

The Narrow Bridge

גשר צר מאוד

PARSHA PERSPECTIVES

Short Divrei Torah on Parshas Ki Seitzei

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לע'נ פעסל בת ישראל מנחם / לזכות חילינו

GETTING TO KNOW HASHEM

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

There are seventy-four mitzvos in Parshas Ki Seitzei, which equals the numerical value of דע - to know. The greatest way to know an author is by studying his book. The greatest way to know Hashem is by studying His Will - the Torah.

WEAPON OF TORAH

Zohar

"When you go out to war upon your enemies, G-d will deliver him [your enemy] into your hand, and you will capture its captives." (21:10)

"When you go out to war upon your enemies" - i.e., the yetzer hara - "Hashem, your G-d" - i.e., the study of Torah - "will deliver the enemy into your hand" - will cause you to emerge victorious.

BEGINNING THE BATTLE

Chasam Sofer

"When you go out to war upon your enemies, G-d will deliver him [your enemy] into your hand, and you will capture its captives." (21:10)

The pasuk may be taken to refer to the continual fight we must wage against our eternal foe - the evil inclination.

The Sages say: "Our evil inclination gathers strength against us each day... and if the Holy One, blessed be He, were not there to help us, we would not be able to prevail against it."

Because it is quite difficult to conquer the evil inclination, and we might avoid persisting in the battle, the Torah tells us: "When you go out to battle against your enemies" - just begin the battle, and you can be sure that "Hashem, your G-d, will deliver them into your hands" - G-d will help you conquer the evil inclination because it is said that "G-d will help he who comes to purify himself."

CAPTURING TACTICS

Baal Shem Tov

"When you go out to war upon your enemies, G-d will deliver him [your enemy] into your hand, and you will capture its captives." (21:10)

It is not enough to simply go to "war" against the evil inclination; one cannot be satisfied with merely overcoming its evil ways. One must also "take captives"; a Jew must capture and press the inclination into Divine service.

We see the alacrity and devotion with which the evil inclination fulfills its mission of tripping man and bringing him to error. We can use this dedication as instruction about how to serve Hashem.

THE WAR AGAINST EVIL

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"When you go out to war upon your enemies, G-d will deliver him [your enemy] into your hand, and you will capture its captives." (21:10)

When we contend with evil, we are "going out to war." We are "going out" of our true selves, for waging war is unnatural. Our soul's native environment is the peaceful, infinite Divine consciousness it experienced before it entered the body.

Since our souls originate in G-d's essence, and evil has no power against G-d's essence, we have the upper hand over evil even before the battle has begun. We are "upon" - i.e., above - our enemies.

In addition, G-d only created evil in the first place in order for us to vanquish it. For both these reasons, the Torah goes on to assure us that "G-d will deliver [your enemy] into your hands."

The Torah thus teaches us that in order to win the war against evil, we must identify with our Divine soul. We are then backed by the full power of G-d's holiness. - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

PROPER ENTHUSIASM

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

“When you go out to war upon your enemies, G-d will deliver him [your enemy] into your hand, and you will capture its captives.” (21:10)

The verse (Tehillim 119:98) states, “Each of your commandments makes me wiser than my enemies, for it is ever with me.” This is to say that from the enemy, the evil inclination, one can learn how to observe the mitzvos. It can be noticed that when it is ready to perform a transgression, it is done with much zeal and with a burning desire. Yet, the result is only momentary and does not last forever. Therefore, to perform a mitzvah one must also have the same zeal and fervor. However, its result will last forever.

CLEARING THE WAY

Rebbe Nachman

“When you go out to war upon your enemies, G-d will deliver him [your enemy] into your hand, and you will capture its captives.” (21:10)

There are things that proceed in proper order in a person’s life, and other things that oppose his will. This verse alludes to how one can ensure that his life runs smoothly:

“When you go out to war” - when things oppose your will and do not go according to plan, “Hashem, your G-d, delivers them into your hands” - G-d will help your life develop in a proper, orderly manner, as long as “You take some of them captive” - i.e., you draw G-dliness into yourself and constantly bind it to your thoughts.

When you acknowledge that everything is from G-d - even those things that seem to oppose you and nullify your desires to G-d, then G-d will eliminate the things that oppose your will and your life will proceed smoothly. (See Likutey Moharan II, 82:4)

BUSINESS WARS

Rebbe Nachman

“When you go out to war upon your enemies, G-d will deliver him [your enemy] into your hand, and you will capture its captives.” (21:10)

Scripture uses the same expression of “going out” when it speaks of engaging in business, as it is written (Devarim 33:18), “Rejoice, Zevulun, when you go out.”

“When you go out” - this refers to conducting business. The field of business is a battleground in which a person must fight against his evil inclination in order to maintain his honesty and integrity.

“To war against your enemies” - it is then a time of war with the enemy - i.e., the forces of evil - that has trapped the fallen sparks of holiness.

The Kabbalah teaches that man’s mission is to gather the sparks and elevate them to their original level. Through the honest “give and take” of business, one “takes” the fallen sparks in the object he sells or trades, and “gives” them over to a higher level.

“And Hashem, your G-d, delivers them into your hands” - the hands represent faith, as it is written, “His hands were faith” (Shemos 17:12). When a person conducts his business faithfully and honestly, he removes and elevates the sparks of holiness from the side of evil.

“And you take some of them captive” this refers to the Torah, as it is written, “You ascended on high; you took a captive” (Tehillim 68:19; see Rashi). By binding your inner thoughts to the Torah while conducting your business, you can win the war. (See Likutey Moharan I, 280:2-3)

ELEVATING CAPTIVE SPARKS

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“When you go out to war upon your enemies... and you see among the captives a beautiful woman, and you desire her, you will take her as a wife...” (21:10-11)

The Maggid of Mezeritch interpreted this passage allegorically, as follows:

If you go out: If you happen to leave your elevated state of Divine consciousness, then -

To war: you will have to fight the enticements of the material world. The next verse continues:

If you see among the captives: If you see captive sparks of Divinity in the materialism of this world -

A beautiful woman: You might find yourself attracted to the beauty of material reality and the pleasure it promises. If so, you must not succumb to it; rather -

And you take her: you should take it -

As a wife: i.e., a partner in your Divine service.

Capitalize on your temporary lapse of Divine consciousness by elevating the Divine sparks to their source, using materiality for Divine purposes. Rather than allowing the materiality of this world to drag you away from G-d, partner with it to enhance your relationship with Him. (Maggid Devarav L’Yaakov 20; Ohr Torah 174) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

PERFECTLY IMPERFECT

Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

“...and you see among the captives a beautiful woman, and you desire her...” (21:11)

Parshas Ki Seitzei begins with the law of the אשת יפת תואר - the attractive captive woman whom a soldier sees during battle and desires. The Torah prescribes a procedure for the soldier to follow whereby it becomes permissible for him to marry this woman.

Rashi cites the Gemara's famous comment about this exceptional law: לא דברה תורה אלא כנגד יצר הרע - the Torah here is responding to the evil inclination, to the soldier's natural instincts and urges. Warfare has the effect of nourishing, as it were, the soldiers' most carnal elements of their beings, bringing out their animalistic instincts. The Torah understood that under these exceptional circumstances, it is unreasonable to expect the soldier who experiences a desire to simply restrain it. It therefore made a concession in this particular case, allowing the soldier to marry the woman in a humane, appropriate manner.

This concept reveals a fundamental outlook on Torah life. The Torah speaks בנגד יצר הרע, to flawed human beings living in a flawed world. It does not address a utopian society, a perfect world. It acknowledges the reality that human beings, while possessing a G-dly spirit, also have base desires and temptations. The Torah does not tell us to ignore our animalistic tendencies, or even to purge them from our beings. It speaks to the real world, not to an imaginary, utopian world. And in our real world, we are going to fail and make mistakes. We are going to struggle. We have flaws and imperfections that we need to try very hard to overcome, but that we will not always succeed in overcoming.

The Midrash lists several things which Hashem created even before He created the world - one of which is teshuva, the process of return and repair after failure. This teaches us something exceedingly profound about teshuva. Hashem created the world knowing that we are going to fail, that we are not going to be perfect, that we will cause spiritual damage which we will then need to repair. From the outset, even before He set the world into motion, Hashem created the concept of teshuva, because the process of failure and recovery is built into the very fabric of human life. We should not think that Hashem expects us to be perfect, but because we sometimes err, He has no choice but to give us the opportunity of teshuva. Rather, teshuva was part of the world's original design, because failure is part of the human experience.

I find this very empowering. This teaches us that we should not feel disheartened or worthless when we make mistakes. We should instead recognize that we were created as imperfect people, and that the process of failure and repentance is part and parcel of human life, as G-d originally designed.

