

PENINIM ON THE TORAH **PARSHA BOOKLET**

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PARASHAT ACHREI-MOT

Speak to Aharon, your brother, he shall not come at all times into the Sanctuary...so that he should not die. (16:2)

Rashi comments that Hashem commanded Moshe Rabbeinu to remind Aharon Hakohen regarding the sanctity of the Sanctuary, referring to the tragic incident of his sons' deaths. This seems to imply that at a time when the yetzer hora, evil inclination, stirs us up and encourages us to do the inappropriate, it is only the fear of punishment, yiraas ha'onesh, that can save us from falling into the abyss of sin. Even Aharon, who would enter the Holy of Holies on the holiest day of the year, Yom Kippur, needed that Heavenly reminder. Remember what happened! It can happen to you if you do not listen. Horav Aharon Kotler, zl, underscores this idea, reiterating that even an individual who has achieved a profound, elevated level of cognition concerning the greatness of Hashem, one who possesses a penetrating awe of the Almighty, must still maintain yiraas ha'onesh, fear of punishment, to serve as a deterrent from sin.

Let us attempt to analyze this idea further. In the parsha that deals with ribbis, usury, the Torah says, "Do not take from him interest and increase; and you shall fear your G-d" (Vayikra 25:36). Horav Matisyahu Solomon, Shlita, derives from the pasuk's conclusion with, "fear of Hashem," that without fear, it would be difficult to restrain someone from taking interest, because the individual will be moreh heter, render for himself a dispensation, that it is "reasonable" to ask for something in return for using someone's money. We see from here that finding heterim for oneself is natural, and it is the opposite of erecting fences to protect oneself from falling into the abyss of transgression. Indeed, one who seeks and finds dispensations to allow himself to skirt the law-or to go beyond the parameters of right and wrong-- clearly has no fear of Heaven. If one has yiraas Shomayim,, he does not look for opportunities to avoid observance.

Horav Yeruchim Levovitz, zl, takes this point even further, positing that even if one were to transgress and eat non-kosher meat, it would still not be a clear indication that he lacks yiraas Shomayim. It is possible that he is a G-d fearing Jew who has fallen under the trance of his yetzer hora's blandishments. One who renders a dispensation for himself, who convinces himself

that what he is about to do is permissible, demonstrates that as far as his "desire" is concerned, he could refrain from sin, he could navigate past the yetzer hora. Nonetheless, he finds a way to sin - but with a heter. This is the epitome of a yiraas Shomayim deficiency. One who fears Hashem does not look for excuses or dispensations. He listens and observes. One whose entire life is lived in the specter of, "I must be careful because I might do something wrong," is a yarei Shomayim. He does not look for a way around sin. He distances himself as far away as possible from any opportunity that might lead him astray.

In his sefer, Emunah U'Bitachon, the Chazon Ish delineates the necessary requisites for one to be worthy of earning the appellation of talmid chacham, Torah scholar. After discussing the minimum requirements of Torah erudition that a talmid chacham must possess, he writes, "The praises of the talmid chacham cannot be sung unless his wisdom is preceded by fear of Hashem. The Torah's wisdom cannot come to rest on a heart that is closed... To be truly wise in the knowledge of Torah, a synthesizing of intellectual analysis and dread of sin is necessary... One who has not achieved wholesomeness in fear of Hashem will never achieve wholesomeness in knowledge of Torah, even if he is endowed with superior mental abilities. The paths of his studies will be crooked and perverse; he will not arrive at halachic truth."

Conversely, Torah study enhances, strengthens and refines one's yiraas Shomayim. The Chazon Ish once told a student that upon reading correspondence containing chiddushei Torah, Torah novellae, he could discern the writer's level of yiraas Shomayim. He added that one's success in Torah is dependent primarily on his level of yiraas Shomayim and overall service to Hashem. He felt that one cannot be a repository of daas Torah, the wisdom acquired through Torah study, unless he possesses an abundance of yiraas Shomayim.

The Chazon Ish was once traveling in a wagon, together with Horav Chaim Ozer Grodzenski, zl, on their way to inspect the recent modifications to the city's mikveh. Suddenly, the Chazon Ish jumped off the wagon. It dawned on him that the seats of the wagon might contain shatnez, a mixture of wool and linen. Although to avoid sitting on shatnez is actually a chumrah, stringency not demanded by halachah, the Chazon Ish was not taking any chances, and he continued the rest of the way on foot. The Chazon Ish did not just fear sin - he dreaded it as one would fear physical danger. This was true even when the sin was not his own. It happened once that a group of Israeli soldiers were engaging in target practice near his home on Shabbos. An officer knocked on the door to assure the Chazon Ish not to be concerned: this was only a training session and there was nothing to fear. The Chazon Ish replied, "I am more afraid of your Shabbos desecration than I am of the Arab grenades during the weekdays."

He shall don a sacred linen tunic. (16:4)

The Kohen Gadol possessed two sets of vestments: one set was called Bigdei Zahav, golden vestments, in which four of the eight garments contained gold in them, and the other set was called Bigdei Lavan, white vestments, because four of its garments were made of white linen. The white vestments were worn once a year, on Yom Kippur, during special portions of the service. The Kohen Gadol performed the remainder of the service wearing the golden vestments. In Rosh Hashanah 26A, the Talmud explains the reason for this change in procedure. When the

Kohen Gadol sought forgiveness for Klal Yisrael's sins, it was considered inappropriate that he should do so while wearing golden vestments. Since the Jewish People had sinned by creating and worshipping a Golden Calf, a sin so grievous that it continues to remain a "prosecutor" against us, it would be wrong to have "a prosecutor become a defender, i.e. have gold (worn by the Kohen Gadol) be a part of the forgiveness seeking service. Thus, the Kohen Gadol wore white linen, a color symbolic of forgiveness and purity, and a material symbolizing the Heavenly service of the angels, who are described as wearing linen. Indeed, the custom to wear a white kittel on Yom Kippur originated from the white vestments of the Kohen Gadol.

Horav Zalman Sorotzkin, zl, feels that the maxim, "Ein kateigor naase saneigor," "A prosecutor may not serve as a defender," has been misused. How often do we hear clamoring from those self-righteous individuals who suddenly remember this Rabbinic dictum when the spiritual leader must take a stand to render rebuke? Rav Zalman was referring to a situation in which the rav of a certain community rebuked one of its most powerful citizens for eating non-kosher food. This caused an outrageous uproar as a number of sanctimonious, hypocritical people came forward and denounced the rabbi for his negativity. "How can a man charged with doing good and being the symbol of positive living and caring cast aspersion on a reputable member of the community?" "Is it not prohibited to speak ill of another Jew?" "How could the rabbi take such an antagonistic and jaundiced view of a prominent member of the community?"

Rav Zalman explains that the Torah teaches us that when a Jew falters and falls into the nadir of sin, he should be rebuked. When a Jew publicly flaunts his transgression, we must protest publicly and vilify his malevolence as much as possible. This attitude however, applies only in regard to the individual. In speaking with Hashem, however, one must find every possible merit and justification to absolve the individual of his sin. In other words, we reproach and denounce the sinner to his face, but pray to Hashem for his welfare. We hope to see an end to sin, not to sinners.

This is the lesson of the Bigdei Kehunah, Priestly vestments. As long as the Kohen Gadol was in public, serving in the Sanctuary filled with Kohanim, Leviim and Yisraelim that came to observe his service, he wore gold. Even though gold was an agent of indictment because it recalled the sin of the Golden Calf, nonetheless, it served a positive role, by reminding the people to atone for their past sins. The gold demonstrated to them that it was not all positive. They had transgressed and must repent and seek atonement.

When the Kohen Gadol was alone in the Kodoshei Kodoshim, Holy of Holies; when he poured forth his heart in sincere prayer to Hashem to spare Klal Yisrael, he wore only white linen. When he stood in prayer on behalf of the nation, he would not wear gold which signified a pessimistic attitude towards the people he was seeking to help. This was not the place or the time to prosecute. It was the time for mercy and forgiveness.

And confess upon it all the iniquities of Bnei Yisrael, and all their rebellious sins among all of their sins. (16:21)

Prior to sending the he-goat to the desert, Aharon HaKohen-- or whoever was the Kohen Gadol-- would lean upon it and confess the sins of Klal Yisrael. In Meseches Tamid 30b, Chazal

say that the Kohen Gadol's voice would carry and be heard all the way to Yericho, a distance of quite a few miles. How did he do it? What power did the Kohen Gadol have to raise his voice so loud that it was heard in the distance? Certainly, the Kohen Gadol was not selected for his ability to raise his voice. Horav Tuvia Lisitzen, zl, maintains that anything that is founded, established, created in kedushah, holiness, and taharah, purity, has incredible, supernatural force that goes beyond its physical counterpart. Spirituality begets a physical force unlike anything else, rendering it much stronger.

We find this concept in a number of places in which a human being is capable of doing much more, of going beyond the usual and acceptable norm of physical strength and ability.

When Avraham Avinu heard that his nephew, Lot, had been taken captive by the consortorium of four very able and powerful kings, he gathered together his "strong" army of three hundred eighteen students, and-- according to one source-- his army consisted of none other than Eliezer, his trusted servant. How did they do it? Avraham was strong, but not that strong. Eliezer was one person. Where did he get the strength to fight against four kings, four armies of heavily armed soldiers? We must say that spirituality creates strength. An overriding desire to help his master and save Lot engendered within Eliezer a new source of strength, a sort of spiritual adrenaline, beyond the realm of the physical.

