ZEVI'S NOTES

INSIDE THE YESHIVAH

My favorite messages and ideas from the sefer, the ones that connected to me the most.

ZEVI SAMET · ZS BEYOND THE COURT

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ZEVI'S NOTES

01
INTRODUCTION

I am writing my favorite messages and ideas from the sefer that connected to me the most:

The Sfas Emes writes (Likutei Yehudah, Parshas Toldos 7a) that when Hashem gave us the Torah as a gift He also provided us the derech to the Torah. Torah is a gift from Hashem and He directs us on the path to reach it. We all have a pathway that brings us to our cheilek in Torah; we only need to find it. We need to pray to Hashem to reveal that path for us.

- This handbook is intended for sixteen to twenty-two-year-old boys. These are the most critical years of one's life (See Tosfos Ri Hazaken, Kiddushin 30a).

I once heard a phenomenal vort from Rav Meir Hershkovitz, shlita, rosh yeshivah of Stamford. He asked a simple question: We all know the vort based on Chazal (Rashi, Shemos 19:5), "Kol haschalos kashos, aval mikan v'elech ani ye'arev lachem — All beginnings are difficult but henceforth I will sweeten the way." Things usually are tough when we start, but as time

passes, it gets smoother. Why is it we find the absolute opposite?

GREAT QUESTION We all start off the beginning of the zeman with a bang, but as the zeman goes forward our zest starts to die down. Shouldn't it be the other way around — the beginning of zeman torture and the end smooth?

ANSWER It all depends on the type of start we have. If we start off the zeman with a real plan of what we want to accomplish and sit down to contemplate what it entails, and thus accept upon ourselves to get there no matter what the challenges are, such a beginning is difficult. When our start follows this pattern, we are actually paving the way for the rest of the zeman.

- We have already done the hard work of deciding and choosing correctly. However, if we don't actually sit and contemplate in the beginning of the zeman but rather go with the flow, the flow usually stops after a while and we are left high and dry.

Rashi says this teaches us a tremendous principle. When you accept upon yourself to do something, it's as if it's finished already. When Bnei Yisrael accepted upon themselves to bring the korban Pesach, for all practical purposes, it was as if they had already done it. The most critical step we take is choosing; the physical action is only the finishing touch.

When we choose, we take into account all the hurdles we may come across and empower ourselves to conquer them. That's the biggest challenge we face, the mental

decision. When we actually go ahead and finish off what we have decided, it's just ceremonial.

- **TIP** Before you start the zeman, sit down and create a plan. Determine what you want to achieve, how much, when, and with whom.
    - Perhaps it's a difficult undertaking, but you will gradually see the satisfaction.

> **ZEVI NOTE**
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> Rav Meilech Beiderman said in his Parshas Tazria / Metzora packet (this week 2023), that for many bachurim and kollel yungerleit, a new zman (semester) is beginning. To maximize their success in their learning, it is highly recommended for bachurim and yungerleit to make a kabbalah not to speak devarim beteilim (idle talk) for the first half-hour of the seder. And if a half-hour is too hard, they can make a kabbalah for less time. Even five minutes at the beginning of the seder devoted to studying Torah can make a big difference. Generally, after they begin the seder with studying Torah, they will continue learning even after the half-hour passes.

All beginnings are important, as it sets the mode for everything that follows. Therefore, the beginning of the zman is important, and the beginning of each seder is important. Being diligent at these moments can help us succeed in Torah immensely.

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02

THE IMPORTANCE OF LEARNING TORAH

"There are 613 mitzvos, why does learning Torah appear to be the most important?"

Aren't all the mitzvos important? What makes learning Torah "take the cake"? We are aware of the mishnah (Peah 1:1) that says, "V'Talmud Torah k'neged kulam — Torah learning is the greatest of all mitzvos," however, it doesn't answer the question.

Isn't it enough to perform this mitzvah once or twice a day like other mitzvos? Why do we spend an entire day on it?

TORAH BRINGS PLEASURE TO OUR CREATOR

Anyone who cares for someone will always try to please that person. The more you care for someone, the more you will want to do anything to strengthen that relationship. But a person's true love is evident when he does something for that individual even before being asked, from his free will. This illustrates his desire to maintain the relationship. Someone who loves Hashem looks to please Him. He knows what

Hashem loves and will do it as often as possible to give Him more and more pleasure. The Mesillas Yesharim (ch. 18) writes that there are people out there who are not satisfied with the minimum; rather they love Hashem so much they want to go beyond the call of duty. The greatest pleasure for Hashem is when we learn His Torah. Therefore, when we go above and beyond our own limits and learn as much as we can, we bring Him the greatest pleasure.

We all owe unlimited hakaras hatov to Hashem for all that He does for us, from the moment we were conceived until now, for all His gifts and kindness. The Ohr HaChaim (Shemos 22:6) says there isn't a moment that Hashem isn't doing something for a person, both for his body and his needs. Don't we want to bring Him pleasure? And what better pleasure can we bring than learning Torah? Our greatest motivation for doing Hashem's mitzvos is our recognition of all that He does for us. (3) When we reflect on the infinite kindness He bestows upon us, we feel a desire to do His will.

- (3) The Chovos HaLevavos (Sha'ar Cheshbon HaNefesh, ch. 3) gives us different ideas to motivate ourselves in avodas Hashem. His first idea is reflecting on Hashem's abundance of kindness. These thoughts will surely be the greatest motivation to serving Hashem.

The reason Hashem commanded us to build a Mishkan was in order to create a dwelling place for Him. When He gave us the Torah He didn't want to depart from it, therefore He created an

area that He may reside in beside the Torah. For this reason, the Beis HaMikdash was destroyed due to bittul Torah. Once we disregard the Torah, there is no reason for a Beis HaMikdash. However, even today after the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash, when each individual learns Torah, the Shechinah is with him. Amazing! The Torah is like no other mitzvah; all mitzvos entail fulfilling the will of Hashem, but one who learns Torah is fulfilling Hashem's will together with the presence of Hashem. It's a package deal; together with the Torah comes the Creator.

The Vilna Gaon (Even Sheleimah 1:2) writes that one of the principal purposes of life is to perfect our middos. We need to overcome all those bad traits we were created with.

- The Mesillas Yesharim (ch. 5) writes that if Hashem created our yetzer hara and told us that there is no other remedy to weaken it besides Torah, should we be foolish and try something else? Our greatest weapon against the yetzer hara is Torah. When we learn Torah, it refines our character.
    - The Mesillas Yesharim quotes the Midrash: "If only they would leave My mitzvos and learn My Torah, for the light of Torah will lead them back to Me."

Olam HaZeh is full of ups and downs, full of tests. People are hardly satisfied with anything. We leave this world without filling half our desires. We feel empty all the time. But there is one thing that will make us feel content, and that is Torah. The more we plunge into Torah, the more fulfilled we will feel. We will have an inner satisfaction of accomplishment.

- The lack of satisfaction we were created with is for the purpose of Torah study.
    - Until we satisfy that desire we will walk around aimlessly looking for something more - for there is nothing that will appease us in Olam HaZeh besides Torah - but once we do, we will sense the satisfaction.
- Even though a person who supports Torah will merit in the next world the same reward as one who actually learned Torah, he will never experience the gratification of feeling content in Olam HaZeh.
- Torah is a gift from Hashem designed to allow us to enjoy both this world and the next. At the same time, the more we pursue it, the more we bring pleasure to our Creator, to Whom we are indebted. It's the least we can do to show how much we appreciate His everlasting kindness to us!

ZEVI'S NOTES

03
GETTING UP

Getting up on time is the first and perhaps most difficult test we will confront in our day.

We cannot even start to discuss waking up on time if we do not go to sleep on time. The first key to overcoming the test of getting up starts the night before. Unless we get sufficient sleep and get to bed on time, we cannot expect to get up early.

- The only practical way of fighting this yetzer is to just get up.
- There will never be enough sleep, and we will always want to sleep more, no matter how much we have slept. When was the last time you jumped out of bed, feeling rejuvenated after a full night's sleep? Probably never. Even if we sleep for another hour or so, we will have the same problem getting up. But on the other hand, once we get up, wash up, and start to get dressed, the tiredness will wear off.
- There is nothing like being ahead of time and on schedule in the morning.

- Perhaps the yetzer hara strikes a battle here more than other places because he knows a very important secret. Rav Chaim Volozhin, zt"l, says (Eitz HaChaim, Torah 10) if we wake up in the morning with the intention to succeed, we will have success the entire day. The yetzer hara knows that if he loses this initial battle, he will be the one behind all day. He knows that even if we eventually get up, if it is a weak and lazy start, it will leave a lethargic impression on us all day. So as hard as it seems, it's worth getting up right away. The key is not to give him a chance to debate with us.

- The Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (1:4) writes that as hard as this test is, if we fight it four or five times in a row we will conquer it. A short-term fight will give you long-term benefits. If we don't take charge and continue to struggle day after day with some wins here and there, unfortunately, we will battle this yetzer hara forever. How many people do we know who have this problem even at an older age?

- Most people who have trouble waking up in the morning tell themselves, "Tomorrow will be different," but for some reason, the same cycle happens all over again. Some people have been repeating this mantra to themselves for the last who knows how many years, but regrettably, they are still waiting for change. Rav Chaim Friedlander, zt"l, says the only way you can expect a difference is if you do something different. For example, make a chavrusa in the morning before tefillah or have someone call you in the morning - just deciding that tomorrow will be different will not do the job.

- We all want to improve and, in our minds, want to change, but the only way we will make a change is if we do something tangible about it.

ZEVI'S NOTES

04
TEFILLAH

Tefillah is the weapon of the Jewish people. Whenever we are confronted with any type of challenge, our automatic reaction should be to pull out a Tehillim or siddur or to just turn to Hashem.

QUESTION Doesn't Hashem see what we need? Doesn't He know what is good for us? He created us! Why do we need to pray?

ANSWER Hashem knows what we need, much better than we do. He is prepared to take care of us all on His own, without our asking. Tefillah is for us. We need to remind ourselves three times a day that Hashem, and only Hashem, holds the ticket to everything. When we approach Him with all our needs, we admit that He is the only One Who has a direct effect on us.

- Through tefillah, we build our emunah. Hashem knows that if He would just give us what we need without our asking, we would have a difficult time discovering Him. Now that we need Him, we are forced to recognize Him.

- From the time we are born we deal with perfecting different relationships.
- Although Hashem created us and loves us, we need to build our relationship with Him. Prayer is the way to build that relationship. When we approach Him and beseech Him, we connect with Him; we get to spend time with Hashem, alone, just us and Him. If we let the time slip away and squander it, all we are doing is distancing ourselves from our Father in Heaven.

Hashem is in control of every detail of our lives, and we must beseech Him at every moment. There is nothing that Hashem isn't involved in.

The Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh (Shemos 20:4) says this is how avodah zarah started. People felt they couldn't burden Hashem with all their trivial matters and thought Hashem sent emissaries to take care of all the small details in the world.

Every challenge we are met with should be brought to our Father, our King, no matter what.

> **ZEVI NOTE**
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> Even the most physical mundane matters? Like if a person is upset that the Knicks won or something like that?

> **ZEVI**
> Check out Mussar from Parshas Behar (I think). He talks about, if you really connect to something, ask for it. It's sad that your life is all sports.

We build belief and trust in Hashem by involving Him in all aspects of our life. The more we pray, the greater our emunah becomes. So, when you are standing there in the morning, ask in detail for success in all the endeavors you plan that day (See Rabbeinu Yonah, Mishlei 3:6). Then sit back and let Hashem do the work.

However, we need to be careful not to put all our eggs in one basket. If we daven for a specific chavrusa or a particular shidduch and don't see the yeshuah, we can feel broken and worn-out. The best approach to tefillah is the following: "Hashem, if this is the right thing, let it work out quickly; if not, give me the strength to endure the test that may follow." Or perhaps: "Hashem please let me find a good chavrusa, or a good wife," without specifying who. With this approach, we give Hashem the room to work, and at the same time give ourselves the flexibility to move beyond what we think we need. Remember: Hashem knows best.

One of the biggest challenges we face when we pray is the test of our patience. Being a Jew requires a lot of patience. Hashem

has His plan which is ultimately good, better than we would ever think to devise, but we must have the patience for it to come to full fruition.

- No prayer is wasted.

The Steipler, zt"l, writes (Chayei Olam, ch. 28) that while some tefillos are answered right away, others take time. We don't know the rule of when, what, where, and why, but one thing we know is that each tefillah has an effect at some time. So, hold on. The more we persevere in our prayers, the better chance we have to be answered, as it says (Tehillim 27:14): "Kavei el Hashem, chazak v'yaameitz libecha v'kavei el Hashem." The more we believe, the more we persevere; the less we believe, the less we persevere. The Gemara (Yoma 29a) says that tzaddikim were answered because they prayed a lot.

> **ZEVI**
>
> Add the story about the boy's cries, crying to say good night to his mother (Artscroll shabbos table - pesach addition).

- The power of constant prayers; it pushes those requests over the top. So day in and day out, the more we pray for the same thing, the more of a chance it has to come to fruition.

One reason we may not see results right away is because Hashem may test us to see if we believe He is the ultimate power. If He answers us right away it wouldn't be a test; it wouldn't show our faith in Him. If we were answered immediately, we would turn to Him again

because of success but not from belief. But if we still persevere after calling many times without being answered, it shows that we believe. If it were a human being we sought for help, after a while, we would give up, thinking to ourselves, "There is nothing he can do." However, when we stick it out with Hashem despite all the disappointments, we show unequivocally that He is the "Boss."

- Sometimes we hit a brick wall. We pray and pray and still receive no answer. We try this segulah and that segulah, and still no reply. We feel like giving up. The feeling is understandable, and it is very hard to break out of such a rut. However, let's remember that there are things that need constant chizuk, and one of them is tefillah (Berachos 32b). We need to step back and remember that Hashem loves us more than we love ourselves and wants the best for us. Many will see the salvation in the end, but we might have to wait.
    - We will see the good; we just need to be patient. Often when we see no opportunity for success, or if things perhaps look bleak, with tefillah we open avenues that didn't exist previously. The playing field can change altogether when we pray.

We have to realize initially that everything is out of our hands and only in the hands of Hashem. The sooner we realize this, the sooner He will enter the picture. As long as we think we can still do something about the situation, Hashem remains on

the sidelines. This is one of the greatest steps forward in tefillah: when we realize right away that Hashem is the only One Who can affect us both positively and negatively in this world.

- We all experience stresses in life. Stress only comes when we feel that we can do something about a given situation. If something is out of our hands, our stress will disappear, since we can't do anything about it anyway. The earlier we realize that nothing is in our hands, rather, everything is only in Hashem's hands, the quicker we will live a stress-free life.

We must turn back after our success and remember that Hashem was the One Who helped us along the way and opened up the doors to our success.

- "Hashem how much more would I thank You if I could hear from both ears."
- Thanking Hashem is the most powerful thing we can do.

If we continue to emphasize our blessings and think about all the good we receive, we will be genuinely happy. The best way to create a relationship with someone is to realize the good they give us.

