach their ultimate extent. This principle will become clear and confirmed for him: that abandoning sin has no bearing on the foundation of repentance which is the forgiveness of transgression. For whether the Holy One, blessed be He, forgives and abounds in pardon, or whether He does not forgive and pardon, God forbid, it is one and the same for the sinner: to abandon his path and to return and observe all the Torah and the commandment. For even if he will have no remedy for the past, nevertheless, he is compelled in any case to save the future, lest he be lost and dissolve in his wickedness.

**[24]** However, he who ultimately abandons sin can also attain forgiveness and pardon for his transgressions, to shake off all his iniquities, and to blot them out like mist and like a cloud. This is a discovery like finding treasure with great spoil. For the Holy One, Blessed be He, does not demand anything further from the sinner for the atonement of his iniquity, other than that he abandon his way and observe this Torah and commandment, which he was obligated to observe and perform even if the Holy One, Blessed be He, had not forgiven and pardoned. And the atonement of iniquity is merely a gratuitous kindness.

**[25]** And behold, the Rambam, at the beginning of Chapter 4 of Hilchot Teshuvah, wrote, and this is his language: "Twenty-four things impede repentance. Four of them are a great sin, and one who commits any one of them, the Holy One, Blessed be He, does not provide him with the ability to repent according to the magnitude of his sin. And these are: he who causes the public to sin, etc.; and he who leads his fellow from a good path to a bad one, etc.; he who sees his son going towards bad ways and does not admonish him, etc.; and he who says, 'I will sin and then repent,' etc." And examine there, for he enumerated all twenty-four things there. And for all of them, he provided reasons of natural cause, except for the first four things. These are spiritual causes that impede repen-

tance, for the Holy One, Blessed be He, does not provide him with the ability to repent according to the magnitude of his sin. And similarly, it is explained at the end of Chapter 2 of Yoma, for he who says, "I will sin and then repent," and he who causes the public to sin, are not provided with the ability to repent.

**[26]** And there, at the end of the chapter, the Rambam wrote, and this is his language: "All these matters and their like, even though they impede repentance, do not prevent it. Rather, if a person repents from them, behold, he is a penitent and has a portion in the World to Come." Thus far his language.

And behold, the plain meaning of the words our Sages, of blessed memory, said: "He is not given the ability to repent." It appears at first glance that from Heaven they cause him impediments and hindrances, so that he will not repent. And according to this, one needs to understand what the Rambam wrote. For concerning four of them, the Holy One, Blessed be He, does not give him the ability to repent. And despite all this, he wrote that they do not prevent it, etc.

**[27]** Indeed, it appears that what is written [elsewhere] is that the Holy One, Blessed be He, does not have the ability to perform repentance. This has another aspect. For behold, our Sages, of blessed memory, said (Menachot 29a): "Why was this world created with a *heh* [the letter ה]? Because it resembles a portico, where whoever wishes to exit may exit." And what is the reason? His legs are dangling. For if he returns in repentance, they will bring him in. And to bring him in to this [state], the matter is not assisted. As R' Lakish said: R' Lakish said, "What is written: 'If for the scorners He scoffs, but to the humble He gives grace' (Proverbs 3:34)? He who comes to purify himself, He assists him..." (Yoma 38a). And Rashi explained: "the matter is not assisted." For he who comes to purify himself requires assistance because of the evil inclination. Therefore, they make for him an additional opening for assistance. He is assisted. This demonstrates that he requires assistance.

Thus far is his language.

**[28]** In any case, it is explained that whoever comes to purify himself and to do *teshuvah* (repentance), is aided by Heaven in his *teshuvah*. And behold, the language of "sufficing" (*maspik*) is assistance and support for some matter, as is explained in several places in the Talmud. We find, therefore, that whoever comes to return to the Blessed God, may His name be exalted, is enabled to do *teshuvah*. This means that he has assistance and support from Heaven for *teshuvah*. And similarly, it is explained in *Avot* Chapter 4: "Whoever learns with the intention to teach, is enabled to learn and to teach." And this is, whether he wills it or not, assistance and support from Heaven so that he will be able to learn and to teach. In any case, concerning all sins, if one does *teshuvah*, he is enabled from Heaven to do *teshuvah*, as mentioned above.

**[29]** Indeed, one who commits one of the four matters mentioned above, the Holy One, Blessed be He, does not provide him with the means to repent. This is because he is not granted sufficient aid and assistance from Heaven to perform repentance. Therefore, even if he desires to purify himself and repent, since he is not assisted from Heaven, he is distant from repentance. As Rashi explains, "One who comes to purify himself requires assistance because of the evil inclination," as mentioned above.

**[30]** Indeed, even with regard to all four matters mentioned above, which constitute a great transgression, and whoever commits even one of them, the Holy One, blessed be He, does not provide him with the means to repent. As the Rambam wrote, as mentioned above. And this is because he does not receive sufficient aid and assistance from Heaven for repentance, as mentioned above. Nevertheless, let a person not say to himself, "I am despairing of repentance." Truly, although it is difficult to repent without assistance from Heaven due to the evil inclination, the Holy One, blessed be He, has given strength and might into the hand

of man. When he desires to gird himself with strength and fortitude, and to be girded with valor, then he will be able to overcome his inclination and repent, even without any assistance or help from Heaven at all.

**[31]** This is what the Rambam wrote. All these matters and their like, even though they impede repentance, do not prevent it, etc. Indeed, concerning the matters mentioned above, there are those for whom the Holy One, Blessed be He, does not provide sufficient means to repent. However, this is only when one does not receive aid and assistance from Heaven to repent. And they are not like other transgressions, concerning which our Sages, of blessed memory, said: "One who comes to purify himself, Heaven assists him." Nevertheless, even if one does not receive aid and assistance from Heaven, it does not prevent repentance. This means that Heaven will not create obstacles and hindrances in the paths of repentance to forcibly prevent him from being able to repent, God forbid. Rather, it is only that Heaven will not provide aid and assistance for repentance. And thus, the ability is in his hands. For if he wishes to don a spirit of valor and strength, behold, his strength and might are abundant to perform valiantly, to overcome his inclination and the desires of his heart, and to repent even without any aid and assistance from Heaven at all, as mentioned above.

**[32]** These matters appear to be necessitated by the words of our Sages, of blessed memory. For behold, in *Sanhedrin*, page 107a, they said there: "And Elisha went to Damascus, where did he go?" Rabbi Yochanan said that he went to bring Gehazi back to repentance, but he did not return. He said to him, "Repent." He replied, "This is what I have received from you: 'The one who sins and causes the many to sin, it is not sufficient for him to repent.'" Look there. And it would seem perplexing. Behold, the prophet said to him, "Repent." And Gehazi replied, "It is not sufficient..." However, this is the matter: For what they said, "it is not sufficient," means only that he does not receive help and assistance



from Heaven. Nevertheless, nothing prevents him. And if he wishes to gird his strength, he can repent even without help and assistance. And therefore, the prophet Elisha said to him, "Repent." Indeed, Gehazi replied to him, "This is what I have received from you: 'The one who sins... it is not sufficient for him to repent.'" And this is because the Holy One, blessed be He, does not wish to assist him in repentance. Therefore, he will draw back and not wish to return.

**[33]** This is what our Sages, of blessed memory, recounted in Chagigah, folio 15. For a Heavenly Voice emanated and declared, "Return, O wayward children, except for Acher..." Acher went forth to a wicked culture... Acher asked Rabbi Meir, after he had gone forth to a wicked culture, "What is written...?" He said to him, "You too, repent." He said, "I have already heard from behind the curtain, 'Return, O wayward children, except for Acher.'" Our Rabbis taught: An incident occurred with Acher who was riding on a horse on Shabbat. And Rabbi Meir was walking behind him to learn Torah from his mouth. He said to him, "Meir, return behind you..." He said to him, "You too, repent." He said to him, "Did I not already tell you? I have already heard from behind the curtain, 'Return, O wayward children, except for Acher.'" See there.

**[34]** And behold, as it appears, it was within the power of Acher to repent. For even though Rabbi Meir said to Acher, "Repent." And he replied, "I have already heard from behind the curtain, 'Return, O wayward children, except for Acher.'" Nevertheless, Rabbi Meir said to Acher a second time, "You too, repent." And examine there in the Tosafot, which brought the Jerusalem Talmud, that in the end Acher fell ill. Rabbi Meir went to visit him. He said to him, "Repent," etc. Elisha wept and passed away. Rabbi Meir said, "It seems that he passed away from within repentance." Examine there. And according to this, one needs to understand the explanation of the Bat Kol's words, which said, "Return, O wayward children, except for

Acher."

**[35]** Indeed, in light of what has been mentioned above, it will be understood clearly. For behold, besides the goodness and kindness with which the Holy One, blessed be He, created the attribute of repentance, to receive the sinner through repentance and to abundantly forgive, His Name be blessed, His kindness will further increase, in that He desires that the sinner return in repentance before Him. For in the way of the world, if a person sins against another, or even a son sins greatly against his father, even when the sinner comes to appease him and ask for his forgiveness, he will forgive him. Nevertheless, sometimes he may desire in his heart that the sinner not come to ask for his forgiveness at all. However, the Holy One, blessed be He, desires that the wicked return before Him in repentance. And as we say in the Ne'ilah prayer: "And You desire the repentance of the wicked, etc." And likewise, we say every day in prayer: "Blessed are You, O Lord, Who desires repentance."

**[36]** And even more so did His kindness astonish. For He seeks from the sinner that he should do *teshuvah* (repentance). As it is written, "And I sent unto them My servants the prophets, morning and evening..." (Jeremiah 23:21). And so, all the prophets would come to Israel in the name of Hashem, that they should turn from their ways. As it is written, "Return, O backsliding children" (Jeremiah 3:22).

Now, we have already written that there are two categories in the ways of *teshuvah*. One is for him who is included in the category of "one who comes to purify, and is helped." The second is for him who is not capable of doing *teshuvah*. This means that he does not receive sufficient help and assistance from Heaven to do *teshuvah*. However, even in this case, they do not prevent him.

And indeed, concerning this, one can say that the Holy One, Blessed be He, still seeks from the sinner that he should do *teshuvah*, as it is written, "Return, O backsliding children." This is

only for him who is included in the category of "one who comes to purify, and is helped." However, for him who is in a state where he is not capable of doing *teshuvah*, and only that *teshuvah* is not prevented from him, as mentioned above – the Holy One, Blessed be He, does not seek from him that he should do *teshuvah*, nor does He help him. Rather, if he comes to return of his own accord, *teshuvah* is not prevented from him.

It is found, therefore, that what the verse states, "Return, O backsliding children," meaning that the Holy One, Blessed be He, seeks that they return to Him – this applies only to those who are in the state where "one who comes to purify, and is helped," as mentioned above. But it does not apply to that category where "he is not capable of doing *teshuvah*."

**[37]** And behold, there is another who has reached a level where he is unable to perform repentance. He will not be aided from Heaven in his repentance. This is what the Heavenly Voice declared: "Return, O wayward children, except for Acher." This means that the Holy One, Blessed be He, desires all wayward children to return to Him, except for Acher. For from him, the Holy One, Blessed be He, does not request a return, as mentioned above. However, Acher was angered by this matter, that the Holy One, Blessed be He, had distinguished him for evil from all sinners. And therefore, even though it was within his ability to return, because repentance was not withheld from him, nevertheless, he did not wish to return before Him, may His Name be blessed. Since he is separated from the general category of transgressors, and the Holy One, Blessed be He, does not request of him to perform repentance, therefore Rabbi Meir said to Acher several times, "Repent." However, Acher replied, "I have already heard from behind the curtain, 'Return, O wayward children, except for Acher.'" And therefore, he does not wish to return before Him, may His Name be blessed, as mentioned above.

**[38]** Indeed, there are sins greater than those

the Rambam considered. For it is not within the power of the Holy One, Blessed be He, to grant repentance. And yet, repentance is not withheld. Rather, it is that repentance is also withheld from him. For behold, the Rambam, may his memory be for a blessing, wrote in Chapter 6 of the Laws of Repentance, and this is his wording: "And it is possible that a person sins a great sin or many sins, to the extent that he will give an accounting before the True Judge, that the retribution for these sins which he committed willingly and knowingly will be that repentance is withheld from him, and he is not given permission to turn from his wickedness, so that he may die and perish in his sin, etc." And thus it is said, "And they mocked the angels of God and scorned His words, etc., until the wrath of God consumed His people, until there was no healing." This means they sinned willingly and multiplied their transgressions, to the extent that they became obligated to be withheld from repentance, which is the healing, etc. Thus far his words, examine there.

**[39]** It is found from all that has been mentioned above that there are three levels in the ways of repentance. The first: one who is included in the category of "one who comes to purify, He helps him" (Yoma 38b). If he desires to do repentance, he will still attain help and assistance from Heaven. The second: those whose hands are not sufficient to perform repentance according to the magnitude of their sin. And this is because help and assistance from Heaven are not sufficient for them. However, despite all this, repentance is not prevented from them. And therefore, when one girds himself with strength, it is within his ability to repent even without help and assistance from Heaven. The third: one who is obligated for his transgressions, to prevent repentance from him. And he is not granted permission to turn from his wickedness, so that he will die and perish in his sin, as mentioned above.

**[40]** From this, we shall gain understanding, wisdom, and intellectual instruction. For behold, the greatest and most terrible punish-

ment that it is possible to inflict upon a sinner is, Heaven forbid, when he becomes liable for his transgressions because Heaven itself has waged war against him, to prevent him from repenting. And they do not grant him permission to turn from his wickedness. And this is self-evident. For there is no difference for the sinner, whether, Heaven forbid, he reaches this level where Heaven itself punishes him for his sins with a great punishment, to prevent him from repenting, and they do not grant him permission to turn from his wickedness; or whether he is still at the level of "one who comes to purify himself, he is aided." For if he desires to repent, he will still attain help and assistance from Heaven. But he himself is lazy and hides his hand, and does not wish to repent. For ultimately, he remains without repentance. For it is one and the same, whether his not repenting is a form of punishment from Heaven, or whether it is of his own will and desire that he prevents himself from repenting.

**[41]** It is found that when a person refrains from returning in repentance, he is, by his own mind and will, bringing upon himself the greatest punishment. For the Holy One, Blessed be He, punishes the greatest sinners by preventing them from repentance, and does not grant them permission to turn from their wickedness. And behold, he punishes himself with this severe punishment. And behold, even if there are sins in a person's possession that he does not have sufficient means to repent for, nevertheless, since repentance is not withheld from him in all of this, if he does not return in repentance, he is taking upon himself a great punishment as mentioned above. And what if he is still at the level of "one who comes to purify, he is assisted"? And he does not wish to return in repentance. Behold, he himself punishes his soul with the most severe punishment that can be. For the Holy One, Blessed be He, punishes those sinners from whom repentance is withheld, and they are not granted permission to turn from their wickedness. How awesome is this thought for one who delves deeply into it!

**[42]** And behold, the Rambam wrote, "It is possible for a person to sin a great sin, or many sins, until he gives an accounting before the True Judge, etc., that repentance is withheld from him, etc." This is because sometimes the *quality* causes one to sin a great sin, as it is written, "And one sinner destroys much good." And sometimes the *quantity* causes it, for he sins many sins, and the sins increase in their quantity. As our Sages, may their memory be blessed, said in Shabbat, page 10: "A person should always return and sit in a city whose 'residence' is close." For because its 'residence' is close, its transgressions are few. As it is said, "Behold, this city is near to flee to, and it is a little thing." What does "near" mean? Rather, because its 'residence' is close, its transgressions are few. Behold, the quantity of transgressions, which increase in their quantity, causes much [harm].

