

חזק חזק ונתחזק!

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עפרת השבוע

A Weekly Torah Publication from the Students of Mesivta Ateres Yaakov
Ruth & Hyman Simon High School

פרשת בחקתי

י"ט אייר תשס"ה

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Candle Lighting: 7:59

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A ROYAL ANCESTRY

Michael Kariyev, 12th Grade

וזכרתי את בריתי יעקוב ואף את בריתי יצחק ואף את בריתי אברהם אזכר והארץ אזכר (כו:מב)
AND I WILL REMEMBER MY COVENANT WITH YAAKOV, AND ALSO MY
COVENANT WITH YITZCHAK AND ALSO MY COVENANT WITH
AVRAHAM, AND I WILL REMEMBER THE LAND.

This week's *parsha* starts with the many *brachos* that the Bnei Yisroel receive by fulfilling the *ratzon Hashem*. As we proceed further, the Torah then plunges directly into the *tochacha*, the punishments Klal Yisroel will be given if they stray from the proper path. Rav Yitzchok Knobel *shlit"a* brings down a most interesting question from the *Shelah HaKadosh* on a prominent verse found in the midst of these curses. "And I will remember My covenant with Yaakov, and also My covenant with Yitzchak and also My covenant with Avraham, and I will remember the land."

The *Shelah* asks, how can such a *pasuk*, which seems to be a strong *nechama* (comfort), be written in the middle of the *tochacha*? This is very intriguing, especially since the *parsha*, from the fourteenth *pasuk* and on, lists only punishments if the people don't follow Hashem's path. Yet now, the *tochacha* stops in the middle for a *pasuk* full of wonderful

nechama? What is the Torah trying to convey over here?

The *Shelah* answers with a fascinating explanation. There are two wicked people; one a *rasha ben tzaddik* and the other a *rasha ben rasha*. Out of these two people, it is obvious that the *rasha ben tzaddik* will receive a much more severe punishment. He was raised in a *makom Torah* and still went

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FORETOLD EFFORT

Steven Floumanhaft, 10th Grade

This week's *parsha* dictates a listing of blessings and curses. This directory can be easily misunderstood, for it indicates that there are more blessings than curses. An obvious question is, why does it appear to be that there are more curses than blessings? Wouldn't Hashem want to show us that there are more blessings, without causing us to lose hope?"

There are many ways to address this question. The Rambam approaches it as follows. Blessings and curses are both unseen miracles. They go on around us depending on our actions, by the Hand of Hashem. The Torah doesn't need to state that by davening, learning, or doing *mitzvos* one will get a spiritual reward, because it's already an established fact known throughout the Jewish people that we will certainly get rewarded. What is unknown to all is that when you *do* learn, daven or do *mitzvos*, there are a number of other blessings that are bestowed upon you and all of Klal Yisroel. You earn good health for yourself and the entire people, as well as prosperity and victory over your enemies, which is followed by all the other blessings mentioned in this week's *sedra*.

We must recognize Hashem's master plan in the structure of the world. Material entities in this world aren't the primary way for our compensation, and material punishment isn't the primary way of penalization; only in *Olam HaBah* and *Gehinnom* is there an adequate and true reward and punishment. There are two types of people who go up to *shomayim*. There is a person who has it "made in this world" and doesn't really serve Hashem to the

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out of his way to rebel and turn away from his path. A *rasha ben rasha*, however, was born into his evil ways without the sanctity of a *makom Torah*.

The *Shelah* further explains that this is the exact case described by our *pasuk*. Hashem is telling Klal Yisroel, "I remember who your Avos were - the righteous and virtuous Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov. You are their children who were chosen among all the other nations to be My people and become holy by listening to My Torah and *mitzvos*. I also remember that I gave you the holy land of Eretz Yisroel, a *makom* of *kedusha* and a place where I will dwell with you forever – yet with all this you turn your heads and become *risho'im*?! This is truly the biggest *tochacha*; Hashem berates us and warns that we have no excuses since we are descendants of *tzaddikim*.