Rather than wallow in crippling guilt and shame, we should acknowledge that we are frail, flawed human beings. And we should never feel that we are unworthy of living religious lives because of our failings. לא דברה תורה אלא כנגד יצר הרע - the Torah speaks to us, whoever we are, no matter what we struggle with, no matter what embarrassing mistakes we have made. We are not expected to be perfect; we are expected to try to grow. The Torah's vision is not a utopia, in which no mistakes are made, but rather a society of people who work to fix their mistakes and improve.

MONTH OF LOVE

Rabbi Efreim Goldberg

"...and you see among the captives a beautiful woman, and you desire her..." (21:11)

The process required in the case of an אשת יפת תואר entails a one-month period during which the woman "weeps for her father and mother" before the soldier is permitted to marry her.

The Zohar makes a startling remark on this pasuk, commenting: "דא היא ירחא דאלול" - This is the month of Elul." The month during which the captive woman cries for her parents corresponds to the month of Elul, the month of repentance during which we introspect and prepare ourselves for Rosh Hashanah.

Rav Nosson Wachtfogel explained that the Zohar here gives us an entirely new perspective on what the month of Elul is about. This period is not a time of dread and fear. It is a time of love, when we long for G-d like the captive woman longs for her parents. It is a time when we reflect upon the fact that we've grown distant from Hashem, and we feel desperate to return to Him, to feel His embrace, to rebuild our connection with Him.

אני לדודי ודודי לי - Elul is all about love, about our fierce desire to draw close to Hashem, to cultivate our special bond with Him. We long to return like the אשת יפת תואר longs to return to her family. Having strayed far from Hashem, we desperately seek to return and rebuild our relationship.

REPAIRING FROM WITHIN

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

"If a man has a wayward and rebellious son, that will not hearken to the voice of his father, or the voice of his mother, and though they chasten him, will not hearken unto them..." (21:18)

Parashas Ki Setzei introduces the concept of a "wayward and rebellious son" (21:18-21). According to the Gemara (Sanhedrin 68b), the qualifying conditions for a conviction are so onerous that it has never - nor will ever - happen. Why introduce a hypothetical situation that will never occur?

Rav Hirsch explains that this hypothetical situation teaches us important aspects of parenting and education. He explains that for a child to be considered wayward and rebellious, there must be no possibility that anyone else is to blame for his actions. The fact that this will never happen means that there is always an outside influence that can be repaired or improved, and we are encouraged to look inwardly to help others. What started as a focus on the child became an opportunity for introspection by those around him. In a world replete with blame and faults, focusing on what we can personally correct and enhance will naturally refine the actions of those around us.

LET HIM LIVE

Rabbi Elimelech Biderman

"If a man has a wayward and rebellious son, that will not hearken to the voice of his father, or the voice of his mother, and though they chasten him, will not hearken unto them..." (21:18)

The Gemara (Sanhedrin 71b) teaches that a *"ben sorer u'moreh"* (rebellious and wayward son) is given the death penalty since his self-destructive path will ultimately lead him to become a murderer; *"Mutav yamus zakai v'al yamus chayav"* - it is better that he dies meritorious [now] and not die liable [later]."

The Alter of Kelm makes the following observation: If this is the way the heavenly court works, the opposite must be true as well. Someone may be immersed in terrible sin, but if he has started to better himself, and has begun his journey of teshuva, Hashem says, "He may have been steeped in sin, but his future is bright; *Mutav yamus zakai v'al yamus chayav* - it is better that he dies meritorious [later] and not die liable [now]. Let him live!"

We all can be written in the book of complete Tzadikim this Rosh Hashana.

TRUE BEAUTY

Avnei Nezer

"If a man has a wayward and rebellious son, that will not hearken to the voice of his father, or the voice of his mother, and though they chasten him, will not hearken unto them..." (21:18)

Rashi comments that the result of marrying the captive woman for her beauty will cause difficulties and the child of that marriage will be "wayward and rebellious."

If we are to have an impact on our children's upbringing and development, then it is important to be concerned not just with outward appearances. We can have beautiful buildings, charming teachers, and exquisite uniforms; however, if there is no Torah content and spiritual format, then the result is "a wayward and rebellious son." If the concern is outer beauty, but no consideration is given to the fact that inwardly there may be a different religious outlook, the result is the rebellious son.

HOW TO BE HEARD

Perach Levanon

"So shall you eliminate the evil from your midst, and all Israel shall hear, and fear." (21:21)

If you'll "eliminate the evil from your midst," i.e., from your own character, others will listen to your words of reproof. But if any evil remains in your own conduct, they will not listen to you. As it is written, "First they adorn themselves, and only then do they adorn the others."

SEEING FOR A REASON

Rabbi Efreim Goldberg

"You may not observe your brother's ox or his sheep lost and hide yourself from them; you must surely return them to your brother." (22:1)

The Torah commands us not to ignore a lost object - such as an animal - belonging to our fellow, and to instead go through the trouble of taking it and bringing it to its owner, a mitzva famously known as השבת אבידה.

The Ba'al Shem Tov observes that the Torah formulates this command by focusing on the element of seeing - לא תראה. The Torah here tells us that we may not ignore that which we see. If we see somebody's lost object, then we have an obligation to return it to him, and to not just move on as though nothing happened.

The Ba'al Shem Tov explained that every time we see something, there is a reason why Hashem had us see it. When we see somebody in distress, this was shown to us for a purpose, so that we do what we can to lend assistance. When we see a situation where there is a need, this is because we are expected to intervene, to get involved, to make a difference. As the Torah commands here in this context, לא תוכל להתעלם - we do not have the right to just ignore what we see.

The Ba'al Shem Tov applied this concept also to situations where we see people acting wrongly. Our instinct when observing people's failings is to look at them condescendingly, to wag our finger, to feel superior and proud. But the Ba'al Shem Tov taught that if Hashem had us see somebody committing a sin, this is for the purpose of introspecting, so that we examine if perhaps we ourselves are guilty of some similar wrongdoing. If we hear people speaking *lashon hara*, this is an opportunity to check whether we are as careful as we should be with the way we talk. When we see *chillul Shabbos*, we are to respond by thinking about our own Shabbos observance, whether or not we conduct ourselves as we should on this special day and take full advantage of the kedusha it offers us. Rather than criticize and complain about other people, we should direct our attention inward, to our own behavior - because it is for this reason that Hashem had us see what we saw.

LIFTING THE FALLEN

Reb Moshe Koznitzer

"You may not observe your brother's ox or his sheep lost and hide yourself from them; you must surely return them to your brother." (22:1)

The Torah teaches us not to neglect the average person. One should not "hide yourself" from those who are rebellious, unresponsive, or withdrawn from our way of life. "Return them" - we have the obligation to teach and to influence them to lift them to the level of "your brother."

HELPING OTHERS GROW

Rabbi Moshe Schochet

“You may not observe your brother’s ox or his sheep lost and hide yourself from them; you must surely return them to your brother.” (22:1)

The Torah reviews the mitzvah of *hashavas aveidah* - the responsibility to return a lost object. The Shlah HaKadosh points out that if the Torah obligates us to return lost objects, which are materialistic, to our fellow Jews, then certainly the Torah would expect us to return lost *neshamos*, which are far more important, to our fellow Jews.

We are so busy, and we often consider ourselves lucky when we are able to set aside time in our own lives for davening, learning and *chesed* that we forget about the responsibility of inspiring others and helping our fellow Jews get closer to Hashem as well.

People are thirsting for connection, and it is up to us, whom have been privileged to experience the beauty of Torah and mitzvos, to help facilitate those opportunities for them.

It is incumbent upon us to take this powerful message of the Shlah HaKadosh to heart and not only look out for our own spiritual endeavors, but we must also look out for the growth and development of all of Klal Yisrael.

RETURNING THE LOST SON

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

“You may not observe your brother’s ox or his sheep lost and hide yourself from them; you must surely return them to your brother.” (22:1)

The Rishon Letziyon, Chacham Ovadiah Yosef shlit’a, views this pasuk as a clarion call for action. If one sees a lost animal, he must return it. And if he sees the soul of his lost brother, detached from its source, from the eternal fountains and springs of faith, can one possibly ignore him? Can one remain indifferent?

The Torah continues: “Do not see the donkey of your brother, or his ox, falling along the way and ignore them; rather, pick them up with him.” The donkey of his brother? And if one sees his brother himself falling along the way, involved in sins he isn’t even aware of, can he possibly ignore him? Can one simply tell himself, “So long as all is well with me, so long as my path is straight, I can look the other way and ‘to each his own’”? Most certainly not.

True, we cannot perfect the entire world. However, it is incumbent upon every Jew to attempt to speak to one friend, or one acquaintance, in an effort to guide, direct, teach, perhaps even host, in order to introduce him to the delights of our Jewish heritage and the glory of Torah and mitzvos. Bring him to his source, to the *Shechinah*, and you will thereby save an entire world - all his subsequent generations.