**[43]** How awesome is this matter for one who contemplates it. What our Sages, of blessed memory, said, that Sodom preceded Tzoar by only one year. For the inhabitation of Sodom was fifty-two years, and that of Tzoar was fifty-one years, see there. And behold, it is certain that the sin of Tzoar was very grave in its quality. Like the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah. However, the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah was greater in its quantity, one year more than Tzoar. Therefore, the Lord overturned these cities with brimstone and salt. And Tzoar, its transgressions were diminished, only one year. It remained for escape.

**[44]** And behold, every person is liable to stumble in sins, great in their quality. And likewise, very numerous in their quantity. And their quantity increases from day to day. And as our master, may his memory be for a blessing, wrote in his Epistle of Mussar, and this is his language: "We stumble at all times in transgressions that reach the heavens. In sins of the tongue, without restraint for our spirit. And in matters of commerce, excessively. And in the nullification of Torah, above all. And in general, in almost all the limbs, there is no perfection in us. For

the one who contemplates well, each person according to his worth, etc.” Thus far his language, examine there. It is found that a person, with the quantity of his sins, can reach, God forbid, the lowest level, that he will give judgment before the True Judge, to prevent repentance from him.

**[45]** And therefore, it is exceedingly necessary for a person to hasten to perform *teshuvah* (repentance), before his transgressions overwhelm him. While he is in a state where he is counted among those who come to purify themselves, they assist him. For then, it becomes very easy for him to perform *teshuvah*, because the Holy One, blessed be His Name, will send him help from His sanctuary, and from on high He will support him.

## Kokhavei Ohr (Stars of Light) – Chapter 7

### 7 כוכבי אור -- פרק 7

**[1]** The Rambam, may his memory be for a blessing, in Chapter 2 of Hilchot Teshuvah (Laws of Repentance) wrote, and this is his language: “And what is repentance? It is that the sinner abandons his sin and removes it from his thought, and resolves in his heart that he will not do it again. As it is said, ‘Let the wicked forsake his way...’ (Isaiah 55:7). And likewise, he will regret what has passed. As it is said, ‘For after I turned back, I regretted’ (Jeremiah 31:19). And He Who knows the hidden things will testify concerning him that he will not return to this sin forever. As it is said...” (end of his language, see there).

And according to first principles, the order of his words is not precise. For here he is considering two fundamental aspects of repentance: the acceptance for the future, and likewise the regret for the past. And behold, what he wrote, “And He Who knows the hidden things will testify concerning him that he will not return to this sin for-

ever,” this belongs to the foundation of acceptance for the future, as is understood. And according to this, why did he insert regret in the middle? Between what he wrote, “and resolves in his heart that he will not do it again,” and between what he wrote, “And He Who knows the hidden things will testify concerning him that he will not return to this sin forever.” And according to the matter, he should have written: “And what is repentance?... and resolves in his heart that he will not do it again. And He Who knows the hidden things will testify concerning him that he will not return to this sin forever. And likewise, he will regret what has passed...”

**[2]** Here are the two foundational principles of repentance: acceptance for the future and regret for the past. At first glance, it seems evident that they share one spirit and are perfectly aligned. For whoever accepts upon himself to abandon his evil path for the future, is certainly regretting the past. And conversely, as is understood. Therefore, it is fitting that in proportion to the strength of the agreement and acceptance in the heart for the future, so that one will not continue to do evil in the eyes of God, so too will be the strength and firmness of regret for the past, for what one has sinned against God, blessed be His Name.

And even more so, it is evident that regret for the past has an advantage over acceptance for the future. For it is easier to regret the past for what one has sinned, than to accept upon oneself for the future that one will not sin again. This is because acceptance for the future will contend with a strong war against the evil inclination. This is not the case with sins that have already passed and are no more. The power of desire has ceased from them. It is easy to move his heart to regret them. This is what our Sages, may their memory be blessed, said: “Wicked people are full of regrets.” For after they have committed their schemes, they will lament their deeds. And thus, it is evident that whoever accepts upon himself to improve his actions for the future, is certainly even more so regretting the past.

**[3]** And do not wonder at the heart. Indeed, experience teaches us the opposite. For regret over the past weighs far more heavily upon a person than accepting resolutions for the future. And how many God-fearing individuals, seekers of the will of the Blessed God, whose Name is praised, who in the awesome days [of the High Holidays] set their hearts to improve their deeds, and accept upon themselves to abstain from many transgressions in which they stumble, and likewise to be diligent in the performance of commandments from which they are remiss. And despite all this, they know within themselves that they will not feel the weight of regret for the past, or rather, that they will not feel regret at all. For regret necessarily affects the senses, just as it is in the course of worldly affairs. For whoever regrets something he did unknowingly, which brought him great suffering, behold, after he laments his deed, the regret will be evident in his countenance and in all his movements, for he will not be able to dismiss his worry and his sadness from his heart, and he will be like a stunned person. Even when he lies down in his bed, he will not be able to sleep. Thus, even more so ought regret be felt for sin. And behold, a person knows within himself that he will not feel worry and sorrow in his heart over past transgressions, and they will not grant him rest, even if he resolves for the future to guard and to do.

**[4]** Our Master, the Gaon, the Pious, the Holy of Israel, may his merit protect us. He wrote in one of his letters, and this is his language: "In the past, when I observed – every person was seized by trembling at the sound of the call, 'Holy Elul.' This awe bore its fruit in drawing closer to His blessed service. Each person according to their measure. However, not according to the first principle. For the person who throughout the year has distanced themselves from His blessed service, fear and anxiety would seize them more than the dread of judgment. And the change of deed would turn for the good. A double warning would befall the person who, according to their measure, clung to the path of holiness all year, more than the

person who, according to their measure, walked in darkness without light all year." Thus his pure language.

**[5]** We have already written that due to our many transgressions, we lack the awareness of how great is the guilt of sin, and how heavy is the transgression. To defy the will of the King of kings, the Holy One, Blessed be He. For the very essence of the guilt of transgression and sin is very light in the eyes of man. And it has already been explained above that this is because we lack the awareness of His exaltedness, may His Name be blessed, and His great glory, and in contrast, the lowliness and degradation of man. And likewise, we are also devoid of the fear of punishment, as mentioned above.

**[6]** Indeed, the primary reason for the lightness of sin in a person's eyes is what our Sages, of blessed memory, stated in Kiddushin, page 20, and in Arachin, page 30: Rabbi Yossi ben Rabbi Chanina said, "Come and see how severe is the dust of the Sabbatical year. A person engages in transactions with Sabbatical produce, and in the end, he sells his movable property, and so on. He does not perceive it. In the end, he sells his fields, and so on. He does not perceive it. In the end, he sells his house, and so on. What is the difference there, where it says 'he does not perceive,' and what is the difference here, where it says 'it does not come to his hand'?"

As Rav Huna said, Rav Huna said: "Once a person commits a transgression and repeats it, it becomes permitted to him." "It becomes permitted to him" – can this be your thought? Rather, say: "It becomes like a permission to him." Thus far, the words of the Gemara.

And Rashi explained in Kiddushin there: "He does not perceive" – he does not pay attention to the punishment that will befall him, to return from the transgression in his hand. Regarding "he does not perceive," we read "in the end he sells." And regarding "it does not come to his hand," we read in the Tosefta "until he sells." And this is what is implied: the thought of repentance will not come to his hand until he

reaches these [stages]. What is the difference that it states "he does not perceive," which implies that if he does not perceive, he will eventually reach this point? And in the entire [passage], it states "it does not come to his hand until he sells," because it is obvious to the Tanna that his way is such that [repentance] will not come to his hand until he receives further punishment, and so on. Thus far, his words. Examine there.

And in Arachin, Rashi explained: "It becomes like a permission to him" – it appears to him like a permission. Therefore, at the outset, when he has only committed it once, it states "he does not perceive," which implies that he knew and was aware that he was transgressing, but he was not deterred from the transgression and committed it. And on the second occasion, it states "it does not come to his hand," meaning that it does not even occur to him that it is a transgression, until thus far, his words. Examine there.

**[7]** How awesome is this matter! For it was a simple strength for our Sages, of blessed memory. For one who commits a transgression twice, it will make an impression on his soul such that it appears in his eyes as permissible, and it will not occur to him that it is a transgression. And thus will be his way in this matter. And he will not come to the point where he repents, as Rashi explained, as mentioned above. And even more so, for even the punishment that will come upon him one after another will not bring him to the contemplation of repentance, because the transgression becomes to him as if it were permissible.

**[8]** And behold, although our Sages, of blessed memory, have said that even if one has merely transgressed a sin and repeated it once, it becomes permissible to him. Nevertheless, one certainly should not say that the distinction is only between the first and second time. For only the second time acts upon his soul to make the transgression become permissible to him. However, again, there is no distinction between the second and third time, or even when he repeats

it many times. It will not add a greater impression upon his soul for the ease of the sin. For the intellect does not allow for this. Indeed, without a doubt, just as there is a distinction between the first and second time, so too, the more one adds to repeating the sin and multiplying it many times, so too will it add an impression upon his soul for the ease of the sin, and for the transgression to become more permissible in his eyes. For there is no measure or limit to the ease of the sin. This is the primary reason for the ease of the sin in the eyes of man. For behold, the sins into which man stumbles, he repeats them countless times, and they become more permissible to him, until he no longer perceives them at all.

**[9]** This is the matter explained in the words of our Sages, of blessed memory. For whoever engages in transactions with the produce of the Sabbatical year, the Holy One, blessed be He, brings upon him punishment. And if he does not take care to repent from the transgression, He brings upon him even more severe punishment. And so, many, many punishments, each one more severe than the preceding one. See there in Rashi's commentary. And this is because, in a person's eyes, if he commits a transgression and repeats it, it becomes lighter in his eyes, as it becomes permissible to him. However, in contrast, in the judgments of Heaven, it is the opposite. For in this very act of it becoming permissible to him, his sin becomes heavier, and his punishment is greater. And as it is written in the book Sha'arei Teshuvah by our Rabbi Yonah, Siman 5, and this is his wording: "Secondly, for one who repeats his sin, his repentance is difficult, for the sin becomes permissible to him. And because of this, his sin becomes very heavy. As it is said, 'Behold, I have spoken, and you will do evil, and you are able.' Explanation: 'And you are able' means that the evils become permissible to you, and like something within your capability and your permission, from the root of 'you shall not be able to eat within your gates,' whose translation is 'you have no permission.' See there." And according to what is mentioned above, for ev-

ery addition to the sin, so too an impression is made upon his soul, for the transgression to become more permissible in his eyes. It is found that the more he doubles the sin, the more severe the transgression becomes. And from time to time, his sin becomes heavier. And for this reason, when he engages in transactions with the produce of the Sabbatical year, and the sin continues to grow heavier, so too the Holy One, blessed be He, brings upon him punishment from time to time, and each one is more severe than the preceding one.

**[10]** And through this, we shall gain understanding to comprehend what our Sages, of blessed memory, stated in Eruvin, page 19. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: What is the meaning of the verse, "Passing through the valley of Baca, they make it a spring; the early rain also covers it with pools" (Psalms 84:7)? "Passing through" refers to people who transgress the will of the Holy One, Blessed be He. "Valley" signifies that Gehenna is deepened for them. "Baca" signifies that they weep and shed tears like a spring of pools. See there. And at first glance, it is very perplexing. For what was stated, "Gehenna is deepened for them," should have been meant only for a specific severe transgression whose punishment is great. For its sake, Gehenna is deepened for them. For whatever is deeper in the grave is all the more evil and bitter. And for other transgressions, their judgment is in Gehenna that is not so deep. However, since it is stated that "people who transgress the will of the Holy One, Blessed be He, Gehenna is deepened for them," then who are those in Gehenna that is not deep? Furthermore, the language "Gehenna is deepened for them" is itself lacking in comprehension.

**[11]** Indeed, according to what was mentioned above, it will be understood clearly. For behold, the transgressions that a person commits – behold, each and every time that he repeats them, his sin becomes heavier and his guilt increases more than the transgression before it. And consequently, each and every time that he repeats the transgression, just as the sin be-

comes heavier, so too the punishment grows. And so it is without end, for each transgression its punishment is greater than the one before it, as mentioned above. And behold, people who transgress the will of the Holy One, Blessed be He – it is not that they sin by chance, but rather that they constantly transgress the will of the Holy One, Blessed be He. It is found, therefore, that they constantly repeat the transgressions, and the sin continually grows heavier, and the punishment continually grows greater, as mentioned above. And this is what was said: "Gehenna is deepened for them." This means that Gehenna is constantly deepened for them. For just as each and every time that he repeats the transgression, its punishment is greater than the one before it, so too for each time that he adds to repeating the transgression, they add to deepening Gehenna for them. And so it is from the first time that one transgresses the transgression until the last time, Gehenna is deepened for them, deeper and deeper.

**[12]** And this is what they also said: The one who weeps and sheds tears like a gushing spring. And this is because the spring, at the beginning of its flow, is small. And afterwards, it continues to widen and fills all its banks. And therefore, when Gehenna is deepened for them constantly, and the punishment becomes increasingly severe. And for this reason, when they weep and shed tears, behold, to the extent that Gehenna is deepened for them constantly, to punish them with punishments that are more difficult and bitter, so too will they increase in weeping and shedding tears even more. And just as there is no measure or comparison between the beginning of the spring's flow and its subsequent surging, so too there is no measure or comparison between the punishment for the transgression the first time, versus the punishments that will increase and grow from time to time due to the doubling of sins. And thus they will continually increase in weeping and shedding tears like the spring, until there is no end to the weeping.

**[13]** This is the explanation of the riddle that

we observe. For the person who throughout the entire year adheres to his path in holiness, fear and anxiety will envelop him more than the dread of judgment. This is in contrast to the person who throughout the entire year walks in darkness and there is no light, which is contrary to the ways of reason. And as our master, the Gaon, the pious one, may his memory be for a blessing, wrote, and as mentioned above. Indeed, all this stems from this foundation, from what our Sages, may their memory be for a blessing, said: "When a person commits a transgression and repeats it, it becomes permissible to him." And even more so, through the repetition of transgressions many times, it appears even more like permission in his eyes, as mentioned above. And therefore, the person who constantly strays from the path of reason, and repeatedly errs in his foolishness, his heart will not weaken, nor will he be dismayed by the dread of judgment and the verdict. This is because all the sins have become permissible to him. And therefore, why should he fear fear?

**[14]** And with this, we shall gain understanding. To comprehend the matter of the distinction in the foundations of repentance. And this is between the acceptance for the future, and the regret for the past. Experience teaches us that acceptance is easier than regret. And even if a person takes it to heart, and resolves to improve his actions for the future, nevertheless, he is still far from regret, from feeling in his heart complete regret for the past. For according to first principles, this is contrary to the ways of reason, as mentioned above. Indeed, this is the matter: For as each person is according to his measure, so the transgressions in which he has stumbled, he has already passed over and repeated them many times, and has made an impression upon his heart to become accustomed to them as permissible. It is therefore self-evident that it will not be easy to uproot from their very roots that which has already been deeply rooted in his heart through repeated instances. To become accustomed to them as permissible, to be transformed into being forbidden. And therefore, even if he resolves to abstain from trans-

gression from now on, the impression made upon his heart by the repeated transgressions, to the effect that they appear to him as permissible, is not thereby uprooted. And even though he resolves to be careful from them for the future, this is merely like one who wishes to refrain from something that is permitted. And therefore, where will regret be found, after the transgressions still appear to him as permissible?

**[15]** And similarly, one who takes upon himself to conduct himself with a certain measure of piety, which he has not been diligent in until now. Behold, even if he accepts upon himself to be diligent in this for the future, is it possible for him to have complete regret for the past? Seeing as, in truth, it was entirely permissible. It is just that now he wishes to be careful in this matter. Behold, likewise are the transgressions which, in a person's eyes, appear as permissible, because he has transgressed and repeated them many times. Behold, they are to him merely on the scale of a measure of piety. And therefore, as long as the spirit of permissibility rules over them, regret and concern for the past are not possible for him. And even if he accepts upon himself for the future to abstain from them, it is like one who accepts upon himself to abstain from something that is permissible.