When Yehudah spoke to Yosef, he raised his voice in a scream that was heard four hundred miles away, causing the teeth of those who heard his voice to fall out. Why? How? Apparently, Yehudah's over-extension of himself on behalf of his brother, Benyamin, because of his commitment to their father, Yaakov Avinu, generated a source of super-human strength within him, giving him the ability to raise his voice in such a manner. There is no other way to understand this phenomenon.

Shimshon haGibor was holy from the womb. As a nazir whose life was wholly dedicated to the service of Hashem, he possessed amazing physical strength. Once again, ruchniyos, spirituality, catalyzed outstanding physical prowess. An individual whose commitment, devotion and intention are synchronized totally in honor of Hashem, to observe His dictates meticulously, transcends the constraints and limitations that physically encumber a person. He is no longer in the realm of the physical, and, thus, not under its restraints.

Stories abound about those righteous Jews, both common and erudite, members of the Torah elite who lived in a different world. Whereas their bodies existed on the physical plane, their essence was in a world above and beyond this physical plane. They transcended pain and suffering, accomplishing much more than humanly possible, all because they built with the mortar and stone that was composed of spiritual ingredients.

The Klausenberger Rebbe, zl, was an individual who serves as a paradigm for us to emulate. He arose from personal tragedy and irreplaceable loss to serve as both spiritual mentor to thousands and creative builder of everything from chadorim to yeshivos, Bais Yaakov schools and even a world-class hospital. How did he do it? With ruchniyus, with spiritual mortar. In a short synopsis of his incredible life, he was a person who experienced tragedy in its most painful and debilitating sphere, yet, with great personal sacrifice and amazing moral fortitude, he was able to transcend his experiences, to elevate himself to a much higher spiritual plane and to play a pivotal role in the rebuilding of Klal Yisrael after World War II. When one tallies up his

achievements, it is mind-boggling. It is hard to believe that this was all the impetus of one man - who had himself lost everything.

Within twenty-four hours of the liberation - having just learned of the brutal murder of his wife and eleven precious children - himself still clothed in the prison garb of a concentration camp inmate, the Rebbe set about delivering spiritual and emotional CPR to the survivors. He never thought of himself. Indeed, during those years in the concentration camps and after, he never shed a tear over his own misery, fearing that it would imply a critique of Hashem's ways. He worked at establishing kosher kitchens in all of the DP camps, provided Tefillin for the men, established a printing press to print seforim for those who lost out on four to five years of Torah study: founded the first yeshivos in Europe after the war, arranged marriages for the young men and women who had survived, but had lost everything. He even provided shaitlach, wigs, for the women. He came to America to raise money and returned to Europe, claiming that he was needed there.

He arrived on these shores in 1947 and set about establishing schools and shuls -all of this with boundless love. He was not afraid to rebuke when necessary, but his rebuke was always couched in love. The Rebbe was an innovator and, in 1950, he laid the cornerstone for Kiryat Sanz. He built an entire city, but that was not enough. He wanted a world-class hospital with a nursing school that taught Torah as well as nursing skills. The list goes on: with his community in Union City, New Jersey; his Mifal HaShas, which provides the means for students from all walks of life to study Talmud and receive a stipend after they have successfully completed a written test. One wonders how he did it. How does an individual who had suffered so extensively and was so sick accomplish so much? It is as we said earlier: the power of ruchniyus. When one builds with spirituality there are no limitations. This has been proven time and time again. Indeed, the renaissance of Torah in this country since World War II is a clear testament to this fact.

The he-goat shall bear upon itself all their iniquities to an uninhabited land. (16:22)

The Yalkut cites what seems to be a Midrash Pliah, a Midrash whose rationale eludes us. The Midrash states that Hashem takes all of the sins of Klal Yisrael and places them on Eisav HaRasha, the wicked. Since Eisav is referred to as seir, he is the sair, he-goat, upon whom the sins of the Jews are placed. The Midrash continues with Eisav's complaint that he has enough sins to burden him already. Why should he have to also carry those of his brother? His refusal does not seem to concern Hashem. After all, Eisav has so many, a few more will not create much of a difference for him. In his Tiferes Yonasan, Horav Yonasan Eibshutz, zl, wonders why Eisav has to be the receptacle for Jewish sin. Is there a shortage of refuse centers where these sins can be disposed? If the purpose is to get rid of them, this can be achieved anywhere.

Rav Yonasan explains that there is a deeper meaning to this Midrash. When Klal Yisrael's sins are brought before the Heavenly Tribunal to be prosecuted, the angel Gavriel comes forward to defend them. "Ribono Shel Olam," he begins. "All of these transgressions are really the fault of Eisav haRasha. The Jewish People are no more than students of his evil ways. Perhaps they

might be called good students, but students no less. Therefore, the sins of Your people should be placed on Eisav's head, for he is to blame."

Yes, we can lay blame at Eisav's doorstep. It is not our fault. It is the influence of the street, the contemporary society in which we live. It is all Eisav - not us. Perhaps, this is true. Eisav is the source of influence - but, we performed the actions; we sinned. Knowing the origins of sin is important, because then we can protect ourselves in the future. Horav Yaakov Galinsky, Shlita, cites the Talmud in Yevamos 113 that teaches us that the Mabul, Flood, did not reach Eretz Yisrael. Tosfos question why Noach had to have an ark to save him. Hashem could have provided safe passage for Noach and his family to the Holy Land where they would be protected from the waters of the Flood. The Zohar Hakadosh explains that whereas the flood waters did not actively reach Eretz Yisrael, it nonetheless had a detrimental effect on its environment, to the point that whatever life existed there ceased as a result of the Flood.

Rav Galinsky continues, reiterating the fact that our homes are under the influence of the "street." Whatever perversion prevails in today's society finds its way into our homes. Some homes even "invite" the "street" in, while others put on a show of self-righteous religiosity. They are not prepared to grant the "street" carte blanche access to their homes, but they do not seem to lock it out. Furthermore, if we would not be under the influence of the "street," it might be under our influence. When people see the beautiful lifestyle of an observant Jew, when they sense the serenity and joy that permeates his home, they are captivated. They would also like to experience such a life.

How many individuals have become observant after experiencing a Shabbos in a frum, observant, setting? They thought their life belonged in a garbage dump - only there could they experience joy. How difficult it must be for them to accept the truth when they ultimately discover it. We should never forget that we have the ability to influence those around us - if we want to and if we try.

The Talmud tells us that when Sancheirev was laying siege to Yerushalayim, Chizkiyahu haMelech entered the Bais Hamedrash and stuck a sword in the floor, declaring, "Whoever does not study Torah will be pierced by the sword!" The king was acutely aware of the beneficial effect of Torah study. He understood what would occur if the sounds of Torah would suddenly cease in the bais hamedrash. The commentators ask a compelling question concerning Chizkiyahu's action. Obviously, he was interested in making a powerful statement. Is the Bais Hamedrash, however, where people are studying Torah the place to make that statement? He should have gone out on the streets of the large cities to the cafes, fast-food restaurants, theaters and sports centers where people were occupied with nothing and make his declaration there. Why pick on the Bais Medrash?

Rav Galinsky explains that Chizkiyahu understood that if the learning in the Bais Medrash is up to par, then there will be no problem on the street - so compelling will be the influence of the Bais Hamedrash. Placing a sword in downtown Tel Aviv will have no effect, because the problem that exists there has its origins in the Bais Hamedrash. If the learning and camaraderie in the yeshivah are the way they are supposed to be; if the yiraas Shomayim, fear of Heaven, is on the proper level, it would have its positive effect on the citizens that make downtown their home. It is up to us to influence and inspire them, or it will be the converse. We attempt to blame everything on Eisav, but we forget that what Eisav was and what he has become

is, in a great sense, our fault! He receives his lessons in life from us. When we live according to the way our grandfather, the Patriarch Yaakov taught us, Eisav's influence is left to the street. In fact, he improves his behavior due to our influence. It is when we give him a prominent place in our homes, our lives and that of our children, that we pay dearly for this experience. Indeed, we cannot blame Eisav for our ineptitude.

You must not act in the (same) manner as (the people of) the land of Egypt, where you dwelled, nor may you act in the (same) manner as (the people of) the land of Canaan...(18:2)

Rashi explains that the behavior of the inhabitants of Egypt and Canaan was more degenerate than that of any other nation. Furthermore, the inhabitants of the area in Egypt in which the Jews settled were more depraved than those in any other area. In the Sifra, Chazal go so far as to suggest that Klal Yisrael's presence in Egypt provided the catalyst for the moral depravity of the Egyptian People. This same deviation of the native population occurred when Klal Yisrael entered Canaan and became its inhabitants. The prospect of the Jewish settlement in Canaan stimulated the Canaanite's corruption. This is paradoxical! The Jewish People are to be a "light unto all the nations," a beacon of G-dliness and moral purity. Yet, here they are considered to be the reason for the immoral behavior that surged in these two degenerate nations. How is it feasible that, just by living in the land, the Jews had such a detrimental effect upon the people?

Chazal compare the Jewish People's settlement in Egypt to a rose growing among thorns. In fact, Hashem told the people, "In Egypt, you were as a rose among thorns. As you enter Canaan, you are to continue to be worthy of that title. Do not be influenced by the actions of the Canaanites." Chazal compare this to a king who places his only daughter in an environment populated by people of base moral character. He enjoins her not to be influenced by their deviate behavior.