Through appreciating the good, we build a bond with Hashem that will help us through all times of good and bad.

Besides this, when we reflect on the good we receive, we will be motivated to do Hashem's will. We cannot emphasize enough the life changer it will be when we

stop to think before Modim and enumerate our thanks for the past days' successes. We have to thank Hashem even for the smallest things. This will only bring berachah.

— LOVE THIS!! MUST TRY THIS WITH TEENS THAT AREN'T DOWN TO DAVEN!! —

Teens have a very hard time connecting to tefillah. In essence, they feel they don't need it at all. Technically they have parnassah, they usually have health, and they don't feel any connection to tefillah. Try this:

Take a piece of paper and fold it in half. Think. There has to be something you need. Maybe there is a friend you are having trouble connecting to; perhaps there is a family member who requires a refuah. Write down at least ten things you or someone close to you needs. This is your list of needs. Then, turn your paper over and think again: what do you have, what can you thank Hashem for? For your health, for your family's parnassah. On this side of the paper, write at least ten things. This is your list of haves. Keep this paper with you when you pray.

As your prayers are answered, move them from the needs to the haves. This will strengthen your belief in Hashem.

There is no greater emunah booster than seeing your tefillos answered. Besides that, when you see results it will give you an incentive to pray. With this, you will feel a closer connection to your prayers. You will feel it's for you.

QUESTION let's say you don't see results tho?

ZEVI'S NOTES

05
BEIN HASDARIM

The Steipler, zt"l (Toldos Yaakov, p. 104), once told a boy, "If you want to be a gadol, learn during bein hasedarim."

One adam gadol said that a nap during the day is worth double the same sleep time of the night.

- A long nap can be counterproductive. Besides the waste of time, it makes us drowsier than we had been before the nap. Our body tasted that deep sleep, and now it's hard to shake it off.
- The most potent nap is a ten-minute power nap on your bed not under the covers. Those ten minutes - besides giving us long-term strength — will not leave us drowsy and groggy.

ZEVI'S NOTES

06
BEKIUS

- It's not only about the destination, it's about the journey too. As we go along, we will pick up many basic yedios in Shas.

The more we learn, the more we will know. Simple.

- Someone once asked the Chiddushei HaRim, "If someone doesn't have cheishek to learn, what should he do?" He answered, "Learn without cheishek!"

Every boy's dream is to be able to learn on his own. It can get so disappointing when we see all these boys around us ripping through gemaras, and we feel we can't get to first base. There is no quick way to learning how to make a leining. It takes work and commitment. It's like learning how to ride a bicycle. You need to sweat it out on your own, fall, hurt yourself, but ultimately, you will learn how to ride. The same with Gemara, you need to keep striving to learn daf after daf on your own, and eventually you will get it.

- Learning how to learn Rashi is based on the same rules. The more exposure we have, the better we will get at it. However, there is one point to know. The better we

understand the Gemara, the easier it will be to read the Rashi. Most of the basic assumptions in the sugya are found in Rashi. Rashi will always give us the basic understanding of the sugya, and if we have that already, we probably know what Rashi will say, it's just a matter of figuring it out in his words.

When you learn bekius it's important to use a pencil.

How many times have we learned something, reviewed it, and feel like we still can't remember it? How frustrating!

The reason for this is that you probably never understood it at first. If you didn't get it the first time around, then you will probably never get it. The opposite is also true, if you got it the first time, you will be surprised how long you will remember it.

- This is the core of the issue with bekius, if we don't learn it well to begin with, chazarah will never help. When you review, you will just be reviewing all the same mistakes over and over again. You will review what's unclear, not what's clear.
- The key is not to take anything for granted when you are learning.

One of the best pieces of advice I got from one of my rabbeim was how to do chazarah. He said, "Don't just review what you learned, rather learn it again." Learn it as if it's the first time you are learning it. Go slow, write down your hearos. If you do it this way, you will be able to analyze the Gemara differently from the first time you learned it. Each chazarah is adding more depth than the one before.

An excellent method for these four times would be to review the Gemara you learned that day, plus yesterday and the day before that. Then on Shabbos, do a complete review of the past week's learning. Through this system, you will cover each Gemara you learned four times. After those first four times, you will understand it. It seems time-consuming, but this is the only way to absorb it.

- Nothing is more important than chazarah, just be careful to give yourself enough time to do it right, to learn it over wholeheartedly, and not just for the sake of saying you did it.
- Time and patience are the key to achieving proper chazarah.
- If you are pressed for time and must finish a certain amount in a certain time, you can fall into this trap. Take your time!

ADD TO GEMARA – EMES!!!

The geshmak we can get from doing chazarah is out of this world. When we review something and understand it well, we feel great. It's definitely a segulah for geshmak in learning.

The Gemara in Yoma (29a) says it's harder to review than to learn new material. Rashi explains that when we forget what we learn, then it's agony to relearn it all over again, especially when it doesn't have that Geshmak of being exposed to new concepts, but when we keep up the review and retain our grasp, there is nothing greater.

If you learn straight from an English Gemara, it will not benefit you. First, if you don't work on trying to understand the Gemara terminology on your own, you will never master it.

It's like riding a bike with training wheels — it's fun, but you will never learn to ride on your own. You need to remove that crutch to succeed. You may fall many times and feel like you are getting nowhere, but in the long run, you will learn how to learn on your own. If you are so far from understanding a Gemara any other way, and perhaps will not learn otherwise, then perhaps it's better than nothing. (However, I don't believe you are that person!) Be honest with yourself.

- Once you really have gotten the Gemara the first time around, you will be surprised how long it will stay with you. All you really need to do now is refresh periodically. A year after you've learned a certain masechta, review it again once more and it will continue to stay with you.
    - The object of this chazarah is not to learn it over again for the first time, rather to refresh what you know already.
- Add to Gemara — The Steipler says reviewing by heart is like reviewing four times inside. Why? Because the first four times are there to help us get it and understand it, not for review. Therefore if you can review by heart, you've completed chazarah in just one time.
- Add to Gemara — You can't imagine how much it helps if, after you learn something, you close the sefer and then repeat over what you learned. Not word for word obviously, but the entire shakla ve tarya. It's a different world. It goes in. It's like what the Gemara says (Kiddushin 30b), "You

have to write Torah on your heart" — that's how it's done when you review it outside. Try it again the next day before you continue the Gemara.

ZEVI'S NOTES

07
WRITING

The Gemara in Bava Basra (10b) says, "Fortunate is the one who comes to Heaven with his Torah in his hands." The Maharsha explains that this is referring to his chiddushim.

- Writing is a crucial part of our success in Torah.
- What our minds cannot do by mere thought, can be accomplished easily by writing.

Unfortunately, many think it's a waste of time to write; they think it's bittul Torah. This is clearly the yetzer hara speaking.

- You will see once you write. You will see how deep you get into your learning while you write.
- You will want to be mechadesh more and more so you can write. You will focus more so you will have something to write down. It will be your favorite part of learning. You will guard your notes with your life.

The Steipler (Karyana DeIggarta, vol. 1; letter 23) writes in a letter that you should write down any sevara, explanation, or answer to any question you may have had, even if it seems very

simple. This, he says ,will bring you tremendous success in learning.

We can get lazy in this area — that's just proof that the yetzer hara is involved.

- We feel a real sense of accomplishment when we finish off a zeman and have many pages of written Torah.

ADD TO GEMARA

The Michtav Me Eliyahu (vol. 4, p. 310) writes that by writing chiddushim we not only complete our sugya, we build ahavas haTorah.

Whenever we feel a little down and unproductive, we can glance through old notebooks and look at the many pages of writing. It will give us a tremendous chizuk when we see what we can accomplish.

ADD TO PIRKEI AVOS + GEMARA

We all are familiar with the mishnah in Pirkei Avos (1:6), "Knei lecha chaveir — Buy yourself a friend." The sefer Ohr HaYashar has a famous, unique explanation of this mishnah. He says knei means a quill. The mishnah is telling us: The quill - your pen — is your friend. Your pen will be there when your chavrusa is not there, and it will be there to lift you up when you need to get back into your learning. He adds that it is also a tremendous tool to help us remember our learning. It's a good friend who won't let you down. So don't give it up.

ZEVI'S NOTES

08
MUSSAR SEDER

- Learning mussar is possibly the difference between becoming a gadol or merely a talmid chacham. The Gaon, zt" l, says (Even Sheleimah 1:2) that the purpose of man in this world is to perfect his middos.
- Changing our middos is impossible without mussar. Let me repeat: changing your middos is impossible without mussar.

Life is more than a beis midrash. Perhaps as of now, we don't feel the necessity of working on our middos, but believe me, you can't lead an ordinary life without proper middos.

- The earlier we break a bad middah, the greater we can become.

No pep talk will win a game; it will only motivate us.

- To change, we need real mussar. We need to absorb the mussar; we need to allow it to penetrate our hearts. As we are learning, we need to think of the words we are reading and contemplate how it relates

to us in our daily life, or how it can relate to us in the future. This mussar will slowly penetrate us and transform us; it will shape our hearts.

No doubt we will feel the words working on us.

Zevi check it out - The Alei Shur (vol. 2, p. 175) lists which sifrei mussar fall into this category and need to be learned b'iyun." (Add source - go back to page) The proper way to learn this mussar is to find the specific words of the sefer that relate to us and to keep repeating them over until we absorb them. As we repeat these words, they will slowly penetrate and affect us?

- One very important rule: This mussar cannot be done with a chavrusa. This mussar is avodas halev and must be done alone and at one's own pace. Rav Shlomo Wolbe, zt"l (Avnei Shlomo, vol. 2, p. 25), compares learning mussar with a chavrusa to davening Shemoneh Esrei with a chavrusa. They are both avodah and both need to be done alone.

Rav Yerucham Levovitz (Da'as Torah, Bamidbar, p. 84) says the key to winning over the yetzer hara is to understand ourselves, to be in touch with our feelings. Most of all we need to be honest with ourselves and admit what desires and feelings are inside of us — this way we can work on them. How can we expect to change ourselves if we aren't sure what it is that needs change?

This process is done through mussar. When we learn mussar properly we are in touch with ourselves. We start to understand what makes us tick and where our shortcomings are. Knowing who we are is the key to bettering ourselves.

- The Mashgiach of Lakewood, zt"l, would say not to take a son-in-law who doesn't learn mussar. Is it such a wonder? People have animalistic tendencies that need to be harnessed. Without mussar, we are on the loose.

- The Gemara in Pesachim (49b) says marrying one's daughter to an am ha'aretz is like putting her in front of a lion. How many marriages are destroyed because of improper behavior? The biggest problem of all is that when we don't learn mussar, we don't even realize we are acting out of line. We feel that it's normal behavior, when in essence we are acting subhuman.

TORAH TAVLIN

The famous Gemara in Kiddushin (30b) states that Torah is the antidote to the yetzer hara.

GREAT QUESTION What type of limud haTorah exactly are we referring to that has the magical power of harnessing our yetzer hara? When dealing with medicine we find two types of medication. When someone has pain and takes aspirin, how does the aspirin know to direct itself to the area of pain? The answer is, it's a general medication that, once taken, will relieve all pain in the body no matter where it is. But then there is the medicine that can be applied directly to the pain itself, like cream on an injured area.

Torah works the same way. There are two types of Torah tavlin. There is the type that is a general medication that will destroy the yetzer hara even if not directed at him. That is limud hagemara. When we learn gemara and internalize the logics, the shakla ve tarya, we burn out the yetzer hara from inside us.

It makes no difference what we learn, as long as we are learning and internalizing it.

But then there is a Torah which is a direct remedy to the yetzer hara - when you learn mussar on a specific topic. He may need to learn the mussar that applies to his weakness.

- Mussar is what is going to make us great. A change in our middos will not evolve on its own; in fact, it will get worse as time goes on. We need to put time aside to allow the mussar to penetrate us and make us a better person, chavrusa, family member, and Jew!

ZEVI'S NOTES

09
SLEEP

Probably half the world runs on inadequate sleep, and over time there is no doubt that it will affect their performance.

Rav Shalom Schwadron, zt"l, would say over from his Rebbi Rav Elya Lopian, zt"l, that inadequate sleep will creep up on us in our old age. Even if we do not feel it now, we will feel it later in life. And the opposite is true too. There are people who saturated themselves with proper sleep when they were young and later in life could suffice with less. We are still young and don't contemplate the long-term effects of sleep deprivation; however, we will appreciate good sleeping habits in the long run.

- There are two recipes for success. One, to be well-rested. Second, to be well-prepared for everything you plan on doing that day. (The source for this is below)
- If you follow both rules, you will reap success in all your endeavors.
- Rav Avigdor Miller, zt"l, once said, "Lack of sleep can often cause stress and nervous disorders." We sometimes in

wonder why we can't concentrate during tefillah. We wonder why we don't understand the shiurim. Perhaps it's just because our minds are too weak from sleep deprivation.

You need to establish how much sleep you need. There isn't any set amount of time, but a general guideline would probably be between six hours and twenty minutes and seven-and-a-half hours. You need some trial and error to determine the right amount. However, a one-night trial will mean nothing. Your trial has to be at least a week long. Start at seven hours. Try it for a week. If you feel strong, be thrilled that you can be alert all day and not just drag your feet around throughout the day. If it's not enough, then increase by ten minutes the next week. Try that; those numbers should work.

- Every once in a while, we will come short of the minimum sleep we need. It might be due to a wedding the night before, or perhaps we just lost track of time. On those days we need to remember what the Ben Ish Chai says (Parashas Vayishlach 1): "Have trust in Hashem that that amount of time will suffice for just this one day." The wrong thing to do would be to make up for it in the morning and sleep later.
- If you have an irregular schedule, you will always be tired. If you have a system, your body will adjust to it and work at your demands.
- We are creatures of habit and need to stick to the plan. The better schedule you have, the less sleep you may need.

- Too much sleep will make you more tired and drowsy.

GREAT QUESTION Imagine we would take a seven-hour break from learning during the day. Wouldn't that throw us off tremendously?

Wouldn't that just burn us out? Why isn't sleep the same? We should wake up totally out of it, not in the mood to learn. Yet sometimes we find the opposite — we wake up feeling more vigorous than we had felt before we went to sleep. Sleep works very interestingly. It is almost like a frozen state.

- The mode we go to sleep in is the way we wake up. If we are in a good state spiritually, then we wake up that way too. If, however, we go to sleep on the wrong foot, that's the same way we'll wake up. It is very important that we fall asleep while learning or being involved in something spiritual.

This is one reason Chazal enacted the obligation to say Krias Shema before we sleep — to ensure we fall asleep on a positive spiritual note. Try hard to let that be your final thought for the day.

- Sleep is obviously the key to our day.
- The earlier we go to sleep the easier the wake-up and the rest of the day will be.

ZEVI'S NOTES

10

HOW TO LOVE TORAH

GREAT QUESTION I recall asking one of my rabbeim in high school, "How is it possible that all these people are learning all day and we can't even sit for forty-five minutes?" He answered something I have never forgotten: "You never learned!" What does that mean?

We learn Gemara every day for over two hours? We learn plenty. "No, you never really learned."