**[16]** Indeed, complete repentance does not come to a person easily. Rather, it comes only after he abandons his path. Over many days and as time passes, he must be exceedingly careful not to fall into the sins he has already been ensnared by. He must labor greatly with wisdom, fear, and ethical discipline, with the fear of punishment and the fear of exaltation. And likewise, other considerations from the accounting of the soul, to restore to him the substance of the transgression. Behold, slowly, slowly, the form of permissibility will be stripped away from it. And when the substance of the transgression is restored to its original state, so that it is to him, on the scales, as if he had never sinned, then the spirit of repentance will begin to beat within him with all strength and might, for his foolishness and his sin. And as he increases



in knowledge, to understand and comprehend the magnitude of the guilt of sin and transgression, and how great is the evil of defying the will of the King of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He, so too will the pain of repentance and anxiety increase.

**[17]** And from this, the words of the Rambam mentioned above will be clarified. For behold, what he wrote, "and He who knows the hidden things will testify concerning him that he will never return to this sin," appears very perplexing. For behold, the meaning of his words is: if he ever returns to this sin, it is not [a complete] repentance. And this is astonishing, for according to what is accepted, behold, one who performs complete repentance, all his transgressions are forgiven him. And if afterward he returns to sin, he is like one who sins anew, and the former [sins] that were already forgiven him will no longer be remembered. And if so, that the Holy One, Blessed be He, knows that he will at some point return to this sin, it will not harm or corrupt in holiness the complete repentance.

**[18]** Indeed, it appears according to what our master, the Gaon and pious one, may his memory be for a blessing, wrote in the book *Tevunah*. For the knowledges of the future are of two kinds. The first is an absolute knowledge that is not subject to change and alteration. And this is not within the category of the human. The second is an intellectual knowledge, according to the connection of things from cause to cause and from mover to mover. And thus the matter will unfold until it reaches the ultimate Mover. Even in this knowledge, human capacity is too short to reach its ultimate end, due to the deficiency of his knowledge of all the matters of causes that pertain to the thing destined to come to pass. So too with human choice. Knowledge concerning human choice is divided into two kinds. The first is an absolute knowledge, which one cannot even conceive how it would not contradict free will, etc. The second is an intellectual knowledge, according to the person's conduct, his nature, and his disposition, according to the correct connection of

things to their causes. It is with this knowledge that the Holy One, Blessed be He, guides His world for good, etc. Thus far his pure words, examine there.

**[19]** And according to the words of our master, may his memory be for a blessing, mentioned above, we can say that even in the aspect of one who performs repentance, with the knowledge of whether the person will return to this sin or will never return to this sin, this knowledge is also divided into two types, as mentioned above. One is intellectual knowledge. For behold, the foundation of repentance is to abandon one's path, and not to continue to do evil in the eyes of the Blessed One. And for this, a resolution is required, that he will decide in his heart not to sin again. And behold, according to the value of the strength of repentance in all its details, one must understand and comprehend whether what he decides in his heart not to sin again is a strong and established matter, or whether the repentance is not so complete and he is liable to return to this sin. And behold, even in this knowledge, human hands are too short to reach its ultimate end. For the value of repentance depends on the person's spirit, his disposition and his character traits, his nature and his temperament. And according to his strengths, he knows the value of repentance, whether it will suffice according to the ways of intellect so that he will not be liable to return to this sin. And behold, man does not know himself, like the Rock who created him from nothing. And He who examines hearts, He knows intellectual knowledge, according to the value of his repentance and according to his strengths, whether according to his repentance he is liable to return to this sin, or whether he will never return to this sin.

**[20]** The second is absolute knowledge. Without a connection of cause to effect. For even if, according to intellectual knowledge, due to the strength of repentance, one is not liable to sin again, nevertheless, choice is in the hands of man. And it is possible that he will return to his vomit. And the Holy One, Blessed be He, also knows this. Although this depends on man's

choice.

**[21]** And with this, the words of Rambam, may his memory be a blessing, will be understood. For what he wrote, "and He Who knows the hidden depths will testify concerning him that he will never return to this sin," the intention is only according to intellectual knowledge. And this means that the strength of the repentance will be such that he resolves in his heart not to sin, to the extent that He Who knows the hidden depths, the Examiner of Hearts, will testify concerning him. For according to the measure of repentance according to the ways of intellect, he will never return to this sin. And if the repentance is so complete that He Who knows the hidden depths testifies concerning him, as mentioned above, even if the Holy One, Blessed is He, knows with definitive knowledge what is destined to be, that ultimately he will return to being a sinner, nevertheless, it will not be accounted as evil in the Sanctuary, and He will not corrupt his former repentance.

**[22]** And from now on, even the order of the Rambam's words is precise. For behold, the knowledge of the essence of the strength of repentance is to judge according to the ways of reason. Whether what one resolves in his heart not to sin again will be something that endures or not. Behold, from the resolution alone, one cannot judge anything. For easily a person will be aroused to mend his ways. And therefore, even if one accepts upon himself with a pure heart and a willing soul to abstain from every sin and transgression, nevertheless, as long as he does not feel in his heart complete regret for the past, it is a sign that he does not yet recognize the magnitude of the guilt of sin, how great it is. And it still appears in his eyes as permissible. And thus it may be that the resolution will not be something that endures. For quickly he will be enticed by his inclination, and he will return to his vomit. This is because the sin itself is light in his eyes, and he is not deterred or frightened from transgression.

**[23]** Indeed, the potency of repentance to rec-

ognize its path towards the future is achieved only through the essence of the value of regret. For when one reaches the level of recognizing the gravity of the sin, how evil and bitter it is to have abandoned Hashem, and all the harm one has wrought upon oneself, and one truly regrets their evil deeds and deeply contemplates them, and sighs with bitterness of heart. And as it is written in the book *Sha'arei Teshuvah* by our Rabbi Yonah, concerning the core of regret: behold, according to the measure of the greatness of the bitterness, and the intensity of the worry and sorrow, and how much one recoils and is frightened now from sin and transgression, one can judge the potency of the repentance and the acceptance, what one resolves in their heart not to sin again. If it is a matter that endures.

**[24]** This is what the Rambam, may his memory be blessed, wrote. And what is repentance? It is that the sinner abandons his sin and removes it from his thoughts. And he resolves in his heart not to do it again, etc. And likewise, he will lament what has passed, etc. And He Who knows secrets will testify concerning him that he will never return to this sin, etc. However, regarding what he wrote, "And He Who knows secrets will testify concerning him, etc." This is a matter pertaining to the realm of Kabbalah. Concerning what he wrote, "And he resolves in his heart not to do it again." Even with all this, he wrote initially, "And likewise, he will lament what has passed." Indeed, this is the matter. For with the Kabbalah alone, that he resolves in his heart not to sin again, even if he accepts upon himself truly and with a whole heart, as long as he feels in his heart complete regret for what has passed, it is prevented that He Who knows secrets will testify concerning him that he will never return to this sin, as mentioned above. Indeed, only after he laments what has passed with complete regret, then he can reach a level where He Who knows secrets, and examines hearts, and knows and recognizes the bitterness of his heart, and his sorrow, and the anguish of his spirit, and the value of the transgression in his eyes, how much he recoils and is frightened by it, will testify concerning him based on intellec-

tual knowledge that he will never return to this sin:

## Kokhavei Ohr (Stars of Light) – Chapter 8

### סוכבי אור -- פרק 8

**[1]** In Midrash Rabbah, Parashat Pekudei, there is an account of Rabbi Shimon ben Chalaphta. It was Erev Shabbat, and he had no means of sustenance. He went outside the city and prayed before God. A precious stone was given to him from heaven. He gave it to the moneychanger and was sustained for that Shabbat. His wife said, "From where did these come?" He replied, "From what the Holy One, Blessed be He, provided." She said, "If you do not tell me from where they are, I will not taste anything." He began to tell her. He said, "Thus I prayed before God, and it was given to me from heaven." She said to him, "I will not taste anything until you tell me that you will return it after Shabbat." He asked her, "Why?" She replied, "Do you want your table to be lacking and your friend's table to be full?" Rabbi Shimon went and informed Rabbi [Akiva] of the incident. He said to him, "Go tell her, 'If your table is lacking, I will fill it from mine.'" He went and told her. She said to him, "Go with me to the one who taught you Torah." She said to him, "Rabbi, does one see his fellow in the World to Come? Is it not that each righteous person has his own world? As it is said, 'For man goes to his eternal home' (Ecclesiastes 12:5). It is not written 'worlds' here, but 'his world.'" When he heard this, he went and returned it. Thus ends the language of Midrash Rabbah.

**[2]** Behold, the response that the wife of Rabbi Shimon ben Halaphta gave to our holy master. It is an obscure and wondrous riddle, hidden. In what did she defeat him? And what is this response that she gave to Rabbi? Does a person see his fellow in the World to Come? Would she

need there, in the World of Truth, to return to the thresholds of the righteous and the pious, to search for Rabbi, to demand of him to fulfill his promise, and not find him? Or perhaps she will not be able to see his face? And if our holy master said, "If your table is lacking, I will fill it from my own," did he say and not do? Did he speak and not fulfill, God forbid?

**[3]** We have learned in Pirkei Avot, Chapter 5: Ben Heh Heh says, "According to the measure of the suffering is the reward." Behold, in the ways of the world concerning the wages of a hired laborer, the reward is not great for the very toil and exertion of the work itself. Even all those who perform hard labor with bricks and mortar, and stonecutters, who labor with the sweat of their brow – despite all this, their daily wage is very meager. And what is more, the endurance of the suffering of the work is not considered at all in relation to the reward. There is no difference whether the one performing the labor is a mighty man whose work is easy for him, or a weak man with no strength, upon whom the work is burdensome. Whether he is healthy or afflicted with suffering – in all this, one has no advantage over the other, and behold, their reward is as one.

**[4]** Indeed, the ways of God, blessed be His Name, and His judgments with His creatures are not so. For He repays good reward to those who do His will, blessed be His Name, in exchange for their service. Behold, apart from the reward for the intrinsic value of the commandment itself, which is for one who hearkens to the voice of God, there is yet for this person a basis for calculating reward. This is in consideration of the hardship of the service in fulfilling the Torah and the commandment. For "according to the measure of the suffering is the reward." If it is suffering from the burden of the service, from the toil of the body and soul in His service, blessed be His Name. And similarly, it is not the same for one who fulfills the Torah out of ease, or out of distress. Whether he is healthy, or afflicted with suffering. Or the hardship of service in subjugating the evil inclination. It is not the same for

one who performs a commandment that does not involve subjugating the evil inclination, or if one needs to overcome his desire and subdue his inclination. And according to the measure of the toil and suffering one endures in His service, blessed be His Name, so shall the reward increase and so shall it grow above, without end. For "according to the measure of the suffering is the reward." And our Sages, may their memory be for a blessing, have already expounded greatly in Avot d'Rabbi Natan on the superiority of service when it is performed with hardship over service performed with ease. And this is what he says there: "If you learned Torah during a time of ease, do not return to it during a time of distress. For one thing done with hardship is better for a person than a hundred things done with ease." See there. And similarly, it is written in Sefer Chasidim: "A commandment that requires subjugating the evil inclination is greater than a hundred commandments that do not require subjugating the evil inclination."

**[5]** This is what our Sages, of blessed memory, stated in Bava Batra, folio 78a: "What is written, 'Therefore, the parables will say: These are the ones who rule over their inclination.' Come, let us calculate, come and let us calculate the world's accounting. The loss of a commandment versus its reward, and the reward of a transgression versus its loss."

And it might seem surprising, what have the parables taught us in this matter? Who does not know the reward of a commandment and the loss of a transgression? For the Holy One, Blessed be He, repays a good reward to those who do His will, may His Name be blessed, and just judgments are for the workers of iniquity.

However, this is the matter: For it is easy for a person to walk in the path of the upright, which is paved. If the service does not become burdensome for him. But when he encounters on his path some burden in his service of the Holy One, Blessed be He, or some test that requires him to conquer his inclination, then his hands will weaken.

Therefore, when a test comes before a person regarding some commandment, whether in his body or in his money, he should bring this to his heart: Is not the great reward only because of the burden of the service and the suffering of fulfilling a commandment? And this is like one hundred, as mentioned above. And if he stands in the test and conquers his inclination, then for this suffering, his reward will be exceedingly great, more than he would gain from fulfilling one hundred other commandments that are not accompanied by suffering and the subjugation of the inclination.

**[6]** This is what those who govern their impulses say: "Come, let us calculate the world's accounting. The loss of a commandment versus its reward." It informs us that besides the inherent reward of the commandment itself, there is also an accounting of reward for the suffering involved in fulfilling the commandment. For "according to the suffering is the reward." And this is the loss of a commandment versus its reward: that is, the accounting of the loss of a commandment versus the reward of that loss. For only through the loss and suffering one endures in fulfilling a commandment does his reward grow exceedingly great.

**[7]** And similarly, what the wise say in their hearts: "The reward for a transgression is commensurate with its loss." This might seem surprising according to first principles, for there is nothing novel in this. Who does not know that judgments are prepared for the doers of iniquity? This can also be explained in the following manner. Behold, our master, the Gaon, the pious, may his memory be for a blessing, wrote in one of his letters that just as the commandments are evaluated according to the suffering involved in their observance, as our Rabbis, may their memory be for a blessing, stated, "According to the suffering is the reward," so too in the matter of transgressions, their punishment is exchanged according to the measure of the suffering of abstaining from the transgression. And the more its suffering diminishes, so too its punishment increases. As our Rabbis, may their

memory be for a blessing, stated in Masechet Menachot, page 43b: "It was taught: Rabbi Meir used to say, the punishment for white is greater than the punishment for blue," a parable, etc. Thus far the words of our master. And similarly, he wrote briefly in *Tevunah*, see there. And behold, according to this premise, that the punishment for a transgression is evaluated according to the measure of the suffering of abstaining from the transgression, if so, it is very surprising. Behold, theft and forbidden relations, which a person's soul craves and desires, as explained in Masechet Makot, page 23a, and the suffering of abstaining from these transgressions is very great, for the desire is intense and their inclination is strong. And if so, it would be reversed like wax under a seal, that the more severe transgressions, like theft and forbidden relations, would have their punishment diminished.

**[8]** Indeed, it appears that in contrast to this, there is another accounting. For just as in a mitzvah, "according to the suffering is the reward" (le'fum tza'ara agra), meaning that besides the reward for the mitzvah itself, there is also an accounting of reward for the suffering one endures in fulfilling His will, blessed be His Name. So too, in the matter of a transgression, besides the punishment for the transgression itself, for not heeding the voice of God, there is also an accounting of punishment for the pleasure one's soul derives from rebelling against the will of God, blessed be His Name. And just as in a mitzvah, "according to the suffering is the reward," so too in a transgression, "according to the pleasure is the punishment." For, as explained by the Gra, may his merit protect him, in his commentary on the Book of Proverbs, he wrote that all the pleasures a person enjoys in this world will turn bitter for him in the grave. And those who are desirous are punished with the beating of the grave. There, each limb that enjoyed itself in this world not in a mitzvah is judged, and it is burned like the venom of a serpent. But for the righteous person who intends his enjoyment solely for the sake of Heaven, the enjoyment is rather counted as a mitzvah, and

his eating is like an offering. See there.