Yet a question remains. Why does the *pasuk* need to mention all three of our forefathers? Couldn't the Torah simply have written '*zera tzaddikim*'? What significance is there to stressing

all three avos rather than simply stating that Hashem remembers our righteous ancestors?

The answer can perhaps be found at the beginning of *Sefer Yeshaya*. The Prophet Yeshaya states, "הוי גוי חטא עם כבד עון זרע מרעים בנים, משחיתים [א:ד], *Woe! They are a sinful nation, a people weighed down by iniquity, evil offspring, destructive children.*" The Vilna Gaon explains that the four *lishonos* listed in this *pasuk* are opposite the words we say in *Birchas HaShachar*, "אבל אנחנו, עמך בני אברהם זרע יצחק עדת יעקב, *But we are Your people, members of Your covenant, children of Avraham, offspring of Yitzchak, and congregation of Yaakov.*" He elaborates that the word 'עמך, your nation', is *kineged* 'עון כבד עון, a people weighed down by iniquity'. '*Bnei Avraham*' is opposite the words 'בנים משחיתים, destructive children'. "*Zera Yitzchak*" is *kineged* 'זרע מרעים, evil offspring'. Finally the words "*adas Yaakov*" is opposite 'גוי חטא, a sinful nation'.

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אם בחקתי תלכו

by Tzadok Picker

IF YOU FOLLOW MY LAWS

The Baal HaTurim explains that the gematria of the words, "If you follow My laws," is equal to "עמלים דברי תורה, *toiling in the words of Torah.*" This teaches us that the laws this *pasuk* refers to is that of learning Torah. Rashi also states this *pshat*, as well as the Ibn Ezra, who adds that the entire *pasuk* refers to the *mitzvos* of learning, teaching, and fulfilling the words of the holy Torah. By doing this, one can be *zoche* to all of the rewards mentioned over here, including *parnasah*, peace, and Hashem's word to "destroy / send away the evil beast from the land". The Baal HaTurim explains this "evil beast" to be none other than the four exiles that Bnei Yisroel have gone through and are going through. May we all merit such *zechuyos*, and see the end of this "evil beast" of exile, ultimately meriting our final redemption.

fullest extent by davening each day and doing the *mitzvos* properly. This person will eventually come to the gates of *Olam Ha'Bah*, and only receive a decent reward, adequate of the effort he put into this world, yet, there is another man who is not so wealthy or healthy and hasn't had much success as the man before him. However, this man struggles and tries his hardest to serve Hashem in the proper way, even though he is not as fortunate as the other person was. When this man comes up to *Olam Ha'Bah* he will have the greater eternal reward. Do not think that if a person rebels against the Torah and still suffers with deprivation in this world that it makes it any easier for him to receive *Olam Ha'Bah* - a person must truly want to do *teshuva* to get his reward.

There is a story of two armies, both with hard working generals. One army goes off to war and tries its hardest but loses anyway. When they come back to their general he comforts them by saying, "I know you tried your best and that you will win next time."

The other army however was then sent

into battle, but they didn't prepare very well. They sat around lazily and wandered about, while the opposing army took their weapons. As quick as the battle began, they were utterly defeated and retreated back to camp in disgust. Yet, when they go to approach their general and tell him of the loss, he rebukes them, "how can I forgive you? You didn't put in your best effort and sat aside with all the weapons and great things I gave you - for this I can't forgive you!"

With this, the Rambam finishes off that in the end we are better off being punished in this world than to lose out in the much greater reward of the world to come. We could also learn from this the habit of looking ahead for the end result before doing an action which we might later come to regret. Only a person who truly puts in all his effort will succeed regardless of his status or *parnasah* in life. A man who does a lot with a little will certainly receive more than the richest man on earth! This will lead us in the path of Torah and *Yiddishkeit* for generations to come.

FOCUS ON GREATNESS

by Yoni Feder

Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt"l

Part II / Conclusion

23 Tammuz 5670 / July 30, 1910 – 20 Adar I 5755 / February 20, 1995

• Rav Shlomo Zalman's reputation spread like wildfire throughout Eretz Yisroel, and he soon after accepted the position as Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivas Kol Torah.