We cannot even begin to imagine how much love Hashem will bestow upon us when we arrive at the Day of Judgment able to proclaim, “Master of the World, we brought with us one of Your sons who has returned to You!” How much blessing and kindness would a father bestow upon one who has returned a lost son to him? We can experience this love tenfold; there is so much we can do to help our lost brothers.

RETURNING SPIRITUALITY

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“You may not observe your brother’s ox or his sheep lost and hide yourself from them; you must surely return them to your brother.” (22:1)

Allegorically, the missing ox or sheep alludes to elements that are lacking from our fellow’s observance of G-d’s commandments and/or spiritual life in general. The Torah tells us here that we must not ignore such shortcomings in our fellows; we must help them reclaim their spiritual wealth.

This is true even if “your fellow is not near you, or you do not know him.” Even in such cases, we must help our fellows retrieve whatever spiritual wealth they have lost due to their inadvertent over-involvement in the mundane affairs of the material world.

Furthermore, if, for some reason, our fellows do not consciously value their missing spirituality enough to seek it out, we must educate them to appreciate it - “until your fellow seeks it out” willingly. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 24, pp. 284-285) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

LOST AND FOUND

Rebbe Nachman

“If your brother is not near you, or you do not know who the animal belongs to, you must bring [the animal] into your house, where it must remain with you until your brother seeks it out, whereupon you must return it to him.” (22:2)

Our Sages (Niddah 30b) teach that when an infant is in its mother’s womb, it studies the entire Torah and is shown all that it must accomplish in this world. But when the infant is born, it forgets all that it had learned.

Every individual has forgotten, or lost, the knowledge of his mission in life, and he must seek to remember it. The tzaddik finds that which was lost. A person must therefore travel to the tzaddik to retrieve what he has lost.

However, the tzaddik will not immediately turn it over to him. Instead, the tzaddik will test him to see that he is sincere in his desire for holiness and closeness to G-d.

[Reb Noson adds that when a person sins, he loses his sparks of holiness. The tzaddikim are always seeking these sparks of holiness in order to return them to their rightful realm.]

MAKING THE EFFORT

Rabbi Efreim Goldberg

“You must not see your fellow’s donkey or ox fallen on the road and ignore them. You must pick up the load with him.” (22:4)

The Torah addresses the situation of one who sees his fellow’s animal transporting cargo, and the cargo has fallen off the animal.

In such a case, the Torah commands, הקם תקים עמו - one is required to help his fellow reload the cargo onto the animal. The modern-day application of this mitzvah might be seeing someone stuck on the side of the road with a flat tire or dead battery, in need of help. הקם תקים עמו - we are responsible to stop and lend a hand to our fellow Jew in need.

Rashi, based on the Gemara, notes that the Torah requires loading the cargo “עמו” - with him, together with the owner. But if the owner does not want to take part in the process, and he instead sits back and waits for other people to do all the work for him, then one is not required to help him.

The Kli Yakar applies this rule to tzedakah generally. As long as somebody is making a real effort to help himself, we have the obligation to give him the assistance he needs. But if somebody is not trying to help himself, and does not bother to look for a job to regain his financial footing, then we are not required to help such a person.

The Kotzker Rebbe remarked that this is true of us and Hashem, as well. The Gemara in Maseches Shabbos (104a) teaches, בא ליטור מסייעין אותו - if one seeks to purify himself, he receives Hashem’s help in this process. It is only if we truly seek ליטור, if we are prepared to put in the work and do our part, that Hashem will do His part, so-to-speak, and provide the assistance that we need. Hashem helps those who help themselves.

We cannot sit back comfortably and ask Hashem to change our hearts, or to “download” Shas into our brains. Only when we make the firm decision to work hard to grow and learn that we have the right to ask Hashem to help us achieve our goals.

LIFT THEM UP

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“You must not see your fellow’s donkey or ox fallen on the road and ignore them. You must pick up the load with him.” (22:4)

Allegorically, this verse can be interpreted as follows:

If you see your fellow’s donkey: If you see your fellow acting like a donkey, a non-kosher animal (i.e., by succumbing to some forbidden desire) -

Or his ox: or even like an ox, a kosher animal (i.e., by succumbing to some desire that is technically permitted, but he is indulging in it for materialistic gratification) -

Fallen: This indicates that he has fallen from the behavior associated with an enlightened human being, to the level more associated with animals. In such a case -

You must not ignore them. You should pick up the load with him: You should feel a brotherly responsibility to elevate and enlighten your fallen fellow. It is precisely in order to assist him that you have been made aware of his spiritual descent. G-d would not have arranged for you to see him this way unless you were able to help him. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 2, p. 633) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

APPROPRIATE GARMENTS

Reb Noson of Breslov

“A woman should not wear a man’s garb, or a man wear a woman’s garments.” (22:5)

Man represents truth and understanding. Woman represents faith and the ability to know when not to delve into things that are beyond the parameters of one’s intellect.

A person must be careful never to change his “garments” - meaning, to change from a garment of truth into a garment of falsehood, or of false faith or idolatry. One must take care not to trust on faith when something can be understood (i.e., he must seek the truth), yet he must also take care not to try to understand that which is beyond him (i.e., he must have faith). One is forbidden to change these “garments.” (Likutey Halakhot IV, p. 422)

One’s garments represent his comprehension of G-dliness. The prohibition against wearing garments of the opposite gender suggests that a person may not delve into deep mysteries and teachings of Torah that are beyond his understanding. On the other hand, a person who possesses a greater intellect must not suffice to “wear the garments” of those with lesser intellects, but should serve G-d on his higher level. (Likutey Halakhot IV, p. 243a)

KEEPING THE CHICKS

Reb Noson of Breslov

“If you should chance upon a bird’s nest before you on the road in any tree, or on the ground, [with] fledglings or eggs... do not take the mother with her offspring.” (22:6)

The Zohar states that the “bird’s nest” refers to the exile of the Divine Presence (Tikkuney Zohar, Introduction, p. 12b). Ostensibly, G-d’s Presence is hidden in exile and the forces of evil appear to be in control. However, a concealed level of G-dliness continues to sustain everything, even the forces of evil.

One who “happens upon a bird’s nest” - i.e., one who feels he has come across the Divine Presence during this exile - acknowledges the revealed existence of G-dliness and returns dominion to G-d.

Then he can “send away the mother bird,” which represents the concealed Presence of G-d that permeates all of creation. He acknowledges that G-d’s domain is everywhere, and he is not without G-d, even if he does not openly experience Him.

Recognizing that G-d is truly in control, he can then keep the “chicks” - i.e., he can elevate lost souls - for he has shown that the forces of evil have no real power. (Likutey Halakhot V, p. 128a)

Honor and glory are known as the “mother of all life” (Bereishis 3:20), for everything in creation is rooted in the glory of G-d (cf. Yeshayahu 43:7). “Mother” refers to honor and “chicks” to the souls that are born into this world.

The Torah tells us to avoid pride and not seek honor for ourselves. If we “send away the mother bird” - if we shun honor, then we can “keep the chicks” - we can protect and nurture our souls, since many souls have been lost due to their pursuit of honor and glory.

When we follow this advice, “it will be good for you and you will have a long life” - when honor does come our way and we offer it to G-d, we merit to a good, long life. (Likutey Halakhot V, p. 254)

The “chicks and eggs” represent souls that are weak and far from G-d due to their sins. A person who wishes to draw these souls close should “send away the mother bird” - i.e., chase away the intellects that led these souls onto an evil path. He must teach them to begin anew with a fresh approach, not as if their days are the “same old thing,” but as if each day is a new creation. (Likutey Halakhot IV, p. 99a)

The “chicks and eggs” represent souls that are weak and require the nurturing and protection of the “mother bird” - i.e., the tzaddik. These souls must be protected rather than cast away. However, there is a mitzvah to “send away the mother bird” so that the souls can mature on their own and find their rectification. (Likutey Halakhot IV, p. 184)

ALWAYS APPLICABLE

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

“If you should chance upon a bird’s nest before you on the road in any tree, or on the ground, [with] fledglings or eggs... do not take the mother with her offspring.” (22:6)

At his daily Gemara shiur to laymen and working men, Chacham Ezra Attiah zt’l was once teaching the topic of shiluach hakan, and he mentioned the Gemara (Chullin 139b) that asks: If one found a nest on a man’s head, what is the law?

One man in attendance guffawed loudly and called out, “Chacham, how is this possible? Why must the Gemara give such a hypothetical and ridiculous scenario?”

R’ Ezra tried to explain to the man that if Chazal discuss such a case, then it cannot be impossible. One must never doubt the Sages, for they speak the word of G-d! But the man would not accept this and continued to disrupt the shiur. Nothing the chacham said could sway him and his mocking tone.

Suddenly, the door opened and a regular who hadn’t come to the shiur for a few weeks walked in. “Where have you been all this time?” asked R’ Ezra, happy for the distraction.