**[9]** And in any case, it is clarified that even for all the pleasures a person enjoys in this world, even from permissible matters, as long as it is not in the performance of a mitzvah, the punishment is very great. And each limb that enjoys, they will burn it like the venom of a snake. And from this, we can make an accounting to judge and to decree the magnitude of the punishment for the pleasure enjoyed in this world from a transgression. For he enjoys and delights in that which he rebels against the will of God, blessed be His Name. For there is no comparison to the punishment for the pleasure of transgression. How awesome is this thought for one who contemplates it. For when his inclination overcomes him towards a transgression, even to speak some of the forbidden words, let him place in his heart that besides the punishment for the sin itself, behold, even for the pleasure, he will pay sevenfold.

**[10]** And from now on, it will not be surprising. For behold, theft and forbidden sexual relations, which a person's soul desires and covets. Even if, in and of itself, the transgression is that one transgresses the will of God, blessed be His name, the punishment would be diminished in its value. This is because of the distress of abstaining from the transgression. However, conversely, since the pleasure derived from them is great. Behold, the pleasure and enjoyment of the transgression, which is the enjoyment of rebelling against the will of God, blessed be His name. Behold, the calculation of the pleasure magnifies the punishment exceedingly.

**[11]** This is what the wise say regarding their inclination. "Come, calculate, etc., the reward of a transgression versus its loss." Behold, he informs us herewith that besides the punishment for the transgression itself, there is also a reckoning of punishment for the *reward* of performing the transgression, meaning the pleasure derived from the transgression. And this is "the reward of a transgression versus its loss" – that is, a calculation of the reward of a transgression

versus the loss incurred *because of* the reward. For because of the reward and the pleasure one has from the transgression, his punishment will be greatly magnified.

**[12]** And behold, even though the suffering involved in fulfilling a commandment greatly magnifies the reward above, for "according to the suffering is the reward." And one whose situation presents him with trials in the service of the Blessed Name, and he merits to stand firm in the trial and to overcome all afflictions and hindrances – how good is his portion! For his reward will be exceedingly great. However, intertwined with the trials is also great danger, lest he be swallowed up because of them, for his strength may become weak to stand against them, and he may stray from the path of good and uprightness. For this reason, we pray every day, "And lead us not into temptation."

**[13]** Indeed, we have found one thing. The aspect of suffering in His blessed Name's service, which magnifies and glorifies the reward of the commandments above. And despite all this, a person will be secure with it. For this suffering will not harm nor corrupt the sacred. It will not be a test for him, nor will it stand as an adversary to lead him astray through crooked paths.

**[14]** Indeed, in Kiddushin, page 31a, the Gemara brings an incident that one gentile performed for his father in Ashkelon. Once, they requested stones for the ephod from him. A key was placed beneath his father's head, and he did not trouble him. The following year, the Holy One, Blessed be He, gave him his reward, etc. And Rabbi Chanina said: If one who is not commanded and acts [in a praiseworthy manner] is like this, how much more so one who is commanded and acts! For Rabbi Chanina said: "Greater is one who is commanded and acts than one who is not commanded and acts." Rav Yosef said: Initially, I would have said, whoever told me that the *halakha* is like Rabbi Yehuda, who said that a blind person is exempt from the *mitzvot*, I would have made a festive day for the Rabbis. For I am not entrusted [with a com-

mandment] and yet I act. Now that I have heard this which Rabbi Chanina said, etc.:

**[15]** And in the reason for the matter, "The commanded one who acts is great." The Tosafot wrote in Kiddushin there, the introductory words are: "The commanded one who acts is great," and this is their language: It appears that this is the reason why the commanded one who acts is preferable. This is because he worries and suffers more lest he transgress. Than one who is not commanded, who has bread in his basket; if he wishes, he can rest. Thus far is the language of the Tosafot.

**[16]** It is revealed and clarified, in any case, that the concern and sorrow regarding the fulfillment of the commandments – that a person fears, worries, and is pained lest he transgress – this sorrow itself magnifies the reward of the commandments. Just as with other types of sorrow that a person experiences in his service of the Blessed One, may His Name be exalted. For regarding this, they said: "Greater is one who is commanded and performs than one who is not commanded and performs." And indeed, this too is included in the general principle our Sages, of blessed memory, stated: "According to the measure of the sorrow is the reward." For this is self-evident. For even among those who are commanded and perform, not all are equal in the concern and sorrow regarding the fulfillment of the commandments. For this is tied to a person's fear of the Lord, may He be blessed. And according to the quality of his fear, so will be the concern and sorrow regarding the fulfillment of the commandments. And the more God-fearing a person is, so will his worry and sorrow increase lest he transgress and fail to fulfill one of the commandments of the Lord, may His Name be exalted, or lest he not perform the commandment as it should be performed. And according to the measure of his fear, so will be his concern and sorrow to fulfill the will of the Lord, may His Name be exalted. Thus will his reward for his commandments be elevated and exalted above all. For "according to the measure of the sorrow is the reward."

**[17]** And similarly, if we were to regress several levels. If a person were to be utterly devoid, Heaven forbid, of the fear of God, blessed be His Name, then even the commandments he performs, their reward might only be in the category of "one who is not commanded and performs." This is because all the advantage that one who is commanded and performs has over one who is not commanded and performs, stems solely from the concern and distress that he feels more acutely lest he transgress. However, one in whose heart there is no fear of God, and who does not feel concern or distress regarding the observance of the commandments lest he transgress, it is found that even the commandments he fulfills will have their essential reward only in the category of "one who is not commanded and performs." For what is the significance that he is commanded, if he does not feel concern or distress regarding the command of the Omnipresent?

**[18]** And through this, it will be understood what our Sages, may their memory be blessed, said at the beginning of the first chapter of Avodah Zarah. For Rav Yosef taught: "He stood and measured the land; he looked and saw the nations." What did he see? He saw the seven commandments that the descendants of Noah accepted upon themselves, and they did not fulfill them. Since they did not fulfill them, He stood and permitted them to them. And one might object: "Is it a matter of dispute, a matter of dispute?" And the answer is to say to you that they do not receive reward like one who is commanded and does, but rather like one who is not commanded and does. For Rabbi Chanina said: "Greater is one who is commanded and does than one who is not commanded and does." And it would seem surprising, since for what they did not fulfill of the seven commandments, they would certainly be punished for it. Why would they be punished further, doubly so, if their reward is also taken away? That they will not receive reward for the commandments they will fulfill, but only like one who is not commanded and does.

**[19]** However, based on what was mentioned above, it will be understood well. Since all the advantage and reward of one who is commanded and acts is only due to the concern and sorrow that he is more concerned and sorrowful lest he transgress, as mentioned above. And therefore, when the Holy One, blessed be He, saw that He gave the children of Noah only seven commandments, and they accepted them upon themselves and did not fulfill them, behold, they have no desire at all to bear the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven. And they have no concern or sorrow at all to fulfill a command from the Place. And for this reason, even if they fulfill some commandment, they will not receive reward except like one who is not commanded and acts, as mentioned above.

**[20]** And with this, let us gain understanding to comprehend what our Sages, of blessed memory, have said. In Bava Metzia, page 86a, Rav Yehuda said in the name of Rav: "Whatever Abraham did for the ministering angels with his own hands, the Holy One, blessed be He, did for his children with His own hands." And whatever he did, etc. "And to the cattle Abraham ran." And a spirit went forth from the Lord. "He took curds and milk." "Behold, I will cause to rain upon you bread from heaven," etc., and Abraham went with them to send them off. And the Lord went before them by day. "Let a little water, I pray you, be fetched." And you shall strike the rock, and waters shall come out of it, that the people may drink.

**[21]** How greatly one must marvel and be astonished at the immense and awesome reward for this simple commandment of hospitality. And all the miracles and wonders that the Holy One, Blessed be He, performed for our ancestors in the desert – He brought down the manna for them, He brought them quail, He struck the rock, He went before them by day in a pillar of cloud – all this is by the power of the reward for this commandment that our father Abraham, peace be upon him, performed. How awesome is this reward! Is it that anyone who performs it even once will have such a great

reward?

**[22]** Indeed, as mentioned above, the concern and sorrow for the fulfillment of the commandments magnifies the reward of the commandments. For this is why the one who is commanded and acts is great, as the Tosafot wrote and as mentioned above. And behold, this concern and sorrow stems solely from the power of the fear of God. And according to the quality of his fear, so will be his concern and sorrow lest he transgress. And it is known that the fear of God, blessed be His Name, has no measure, nor boundary, nor end, nor limit. And behold, even in the generation of the Sages of the Mishnah, we find concerning Rabbi Yehudah in Niddah, page 13, that they said there about Rav Yehudah: "The awe of his Master was upon him." Shmuel said about him, "This is not a child born of woman." And this is because, due to the great fear and awe that Rabbi Yehudah had of His exaltedness, blessed be His Name, Shmuel interceded for him, saying that he was not a child born of woman, but rather one of the ministering angels of the High Heavens. For when they are merely separate forms, devoid of body and substance, it is easier for them to apprehend and comprehend His exalted holiness, blessed be His Name. And therefore, they are exceedingly fearful and trembling.

**[23]** From this, we can infer the essence of the reverence that the holy Patriarchs possessed. When we ascend from the generation of the Amoraim, by several degrees, to the earlier generations, and from them, degree after degree, up to the Prophets, and up to the Patriarchs of the world, may peace be upon them. Now, how awesome was their reverence, like Seraphim, Ophanim, and Holy Living Creatures. And they said, of blessed memory, in Tana D'vei Eliyahu: "Fear not, Avram." It is not said, "Fear not," except to one who is truly God-fearing.

**[24]** And from this, it should not be surprising. If the reward for the commandments of the holy Patriarchs was so great, that from the reward of a single commandment that our father Abraham,

peace be upon him, performed, the Holy One, Blessed be He, bestowed an abundant outpouring of goodness, salvation, and blessing upon his descendants after him. For according to the immense awe of our father Abraham, peace be upon him, which human intellect is incapable of fully grasping its essence, just as the essence of the awe and dread that is upon the Ophanim and the Holy Chayot cannot be conceived by the intellect. And according to his awe, so too did his concern and his anguish in the performance of the commandments increase. And therefore, the reward for his commandments also grew immeasurably above. For "according to the suffering is the reward."

**[25]** And from this matter, we shall gain understanding. How much great good is hidden in the treasury of the fear of Heaven. If a person is laden with the fear of God, blessed be His Name, for besides the fact that fear is a cause to guard, do, and fulfill all the words of the Torah and the commandment, furthermore, the commandment that he performs with the strength of the fear of God, blessed be His Name, for which he is fearful and trembling to fulfill it, its reward will be greatly increased above. For the anxiety and sorrow that he has lest he transgress, is like other types of sorrow that a person has in his service of God, blessed be His Name, for according to the extent of the sorrow, so is the reward, as mentioned above. And behold, each person is according to his worth. Not all commandments will have the same weight for him. There are commandments that are severe in his eyes, and he will not transgress them under any circumstances in the world. And there are those that will be light in his eyes. It is self-evident that every commandment for which he is most fearful and trembling lest he transgress and not fulfill it, its reward will be greatly increased above, as mentioned above.

**[26]** There is one matter that is fitting to focus upon, and that is the commandment of Torah study, whose reward is greater than all the commandments. However, one thing can become its adversary, diminishing the reward of



this great commandment. For as our Sages, of blessed memory, stated in their books: "Just as the reward for Torah study is greater than all the commandments, so too is the sin of its neglect greater than all transgressions."

Despite this, experience teaches us that the neglect of this commandment of Torah study is perceived more lightly by a person than the neglect of other commandments. For if, by chance, a person neglects some commandment, such as prayer or phylacteries, and the like, he will worry and be distressed about it greatly. But if he neglects some time from the commandment of Torah study, even without any reason, he will not be concerned or distressed at all. Only the remnants whom God calls will consider this commandment like all other commandments.

The reason for this is that permission has been granted to neglect the commandment of Torah study out of necessity for livelihood, or for a commandment that cannot be performed by others. And in any case, for many people, this commandment is almost in the category of "one who is not commanded and performs." For he has bread in his basket; if he wishes, he can study, and if he wishes, he can rest. And as the Tosafot wrote in Kiddushin, as mentioned above. And therefore, its great reward will also be diminished, as mentioned above.

Therefore, how awesome is the matter of laboring to elevate this commandment of Torah study, at the very least, to the same level as all the commandments, and its sin of neglect to be as severe as the neglect of other commandments.

The counsel suggested for this is to study Mussar books that elaborate on the severity of the sin of neglecting Torah. Likewise, to study the laws of Torah study with deep contemplation for practical application. And as our master, the Gaon and Chasid, of blessed memory, wrote in his Mussar Epistle, see there.

**[27]** Now we shall return to the words of Midrash Rabbah, which stand at the threshold

of our discussion. And at the outset, we will say that the reason Rabbi Shimon ben Chalafta's wife refused to accept the precious stone given to her husband from Heaven, and urged her husband to return the precious stone back to Heaven, so that his table would not be lacking, is not solely because perhaps his merits would be diminished due to the miracle that occurred to him. Rather, it appears that Rabbi Shimon ben Chalafta was exceedingly poor, and he studied Torah out of hardship. And the greatness of the reward for studying Torah out of hardship is well-known. As our Sages, of blessed memory, said in Avot d'Rabbi Natan: "If you studied Torah during times of ease, do not return to it during times of hardship." For it is better for a person to have one thing through suffering than a hundred things through ease. And behold, when he was given from Heaven a precious stone with which he could sustain himself, would he not now study Torah out of ease? Upon this, the pious woman's eye pitied the loss of the great reward for studying Torah out of hardship. And therefore, she trembled with all this great trembling and hastened her husband to return the precious stone back to Heaven. And she chose for herself to roll in poverty and hardship, so that her husband would specifically study Torah out of hardship.

**[28]** And behold, what the wife of Rabbi Shimon ben Chalaphta said to the Rabbi: "Does a person see his fellow in the World to Come?" Indeed, not every righteous person had a world of his own, as it is stated [in scripture]... which, at first glance, seems to be lacking in understanding. However, it appears that the spiritual pleasure and delight of the World to Come is not a single type of spiritual pleasure for all the commandments. Rather, just as in the physical pleasures of this world there are many kinds of different types, so too in the World to Come, in spiritual pleasures. And for each and every commandment, there is a distinct type of spiritual pleasure and delight, separate from others. And similarly, a commandment whose reward is differentiated according to the difficulty of its observance, as our Sages, may their memory

be blessed, said: "According to the effort is the reward." So too, according to this, the type of spiritual pleasure and delight will be different. And in the world of each righteous person are embedded many different kinds of spiritual pleasures and delights, according to the number and count of the commandments he performed in his life, and according to their essence and value, and the variation in the difficulty of their observance. And the righteous person delights in his world with different spiritual delights according to the number of his commandments. And from each one, one hour of spiritual satisfaction is more beautiful than all the days of this world.

**[29]** This is what the wife of Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel said. For every righteous person, there was a world unto himself, as it is stated [in scripture]... This means that for every commandment, there is a unique spiritual delight and pleasure, distinct from any other. And the righteous person delights in spiritual pleasures and enjoyments that differ from each commandment. And it is known and understood that it is unavoidable. For no righteous person will lack some level of attainment that another does not possess. Even for a righteous person who is greater than him. If one commandment is great in its intrinsic value, or due to the difficulty of its observance, which is not even [experienced] by those greater and better than him. Therefore, it is absolutely necessary for every righteous person to have a world of his own. For he cannot enter into the world of another righteous person, even one who is lesser than him. So that he will not taste the flavor of spiritual pleasure and enjoyment from any commandment that his fellow possesses, and which is not available to him. And this is also the interpretation of the saying, "Does a person see his fellow in the World to Come?" This means that for every righteous person, there is a world unto himself. And no righteous person has permission to enter into the world of his fellow, as mentioned above.