~ Before receiving the position, Rav Shlomo Zalman was invited to deliver a Shiur before the heads of the Yeshiva. Not long after the start of the shiur, Rav Yonah Meltzbach interrupted with a question. After a few moments of silence Rav Shlomo Zalman declared "*Ta'isi* – I have made a mistake," and began a new topic, building up to a second approach on the matter. When asked by his rebbetzin how it went he said, "Not so well, the shiur had hardly begun when I admitted to a mistake. Actually, I had three different answers to offer. But I felt that the question was closer to the *emes* than any of my answers."

• Rav Meltzbach later commented, "Do you know why Rav Shlomo Zalman was appointed to his position? When I asked him that question and he answered, 'I'm mistaken', it was clear to me that with such a level of *emes* (truthfulness), he should be our Rosh Yeshiva".

~ It was here that Rav Shlomo Zalman was able to spread his Torah to thousands of



talmidim. Many of these students have subsequently taken positions as Rabbonim and Roshei Yeshiva of many esteemed Yeshivos throughout the world.

• As the years progressed, Rav Shlomo Zalman published his *sefarim Ma'adanei Melech* on the laws of Shviis and Terumos as well as *Minchas Shlomo*.

~ His halachic decisions soon became widely accepted and Rav Shlomo Zalman gained a reputation as one of the worlds leading Torah authorities of his day. Every moment

of Reb Shlomo Zalman's day was accounted for. He valued every moment as an opportunity for another mitzvah - another word of Torah study.

~ When one of his sons mentioned that he was studying the topic of *Shehiyah* (leaving food on a stove on Shabbos), Rav Shlomo Zalman told him, "I closeted myself for weeks on end when I studied that topic".

• Anyone who watched Rav Shlomo Zalman daven could readily see the intensity and devotion with which he stood before HaShem.

~ R' Chaim Brim, one of Jerusalem's outstanding Torah personalities, once said that if someone wants to know how to talk to the Ribono Shel Olam, he should watch Reb Shlomo Zalman

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Insights on Lag Ba'Omer

by Avi Lieberman

In Maseches Shabbos, the *gemara* describes Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai's seclusion in the cave together with his son Rabbi Elazar, as they plummeted into the depths of Torah, finally emerging after twelve years as *molei kedusha*. As they approached the city, they were shocked to see people working and plowing the fields rather than learning Torah. "How could people waste their time on such trivial pursuits, in place of becoming one with Hashem's world? Rabbi Shimon and his son's glares resulted in mass destruction of ashes. Hashem commanded Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai together with his son to go back into the cave for an additional twelve months, to teach them that more thought must go into understanding and appreciating the potential of the mundane world.

We must ask, however, that Hashem's reaction seems to be counterproductive. If being in the cave for twelve years caused Rabbi Shimon and his son to react as such, how would returning to that very situation remedy their perspective?

The answer can perhaps be found in Masechtas Brachos, where Chazal give the following advice for one who has experienced misfortune. "*If a person suffers afflictions, he should examine his deeds. . . If he examines his deeds and finds nothing to warrant Divine punishment, he should attribute his punishment to having neglected the study of Torah.*"

The Vilna Gaon asks, since Torah study equals the value of all other *mitzvos*, why is a person not told *first* to consider that he might have neglected *Talmud Torah*? The Gaon answers that a person only finds himself blameless with respect to the other *mitzvos* because he has not learned enough to know what he has done wrong! Thus, if he finds no faults in himself, he surely has not learned enough. The root of sin, accordingly, lies in lack of Torah Study.

One of the greatest lessons to gain from the story of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai and Rabbi

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Elazar, is that as powerful and prevailing as their knowledge of Torah was, there was still a need for more Torah. Hashem was telling them that they must return to the cave, because through inculcating themselves with even more Torah they would be able to then apply it to those not on their level and use it to relate to the outside world. One's whole life must be engulfed in Torah, and even then, there is so much to acquire. As Rav Yissocher Frand coined at the Siyum HaShas, "It is never too little, it is never too late, it is never enough."