“I was in a distant land called India,” said the man, shaking his head. “So many strange people. I saw this one monk who sat cross-legged for three days, not moving a muscle. Even when a bird built a nest on his head, he didn’t budge!”

Not surprisingly, the mocking came to an immediate stop.

SENDING AWAY THE DOUBTS

Reb Noson of Breslov

“You shall surely send away the mother, but the young you may take for yourself. If you do this, it will be good for you, and you will have a long life.” (22:7)

“Send away the mother bird” - even if you intended to do a mitzvah with it. (Chullin 138b)

The “chicks” represent the lost souls that have descended into the degradations and humiliations of this long exile - i.e., they have fallen to dishonorable levels. Through repentance, we can help restore them to their former glory. G-d’s glory sustains them at all times, since glory is the “mother of all life” (Bereishis 3:20).

But when a person begins to repent, he must not take any glory for himself. He must “send away” that glory: he must return it to G-d. Then he can reach out to the lost souls and elevate them with repentance.

“Send it away” - even one hundred times. (Bava Metzia 31a)

The “bird’s nest” refers to the exile, and also to the souls that are distant from G-d. The “mother bird” refers to one’s thoughts. The “chicks and eggs” refer to one’s good deeds of prayer and Torah study.

When a person is in exile - when he has sinned and caused his mind to wander from G-d - and he wishes to do good deeds once again, he must not hold on to the confusions and doubts that beset his mind. Let him pay no attention to those thoughts, but continue to do whatever he is trying to do, be it praying, learning, and so forth. If the thoughts keep returning, he should send them away again and again, until they no longer return.

Acher saw a young man obey his father's command to climb a tree and send away the mother bird. As the young man descended, he fell and died. Acher said, "Where is the long life that the Torah promised this man?" and, in turn, became a heretic. He did not realize that "long life" refers to life in the World to Come, which is eternal. (Chullin 142a)

The Torah tells us that many mitzvot are propitious for certain rewards. The mitzvah of sending away the mother bird brings long life. Obeying one's parents leads to long life. Wearing tzitzit protects from immorality. If, in the course of performing any of these mitzvot, someone commits an immoral act, should he lose hope in the Torah's promise? Certainly not. For the mitzvot have enormous power to protect a person and bring him blessing and bounty.

However, the fact that someone succumbs to sin while performing a mitzvah stems from the fact that G-d has specific designs for each and every person, in each and every circumstance. Each person is put to a different test according to how G-d perceives his individual needs and the benefits he can accrue from such a test. For G-d's thoughts are very deep, and there are things we cannot understand at all. (Likutey Halakhot IV, p. 126)

EMPATHY AND KINDNESS

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

"You shall surely send away the mother, but the young you may take for yourself. If you do this, it will be good for you, and you will have a long life." (22:7)

The Torah presents us with the unique commandment to send away a mother bird before taking her eggs (22:6). The reward given is "so that it should be good for you, and you should lengthen your days" (22:7). What is so distinctive about this command that a respective reward accompanies it?

Quoting the Ramban, the K'sav Sofer explains that repeated actions have the ability to change us. If we are habitually kind to others (people, animals, the planet, etc.), we will become kinder and more empathetic. The Torah teaches us that empathizing with others' struggles will not increase our pain, but rather, our compassion and kindness. We become happier overall as we support others in need, leading to a long and virtuous life.

OVERCOMING THE EGO

Avnei Ezel

"You shall surely send away the mother, but the young you may take for yourself..." (22:7)

"And what will be your reward? If you have no children, I (G-d) will give you children. By keeping this commandment you hasten the coming of the Mashiach, and the coming of Eliyahu HaNavi." (Midrash Rabbah)

Why would the reward for the observance of this one commandment be so immense; namely, that the person who observes it is promised progeny and regarded as hastening the coming of the Mashiach and Eliyahu HaNavi?

It is because the observance of this commandment symbolizes the repudiation of selfishness. The root of all evil and sin in this world - whether it is in the rearing of children, the worship of G-d or relations between one person and another - is egotism; the failure of individuals to set aside their own concerns and personal interests for the sake of the common welfare, or an ideal, or spiritual perfection. Parents' financial considerations may deprive their children of a Torah education. Lust for honor or gain make for strife, jealousy, hate and many other evils.

However, once people set aside their personal interests for the sake of an ideal, or an important cause, there will be a thorough change for the better in all aspects of life - in the education of children, as well as in social living and in religious observance. Then, the final, complete redemption will be at hand.

This is the moral lesson taught by the observance of the commandment to send away the mother bird before taking her young from the nest. Even though you may have captured the large mother bird and have the chance to use her for food or other personal gain, the Torah commands you to consider the welfare of others and send her away so that she should be able to produce more young and the species will not become extinct. Thus, the observance of this commandment teaches us to struggle against our selfishness for the sake of the common good, and this is the reason that the reward for its fulfillment is so great.

GAINING MERITS

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

"You shall surely send away the mother... when you build a new house, you must make a railing for your roof... do not sow a mixture in your vineyard..." (22:7-11)

Rashi explains that the Torah listed several mitzvot next to each other to teach us that fulfilling one mitzvah leads to a second and so on. (This is in line with the same principle stated in Pirkei Avos 4:2.) In this example, one who fulfills the mitzvah of sending away the mother bird will come to build a house, which will then lead to owning a vineyard and nice clothing in order to fulfill the mitzvot relating to them.

If sending away a mother bird leads to all these benefits, what happened to the principle that the performance of mitzvot do not bring reward in This World (Kiddushin 39b)? On the contrary, it sounds like sending away the mother bird leads to a life of great reward! (Rav Dessler [Michtav M'Eliyahu, vol. 1, p. 3] essentially asks this question from the words of the Shema which state the blessings upon the Land that Hashem will give if only its inhabitants perform the mitzvot.)

Rav Dessler notes that even the smallest of mitzvos cannot possibly generate an adequate reward in This World, and therefore, to receive fair recompense is impossible. However, when Hashem sees someone performing a mitzvah, He presents him with the opportunity to perform other mitzvos, not as payment for his deeds, but in order for him to attain more reward in the Next World.

This is like someone who works for a top firm, and his role is to bring in high-end clients. If his work requires him to wine and dine the prospects, then the bill is covered by his boss who understands that despite the great personal benefit his employee is enjoying, the extravagances are only a means to facilitate the employee's success. In fact, when he sees that his employee is successful, he is likely to increase the budget in order to bring in even more valuable clients. The employee's expenses are not taken from his salary or commission; rather, it is considered a business expense aimed at facilitating further success.

Similarly, knowing that our role in This World is to acquire the merits to enjoy Hashem's Presence in the World to Come (Mesillas Yesharim, chap. 1), when we demonstrate our ability to be successful in our life's role, Hashem is willing to increase the budget, so to speak, by providing us with opportunities to gain more merits. (While it is true that Hashem could have provided us with mitzvos that do not bring gratification in This World, the Maharal writes that, ultimately, Hashem is pure kindness and therefore wants us to enjoy the opportunities as much as we can.)

Therefore, if we view our possessions not as a means of enjoyment per se, but rather as a vehicle to gain further merits, then Hashem will continue to provide the means to come closer to Him and facilitate our growth, for that is the ultimate goal of our existence!

BUILDING A SAFE HOME

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"When you build a new house, you must make a railing for your roof." (22:8)

This law can be interpreted to apply to a newlywed couple about to embark on the exciting challenge of building a household. The Torah counsels the couple that they are commencing a new phase in their lives, with new responsibilities and tasks that they have never yet had to face.

Therefore, they must "make a railing," i.e., undertake new spiritual safeguards in their observance of the Torah's commandments, not relying on their previous ones alone. Maintaining and enhancing their study of the Torah and observance of its commandments will ensure that the euphoria of the wedding day continue throughout their married life. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 2, p. 384; vol. 19, p. 208) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

Allegorically, "when you build a new house" means "when you set out to make this physical world into a home for G-d." This house is considered "new" because spiritualizing the physical is a reversal of the order of creation. G-d made the physical world appear consummately physical; by revealing its inner Divine essence, we make it a vehicle for spirituality.

"You must make a railing for your roof" means that in order to succeed in this mission and avoid being dragged into the materiality of the physical world, we must be sure to remain sufficiently aloof from the world. We accomplish this by setting appropriate boundaries that we do not cross. This shows that our involvement in the physical world is not for our own betterment or indulgence, but for selfless purposes.

This selflessness opens us up in turn to greater insights and to higher levels of the Divine consciousness. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 2, p. 384; vol. 19, p. 208) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

SPIRITUAL FENCE

Reb Noson of Breslov

"When you build a new house, you must make a railing for your roof; and do not place blood (liability) in your house." (22:8)

The final letters of the words "*ki tivneh bayit chadash*" (כי תבנה בית חדש, when you build a new house) spell "*Shetiyah*" (שתיה), referring to the *Evin HaShatiyah*, the Foundation Stone from which the world was drawn forth (Yoma 53b) and upon which the Temple was built. All the homes of the Jewish people are rooted in the Temple, the source of holiness. (Likutey Halakhot VIII, p. 289b)

A "new house" refers to the Third Temple. If you wish to help build the Third Temple, make a railing for your "roof" - i.e., your intellect. Do not seek that which is beyond your ability to comprehend.