**[30]** And behold, in general, there is no doubt that the level of our holy Rabbi was greater than

the level of Rabbi Shimon ben Chalafta. However, Rabbi Shimon ben Chalafta had one great mitzvah in its value, which our holy Rabbi did not have: and that is the study of Torah out of hardship. For Rabbi Shimon ben Chalafta was exceedingly poor, to the point that he had nothing from which to sustain himself on Shabbat. And our holy Rabbi was exceedingly wealthy, as our Sages of blessed memory said in Bava Metzia, page 85: "The household of Rabbi was wealthier than the king Shavur." And our holy Rabbi had no worry for sustenance, and no study of Torah out of hardship. And behold, it has already been explained that when the wife of Rabbi Shimon ben Chalafta refused to accept the precious stone that was given to her husband from heaven, that he could sustain himself from it, it was because the eye of the pious one had compassion for the great reward of studying Torah out of hardship. And she desired to roll herself under poverty and hardship. And for this reason, when our holy Rabbi said to Rabbi Shimon ben Chalafta, "Go and tell her, 'If your table is lacking, I will fill it from my own,'" there is room to ask. After all, for every mitzvah there is a unique, distinct reward of pleasure and delight. And similarly, according to the varying suffering in their fulfillment. Therefore, how could our holy Rabbi fill from his own the reward of studying Torah out of hardship? After all, this type of mitzvah, namely studying Torah out of hardship, does not exist in itself for him, for he was exceedingly wealthy, as mentioned above.

**[31]** This is what the wife of Rabbi Shimon ben Halaphta answered our Holy Rabbi. Her mouth opened with wisdom. And she said to him, "Rabbi, does one person see into his fellow's world to come? Not every righteous person has a world unto himself, as it is stated [in scripture]... This means, why does every righteous person have a world unto himself? Because the reward for the commandments is, for every commandment, a unique delight and Eden. And similarly, for every commandment according to the value of the effort in its fulfillment. And therefore, no righteous person can enter into his fellow's world to see his face.

And now, since our Holy Rabbi is exceedingly wealthy, and learns Torah from a place of ease, how can he fill [his portion] with the unique reward for learning Torah from a place of hardship, as mentioned above?"

## Kokhavei Ohr (Stars of Light) – Chapter 9

### כוכבי אור -- פרק 9

**[1]** In the Gemara, Sukkah, page 51a, Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish said: Man's inclination [yetzer] grows stronger against him each day and seeks to kill him. As it is said, "The wicked one watches for the righteous one and seeks to kill him" (Psalms 37:32). And were it not for the Holy One, Blessed be He, who helps him, he would not be able to prevail. As it is said, "The Lord will not abandon him into his hand" (Psalms 37:33). And it seems very perplexing: for what purpose did the Holy One, Blessed be He, create man in this manner, such that he would not have the strength in his own hand to conquer his evil inclination, except with help from God? And why did the Holy One, Blessed be He, give such power and might to the evil inclination, such that man alone cannot overcome it, but only with the help of the Holy One, Blessed be He? What is the fruit of the benefit from this? And already, the great and pious leader, may his memory be for a blessing, was astonished by this in his work, Etz Peri.

**[2]** It is written, "And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart..." (Deuteronomy 6:5). Our Sages, may their memory be a blessing, expounded in the beginning of Perek HaRo'eh: "with all your heart" means with both your inclinations, with the good inclination and with the evil inclination... See there.

It is to be explained: Behold, it is known that the pillars of the service of God, blessed be His name, upon which all the Torah and the commandment are reliant, are two: fear and

love. And both of these are positive commandments (mitzvot aseh). And as the Rambam, may his memory be a blessing, wrote in the second chapter of Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah, and this is his language: "It is a commandment to love this honored and awesome God, and to fear Him, as it is said, 'And you shall love the Lord your God,' and it is said, 'The Lord your God shall you fear'" (Deuteronomy 6:5, 13).

**[3]** And behold, just as there are two aspects within the fear of God, which the sages of fear designate by name: the fear of punishment and the fear of exaltation. And as it is written in the book *Chovot HaLevavot* (Duties of the Heart), Chapter 6 of the Gate of Love of God, and this is its wording there: "And fear is of two kinds. One of them is the fear of His punishment, etc. And the second is fear for His honor and His exaltation and the might of His strength, etc." And similarly, it is written in the book *Mesillat Yesharim* (Path of the Upright), Chapter 24, and this is its wording: "There is the fear of punishment, etc., and there is the fear of exaltation, etc." The fear of punishment is straightforward: that a person is afraid to transgress the command of the Lord his God, because of the punishments that are for transgressions, whether for the body or for the soul. And the fear of exaltation is that a person distances himself from sins and does not commit them, for the sake of His great honor, may His name be blessed.

**[4]** And similarly, there are two aspects in the love of God, blessed be His Name. Which we can also designate by names. The love of goodness, and the love of exaltation. The love of goodness is to love the Creator, blessed be His Name, for the goodness and kindness that He constantly bestows upon man. And the love of exaltation is to love God, blessed be His Name, because of the greatness of His glory and His exaltation, blessed be His Name. And as it is written in the book *Chovot HaLevavot* (Duties of the Heart) in Chapter 2 of the Gate of the Love of God, and this is its wording: "But in how many ways will love be in God, blessed be His Name, it says..." For the love of the servant for his mas-

ter will be in one of three ways... And upon this analogy, love will be from Him in God. For His abundant kindness towards us and His continuous goodness to us. And our soul will cleave to His love in hope of His reward... And there is that our love for Him will be for His own sake and for His glory, to magnify Him and to exalt Him. And this is the pure love in God, blessed be His Name.

**[5]** And behold, just as the fear of punishment stems from the punishments that await transgressions, whether for the body or for the soul, as mentioned above, so too the love for the Creator, blessed be His Name, is due to His goodness and His kindnesses. This encompasses the physical good things that are with the body in this world, and the good and kindness with the soul in the world of recompense. And this is the great reward hidden for those who do His will, blessed be His Name, for the World to Come. And this is what is written in the book *Chovot HaLevavot* (Duties of the Heart): "The love from Him in God, due to His abundant kindness towards us, as mentioned above, these are the physical good things with the body." And what is written, "And may our soul cleave to His love, in hope of His reward, etc.," this is the good with the soul, for which the Holy One, blessed be He, pays a good reward to those who fear Him.

**[6]** However, there is a distinction: a person is more affected by the fear of punishment than by spiritual punishment that pertains to the soul. This is because they believe that just judgments are established there for perpetrators of iniquity, from which there is no escape or refuge. However, they are not as affected by the punishments for transgressions that pertain to the body. This is because the way the Holy One, Blessed be He, governs His creatures in this world is hidden from the eyes of all. For sometimes it appears that the wicked and those at ease in the world attain wealth, and the souls of the righteous dissolve in suffering. The wicked prolong their wickedness, and the righteous perish in their righteousness. Jeremiah the prophet

already lamented this, saying, "Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper?" However, in the ways of love for the Creator, Blessed be His Name, due to His abundant goodness and kindness, a person feels more the physical benefits, which are close to the senses. For with a little contemplation, behold, every person, according to their situation, will recognize and know that they are laden with the Creator's benefits and kindnesses at all times and every hour, from the moment they emerge from the womb.

**[7]** Let a person not say, "Indeed, all the good things of this world are but vanity of vanities. And all desires and pleasures are but trivial and base. Even one whom God grants wealth and possessions and honor, this too is vanity and vexation of spirit." Now, is such love fitting for the King of Glory? For His goodness and His kindnesses in matters of the physical, whose essence has no substance, their foundation is false, emptiness and void. Is this not like a small child who is grateful to one who gives him a trifle to play with, and loves him for it? Will a person be impressed by such love? Thus, what is the gain for the King of Glory in such love?

**[8]** Indeed, the matter is not so. For it is the will of the Blessed Name, may He be exalted, that man should constantly increase in knowing and contemplating His abundant goodness and kindness. To thank Him and to love Him. And consult the book *Sha'arei Teshuvah* by our Rabbi Yonah, the third gate, section 17, and this is his wording: "And the virtues of remembering His kindnesses and contemplating them, as it is said, 'And you shall remember all the way...' (Deuteronomy 8:2), and David said, 'And they shall contemplate the kindnesses of the Lord' (Psalms 107:43), and it is said, 'For Your kindness is before my eyes...' (Psalms 26:3)." Thus far his wording.

**[9]** This is what our Sages, of blessed memory, expounded: "And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with both your inclinations, with the good inclination and with the evil inclination." The intention is for the two

types of love mentioned above: namely, the love of goodness, which is the love of the Holy One, blessed be He, because of His abundant goodness and kindness towards man; and the love of exaltation, which is the love of Him, may His Name be blessed, because of His great honor and His exaltedness, may His Name be blessed. For the love of exaltation is by the power of the good inclination, as it is only born from knowledge and understanding, to comprehend and grasp His exaltedness, may His Name be blessed. And as the Rambam, of blessed memory, wrote in Chapter 2 of the Laws of the Foundations of the Torah, and this is his wording: "And what is the way to His love and His fear? When a person contemplates His wondrous and great deeds and His creations, and sees from them His wisdom, etc., immediately he loves and praises, etc." (See there). All of this is by the power of the good inclination and the ways of intellect. And this is love with the good inclination. However, the love for His abundant kindness and His continuous bestowal of good in material matters, behold, this too is by the power of the evil inclination and desire. One must love the Holy One, blessed be He, who bestows upon him from His goodness and kindness and satisfies his desires. And even more so, the more the inclination of a person's heart turns to love and covet the benefits and desirable things of this world, so much the more will he add love to the Holy One, blessed be He, because He bestows upon him from the goodness of this world and satisfies his desires. And therefore, this love for the bestowal of goodness from material matters is called love with the evil inclination. And this is what our Sages, of blessed memory, said: "And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, etc., with both your inclinations, with the good inclination and with the evil inclination." This means that one must love the Holy One, blessed be He, in two aspects of love. For besides the love of exaltation, which is with the good inclination as mentioned above, there will also be love for Him, may His Name be blessed, with the evil inclination. That is, because of His abundant goodness and kindness in material matters, which is with the evil inclina-

tion as mentioned above.

**[10]** And so it is concerning praise, blessing, and prayer. Regarding all material matters, the needs of man in this world. For it is His will, blessed be His Name, that man should greatly recognize and contemplate the abundance of His goodness and kindness. And he should always thank Him for His kindnesses. And so, in particular, for whatever enjoyment he derives in this world, he should bless Him. As our Sages, of blessed memory, said at the beginning of the chapter "How are blessings recited": "It is forbidden for man to derive any enjoyment from this world without a blessing." And they substantiated this from a verse. See there. And even though all enjoyment of this world, in its essence, is vanity and a chasing after the wind, nevertheless, this is His will, blessed be His Name. And so it is from His will, blessed be His Name, that man should always pray to Him and ask for mercy from Him concerning his needs, to fulfill all his desires and to fill the yearnings of his heart. He calls out, and "the L-RD will answer."

**[11]** This is what they stated in the Midrash Eichah: "Good is Hashem to His hopeful ones." One might think that one can say "He is capable of all things" to one's soul, that it should seek Him. Behold, it is known that among the foundations of the ways of serving Hashem, blessed be His Name, is trust in Hashem, blessed be His Name, and how many scriptures are there concerning this! That one should not hope in a person, nor rely on human beings, but rather Hashem shall be one's trust. And blessed is the man who trusts in Hashem.

Now, consider the custom in the world: if a certain philanthropist promises a poor man to give him his sustenance, and he fulfills his promise and always gives him what he lacks, would it be conceivable that the poor man would every single day implore the philanthropist's face, that He not forsake him with His kindness, nor diminish his daily bread? For this is not in accordance with custom and proper conduct, as is under-

stood.

And for this reason, I would say that just as the Holy One, blessed be He, commands man to place his trust in Him, blessed be His Name, and He always satisfies the desire of every living thing, what further need is there for constant supplication for mercy before Him, blessed be His Name?

**[12]** Indeed, the matter is not so, for trust alone is insufficient. Rather, it is His Blessed Name's will that with trust, a person should always pray and plead for mercy before Him, Blessed is His Name, for his needs. And then his eyes will be lifted to the Lord, Blessed is His Name, for He will bring about His will to fulfill the desires of his heart for good. And thus the holy forefathers established for us to pray three times each day. This is what our Sages, may their memory be blessed, said in the Midrash: "The Lord is good to those who hope for Him." One might think this means even to one who does not pray to Him at all, for it is only necessary to hope in the Lord and trust in Him, Blessed is His Name. The verse therefore states: "for the soul, you shall seek Him." This means that along with trust, one must also constantly seek and pray before Him. And when he seeks Him, he will find Him.

**[13]** The ultimate will of the Blessed God, may His Name be exalted, in all that has been mentioned above, appears to be entirely for the benefit of man. For the Holy One, Blessed be He, is exalted above all praise and commendation. He has no need for man's praise or prayer, for all is revealed before Him. However, it is known that the ultimate purpose of man's creation in this world is solely for His good in his ultimate end, to bequeath to him eternal life and everlasting delight, so that he may come to receive his reward in the World of Recompense, for the fruit of his labor and toil in Torah and Mitzvot. As it is written in the book *Mesillat Yesharim*, Chapter 1, see there. And it appears that for this reason the commandment "Take heed to yourself, lest you forget the Lord your God" was given. And it is written in the book *Sha'arei Teshuvah*

by our Rabbi Yonah, and his words are as follows: "We are warned in this to remember the Blessed God at all times." Thus far his words. And this means that when the remembrance of the Blessed God, may His Name be exalted, is constantly within his heart, he will walk in the straight paths of God, to observe all the Torah and the Mitzvot. As it is written in the *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim*, Siman 1: "I have set the Lord before me always." This is a great principle in the Torah and in the virtues of the righteous, etc., see there.

**[14]** Indeed, when the soul is imprisoned within the confinement of matter, and the inclination of man's heart is evil from his youth, and his heart inclines towards material desires, therefore man is liable to forget the Blessed God, may His Name be exalted, and to stray from the path of Torah and Mitzvah. Hence, it was from His wisdom, may His Name be exalted, to clear a path for man to remember Him, may He be blessed, always, through the matters of the physical world, the needs of man. And He commanded that man should always pray to Him and ask for mercy from Him, may His Name be exalted, for his needs. And likewise, to always remember His kindnesses and the continuity of His goodness, and to thank Him for His kindness. And for everything one benefits from in this world, he should bless Him.

**[15]** This is what our Sages, of blessed memory, stated in Yoma, folio 76a. His disciples asked Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai: "Why did the manna not descend for Israel once a year?" He replied, "Let me tell you a parable. To what is this matter comparable? To a mortal king who has one son. He used to allocate his sustenance once a year, and consequently, he would only face his father's countenance once a year. Then, he changed and allocated his sustenance daily, and thus he would face his father's countenance every day. Likewise, Israel, if they had four or five sons, would worry and say, 'Perhaps the manna will not descend tomorrow,' and they would all be found to have died of hunger. Thus, they would all direct their hearts to their Father

in Heaven. And it would seem perplexing, for behold, the generation of the desert, who saw the great and awesome glory of God eye to eye, and there is no doubt that their service was at the exalted level of awe of transcendence. What further need was there to frighten and alarm them with the lowly fear of punishment, with the disgrace of hunger and starvation?"

**[16]** Indeed, this is the matter. For the intention is not to instill in them the fear of punishment for lack of sustenance, to compel them to His service, blessed be His Name. Rather, behold, every person, according to their level in reverence, needs the fear of Hashem to be upon their countenance always, so as not to forget Hashem, blessed be His Name, even for a moment. And as it is written, "Be exceedingly watchful over yourself, lest you forget..." Indeed, since man is prone to forgetfulness, and therefore, behold, the matters of the physical world, all of which are in the hands of Heaven, and he constantly needs the kindnesses of Hashem, blessed be His Name. And He commanded us to pray to Him and to seek mercy from Him. This is the reason why he will not forget Hashem. And then his service to Him, blessed be His Name, will be according to the state of his level in reverence for Him, blessed be His Name. This is what our Sages, of blessed memory, said: "Even Israel... and he would worry and say, 'Perhaps man will not descend tomorrow...'". Thus, all of them directed their hearts to their Father in Heaven. That is, this fear, that perhaps man will not descend tomorrow, only brought them to remember Hashem, blessed be His Name. For they directed their hearts to Him day by day, to pray to Him and to seek mercy from Him, and to always thank Him for His kindnesses. And consequently, their service was according to their high level of awe of His majesty and love for Hashem, blessed be His Name, as mentioned above.