When streetlights slowly began appearing around the avenues of Eretz Yisroel, someone asked the Chazon Ish *zt'l* his sentiment and outlook on having a streetlight put up conveniently in front of his house? He replied that he has actually gained much *hashkafa* and insight into this fancy light fixture. "When I am standing far away from the light, my shadow is very large and spreads out over the entire street. Yet as I walk closer to my house and subsequently to the street light, my shadow gets smaller and smaller, until I stand under the light with no shadow present whatsoever."



R' Avraham Yeshayahu Karelitz *zt'l*
The Chazon Ish

"This same concept," explained the Chazon

Ish, "also applies to us in our daily devotion to *ameilus BeTorah*." There are people who contain opinions about every topic of *Yiddishkeit*, yet are speaking from ignorance rather than acumen. They are far away from the light and enjoy a rather large and dark shadow, making themselves mighty and full of their darkened and empty perspectives. Yet there are also the people who are truly dedicated and committed to *talmud Torah*, ultimately closer to the source of Light that bestows the greatest source of supremacy. Yet the closer a person is to the Torah and steeped in the awesomeness it possesses, the more they realize there is so much more to learn and conquer – the smaller their shadow becomes. One who is in fact steeped in Torah will understand how much more there is for him to delve into and accomplish.

As the festive experience of Lag Ba'Omer carries us into Shabbos and many of us prepare for the summer ahead of us and a year filled with so many alternatives – let us resolve to make *ameilus beTorah* an intense focal importance in all decisions. It is mainly through learning Torah and delving into our studies that we become closer and more attached to Hashem. From this day that commemorates the revelation of the secrets of Torah, the greatest way to celebrate it, is to increase our achievements and successes in *talmud Torah*. May we merit to truly succeed in such endeavors, and merit to become closer and more attached to the ultimate Light – yet imbued with the realization that it is never too little, it is never too late, and it is never enough.

STORIES OF TZADDIKIM

Rav Ephraim Wachsmann *shlit"a* once gave a ride to an older person, who mentioned that he had been a young bachur in Radin during the last three years of the Chafetz Chaim's life. Rav Wachsmann was stunned, and asked the man if there was any story or lesson he could say from his time with the *gadol hador*. "When I was in the yeshiva," began the older man, "The Chafetz Chaim was already very old, and we would rarely see him. I don't think I have any stories to tell over."

Rav Wachsmann pressed him further to try hard and see if there was *anything* he could remember. "Actually," the man responded, "There is one thing which happened that I can tell you. In my first few months of learning in Radin, I received a letter from my family that my sister was very sick. They urged me to go to the Chafetz Chaim for a bracha. I was only in Radin for a short time, and I was too embarrassed to go to him. Yet when I received a second telegram stating that things are getting even worse, I realized that I had to go."

I made my way to the Chafetz Chaim's house with the telegram in hand, and peeked into the door. I saw a *malach*, a true angel sitting and learning by a table. After a few moments he turned around and motioned for me to come in. When the Chafetz Chaim asked me what I want, I realized I couldn't speak! Here I was standing in front of the *gadol hador* and I just couldn't bring myself to talk! I finally threw the telegram down on the table in front of the Chafetz Chaim, who picked it up and read it.

The Chafetz Chaim turned to me and said, 'You're a yeshiva bachur – you don't need a bracha!' There was silence. "Then what should I do?" I thought to myself. 'All you have to do,' continued the Chafetz Chaim, 'Is pick *one* thing; one area of your life, and work on it. Take one item and dedicate it to a *refuah shileimah* for your sister, and I promise you all will be well'."

"And that is exactly what I did," the older man concluded to Rav Wachsmann. "I accepted upon myself one *midah* and pledged to work on it. . . and my sister had a complete recovery."