When we analyze Chazal's analogy, we wonder why the king placed his daughter there in the first place? This question extends to Egypt and Canaan: If they were such immoral places, why did Hashem place Jews there? Why did He play mind games with their spiritual welfare? In explaining this anomaly, Horav Mordechai Miller, zl, first examines the obligation, which is incumbent upon every Jew, to sacrifice his life to sanctify the Name of Hashem. One must be prepared to sacrifice his very life, if that is what it takes. This phenomenon has been heroically played out during our tumultuous history, as individuals and whole families sacrificed themselves on the sword and the flame, rather than renege on their commitment to the Almighty. While this has been our heritage, can we say that we would grasp this legacy with open arms, displaying the fortitude and courage to face our persecutors with the necessary strength to say, "No! We are ready to die for our beliefs!"?

Rav Miller cites a statement from Horav Chaim Zaitchik, zl, that illuminates this issue. He says, "Opposition sharpens one's spiritual strength." When an opposing force challenges the individual, he rises to the challenge specifically because of the challenge he is facing. A response is always stronger than a proactive action. A practical example to which we can relate, is when a child misbehaves, his mother invariably threatens him with some form of punishment. During that moment, her love for the child is "momentarily" on hold. If she were to then see someone

attacking her child, however, her reaction would be swift and furious, as she defends her child. The opposition which her child faces arouses her love.

Rav Miller cites the Talmud Chagigah 5b, which relates a conversation that took place between Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananyah and the sages of the time, as Rabbi Yehoshua lay on his deathbed. They wondered to whom they would turn in order to counter the heretical arguments of the Tzedukim, the Jews who only believed in the Written Law. His response has become a classic. He said, "When wisdom departs from the children (of Yisrael), then wisdom (that of the Tzedukim) also departs." This means that Hashem grants wisdom to the forces of evil to provide a challenge for the Jewish People. At a time in which the Jewish People are left bereft of their intellectual spiritual giants, He has no need to increase the wisdom of their antagonists. When Rabbi Yehoshua would pass from the world, so, too, would pass the extraordinary wisdom of the Tzedukim. There is nothing constructive in endowing the Tzedukim with challenging intellect and wisdom, because there was no one available to counter their heresy. If no one will benefit from the challenge, the challenge has no purpose.

After the Bais Hamikdash was destroyed, the forces of impurity greatly increased. In reaction to this void and ensuing evil, so many righteous leaders, such as Daniel, Ezra and Mordechai, appeared.

With this principle in mind, we can now understand why Hashem chose to exile the Jewish People specifically to Egypt and Canaan, countries that were infamous for their moral depravity and perversion. Hashem knows the unique constellation of strengths and weaknesses of each individual. Only He can place His People in a situation that is challenging, for only He knows who will emerge triumphant and who will benefit from the ordeal. Man cannot undertake to make this decision due to his lack of objectivity concerning himself and certainly his cluelessness regarding the situation. Hashem knows whether a person will rise to the challenge, and, therefore, if He challenges him, it is because He knows that the person will succeed. Challenges draw out one's inner strengths and hidden potential. This is the reason that Hashem placed the Jews in countries which were morally depraved, for it is here that they would confront their greatest moral obstacles. From here, from the crucible that was Egypt and later Canaan, they would triumph and become a better people.

Let us go one step further. Talmud Sanhedrin 39b makes the following statement: Let Ovadiah (the Navi) -- who lived among two wicked people (Achav and his wife, Izevel, King and Queen of Yisrael), yet did not learn from their deeds -- challenge Eisav, who lived among two righteous people (his parents, Yitzchak and Rivka) . Horav Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler, zl, explains that Eisav was the archenemy of Yaakov and, eventually, his descendants. Indeed, Satan, who represents the concept of evil, is his guardian angel. Amalek, his grandson, initiated an unprovoked war against the Jewish People, for no reason other than his hatred for the representatives of truth. Amalek sought to suppress the spiritual effect of the Jewish People, the Exodus and its accompanying miracles on the cosmos. An implacable hatred burned within him to erase the Jewish People from the face of the earth. Why? He inherited this virulent animus from his grandfather, Eisav, who had been raised in a loving spiritual home, but rejected it. The lofty, awesome deeds to which he had been privy only further tempered his obstinate resolve to continue hating with a vehemence. He transmitted this hatred to his offspring to such an extent

that their love for falsehood passionately drove them with a suicidal force to destroy the nation that symbolized truth.

This thought illuminates for us why the Jewish People's presence in Egypt and Canaan catalyzed and even necessitated the corruption of these nations. "Opposition sharpens one's spiritual strengths": In order for the Jewish People to grow spiritually, they had to be challenged by depravity and corruption.

Rav Dessler concludes with a powerful warning to members of contemporary society. One who lives in a society that is morally and spiritually upright is paradoxically in a dangerous position. If he has chosen to oppose the righteous, he will regrettably develop an overwhelming hatred for their ideals and values, to the degree that it will even supersede that of the individual who has not been exposed to true good. Opposition brings out the resolve - and hatred. Those of us who are blessed to live in an environment that is inherently good, righteous and moral must be thankful, but also very careful to guard ourselves against any possible danger.

On the other hand, considering the moral perversity of contemporary society, we are in a unique position to react strongly against this pervasive evil and to develop our spirituality in a positive manner. It all boils down to one question: Are we challenged by contemporary society? Do we struggle against contemporary society, or have we capitulated?

Hashem spoke to Moshe after the death of Aharon's two sons. (16:1)

In Shir HaShirim 3:11, Shlomo Hamelech says "Go forth and gaze...upon the King to Whom peace belongs, adorned with the crown His nation has made for Him on His wedding day (on the day His Law was given) and on the day His heart was gladdened (by His Sanctuary's consecration)." Two of the happiest days in the Jewish calendar of events, the Giving of the Torah and the Inauguration of the Mishkan, were marked by tragedy. Aharon HaKohen's two sons perished on the day of the inauguration of the Mishkan. During the period of the Sefiras Ha'Omer between Pesach and Shavuous, the prelude to the Giving of the Torah, the twenty-four thousand students of Rabbi Akiva died. We do not question the reason for their demise. We wonder, however, if it was necessary to tie these tragedies to the two days of ultimate joy.

The Maggid zl, m'Dubno responds with an analogy. There was a king who decided to build a new city from scratch. It was to be the perfect city. Its design, architecture and construction was to be planned to the smallest detail. He engaged the services of the most qualified city planning firm to make all of the arrangements. To the amazement of everyone, after the city had been completed, the king was still not satisfied. "What more can I do to enhance this city?" he asked the firm of advisors.

"If the king really wants to impress the world, we suggest that a world class medical center be built under the leadership of the most distinguished physician of our time. This will surely achieve an unparalleled position in history for the king," they replied. The king agreed, and they soon had a functioning hospital, prepared to treat the most complex medical problems. The chief of staff was a world- renowned physician, whose reputation as an expert diagnostician was superseded only by his skill and expertise in dealing with the most chronically ill patients.

The first patient arrived for treatment. After a short stay in the hospital, under the personal care of the noted chief of staff, he succumbed to his illness. This was a bad jolt to the physician's stature. The patient, however, had been so chronically ill that he was beyond all scientific help. Nonetheless, this did not cause people to look favorably upon the hospital or its chief.

The king called for the doctor and asked, "Why did you take it upon yourself to treat such a chronically ill patient? You were not successful, and now the hospital's reputation has been impugned."

"My dear king," replied the doctor, "let me explain to you the reason for my actions. My distinguished reputation preceded me to this city. All of a sudden, patients were lining up at the hospital door seeking treatment. I could accept this. There is something else, however, which gave me great cause for concern. I feared that, with the presence of the best hospital coupled with the finest physician in the world, the citizens of your community might become complacent and no longer care about their health. We all know that preventive care is the best therapy for illness. I know only too well how limited medicine really is. If people neglect their health, I will not be able to save them. When I saw that the first sick person to enter my office was someone whose illness was too far advanced for even the finest medical care, I was happy in an ambivalent sort of way. I did everything to help him, knowing fully well that it would be to no avail. When he died, the citizens of the community were confronted with the stark reality that if they do not take care of themselves, the finest doctor and best hospital will not be able to save them."

The lesson is clear. Hashem gave us the Torah which is to be the cure-all, the panacea for all spiritual ills. Herein, however, lies the greatest danger. People think that by learning alone - without developing their middos, character traits -they will succeed in warding off the blandishments of the yetzer hora, evil inclination. What did Hashem do to teach us this important lesson? Specifically, prior to the festival commemorating the Giving of the Torah, He acted with middas ha'Din, the attribute of Strict Justice, and He took the lives of Rabbi Akiva's

distinguished disciples. Their infraction has been noted as "a lack of respect one for another." Veritably, the hairbreadth of sin concerning these great giants of Torah was employed on a level that is beyond our comprehension. For all intents and purposes, it was a blemish on their middos that led to this tragic punishment.

Likewise, the Mishkan/Bais Hamikdash is supposed to be the place whose spiritual stature, its quintessential sanctity, has the power to atone for sin, via the korbanos, sacrifices, and ritual service that takes place there. Once again, this can lead to complacency in which people forget the significance of middos tovos, good character traits, and the need to constantly refine them. As a reminder, the two sons of Aharon, men of incredible lofty spiritual eminence, were tragically taken from our midst, also because the middas ha'Din was employed to delve deeply into their middos. The lesson for us is apparent. If the fire can fall on the cedars, if the greatest Torah leaders can perish as a result of the middas ha'Din, how can we respond?