**[17]** And from now on, let us gain understanding to comprehend what our Sages, of blessed memory, have said. A person's inclination (yetzer) grows stronger against him each day. And

were it not that the Holy One, Blessed be He, helps him, he would not be able to withstand it. It may seem perplexing to understand the reason why the Lord acted thus: to grant strength and might to the evil inclination more than a person's own strength, to the point that he cannot conquer it without the help of the Holy One, Blessed be He. Indeed, this is the matter: For behold, matters of the physical are among a person's needs, and all is in the hands of Heaven. And a person constantly requires the kindness and goodness of the Lord. And to constantly seek mercy from Him, this is the reason that the remembrance of the Lord, may His Name be blessed, will be within his heart always, to walk in His ways and to observe the Torah and the commandment. Indeed, concerning matters of the spiritual, of His service, may His Name be blessed, there was no such reason before Him. This is because in this, there is no connection whatsoever for a person with the High Heavens, after all, free will is in the hands of man.

**[18]** And therefore, His blessed Name's wisdom saw fit to restrain the hands of man, for even concerning his service [of God], he cannot move without His blessed Name's assistance. And therefore, He gave strength and might into the hand of the evil inclination, which prevails over man, and man cannot conquer it without God helping him. And since he requires His blessed Name's help, he is compelled to pray to Him and constantly seek mercy from Him, that He not abandon him into the hand of his inclination. And how many prayers did King David, peace be upon him, offer concerning matters of the soul. And so too do we pray every day: "And let not the evil inclination rule over us." And even though free will is in man's hand, indeed, all is from this foundation, from what our Sages, may their memory be blessed, said: "And were it not that the Holy One, Blessed be He, helps him, he is not able." And despite all this, it does not contradict free will, for when man does his part, all that is within his power to subdue his inclination, even though his inclination prevails over him, behold, God helps him and will not abandon him into the hand of his inclination.

**[19]** And in any case, after all, man is compelled to rely on His blessed Name in every direction he turns. And he must always pray to the Holy One, Blessed be He, and plead for mercy from Him for his physical and spiritual needs, that He not abandon him into the hands of his inclination. From this, then, both will be as one cause: that man's eyes will always be raised to the Holy One, Blessed be He, and that he will not forget Him, His blessed Name, even for a moment.

## Kokhavei Ohr (Stars of Light) – Chapter 10

כוכבי אור -- פרק 10

**[1]** From the Gemara, Kiddushin, page 81a. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi was accustomed to say every day: "A splinter in the eye of Satan." One day, on the eve of Yom Kippur, he appeared as a poor man. He came and knocked at the door. They brought him bread. He said to them: "A day like this! The whole world is eating, and I am eating alone." They brought him in and seated him at the table. He said to them: "A day like this! The whole world is eating together, and I am alone." They brought him and seated him at the table. He sat, filled his stomach with food, and lay down upon it. And he began to do disgusting things. He said to them: "Sit properly." He said to them: "Give me a cup." They gave him a cup. The demon mixed filth in it. They poured it on him, and he died. They heard people saying: "Plimo killed a man! Plimo killed a man!" He arranged and cleaned himself in the privy. He went after him, and fell before him. When he saw that he was distressed, he revealed himself to him. He said to him: "Why did you say that?" He replied: "Otherwise, what should I say?" He said to him: "Say, 'May the Merciful One rebuke you, Satan.'" Thus ends the language of the Gemara.

**[2]** And Rashi explained it well: "Sit as is fit-

ting, lest you make him repulsive. He cast into him his 'kich'o' – the phlegm issuing from the lungs. They rebuked him, they reprimanded him. Shaka – he held himself as dead. They heard that they were saying, etc. He made his household hear a voice from outside saying, 'Plimo has killed a man.' Plimo fled, thinking that the king's tax collectors were coming to kill him. Tasha – he hid in the privy outside the city. Satan saw Plimo suffering and said, 'Why did you say that? Why were you accustomed to curse me?' Rather, how should it be? 'To push you away from me, so that you do not cause me to sin.' Thus far his words. And it appears from Rashi's explanation that what Plimo was accustomed to say every day, 'A thorn in Satan's eye,' is a curse that Plimo cursed Satan with, in order to push him away from him, so that he would not cause him to sin."

**[3]** Behold, this entire narrative is a wondrous vision. A hidden wonder and an obscure riddle. One: What is the relevance of Plimo's cursing Satan daily? Is this the way to conquer the war of the evil inclination? Two: Satan, who is among the ministering angels, girded himself with wrath and anger, descended below, and clothed himself in the form of a crude body and a physical frame, to walk about outwardly like one of mankind. To perform wonders and do terrible things, to take revenge on Plimo, to frighten him with deeds of murder and the danger of death. Is Satan vengeful and wrathful? Is not this attribute solely possessed by the force of matter, whose foundation is in dust? Three: Also, the rest of the things he did. For he was accustomed to doing loathsome deeds, and after they told him, "Repent well," he added to ask for a cup of wine and to pour it upon himself like a fool. Is there no revenge in this at all? And what he drank and died, and Plimo's voice was heard proclaiming, "A man has been slain," he could have done without this. And as it appears, these are merely words of jest and mockery. Is Satan a jester who desired mockery and wished to play with Plimo? Four: Why did he time his deed for the eve of Yom Kippur, and not for some other festival or occasion? Five: What



is it that Plimu said afterwards to Satan, "Otherwise, how shall I say it?" Is there no other way but to curse his portion on earth? Also other minute details which are not to be prolonged.

**[4]** And it appears fitting to clarify the path through this story. Initially, let us explain that what was commonly said, "A splinter in his eye, Satan," is not a curse. Indeed, it is known that the wisest of all men, in his wisdom, describes the evil inclination in relation to the body's forces as a war of enemies. As it is written in Ecclesiastes 9: "A small city, and few men within it. And a great king came against it and besieged it..." And our Sages, may their memory be blessed, expounded in Nedarim 32a: "A small city" - this is the body. "And few men within it" - these are the limbs. "And a great king came against it and besieged it" - this is the evil inclination... See there. Likewise, our Sages, may their memory be blessed, said in Brachot 6a: "A person should always provoke the good inclination against the evil inclination." And Rashi explained: "He should wage war with the evil inclination." And the pious author of *Hovot HaLevavot* (Duties of the Heart) wrote in Chapter 5 of the Gate of Unification of Deeds: They spoke of a pious man who encountered men returning from a war of enemies... He said to them: "You have returned from the small war; prepare yourselves for the great war, which is the war of the inclination and its soldiers." See there. And behold, the evil inclination hates man with ultimate hatred. And as our Sages, may their memory be blessed, said in Sota 53a: "The evil inclination has seven names..." Solomon called it "hater," as it is said: "If your enemy is hungry..." And in the book *Hovot HaLevavot*, there, he wrote in his words: "Son of man, it is fitting for you to know that the greatest enemy you have in the world is your inclination... and it directs you with its deadly arrows to uproot you from the land of the living..." See there.

**[5]** And behold, it is known from the powers of the body, how great is the power of vengeance and victory within man. To exact vengeance from his enemy who seeks his life, and to con-

quer him. And even more so when he faces his foe on the field of battle, in the arrays of war. For then the power of vengeance and victory will awaken within him. And a spirit of valor will clothe him. And he will gird himself with strength and might to surrender even his life to death. And by this, he will sometimes overcome even his stronger foe.

**[6]** And concerning this, it is greatly astonishing. After all, the evil inclination utterly hates a person, and plots only evil against him all day long, to trap him in a snare and to uproot him from the land of life. And although the eyes of flesh do not see it, the eyes of intellect do see. If so, it is astonishing: why does one walk with the evil inclination in peace and in straightforwardness? Why is there not found among people a spirit that desires victory and vengeance, to conquer one's inclination and to win the war, as is the judgment for every enemy and foe? However, one should not be astonished regarding the spirit of humankind, for we are distant from the perception of spiritual matters, and this war is not truly depicted in our hearts. For we also lack the perception of spiritual reward and punishment.

**[7]** Indeed, the struggle was vividly before his eyes. The depiction of this war against the evil inclination was like a literal war between enemies. He would strengthen himself in his war against the evil inclination with the power of vengeance and victory. This is what he was accustomed to say every day: "A splinter in Satan's eye." That is to say, he would boast against it, that he would overcome it and shoot arrows at it. And by this, he would gird himself with strength to conquer his inclination and win the war.

**[8]** Indeed, while this idea itself is good – for a person to possess a spirit that desires victory and vengeance against the evil inclination – nevertheless, the boastfulness that arose against the inclination, claiming one could overcome it and shoot arrows at it, and with his mouth saying daily, "A splinter in the eye of Satan," this

is not in accordance with what our Sages, of blessed memory, stated in Sukkah (fol. 52b): "A person's inclination overcomes him each day and seeks to kill him..." and "Were it not for the Holy One, Blessed be He, who helps him, he would not be able to prevail," as it is stated... Behold, truly the strength and might of the evil inclination are greater than the strength of man. And he cannot boast against the inclination, for it is stronger than him. For his right hand will not save him. But only by the strength of God's right hand and His help, may His Name be blessed, will he gain strength to conquer the war. And we have already written that all this is by the intention of His wisdom, may His Name be blessed, to give such strength and might to the evil inclination, which man cannot overcome without His help, may His Name be blessed. For this is the reason that man will direct his heart to his Father in Heaven, and his eyes will be lifted to Him always, for He will not abandon him into the hand of his inclination. Indeed, the boastful one truly assumed that when the Holy One, Blessed be He, gave free choice into man's hand, behold, by his own strength and the might of his hand alone, he would be able to overcome his inclination and conquer it.

**[9]** And behold, our Sages, of blessed memory, said in Midrash Rabbah, Parashah 54: "When a man's ways please the Lord, even his enemies He will reconcile with him." This refers to the evil inclination. See there.

It appears that the intention is not that the evil inclination will reconcile with the person, and cease its provocation against him. Rather, the intention is that behold, the evil inclination hates the person with utmost hatred, and desires to cast him down into the depths and uproot him from the land of the living.

However, "When a man's ways please the Lord, even the evil inclination will reconcile with him." It will become his friend, and will rejoice in being overcome by the person. And behold, even Pelimo (a righteous individual) reached this level, for the Lord desired his ways, and the evil inclination reconciled with him and became his

friend.

**[10]** And therefore, when Pelimo saw that he was mistaken in this, to think that his own right hand alone was mighty in strength to achieve victory, to overcome his inclination and to subjugate it beneath him without the help of His Blessed Name, therefore he arrayed this entire battle before him. The ultimate purpose of the matter, in our estimation, is to bring Pelimo to a great test in the ways of the character traits, and to trap him in the snare of the trait of meticulousness, as will be clarified before us with the help of Heaven. And to show him tangibly that a person does not prevail against the evil inclination by his own strength, for its strength is greater than man's strength. And it is in His hand to spread a net for the feet of those who fear the Lord and all His pious ones, through great trials, and to trap them in the snare. And if the Lord does not guard the city, the small one, from the hand of the great king who surrounds it – this is the evil inclination – in vain does the guard labor to guard himself from his hand. And only the Lord, Blessed is His Name, He will guard the feet of His pious ones from being trapped, and will not abandon them into the hand of their inclination. And as our Sages, may their memory be for a blessing, said: "A person's inclination..." and "Were it not for the Holy One, Blessed be He, who helps him, he would not be able to [overcome it]."

**[11]** Indeed, this vision is lengthy. Behold, when the Satan, who is the Evil Inclination, made peace with Plimo and became his friend, therefore, with this, he wished to show him from the ways of his procession with man. And all that he did in this was not for naught. For in this entire vision, hidden within it are enigmas and parables, from the ways of the Evil Inclination's processions with man. And when it becomes known to Plimo who this man is, who disguised himself and came in the guise of a pauper, he will understand and comprehend the entire vision, what their words allude to. Now, I am about to remove the veil that is cast upon the face of this vision, and to reveal the face of

the Lot, the ultimate intention, and the essence of the enigmas and parables and their solutions. And I shall proceed according to the order of the narrative, and explain, with the help of God, one by one.

**[12]** One day, on the eve of the Day of Atonement, it appeared to him as if he were poor, etc. This is as will be explained before us. For the Satan brought Plimo to a test in the ways of character traits. And he caused him to stumble in the trait of scrupulousness. And for this reason, the Satan timed the hour to the eve of the Day of Atonement. For it is known that during the Ten Days of Repentance, a person must straighten his ways and improve his deeds even more. And even with the trait of piety, which one is not accustomed to being careful about throughout the year, nevertheless, one must be careful during the Ten Days of Repentance. As is explained in the Jerusalem Talmud, first chapter of Shabbat. Rabbi Chiya Rabbah instructs Rabbi: If you can eat [food that is] entirely pure all year, eat. If not, eat [pure food] seven days in the year. The Rosh brought this [teaching] to the end of Rosh Hashanah and wrote in the name of Ra'aviah that these are the seven days between Rosh Hashanah and the Day of Atonement. And the Rosh wrote that this is why the custom in Ashkenaz is that even those who are not careful about the bread of an idolater throughout the year, are careful during the Ten Days of Repentance. See there. And in any case, likewise in the ways of character traits, certainly one must be even more so in the manner of piety during these days. And how much more so on the eve of this holy day. And for this reason, the Satan showed him that even on this day, his strength and might are great to bring a person to a test, and to trap him in a snare.

**[13]** (2) He appears to him like a pauper, then the verse comes, "at the entrance..." – Indeed, the Sages of Awe wrote to interpret the verse in the portion of Bereshit. "And if you do not do well, sin crouches at the entrance." For the Lord, blessed be His Name, informed Cain about the power of the evil inclination. For He set a bound-

ary for it, so that it would not enter the house to tempt a person to sin. Rather, it would stand at the entrance of the house like a pauper at the door. And as our Sages, may their memory be blessed, said in Sukkah, page 52b: Initially, it calls him "a traveler," and in the end, it calls him "a guest." And in the end, it calls him "a man." And examine there Rashi's commentary. And this is "sin crouches at the entrance." And when a person listens to its voice a little, to open the door for it, then the evil inclination will strengthen itself over him to become a lodger in his house. And this is what Satan showed to Plimou in a parable and a riddle. For he appears to him like a pauper. And initially, it stood behind the door, and the verse comes, "at the entrance," to open the door for him, as is understood.

**[14]** (3) They offered him a piece of bread. He said to him, "The day is like this now; the whole world is inside, and I am outside." They brought him in and brought him a piece of bread. He said to him, "The day is like this now; the whole world is with you, and I am alone." They brought him and seated him with them. Indeed, the Gaon and Chasid, may his memory be for a blessing, wrote explicitly in *Mishlei* (Proverbs) that the *yetzer hara* (evil inclination) does not initially urge one towards sin, but rather begins by showing love to a person. And when it sees that it is not overcoming him, then it begins to ensnare him with its net, and tempts him to perform *mitzvot* (commandments) that involve physical pleasure, such as eating and the joy of a *mitzvah*. And when he becomes accustomed to the pleasures of a *mitzvah*, then it begins to draw him after the desires of this world, etc. Indeed, the *yetzer hara* is desire. And this is what he hinted to him from the ways of its progression with a person. For the *yetzer hara* is desire. Initially, it called out "Abba" and asked only for a piece of bread. This means that desire initially asks for mercy from a person, not to neglect this world entirely. And when he opened the door for it and they brought him a piece of bread, he said to him, "The day is like this now; the whole world is with you, and I am alone." This means

that on the eve of Yom Kippur, it is a *mitzvah* to eat and to increase the meal, as explained in the Gemara and *poskim* (halachic authorities). And see *Tosafot*, Ketubot, page 5, the discussion beginning "Elah shehayu regilim leharbot be'ofot uve'dagim" (Rather, they were accustomed to increase [the meal] with fowl and fish). And this is what the Satan said to him, "The day is like this now..." This means that on this day, is it not a *mitzvah* to increase the meal? And he wants to eat with the guests a fixed meal in honor of the day. And this is what he hinted to him in a parable and riddle. For the *yetzer hara* is desire. Initially, it asked only for a piece of bread. And afterwards, it began to draw with its net towards a *mitzvah* that involves physical pleasure.