Let us strive to constantly work and improve who we are, by starting with one thing at a time and developing it until we can continue onto another project. By working honestly and piece by piece, we can all succeed and *im yirtzeh Hashem* become a vessel for Torah and *aliyah* in all our endeavors.

make the *bracha* of *shehakol* on a cup of water.

- On one occasion, a talmid approached him with a question. Because Rav Shlomo Zalman was engrossed in his studies at the time, the student decided to wait until Rav Shlomo Zalman looked up from his Gemara. Fifty minutes passed and Rav Shlomo Zalman did not raise his eyes. Finally, the student tiptoed out of the room.

- Rav Shlomo Zalman abhorred any form of honor and hated the titles of greatness which others accorded him.

~ He once rebuked a Talmid for sending him a letter addressed to 'HaGoan HaRav....' "Do you need to tell the postman that I'm some kind of *goan*?" he demanded.

~ One time, as he entered a wedding hall, he was surrounded by scores of bnei Torah who began to sing "Yomim al yemai melech."

Quickly, he grabbed the chasan and the mechutanim and pulled them into the center of the circle, chanting all along, "*Chasan domeh le'melech*, A bridegroom is like a king."

- Rav Shlomo Zalman's acts of *tzedakah* and *chesed* were above and beyond any norm. He supported widows and orphans and was always available to them for guidance and encouragement. He extended a helping hand to the poor, the sick and the elderly.

~ An old woman who owned a *Makolet* (grocery) struggled every morning as she tried to carry the daily delivery of eggs from the street to her store. This was until she mysteriously began finding the eggs right in front of her store. When she hid one morning to determine her helper's identity she discovered it was none other than Rav Shlomo Zalman.

- Rav Shlomo Zalman lived by the teaching, "Greet every person with a cheerful face [Avos 1:15]", and always went out of his way to make someone feel special.

- Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach *zt'l* was *niftar* on a Monday in Adar 1, 5755.

- Rav Shlomo Zalman's son, Rav Shmuel, asked his family to recite the *bracha* of *Boruch Dayan Ha'emmes* with joy along with him.

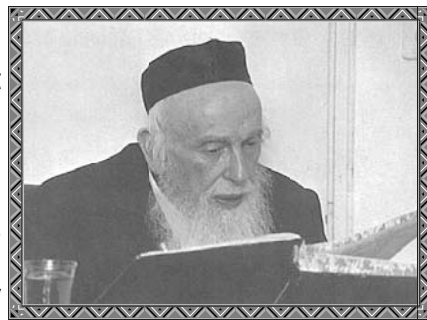
From the hospital, Rav Shmuel ran to Kol Torah and entered the yeshiva's beis medrash. It was 9:40, and the students were reciting Tehillim for Rav Shlomo Zalman's recovery. Rav Shmuel mounted the *bima* and banged on the table. Silence descended. Then in a weak, tear-choked voice, he said, "*Boruch Dayan Ha'emmes*."

- His *levaya* was one of the largest of all time with over three hundred thousand in attendance, all bemoaning the loss of this mighty beacon of Torah.

- Rav Shlomo Zalman left behind children and scores of talmidim who are now renowned Torah leaders and continuing in his path.



Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv *shlit"א* together with Reb Shlomo Zalman *zt'l*



MICHAEL KARIYEV (continued from page 2)

The Vilna Gaon demonstrates how the terrible acts that Klal Yisroel has done are the exact opposite of our avos' principles. With this in mind, we can now explain the reason for our need to list all the avos. Yaakov is to remind us that we have become "a sinful nation". Yitzchok reminds us that through our evil ways we have angered Hashem by producing "evil offspring." Furthermore, the reference to Avraham is to remind us that we have unfortunately become "destructive children." Finally, when the *pasuk* says '*veha'aretz*', referring to Eretz Yisroel, Hashem is sternly reminding us that He has given us the land and we have filled it with a 'nation full of iniquity and immorality'.