You shall observe My decrees...and by which he shall live - I am Hashem. (18:6)

Rashi interprets "Ani Hashem, I am Hashem," to mean, "I can be relied on to reward those who obey Me." There are laws that are beyond the ability of human logic to comprehend. In the previous pasuk, Rashi explains that the promise, "Ani Hashem," applies to those laws that tax the mind, that raise questions which we cannot answer. While there is certainly a powerful spiritual reason for these laws, it is beyond our ken, and therefore, it takes a leap of faith to observe them. In truth, many mitzvos that were understood centuries ago, before society became the bastion of immorality that it is, have become archaic and irrational in the eyes of society today. Hashem will reward those who maintain the fortitude and commitment to see beyond their ability to comprehend, who believe in a heritage that has sustained our people throughout the dark exile.

This idea holds true also of those mitzvos which people take for granted or view as irrelevant. In his Mishnah Berurah (90:29) the Chofetz Chaim zl, relates an incident that occurred concerning the Rav of Hamburg. As he was walking to shul one morning wearing his Tallis and Tefillin, he was stopped by a man with a proposition. It seems that he had in his possession a bag of diamonds which he was willing to sell at a greatly reduced price. This was an opportunity for the Rav to make an incredible amount of money. The Rav asked the diamond merchant to wait until after Tefillas Shacharis. The man said that he could not wait. It was either now or never. The Rav bid the man a good day, saying that tefillah b'tzibur, davening with a

minyan, quorum of ten men, was more important than any money he would earn. Indeed, the Rav was overjoyed at being able to overcome the inclination to make a small fortune and instead affirm his commitment to tefillah b'tzibur.

In citing this story, Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, adds that while the Hamburger Rav did not earn a fortune, he was the recipient of an outstanding reward in being the progenitor of generations of Torah scholars and leaders. Hashem does not let any mitzvah go uncompensated. He will pay us back when we need it most and in a "currency" that we value and appreciate. For the Hamburger Rav, sons and sons-in-law that are talmidim chachamim, Torah scholars, had greater significance than an increased balance in his checkbook.

You shall observe My decrees...and by which he shall live. (18:6)

Horav Shlomo Wolbe, zl, notes that when a person is born, his abilities and talents are already present in the "potential" mode. As he grows and develops, as he lives and travels throughout the highway of life, he has the opportunity to actualize these dormant abilities. In other words, man's life, his focus and objective should be the realization of his G-d-given powers. Every bit of Torah that he studies, every mitzvah that he observes, gives him the tools for growth and the fruition of his inner skills and capabilities. Life is filled with opportunity. We must make the most of it.

As we grow and confront the various milestones in life, each one is a test of commitment and belief. How will we respond? What type of attitude will we have? Will we approach it with zest and enthusiasm, or will it be something we feel compelled to do? We had an opportunity during our youth to grow in a positive and exciting manner. Did we? The opportunity arose again when we married and raised a family. Did we apply ourselves to the education of our children with interest and vigor - or was it another one of the many things on our mind? How did we act with regard to finding a suitable mate for our child? Did we go through the motions and say, "What is bashert, destined, is bashert, or did we act astutely, with sensitivity and decency?

Some of us live our lives in the "b'dieved," ex-post-facto mode. We get married because we do not want to be alone. We enter the field of Torah chinuch, education, because nothing else works easily. This lackadaisical, complacent attitude is a grave mistake. We were granted life with all of its challenges for a purpose: to live, to grow, to realize our potential. To take the gift of life and simply exist as if it has no meaning, no value, is not only self destructive, but it is insubordinate. Indeed, every day should demand of us a renewed awakening, a fresh and exciting approach to its challenges, an enthusiastic resolution for success and growth.

Rav Wolbe views the time of seeking shidduchim, finding a suitable mate for our children, as a period during which one can achieve excellent spiritual growth. It is a time of compelling nisayon, challenge. Commensurate with the challenge, however, is the opportunity to transform that challenge into good fortune. When one takes this idea to heart, he will be certain to live through this period l'chatchilah, a-priori mode. One should realize that min haShomayim, through Divine assistance, he is being walked through this seemingly "difficult" period. Every step of the way, he is being accompanied and guided. One can not then take away what is predestined for one individual, nor can he take what is designated for another.

One who views this period in his life through the lens of Torah will never allow such thoughts as , "I wish I could get through this already," or "When will it end?" to pass through his mind. He will, instead, accept this opportunity for growth and act accordingly. These challenges are a vital part of life, and the way he reacts to them determines what kind of life he will live.

(I am G-d) Who rests among them, even amidst their (spiritual) contamination. (16:16)

How often do we hear a young person remark, "I am too far gone to change my lifestyle to live a Torah life. I have sunk too far to return"? This pasuk teaches us otherwise. Regardless of how far one has strayed from Hashem, the Almighty never rejects him. Hashem is always there, waiting for him to return. Regrettably, this attitude is one that people often use as a cop-out to absolve them of the responsibilities to do teshuvah, to repent, and to return. To those who say that they are tamei, spiritually defiled, Hashem replies, "I will be there with you b'soch tumasam, amidst their (your) contamination." The Berditchever Rebbe, zl, once commented, "You can be for G-d, and you can be against G-d. You cannot, however, be without G-d." Even if man abandons G-d, Hashem will never abandon man.

Parents do not abandon their children. Parents turn their back on their children only after bitter suffering and after having exhausted every attempt to reconcile with them. A parent, after all, is only human. Hashem is also a parent, but He never gives up. Regardless of how much pain we cause Him, His love is boundless.

Perhaps another lesson can be derived from here. If one wants to help a tormented soul, it is crucial that he understands the source of the individual's pain. He has to get into his mind, delve into his soul, feel his torment and sense what it is that is distressing him. This is the meaning of "resting amidst their spiritual contamination." If we do not understand what makes them tick, we cannot feel their pain, so we cannot address their issues. We have to remember that, at times, when we have to extricate someone from the mud, we have to get down into the mud and personally get dirty in order to pull them out.

You shall observe My decrees and My laws, which man shall carry out and by which he shall live. (18:5)

In the Talmud Sanhedrin 74a, Chazal say that the mitzvah of V'chai ba'hem applies to all cases with the exception of the cardinal sins of idol worship, murder and adultery. A Jew faced with the choice of either giving up his life or transgressing any one of these three sins must choose death. Interesting. Why does the Torah tell us that human life precedes mitzvah observance as a prefix to the laws of forbidden relationships, which happen to be one of the three exceptions to the rule of V'chai ba'hem?

Horav Mordechai Gifter, zl, explains that by commanding us to choose life instead of sin, the Torah is conveying to us the significance of life. The Torah, however, has a different standard for measuring true life. Indeed, one who transgresses the three cardinal sins can consider himself among the living. Is this true life? Is a life devoid of ethics and morals to be considered a life? The Torah does not seem to think so. The Torah's enjoinder to sacrifice one's life rather than violate one of the three cardinal sins originates from its high regard for life - true life - with dignity and morals.

Any man shall not approach his close relative to uncover nakedness. (18:6)

And the end of our parshah, the Torah details a long list of forbidden relations: mothers, stepmothers, sisters, aunts, and mothers-in-law. All of these women are forbidden for life. Once a mother-in-law, always a mother-in-law. Even if a man were to lose or divorce his wife, his former mother-in-law remains prohibited to him for life. There is, however, one exception to the rule: A wife's sister is forbidden only during the lifetime of his wife. If a man's wife dies, he may now marry her sister. Why?

The Ramban gives a compelling explanation for this law, one that goes to the heart of Jewish ethics. The other forbidden relationships are, for the most part, incestuous. They are morally wrong. Marrying a wife's sister is not really incestuous. In truth, from a moral standpoint, one could marry two sisters. From an ethical perspective, however, it is not proper. Sisters normally love and care for one another. In their natural state of relationship, there is a healthy respect and admiration from one sister to another. If they were both permitted to marry the same man, they would then become tzaros, rival wives. No longer would love and harmony prevail in their home. They would soon become competitive and combative. Tension would

reign, and dispute would become natural. Their loving-sister relationship would become a thing of the past as they both vie for their husband's attention. Hashem does not want to shatter the status quo that has developed between these two sisters. Therefore, a man cannot marry both of them at the same time. If one has died, however, it is now permissible to marry the other one.

We have just become exposed to a new aspect of Torah dictate - yashrus, or *mentschlichkeit*, human decency. Rabbi Yissachar Frand explains that this is one of the major themes of *Sefer Bereishis*, which is also called *Sefer HaYashar*, Book of Righteousness, or *Sefer Yesharim*, Book of the Righteous, because it details the lives of the Avos, Patriarchs, who embodied yashrus at its zenith.

He cites the Netziv, zl, who posits that the Avos distinguished themselves not only in their relationship with the Almighty, but also in their relationship with other human beings. Their decency and integrity in dealing with others earned them the respect and admiration of all, serving as a living example of the teachings of Judaism. They were acknowledged as righteous because of their *mentchlichkeit*. No one was interested in their religious observance, only in their interpersonal relationships.

One episode, which tells it all is the story of Avraham Avinu's daring rescue of Lot, his nephew. He put his life in danger, when he took the students of his yeshivah with him to battle the invading kings who had taken Lot hostage. Was this really necessary? Does it say anywhere in the Torah that Avraham was obligated to place his and his students' lives in danger in order to save Lot? Surely, a mission of such great danger was not a priority.

Horav Yaakov Kaminetzky, zl, explains that it was not a halachic question, but an ethical one. It was a *shailah*, question, of yashrus, fundamental human decency. Haran, Lot's father, had supported Avraham, who stood up to the pagans of their day, declaring monotheism to the world. Since Haran had come to Avraham's side when he needed him, Avraham felt that it was his moral obligation to save his son. Avraham Avinu acted out of a sense of yashrus. It was for him an obligation of *mentchlichkeit* that carried the same weight as halachah.

