

following vignette reinforces this idea.

Shabbos Kodesh, Sivan 26, 5677, 1917, in Vienna's most prominent shul Khal Adas Yisrael, popularly known as the Shiff Shul. The chazzan began reciting the Yehi Ratzon for Mevarchim haChodesh, Blessing the New Moon. Herr Goldshmidt, the elderly gabbai announced the molad, precise time at which the new moon begins to appear in Yerushalayim. (Traditionally, they announce the exact hour, minute and chelek/portion – 1/18 of a minute or 3½ seconds.) Surprisingly, the time was precisely on the complete hour – no minutes or chalakim. The congregation continued with the recitation of the prayer with all the wonderful blessings that it engenders. The Mussaf service was concluded, and everyone began to return his siddur to the bookcase, in preparation for returning home.

Herr Goldshmidt asked everyone to wait a moment; he had something to say, "You all must certainly know that this molad is unique in the sense that the precise time falls out on a perfect hour." Immediately, one of the congregants asked, "Does this not occur often?" "No!" replied Herr Goldshmidt. "It takes place only once every eighty-seven years! Therefore, at this most propitious time, I would like to wish each and every one of you to experience such a molad one more time in your lives!"

Most of the people smiled; some even laughed. After all, eighty-seven years was expecting a bit much. Even a brachah, blessing, should be realistic. Standing next to the bimah, listening to the gabbai and the congregation's reaction, was a fifteen-year-old teenager, a refugee from Poland (it was during World War I) who did not react like everyone else. Perhaps it was because of his upbringing by his mother. Growing up, he was inculcated with the notion, "My child, never ignore a blessing that is given to you. Always respond with a hearty Amen!" Today was no different. When Herr Goldshmidt blessed the congregation, this teenager, true to his mother's inspiration, responded Amen.

Fast forward to Yerushalayim, Shabbos Mevorchim HaChodesh Mar Cheshvan 5765, 2004. The gabbai of the shul announced the molad Thursday morning precisely at 2:00 am. The shul was silent. The congregants heard Reb Yosha, the oldest member of the shul, whimpering as tears slowly began to streak his face. They understood that every month was special to Reb Yosha. He had reason to be emotional. He had far surpassed in longevity the lifespan of his friends. One man, however, took a special interest in Reb Yosha's weeping. "Reb Yosha, lama bachisa, why did you weep?" asked Gedalyah Stein. He assumed that, if Reb Yosha was weeping, he had to have a good reason.

Reb Yosha looked at Gedalyah and said, "My friend, this is the second time in my life that the molad fell on a perfect time, on a complete hour – without fractions. The last time that this occurred, I was a fifteen-year-old teenager in the Shiff Shul in Vienna. Today, I am one hundred and two years old. I have every reason to express my emotion. My Amen eighty-seven years ago was the catalyst for my

longevity. You, Gedalyah, are still young. I encourage you to take to heart and teach your children the lesson my mother taught me – never ignore Amen! Every blessing is valuable. Answer Amen with great kavanah, intention, devotion! May it be the will of Hashem that you should be there for Mevarchim HaChodesh, Tishrei 5852, 2091, in good health and welfare!"

Va'ani Tefillah

רפאנו ד' ונרפא – Refaeinu Hashem v'neirafei. Heal us Hashem and we will be healed.

The Chafetz Chaim, zl, notes that Hashem's cure is unlike that of a mortal physician. When a physician is asked to heal a person, it requires time. First, following a comprehensive examination, the diagnosis must be made. Once the diagnosis has been confirmed, the physician must decide upon the best course of treatment and which medication will be most effective in curing the disease. There are times when the physician misreads the symptoms, causing an error in diagnosis, which means the medication he has prescribed for the patient is wrong – or worse – can cause even greater problems for the patient. Now, the patient must begin the process of seeking a cure all over again. David Hamelech says, Yishlach devaru v'yirpa'eim; "He sends His word and healed them (Tehillim 107:20). Hashem "does it right the first time." Hashem simply uttered a word: One word from Hashem is sufficient to heal the patient. Thus, we plead: "Heal us, Hashem. If You will grant us our cure, then we will be healed, completely, at once."