Otherwise, you will cause blood to be spilled - i.e., you will open the door to sin. The "railing" protects you from sin. (Likutey Halakhot II, p. 164a)

The Torah specifies a "new" house, even though the roofs of older houses also require a railing or fence to protect people from falling. The emphasis on "new" signifies that one's house should be used for renewal: within its walls, a person should continually strive to renew his commitment to Torah.

To succeed, he should build a safeguard for his "roof" - i.e., his intellect. He must take care not to go beyond his limitations and capabilities. Otherwise, "the one who will stumble will fall from there." (Likutey Halakhot VIII, p. 259a)

PROTECTIVE PREPARATIONS

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

“When you build a new house, you must make a railing for your roof; and do not place blood (liability) in your house.” (22:8)

The Torah teaches that when a person builds himself a new house, he is required to build a guardrail or gated fence around the perimeter of the roof to ensure that nobody falls off and gets injured.

This seems to be such an obvious safeguard that one would think the Torah need not make this an actual obligation, listing it among the 613 mitzvos. However, there is a deeper meaning here which applies to every Jew.

The great Sephardic Chacham, Rabbeinu Yosef Chaim of Baghdad zt'l (Ben Ish Chai), learns a tremendous lesson from this seemingly innocuous pasuk:

As we prepare ourselves for the coming Day of Judgment, the *parshiyos* of the Torah that we read now lend themselves to many allusions and important instructions about how to prepare for meeting the Glorious King of Kings.

Teshuvah awareness at this time means every person strives to tear down the walls of obfuscation and neglect that have built up around him all year, causing him to be derelict in his performance of mitzvos.

Thus, “כי תבנה בית חדש” - when a person is serious about rebuilding himself, his image, and his very essence (בית), the best course of action for him is “ועשית מעקה לגגך” - to provide a fence, a protective barrier around himself, which will secure his mind and body from “falling off” and resorting back to his sinful ways.

One excellent tip is “ולא תשים דמים בביתך” - to use his money (*damim*) for charity and good deeds towards others, rather than spending it all on himself and his personal pleasures, “כי יפל הנופל ממנו” - for this will only bring about his eventual downfall.

STAY INDOORS

Reb Noson of Breslov

“If an unmarried girl is engaged to one man, and another man finds her outdoors and has relations with her...” (22:23)

If she were in her house, he would not have found her. (Rashi)

A person must strive to attain and maintain the inner sanctity of a “house,” with protective “walls” that guard him from sin. Should he let down his guard, he will be transformed to the level of the “outdoors,” where danger exists. (Likutey Halakhot IV, p. 50)

GIVING HAND = OPEN HEART

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

“Neither an Ammonite nor a Moavite may enter into Hashem’s community; even their tenth generation may not enter.” (23:4)

In one community, there was a dire need for funds to provide relief for several poor families. One wealthy, but very stingy citizen, constantly ignored the sense of urgency involved, and barely contributed. No matter who spoke with him, the rich man would not part with his money no matter who tried to convince him otherwise.

The Rav personally called upon him in an attempt to persuade him in contributing to this cause. “The Torah tells us that no converts from the nations of Ammon and Moav are to be allowed to join the ranks of the Jewish people,” he said. “The reason for this is clearly stated in the pasuk, ‘As a result of the matter that they refused to bring out to you (the Jewish people) bread and water on the way when you left Egypt.’”

“Chazal explain that kindness and compassion are innate Jewish character traits, and that cruelty is incompatible with a Jewish identity. Thus, anyone who does not manifest these attributes is raising doubts about the authenticity of his roots.”

“You know,” the Rav continued in a casual tone, “for you to refuse to be of help when the needs of the poor are so desperate, makes me wonder as to whether you truly are a rank and file member of our great nation!”

The man turned crimson with rage. “How dare you come into my home and say such words! I am just as Jewish as the next person. Who do you think you are to decide who and what makes a Jew? I am extremely open-hearted and I have as much a noble spirit as you do!”

The Rav ignored the man’s barbs, and continued to focus on his mission. “Tell me,” he began continued in a low voice, “Have you ever observed how a doctor examines a person who comes to him complaining of chest pains? The first thing he does is take the patient’s hand to check his pulse. The reason for this is because it is a scientific fact that the status of the heart can be determined by checking the hand.”

He stood up and declared with finality, “The bottom line is this: If you insist that your hand should remain closed, you cannot claim that you have an open heart!”

The rich man finally relented and made a sizable donation.

NO EXCUSES

Rabbi Alexander Zusia Friedman

“...and because they hired against you Bilaam the son of Beor.” (23:5)

Regarding their failure to greet the Jews with bread and water, the Moabites and the Ammonites could have given the excuse that they were poor nations and couldn't afford such elaborate gestures of hospitality. Apparently, however, they did have enough money to hire Bilaam to do evil to the Jews. Therefore, their refusal to extend hospitality to the Jews was motivated solely by the desire to do evil to them and was not due to their poverty. Hence, it was sinful conduct, with no extenuating circumstances.

ACTING WITH KINDNESS

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"Because of the matter that they did not greet you with bread and water on the way when you first came out of Egypt..." (23:5)

Mashal: A poor boy who was peddling rags from door to door was hungry but found that he had only one dime left in his pocket. At the next house that he approached to sell his wares, he asked for a drink of water.

The girl who answered the door instead brought him a tall glass of milk. He drank it slowly, savoring it, and then asked, "How much do I owe you?"

"You don't owe me anything," she replied softly. "Mother has taught us never to accept payment for a kindness."

The grateful boy resolved never to forget her compassionate act.

Many years later, that girl, now a grown woman, became critically ill. She was brought to a renowned hospital where a top specialist, Dr. Howard Kelly, was called in to look at her case. When the doctor went to see the patient, he recognized her as the same girl who had been so kind to him years earlier.

Dr. Kelly gave special attention to her case. After a long struggle, the battle was won. Dr. Kelly asked to see the final bill and then scribbled something on the edge of the paper before it was sent to her. She feared opening it, sure it would take the rest of her life to pay it all up.

Finally, she did look, and she read these words on the side of the bill: Paid in full with one glass of milk, (signed) Dr. Howard Kelly.

Nimshal: An act of chessed can promote a nation (such as Edom and Mitzrayim); denying a chessed can castigate an entire nation (such as Ammon and Moav).

It is written in Koheles (11:1): "Cast your bread upon the waters, for you shall find it after many days." Just like the simple glass of milk that, ultimately, saved the girl from many years of financial hardship, the good deed you do today may benefit you or someone else at the least expected time. If you never see the deed again, at least you will have made the world a better place; after all, isn't that what life is all about?

Chazal prohibit a Jew from eating the bread of gentiles (Shabbos 17) for this may lead to intermingling and potentially marriage between Jewish men and gentile women. Accordingly, one would think that the fact that the Amonim and Moavim did not offer food and drink to Bnei Yisrael in the desert was not a bad thing after all. However, their motivation behind their inaction was what gave them away. They wanted to harm them by not offering them food or drink. And the proof is that they even hired Bilaam to curse the Jews which further uncovers their underlying intentions.

A Jew, however, behaves differently. The Medrash states: "When you have given your guest food and drink, escort him as well." In fact, Chazal further tell us: "Whoever escorts a guest on his way receives a reward comparable to the other services provided him" - such as feeding, clothing and lodging.

R' Shneur Kotler zt'l, in discussing the mitzvah of *hachnasas orchim* - hospitality to guests, explains the greater importance attributed to escorting guests over feeding or providing lodging for them. Many times a guest overstays his welcome. At other times, the host is gracious to his guest but prays for the moment when the guest departs so that tranquility and privacy may once again prevail in the home. Accordingly, when this guest leaves, the host is privately overjoyed at his departure. Thus, escorting a guest and remaining with him until the last moment is a positive sign that his departure is not welcomed and engenders a bit of sadness. This is indicative that his previous hospitality - the feeding, the clothing and lodging - were sincere acts of kindness and *hachnasas orchim*.

FROM CURSE TO BLESSING

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"But Hashem, your G-d, did not want to listen to Bilaam. Hashem, your G-d, turned the curse into a blessing for you, since Hashem, your G-d, loves you." (23:6)

G-d can not only transform a curse into a blessing; He can also transform a source of curse into a source of blessing. Specifically, there may have been times in our lives when, for whatever reason, we did something wrong, knowing full well that it was wrong. Such a deliberate misdeed has serious spiritual repercussions, and thus can act as a source of curse in our lives. Yet, G-d provides us with the means to negate the negative effects of a deliberate misdeed: repentance. Once we have repaired whatever damage we have caused to our fellows, sincere repentance - fueled by remorse and expressed as a firm resolution not to repeat the misdeed - wipes our slate clean.