- Let me give you an example. When we ask our children to taste something, they take the tiniest piece and at best lick it, and then say, "I don't care for it." It annoys us tremendously.

How can they claim it doesn't taste good if they barely tasted it? We do the same thing. Torah and Gemara are so rich. There are so many surfaces we never penetrated. If we only broke through these surfaces, we would surely appreciate the geshmak.

- It's when things are unclear and fuzzy that we feel frustrated and confused. However, when things fall into place, we enjoy it very much.

- David HaMelech says (Tehillim 34:9): "Tamu reu ki tov — Come and taste [the Torah] for it is good." It's only a matter of our tasting it, it will surely be pleasurable. Don't assess the situation from where you are holding now. We are standing too far away from where we can have a clear outlook.

- No individual in the entire world was born with a cheishek, desire to sit down and learn all day. It's against our nature; we are not naturally inclined to sit down and do one thing for an extensive amount of time — especially learning. It takes time to develop the skill.

We can compare Torah to dry wine. No one I know is born with an appreciation for dry wine. Many of us can't even stand the taste. Then there are those who pay thousands of dollars for one bottle of wine. How can there be such a difference in types of people? The answer is, wine is a taste that needs to be cultivated. It takes time to bring out the taste buds in the mouth to properly appreciate it. If you invest the time it will pay off, if you do not you will forever dislike it. How do we develop that appreciation for wine? The answer is, the more we drink the more acute our taste buds become.

- We need to build an appreciation for it. How do we develop those tools and taste buds? Here is the trick: the more we learn, the more we exercise those abilities, the stronger our "taste buds" will be. The key is to learn more and more. But not only once, we need to do it consistently. If we keep on

taking breaks, we will never overcome the challenge and never acquire that taste.

Once we experience the awesome taste of learning, we will continually run back to it. Even if we have ups and downs, once we appreciate it we will never give it up again, because we know we can experience that taste once again. It's similar to tasting food. If we've tasted some kind of food and enjoyed it, even if the next time around it didn't taste as good, we nevertheless will try it again, since we recognize the potential that lies in it. Our taste for Torah is the same: we will constantly pursue it knowing the power that exists within it.

The Chosen Yehoshua (maamar 1, perek 1) makes a profound comment. (Chosen Yehoshua is a sefer on the topic of developing diligence in learning).

- He says once we get into our learning, it will be more painful to withdraw from it than it had been to get into it in the beginning.
- The Michtav Me'Eliyahu says the key to remember is that this war will not last too long. If we trench in and endure the battle to obtain the tools we need, we will be on our way in no time.
- Another good tip on breaking into learning is based on the following story ("Torah Wellsprings," Parashas Bo 5777). Rav Binyamin Rabinovitz, zt'l, rosh yeshivah of Yeshivos Toldos Aharon was an extraordinary masmid.On Shivah Asar B'Tammuz, the bachurim of the yeshivah were amazed when they saw him learning nine hours straight without

interruption. One bachur asked him how he obtained this level of hasmadah.

Rav Binyamin replied, "When I was young, I wanted to learn with hasmadah, so I made a kabbalah to learn five minutes without interruption. When I could do that easily, I made another kabbalah to learn up to ten minutes without interruption. Some weeks later, I added another five minutes and learned for fifteen minutes without interruption.

A great way to ignite the fire within ourselves is to say a chaburah. I know what you are thinking. Me? I can't do that.

- First, there are plenty of individuals who would be happy to help you with the material. Just ask any rebbi or older bachur; they will be more than happy to provide you some lomdus. The person who stands to gain the most out of a chaburah is the person delivering it. It won't hurt if someone else understands it too, but the biggest benefit is for yourself. You will feel what real learning is even if it's for a short time.

GREAT QUESTION

"I know the sweetness of Torah, I've felt it in the past. But occasionally I don't feel the enthusiasm, and it feels routine to me. How do I get out of this rut?"

The Sefer HaYashar by Rabbeinu Tam (Shaar 6) explains that this pattern of ups and downs is the normal procedure of life.

Everything good settles down after a while.

The way for us to restart these engines is to add a new element to our avodah.

- If we weren't writing notes till now, start. Or perhaps start a new seder during the day, a new mussar sefer or Mishnayos. A small seder, nothing radical, even something small can do the job. This small change can give us a new chashivus to what we are doing and can improve the situation entirely. This will rekindle the passion we previously had. Believe it or not, something so small can make such a big difference.

By learning what you enjoy it will give you energy for the rest of the day. It makes you feel good and accomplished. Rav Gershon Edelstein, shlita, firmly believes one shouldn't underestimate the power of "mah she libo chafeitz"" learning what you enjoy.

Spending your free time doing something you have a passion for can inspire you an entire day.

Many times, we don't have the cheishek to open that Gemara and sit and learn; however, once we open it and start learning, we get pulled right in immediately. It's precisely like diving into a cold pool. It's the initial jumping in that's hard, but within moments we become used to the temperature and start enjoying it.

ADD TO GEMARA

Rav Yaakov Yitzchak Ruderman, zt"l, that he has the following mesorah from the Vilna Gaon: if someone doesn't have the cheishek to learn, if he just reads the gemara — even just an amud — he will be pulled in. However, to achieve this you need

to read out loud. If you just scan the gemara with your eyes, it will not draw you in.

- You must read the words of the gemara with your mouth. Then, and only then, it will do the magic you need.
- Cheishek in learning is not something we are born with; rather, we need to develop it.
- The Or HaChaim tells us (Shemos 33:11) that the more we work on building our desire in learning, the more Hashem loves us!
    - However, the catch is till we start to learn we will never develop the desire for it. Plunge in and you will see the desire will strengthen over time.

ZEVI'S NOTES

11
SHABBOS

ADD TO SHABBOS DOC

We can't appreciate Shabbos till we toil throughout the week. When we work hard an entire week and use our kochos to the max, then we can tap into the sweetness of Shabbos. We need to fulfill both halves of the pasuk (Shemos 34:21): "Sheishes yamim taavod uva'yom hashvi'i tishbos — For six days you shall work and on the seventh day you shall rest." Only when we work and toil throughout the week will we genuinely appreciate the peace of Shabbos. The only way we can understand the concept of true menuchah is when we have the other dimension, of toiling. Without toiling, the entire week — including Shabbos — will feel the same.

ADD TO SIDDUR AND SHABBOS DOC

- In Shemoneh Esrei on Friday night, we say, "Tachlis shamayim vaaretz." The word tachlis can mean two things: either the end of the creation, or the more popular meaning, the tachlis, the purpose, the ikkar. Shabbos is the main purpose of this world. The same way Olam HaBa is the main world, Shabbos is the main day of the week. Shabbos is not an off-day, it's an on-day, the only on-day.

- Many of us look at Shabbos as a burden: stop what you are doing, no driving, no phones, and no work. But we need to realize Shabbos is what we work for and prepare for the entire whole week.
    - On Shabbos we are commanded to feel as if all our work is completed, not that it's just a break in the action. It's the culmination of our work. The more we prepare the better it will be. It's game day — all the work is for these moments. Think in this fashion and perhaps you can tap into the beauty of Shabbos.
- What a feeling, to greet the Shabbos queen without rushing!
- Besides the unique aura that descends on Friday afternoon, there is also a tremendous segulah in accepting tosefes Shabbos.

Add to Shabbos doc — Without going into specifics, the Chafetz Chaim, zt"l, would say all the berachos lie in tosefes Shabbos. It's a segulah for health, wealth, and all success. The rationale of this is if we accept Shabbos early it indicates that it isn't a burden to us, where we must stop our work. Rather we are anticipating it, looking forward, and can barely wait. However, if we do not begin our preparations early enough, especially in the winter, it will be very hard to get them done.

- Add to Shabbos doc — The Yerushalmi (Shabbos 15:3) says the purpose of Shabbos and yom tov is to take advantage of the extra time for Torah learning. Even though the Mishnah Berurah (290:7) seems to say that a ben Torah can rest more

on Shabbos than he does during the week, we shouldn't just sleep it away.

LOVE THIS! HANG IN HOUSE! (MAYBE)

We know that enjoyment of Torah comes after the initial toil, like it says, "Kol haschalos kashos" (Rashi, Shemos 19:5). If so, why do we constantly feel the toil and not the enjoyment? The answer is that every day is like a new start. We will only experience pleasure when we remain consistent in our learning and build continuity from day to day. If we don't learn properly on Shabbos, our Sunday and Monday will be a new beginning, and every new beginning has its difficulties. However, if we keep the momentum over Shabbos, then Sunday will just flow along.

OH WOW! I COULD DEFINITELY USE THIS!

Rav Yerucham, zt'l, said if you wish to gain yiras Shamayim, learn Chumash-Rashi. It's also said in his name that if you want to study psychology learn Chumash-Rashi.

Shabbos is perfect to set aside time to gain the kinyan of Chumash-Rashi. Especially those long Friday nights. It's worth the investment. Learn it, understand it, and it will serve you well.

Shabbos is a perfect time to set aside time to go over what we did that week. The gemara in Nedarim (36b) says Shabbos is for review, not to go further in our learning.

ADD TO SHABBOS DOC

> **ZEVI NOTE**
>
> I saw this in Torah wellsprings once:

The Chazon Ish said, “If non-Jews would know the joy Yidden have when they learn Torah before Shacharis on Shabbos morning, they would convert just to have the opportunity to experience this bliss.”

If you have a plan of what you wish to achieve, either chazarah or a new seder, that will draw you in. Mentally prepare for that time and it will be easier.

Shabbos is a day of rest but also a day of opportunity. If we take the opportunity there is so much to gain, both physically and spiritually.

ZEVI'S NOTES

12
IYUN

Question: We all hear the term ameilus baTorah, toiling in learning. What does that mean, ameilus? Do we have to work up a sweat?

- Ameilus baTorah is not physical labor; it's mental labor. It's the ability to put ourselves entirely into our learning with no outside distractions. When we prepare to engulf ourselves with learning, that is ameilus baTorah.

Our minds seem preoccupied, and there is hardly any space for anything else. Our first step is to clear the mind.

WE NEED TO DEFINE WHAT EXACTLY GEMARA IS

In Hilchos Talmud Torah (1:11) the Rambam describes Gemara as a deeper understanding of Mishnayos; it's analyzing concepts and resolving contradictions. From the Rambam we see that Gemara is not just a collection of laws, it's an in-depth analysis of the Torah.

- Rav Chaim Brisker, zt"l, says that nowadays we do not have the ability to be mechadesh like the earlier generations, our

job is just to clarify all the Rishonim and get to the bottom of their thoughts (add source).

- We are encouraged to speak the sugya over with our chavrusa, because the more we verbalize the words, the more we can open a channel of understanding. As we think through their words, we will be able to find some open holes which will then lead us into a deeper understanding. It's possible that what they say is simple, but we have to make sure we absorb what they are trying to say before we make that assumption. And unless we think hard and strongly about their words, it's hard to grasp what their real intent is.

Try to see if there is an argument going on between Rashi and Tosfos. Tosfos will rarely repeat what Rashi says; if he does, he may have a deeper intention. Either way, through Tosfos's understanding we will get a better understanding of Rashi.

- The standard is to start with the Ramban and Rashba on the sugya. The Ritva will often open a whole new approach. Look in their words — they often say the same ideas as Tosfos or other Rishonim but use different words. Don't assume it's the same; they may be slightly different. Think about it. With just a few more words it may give us a clearer understanding of Tosfos or others.

Something that may help with clarifying all the opinions is to speak them out — either to yourself or with your chavrusa. Speaking out the different opinions will clear them up and their differences.

When we have a question, we usually jump to ask. There is this strong desire to share our thoughts with others. You may share any question with your chavrusa. In fact, the more you do, the more you will help each other break open the sugya. But hold off with others. Let your mind sit on it for a few seconds; perhaps you can come up with your own answer.

We don't give ourselves an opportunity to allow our brains to think. When was the last time we closed our eyes and thought about something? We will be surprised at what we have within ourselves. The power of our brain is remarkable if we tap into it. We need to give ourselves a chance. Often when we jump to ask, we confuse ourselves. Either we aren't ready for the answer, or perhaps we don't have the question clear. We haven't seen enough in the sugya to understand what it is talking about. Give it a few minutes till you are really stuck.

- The more we ask, the more we build, not break. Sometimes the simplest points bring out the largest results.
- The sefer Shiurei Da'as (vol. 1, Darchah shel Torah) points out that Sir Isaac Newton discovered gravity from one of the simplest observations. "Why does an apple fall downwards and not upwards?" People had been seeing that for years, but no one bothered asking why it was like that. He asked and discovered gravity. Simple questions may be the key!
- We introduce bad questions in the following manner, "It's probably a bad question but..." "If it's bothering you, you need to answer it." As bad as the question may be, and even if there is a simple answer, if you don't know it, don't be afraid to ask. You are entitled to an answer. No matter the question, it may still be worthwhile to ask.

- You need to trust yourself. As long as you understand why you are saying what you are saying, you are entitled to your way of understanding a sugya.

ADD TO GEMARA – LOVE THIS!

- Don't be afraid to challenge what your chavrusa assumes is a simple fact. Once you start to trust yourself you will see tremendous advancement in your learning.

ADD TO SIDDUR

We pray every day for chochmah, binah, va daas. We know chochmah means wisdom which we learn from others. We know binah means the ability to break down concepts. But what's daas, knowledge? Why is that different from wisdom?

Rashi (Shemos 31:3) explains that daas is ruach hakodesh. How can we pray for ruach hakodesh — who has that nowadays?

Let's answer this with another question. Many times in tefillah we ask Hashem to grant us knowledge; we ask to let our "hearts" understand. What does the heart have to do with knowledge — isn't knowledge in the mind?

- The Sefer Halkrim (1:16) explains daas as intuition, or first initial assumption. This is a gift from Heaven, as we say, "Atah chonen l'adam daas." Nothing prompts us to it, we just feel it.

- The Chazon Ish said, "A bachur may start off on one side of the street not being able to learn. But by the time he gets to the other side, he is a new person, someone who understands Torah, because a tefillah

of a grandmother or mother said at the Shabbos candles can work instantly."

When we schmooze in learning, it expands our horizons in the sugya. We will hear new points we may have missed in the sugya. Never think schmoozing in learning is a waste of time, chas 'shalom. It is worth every moment spent on it.

Don't be embarrassed to talk to a rebbe or a shoel meishiv who can guide you; they will respect you more. When you show real interest in learning and growing, they will have the utmost respect for you, no matter how many times you approach them. No one expects you to be a navi and know where to look.

One final note which is essential to learning Rishonim and Acharonim: Whenever we learn any commentary on the Gemara, realize that they are only coming to explain the Gemara. For instance, Rashi is explaining the Gemara, and his explanation must fit back in there. People tend to think that when we open the sefarim it's just another point on the side. It's not — it's all to understand the original text, the Gemara.

- We all have it in us to break down the sugya; don't be intimidated. Be patient and use the gift Hashem gave us — our brain. With time you will be more confident in yourself and your chiddushim. Like everything good in life, you need patience and perseverance.