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Parashas Matos-Masei

תשע"ז

פרשת מטות-מסעי

Parashas Matos

לא יחול דברו ככל היוצא מפיו יעשה

He shall not desecrate his word; according to whatever comes from his mouth, he should do. (30:3)

The word of a Jew is sacred. He must stand behind his word. When a person does not keep his word, he is mechallel diburo, desecrates his word. Chillul is a strong term. We use the term chillul with regard to desecrating Hashem's Name – chillul Hashem. Also, when a bas Kohen, daughter of a Kohen, acts in a morally profligate manner, the Torah writes, Es avihah hee mechalleles, "She desecrates her father" (Vayikra 21:9). Apparently, the sanctity of a Kohen, the sacredness of a person's word, are of a similar nature to the sanctity of Hashem, in the sense that a violation of this sanctity is called a chillul.

The Zohar HaKadosh explains chillul Hashem as being derived from chahal, hole, vacuum. When a person commits a chillul Hashem, it is tantamount to implying that a vacuum exists; the Almighty is not present. The area in which one has committed a desecration is devoid of Hashem. Thus, a chillul Hashem is an act by which one makes a statement; there is a chahal here.

Likewise (I think), when a Kohen's daughter commits an act of adultery, she is indicating by her actions that her upbringing was devoid of her father. He has had no positive influence on her. Otherwise, she might not have acted so licentiously. A chahal existed in her home – no father. Her education was flawed. Thus, the term chillul.

Lo yacheil devaru; "He shall not desecrate his word." When a person does not keep his word, he indicates that a void is behind the statement which is attributed to him. "Nobody is home." He is not responsible for what he says because "someone" is lacking. He is not in control of his words, because he is missing. When a person speaks, he must take responsibility – unless "nobody is home." A person's word is sacred. He must stand behind it.

גדרת צאן נבנה למקננו וערים לטפנו

Pens for the flocks shall we build here for our livestock and cities for our small children. (32:16)

The response tendered by Bnei Gad and Bnei Reuven, "we will build pens for our flock and (then) cities for our small children," did not sit well with Moshe Rabbeinu. By prioritizing the needs of the flock before those of the children, they were implying that the sheep had greater significance in their eyes than the children. Moshe immediately corrected their attitude. It is difficult to believe that such holy individuals as Bnei Gad and Bnei Reuven

would have misplaced priorities. To prioritize sheep over children is to confuse one's priorities in life. It is not imaginable that members of the Dor Deah, Generation of Knowledge, would be guilty of such an error.

Horav A. Henach Leibowitz, zl, explains that addressing the needs of the flocks was indeed all for their children (is it not always?), but they got carried away. Concerned with their livelihood so they could better support their families, they became involved in raising animals. They became so involved that they lost sight of their goals, the children; and they turned their livelihood, the animals, into an end onto itself. As a result, they neglected to pay better (or at least equal) attention to their children.

A person's sensitivities are most often influenced by his actions. Indeed, a person cares most about something for which he has expended energy, effort and time. Now, if Bnei Gad and Bnei Reuven, who were holy individuals, whose perception of Hashem and everything spiritual was light years above ours, were negatively influenced by their involvement in their mundane endeavors of earning a livelihood, what should we say? When a person spends the majority of his waking hours engrossed in commerce – it takes its toll. One forgets that his original goal was only to provide for his family – not to devote his lifetime to earning a nest egg that would provide for the next few generations of his family.

The Rosh Yeshivah adds that a similar idea applies to one who has chosen Torah as his lifetime endeavor. He must remember that he still has a family at home – children who need a father, a wife who needs a husband. The bottom line is that we all have our priorities, but we must neither misplace them, nor get carried away by them. Our families are all important and providing for them is essential, but at what expense? Torah study is paramount, but so are our wives and children. There must be a balance in life, which the Torah provides – if we are willing to listen.