This is true even if our motivations for repentance are self-oriented, e.g., concern for our spiritual welfare. If, however, a newfound and unbounded love for G-d drives us to repent, the deliberate misdeed is transformed into a merit, a source of Divine blessing.

HASHEM SEES THE GOOD

Reb Noson of Breslov

“But Hashem, your G-d, did not want to listen to Bilaam. Hashem, your G-d, turned the curse into a blessing for you, since Hashem, your G-d, loves you.” (23:6)

Bilaam always looked for the worst in everyone and tried his best to bring out the worst in the Jews. He tried to remind G-d that the Jews had sinned grievously when they made the golden calf (see Rashi on Bamidbar 24:1).

But G-d does not see things the same way as Bilaam. Whenever Bilaam and his ilk look for the bad in the Jews, G-d looks for the good by comparing the evil of the Jews to the evil of the nations.

Thus, not only did Bilaam fail to curse the Jews, but G-d used Bilaam’s evil intentions to benefit the Jews and transform his curses into blessings. The more Bilaam tried to arouse the evil of the Jews, the more G-d noticed their good deeds instead. (Likutey Halakhot V, p. 268a)

NO BLESSINGS FOR HIM

Degel Machaneh Ephraim

“And Hashem your G-d didn’t want to listen to Bilaam. So Hashem your G-d transformed the curse into a blessing for you.” (23:8)

It appears that the word *“lecha,”* for you, is superfluous here. However, anyone who blesses the Jews is himself blessed, as it says, *“those who bless you shall be blessed”* (Bamidbar 24:9).

This being so, Bilaam deserved a blessing for the blessings he blessed the Jews with. Therefore, the pasuk says, *“So Hashem, your G-d, transformed the curse into a blessing for you”* - concerning *“you”* the curse was transformed into a blessing, but Bilaam himself remained cursed even for the future, and not blessed.

FAITH ALL DAY

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“Observe and do whatever issues from your lips.” (23:24)

According to the Code of Jewish Law (the Shulchan Aruch), immediately upon waking up in the morning, our first words should be: *“I offer thanks to You, living and eternal King, for You have mercifully restored my soul within me; Your faithfulness is great.”*

These, our first words each day, are the issuance of our lips that we should observe and preserve throughout the day. In this way, our gratefulness to G-d influences our attitudes and conduct throughout the day, infusing them with joy, and similarly affects all those around us. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 24, p. 296) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

TASTING REVELATIONS

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“[If you are a hired worker in a vineyard,] you may eat as many grapes as you desire, until you are sated. But do not put any into your basket.” (23:25)

Working the grain field and working the vineyard represent the two aspects of our relationship with G-d.

Grain, the basic component of the diet, represents the acceptance of G-d’s sovereignty and the observance of His commandments. Grapes, a sweet addition to the normal staples of the diet, represent the expression of our relationship with G-d that goes beyond the letter of the law.

When we are spiritually mature enough to feel pleasure and joy in the revelation of G-dliness, we look to bring awareness of G-d into all facets of our lives, not only in the ways expressly required by the Torah.

The Torah entitles the workers of the fields and vineyards to partake of the grain and grapes while they work. This teaches us that whether we are relating to G-d at the basic, *“grain”* level, or have progressed to relating to Him also on the voluntary, *“grape”* level, we will be constantly rewarded by receiving further, greater revelations of Divinity and Divine beneficence. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 34, p. 129) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

PARTNERING WITH HASHEM

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“[If you are a hired worker in a vineyard,] you may eat as many grapes as you desire, until you are sated. But do not put any into your basket.” (23:25)

We can conceive of ourselves in our *“working”* relationship with G-d as His servants, as His employees, or as His partners.

A servant’s master is obliged to feed, clothe, and house him. An employer provides more for his employee: he pays him (enabling him to provide for his own needs as he chooses), provides him with the means to do his job, and must even allow him (as this verse describes) to partake of the produce he is harvesting. A partner not only is provided by his partner with everything he needs to do his part and is paid for his work by the partnership, he also shares in the profits.

Thus, once we accept our role as G-d’s partners in transforming the world into His ultimate home, G-d not only provides for all our needs, rewards us for our efforts, and allows us to benefit from the world as we refine it - we will even share the *“profits”* of our work (the great Divine revelations of the Messianic future) with Him. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 29, pp. 138-144) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

AVOIDING EXCESS

Rebbe Nachman

"[If you are a hired worker in a vineyard,] you may eat as many grapes as you desire, until you are sated. But do not put any into your basket." (23:25)

When a person eats more than he needs, the excess food can be harmful to him. Everything has a source from which it draws vitality. Foods get their vitality from a person's eating them - i.e., when one consumes food to sustain himself, the food itself is sustained by the person whom it has nourished. But when one eats more than he needs, the excess food has no one from whom to receive vitality, since the person has no need of it. It is as if the person put the excess food into a basket - it certainly will not receive vitality from there. Instead, the food seeks its vitality by drawing out the person's own vitality.

Thus, the verse states: "You may eat as many grapes as you like" - but not overeat (see Bava Metziah 87b). "But do not put any into your basket" - for you have no need for it. (See Likutey Moharan I, 257)

BEING MINDFUL

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

"[If you are a hired worker in a vineyard,] you may eat as many grapes as you desire, until you are sated. But do not put any into your basket." (23:25)

The Torah details the right of field workers to eat from the produce they're harvesting, specifying, "You may eat as many grapes as you desire until you are full" (23:25). Since this law applies to any type of produce, why does the Torah use grapes as the example (especially since grapes were more commonly drunk as wine than eaten as fruit)?

Rav Hirsch quotes a *halachah* (law) that one may not squeeze the juice from the grapes and throw away the rest of the grape, as this indicates wasteful insensitivity to another's property. While the owner needs to be sensitive to the workers' desire to eat from their produce while working, the workers need to, in turn, be mindful of their employer's property and treat it as their own.

This underlying focus on another's position is the foundation of the Torah and in bettering ourselves and our interactions with others.

MARITAL HARMONY

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"When a man takes a new wife... he shall be free for his home one year and he shall bring joy to the wife he married." (24:5)

When a man and woman decide to marry and create a union of *kedushah* (holiness) and purity within Klal Yisrael, the Torah dictates that the first year of marriage is ultra important, and they must fulfill the precept of, "He shall gladden (the heart of) his wife."

The tzaddik of Yerushalayim, Rav Aryeh Levine zt'l, was once asked: What is the most important piece of advice to offer a young couple? Is there one concept, one phrase or nuance, that can sum up the epitome of a Jewish marriage?

R' Aryeh thought for a moment and then answered:

"The Shulchan Aruch (Hilchos Mezuzah 289) discusses a controversy regarding how to position a *mezuzah* on the doorpost. One view is to fasten it upright to the door, whereas the other view is to fasten it sideways. The Rema concludes that we position the *mezuzah* on a slant in order to satisfy both opinions."

R' Aryeh explained, "When a newly married couple walks into their house or apartment for the very first time, the first mitzvah that they see is the *mezuzah* hanging on a slant on their doorpost. The *mezuzah* calls out and teaches them that compromise is the ideal manner with which a husband and wife should conduct their life together. There may be two opinions in every situation, but if a couple is willing to bend and compromise, they will ultimately succeed."

"If you want to live together and enjoy a wonderful married life, live it in the spirit of the slanted mezuzah, always looking for compromise, and you'll see how wonderful it can be."

Mashal: The Alter of Slabodka, R' Nosson Tzvi Finkel zt'l, used to give shiurim in the evenings for young married men who had been his students in the yeshiva. It was a prestigious achievement to be included in this shiur, which the men eagerly looked forward to.

One time, the shmuess went beyond its usual time, and the students remained transfixed. At this point the Alter's wife came in and said that the young men should go home. "They have wives waiting for them at home," she claimed.

The Alter apologized and said that he was unaware that so much time had passed.

The young men begged him to continue. "Our wives would rather we remain as long as necessary to hear your teachings," they reasoned.

The Alter refused to continue. "You have no right to determine what your wives would prefer," he said. "Furthermore, even if they explicitly indicate that they wish you to maximize your study, you must remember that they have a right to your companionship and may also need your help at home with the chores." With that he sent the young men home.

Nimshal: The Torah is very firm regarding the duties and responsibilities of a newly married man. He is required, "To bring joy to the (new) wife that he married." He must put his bride's wishes, desires and requests above all else, for only in this manner, will the young couple learn to grow together in a mutual spirit of respect and tender loving care.

OFFICER AND SOLDIER

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“When a man takes a new wife, he must not go out in the army, nor must he be obligated to do anything...” (24:5)

An army requires both officers and soldiers; the officers organize the troops and supply them with provisions and ammunition; the soldiers go out to battle. The same is true of the spiritual army into which we have all been drafted by G-d in order to combat the enemies of Divine consciousness.