ZEVI'S NOTES

13
BURN OUT

The Alei Shur (vol. 1, p. 34) brings down from Sefer HaYashar L'Rabbeinu Tam that in life there will always be ups and downs. Anything we do on a regular basis will have its ups and downs. Learning is no different. We will feel out of it occasionally, and this is natural. One positive note is what Rav Ezriel Erlanger, shlita, said in the name of his father-in-law, Rav Shlomo Wolbe, zt"l: as we grow older, this test decreases.

There is a feeling of burnout that may come when we do things superficially. The less attached we are to the action at hand, the less we have any pleasure or impact from that activity. If our learning is shallow and more of a duty, of course, we will burn out. Every day will feel the same. If all our days are the same, is it any surprise we burn out? The only way we can protect ourselves from burning out is to make each day a new day.

- The pasuk says (Mishlei 15:24), "Orach chaim l'maalah l'maskil" — those who are constantly analyzing and thinking will live a positive life. We need to give taam to our lives by analyzing and thinking everything through — this way we will give it life!

ADD TO SIDDUR

If we pray knowing every passing day differs from the one before, and that it has different challenges and different tests, then we will view each tefillah differently. If we daven with the intent that our tefillos represent our feelings toward our specific challenges of that day, then we will find infinite meaning and excitement in even the simple words.

- If we start to analyze each word of tefillah, then the prayers will have a deeper meaning and that superficial feeling will automatically dissipate.
- If we daven each day and approach the words as if they are new, we will find new meaning every day in the words. This is the secret to long, fulfilling days.

QUESTION

Rashi writes multiple times that a person must view every day as if he received the Torah that day. What does that mean? How is it possible for us to imagine we just received the Torah today if we know we received it over three thousand years ago?

The Chovos HaLevavos (Shaar Cheshbon HaNefesh, ch. 3) tells us an important concept in all our learning. For many of us, our understanding of Chumash remains on an elementary-school level. We all remember the stories of the Torah and its laws from when we were kids.

However, unfortunately many of us remain with that understanding our entire lives. As our minds develop we are obligated to relearn the material as if we have never learned it before. This does not only apply to Chumash; it applies to any

learning we have done in the past. We can never rely on our previous understanding but must relearn it constantly as if we never learned it before. This is the meaning of imagining we have received the Torah today. We must always imagine this is the first time we are learning this parashah.

- We may think, how can we imagine we never did it before if we have? It can be done. It requires a new mental approach. But it is possible.

ADD TO CHUMASH

Believe it or not, a big cause of burnout is a lack of sleep.

At the end of Parashas Ki Seitzei, when discussing Amalek, the pasuk says (Devarim 25:18), "Vatah ayeif u yageia lo yarei Elokim — And you were tired and worn out and didn't fear Hashem." Rashi explains that "you didn't fear Hashem" is referring to Amalek. However, the Ohr HaChaim explains it is referring to Bnei Yisrael.

We see a very important concept here: the mere fact that Bnei Yisrael were tired and worn out caused them to lack fear of Hashem. We need physical strength to fear Hashem and to overcome our yetzer hara. If we are worn out and tired, it's virtually impossible to push ourselves to do the right thing. Learning and praying requires a lot of physical strength, and if we don't have it, we can't move forward. You can't expect to be on top of your game without the proper rest.

- Get the proper amount of sleep and then you will have the proper tools for a great day.

When we feel we have so much to do, we get overwhelmed and are frozen in place. We cannot deal with anything at all. Our problems will not disappear on their own as much as we wish them away. It's similar to a bill we may have. When we receive it and can't deal with it, we ignore it, hoping it will just disappear. But not only will it not disappear, it will only get worse.

- Put yourself together and go into attack mode; Hashem will assist you.
    - If you enjoy what you are doing there is no such thing as pressure. As long as we are enjoying our learning there is no limit to what we can do. It's when we aren't enjoying ourselves that we feel the pressure. It's when we push ourselves a bit over the top, do more than we can, and instead of enjoying it, we do it out of obligation. That's when the pressure starts.

The Brisker Rav once told a bachur: you need to be relaxed when you learn. It means to relax and try to maintain a good spirit. Not only will it relieve the pressure, it will also allow the Torah to seep in.

- Nothing is absorbed when we are under pressure.
    - We need to close our eyes and imagine, imagine sitting and learning, reviewing, and understanding the concepts. These images can be very motivating.

HANG IN HOUSE

MUST KNOW — Sin drags us down and depletes our desire to do good. We must remember the following

concept passed down from Rav Yisrael Salanter, zt"l (Sichos im HaRav Shlomo Hoffman): The sin isn't the problem, it's how we are affected by it. If we react to sin negatively, feeling low, then the sin is serious. However, if we react to it in a positive manner, then we actually have gained. We are human and have desires and will fall from time to time. Unfortunately, it is inevitable. We must react in the following way: understand that we have a human nature and will be challenged, but remember that it's our job to eradicate those traits.

Yes, we may lose the battle from time to time, but in the end, we must win the war, the war of sheviras hamiddos. We must get back up and renew our energy to battle with the yetzer hara.

When it comes to desires, the most dangerous of the group is eating. The Chazon Ish calls it "avi avos hatumah," the most destructive of all tumah. The Mesillas Yesharim (ch. 11) says it has the greatest impact since it is physically digested into our bodies. When we do not restrain our desire to eat, we will feel down.

- Just think about it — after you eat a large meal, who is in the mood to daven or learn?
    - When we curb our appetite, we feel we are in control and can take control of our spiritual lives too. But when we sense that our eating is out of control, we feel weakened and controlled. I am discussing control, which we need when we fight the war with the yetzer hara.

ZEVI'S NOTES

14

WHY AM I SO DOWN?

When we are down, we are prone to sin. We feel we have nothing to lose since anyway we view ourselves as failures. And when we sin, we go into a cycle: we sin more and become more downhearted.

HANG IN HOUSE

There will be times when we feel down and cannot pinpoint the problem. If you're in such a situation, you need to have a conversation with yourself. Walk around the corner and think, think hard: what is it that's bugging me? Usually, you will come to some sort of conclusion. But you must be honest with yourself; you need to admit that that particular point is what's bothering you — as uncomfortable as it may be. If you dig, you will find results.

HANG IN HOUSE

In order to succeed, we must believe in what we are fighting for. The Chazon Ish, zt"l, says many times in his letters to

people experiencing challenges that the only thing you are missing is commitment.

The Mashgiach Rav Nosson Wachtfogel, zt"l, once said that even David HaMelech needed to be recognized and feel accepted, as it says (Tehillim 142:5), "Habeit yamin ureei vein li makir — Looking to the right, I see that no one recognizes me." We all need to feel accepted and when that gets attacked, we fall apart.

Just because one person has what to say doesn't define who you are. Even if his opinion were to be one hundred percent true, which it probably isn't, it can't determine who you are. You are the only one who can determine your real worth because you are the only one who really knows what you do and who you are. You are your own biggest fan; you need to root for yourself.

- As long as we are tied down with the way other people think about us, we cannot reach our true selves. We may try to impress others and do things which are detrimental to our growth, only because we want to find favor in other people's eyes. But the only way we will gain their respect is by becoming independent and unique.

We love recognition, and truthfully, it's quite normal for each person to feel that way. We need it, we need it constantly and we thrive on it. Think about it. Remember those compliments you were told in the past? Even if it was just a hint of a compliment, we remember them as if it was yesterday.

- The problem is we don't get them often, and even when we do, they aren't always genuine — somebody is just buttering us up. Even if we aren't seeking compliments, it still hurts

when we don't get any. It's not that people maliciously refrain from complimenting others — it's just that everyone is in their own bubble, looking for their own praises. For some reason, they feel that if they compliment others, it's a knock to themselves. How can they admit that someone else is doing great, if no one told them the same? Unfortunately, we are the victims of our own bad middos.

ADD TO GEMARA BAVLI SANHEDRIN

The Mashgiach of Lakewood, zt"l, used to quote the Yerushalmi in Sanhedrin (6b) that Rebbi Akiva was counting his students and he selected Rebbi Meir before he selected Rebbi Shimon bar Yochai. Rebbi Akiva realized that Rebbi Shimon bar Yochai was slighted by this. Isn't that amazing? Even Rebbi Shimon bar Yochai, one of the greatest Tannaim, felt bad he wasn't recognized properly?

Can we blame ourselves when we feel the same? It's a normal human trait to feel this way. Didn't Choni HaMe'agel say (Taanis 23a), "O chavrusa, o misusa"? He also needed to be recognized and feel worthy. But let's see what Rebbi Akiva answered Rebbi Shimon bar Yochai. He told him the following: "Dayecha she ani Borecha makirin kochacha - It's sufficient that I and Hashem recognize your worth."

We need to constantly remember that Hashem is keeping track and taking account of what we are doing. He is always watching us and is proud of us. We need to forge ahead and stop looking for those approvals. As much as we may enjoy and need them, we can't rely on them. If we are reliant on them, when they don't come we feel deflated, as if everything we have

done was for naught. But just remember — Hashem is watching!

- The gemara in Nedarim (62a) says, "Sof hakavod lavo." True honor will surface in the end. But we can't look for it. If we run after it, it will surely never reach us. The Chafetz Chaim would quote the gemara (Eruvin 13b), "Kol harodeif achar hakavod, hakavod bore'ach mimenu - Anyone who chases after honor, honor flees from him." Why does it say kol — which usually comes to include something? It includes those who are worthy of honor. This teaches us that even if we are deserving of the honor but we run after it, it will run away from us. We must always remember that encouragement is a luxury. Enjoy it when it comes, but do not rely on it.

We can't underestimate the impact we have on others when we give them the proper recognition. There is no question people act differently depending on whom they are around. If they feel respected, they live up to that image; if not, they live up to that too. We have the power of influence in our hands.

- We can inspire others to excel with just one small compliment. It's worth the time and words spent on it. We know what it is to feel ignored, don't do it to others. Make sure it's a real compliment, not sarcastic. People don't appreciate sarcastic gestures even if you mean it as praise. Also, too much too often wears down the effect, people don't appreciate overpraise, and after a while, they won't believe it anymore! A small word here and there does marvels. The more specific you are in your compliment the more potent it will be. Just a "You are doing great!" doesn't nearly have

the same result as "I see when you daven you are very sincere," or "You ask such good questions on the gemara."

The Rosh says (Orchos Chaim LaRosh 113), "Jealousy is a sickness that has no cure!"

- The way to calm jealousy is to know there is room for more than one at the top. If we think only one person can be at the top at a time, then we may feel that our friend's success is taking away from our success. But if we believe there is room for more than one, then we understand that his success doesn't minimize ours. Everyone can be great, but no one needs to be the greatest.

Another way to deal with jealousy is to follow the advice of the Mesillas Yesharim (ch. 11). He implies that we are more jealous of people we have less to do with, of those we are more distant from. When we love someone, we want them to become great and are rarely jealous of them. We will have many friends in life who pass us by and it won't bother us a bit. But then again, we will have other friends where even if they experience the smallest success, it will cause us jealousy. Why is that? If that person is someone whom we feel confident around and he makes us feel good, he's not a threat. We only feel threatened when there is distance between us. If you want to remove the jealousy, befriend that person, get closer to him, and slowly the jealousy will subside.

- When experiencing jealousy, it's important to remember that what comes around goes around. We will all have our moments to shine. When we see other people being successful, it may be their time to shine. When we were

shining, they were watching. You can't always be the one in the limelight.

The Rosh says (Orchos Chaim LaRosh 67) that every person has his hour. Be patient; your hour will come around too.

No matter how much sweetness is included in criticism, it still stings. Even if the one giving it is so soft and encouraging, it still hurts to hear our faults.

A known principle in psychology is that our feelings are governed by our thoughts. Control your thoughts and your feelings will change.

- When something is dragging us down, we need to get our mind off it. Unless we can do something about the situation there's no need to think about it. It's all the tactic of the yetzer hara to bring us down. When we are down, we can't learn or daven properly. We can control our thoughts and as a result be in control of our feelings.

Success breeds success and with that type of talk, it can influence you to feel good again. Take out your old notebooks, look at the work you put in, and remind yourself of how capable you are.

When we stop to reflect on what we have, a sense of contentment takes us over. It makes us remember that we have so much, and we forget about what we need. There is a calmness we can feel in our hearts. Stop a moment. Jot down the positives and what you possess, and you will be satisfied.

ADD TO GEMARA AND PURIM DOC

The Gemara (Sotah 9b) says Korach and Haman desired what didn't belong to them and then lost even what they had. Haman said, "All I have is meaningless as long as I see Mordechai standing on the side and not bowing." He focused on what he didn't have but not on what he did. Wealth and poverty are not determined by what you have, but rather by what you feel is lacking! Even if you have a little but feel as if you are lacking nothing, you are wealthy. And so too vice versa.

The Gemara says (Sukkah 52a), "Kol hagadol meichaveiro yitzro gadol heimenu." We are on the battlefield. Just because we are being shot at doesn't mean we are weak or have lost the war! It's just the opposite — we are strong and the yetzer hara is trying to cast us down. Desires aren't a sign of weakness; rather, it's a sign of strength. When we succumb to our desires or we feel weak because of our desires that's when we are actually weak.

Remember, feeling dejected occasionally is normal. Plus, if we realize that there are triggers to these feelings, hopefully we can pull ourselves out of those feelings of despair and feel great again.

ZEVI'S NOTES

15
SELF ESTEEM

HANG IN HOUSE

The Sefer HaChinuch says many times (mitzvos 16, 99) that a person's thoughts follow his actions. If he acts like a pauper, he will feel like a pauper; if he acts in a respectable way, he will feel important. The same can be said about the way we think.

If we think about ourselves in a positive light, we will feel good about ourselves. If, however, we have a negative perception of ourselves we will feel inferior.

- When we talk about ourselves in a negative way, there is nothing more damaging. When we talk about ourselves, everyone listens and believes. Who is a better critic of oneself than the person himself? Would anyone not believe what I say about myself? Who knows me better than I know myself? In fact, the Chafetz Chaim says (Shemiras HaLashon 7:6) that even though we cannot believe lashon hara about others, when one speaks of himself we may believe him.
- There is no mitzvah to announce our faults. Not everyone needs to hear our weaknesses. If they pick up on it, we can't

control that, but to offer a critique? What good does it do me? When we allow others a peek into our faults, we set up a feeling of negativity. Eventually, it may come back to bite us.

- If instead we tell ourselves to look into the past, look at our successes, whether in tefillah or Torah, and remind ourselves that we can do it again, that gives us a boost. We see we can do it and have done it and there is no reason we can't do it again. Remembering our past successes gives us encouragement!

  - ZEVI ADD Sefas Emes on Avos 4:1

GREAT QUESTION "If we need to feel good about ourselves then where does humility come in?" There is a misconception in the world. Many people believe if we think we are doing great or are proud of ourselves, it's considered haughtiness. Nothing can be further from the truth.

- The more we realize how great we are, the more we are humbled. It seems like a paradox, the greater you perceive yourself the humbler you can become. Let me explain.