ויסעו ממדבר סיני ויחזו בקברות התאוה

They journeyed from the Wilderness of Sinai and encamped in Kivros HaTaavah. (33:16)

The yetzer hora, evil inclination, works overtime in its efforts to sway us to sin. Hashem has provided us with a panacea to help us circumvent/overcome the allure of the yetzer hora: Torah. Our Torah is the tavlin, antidote, to protect us from falling into the yetzer hora's grasp. This is alluded to in our pasuk. Once Klal Yisrael leaves Sinai, meaning the Torah which was given at Har Sinai, they fall into the clutches of Kivros HaTaavah, graves of lust/desire. Passion, lust, desire,

hate, envy, anger: all of these negative character traits destroy a person. One's pursuit of passion, his obsession with various avenues that promote satisfaction so that he is able to quell the desires that overwhelm him, are all tools of the *yetzer hora*—which he employs in his attempt to manipulate and eventually control our lives.

In *Sefer Tehillim* (19:8-9), David *Hamelech* writes: *Toras Hashem temimah meshivas nefesh*, “The Torah of Hashem is perfect, it restores the soul.” In his commentary to *Sefer Tehillim*, *Horav S. R. Hirsch, zl*, writes, “Only by subordinating themselves to the will of Hashem can His creatures on earth become that which they should be and fulfill the purpose that gives meaning to their existence.” Man is in contrast with other living things who function in accordance with their instinctual drives and proclivities; hence, they are unable to choose between good and evil – which is the unique gift of freedom of choice given to man. “Man has been ennobled by the *ratzon*, will, of Hashem, for He has implanted within him a Divine spark of His own free personal Being.”

Instinctively, man has the capacity to follow his animal drives which would denigrate him to animal status. This is the goal of the *yetzer hora*. Hashem protected us with a spiritual antibody, an antidote for overcoming the effect of the *yetzer hora*. Hashem's laws were Heavenly-designed to be in perfect accord with the nature and purpose of the creatures with which they deal, and also the nature and calling of ourselves to whom they were given.

Barasi yetzer hora, Basrasi Torah tavlin, “I created the evil inclination, I created the Torah as its antidote.” When a person studies Torah, he reinforces his spiritual antibodies which allow him to fend off the wiles of the *yetzer hora*. Torah is *mesamchei lev*, rejoices the heart, because it energizes the individual and strengthens him. When one learns Torah, he is overcome with a feeling of quiet joy and serenity in the knowledge that he is doing what is expected of him. True joy comes with success. Success comes with fulfilling the will of Hashem. Otherwise, why are we here? A life of duty fulfilled; a life of obedience to the Torah; a life of service to Hashem: that is a life of joy. Those who would tend to debate this verity – should try it.

In a *shmuess*, ethical discourse, *Horav Moshe Aharon Stern, zl*, quotes a frightening statement from *Rabbeinu Yonah*. In fact, the *Mashgiach (Kamenitz)* comments, “I believe that if we did not have any *mussar* (ethical character refinement) texts, other than only this (one) comment from *Rabbeinu Yonah*, it would suffice to arouse a person to overcome his *yetzer hora*.” *Rabbeinu Yonah* writes: “Know that the soul of the *rasha*, wicked man, whose only desire in this lifetime is for physical pleasures and not at all for the service of his Creator, will descend downwards at its death to the earth, the place of its desires. Its end will follow the pattern of the dust, descending and not rising. His soul, however, will be brought up to the Heaven for judgment and justice, and to see how it exchanged the Heavens for the abyss... it will then descend downwards to the earth... as its nature, as a stone falls to the ground after it is thrown.”

We are presented with an entirely different picture of the *rasha*. He may very well be an observant Jew who attends *minyán*, *davenen*, learns Torah and observes *mitzvos* – but demonstrates neither desire for nor interest in, his spiritual endeavors. His affinity is for the physical/material delights of this world. Such a person has the soul of a *rasha*

within him.

Horav Elyahu Lopian, zl, explains this phenomenon. Just as a person's body is covered with clothing, so, too, is his soul. The spiritual raiment of the *neshamah*, soul, is fashioned from the individual's *middos*, character traits. If his *middos* are spiritual in nature, his soul rises up to Heaven. If, however, the attire of his soul is comprised of the here-and-now, the temporal physical/material delights and frivolities of this world, it must remain in the world of materialism. It cannot separate itself from its clothing. It is, thus, relegated to remain with its clothing. Sad, but true.