But whereas in a physical army, the roles of officers and soldiers are often mutually exclusive, in the spiritual army, all of us must be both. On the one hand, we are “officers” who must supply both ourselves and others with the required spiritual provisions and ammunition - broad and sophisticated knowledge of the Torah and its commandments. On the other hand, we are also “soldiers” who must go out to battle - fulfilling the commandments ourselves and encouraging others to do likewise - demonstrating the same discipline and obedience that characterizes the simple soldier.

It is G-d’s ability to be both aloof from the world and intimately involved with it that enables us to play both roles, sophisticated officer and humble soldier. - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

FIDELITY TO HASHEM

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“When a man takes a new wife... he shall be free for his home one year and he shall bring joy to the wife he married.” (24:5)

In prophetic and Talmudic imagery, G-d and His chosen Jewish people are joined to each other like a husband and wife. In this allegorical context, the Biblical prohibition of a woman having more than one husband is analogous to the prohibition of worshipping other deities.

In a broader context, being “married” to G-d implies renouncing love for anything that “competes” with our love of Him. In particular, this means love for any aspect or element of the material world - such as sensual pleasure, wealth, influence, power, prestige, beauty, and so on. The Torah indeed allows us to enjoy these pursuits (as long as we partake of them in permitted ways), but encourages us to do so only as part of our appreciation of G-d’s goodness, using them to intensify our love for Him. As soon as they become ends in themselves, they lose their legitimacy.

In human marriage, a couple can preserve, develop, and enhance their relationship by focusing their love on each other, renouncing all other relationships. Similarly, by focusing on the Divine dimension in everything - rather than its material aspect - we can develop and enhance our relationship with G-d, turning it into a true union. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 19, pp. 217-218) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

IN A BLINK OF AN EYE

Rabbi Elimelech Biderman

“Remember what Hashem, your G-d, did to Miriam on the way when you were going out of Egypt...” (24:9)

The simple meaning of this pasuk is that we must remember how Miriam contracted *tzaraas* for speaking badly about Moshe Rabbeinu. However, we know clearly, as the Rambam says, Miriam didn’t intend to speak badly about Moshe. If she didn’t mean to speak negatively, asks Reb Leibel Eiger, why are we commanded to remember this incident?

Reb Leible answers, we must remember one thing: In a single moment, Miriam’s body was entirely covered with *tzaraas*, Moshe Rabbeinu then pleaded with Hashem, “Please Hashem, heal her.” And in a single moment, she was healed!

This is what we are told to remember! Sometimes, in a single moment, Hashem may bring something that seems terrible, but we must always remember that, in a single moment, He also removes it! You may feel like you’re drowning in a problem, but in a moment, it can be completely gone. Always stay strong.

SPEAK WITH CAUTION

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“Remember what Hashem, your G-d, did to Miriam on the way when you were going out of Egypt...” (24:9)

It is important to realize that Miriam did not lie or even criticize her brother, Moshe. She merely voiced her disapproval of his behavior without bothering to discuss her grievances with him privately first. Nonetheless, Miriam was immediately punished for having spoken against Moshe.

This teaches us how careful we must always be when we talk (or write) about other people. Even seemingly harmless discussion can easily slip into gossip or slander. Rather, we should always be careful to speak and write constructively. If someone’s behavior seems inappropriate, we should clarify matters with them privately, thereby sparing everyone the grief that inevitably results from misunderstanding. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 18, pp. 145-146) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

ALL FOR ONE

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

“Remember what Hashem, your G-d, did to Miriam on the way when you were going out of Egypt...” (24:9)

The Torah tells us, “Remember what G-d did to Miriam [marked her with an affliction for speaking negatively about her brother Moshe] when you went out of Egypt” (24:9). Why are we told that this happened on our way out of Egypt when it doesn’t seem relevant to the lesson at hand?

Rav Hirsch explains that even though Miriam spoke privately to Aharon about Moshe, the entire nation had to halt their journey until Miriam did *teshuvah* (repentance). Speaking negatively about others (and any harmful act, for that matter), even in private, degrades our character, which affects all of us. The nation waited for Miriam to atone because we are all here communally to support each other through challenges, however personal they might be.

SPREAD THE WORD

Chofetz Chaim

“Remember what Hashem, your G-d, did to Miriam on the way when you were going out of Egypt...” (24:9)

The Ramban learns that we are obligated to tell our children and future generations how reprehensible *lashon hara* is. People must realize that refraining from *lashon hara* is not merely a meritorious trait but an obligation of the highest magnitude.

Even those who are usually careful do not feel as upset when they speak or hear *lashon hara* as they would feel if they accidentally were to eat pork. Therefore, we must do all we can to publicize the gravity of speaking *lashon hara*.

Moreover, if you influence others not to speak *lashon hara*, you yourself will be much more careful with what you say.

LENDING WITH COMPASSION

Reb Noson of Breslov

“You should stand outside, and the man you are lending to should bring the security outside to you.” (24:11)

A person’s soul is synonymous with his wealth, and both come from the same root. In a sense, if an individual borrows money, he mortgages his soul to the lender. Should the lender now come into his house to remove the collateral for the loan, the lender is in effect removing the person’s soul from his abode.

Instead, the Torah teaches the lender to be compassionate. He must stand outside and let the borrower bring the collateral to him, and he should try to return it the next day if the borrower needs it. Let the lender recall that every night, we return our souls to G-d without Him coming to take them - and despite our sins, G-d returns our souls to us every morning. (Likutey Halakhot VII, p. 43a)

HOLY WAGES

Rebbe Nachman

“Pay him his wages that day; don’t let the sun set on him. For he is a poor man, and his soul depends on it. He should not have to call out to G-d about you, in which case you would incur a sin.” (24:15)

One should strive to perform the mitzvot with such joy that he feels he has received his reward in the moment of performing the mitzvah, and not in the expectation of a future reward.

Thus, “Pay him his wages that day” - a person’s reward will come from the mitzvot themselves. “Don’t let the sun set on him” - he should not perform the mitzvot for the reward of the World to Come, which is after his “sun sets,” after his death. (See Likutey Moharan I, 5:2)

A worker risks his very life to earn a living, such as by climbing a steep staircase or suspending himself from a tree [to do his job]. (Rashi)

A Jew sacrifices his soul every hour of every day. An example of this is when he gives his money to charity. Money is the soul, as the verse states: *Ve’eilav hu nosei et nafsho* (his soul depends on it), which literally means “he raises his soul for it.” To earn money, a Jew first sacrifices his soul by struggling and even endangering himself for his livelihood. Yet afterwards, he takes the money and gives it away for the sake of G-d. It follows that he is sacrificing his soul. (See Likutey Moharan II, 46)

DAILY BOUNTY

Reb Noson of Breslov

“Pay him his wages that day; don’t let the sun set on him. For he is a poor man, and his soul depends on it. He should not have to call out to G-d about you, in which case you would incur a sin.” (24:15)

Pay him on time according to the terms of employment, be it daily, weekly, monthly, and so on. (Bava Metzia 110b)

Every single day contains its own channel of bounty. In His great compassion, G-d advises us to pay the hired worker on time and not delay payment so that the worker can readily access that day’s channel of bounty. (Likutey Halakhot VIII, p. 143b)

Similarly, a person should recognize and appreciate the opportunity to take care of his soul each day and to “pay” it the wages it demands: Torah study, mitzvot, prayers, and the like. If he procrastinates, saying, “Today doesn’t seem like a good day to study,” or “Today my mind can’t concentrate on prayer,” he will let the day pass without putting any effort into serving G-d. (ibid., VII, p. 143b-144a)

When Adam was cursed to toil, G-d told him, “By the sweat of your brow you will eat” (Bereishis 3:19). *Apekha* (brow) literally means “nose,” referring to the way the nose flares in anger and frustration while one tries to earn a livelihood. Thus, the Torah commands the employer to pay the worker’s wages right away and not make him wait, in order to mitigate that anger and frustration. (Likutey Halakhot VIII, p. 191a)

Conceptually, the hired worker has fallen into a type of servitude, as he is indentured to his employer. A servant represents forgetfulness and a loss of contact with freedom, which is symbolized by the World to Come. Once he completes the job he was hired for, the worker becomes a free man once again. Thus, we must be sure to pay the worker on time, for payment enables him to remember the ultimate goal, the World to Come, where freedom reigns. (Likutey Halakhot VIII, p. 179b)

A worker risks his very life to earn a living, such as by climbing a steep staircase or suspending himself from a tree [to do his job]. (Rashi)

Do all workers make such a supreme self-sacrifice and endanger their lives when they work? No, but anyone who enters into the realm of work must clarify the good from the bad, as work elevates the sparks of holiness from the realm of evil. Even if the work is not physically dangerous, it represents self-sacrifice on the spiritual level. (Likutey Halakhot VIII, p. 187a)

OUR INNER DESIRE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“When you reap your harvest... and forget a sheaf... you must not go back to take it. It must be left for the convert, the orphan, and the widow, in order that G-d bless you in all that you do.” (24:19)

The innermost desire of every Jew, no matter what his or her outward level of observance of the Torah, is to perform G-d's Will in full. Therefore, even when we perform a commandment unintentionally, or even “mistakenly,” it is really the result of our deep-seated desire to do it. Therefore, if a person loses a coin and a poor person picks it up, G-d rewards the person who lost the coin. How much more so will G-d bless us for intentional acts of charity and kindness! - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

PEACEFUL DISPUTE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“If there is a quarrel between people, they should approach the [court for] judgment...” (25:1)

The fact that the Torah describes a quarrel as a possibility rather than an inevitability teaches us that it is possible to remain friendly when we have differences of opinion.