When Nadav and Avihu the sons of Aharon HaKohen died, Moshe Rabbeinu said (Vayikra 10:3), "This is what Hashem meant when He said, 'With those close to Me I will sanctify My name." Rashi explains further: Moshe told Aharon, "I thought it meant you or me [we are the close ones to Hashem]; however, now I see they [Nadav and Avihul are greater than us." Does this make sense? Could it possibly be that the humblest man on earth, Moshe Rabbeinu, should think that he is the greatest of the Jewish people?

- Rav Leib Chasman, zt"l, in his sefer Ohr Yahel (vol. 2, Parashas Shemini), teaches us a great lesson, one of the most valuable lessons we will receive in our lives. Knowing who you are, and knowing your worth is not a contradiction to being humble.

- Rav Aharon Kotler, zt"l (Mishnas Rav Aharon, vol. 1, p. 159), says — when we know who we are it empowers us to do more. We must recognize who we actually are and what our talents are. We need to always have them in mind.

GREAT QUESTION "If thinking we are great is not haughtiness but leads to humbleness, then what is real haughtiness?"

When we attribute success to ourselves, then we become haughty. When we take credit for success, that is real haughtiness. If we attribute our greatness to Hashem and not to ourselves, we are humble. We know we did nothing to get to where we are. We know we didn't bring our success, rather Hashem brought it on for us. When we think this way, we are full of gratitude to Hashem and feel obligated to do more and more.

GREAT QUESTION "But didn't we really create our success? Didn't our diligence make us smarter? Didn't our work ethic bring us success? Look at the other guy who wasn't diligent — nothing became of him."

We need to look differently at the person who was diligent and still wasn't successful. The other guy who

put in more hours than you and still didn't see the same results. You think your practice in the gym made you a great basketball player? How many boys spend hours in the gym and are still struggling? We must realize that the fact that our diligence paid off is only because Hashem wanted it that way. If Hashem hadn't been behind this, then who says we would have had the same outcome?

The first step to success is knowing who you are and what your talents are. Rav Wolbe, zt"l, quotes Rav Yerucham, zt" l (Alei Shur, vol. 1, p. 169), who would say about those who don't recognize their faults, "Oy"; but about those who don't recognize their talents, he'd say, "Oy vavoy." If you perceive yourself as unsuccessful, you will cause your own failure.

You must recognize that every person is gifted with certain talents, and he must bring out those talents in any which way possible. We all have faults. Our job in life is to repair those faults and correct ourselves. But at the same time, we were all given traits and talents that will help us through the journey.

How can two people compare themselves and their situation? The Gemara (Berachos 58a) says just like no two people have the same features, no two people have the same traits. His talents are not mine. If he has success in a certain area, perhaps Hashem made that easier for him. His tests are in a totally different area. We

must focus on ourselves and what we can do. Seeing someone else do something will never benefit us.

Yehoshua bin Nun was compared to a fig tree (Midrash Rabbah, Naso 12). All fruit trees yield their fruits at a given time. However, figs ripen on the tree one fruit at a time. There can be one fruit totally ripened while another didn't even grow yet. Yehoshua bin Nun's success wasn't in one day or in one shot. He built from day to day, one step at a time. You too will turn around one day and see the progress.

The Steipler, zt"l, would say somebody who wants to see himself grow is like the person who looks in a mirror daily to see if he got taller. The daily growth is so minute, he will never see it. However, if he waits a few months or even years and then looks for growth, it will be visible. In this case as well, if you are always checking if you've been successful, you will not see it day to day. But if you wait some time, and then look back at what you've accomplished, you will see the fruits of your labor.

You must always encourage yourself. There is nothing wrong with it. The most powerful method is to think of your past successes. That gives you the confidence to continue on. When we have seen success in the past, it gives us the energy for the future. Rabbeinu Yonah in his sefer Shaarei Avodah points out that the first step to serving Hashem is to appreciate your worth. When we realize our worth we will try to act in a manner that will protect our worth. However, if we think lowly of ourselves, there will be no reason to avoid sinning.

Stop focusing on your shortcomings and your limits and start focusing on your abilities and your potential!

ZEVI'S NOTES

16
FRIENDS

The Ohr HaChaim says (Shemos 32:27), sometimes we become closer to certain friends than we do to some relatives. The mishnah says in Pirkei Avos (1:6), "Knei lecha chaveir — Buy yourself a friend." That means you need to go to the extent of "buying" him.

The choices we make now will have an enormous impact on the rest of our life. We can be influenced for the good or bad, and that highly depends on being with the right crowd.

The Rambam in Hilchos Deï'os (6:1) says it's the nature of humans to be influenced by their surroundings.

If you are a leader, then you have another obligation. You have a great opportunity to influence those around you for the better.

Take the initiative - you can make a world of a difference in many lives.

If you are old enough and in the position to give, be that role model. Don't underestimate the effect it will have on you. It will bring out kochos you never knew you had. Plus, it will give you

a boost in confidence knowing there are boys who look up to you. Live up to that position!

A good friend doesn't press you to do things you don't like; rather he brings out the best in you.

If you feel you are being persuaded to do things just because of peer pressure, stay away. Being pressured to do things in order to keep friends is an awful feeling. Friends come and go, thinking that giving into their pressure will bring more friends is a bad decision and a bad investment. Invest only in good friends — an investment like that will last a lifetime.

Another way of realizing you have a good friend is when he is sensitive to you and your feelings. If he seems to take your feelings into account, grab him with two hands.

A word of good advice: never choose friends based on their social status. Base your decisions on the person himself, regardless of his status. That's a true friend.

Some people enjoy being by themselves, which is absolutely fine. They find that by themselves they function better and learn more clearly. If you are thrilled this way, you can remain this way. However, you should still try to mingle with others during normal social opportunities, for instance during breakfast, lunch, or Friday afternoons.

- Sometimes being alone too long can lock you up into a cocoon. Watch yourself and make sure you aren't alienating yourself from everyone else. However, if you are the type that on the one hand likes being alone, but when around others you are also comfortable, that's great. But remember,

your best friend will always be yourself (and ultimately your spouse!).

"Stick around the people who know your worth."

That's our avodah in bein adam lechaveiro, to be tolerant of others, but not to expect others to be tolerant of us! (Chazon Ish, Emunah U'Bitachon 1:11).

Therefore, if you want to get up early, make sure your alarm isn't too loud. Also, please get up with your alarm. Some don't respond to alarms and all it does is wake everyone else up.

If you want to learn late into the night, that's okay, but be considerate when you come in. Try to minimize the noise and of course the lights.

The best way to know what's right or wrong is to just imagine what you would want to be done to you.

Train yourself to be tolerant and giving, and not to be makpid if your friend uses your stuff, but at the same time be considerate of your friend's possessions.

ZEVI'S NOTES

17
DORM

Our Avodah in bein adam lechaveiro is to be tolerant of others, but not to expect others to be tolerant of us! (Chazon Ish, Emunah U'Bitachon 1:11)

ZEVI'S NOTES

18
DECISIONS

Chazal tell us, "Ein simchah k'hataras hasefeikos" - when we make a choice and get out of our doubts we feel great. The worst state is the state of safeik - we don't know what to do with ourselves.

"But how do I get myself to make a decision?"

The Michtav Me'Eliyahu (vol. 1, p. 60) tells us a phenomenal concept. Hashem will always give us the ability to make the right decision and see the mabat ha'emes, the clarity of truth. With clarity, we will be able to see the right way. We, however, may distort that truth with our own desires and needs. Our job is to see beyond the distortion, to see beyond our own desires and see the truth. If Hashem didn't give us that clarity, then we could never be expected to choose right or be held accountable when we choose wrong. The right choice is within us, we need to find it.

- For example, should I go to a wedding or remain in yeshivah and learn? Should I go home for Shabbos or stay in yeshivah? These are questions which usually apply immediately. For these questions, it is difficult to give a rule

or general guideline for the answer. You need to sit and think out both sides and try to understand the benefit of each side. If you can discern clearly why you want to go or stay, you can sometimes get a clearer understanding of the question. For example, think, why would you want to go to the wedding, is it for a break or is it for simchas chasan 'kallah? That makes a major difference, it will change the entire question.

- Sometimes asking someone to hear the question can help you make a fair decision. We cannot make a fair decision on our own questions, we have too much invested in one side or the other. When an outsider hears the question, they may see it as very simple and clearcut, whereas we are so unsure and confused. And that's because deep inside we know we stand to gain one way over the other. He may tell you what you perhaps knew was the right answer but was too difficult to deal with and therefore you were unsure.

The Mesillas Yesharim (ch. 6) gives us another rule in these areas: "Kol kula trichah bedikah - Anything easy needs to be investigated." Any time there are two sides, usually, the easier side is the product of the yetzer hara. It's not a golden rule, but many times it can help us see things right.

- ZEVI add Rabbi Kalish idea on this

The sefer Binyan Olam (ch. 1) gives a rule: when you sit and learn, never regret it. Even if it possibly would have been better to go, never regret learning.

Should I learn such-and-such, or with so-and-so? Should I give a chaburah? Should I take on a certain responsibility in yeshivah? Fear of the unknown. Will I be able to handle it?

The Ramban tells us how to handle this type of question.

The pasuk says (Shemos 35:21), "Vayavou kol asher nisao libo - Everyone whose heart uplifted him came." What exactly is nisao libo, his heart uplifted him? To do what?

The Ramban says these people who came forward to do work in the Mishkan had no prior training in such meticulous work. In Egypt they dealt with mud and bricks, not with gold and fine wools. Where did they get the courage to come forward and to work without training?

The answer lies in the following pasuk (Divrei HaYamim II 17:6): "Vayigbah libo b' darkei Hashem — And his heart was uplifted in Hashem's ways." Vayigbah is from the word gaavah, arrogance. They used their trait of arrogance for the good. They took a chance and were shooting higher than they were capable of. But they knew the following secret: if you take something upon yourself for the betterment of spirituality, even if it seems beyond you, it's not beyond you. Be a little haughty and say to yourself, "I can do anything." After you jump in, you will be very surprised at what you can actually do or what Hashem will enable you to do if you try. So when you are faced with a decision of taking something upon yourself or not, don't be afraid. There may be times where it will be too much, and you have to say no, but you will feel a natural resistance to this. Of course, this only is true if you first give it some thought. If you answer no immediately, without thinking it through, it may be a cop-out.

Rav Yerucham, zt"l, says (Daas Torah, Parashas Vayakhel-Pekudei), "I never saw a millionaire who didn't take a gamble. Do you think that all those who became wealthy made black-and-white decisions? Absolutely not! And more than that they probably failed many times and lost money, but the reason they are where they are is because they were willing to take a chance. All great things come with a bit of risk. Be willing to stick your neck out a little to be successful.

The same applies to spirituality. If you want to grow, you need to gamble a bit.

Usually, if you see a little light at the end of the tunnel, it's worth the chance. However, if it barely makes sense, then it's a poor decision. Take a calculated risk, not a reckless risk.

The mishnah says in Pirkei Avos (5:20): "Be stubborn like a leopard." Rashi explains in Maseches Pesachim (112a): for mitzvos you need to go beyond your capabilities. That's our job, to go out of the box.

ADD TO SIDDUR

The most fundamental advice — which should be self-understood — regarding all types of questions is: DAVEN!!!

Pray to Hashem for guidance. Pray for clarity. Keep this in mind during Maariv when you say "u'sakneinu b'eitzah tovah milfanecha," or during Shemoneh Esrei in the berachah of Chonein HaDaas. Often with a little wisdom from Hashem we can see the right route.

ZEVI → ADD TO SPEECHES!!

GREAT QUESTION What do you do when you make the wrong decision and now you have to pay the price? Many times, we feel we have decided wrong. Not always are we able to go back and fix our mistakes.

Regret can be the worst torture a human being can undergo. The thought that if only we would have done things differently hurts so much. Often, regret holds us back from having true trust in Hashem. When the situation is out of our hands, we tend to rely on Hashem. But when we face a situation where we feel it's in our hands and we mess up, it drives us nuts. This is where our emunah and bitachon must kick in. We must believe that no matter what, Hashem is guiding us. Every choice has a decision and a result. Even though we have the power of choice and can decide something, the outcome is not in our hands. Those outcomes are up to Hashem. If He wills the outcome then our action will produce the result, if not, our choice will not result in anything. If Hashem didn't want the outcome to come out this way, it would not have happened.

We are responsible for the decision we made — that is our free choice — but the outcome would have been the same anyway.

When we think this way, we can feel a sense of security that this is Hashem's will.

- We should not forget a very important gift we have from Hashem — teshuvah. As far as we have strayed or as many bad decisions as we have made, we can always repair the damage. In the present world, regret and remorse will never erase results. In court, at best they will lessen the punishment, but they will never erase it totally. Teshuvah, however, can actually erase our intention at the time of the action. When we have regret and wish we never did what we did, Hashem considers it as if we performed an action without full awareness, as if we were sleeping through the act — it's a result that we did not cause.

No need for regret or to lose sleep over it. It's what Hashem wanted. Grab the power of teshuvah, it's such a wonderful gift that only lasts while we are in this world.

ADD TO PIRKEI AVOS

GREAT QUESTION On the words "Asei lecha rav" (Pirkei Avos 1:6), the Rishonim write that even if our rebbi is equal to us we must make him our rebbi. What does that mean? How can someone equal to us be our rebbi? Isn't a rebbi supposed to be greater than us?

A friend can be debated. You can argue with what he says; he is not a rebbi. Friends serve another purpose (See Rabbeinu Yonah on Pirkei Avos, who explains the three benefits of friends).

They are there to help us grow; but if you want to learn from someone, make him your rebbi, or better yet make him a rebbi

even if he isn't one. That's what the mishnah means. Make him into a rebbi by believing in him, even if he isn't fully qualified. Of course, a person can challenge his rebbi — we are encouraged to ask questions. In the end, though, we need to accept — even if we don't understand - knowing one day we will come to the truth.

- My Rebbe used to say over from the Mashgiach of Lakewood, zt"l: "You may be smarter than me, or you may be a bigger lamdan than me, but I am older than you and I have more experience." (See Brachos 39a). Experience makes the difference. So as much as we think we know better, it's not true and going out on our own is only danger.

Don't do something and then ask the rebbi to clean up the mess. Ask first and get guidance to avoid creating issues. If only we would ask before and stay on the right track, then we wouldn't need any repairs afterward.

Rav Shach, zt"l, is vital to remember. He told one of his students the following: A talmid doesn't need an issue to speak to his rebbi, he should speak to him, regardless. We don't have to wait for a problem to call our rebbi. We can just pick up the phone to schmooze or pop in for a visit. It's more enjoyable for our rabbeim when we just give them some nachas rather than burden them with our issues. They are there to help, but they are also human and appreciate the fact that we call to just say hello.

- We tend to call with our problems but forget to notify them when they're over. It's menschlich to remember them by the simchah too!

ZEVI'S NOTES

19

CHANGING YESHIVOS

There is a famous vort from Rav Hutner, zt"l, regarding this. He asked, "Why do we shake the lulav while saying 'Ana Hashem hoshi'ah na, but not while reciting 'Ana Hashem hatzlichah na'? Because we only move for salvation and not for hatzlachah."