They journeyed from *Har Sinai* and, as a result, ended in the graves of desire. The desire that had become so much a part of their lives ended up as their graves. They were buried in desire and ultimately remained buried. How true this is. One only has to listen to the news to hear of those who succumb to the various chemical substances that plague our youth, as well as our middle-agers – and seniors. It is a plague of epic proportions, often beginning with alcohol addiction, fostered through such unknowing opportunities as a *kiddush*, get togethers, various *simchos*, and then ratchets up to more concrete, harder substances. Pain and depression might be temporarily relieved, but the alternative is far more permanent – and deadly.

Torah remains the antidote. Torah is the panacea, but only if it is studied properly. When one imbibes the sweetness of Torah, when he realizes that he is studying from Hashem, he has discovered the antidote, he lives the panacea. Our Torah directs us to study Torah and transmit it to the next generation. History has proven time and again that, when we slack off in our Torah study, we open ourselves up to every spiritual dysfunction, with assimilation at the top of the list. Torah links the Jew with G-d – a link that becomes concretized the more that one learns.

When we study Torah, we are not confronting an archaic, abstract educational text. We are *living* Torah. We are engaged in discovering the very essence of Judaism: what makes it come alive; and what sustains it. When we study Torah, we are living Torah. This idea is underscored in the following story.

In “At His Rebbe's Side,” *Rav Yehoshua Liff* relates an incident which occurred when he planned to move his *yeshivah* (Ner Yaakov) to the Katamon section of Yerushalayim. The *baal habatim*, directors, had rented a suitable building and were assured that it was properly zoned, but, after investing considerable funds, time and effort, they were informed a mere few days prior to the beginning of the *zman*, semester, that the building was zoned only for residences. The building had served as a school building for many years, but, as a *yeshivah*, it would offend the many non-observant members of the community. They would have to go to court in order to obtain proper zoning. Their attorney warned them that their chances of winning the case were next to zero. They, of course, did not factor in that Hashem still was in control – even in Katamon.

The morning of the court date, *Rav Liff* davened with the *minyán* of *Horav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach*. After *davening*, he related his predicament to the sage and asked for his blessing. *Rav Shlomo Zalman* replied, “*Mir darfen davenen*; we must pray.”

Taking his advice, *Rav Liff* began to recite *Tehillim* fervently, as he waited outside the courtroom. Prior to entry,

he was informed by his lawyer that there had been a change in judges. His previously assigned judge had been replaced by Judge Elyahu ben Zimra, a religious Jew who held a high position in the country's legal circles.

The judge began the case with his own musings. “I have been living in Katamon for the past fifteen years and remember well that this building has been used as a school in the past. Apparently, it bothered no one until the decision was made to allow a *yeshivah* to move into the neighborhood. After inquiring as to how many students the *yeshivah* would cater to, when was to be its opening date, and how much money *Rav Liff* had expended for renovations, the judge said he needed a few hours to consider the matter. The judge went to his chambers and *Rav Liff* (in accordance with *Rav Shlomo Zalman's* instructions) began to recite *Tehillim*.

When the judge returned, he faced his audience and asked a rhetorical question, “*Mah zeh yeshivah?* What is a *yeshivah?*” Answering his own question, he said, “A *yeshivah* is a place where one studies Torah. A *yeshivah* is a place where one *lives* Torah. It is a house dedicated to Jewish living. It is a house of life” (I have altered the text from the book by design. A *pasuk* is quoted which I have been unable to locate. Nonetheless, the idea remains the same. One cannot view a *yeshivah* through the secular lens of an educational institution. One does not merely *learn* in a *yeshivah*; he *lives* in a *yeshivah*.)

“What does a Jew do in his home?” the judge asked. “*Hu lomeid*; he studies Torah” (referring to the *yeshivah* which supplants the home as a domicile for imbibing Torah). “He may learn with a study partner or he may teach a class.” (It is all a form of living in a house). “Based upon these considerations, I feel there is no legal reason to impede the building in question to be used as a ‘Jewish home’ in the way a Jewish home is used: for the study of Torah and *tefillah*.”

When *Rav Liff* heard the incredible news, he immediately called the home of *Rav Shlomo Zalman*. His grandson answered the phone, “Please tell the *zaide*, grandfather, that we won the case!” he exclaimed. “*Der zaide vart der gantzer tzeit*, (my grandfather has been waiting this entire time.) He has not stopped *davening* for you since this morning!”