Rabbi Frand addresses a number of *mentchlikeit* infringements, such as cell phones going off in the most inopportune places and times, or just plain crudeness on our part. I, however, would like to focus on two areas of which I regrettably have had the opportunity to be on the receiving end. Rebbeim are individuals who devote their lives to educating Jewish children. They put in time and *gezunt*, both physically and emotionally towards the goal of producing a ben Torah. Their financial remuneration is inadequate, but they do not do it for the money. Most teach *l'shem Shomayim*, for the sake of Heaven, to share in the awesome responsibility and privilege of educating our youth. On the other hand, they do need appreciation. A little thank you goes a long way if it is delivered with sincerity and feeling. If so, why is it that when a rebbe goes beyond the call of duty and spends time with our child, do we seldom remember to say those "two words"? How often do our children return from a trip, and, in our great rush to pick them up and go home, we "forget" to say, "Thank you for spending time with my son"? Trust me, the rebbeim are not getting paid for all of the time and effort that go into making an extra-curricular activity successful. This applies to so many instances when our children benefit from the love, attention and extra care that a rebbe manifests.

Next is car pool. I write this at 11:00PM, while I wait for those few parents to pick up their children after an extra-curricular event that ended on time - at 10:00PM. For some, it is simply not convenient to come until later. The fact that it is inconvenient for the rebbe does not seem to matter. There are always children who are relegated to staying after school, waiting for their parent to return from his or her errands, job, or appointments. What adds insult to injury is that the parent picks up his or her child and does not even bother to wave, "Thank you" or "I'm sorry". Is the parent ashamed? Probably. It does not, however, stop him or her from doing it again - and again. I am sure I have given my readers food for thought, under the purview of yashrus - mentschlichkeit.

Do not profane the Name of your G-d. (18:21)

Chillul Hashem, desecrating Hashem's Name, is a severe transgression for which teshuvah, repentance, cannot atone. Teshuvah suspends the punishment of death, which ultimately purges one of the sin. The Rishonim cite a number of vehicles through which one can atone for this dreadful sin. In Parashas Emor (22:32), the Torah repeats its admonition against chillul Hashem and juxtaposes upon the mitzvah of Kiddush Shem Shomayim, "You shall not profane My holy Name, rather I shall be sanctified among the Bnei Yisrael." Rabbeinu Bachya explains that the Torah is alluding to a way of rectifying the sin of chillul Hashem - by sanctifying Hashem's Name. When one acts in a manner that increases the honor of Hashem's Name in the world, he is atoning for the sin of chillul Hashem. One must attempt to rectify his sin in a manner similar to the way he has sinned. Rabbeinu Yonah writes in his Shaarei Teshuvah that acts of chesed, loving-kindness, and the pursuit of emes, truth, which are hallmarks of the Jewish People, bring about Kiddush Hashem. When Jews act appropriately, they sanctify Hashem's Name, thereby contributing to the rectification of the sin of chillul Hashem.

In a shmuess, ethical discourse, on the concept of Kiddush Hashem, Horav Avraham Pam, zl, in his Sefer Atarah l'Melech, anthologized by Rabbi Shalom Smith, cites the pasuk in Tehillim 87:1, "A psalm, a song, whose foundation is in the holy mountains." The Midrash Socher Tov explains that this is a reference to the two mountains upon which Yiddishkeit, as a religion, is based: Har Ha'Moriah, the mountain upon which Yitzchak Avinu was prepared to sacrifice his life during the Akeidas Yitzchak; and Har Sinai, the mountain which was the scene of the Revelation where the Torah was given to Klal Yisrael. As Rav Pam explains so beautifully and meaningfully, Har Ma'Moriah taught the Jews how to sanctify Hashem's Name by their willingness to sacrifice their lives for Him, and Har Sinai taught the Jews how to live a life of constant Kiddush Hashem by adhering to the mitzvos of the Torah. One taught us how to die for Hashem, while the other taught us how to live for Him. The Jew is guided in life and death. Both scenarios must be dedicated towards serving the Almighty with every fibre of our being.

Rav Pam notes that a close student of the Chafetz Chaim related how, during davening, he would often hear the Chafetz Chaim entreating Hashem to give him the zchus, privilege, to give up his life Al Kiddush Hashem in the long and productive life that he had. His service to the Jewish People was the quintessential embodiment of Kiddush Shem Shomayim, a service that endures beyond the parameters of his mortality.

Just over sixty years ago our People underwent an epic Kiddush Hashem, as six million martyrs perished in the most heinous ways, due to a single factor: they were Jews. The Holocaust decimated a large portion of our People and left a scar on the lives of every Jew from that day on. Rav Pam notes that today, there are hundreds of thousands of Jews, descendants of those kedoshim, martyrs, who carry their names - with distinction. They died Al Kiddush Hashem. Our function is to live a life of Kiddush Hashem. We can do this by maintaining a holy demeanor, by acting courteously, with integrity, and by speaking in a kind, polite manner. Our actions, our inter-relationships with people, all promote a feeling of good-will, respect and, ultimately, Kiddush Hashem.

And the he-goat designated by Lot for Azazel shall be stood alive before Hashem, to provide atonement through it. (19:10)

When Yaakov Avinu followed his mother Rivkah's orders to provide two goats for Yitzchak Avinu, the pasuk says, "And fetch me from these two choice young kids of the goats" (Bereishis 27:9). The Midrash comments, "These goats will be good for you, since they will access for you Yitzchak's blessings, and they will be good for your offspring, since through the two he-goats, one to Hashem and one to Azazel, they will achieve atonement on Yom Kippur." The Midrash begs elucidation. What is the connection between the goats that Yaakov was to bring to Yitzchak at the behest of Rivkah, and the two he-goats offered on Yom Kippur? Furthermore, why did Rivkah try so hard to see to it that Yaakov received the brachos, blessings, instead of Eisav? These brachos were material in nature, something about which Yaakov did not really care anyway. Why then go to all the trouble? Last, ultimately, Yaakov received the blessings, but as we can see, the material benefits of this world were all delivered to the hands of Eisav. So, in the end, Yaakov suffered at the hand of Eisav for the blessings that he received instead of Eisav - which Eisav enjoyed nonetheless! So, was it all worth it?

In his commentary to Parashas Toldos, The Bais Halevi explains that Rivkah sought the material blessings for Yaakov by design, and it was her intention that Eisav should steal from him. This way Yaakov's reward was magnified. If Yaakov were to have received the material blessings, then all of the world's material and physical bounty would be destined for him and his descendants. Eisav and his descendants could not tolerate this. Therefore, they acted accordingly and seized what was appropriately Yaakov's, leaving him with little or nothing. This is all l'tovas Yisrael, for the benefit of the Jew, who now achieves atonement as a result of his "loss." On the other hand, if Eisav would have originally received the blessings, then the material bounty that he possessed would, by right, be his. Then, Yaakov's lack of material bounty could not serve in his spiritual merit.

There is another advantage to the brachos that Yaakov received from Yitzchak. One who takes a vow not to enjoy any pleasure from his possessions does not revoke his ownership of these possessions. While he may not derive benefit from them, he still retains his ownership over them. Furthermore, he may use these possessions in the performance of a mitzvah, since Chazal are of the opinion that mitzvos lav l'henos nitnu, mitzvos are not given for the purpose of our deriving benefit from their fulfillment. In other words, the pleasure gained from mitzvah

performance is not considered a benefit. Likewise, the material resources that Yaakov received from Yitzchak remain his, even though he did not necessarily have access to enjoy them. This idea has two applications. First, Eisav was a thief and, by using Yaakov's possessions, he caused a reduction in Yaakov's spiritual demerits; second, Yaakov would be permitted to appropriate his possessions which were seized by Eisav and use them for mitzvos, such as charity or supporting the study of Torah.

We now understand the relationship between Yitzchak's blessings and the Yom Kippur service. On Rosh Hashanah, Klal Yisrael prays for a positive judgment from Hashem. On Yom Kippur, Hashem formalizes and signs the final decree. In order to achieve a positive decree, we send the he-goat to Azazel as an allowance from which Eisav and his descendants sustain themselves the entire year. When they enjoy our material blessings, our demerits are diminished and we merit a positive signature from Hashem.

To bring atonement upon Bnei Yisrael for all their sins once a year. (16:34)

Yom Kippur is not the only Festival that occurs once a year. Yet, the Torah emphasizes its singular annual occurrence. Why? Horav Eliyahu Lapian, zl, the venerable Mashgiach of Kfar Chasidim, asked this question in his shmuess, ethical discourse, on Yom Kippur 1960 shortly before Neilah, the Final Prayer of the day. In his reply, he cited the Talmud in Moed Katan 28 in which Chazal explain the juxtaposition of the death of Miriam upon the Parah Adumah, Red Heifer. Just as the Parah Adumah atones, so, too, does missas tzaddikim, the passing of the righteous, achieve atonement for Klal Yisrael.

By implication, Chazal are teaching us that it is possible to have more than one Yom Kippur during the course of the year. The passing of a tzaddik atones for his immediate family. If he is a great tzaddik, the effect of the atonement will be more widespread, and even his community will achieve atonement. If the gadol hador, preeminent Torah leader of the generation, passes away, it atones for the sins of the entire generation. This is the explanation of the words, "once a year." The Torah implies to us that Yom Kippur, with its concomitant atonement effect, should only occur once a year. In other words, we should not need the additional effect of a tzaddik's passing to remove the taint caused by our sins.