When it's really time to move on, we have to move on without turning back. We find when Bnei Yisrael left Mitzrayim they complained and wanted to go back. As much as they wanted to leave, once they left they yearned to go back. Our tendency is that we would prefer the known, as terrible as it may be, over the unknown, as good as it may be. So if you are feeling remorse about your decision and are yearning to go back, just know it's normal. Your job is to stick it out a bit and you will see the opportunity that awaits you.

We often use the term she'ifos, goals. It's fair to state that the difference between someone who has a goal and someone who doesn't is the difference between ordinary and great. Everything in life needs a goal.

- Someone who has a goal will always be on the move, never satisfied with how far he has gotten, always seeking more.

A goal oriented person must decide — before every action he takes part in — whether this will bring him closer or further from his goal.

- Consequently, every moment of every day serves a higher purpose — it serves the purpose of reaching his goal in life. When we set goals, it can change our entire approach to life.

Every person should have a mission statement which clearly defines what he needs to accomplish. What legacy he wants to be remembered by a charitable person, a community leader, or any other influential person. Start now, not when you are forty. The sooner you start, the better chance you have of attaining your goal.

We need to realize that we are in this world to grow, not to just stagnate. We can simply strengthen the traits we have. People feel that life is a test to see how we navigate all those difficulties thrown at us, and that there isn't much room for improvement.

If this is the way you think, think again. It's wrong. We were all created with basic abilities, but can grow more, develop new traits, and become greater and greater. That's where goals come in. We can set goals and actually grow.

How do we know if we have the fixed mindset or the growth mindset? It depends on how we take criticism. If our world collapses when we hear criticism, then we have the fixed mindset because our whole self-worth just went out the window. If we have a growth mindset, we would see it as an opportunity to grow further.

ADD TO CHUMASH

- At the end of his life, Yaakov Avinu brought in his children to bless them. As we read the pesukim, it doesn't seem like he blessed them, rather it seems he admonished them instead. Where is the berachah in this?
    - When we have a growth mindset and are looking to improve our shortcomings, then the biggest berachah is rebuke. When we hear criticism, we have an insight of what we need to work on. The shevatim knew the greatest berachah is rebuke.

It's important to also keep in mind the words of the saintly mashgiach Rav Yerucham Levovitz, zt"l (Da'as Chochmah U'Mussar 3:214). "It's not enough to have a lev tov, good intentions, and ambitions. It needs to come to fruition." We all have constant thoughts of improving, day in, day out. We have extensive plans for change. Unfortunately, we don't get points for yearning to be better, but only when we actually get better. Sadly, many people think of being great, but never make the time to actually do it. We need to keep this in mind - goals are vital but getting there is the purpose.

- Goals will change from time to time. When we set goals, we usually set them based on where we are at that time in life. As we move up and along, we will need to readjust our goals. Perhaps we will surpass our goals and need to aim higher. Even if our ultimate goal stays the same, our routes may need some adjusting. Hashem may guide us on a

different route from what we perceived in the beginning, and we need to work with that.

- Before we try to assess what the right goals and routes are, we need to choose a role model. We need to choose someone who is an achiever. An achiever doesn't mean someone who is popular, but rather someone who has grown significantly in life. When we do that, we can have a real-life goal in front of us, and not just a made-up assumption of where we need to go. No two people are alike and to just copy another individual is ineffective. We have our own tests and situations and cannot just mimic what we see. But we can get a general idea of who we would like to be comparable to.

The Mesillas Yesharim (ch. 21) writes that each person should read stories of gedolim. When we read about someone's accomplishments we yearn to do the same. We read how people have pushed themselves to the brink of their strength in many ways. How they learned and performed mitzvos in some of the hardest situations. When we read this, we imagine ourselves compared to them and strive to do the same.

If you are the type to allow the ideas you read to plant seeds in your mind or to absorb a general theme, it's extremely healthy to read stories of gedolim. It will keep us on our toes, constantly demanding that we look to grow, but of course at our own pace and in our own way. It will actually be stronger than mussar sefarim because we'll see in real time what people have done, and we relate to real-life examples better than to abstract images.

Seeing someone else who is accomplished gives us a desire to accomplish too. We see success in front of us and it gives us a deep yearning to do the same.

HANG IN HOUSE

There is another form of goals which, if carried out, will undoubtedly change your life for the better. That is daily goals. Rav Chaim Kanievsky, shlita, refers to them as chovos, daily commitments. We need short-term goals that will lead us down the road of our long-term goals. A businessman once said, "Our short-term goal must match our long-term goal." If our long-term goal is to become a talmid chacham then we need to have daily quotas of learning. This way over time we will get to where we want to be. For example, if a person takes upon himself to learn a certain amount of gemara daily, and/or a certain amount of halachah, then over time he will accomplish a tremendous amount toward his main goal. The benefits of daily goals are varied. First, it gives us a precise objective for our daily achievements. Second, it forces us to learn no matter what the situation is. When a person has a daily goal, he is motivated to keep to it, no matter what.

He won't allow his mood to affect his goal. However, if he doesn't have a daily obligation, then when he isn't in the mood to learn, he will just leave it. Daily goals give us a push and geshmak in our learning. When we see results, it gives us tremendous gratification. We will wake up each morning excited and eager to fulfill our chovos. And when we complete them it will give us a sense of fulfillment for the rest of the day.

We generally assume laziness is the cause for unproductiveness. But it's really the opposite, it's not a cause

but a result. We become lazy when we do not have a goal or a specific task to do. When we have nothing to accomplish, we have nothing to get moving for. That's when laziness prevails. However, when we have a goal or task, we are driven to accomplish it. When we have a plan, we are excited to start on our journey. There will be times when we are exhausted or worn out and we don't accomplish much, but usually, laziness is due to a lack of goals and motivation. When you take upon yourself long-term and short-term goals, you will see laziness fade away.

ZEVI'S NOTES

20
YETZER HARA

The yetzer hara is our biggest enemy. It seems like he will do anything to destroy us, and he will. How do we fight him, what's his weakness? First, we must understand the yetzer hara's tactics; then we can plan our counterattack.

The Gemara says (Berachos 5a), "L'olam yargiz adam yetzer tov al yetzer hara - A person must always incite his yetzer tov to overcome his yetzer hara." What exactly are we supposed to be telling our yetzer hara?

Rav Yisrael Salanter, zt"l, writes in Iggeres HaMussar that we have two types of yetzer hara: physical and spiritual. The physical one is our desire for human pleasures - eating, drinking, sleeping, and all other physical demands. The reason this is referred to as the yetzer hara even though man cannot exist without it, is that all pleasures in this world have a red line. Everything is acceptable in moderation, but once we cross that line and overindulge in our desires, it turns negative. Then there is the spiritual yetzer hara. This Rav Yisrael explains with the gemara in Maseches Sotah (3a): "Ein adam over aveirah elah im kein nichnas bo ruach shtus - Man does not sin unless a

spirit of foolishness enters him." Our sins result from foolishness. We fall into a situation without thinking.

This yetzer hara is created in the mind, and its power is through imagination. The way he convinces us is through fantasy. He builds our imagination and makes us believe giving in to him is utopia. If only we indulge, if only we eat that one thing, we will be happy. However, many times we give in to our yetzer hara and find it isn't as great as we thought. Why not? Because it's all an illusion. It's our imagination.

How can our imagination fool us so strongly? If you are ever fortunate to see a hypnotist in action, you will understand this better. He asks his participants to close their eyes and imagine that they are sitting on the beach in the sun, falling asleep. And as he is talking, they are dozing off. He even has them believing their shoes are their cell phones. How? Our minds control our feelings and actions. When we close our eyes and pretend we are somewhere else, our mind can make us feel we are there. If our eyes don't contradict our thoughts, we can believe almost anything. Try it, close your eyes and make believe you are standing at the Kosel - you'll be surprised what you can imagine.

The yetzer hara also knows that trick and can make us believe that what lies in front of us is greater than reality. Fiction has no limit.

He knows how to paint a picture of pure pleasure and happiness, but he is only using our imagination — it's not real. Our responsibility is to talk to ourselves, to convince ourselves that it's all deception, as if to wake ourselves up from the

hypnotism. We need to take control of our minds and stop the delusion. We can do it!

We should know desires and urges are only temporary. It's comparable to hunger pains. On a fast day we all experience some strong type of hunger pains for a short while, but then it passes. Afterward, we may still be hungry, but those strong pains pass. Our desires are the same. We face moments of desires and cravings, but they pass. If we let the moment pass and don't act on it, it will shrink. If we run after the desire, we actually keep it active; just as our appetite would increase if we ran after food during our hunger pains (Sukkah 52b).

- If we understand the power of our mind both for the negative and the positive, we can reclaim command of our lives.

GREAT QUESTION We all believe in the existence of Olam HaBa, and the concept of reward and punishment. We need to ask a simple question: why is it that we still succumb to our yetzer hara and don't take the future into account? This is the struggle in many areas of our life. We trade the future for the present. Even though we believe in a World to Come, it's too far away for us to have it in mind when we are tested. In front of us, we see immediate benefit; it's hard for us to trade that for something way down the road. But this is the essence of a tzaddik, as the Gemara says (Tamid 32a), "Eizehu chacham? Haroeh es hanolad - Who is wise? One who looks to the future." The essence of a great person is someone who always takes the future into account. He will give up the now for the future.

- In the world of business and retirement it's the same thing:

Are we prepared to give up today for a better future? Are we willing to put away some money now for the future? It may be a sacrifice today, but we will reap the benefits later in life. It's the same regarding spirituality: Are we willing to sacrifice today for a better tomorrow? Some of us can't. We see the future and understand the need to invest in it, but we just can't give up the "now." Why worry about the future when you can enjoy today?

- We need to remember that Hashem does not overlook our sins. As much as He is a Rachman, full of mercy, we don't get write-offs. He won't overlook anything; don't rely on that!

The more we are connected to our spirituality, the weaker our desires will be. Spirituality is like energy, when we are learning well and are doing mitzvos we get energy, and with that energy, we can be strong enough to fend off our desires.

It's like a barometer, we can tell how well we are learning from the level of our desires.

- The Rambam (Hilchos Issurei Biah 22:21) says only a person empty of wisdom desires immorality. If our mind is full of wisdom, it's a shield from the outside world. It's a seesaw effect.
  - When we are strong in our learning our desires will be weak, and vice versa.

ZEVI'S NOTES

21
ANGER

Why we become angry may not be difficult to understand. We probably expect things to be a certain way and then realize that they're not. A good rule in life is: don't expect, just aspire. Some of our expectations will not be met, and there will be disappointment, if not anger.

Sefer HaYashar L'Rabbeinu Tam (Shaar 6) gives us advice on how to battle anger and other tests that confront us. We must prepare ourselves prior to the situation. When we mentally prepare ourselves for a situation, we are prepared for disappointment.

- For example, if we know that we have gotten upset when we've come home starving and dinner isn't ready, then before we walk in the door, let's stop and think, "Perhaps dinner will not be ready, and if dinner isn't ready, it's okay, we will have a snack." We will not get upset because we have prepared ourselves with Plan B. Prepare yourself and you will see the change.

NEVER FORGET THIS!!

A great rule in all relationships — and especially marriage — is: don't expect just accept!

ADD TO GEMARA AND CHUMASH

The Gemara (Kesubos 28a) discusses a situation where a kohen and his divorcee live in the same neighborhood, and someone needs to move. Who? The Gemara says the lady must move, for it is much more difficult for a man to change than for a woman. Perhaps it's due to the genetic makeup of a man. Men are typically not emotional like women are. Women can handle changes and sudden shifts, not men. Just look at yotzei Mitzrayim: the men constantly complained that they wanted to go back to Egypt. As horrible as it was, at least they knew what they were dealing with. The unknown kills us. However, the women had tremendous emunah and never looked back. They could handle that change.

When we face a challenge, it can anger us. We can feel feelings of resentment. We tend to ask: why did this happen? Why do I have to deal with this now? The truth is, we ask every morning not to be brought to tests, lo lidei nisayon. But once we are placed in these circumstances, we need to deal with them. How?

These challenges are also based on the fact that deep down inside we have expectations. We expect certain things to be in their place, and in our mind we assume they are there, but when lo and behold they are not, we aren't ready for it. We are taken by surprise. We need to be prepared.

When we work on ourselves, we can get deep into our souls and physically change our makeup. We actually talk to and awaken our neshamah. We can change our habits and normal reactions. But we have to dig deep inside. Mussar can do that if learned properly.

We must realize that anger is part of our nature. If we don't work on ourselves, anger will be an automatic reaction to any circumstance. We will say things and overreact, even if we can't stand ourselves for it later. The only way to take control is to reprogram ourselves and uproot those bad traits.

Rav Yisrael Salanter, zt"l, says changing our traits without mussar is like seeing without an eye — it's impossible. The younger you start the process, the better quality of life you will experience. It's up to us to make the change.

ZEVI'S NOTES

22

DESIRES - SHMIRAS EINAYIM

HANG IN HOUSE

We need to know that the challenge of shemiras einayim is normal and expected. Unfortunately, this battle will not only never leave us, it will just get harder as we get greater. The sefer Seder HaYom writes that the concept of "Kol hagadol mei chaveiro yitzro gadol heimenu - Whoever is greater than his friend his yetzer is greater as well," applies specifically to this yetzer hara. We should never think since we are still fighting, we haven't grown. To the contrary, the greater you become the bigger the battle will be.

GREAT QUESTION "Sometimes I feel I can't control myself. And when I fall I feel terrible. Am I going to have this battle my entire life? Is there something I can do to take control of my desires once and for all?" The truth is we will never truly conquer our yetzer hara in this area. We may lose the battle here and there. But we have an ability to win the war.

Perhaps there is something we can do so we can feel we are in control and not chas v'shalom out of control.

First, we must explain what fuels our desires. We think it's our eyes that fuel our yetzer hara, as it says, "Ayin roeh lev chomeid — The eye sees and the heart desires." When we walk the streets and see what we shouldn't, that creates our desires. Therefore, if we are in control of our eyes, we will be free of all desires. It's not totally false, as the Gemara says (Sotah 8a) that the yetzer hara can only entice us based on what our eyes see. But if we merely work on this issue, then we wouldn't be getting to the bottom of the problem. It's like placing a Band-Aid on a wound when we need to heal it. It will only give us temporary control, but it will not permanently fix the issue.

The pasuk says (Bamidbar 15:39), "V'lo sasuru acharei levauchem vacharei eineichem — Do not go after your heart (desires) and eyes." Shouldn't the pasuk say it the other way around? Shouldn't the pasuk say first don't go after your eyes, then don't go after your heart? If it's true that desires start from the eyes, then the pasuk is out of order. From here we see it actually starts the other way around.

Our desires cause our eyes to look. Let me explain with an example.

Two friends walk into a wedding; one notices the food and one doesn't. Why? Simple, one has a burning desire for food and his eyes subconsciously scan the room for food, while the other isn't that crazy about food and thus it doesn't catch his attention.