Apparently, when *Rav Shlomo Zalman* had said, “*Mir darfen davenin*,” he included himself.

כי בעיר מקלטו ישב עד מות הכהן הגדול

He shall dwell in it until the death of the Kohen Gadol.

(35:28)

The *Talmud Makkos* 11a teaches that, since the fate of the *rotzeach b'shogeg*, unintentional murderer, was dependent upon the *Kohen Gadol's* longevity, there was fear that the *rotzeach* would pray for the early demise of the *Kohen Gadol*. Once the *Kohen Gadol* died, the murderer would be free to leave the *ir miklat*, city of refuge. To circumvent their prayers, the mothers of the *Kohanim Gedolim* would furnish the murderers with food and clothing to keep them happy and satisfied, so that they would not pray for the death of their sons. Why did the *Kohen Gadol* not personally pray for longevity? His prayer for life would certainly be as effective as the murderer's prayer for his death. Perhaps this is why he had been elected as *Kohen Gadol*. He was a holy person to whom life was certainly quite

important. He realized, however, that, by praying for life, he was essentially praying for the many unintentional murderers to be doomed to a life of exile away from family and friends. I guess the *Kohen Gadol* was such a person that “living at the expense of another Jew's pain” was not something he felt warranted his prayer. If Hashem allowed him to live, if his personal merit outweighed the prayers tendered by the murderers – good. If not, well, that was his lot. It came with the territory. Nonetheless, he could not allow his personal prayer to have a detrimental effect on another Jew.

We derive from here the incredible power of prayer. The *Kohen Gadol* is a holy man. The murderer is an exiled Jew, who is in his position for a reason. True, the murder had been unintentional, but it was no accident. One is not sent to the *ir miklat* for an accident. He is sent for unintentional murder, which covers a gamut of ambiguous circumstances. This man is certainly not on a spiritual par with the *Kohen Gadol*; yet, the *Kohen Gadol* fears his prayers (or, at least, the *Kohen Gadol's* mother fears for her son's life). *Karov Hashem L'chol kor'av l'chol asher yikre'uhu b'emes*. “Hashem is close to all who call upon Him – to all who call upon Him sincerely” (*Tehillim* 145:18). Hashem listens, and, when the prayer is sincere, it achieves efficacy. The exiled murderer is sincere (perhaps for the wrong reasons, and self-serving – but sincere). And, thus, his prayers gave the *Kohen Gadol's* mother reason to be anxious for her son's life. This is the awesome power of prayer.

It works because of our relationship with Hashem. He is our Father in Heaven. A father always listens. He never closes his door to his children – regardless of the offense or the duration of time that has elapsed since they had last spoken. If this is true of human emotion, how much more so of Hashem, Who is our Creator?

While the significance of prayer cannot be sufficiently emphasized, we often (because of a lack of knowledge and awareness) ignore the significance of one mysterious word: *Amen*. *Chazal* teach that the individual who answers *Amen* is even greater than the one who initially recited the blessing. *Amen* is related to the word *emunah*, faith, a derivative of *emes*, truth. One who recites a blessing is acknowledging that he is about to partake of Hashem's beneficence, and he offers his gratitude for this opportunity. The one who answers *Amen* is not acknowledging his gratitude to the Creator for the bounty, because he did not receive it. He is, however, seizing the opportunity to express himself to Hashem in terms of pure faith – unfettered by the limits of his gratitude. When he says *Amen*, he is connecting with Hashem on a purely spiritual level, declaring his total subjugation to Him. In other words, he is affirming his faith in Hashem as Provider, Benefiter – even though he personally did not receive; he is affirming it based upon pure faith. Thus, *Amen* is greater than the blessing, because the blessing is contingent upon gratitude, while *Amen* is a declaration of pure faith. When we say *Amen*, we declare to Hashem that we are prepared to do anything that He asks. We believe wholeheartedly in His ability to do anything. It really cannot get any better than that.

Amen is effective – even if the blessing to which one responds might be unreasonable, even injudicious. Even if hope for the realization of the blessing hangs by less than a shoestring, one should respond *Amen* in the hope that his response may catalyze the actualization of the blessing. The