If a difference of opinion degenerates into a hostile quarrel, the parties will find it difficult to arrive at (or admit) the truth or to negotiate a compromise. They will then have to go to court, and the court's only option will be to render a definitive judgment, even though all parties know this might only solve the particular lawsuit and not end the quarrel.

In contrast, if the two people manage to keep their dispute friendly, they can usually ascertain the truth themselves, or at least reach a compromise. Even if they cannot solve their dispute themselves and have to take it to court, the dispute will end peacefully since there is no animosity between them.

WISDOM OF SILENCE

Rabbi Chaim Kramer

“When two men are fighting together, and the wife of one approaches to rescue her husband from his assailant...” (25:11)

Rabbah bar bar Chanah said: Once we were traveling in the desert and we saw these geese who were so fat that their plumes [Rashbam: feathers] fell off. (Bava Batra 73b)

Anyone who sees a goose in his dream can anticipate wisdom. (Berakhot 57a)

In this *aggadah* (homiletical teaching), Rabbah bar bar Chanah is discussing the fine trait of humility. Geese allude to *chachamim* (Sages). *Notzot* (נוצות, feathers) is similar to *Yenatzu* (ינצו, they are fighting), alluding to controversy and insult.

Rebbe Nachman explains that tzaddikim do not pay attention to the controversy or insults directed at them. Though they hear themselves ridiculed, they do not retort. As a result of this silence, they are called *chachamim* (literally, “wise ones”), because “Silence is a fence for wisdom” (Avot 3:13). (See Likutey Moharan 6:6)

PROTECTED WHEN UNITED

Rabbi Moshe Schochet

“Remember what Amalek did to you on the way, when you were leaving Mitzrayim...” (25:17)

The Chiddushei HaRim wonders why the words “*zachor*” - “remember” and “*lecha*” - “to you,” are written in single form? Isn't this a commandment to all of Klal Yisrael?

The Chiddushei HaRim explains that Amalek is only victorious in their attacks on the Jewish people when a person isolates him or herself from Klal Yisrael. If a person steps outside of the protective cloud of the Jewish camp and people, it is only then that they are at risk of being harmed. It is for this reason that the Torah instructs us in the singular form, reminding us that we are susceptible to the dangers of Amalek when we do not remain close with our brothers and sisters within Bnei Yisrael.

As we find ourselves in the middle of the month of Elul, just weeks away from Rosh Hashanah, we must do our very best to ensure that we stick together. We can't allow differences of opinion or thought to create barriers between us that can in turn cause potential harm. Instead, let us find common ground and help each other remain under the protection of Hashem, together, so that we enter the *Yomim Noraim* as one *agudah* - one unit, serving Hashem.

CONSTANT REMINDER

Reb Noson of Breslov

“Remember what Amalek did to you on the way, when you were leaving Mitzrayim...” (25:17)

Amalek attempts to make us forget about G-d. We must always remember what Amalek wants to do, to remind us of our constant battle against him. (Likutey Halakhot III, p. 36a)

Kabbalistically, prayer and fear both correspond to *Malkhut* (Kingship). One who does not fear G-d and His authority will be weak in his prayers, making him an easy target for Amalek. Therefore, the Torah tells us to “remember Amalek” - i.e., to remember to strengthen ourselves in prayer so we can overcome Amalek. (Likutey Halakhot VIII, p. 103a)

STICK TOGETHER

Reb Simchah Bunim of Pshischa

“Remember what Amalek did to you on the way, when you were leaving Mitzrayim...” (25:17)

Why does the Torah use the singular when telling Bnei Yisrael to “Remember what Amalek did to you (*lecha*)”? Since Amalek wanted to annihilate the entire nation, it should have been written *lachem*, “to you” in the plural.

While it is true that Amalek wanted to destroy the entire nation, the Jews who remained steadfast and united as a people were not harmed. However, the ones that split from the camp and went separately were killed. Therefore, the Torah tells us to be as one and “remember” what Amalek did to you when you split from the rest of the people.

KEEPING WARM

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“Remember what Amalek did to you... how they attacked you by surprise on the way...” (25:17-18)

The Hebrew word used in this verse for “attacked you by surprise” (קָרַךְ) can also be understood to mean “cooled you off.” Thus, allegorically, Amalek represents the inner voice of apathy and indifference that tries to cool off our enthusiasm for holiness and goodness.

A defining characteristic of a healthy spiritual life is periodically feeling inspired to leave “Egypt,” i.e., to lift ourselves above the bondage and dictates of physical reality by aspiring to lead a higher, more spiritual life. But when we try to “leave Egypt,” the voice of our inner Amalek attempts to distract us and discourage us.

The antidote to Amalek is to “remember”; to keep the holy words of the Torah in the forefront of our consciousness. (Sefer HaMa’amarim Kuntereisim, vol. 2, p. 287a-288a)

The fact that the Torah commands us to “wipe out” Amalek implies that we can successfully do so. By continuously reminding ourselves of the Torah’s eternal relevance, we can neutralize the ability of Amalek to “cool off” our relationship with G-d. (Sefer HaSichot 5749, vol. 2, pp. 680-681) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

PROTECT THE VULNERABLE

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

“You shall wipe out the remembrance of Amalek from under the heaven, you shall not forget.” (25:19)

Parashas Ki Setzei contains many laws, including the one to erase the memory of Amalek because of what they did to the Jews on our way out of Egypt (25:17-19). Because Amalek no longer exists as a nation, the only reason we are to speak of them now is because the Torah memorializes this law. If we’re commanded to forget them, why would the Torah mention it as a law, ensuring that we never forget the law?

Rabbi Ami Silver suggests that while the Jews have been attacked many times, Amalek specifically targeted the helpless and weak while the nation was tired and weary of all their travels. It’s not Amalek that we need to forget; it’s actually the lesson of Amalek that we must commit to memory - the concept of protecting the vulnerable.

This concept is even more evident in the battle of Amalek itself. While Amalek fought the Jews, Moshe stood on a mountain and lifted his arms to the heavens. When his arms got weak, Aharon and Chur helped him by holding up his arms. While Amalek attacked the weak, Aharon and Chur supported the weak Moshe.

It’s clear from our understanding that the law of erasing Amalek is more of a moral directive relating to the vulnerable, helping those that are weak rather than taking advantage of their weaknesses. This is a common theme among many of the laws and highlights the beauty of the Torah and its guided sensitivities meant to enrich our lives.

ERADICATING ARROGANCE

Yid HaKadosh

“You shall wipe out the remembrance of Amalek from under the heaven, you shall not forget.” (25:19)

The intent of the war against Amalek was to destroy the arrogance in oneself. The numerical value of the letters of “Amalek” (עמלק) is equal to the numerical value of the Hebrew word רם, which means “haughtiness” (ayin = 70, mem = 40, lamed = 30, and kuf = 100, for a total of 240; resh = 200 and mem = 40, for a total of 240).

[Many commentators note that the numerical value of the letters of “Amalek” (עמלק) is equal to the numerical value of the Hebrew word ספק, which means “doubt.” We are being told to eradicate all doubts and worries from our minds.]

HAFTORAH

OVERFLOWING WITH BLESSINGS

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

“Sing out, barren woman who has not given birth, burst out into joyous song and jubilate, you who have not had birth pangs. For the children of the desolate will be more than the children of the inhabited one, said Hashem.”
(Yeshayahu 54:1)

In the first three pesukim of the *haftorah*, Hashem’s boundless love for the Jewish people is revealed. After a long, painful exile, the Jewish people will return to the Holy Land and the prophet Yeshayahu invites Jerusalem to rejoice over the ingathering of her exiles.

He says that the proportions of the Jewish Redemption will be so overwhelming that Eretz Yisrael won’t be able to contain it. She will overflow, and the surrounding areas will rapidly fill to capacity.

The metaphorical barren woman will cry out in joyful celebration, because she will be blessed with so many children that she will be forced to enlarge her boundaries to make room for all of them.

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