Our desires are what cause us to look. Our desires make us aware of our surroundings. The Orchos Tzaddikim (Sha'ar Ahavah) says, "Due to our desire of women, we stare at them constantly." Our desires are really what cause us to look. If you

go after your heart and desire them, then you will go after your eyes. The desires that reside in our heart cause us to look with our eyes.

If our desires are out of control, it will be almost impossible to control our eyes, or at least it will be an endless battle.

ANOTHER QUESTION = "But that sounds like an impossible battle, how can we control our desires? Isn't having desires part of our makeup?"

Desires are very controllable. We must realize that they can either lay dormant inside of us and practically be sleeping or they can be aroused and be on fire. This all depends on whether we feed our desires.

Interestingly enough, the more we feed them the more they're provoked. The Gemara says (Sukkah 52b) that if we satiate our desires they become hungry, but if we starve them they become happy and content. Naturally, we think if we give in to our desires just this time we will be satisfied, and our burning desire will go away.

It's actually the opposite — the more we feed it the bigger it gets. If we allow ourselves to do as we wish, our desires will only increase, and we will be caught in this vicious cycle, with no light at the end of the tunnel. If, however, we make a commitment to take control, we will automatically start to feel our desires under control. The previous gemara tells us clearly there is a state where our desires are satisfied. We can get there.

HANG IN HOUSE

The Sefer HaChinuch says (mitzvah 387) if we control ourselves just once we already suppress our desires. It only takes one battle to change the tide of the war. Mitzvah goreres mitzvah — one mitzvah leads to another. When we give ourselves spiritual energy, we continue to go up. We think the road to victory is longer and further than it really is. When we are in control of our desires, we won't want to look. We won't walk the street looking for what we shouldn't because it's not on our mind. Once we start the ball rolling, it will continue to roll.

Why is it so hard? Because we are so addicted to our physical needs and it's extremely challenging to do without them. If we were in full control, we would be used to saying no to them and could do without them for a short period. However, since we never say no, and fall to our desires immediately, when they aren't available we have withdrawal symptoms. It's like an addict.

Is giving into his addictions freeing or enslaving him more? It's just sending him deeper into the pit. When we break loose and learn to resist, we are truly freeing ourselves.

Is there any bigger slave than someone who can't get out of bed in the morning as much as he would like to start his day properly? Is there any bigger slave than one who is addicted to his phone or other device and cannot get his life in order? A slave is one who is controlled by others. When we are dictated by our desires we are slaves to those desires.

A very important ingredient is to do what we can to protect ourselves from being provoked. We need to clean our

environment as much as we can. Being surrounded by images or anything that can reawaken our desires will only increase the risk of falling again. Be careful what you hear, be careful what you read and see. Be careful where you walk. All these things can drag us back in the ring.

HANG IN HOUSE

The Rambam (Hilchos Issurei Biah 22:21) says it's impossible for a person to have two thoughts at once. If you change the channel, those bad thoughts fall away. Rav Yisrael Salanter, zt"l, in a letter (Tzohar, Kovetz Ohel Baruch, p. 827) writes that one thing we shouldn't do is to say to ourselves: "Don't think these thoughts." Human nature is the more emphasis we place on something, the more we concentrate on it. When I say not to think of something it does the opposite. You are putting too much emphasis on it (See Keser Rosh, Vilna Gaon). I tell you not to think of red, what color are you thinking of? Red. The only way to not think of red is to think of blue.

The Gemara (Yoma 39a) says one who sanctifies himself a little is sanctified a lot from Heaven. We need to control ourselves regarding what is in our control and then, believe it or not, Hashem will keep those other images away. As it says (Shabbos 104a), "Haba l'taheir, misayin oso - One who comes to purify himself is helped [from Above]." The Gemara (Kiddushin 30b) says the yetzer hara seeks to kill us, and if it weren't for Hashem helping us, we wouldn't be able to overpower him. All Hashem expects from us is to turn in the right direction and He takes over from there. If we think we are the ones expected to fight to the bitter end, we will be very frustrated and worn. We must choose right and Hashem takes over from there.

- We also need to realize that tefillah plays a significant role in this battle. We need to turn to Him and beseech His help. With His help, we can win the war.

The Gemara (Yoma 29a) says thoughts of an aveirah are worse than the aveirah itself. Rashi explains the logic behind this. One who fantasizes about an aveirah suffers much more than one who performs an aveirah. One who fantasizes never satisfies himself; it's all fantasy and remains that way. This is the danger of improper thoughts. We will suffer from the unrealistic thoughts, plus we will just arouse our desires without ever really fulfilling them. This is suffering, literally!

- Therefore, as much as we may think we are appeasing our yetzer hara, we are really feeding an endless fire. It's not worth it.

- The fuel behind all our battles with the yetzer hara is that we want to do good and become better. However, when we feel low and unsuccessful, we don't have the energy to fight. We feel it's a worthless fight. We feel we are lost anyway. Why should we put up a battle against the yetzer hara if anyway nothing is going well?

Don't make any major decisions while you are down. You have a different attitude now and you can't make long-term decisions based on negative feelings now. (Look at page 208 for source)

ADD TO PARSHAS BECHUKOSAI DVAR TORAH 2024

GREAT QUESTION "What do we do if we get to a point of feeling overcome with desires?" There is no other weapon against the yetzer hara besides Torah learning. When we say learning

Torah, we mean ameilus baTorah. It needs to be Torah which our minds become encompassed by. The Torah that we learn harnesses our desires and suppresses them. When our minds are preoccupied with thoughts of Torah, then it protects us even when we are not learning. That means we don't necessarily need to be thinking of Torah when we walk the streets in order to be in charge of our thoughts. The Torah we learn shrinks the yetzer hara to a point where our desires are calmed.

There is no bigger vacuum for sin than batalah, free time. The Mishnah says (Kesubos 59b) that idleness brings a person to sin. When we are idle and our minds are empty, unfortunately, our minds immediately gravitate to think of desires. Like all desires, a person is most vulnerable when empty. Keep busy, it's our only protection.

ZEVI'S NOTES

23
HATS AND JACKETS

The fact is everyone looks at you that way and classifies you by the way you dress, and people want to be viewed the way they dress too. You are what you wear.

When they dress the way they do, they become associated with the bnei Torah of the world. They are viewed as bnei yeshivah. That's the association they want. Just like the well-dressed people enjoy their association with the trendy dressers of Paris, the yeshivah boy wants to be associated with the yeshivah world. When you walk around like that you become one of them.

ADD TO BLACK AND WHITE DOC

GREAT QUESTION "Why is it so important to look like a yeshivah guy? I am learning just as much as many of them, I am doing just as many mitzvos as they do, I need to look like them too? Who cares what other people think?"

The Sefer HaChinuch, in the mitzvah of bigdei kohen gadol (mitzvah 99), teaches us a very important concept. A person goes after his dress. Meaning, the way we dress

is the way we perceive ourselves. More important than how others look at me is how I look at myself.

When I wear those clothing, I can't just go wherever I want, I can't just be seen wherever I want, and I must live by different standards. I need to live by the standards of what people expect from bnei Torah. It's a protection for me to make sure I keep the standards I need to keep. There is no question about it: if we walk around with a bathing suit we act like we are in the pool. If we walk around in jeans and a tee shirt, we will act chilled. When we walk around looking like a ben Torah, we act like a ben Torah. Sometimes we need the push. Often, it's hard to keep a certain standard of practice, but when we know people are looking at us in a certain light, it can help push us to be that way. The Mesillas Yesharim says (ch. 7), "Hachitzoniyus me'oreres es hapenimiyus — The outer arouses the inner."

- Dress has that power of motivating us to act in a certain way.
- So, next time you contemplate whether to put on that hat or not, think: it's not just a style of dress, it's a lifestyle. The more we act like bnei Torah, the stronger bnei Torah we become.

ZEVI'S NOTES

24
CHALLENGES AND TESTS

Most people think if we didn't have tests we would be so much better off. They think that tests slow us down toward our goal and we would get to our goals quicker if we didn't have all these hurdles. Honestly, Tests actually speed us up to our goals. Naturally we desire to remain idle. We love to stagnate and stay at the status quo.

That's where tests come in. When we are tested, we must dig deep inside ourselves and use strength we never thought we had. Hashem gives us an endless reservoir of abilities to become the people we need to be. However, we seek laziness and can't stand challenges. But when we stand up and persevere through some of the hardest tests in life, we bring out those strengths and become someone we never thought we could be. That's the purpose of a test.

We look at tests as a bedieved and have a tough time accepting them. Many people react to tests by trying to get rid of them, fight them, or perhaps even wishing them away. When we fight them, it will usually end up in disaster. We must embrace our tests and work with them, using them as a way of growth. We must realize that each situation hurled at us is tailor-made.

Hashem is giving us an opportunity to grow, to bring out our strengths, rather than keeping them dormant inside.

Tests are Avodas Hashem like any other avodah. When we realize that this is what Hashem wants, we are not as emotionally involved and can deal with them as an avodah and not just as a personal issue. It's like traffic. No one in their right mind will go head-on and fight traffic; rather, they navigate around it. We also need to work with the tests rather than trying to remove them. When we come to that realization half the battle is won. Tests are not bedieved, they are l'chatchilah!

Chazal teach us that the purpose of the challenges and tests is so Hashem can hear our prayers. The Imahos were barren because Hashem wanted to hear their prayers. When everything goes smoothly, we are complacent and forget about the Ribbono shel Olam. But when things go wrong, we all know how to turn to Hashem. Through our challenges, we connect to Hashem. There is no greater way of connecting to Hashem than tests. When we connect to Hashem through our tests, we are really utilizing our tests to the utmost. Tests must bring us closer to Hashem. If not, we have failed the test.

The ba'alei mussar tell us if a person can connect to Hashem even without the tests, he will not need those tests to get there. If we stay constantly connected, we can avoid many trying

times. It's up to us to connect to Hashem and help avoid those trying times.

One thing to consider is what the gedolei hamussar say: You choose when and where that pain should occur. You can allocate all that suffering into Torah and mitzvos. If one toils in Torah he can fulfill his quota that way. If he pushes himself against his nature to learn when it's difficult, you can't imagine what he has just saved himself from. If he toils to perform mitzvos, he takes away from his suffering in other ways. It's up to us to choose our destiny. It's like having your cake and eating it too. Not only is he choosing his suffering, he is also being rewarded for it, as it says (Pirkei Avos 5:22), "Lefum tzaara agra — According to the pain [effort] is the reward."

This world is for work, the next world is for rest. When Yaakov Avinu asked Hashem to be able to spend the rest of his life in peace, immediately Hashem sent him the test of Yosef. Why? Rashi explains (Bereshis 37:2), Hashem told Yaakov Avinu, "It's enough that the righteous have the next world to rest, they want this world too?" You choose one world, this one or the next. Unfortunately, many of us are not equipped to deal with the tests of life. As we get older and encounter more tests we get frustrated and feel down. The problem is we have the wrong perspective in life. We feel that every test is a burden. However, if we realized that tests are our purpose in life and the way we are able to step up, we would embrace them more and be prepared for them. They aren't slowing us down from achieving our goals, they are actually bringing us closer to them.

One last thought on tests and how to handle them is to remember the powerful words of the Ibn Ezra on the pasuk (Devarim 14:1) "Banim atem laShem Elokeichem lo sisgodedu - You are children of Hashem; don't injure yourselves." What does one have to do with the other? The Ibn Ezra explains that Hashem is telling us: you are My children, and a father has only the best in mind for his children. As much as we may not understand why things are the way they are, we need to recognize Hashem is our Father. Therefore, there is no reason to injure oneself out of anger. Hashem loves us like a father. Think: would our parents ever do anything to us that isn't in our best interest?

The Orchos Tzaddikim (Sha'ar Ahavah) says sometimes a parent's love for his child is dangerous. Many times, children demand something from parents they know might be harmful to them and their spiritual advancement; however, because of their love they can't say no. Either they can't bear to see their child upset or they can't deal with the pressure. Their love can be destructive if they give into our demands. However, Hashem will say no. Even if it means we will be upset at Him for "robbing" us of what we desire, He cares for us so much that He will "bear the pressure" in order to safeguard us. This is called true love. Love for us and us only, at His own expense.

- The next time we feel down when we are confronted with a test, remember these words. We can soothe ourselves by realizing as much as it hurts now it's in our best interests and comes from the One Who loves us most!

ZEVI'S NOTES

25 TECHNOLOGY

The further we keep ourselves from the secular world, the safer we are. Once we are connected to them through media, we are open to their thought processes and influences.

If someone was trying to reach us and we didn't answer, we fear we have just lost a friend or have been deemed worthless because we cannot be reached. That's why we answer calls and messages during tefillah — it would be terrible for us to delay answering the message we received. Unfortunately, this is all the lure of the yetzer hara. It's all a mirage. He wants us to think that if we are disconnected, we are dead. If our cell phones are off or if we have no access to communication, we are missing out on all the fun.

If we are really needed, people will find a way to get in touch with us. They have done so for generations.

- When we aren't as available, Hashem takes that into account and won't bring a challenge or threat to us. But when we are reachable, the cheshbon is different.

Let's say a person bought himself a huge television and then heard about the ill effects of TV. He is ready to get rid of it, but how can he do that if he just spent one thousand dollars on it? This is something we will need to get over. The key is to just do it when you get that inspiration, do it without thinking and you will look back and be happy that you did it when you did.

The definition of addiction is when we revert to something out of habit and not out of necessity. When we check emails and shop on the web out of boredom, isn't that addiction? Before you know it, you will be looking at those emails or browsing sites out of habit. What do we need it for?

Being bored is a berachah in many ways; it can be very healthy. Boredom in the olden days brought many people to discover their talents. They would read, paint, etc. Unfortunately, we have trained ourselves that we need to connect to the outside world when we are bored. We need to run from this place to that place.

- Train yourself to pull out a sefer or an enjoyable book when you are bored. The Gemara (Nedarim 81a) tells us to be conscious of poor people's children because they will develop into talmidei chachamim. The mefarshim explain that this happens because they have nothing to entertain themselves with besides Torah. Boredom can be a berachah — learn how to channel it.

Boredom can bring us to disaster; it can invite trouble. The most opportune days of the week for crime is on the weekend when people are off from work.

The sefer Divrei Emes (ch. 2) says the most dangerous thing is boredom, because it only breeds trouble. When we don't occupy ourselves with something fulfilling, then we will look for anything to keep us busy, which may include inappropriate activities. Boredom is something we cannot run away from. Have a plan for boredom.

Have a book or sefer you can run to when you aren't learning. Find something you enjoy and keep to it.

ZEVI'S NOTES

26
OLAM HABA

"I realize our main purpose in life is to achieve Olam HaBa. However, it seems strange to me that the Torah never discusses it straight out."

The Rishonim have dealt with it already. But before we discuss it, it would be helpful if we first discuss a more daring question: "How do we know there is Olam HaBa?" The Mesillas Yesharim (ch. 1) tackles it, as does the Steipler (Chayei Olam, chs. 3-6), and many other great people in between. And honestly, we are obligated to discuss it.