**[15]** He was sitting, his soul filled with contemplation, and it occurred to him – behold, in the explanations of the Gra [Rabbi Eliyahu of Vilna] on the Aggadah of Berakhot (folio 61). He wrote concerning what is stated there, "The evil inclination is like a fly, etc.," as it is said, "Dead flies cause the perfumer's ointment to putrefy and bubble" (Ecclesiastes 10:1). For indeed, a fly stands only upon a foul place. And so too, the evil inclination dwells only in a flawed place. And this is what he hinted at in the parable: for when he wrapped himself in the garment of a lifeless body and flesh. His soul was filled with contemplation and it occurred to him, for it dwells only in a flawed place, as mentioned above.

**[16]** (16) He was doing detestable things. He said to him, "Sit properly." He said to him, "Give me a cup," and they gave him a cup. He threw a fly into it. Behold, this is what our Sages, of blessed memory, said: "The evil inclination is like a fly," as it is stated, "Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a foul odor" (Ecclesiastes 10:1). It seems fitting to interpret the metaphor in this way. For behold, all the animals and birds are afraid of man, as it is written, "And your dread and your fear shall be upon them" (Genesis 9:2). Therefore, it is possible to chase them away and drive them off, and they will not quickly return in their wake. Except

for flies, they are not afraid of man. And when they fly upon his face and he chases them away, behold, in a moment they return in their wake, ashamed to alight upon his face. And there is no wisdom or counsel against them except to constantly wave a fan at them. This is what our Sages, of blessed memory, said: "The evil inclination is like a fly," as it is stated, "Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a foul odor." For the evil inclination is like the fly that is not afraid of man. And even if man rebukes it and drives it away, in a very short while it will return to him. And there is no wisdom or counsel except not to divert one's attention from it and to constantly drive it away. And perhaps this is what our Sages, of blessed memory, said in Berakhot 10a: "Behold, I know now that you are a man of God, a holy man." "How did Rav and Shmuel know?" "One said, 'A fly was never seen passing over his table,' and one said..." And this is because the evil inclination is like a fly. And the holy prophet, over whom the evil inclination had no dominion, therefore, a fly was not seen passing over his table. And examine Berakhot 61a: "Rav said, 'The evil inclination is like a fly,' and Shmuel said, 'It is like a type of wheat.'" And this is what they said there: "One said..." And understand.

**[17]** And this is what Satan showed to Pelimu in a parable and a riddle. For he is like a fly. And it is difficult to drive him away. For when one was doing [things that were] repulsive, and he said to him, "Sit properly," he was not afraid and did not flinch. And in an instant, he asked for a cup and poured into it his excrement.

**[18]** (5) "They rebuked him" — behold, this is explained according to the superficiality of the language. For initially, he was told gently and in a soft tone, "Sit well." And as Rashi explains, "Sit in a manner that you do not make it repulsive." Afterward, when they gave him a seat, and he "turned his face to it as he vomited," they rebuked him. Rashi explains "rebuked him" as "scolded him," and it appears that this was a rebuke with a loud voice. And this is what they said, "Shaka and died," and

Rashi explained, "Shaka" means he considered himself dead. And this is because he made himself as if he were terrified and startled by the sound of the rebuke. And through this, his spirit departed suddenly. And it appears that this was the Satan's primary objective: to anger Plimo and to provoke him, and to bring him to a state of indignation until they rebuked him with a loud voice. And behold, it is true that he brought Plimo to a great test. A poor man sat at the table, despising the foods in front of the guests. And when they urged him not to do so, he asked for a cup, and he "turned his face to it as he vomited" into the cup. And he returned again to his vomit, until the guests were utterly disgusted.

**[19]** Indeed, it is known that the path of true humility is not to be particular about anything whatsoever in the world. And as our Sages, may their memory be blessed, related in Shabbat (folio 30a) concerning the humility of Hillel, when a certain man wished to provoke him. He performed actions that should not be done. Yet, in no way did he succeed in provoking Hillel or bringing him to a state of vexation. And in any case, according to the path of true humility, there was no reason to feel any vexation. Nor to reprimand the poor man, and even more so on the eve of Yom Kippur, when the ways of character traits should be in the utmost measure of piety, as mentioned above. And this was the ultimate goal of the Satan in this episode: to show him the extent of his strength and might, to bring him to a great test, and to cause him to stumble in the trait of meticulousness. So that he would not boast over him, saying, "a splinter in Satan's eye," as mentioned above. For to those holy pietists, who are like ministering angels, even a slight weakness in any trait is a very great stumbling block.

**[20]** (20) "He was stunned and died" - and Rashi explained, "He considered himself dead." Behold, in this, it also showed him the strength of man, that sometimes his power and might are great against the evil inclination. For behold, in the curse that the Holy One, Blessed be He, cursed the serpent, He said to it, "And I will

put enmity... It shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise its heel." And it is to be explained that behold, with all the might and strength of the evil inclination, and with the weakness of man's strength, nevertheless, there is one aspect wherein the strength and might of man are greater than the strength of the inclination. For behold, the evil inclination cannot take a coarse step to ascend upon man's head. This means that it is not within its power to come to any of the faithful followers of Israel, who observe Torah and commandments, to incite them to abandon the paths of righteousness all at once and to commit every abomination, let alone to worship idolatry. Rather, if it commits its deed, it does so gradually. Slowly, slowly, it will lead him astray from the path of good, until it bends him into crooked paths in a wilderness with no way. And as our Sages, may their memory be blessed, said in Shabbat, page 105, "This is the craft of the evil inclination: Today it says to him, 'Do this,' and tomorrow it says to him, 'Do that,' until it says to him, 'Worship idolatry,' and he goes and worships." See there. And likewise, our Sages, may their memory be blessed, said in Sukkot, page 51, "At first, he was estranged, and in the end, he was among them." See there.

**[21]** Indeed, it is not so with man. Even if he has already been ensnared in the trap and caught in the net of the evil inclination, and has descended to the lowest level, turning away from all Torah and commandment. Nevertheless, it is within his power to gird himself with strength and might, to conquer his inclination and overcome it in a single moment, to return to the Lord, blessed be His Name, and to perform complete repentance. And as our Sages, may their memory be blessed, related in Avodah Zarah, page 17, concerning Rabbi Elazar ben Durdaya, who did not leave a single harlot in the world with whom he had not had relations. Once he heard that there was a harlot in the cities of the sea, etc., he took a purse of dinars, etc. She said to him, "Just as this smoke does not return to its place, so too Elazar ben Durdaya will not be accepted in repentance." He

placed his head between his knees and wept until his soul departed. A heavenly voice went forth and said, "Rabbi Elazar ben Durdaya is destined for the World to Come." Rabbi wept and said, "There are those who acquire their World to Come in many years, and there are those who acquire their World to Come in one hour." See there. And furthermore, there are several such narrative stories.

**[22]** This is what the verse states: "He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel" (Genesis 3:15). For it is known that the primordial serpent is the Satan, who is the Evil Inclination. And this is what is meant by "He shall bruise your head": that at first, it will seem to you as if the Evil Inclination is biting you on the head, and you will return to the Almighty, blessed be His Name. But "you shall bruise his heel" means that you will be compelled, at first, only to bite him on the heel. And as our Sages, of blessed memory, said: What is the craft of the Evil Inclination today? It says to him, "Do this." Until it eventually says to him, "Serve idolatry," as mentioned above.

**[23]** This is what Satan showed him in a vision. For when they rebuked him, he held himself as if dead. This means that it is within man's power to gird himself with strength in one moment to rebuke the evil inclination and to crush it beneath his feet, until it falls before him vanquished, as if dead. And we have already explained above. For Satan appeared to him as a pauper and called out, "I am at the door." And afterwards he said, "Today the whole world is dying, and I am at the door." And afterwards he said, "The whole world is coming to you," etc. For he hinted to him through this his way with man, gradually and slowly, just as our Sages, of blessed memory, said in Sukkah, page 52b: "At first, He called him 'a traveler,' and in the end, He called him 'a guest.'" Therefore, he showed him after this, in a parable and a riddle, man's power to overcome his inclination at once, and to cast it vanquished at his feet.

**[24]** (24) When a person flees and hides him-

self in the privy, and the Evil Inclination pursues him and falls before him, this teaches him a lesson concerning the war of the Yetzer (Evil Inclination). It is to instill in him understanding that even if a person ascends to great heights, becoming a hero who conquers his Yetzer and subjugates it beneath him, to the point where it seems to him as if he has already slain it, nevertheless, the righteous person should not rejoice because he has seen vengeance. And he should not say in his heart, "Behold, I have defeated it." For the Satan will not cease from man. For as soon as he falls, he will live again and attempt to renew the war against him. And as the pious author of *Chovot HaLevavot* (Duties of the Heart) wrote in Chapter 5 of the Gate of Unification of Deeds, and this is his language: "And it is astonishing, my brother, for any enemy you have, if you defeat him once or twice, he will desist from you and will not conceive of fighting you again. But the Yetzer, victory once or a hundred times is not sufficient for it." And as our Sages, of blessed memory, said, "Do not trust in yourself." And this is what the Satan showed to Plimo in a parable and riddle: that even though it was struck and died, it immediately stood on its feet and pursued Plimo.

**[25]** (9) He fled for his life to the privy. In this, [the Adversary] showed him the extent of his power and his forces. For besides the fact that within a person he places his four [aspects of the soul] to incite and mislead him from the path of good, he also has the ability to distress and oppress a person in his physical state, and to disturb him from serving God, blessed be His Name. To deny him rest and to confuse his intellect and his thoughts. For behold, this is the eve of Yom Kippur, when a person needs to be at rest and prepare himself for the holy day, to return to God, blessed be His Name. [The Adversary] brought upon him fear of murderous deeds and the danger of death, to the point that he was compelled to flee outside the city and take his stand in the privy, a place where even contemplating words of Torah is forbidden.

**[26]** (10) For when he saw that he was suffer-

ing, his soul revealed itself to him, and he said to him, "What is the reason you said this?" He replied, "This is because the Satan said to him, 'What is the reason you said, "Spit in the eye of the Satan!'" And you think that by your strength and the might of your hand you can overcome your inclination and boast over me, saying, 'You are a teacher of the bow and arrows!'"

**[27]** (11) Rather, how can I say this? It means that Satan said to him [God]: "Since your strength and might are great, greater than the strength of man, and you can overcome him until he cannot defeat you, then how can I say [that I can overcome him]? This means, what counsel or stratagem is there against you to conquer you?"

**[28]** (12) He said to him: "May the Merciful One rebuke him, the Satan, upon you!" – Here he revealed to him the secret. For in truth, a person's own strength will not save him against the *Yetzer* (Evil Inclination). Salvation comes only from God, and by the strength of God's right hand and His assistance will he achieve might to conquer his *Yetzer*. And as our Sages, of blessed memory, said: "A person's *Yetzer* grows stronger against him each day..." and were it not that the Holy One, blessed be He, assists him, he would not be able to overcome it. Therefore, one should not boast against the *Yetzer*. Rather, one should always pray and seek mercy from God, may His Name be blessed, to send him His help from holiness, and not leave him in the hand of his *Yetzer*. And God, may His Name be blessed, will guard the feet of His pious ones from being ensnared, for His eye is upon those who fear Him, who hope for His kindness.

## Kokhavei Ohr (Stars of Light) – Chapter 11

כוכבי אור -- פרק 11

**[1]** "You, O Lord, preserve man and beast." (Psalm 36:7). Rabbi Yehuda said in the name of Rav: This refers to people who are naked in their understanding and make themselves like beasts. (Chullin 5a)

**[2]** We have learned in Avot, Chapter 6: "Such is the way of Torah: Eat bread with salt, drink water by measure, sleep on the ground, and live a life of hardship. And in Torah you shall toil. If you do so, happy are you and good for you – happy are you in this world, and good for you in the world to come."

Now, regarding the intention of what our Sages, of blessed memory, said, "and live a life of hardship" – it appears to be lacking in understanding. What is a "life of hardship"? For one who eats bread with salt, drinks water by measure, and sleeps on the ground – is this not a life of hardship?

**[3]** In the Gemara, Yoma (daf 76a), his students asked Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai: "Why was manna not sent down to Israel once a year?" He said to them, "I will tell you a parable. To what is this matter comparable? To a mortal king who has one son. And he would set his provisions for him once a year. And he would only face his father once a year. [The king] then changed and set his provisions for him every day. And he would face his father every day. So too, Israel, if they had four or five sons, and he would worry and say, 'Perhaps manna will not descend tomorrow,' and they would all be found dead from hunger. [But] they were all found to direct their hearts to their Father in Heaven."

**[4]** And according to first principles, this is very perplexing. For behold, in Menachot (daf 103), our Sages, of blessed memory, expounded upon the verse in the Parashah of Rebuke: "And your life shall be hanging before you" (Deuteronomy 28:66). This refers to one who purchases produce from year to year. "And you shall fear day and night." This refers to one who purchases produce from Erev Shabbat to Erev Shabbat. "And you shall not believe in your life." This refers to one who relies on the baker. And

Rashi explained: "one who purchases produce from year to year" means one who has no land to sow, and thus his life is hanging, as he does not know if he will have money for the coming year. Thus far his words. And consult Rashi's commentary there.

It appears that every delay in the verse is a greater curse. For "And your life shall be hanging before you" refers to one who purchases produce from year to year, who worries about the coming year. And "you shall fear day and night" refers to one who purchases produce from Erev Shabbat to Erev Shabbat, and does not know if he will have money even for the next Erev Shabbat. And "you shall not believe in your life" refers to one who relies on the baker, who does not purchase produce at all and does not know if he will have money even for tomorrow to buy bread, or perhaps the baker will not bake.

And in any case, we understand from all this that one who does not know if he will have money even for tomorrow to buy food, this is a great curse like no other, for he will not believe in his life. And according to this, it is very perplexing. For in the generation of the desert, when manna descended for them daily, and one who had four or five sons would worry and say, "Perhaps manna will not descend tomorrow, and all of them will be found dead from starvation." It turns out that the fact that manna descended for them daily, is this a curse from God from the Rebuke? God forbid, did the Holy One, Blessed be He, give the generation of the desert the curse from the Rebuke?

**[5]** Indeed, the explanation of the matter appears. For behold, in Sotah (page 48), a Baraita is brought. It was taught: Rabbi Eliezer the Great says, "Anyone who has bread in his basket and says, 'What shall I eat tomorrow?' is merely among the lesser in faith." For truly, one who is among the great in faith does not worry at all about what he will eat tomorrow, because he believes in God and places his trust in Him, blessed be His Name. For He gives bread to all flesh. And one who worries and says, "What shall I eat tomorrow?" has a sin upon him, be-

cause he is among the lesser in faith. And therefore, one who is perfect in faith to the utmost, even if God burdens his sustenance only day by day, and he does not know if tomorrow there will be something to eat, this is not considered a curse for him at all. For he does not worry in the least and trusts in God that he will not lack sustenance, and there is no want for those who fear Him. And conversely, this curse will turn into a blessing for him, so that he may derive benefit from it for his soul. For this one who does not know if he will have something to eat tomorrow – this is a reason that he must, at the very least, enslave his heart to his Father in Heaven.