It occurred that shortly after Kol Nidrei, the opening prayer of Yom Kippur, was chanted, the gadol hador, the Brisker Rav, zl, passed away in Yerushalayim. No one outside of Yerushalayim knew of his passing until after Yom Kippur. How Rav Elya Lopian knew remains a puzzle. Furthermore, the Brisker Rav's son, Horav Yosef Dov, related that shortly before his father's passing, the Brisker Rav had said, "This year we will have two Yom Kippurim; one will go, and the other will come."

You shall observe My decrees and My laws, which man shall carry out and by which he shall live. (18:5)

In his later years, The Brisker Rav, zl, was weak and infirm. Indeed, his close disciples sensed that every moment of his life was a struggle to fulfill the mitzvah of V'chai bohem, "And

by which he shall live." When he took his various medicines, he would do so as if he was performing the greatest mitzvah. Every breath that he took was a mitzvah of "staying alive," simply to live as a Jew, because Hashem has given us this mitzvah. Horav Ezriel Tauber, Shlita, recalls that when his father became old, he was relegated to spending his days in a wheelchair. He could do nothing for himself. Everything was done for him. This was in stark contrast to his younger days, when - as a vibrant powerhouse of energy - he was able to raise kavod Shomayim, the honor of Heaven, by reaching out to thousands of Jews. Obviously, his present, sorry state catalyzed much depression. His children were always seeking ways to comfort and encourage him.

Once Rav Ezriel said to his father, "You know Hashem really did a great justice for you." His father looked back at him incredulously. "Let me explain," Rav Ezriel continued. "Tell me, Father, which mitzvah in the Torah have you never fulfilled lishmah, for the sake of the mitzvah?" His father's shock became even greater. Was there a mitzvah that had eluded his appropriate performance? He had tried to perform each and every mitzvah meticulously, to the fine letter of the law. To what was his son alluding?

"Yes, Father, there is one mitzvah that you did not perform for the sake of the mitzvah: the mitzvah of V'chai bohem, "And by which he shall live." The Torah admonishes us to live as Jews, just for that purpose - to live as Jews. You, Father, have always lived to fulfill mitzvos, to perform acts of loving-kindness. Every breath that you have taken was to do something to elevate kavod Shomayim. You have never lived, however, just for the purpose of living. Have you ever taken a breath and said, "I am breathing solely for the purpose of fulfilling the mitzvah of V'chai bohem, so that there will be another living Jew in the world?"

"What did Hashem do for you? He provided you with the opportunity to serve Him fully. Seeing that every minute of your day was devoted to carrying out mitzvos, He saw to it that you could no longer do anything else but live for Him."

What a beautiful and powerful thought! Whoever would think that when Hashem removes our faculties, He is simultaneously providing us with an opportunity to live for Him and not for any other reason? Unquestionably, one must be on a very elevated plateau of spiritual conviction to understand what it means to live - just for the purpose of living as a Jew.

It happened that this past week, as I was reading this thought concerning the Brisker Rav, I also came across a poignant article about another Jewish hero, one who has recently passed away. He literally inspired thousands with his awesome faith and conviction. He exemplified living for the purpose of living as a Jew, since his physical condition did not allow him to carry out many activities. His name was Mikey Butler, zl, a giant of middos and emunah who spent more than half of his twenty-four years of life in hospitals.

I never met Mikey, but when he passed away, a friend of his called me just to talk. Mikey was sick all of his life, yet he lived every minute fully, for the purpose of living. He lived on the threshold of death with a powerful belief in the meaning and value of life. His life story is a tale of courage, faith and triumph. Every minute of life that Hashem granted him was used to live as a Jew should live. He never complained. Two months before Mikey passed away - at a time when he could no longer see, hear, breathe, walk or talk - Mikey said, "G-d is good." Indeed, Mikey coined a phrase, a motto by which we should all live: "Day by glorious day." He sought

every opportunity to perform acts of chesed and to inspire others, which he successfully accomplished. He wanted so badly to live one day as a healthy person, without the multitudes of medicine that had become his daily staple. He never got his wish. He did, however, live his life to its fullest potential, using every minute that was allotted to him just to continue living as a Jew. His life was a source of inspiration to thousands. His story will continue on to serve as a blessing for him and a source of encouragement and hope to the many who will look to Mikey as the symbol of V'chai bohem.

You shall not present any of your children to pass through for molech, and do not profane the Name of your G-d. (18:21)

Sforno gives a powerful explanation for the sin of giving one's child to the molech, which has practical application in our lives. One who brings animal sacrifices to Hashem - but offers his children as sacrifices to the molech - demonstrates his priorities. He indicates his true allegiance. He gives his most precious possessions, his children, to the idol, while he gives his material possessions to Hashem. He thereby demonstrates his true loyalties.

Horav Shmuel Walkin, zl, notes that this occurs in our own times. We see fine, upstanding, observant Jews who contribute large sums of money to yeshivos to support Torah study. Yet, they send their most precious possessions, their children, elsewhere. The yeshivah is not adequate for their children. One can demonstrate no greater support of a yeshivah than to send his own children to study there. Writing a check is not as great a commitment to an institution as "contributing" one's own son. Regrettably, there are no plaques for that type of contribution.

For on this day, he shall provide atonement for you to cleanse you, from all of your sins. (16:30)

Yom Kippur provides atonement - if it is not too late. Horav Yitzchak Blazar, zl, the famous Rav Itzele Peterburger, primary disciple of Horav Yisrael Salanter, zl, spoke prior to Rosh Hashanah in the Bais Hamussar of Kovno. After his ethical discourse, the assemblage began to recite various perakim, chapters, from Sefer Tehillim. At the end, they together recited the verses of Shema Koleinu, Hear our Voices, a heart-rending appeal which follows the Selichos prayer. When they reached the pasuk, Al tashlicheinu l'eis ziknah, "Do not discard us when we grow old," Rav Itzele stopped, turned around to the kahal, those gathered in prayer, and related the following story:

The Czar Nikolai conscripted men into the Russian Army in a manner unprecedented in its cruelty. Once they were in, it was extremely difficult to leave. Being a soldier in the Czar's army was a lifelong ordeal. Anyone of draftable age would hide from the "recruiters," knowing fully well what it would mean if they were drafted. Anyone caught avoiding the draft was immediately sent to Siberia. There, they would work at hard labor in the frigid cold without any letup. Most of those who ended up in Siberia were never heard from again.

One day, the Czar made an announcement to all of his subjects. As a one-time dispensation, he was allowing anyone who had previously been avoiding conscription to come

forward and all would be forgiven. They would be "accepted" into the army, and their pasts would be overlooked.

The announcement provided results for the Czar. Tens of thousands of Russians came out of hiding. Young, strong men, middle-aged and older men, stood together in the recruitment centers waiting to be accepted into the Czar's army. As bad as the army was, it was a fate that was far more favorable than Siberia. The officers walked into the rooms and immediately separated the young, strong men from the older applicants. These young men were immediately inducted into the army, while the others were taken to a kangaroo court where an army judge was to decide their fate.

"How could this be?" they clamored to the judge. "We were told that if we come forth, we would be inducted into the army." The judge looked at them and laughed, "Yes, the young, strong ones will be inducted into the army. What does the army need from you? You are no longer strong. You cannot fight. As far as the Czar is concerned, you are worthless. Yes, we will take you to Siberia where you can live out the rest of your lives. You should have come forth earlier when you could have provided a service. Now, we have no use for you."

As Rav Itzele finished the story, all those assembled began to cry. A number of them fainted. They understood the meaning of the story and its relationship to the Selichah, Al tashlicheinu.

Rav Itzele continued, "We entreat Hashem, Hashiveinu Hashem eilacha v'nashuvah, Return us Hashem to You, and we will repent. When a young man, with his whole life ahead of him, utters these words, there is some validity to them. He will be accepted by Hashem. He will grow and mature as a returnee. When an older man, however, one who has enjoyed much of life, supplicates these words, is there any efficacy to his request? This is why we cry out to Hashem, Please do not discard us when we grow old. When we age, we need even greater compassion. Please, Hashem, do not discard us like a worthless object that has little value."

Perhaps we may supplement this with a thought from the Mezritcher Maggid, zl. He explains that every person is sent to this world to perform a function, to fulfill a purpose. Once that purpose has been completed, he is called back. In order to increase our longevity, every person should accept upon himself new and greater responsibilities, so that there will be a "need" for him to remain on this world.

You shall observe My decrees and My laws, which man shall carry out and by which he shall live. (18:5)

Targum Onkelos explains the words, V'chai bahem, "By which he shall live," as referring to chayei alma, eternal life. In other words, as the Chafetz Chaim, zl, explains in his preface to the Mishnah Berurah, the Torah is the spiritual food of the neshamah, soul. By studying Torah in this world, we are preparing ourselves for chayei olam, eternal life in Olam Habba. This is the meaning of the phrase, V'chayei olam nota b'esocheinu, "He planted eternal life within us." With the study of Torah, we plant the seeds from which we will one day subsist in the eternal world.