The galaxy is enormous, created with such wisdom. The human body is formed to perfection. And at the same time, we see a world of hardships. We hear tragedies from time to time that leave us bewildered. Can it be that the purpose of all this beauty is to endure challenges and difficulties? Should we suffer and then just die? Why would Hashem create a world like this?

It makes no sense to any sensible person. The Mesillas Yesharim (ch. 1) says the biggest proof of Olam HaBa are all

these tragedies. How can it be that people suffer so much? There must be a deeper meaning and purpose.

Perhaps this is all it is? Perhaps this is what the world is all about? Challenges, tests, and the like? When we realize that there are two worlds and we need to choose one of them, we can have a better understanding of these concepts. Which world will we choose? You can only choose one. If you decide this is your world, then you will have all the benefits of this world, but if you decide you want the next world, then this world is just a stepping stone. Every day we wake up and encounter these choices. (Brachos 61b –

> וְאָמַר רָבָא: לָא אִיבְּרִי עָלְמָא אֶלָּא לְרַשׁׁיעֵי גְּמוּרֵי אוֹ לְצַדִּיקֵי גְּמוּרֵי. אָמַר רָבָא: לִידַע אִינָשׁ בְּנַפְשֵׁיהּ אִם צַדִּיק גָּמוּר הוּא אִם לָאו

– Check out page 228 in this sefer). In every choice we make there exists a deeper choice — which world are we choosing? When we give up some benefit, we are choosing the next world, but when we give in to the immediate benefits and don't look to invest in our future, we are choosing this world. This is the root of a tzaddik: to give up now in order to benefit later.

GREAT QUESTION The Steipler, zt"l, questions the human design. Technically in all facets, we are created perfect. Our body functions flawlessly, with so many minute details to assure proper health. However, we find something in man which doesn't seem to work properly. Why is it when we have desires and fulfill them we aren't satisfied? When animals feed their

desires, they are satiated; however, the more man feeds his desires, the hungrier he gets. Why is that? The Steipler, zt"l, says from here we see that there is clearly something greater that man seeks, more than just his physical desires. If it were only physical desires, then as soon as he fed them, they should be suppressed. If it were only physical, we would be happy with our physical pleasures. It must be that we desire something higher, something spiritual, and until we feed it properly we will never be satisfied. We keep on feeding our desires with new possessions, thinking perhaps this new detail will help. When we realize it doesn't help, we think perhaps it wasn't good enough and perhaps we must try something else. In truth, we are totally off the mark. What we desire is something totally different, and that is food for the soul.

Our neshamah is crying to be fed, and we need to address it. As long as we do not address it, we will continue to be famished. The problem is we do not attribute the hunger to our neshamah. We continue to imagine we are experiencing desires for more physical pleasures, and we continue to pursue them, only to come up empty-handed. However, the moment we realize where the desires stem from, and we feed the soul its needs, we will feel the satisfaction we have been looking for.

HANG IN HOUSE

I heard in the name of Rav Dovid Feinstein, shlita, that the gematria of the word "kemisonenim (כמתאננים), like complainers," is the same as "Torah (תורה)" — 611. They are two sides of one coin. When there is no Torah, we are filled with complaints and desires for more physicality. But when we have the Torah, we desire nothing.

SAY THIS OVER ON SUKKOS

The Vilna Gaon says for all practical purposes the more relevant world is Olam HaZeh. Phenomenal! Let's explain. We all know the Vilna Gaon was niftar on Sukkos. That year, on Simchas Torah, his students wanted to dance during the hakafos, but they were so sad because of their rebbi's petirah, that they simply couldn't dance.

The Vilna Gaon's great student, Rav Chaim Volozhin, zt"l, tried to convince the others to throw away their grief and to rejoice with the Torah, but they weren't able to. Rav Chaim Volozhin then shouted, "Do you know where our rebbi is right now? He is in Heaven, standing under the Kisei HaKavod, enjoying the light of the Shechinah. At this moment, our rebbi is raising his hands in prayer. He is saying, Master of the Universe, allow me to return to the world again, even just for a short while. Just allow me to learn another blatt Gemara in the world of nisyonos.' HaKadosh Baruch Hu replies, 'Elinke (Eliyahu, the Vilna Gaon's name), that is impossible. After you left that world, you can't ever return to it.'

"Our rebbi raises his hands in tefillah again, and he cries and begs, 'Ribbono shel Olam, I will give away my entire reward of Gan Eden, just allow me to come down to the world to learn just one mishnah. HaKadosh Baruch Hu replies, 'Elinke, you can't go back. "The Vilna Gaon then says he will give away his entire Olam HaBa for the opportunity to just say one amen yehei shemi rabbah one more time. Hashem replies, 'Elinke, you remain here. You can't go back down.?' But we," Rav Chaim Volozhin concluded, "are living in this world. We can grab mitzvos: amens, mishnayos, pages of Gemara - as much as we

desire. Therefore, let us not be sad. Let us rejoice with the simchah of the Torah."

The talmidim danced with all their strength. At that time, Rav Chaim Volozhin composed the famous song, "Olam HaBa iz a gutte zach, lernen Torah is a besser zach - Olam HaBa is good, but learning Torah is even better."

Yes, Olam HaZeh is shver. However, as much as it is full of challenges and difficulties, it is also full of opportunities, which we can never make up once we leave. As much as our main goal is to achieve Olam HaBa, let us not downplay the greatness of Olam HaZeh. When we face challenges and tests and we prevail, there is no greater accomplishment. The Gaon knew that and so badly wanted to get another chance. Olam HaZeh is a shverer zach, but learning Torah is a besser zach. We can live a life above the shverkeit of Olam HaZeh and taste an experience greater than Olam HaBa — when we learn Torah and do mitzvos.

Success is not a proof of what type of person we are. When we see others' success, our tendency is to assume that he is doing everything right. Perhaps we should follow suit even if it may not be our standards. We say to ourselves, look at them, they are doing such and such, and they are still successful, maybe it's not so bad. Wrong, absolutely wrong. Success is from Hashem, and there can be many reasons for it. But it isn't necessarily due to the person's righteousness. Rather, our standards and our yiras Shamayim define us. That's our success in life.

We need to remember that success and honor come from Hashem, and no matter what we do, it's up to Him. It's a grave

mistake to try to imitate others. Don't worry about anyone else's success; just focus on living your own life and you will have success in this world and the next.

The Mishnah says (Pirkei Avos 4:17) that one sniff of Olam HaBa is greater than all the pleasures of this world. Our soul seeks that ultimate pleasure and until it reaches it — or some part of it — it will never be satisfied. However, the opportunities of this world outweigh the opportunities of the next world, like the same mishnah says: a moment of mitzvos and teshuvah in this world is greater than any opportunity in the next world. Let's grab it.

We may never judge our parents; even the slightest amount of judgment is forbidden. They are our parents, and we must, in every sense of the word, look to find their good traits. The Chayei Adam (67:3) says a tremendous chiddush in the obligation of kibbud av veeim. He says the main obligation is to honor our parents in our mind — to view them in our mind with immense respect. When we think that way, we will come to properly respect them. It's our obligation to change our outlook.

- Judge no one till you are in their position. Perhaps your father had an exhausting day at work. Perhaps the test of parnassah and providing for his family is stretching his nerves. Even more so, perhaps when we will be parents we will not be any different from our own parents. Tzaar gidul banim is one of the hardest tests we encounter in life and it puts our parents in very stressful situations, sometimes beyond reason. So as much as it seems our parents are "off the handle," it is far from that.

ZEVI'S NOTES

27
PARENTS

If you practice your halachah without putting pressure on your parents to follow suit, they may follow when they are ready. But if you apply pressure it won't work: resistance causes resistance. They will feel choked and fight you. The only answer is to lay off and daven hard that they see the light like you have. When you get married bezras Hashem, you will be able to structure your house exactly the way you would like. Till then, you may have to just tolerate a bit. One word of guidance, if you flip-flop with your halachos and compromise, they will never follow behind. If they see you preach without practicing, they will lose respect for you and chas v'shalom all mitzvos. When you ask your parents to uphold certain practices, it's imperative that you stick to them yourself at all costs. It's not only regarding those things you asked for — it's in all areas. Your devotion to halachah is being analyzed and looked up to. When they see you are one hundred percent legitimate, they will respect it too. But if they see you are just playing a game, they will fight you on it.

We need to reflect on the abundance of kindness they provide for us, and this will lead us to properly respect them. If we

think about how often they give up of themselves for our welfare, we would run to fulfill their wishes.

- If we express our appreciation and respect for them, they will undoubtedly reciprocate. We will see an entirely different set of parents. It's a mirror effect — if we show respect, we will receive it.

ZEVI'S NOTES

28
HOMESICK

Bnei Yisrael in the desert were homesick for Mitzrayim. The situation back there wasn't anything to write home about.

Homesickness occurs when we are put in a situation that is new and insecure. Bnei Yisrael were put into a situation of the unknown. They didn't know where they were going. They didn't know where their next meal was coming from.

- The pasuk says (Yirmiyahu 2:2) that Hashem always remembered our devotion to Him in the desert. We followed Hashem into a barren land without food and water and relied on Him.

ZEVI'S NOTES

29
DATING

Our future depends on who we marry? Yes. We see it with our own eyes countless times: boys who were just mediocre before they got married, became great afterward. And sadly, we've seen the opposite, too. People who were steiging before they got married, experienced a setback afterward. What's the pshat? When we marry someone who looks up to us, which is usually the case in marriage, we want to live up to the role expected of us. If we marry someone who expects certain standards of Torah learning and mitzvah observance, we will rise to the calling. We do not wish to disappoint our wives.

- When we choose a wife, we need to choose someone who shares the same goals as us. We need to choose someone who comes from a family that shares the same values as us. However, the family level is not as crucial as the status of the girl. It's more of a luxury. There are many wonderful girls who come from less-religious families, and the couple can grow beautifully together after they are married.

Rav Pam, zt"l, used to say (Atarah LaMelech, p. 29) that Shlomo HaMelech said (Mishlei 31:3), "Sheker hachein u bevel hayofi — Grace is false and beauty is nothing." Shlomo HaMelech tells us

that looks are a zero. However, if when rating a girl's middos from one to ten, she is an eight, then add that zero to the eight. This makes her an eighty. Without that zero; however, she is still an eight. Looks are an enhancement to a girl when she has other sterling traits. It cannot create our choice, but it can legitimately affect our choice.

But we still need to clarify something. How can Shlomo HaMelech, the smartest person who ever lived, make a statement like that? Are looks false? I understand if he would say looks are unimportant, but can we say they are false?

This statement only proves Shlomo HaMelech's brilliancy.

Just imagine meeting a person for the first time. On the first encounter, most people judge each other by their looks. When we meet someone we are not familiar with, we can only evaluate them based on what we see. However, the more we get to know someone, the more we will see his entire personality.

Just imagine again, someone who has exceptional looks but who is obnoxious and self-centered. Is he beautiful anymore? Absolutely not. He is atrocious. A person's outward appearance is influenced by his insides! Looks only play a role when we meet someone for the first time, not after. They are false because at first, a person looks one way, but after time he will look totally different. The more you get to know a person, the better or worse they may look. Don't be fooled by pictures or by looks in the beginning. Give it more time; you will be surprised to see the girl isn't who you thought she was.

Rav Elyashiv's wife used to repeat from the elders of Yerushalayim that even though the anenei hakavod, the clouds

of glory, don't exist nowadays, there is one area where they have remained. That is in shidduchim. Matches are made in Heaven.

ADD TO TEHILLIM

The Vilna Gaon, zt"l, would repeat the following pasuk (Tehillim 127:1): "Im Hashem lo yivneh bayis, shav amlu bonav bo — If Hashem doesn't build a home if He doesn't want a home to be established, the laborers will work for nothing." We will try to make a certain shidduch work and in the end, it will fall apart. Why? Because Hashem must will it. Then again, we will try to prevent other matches and for some reason, they happen anyway. Why? Because Hashem is the One Who makes matches.

- We can see as much as we try to control things in shidduchim, it's not in our control.

From when we are infants, our entire life is being orchestrated to enable us to make choices to put our destined shidduch together. Who we marry isn't a sudden decision; we are being prepared for this our entire life.

If asked to choose a car you will drive for the rest of your life, how long would it take you to make that decision? Remember it's more than the look of the car; you also have to make sure it has a good long-term life to it. Besides that, how will it handle the wear and tear over the years? It surely will not be a split-second decision. How then, does it make sense to decide to marry a girl only after a month of dating? Is it possible to decide in such a short time?

In truth, we are judging it all wrong. A car deteriorates over time, marriage gets better. We are not expected to decide based on what we know now. How can we? We can never judge what will be in ten years. All Hashem wants from us is to see if this shidduch has potential. Can this match work? Can we get along with one another? Do we have compatibility? We need not think past tomorrow. Marriage will have its ups and downs. If we are prepared to work on ourselves, we can make almost any marriage work. If we are not, then even the best match will fail.

We need to approach dating with that mindset involved, the mindset that marriage will only get better and our decision now should only be based on what we see now. The future of our marriage is in our hands, and we can't determine yet what it will be. Only our free choice will determine it. Our shalom bayis cannot be determined based on the present; rather, it's developed over time.

ZEVI'S NOTES

30 REFLECTIONS

Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz, zt"l (Sichos Mussar, maamar 38), says the times that will stand out the most will be the times we learned with simchah, joy.

The Michtav Me Eliyahu (vol. 5, p. 484) writes that there are three types of bachurim. The "dreamers" who long for success but are not willing to put forth the effort. They will remain with just their dreams. Then there are those who are in constant battle, go back and forth and up and down, but can't seem to tip the battle in their favor. But the last type wages a battle and fights till he wins. They trench in and are ready to battle and battle till they win. They see the enjoyment of success. We need to become that third type of bachur.

ADD TO RAMBAM

The Rambam in the end of Hilchos Shemittah tells us that Shevet Levi is considered the army of Hashem. What exactly does the army of Hashem do? We can all understand that each country must create an army to ensure the physical safety of their countrymen. A few good men enlist or are drafted to be ready to protect the interests and safety of each country. What

makes these people enlist and put themselves in harm's way for their fellow citizens? Their love of their country and what it stands for.

What about the spiritual well-being of each nation? Who is going to ensure that our grandchildren will be G-d-fearing Jews? For that safety we employ Shevet Levi. At the time of the eigel hazahav, Shevet Levi took upon themselves the selfless act of protecting the spirituality of their nation. That commitment remains till today. Shevet Levi are the ones who dedicate themselves to ensuring that Hashem's Torah remains intact and observed at all times. What motivates Levi to commit themselves to a life of Torah and mitzvos? Their love for their Creator.

However, the Rambam tells us that any person who is motivated to enlist in this special legion can join. It isn't limited to Shevet Levi. Any person who feels a passion to protect our religion can step up to the cause. The Rambam calls these special people "kodesh kodashim"!

Being a ben Torah is a challenge, an opportunity, and most importantly — a privilege!

I finished the first write up at 10:01 pm in Orlando:

Now I gotta go through everything again and edit, highlight and stuff!!

I just finished my Second and final edit on 6/2/24 at 1056am

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