**[6]** However, one who is among the lesser in faith, and truly worries even about what he will eat tomorrow, if his livelihood will be to seek daily to earn his bread. And each day he does not know if he will have something to eat for the next day. And what if he also has children, and tomorrow his little ones will ask for bread, and he does not know if he will have bread for the little ones. And he cannot remove worry from his heart. For him, it is truly a divine curse from within. For his life hangs precariously before him, and he will not believe in his life. He will also not bear any beneficial fruit from this for his soul, to direct his heart to his Father in Heaven, since he is among the lesser in faith. And even more so, because the worry sours his spirit and confuses his mind, and he is struck with bewilderment of heart.

**[7]** And through this we shall gain understanding and find the resolution of the matter. For behold, the curses in the Parashah of Rebuke—if the Children of Israel do not listen to the voice of Hashem, to observe and to do all His commandments, and they stray from Him—behold, for them, even when buying produce from the market, they will not know if they will have money to purchase it. And how much more so for one who relies on credit. Behold, this will be counted as a curse for them, for their lives will hang precariously before them, and they will not believe in their lives.



However, the generation of the desert was on a very great level, as is known. And at the Red Sea, faith was established in their hearts to the utmost degree, as it is written, "And the people feared Hashem, and they believed in Hashem and in Moses His servant." And for this reason, even though the Holy One, Blessed be He, did not send them manna once a year, but rather manna descended for them every day, and they would worry, "Perhaps manna will not descend tomorrow." Despite all this, this was not considered a curse for them, Heaven forbid, but rather a blessing. For this worry was only a beneficial fruit for their souls, because they all directed their hearts to their Father in Heaven, and they no longer worried at all about the next day, for they believed in Hashem and in Moses His servant.

**[8]** Based on what has been mentioned above, we must interpret the statement of our Sages, of blessed memory: "The Torah was given only to those who eat manna." This means that for the Torah to be in a superior state, it is necessary that it be accompanied by the fear of God, blessed be His Name. As our Sages, of blessed memory, stated in Chapter 3 of Pirkei Avot: "If there is no wisdom, there is no fear; if there is no fear, there is no wisdom."

Now, in the desert generation, when Israel was sustained by manna, and the Holy One, blessed be He, sent them manna daily, just enough for their sustenance, this was the reason that all of Israel directed their hearts to their Father in Heaven, as mentioned above. Consequently, their fear of God was also in a very elevated state, and the Torah and fear were intertwined for them like twin gazelles.

However, this was not the case in later days. When Israel entered the Land and engaged in settling and livelihood, and in the days of harvest they gathered their produce and filled their storehouses with grain, and the Holy One, blessed be He, sent them His blessing, so that they brought out the old because of the new. Therefore, concerning their sustenance, they no longer had a reason to direct their hearts

to their Father in Heaven, for they no longer had the worry of tomorrow, nor even for many days. And when the cause is removed, the effect ceases. This, as is understood, is what our Sages, of blessed memory, meant when they said: "The Torah was given only to those who eat manna."

**[9]** And behold, the order of the Torah's relationship with "derech erez" (worldly conduct/livelihood). If indeed man is permitted to engage in "derech erez," in work or commerce for the sake of his sustenance, nevertheless, our Sages, of blessed memory, have already stated in Avot, Chapter 4: Rabbi Meir says, "Be few in business and engage in Torah." And similarly, they stated there in Chapter 1: Shammai says, "Make your Torah a fixed practice."

The core principle is that if a person desires to enter into and gather matters, to prepare for himself for many days, and even to leave an inheritance for his descendants, through this he will be compelled to increase his business or work, and to diminish his Torah study.

However, the path of superior discernment is to engage in "derech erez," in work and the like, each day, earning only enough for that day's sustenance alone. As explained in the Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh De'ah, Laws of Torah Study, Siman 246, in the gloss, which states: "And he shall do work each day enough for his needs if he has nothing to eat. And the rest of the day and night he shall engage in Torah." See there.

And it appears that this is from what our Sages, of blessed memory, related in Yoma (folio 35) concerning Hillel the Elder, that each and every day he would work and earn a "trefik" (a measure of produce or money). Half he would give to the keeper of the study hall, and half for his sustenance and the sustenance of his household.

And even if a person conducts himself in this manner, he will still have the worry of tomorrow, whether he will have something to eat. However, if he is among the great ones of faith

("gedolei emunah"), he will further have a beneficial fruit for his soul, to direct his heart to his Father in Heaven, and he will no longer worry at all. And as was the case with those who ate manna, as mentioned above.

But if he has not yet reached this level, to be complete in faith and trust to the utmost, for this is a very difficult matter, as explained in the Mishnah Sotah (folio 48): "Since the Temple was destroyed, the people of faith ('anshei emunah') ceased from Israel." And Rabbi Yitzchak said, "These are people who believe in the Holy One, Blessed be He." For it is taught: Rabbi Eliezer the Great says, "Whoever has bread in his basket..." See there.

And in any case, even if he has not reached this level, and cannot entirely dismiss the worry of tomorrow, nevertheless, he should conduct himself as mentioned above, and strengthen his faith in every possible way, and endure a little suffering.

**[10]** This is what our Sages, of blessed memory, stated in Pirkei Avot: "Thus is the way of Torah: Eat bread with salt, and drink water by measure; sleep on the ground, and live a life of hardship. And in Torah you shall toil." Now, a life of hardship is one where one does not know if there will be something to eat tomorrow. For this is a divine curse mentioned in the Parashat Tochecha (the section of rebuke). And the verse describes this in a fearsome manner: "And your life shall be hanging before you, and you shall fear night and day, and you shall not believe in your life." As our Sages, of blessed memory, expounded in Menachot, as mentioned above. And this is what our Sages, of blessed memory, taught us: That the way of Torah is for a person to possess the attribute of contentment, whereby he is satisfied with dry bread with salt and measured water. Indeed, even this little of bread with salt and measured water is a life of hardship. And this means that one does not wish to prepare for himself bread with salt and measured water for many days, nor even for the next day. Rather, he lives a life of hardship, for day by day he shall labor only enough for his

sustenance, to earn for the bread with salt and measured water of that day alone. And the rest of the day and night he shall occupy himself with Torah.

**[11]** And just as Hillel the Elder used to act, that each and every day he would gather wood and earn a *terufeik*. Half of it he would give to the keeper of the House of Study. And half for his sustenance and the sustenance of the members of his household. And the Rambam, may his memory be for a blessing, in his commentary on the Mishnah, Chapter 4 of Avot, wrote that Hillel the Elder was a wood gatherer. And behold, our master, the Gaon, the pious one, may his memory be for a blessing, used to say: That one must understand that half a *terufeik* is a very small thing. For indeed, he would give half a *terufeik* to the keeper of the House of Study. And certainly, others would also give such a thing to the keeper of the House of Study. And if half a *terufeik* were some important thing, the keeper of the House of Study would become wealthy. And in any case, with such a small thing as half a *terufeik*, he would suffice for his sustenance and the sustenance of the members of his household. And even this little he did not prepare for himself for the next day. For each day he would gather wood and earn enough for a *terufeik*, so that half would be for the sustenance of that day. And thus is the way of Torah.

**[12]** And behold, in Berakhot (folio 35a), Rabba bar bar Chana said in the name of Rabbi Yochanan, in the name of Rabbi Yehuda ben Rabbi Ila'ai: "Come and see that the latter generations are not like the former generations. The former generations made their Torah their permanent occupation and their work their incidental pursuit. Both were fulfilled by their hand. The latter generations made their work their permanent occupation and their Torah their incidental pursuit. Neither was fulfilled by their hand." Thus far the language of the Gemara. Examine there.

And it will be explained correctly that it is known that all of a person's affairs, whether the needs

of the body, such as livelihood and the like, or the needs of the soul, Torah and reverence, even if a person engages in them with diligent hands and a toiling soul, nevertheless, they will not stand and will not be except with the help of the Blessed Holy One, may His Name be blessed. The matters of the physical realm are known to be entirely in the hands of Heaven. And even though the Torah permitted engaging in worldly affairs, as our Sages, of blessed memory, said there in Berakhot: "And you shall gather in your grain" (Deuteronomy 11:14) – conduct yourself in them according to the ways of the world' (Berakhot 35b), the words of Rabbi Yishmael. Examine there. Nevertheless, with this, His blessed Name's help is required, that the blessing of the Lord shall be in the house and in the field, as it is written in the portion of Bechukotai (Leviticus 26:3-13).

And similarly, concerning matters of the soul, our Sages, of blessed memory, said in Sukkah (folio 52a): "A person's evil inclination grows stronger over him each day and seeks to kill him..." and "Were it not for the Holy One, Blessed be He, helping him, he would not be able to overcome it..."

**[13]** Indeed, this is the distinction. For in matters of the material, the essential is the hand of Heaven. And truly, the right hand of the Lord performs mighty deeds. And man needs only to engage in some cause, so that there may be a place for the blessing of God to alight. And since there is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few, therefore, the more a person diminishes the cause, and casts his hope upon the Lord, and reduces his engagement in worldly matters in order to engage in Torah study, so much the more will His blessed Name's providence be upon him to bless the work of his hands. However, in matters of the spiritual, in Torah and reverence, it is the opposite. For the essential is the labor of man. And when man does his part, all that is possible by human strength to dedicate his soul to Torah and reverence, then also the Lord will give His spirit upon him, and send him help from the

sanctuary.

**[14]** This is what our Sages of blessed memory said: The earlier generations made their Torah study constant and their work incidental. Both were fulfilled in their hands. And this is because the Torah was fulfilled in their hands because they made it constant. And their work was fulfilled in their hands because they made it only incidental. And therefore, the blessing of the Lord hovered over the work of their hands. And the later generations, who made their work constant and their Torah study incidental, neither was fulfilled in their hands. This is because the Torah was not fulfilled in their hands because they made it only incidental. And their work was not fulfilled in their hands because they made it constant. And they relied on their own strength and the might of their hand. And they did not trust in the Lord who gives strength to achieve might.

**[15]** This is also what our Sages, of blessed memory, stated in Pirkei Avot: "Thus is the way of Torah: Eat bread with salt, and drink water by measure, and live a life of affliction, and toil in Torah." And if you do so, "Happy are you and good for you." Happy are you in this world, and good for you in the World to Come. This means that one should conduct himself in the way of Torah, making his Torah study his constant pursuit. He should suffice himself with bread and salt and water by measure, in order to be diligent in Torah. And his work he should do incidentally. For he will live a life of affliction, meaning that even this little he will not want to prepare for himself what to eat tomorrow, but only the sustenance of that day alone. And as Hillel the Elder used to do, and as was mentioned above. And then, both this and that will be fulfilled for him. And therefore, he will be happy in this world, for God will bless his bread and his water, so that he will never lack sustenance. And good for him in the World to Come, for the Torah will also be fulfilled for him.

**[16]** Based on what has been mentioned above, the statement at the beginning of our

words can be clarified. What our Sages, of blessed memory, said: "Both man and beast, You save, O Lord" (Psalms 36:7). This refers to people who are intellectually sharp but make themselves like beasts. For indeed, in Chapter 4 of Tamid, our Sages, of blessed memory, said: "Who is wise? One who sees what is born" (Mishnah Tamid 2:5). And it is self-evident that the foundation of wisdom, to see what is born, pertains to matters of the soul. To contemplate what will be with him in the end of days and for generations to come, so that he may fear and turn away from evil. In order to save his soul from the grip of Sheol, and to inherit eternal life and everlasting delight.

However, concerning material matters, this is the way of man: not to worry at all, even about tomorrow, as is known. And indeed, even a beast knows only the present moment. When it is hungry to eat, it raises its voice. Truly, it knows nothing of the worry of tomorrow. And sometimes, even what remains from its satiety, it will turn the vessel upside down. Therefore, a person who conducts himself in this manner, to worry only about the present moment to satisfy his hunger, and not to concern himself at all about the future, what he will eat tomorrow – behold, according to the sight of fleshly eyes, he is likened to a beast. Not according to the eyes of intellect, for truly our Sages, of blessed memory, said: "One who has bread in his basket and says, 'What shall I eat tomorrow?' – behold, this one is among the diminished in faith" (Avot 3:15).

**[17]** This is what our Sages, may their memory be blessed, said: "Man and beast, You save, O Lord" (Psalms 36:7). This refers to people who are wise in understanding, yet make themselves like beasts. That is, in true understanding, they are wise and discerning, able to see what is coming, and to care for their souls, even for generations to come, to live an eternal life. And they make themselves like beasts, meaning, concerning their own affairs and the needs of the body, they make themselves like beasts, not worrying at all about the future, not

even about tomorrow. "You save, O Lord." This means that therefore, the salvation of the Lord will be for them in both aspects. For matters of the soul, the right hand of God will save them, because they care for their souls. And for matters of the physical, the needs of the body, they will attain salvation and the blessing of God, because they make themselves like beasts, not worrying about the future. For they will place their trust in the Lord and hope for His kindness.

**[18]** "With the way of Torah, even bread and salt suffice, etc. The essential matter is contentment, that one rejoice in his portion. This is what our Sages, of blessed memory, said in Ta'anit (page 24): 'Every single day, a Heavenly Voice goes forth and declares, "The entire world is sustained for the sake of Chanina my son." And Chanina my son, a kav of carob pods from erev Shabbat to erev Shabbat is sufficient for him.'" It does not say, 'And Chanina my son *has* a kav of carob pods, etc.,' but rather, 'is sufficient for him.' For the essential matter is what is sufficient for him. For 'those who fear Him lack nothing' (Psalms 34:10). Understand this."

**[19]** And behold, in Berakhot (folio 34b), there is an account of Rabbi Hanina ben Dosa, who went to study Torah with Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai. And the son of Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai fell ill. Hanina said to him, "My son, pray for him for mercy, and he will live." And he prayed for him for mercy, and he lived. Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai said, "If Ben Zakkai had only bowed his head, they would not have paid attention to him." His wife said to him, "Is Hanina greater than you?" He said to her, "No. Rather, he is like a servant before the king, and I am like a minister before the king. See there. And it is a deficiency in understanding what is the difference between a servant and a minister."

**[20]** Indeed, it appears that there is a servant before the king and a minister before the king. Both serve with faithfulness and risk their lives for love of the king. Yet, if they have any request

from the king, sometimes the servant will fulfill his request more than the minister. The distinction between them is that the minister, with all his strong love for the king and risking his life for him, nevertheless also benefits from the king. For the minister receives a great reward from the king, as is known, and lives like one of the dignitaries. However, the servant, a simple man of valor, receives no reward at all, and lives only on bread. And if, despite this, he risks his life for love of the king, then if he has any request, the king will hasten to grant him his plea and request. For what does he have from the king in return for his faithfulness and service to Him with self-sacrifice? Not so the minister, who has a great reward, as mentioned above. Therefore, even if the king does not fulfill his request, he has no cause to complain at all, as is under-

stood. This is what Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai said: "He is like a servant before the king," etc. For the distinction between them is that Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai, the Holy One, Blessed be He, also bestowed upon him from the goodness of this world. And it also appears that he was a prince in Israel, and the Sages, of blessed memory, said, "He was elevated above his brethren." Indeed, Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa, the Lord, may He be blessed, deprived him of all goodness, for he did not even have bread to eat, only a *kav* of carobs from Shabbat eve to Shabbat eve. And therefore, when he asks for mercy from Him, may He be blessed, He will fulfill his request. For what does he have besides this from Him? Not so Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai, for he is like a minister before the king, as mentioned above. Understand this.



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