We neither have any idea of the value of every minute of Torah study nor can we even begin to grasp the meaning of the word "eternal." For every moment of Torah study, we earn a portion of eternity - a concept which is incomprehensible to us. To demonstrate the incredible value of even one moment of Torah study, Horav Yaakov Beifus, Shlita, relates a story concerning the Chafetz Chaim. When Horav Naftali Tropp, zl, the Rosh Yeshivah of Radin, was gravely ill, the yeshivah students decided that each of them would donate a certain amount of their time studying Torah as a merit for a refuah sheleimah, speedy, complete recovery. They decided to include the Chafetz Chaim, whose love for Rav Naftali was overwhelming. They approached the great sage and asked if he would contribute a portion of time for Rav Naftali's benefit. The Chafetz Chaim listened to them intently before responding, "I will contribute one minute of my time for a refuah sheleimah for Rav Naftali." The students who heard this could not conceal their incredulous reactions to the revered sage's donation. The Chafetz Chaim could not help noticing their surprise. He said, "You have no idea of the infinite value of one minute of Torah study. I dedicate the incredible reward achieved for one minute of Torah study to Rav Naftali's refuah!"

Rav Beifus writes that he heard this story from Horav Shlomo Zalmen Aurbach, zl, who added that the Chafetz Chaim's remarks left an overwhelming impression on the yeshivah. We may add that, now that we have some idea of the vast reward earned for one minute of Torah learning, we should shudder to think of the other side of the coin - the negative aspect of wasting a minute of time.

Living a life of Torah is more than a motto, it is as Jewish life should be lived. Chazal have a phrase that aptly describes that which should not be a Jew's focus in life: Manichin chayeit olam v'oskin b'chayeit shaah, "They leave the eternal life, and are involved with temporary life (Shabbos 10a)." While we certainly live on this temporary world, it should not be the focus and thrust of our existence. Our lives should have a deeper meaning, a more profound set of values. Horav Shalom Schwadron, zl, would often cite the following story which is written in *The Maggid Speaks* by Rabbi Peysach Krohn. Rav Belfus cites the episode, adding an ethical perspective to it.

Ten years after the passing of the Gaon M'Vilna, many of his disciples decided to leave Europe to settle in Eretz Yisrael. Indeed, this was the beginning of the Ashkenazic Yishuv, settlement, in Eretz Yisrael. The voyage was a dangerous one. The hazards were life-threatening. Yet, it would be worth it, if it would bring them to the Holy Land. It was 1809, and Horav Yisrael, zl, m'Shklov, one of the Gaon's greatest students, led a group of one hundred fifty men, women and children to Eretz Yisrael.

After a month at sea, the frail ship was besieged by torrential rain and gale force winds. Wave after wave slammed the ship, as it was wildly thrown about in the churning sea. After two days of this ceaseless misery, it became clear that the objective of reaching Eretz Yisrael was unrealistic. The hope now centered on staying alive. People were ordered to throw overboard whatever belongings they could, since every extra bit of weight added to the ship's burden. The people were left with their barest necessities. Even this seemed to no avail. The ship was still in grave danger.

The captain approached Rav Yisrael and, in the simplest terms, explained that they were at the end of the rope. In the captain's thirty years of seafaring, he had never come across such a

storm. He felt that he must warn the passengers to be prepared for the worst. Rav Yisrael was heartbroken, as he turned to his fellow travelers. They had dreamt of settling in Eretz Yisrael for years. Now, they were to prepare for their deaths instead. Could he give them some hope, something for which to aspire, a miracle? No. He had to prepare them to depart this world as a Jew, with Vidduy, confession, and teshuvah, repentance.

The Rav could hardly bear to look at the shocked faces of the passengers, as he began what would probably be his last few words to them. Restraining his tears, he said, "Soon we will be in the Olam ha'Emes, world of truth. Prior to leaving this world, one should recite Vidduy. While we usually do so quietly in order not to embarrass anyone, in this instance - since we are going to perish - it makes no difference. Moreover, the embarrassment will in itself serve as an atonement for us.

The students of the Gaon were not simple people. Each in his own right was an accomplished Torah scholar. Piety and virtue were their essence. They decided that the youngest student should begin with his Vidduy. The one chosen for the "honor" was a young man who lived near Vilna.

The wind howled, the rain slammed down on the ship, as the young man came forward. Overcome with emotion, trembling with fear, he burst into tears as he said, "For two years, I violated the mitzvah of Kibbud Av v'Eim, honoring my parents. I lied and deceived my mother daily. While I am sorry for my sin, I wish to explain the circumstances that led to it.

"I was thirteen years old when my parents moved to Vilna. We became next-door neighbors to the Gaon. In fact, we shared a common wall. One night, my father - who had just returned from a hard-day's work in his grocery store - heard the Gaon repeat the phrase, Manichin chayeit olam v'oskim b'chayeit shaah a number of times. The intensity and fervor, coupled with the repetition made such an indelible impression on my father that he immediately decided to leave his job and study Torah exclusively. He felt this was his life's mission. He must learn Torah - incessantly.

"My mother took the responsibility of supporting the family. It was too difficult to take care of nine children and run a store, so she sold the store. She supported the family by selling some bread and cleaning people's houses.

"One day, my mother gathered together the family and told us, I can no longer feed you twice each day. There is no money. We will have to make do with one meal a day. It was so difficult to watch her divide the meal into eleven portions that I could not tolerate to see my brothers and sisters live like this. I decided that I would no longer take a portion. I invented a story that the cheder, school, where I studied served lunch every day. For two years, I lived on the scraps that some of the boys left over. Every time my mother asked me if I had eaten, I lied. I now beg Hashem's forgiveness for this terrible sin."

The young man completed his story and a solemn hush fell over all those assembled. Rav Yisrael was visibly moved by what he had just heard. Despite his travail, the young man had developed into a great scholar. His piety was now clearly undisputed.

Rav Yisrael turned his head Heavenward, stretched out his hands and cried out, "Hashem Yisborach! In the first Selichos before Rosh Hashanah we entreat you saying, Pnei na el ha'telaos v'al la'chataos, "Turn to our travails and not to our sins." We beg You to look at our afflictions, -

the tzaros, pain and anguish that we have endured -and not to look at our sins. Now I plead with You, Hashem, to look at our sins! Look at what this young man considers his eternal sin. These are the sins of Your children. In his merit, have mercy on us."

Rav Yisrael's supplication made a powerful point. He had barely finished his plea, when the rains subsided. Sunlight soon shone through, as a Kiddush Hashem had been witnessed by all of those on board.

This story is incredible. Its messages are powerful, valuable and very meaningful. Rav Beifus emphasizes one important lesson: the underlying cause of the family's transformation. It was the Gaon's repetition of Chazal's statement rejecting materialism at the expense of spirituality. The Gaon was so inspired with Chazal's maxim that he kept reiterating it over and over with such fervency that it left a stirring impression upon his neighbor and his entire family! He was acutely aware of the significance of chayeit olam over chayeit shaah.

Let not the Land disgorge you for having contaminated it. (18:28)

Eretz Yisrael will tolerate us as long as we act appropriately, as befits a land that is pure and holy. The Maggid m'Dubno offers a valuable analogy that sheds light on the reason Klal Yisrael is compelled to go into exile. A wealthy man exemplified the middah, character trait, of hachnosas orchim, welcoming wayfarers and providing for their immediate needs. His home was a veritable restaurant that fed anyone in need - from the abject poor to the business traveler who needed a home-cooked meal and a bed. Acutely aware of the varied backgrounds of his guests, he divided his dining room into two rooms that provided for the individual needs of his guests. The poor subsisted on breads, potatoes, herring and onions. Those who were used to a more refined diet of meats, fish and salads ate in the other dining room.

Once, a well-dressed traveler appeared at the wealthy man's home, and the host promptly seated him in the dining room in which he felt he would be most comfortable. Surprisingly, when the guest looked at the small serving of fancy bread and vegetable salad, he quickly went over to the table set for the poor and began to partake of a hefty portion of bread and potatoes. Apparently, his eating habits did not coincide with his station in life. Noticing this, the host went over and said, "I see that you are trying to take food from the other table. Why do you not simply go over there, sit down and eat to your heart's content?"

The Navi in Chavakuk 3:6 says, "He stood and measured out the land; He looked and dispersed nations." Chazal explain that Hashem assessed each nation in order to determine the appropriate place for it to live and thrive. Gilaad was home to people that were bloodthirsty and manifest no respect for human life. Bavel was a country in which people who were always angry - and were constantly involved in disputes - lived. Egypt was the center of witchcraft, and the list goes on. Eretz Yisrael is a place where spirituality thrives. Its kedushah, holiness, and taharah, purity, are suitable for achieving a high degree of spirituality. There is no Torah like the Torah studied in Eretz Yisrael. Nevuah, prophecy, which is one of the highest levels of Divine Inspiration, only reposes on an individual while he is in Eretz Yisrael.

When Klal Yisrael sins and behaves in a manner befitting the gentile nations of the world, Hashem says to them, "Why should you live in Eretz Yisrael and stretch out your hand to partake of the lifestyle endemic to chutz la'aretz, the land outside of Eretz Yisrael? Why live in the Holy Land and live like a gentile? If you want to adapt their lifestyle - go to live with them!" This is what the Torah means when it says, "The land will disgorge us." Economy class meals are not served in the first-class section.

For on this day he shall provide atonement for you. (16:30)

In a drasha, lecture, during the month of Elul, the Klausenberger Rebbe, zl, told the following story. The author of the Yeshuos Yaakov lived in the city of Yarislov for a number of years following his marriage. He davened in that city's main shul. He witnessed the following story. One year, on Erev Yom Kippur shortly after Kol Nidrei, a man entered the shul and walked up to the amud to lead the service. This person gave the outward appearance of piety, virtue and dignity. He did not ask permission to daven; he just went up to lead the service. Something about this individual's appearance and his awe-inspiring davening prevented anyone from stopping him from "taking over," even though there were regular chazzanim in the shul.