Rav Zecharia Wallerstein *shlita* tells over a most beautiful *mashal* to illustrate this point, based on the life of a *shikur* (drunkard). "Have

you ever noticed that he is always smiling and yet he lives a most horrible and depressing life? Yet due to his habits and morbid routine, he is numb to all his problems, but always feels happy and *gevaldik!* However, this does not last long; when the ecstasy has tapered off and his sanity returns he realizes his life is a big zero." Although we seem to be sacrificing the pleasures of this world for a life of Torah and *mitzvos*, it is a great misconception. The Torah way of life offers the deepest and greatest lasting pleasures. We must not blind ourselves from the truth before we are forced to wake up and see it is too late!" It is through intense change and a full desire to improve can we ultimately succeed in our endeavors, and in due time merit the coming of *Moshaich Tzidkeinu, bimheirah biyameinu*.

אמת ליעקב

Weekly Insights from Moreinu HoRav Yaakov Kamenetzky zt"l

והשבתי חיה רעה מן הארץ (כנ"ו)

AND I WILL REMOVE ALL THE WILD ANIMALS FROM THE LAND

One of the *brachos* that Klal Yisroel is promised if they keep the Torah, is that they will not have to fear wild animals attacking them on their land. The Ramban on this *pasuk* explains that when Klal Yisroel are living in Eretz Yisroel and properly observing the *mitzvos*, the world will be similar to the world of Adam HaRishon before the sin of the *eitz ha'daas*, and no animal will be able to kill a human.

HaRav Yaakov Kamenetzky zt"l explains this Ramban in the following way. There are certain *mitzvos* in the Torah that are completely beyond our comprehension. We must view these *mitzvos* simply as decrees from



R' Yaakov speaking at a Ner Yisroel Dedication in 1943

Hashem, and perform them despite our lack of understanding. However, we must understand that these *mitzvos* are not arbitrary decrees that are simply there to control our lives, but rather, that there is reason for all these *mitzvos*. Indeed, these *mitzvos* exist as part of the natural order of the world. The Midrash tells us that Hashem used the Torah as the blueprint for the world. The world was created based on the *mitzvos*. We cannot understand how this works, as we, in this world cannot hope to fathom the depth of Hashem's intellect. As such, we have no choice but to view these *mitzvos* purely as decrees that we must follow.

For this reason, the Torah promises us that we will merit all the *brachos* of the Torah "אם נחלתם את הארץ ושמרתם את מצוותי, בהקתי תלכו, If you will walk with my commandments." A person is obligated to keep all the *mitzvos*, but the ultimate level is for a person to keep the *mitzvos* not for any pleasure or because of any understanding, but because he realizes that this is the way in which the world must run. This is what is meant by walking in the path of the *chukim*; a person should conduct himself in a manner that reflects the idea that the *mitzvos* are part and parcel of the existence of the world, despite the fact that he doesn't understand how this works. When Klal Yisroel reach this *madreigah*, and are keeping the *mitzvos* in this way, then *midah kineged midah*, Hashem will revert the world to the state in which it was intended to run, as it existed before the *cheit* of the *eitz ha'daas*. In the natural order of the world, animals should not have been able to harm humans, and as such, when Klal Yisroel are *zocheh* to revert back to this world, they will no longer have to fear animal attacks.

May we be *zoche* to keep the Torah properly, so that we may merit all the *brachos* that are written in the Torah.

A man once asked his rav, "Why do we need all the different sections of gemara? Are they all so necessary? Why not cut some of them out?" The rav replied by referring to the famous story of the two women, both claiming to be the mother of the same infant, who brought their case before Shlomo HaMelech. He explained, "The woman who consented to have the baby cut in two, according to Shlomo HaMelech's judgment, was not the true mother. There was no way that the baby could have belonged to her - to a true mother, half is tantamount to nothing at all."

It is told that when Reb Hillel Zaks *shlit"a* was a young child, his mother used to encourage him never to leave over food on his plate. "It's a shame to throw it out!" his mother would urge.

To this, Reb Hillel would respectfully reply to his mother, "But it is an even greater shame to throw it in."

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