As soon as the visitor completed Kol Nidrei, he went on to lead Maariv. After Maariv, when everyone left to go home, he stayed in the shul to recite Tehillim all through the night. Certainly, his physical stamina was superhuman. In fact, people began to suspect that he might be a malach, Heavenly Angel. Morning came, and the visitor was standing by the podium prepared to lead the services. This continued on all day: Shacharis, Krias HaTorah; he even blew the Shofar; Mussaf and Minchah. As they prepared for the climax of the day, the Neilah service, everyone was sure that this person was not a human being. How could anyone stand on his feet all day without food and rest, praying in such a heart-rending and emotional manner, and not be superhuman? After Neilah, the visitor led the Maariv service and wished everyone a Gut Yom Tov, referring to the upcoming festival of Succos. One of the more distinguished members of the shul invited the "Heavenly" visitor to his house to make Havdalah and break the fast, to which the visitor accepted.

The Yeshuos Yaakov, who was privy to the entire drama of the day, felt that now they would know whether the visitor was a human or an angel based upon whether or not he would eat. When a plate of food was placed in front of the guest, he said he was not hungry; he needed, however, a Gemara Succah so that he could learn. He said that he felt weak, not having had the opportunity to learn all day. The visitor proceeded to learn all night without pausing to eat. When he completed the entire mesechta, tractate, he went to shul to daven Shacharis. After davening, the people discovered that the visitor was none other than the saintly Kedushas Levi, Horav Levi Yitzchok, zl, m'Berditchev.

There is a postscript to this story, which conveys the essence of this narrative's profound message. The Klausenberger Rebbe noted that after an entire day of tefillos, which surely pierced the heavens, after the emotional pleas of a heart so pure that he was like an angel, the Berditchever still felt "weak." He needed his blatt Gemara, his Rashi and Tosfos to sustain himself. Torah is, after all, the soul's true sustenance.

Like the practice of the land of Egypt...and like the practice of the land of Canaan...you should not do. (18:3)

The Egyptian and Canaanite nations were the most degenerate of all nations. Immorality was their way of life, licentiousness was their culture. We are adjured not to follow in their statutes and traditions. The Sefarim HaKedoshim add that even in those areas which are permitted to us, we should act with restraint, holiness and refinement. In other words, we should abide by a Jewish standard of behavior, a Torah approach to living. As Torah Jews, we must strive to act, live and interact differently than the manner which is in vogue in contemporary society. Our lives are different, our goals are different, our purpose for living is different. Therefore, why would we want to act like those around us? Regrettably, the insecure nature of some of our people drives them to behave in a manner which, unfortunately, conforms quite well with contemporary society. The Piaseczner Rebbe, zl, the great tzaddik, wrote, lectured and inspired the broken-hearted Jews of the Warsaw Ghetto during World War II. When he reached the milestone age of forty, he said, "What should I accept upon myself? What should I undertake? To learn more? I think that, to the best of my knowledge, I waste no time. To distance myself from lust and desire? Baruch Hashem, I think I have overcome that. What am I missing? Pashut, simply - to be a Jew! I visualize myself as a human being with everything but a neshamah, soul. I now wait to convert myself to be a Yehudi!" What a penetrating statement from an individual whose moral/spiritual rectitude served as the paradigm of what a human being can achieve. The Slonimer Rebbe, Shlita, explains that one can look and act like a Jew, he can go through the motions of Jewishness, but he can still lack his essential Yahadus, Judaism, which must penetrate to his inner psyche. Indeed, when the great tzaddikim recited the daily blessing of "Shelo osani goi," "that He did not make me a gentile," they would momentarily reflect, asking themselves, "Is there any organ or part of me that might be lacking in Yiddishkeit?"

You shall observe My decrees and My judgments, which man shall carry and live by them. (18:5) In the Talmud Yoma 85, Chazal derive from this pasuk that the mitzvos are given to us to live by - and not to die by. In other words, we are obligated not to allow the fulfillment of a mitzvah to stand in the way of human life, except for the three cardinal sins: murder; adultery, and idol-worship. While there are other places which imply that pikuach nefesh, saving a life or any life-threatening situation, does not override these three sins, there is a profound lesson to be derived from the implication of "vchai bohem". Horav Yitzchok Goldwasser, Shlita, infers from here that a life of murder, adultery, or idol-worship is not living; it is death! Hence, the command, "Vchai bohem"; "and live by them," does not apply to these sins.

With this idea in mind, he explains the connections between the destruction of the first Bais HaMikdash, and these three sins, which Chazal say provided the catalyst for its destruction. The Bais HaMikdash is commonly referred to as "Bais Chayeinu," the house of our life. The Bais HaMikdash is the source of our spiritual sustenance. It supports and sustains our spiritual well-being. When these three sins are rampant in Klal Yisrael, a force runs counter to the life-preserving effect of the Bais HaMikdash, stimulating its premature "demise".

You shall not present any of Your children to pass to the Molech. (18:21)

The Bais Hamedrash of Horav Yehoshua Tzeitles, zl, was eclectic in nature. Jews from all walks of life felt comfortable entering to ask questions or to have a dialogue with Rav Yehoshua. At times, some of the most erudite Christian Bible scholars would come to ask him to elucidate some of the "difficult" passages in the Torah and Chazal. Rav Yehoshua was patient, responding with lucid and penetrating answers to the most complex questions. Once, a Christian scholar asked him about Chazal's commentary to the prohibition of passing one's child through the deadly fires of the Molech idol. Chazal state that one incurs the death penalty only if he has passed one of his children through the flames. If he, however, has passed all of his children through, he does not become subject to the death penalty. Why? One would think that the more one does, the greater the sin and, similarly, the punishment.

Rav Yehoshua responded, "Your question is truly troubling. A similar question may be asked in regard to the laws of Terumah, a portion of one's grain that must be separated from his silo and given to the Kohen. Chazal have not established a set amount to be given for Terumah. Indeed, "one stalk of wheat exempts the entire silo from Terumah. "If he consecrates the entire silo for Terumah however, it is considered nothing, and it does not become Terumah. What is the logic behind this ruling? If one kernel is sufficient to exempt an entire field, certainly if one were to relinquish the entire silo for Terumah, it should be acceptable.

"Our Sages, in their penetrating wisdom, have taught us a profound lesson with this law," said Rav Yehoshua. "The Torah requires a Jew to share with the Kohen. To that end, he is to give a portion of his harvest as Terumah to the Kohen. Some people might give more than others, but, when one goes and gives everything to the Kohen, it is considered irresponsible. Such a person, who jeopardizes his family's financial stability by giving everything away to the Kohen, is not completely stable. We do not accept contributions from such a person, since we would only be adding to his emotional insecurity. Likewise, one who sacrifices his child to the Molech, as the pagans would do, is considered to be an idol worshiper and should be punished as such. One who sacrifices all of his children to the Molech is not considered a devoted idol worshiper. He is not an idealist; he should be committed to a home for the criminally insane. We judge only those who are certifiably sane, but nonetheless sin. This person does not fit that standard."

And (he) shall provide atonement for himself and for his household. (16:6)

The Kohen Gadol gained atonement by pronouncing vidui, confession, for his own - as well as his family's -- transgressions. The Torah seems to place emphasis upon the Kohen Gadol's "baiso," household. Indeed, in the beginning of Meseches Yoma the Mishnah states that we prepare another woman for the Kohen Gadol in the event his wife dies prior to the Yom Kippur service. The Kohen Gadol who does not have a wife is disqualified from performing the avodah service. Horav Moshe Shternbuch, Shlita, renders a practical reason for this halachah.

Without a wife one lacks sheleimus, completion/perfection. He is deficient, lacking an integral component in completing himself as a man. The individual who represents Klal Yisrael on Yom Kippur must be an adam ha'shaleim, a complete person. On the holiest day of the year, when we seek atonement to perfect ourselves, we must stand before Hashem b'sheleimus.

Horav Shternbuch distinguishes between the Jewish religion and the theology of the gentile nations. Christian dogma expounds that one cannot be holy if he is married. Sanctity and marriage just do not seem to coincide - according to their beliefs. Consequently, in order to maintain their virtue and holiness, their priests do not marry. This is not consistent with what we have been taught. The Kohen Gadol, who must sanctify himself to the ultimate level of kedushah on the holiest day of the year, can perform the avodah only if he is married. The Christians seem to have a different perspective on sheleimus.

This halacha also repudiates the claim of the Torah's liberal antagonists that women are not viewed on an equal footing with men; we derive from here the exact opposite perspective. A woman is a man's life partner, without whom he is considered incomplete. What greater proof is needed to substantiate woman's equality? Regrettably, for those that question the Torah, no answer is sufficient.

And (he) shall provide atonement for himself and for his household and for all the congregation of Yisrael. (16:17)

Horav Moshe Shternbuch, Shlita, derives an important lesson for all of us from this pasuk. Before one extends himself for klal work, community endeavors, he should ascertain that everything is in order with his own family. Many good-willed, good-minded individuals respond to Klal Yisrael's needs. They hear the cries of the oppressed and needy, but at whose expense? Who takes over the role of the father when he is out saving the world? Children need both parents. One should at least do for his own children what he wholeheartedly does for other people's children.

Regarding those askanim, lay leaders, who feel that the merit of working for Klal Yisrael will elevate them to a position in which they do not have to perfect themselves, the Torah seems to have a different idea. The Kohen Gadol must see to the needs and failings of his own family before he can go out to act on behalf of Klal Yisrael.

*And (he) shall place them upon the head of the he-goat, and send it with a designated man to the desert. The he-goat will bear upon itself all their iniquities to an inhabited land.
(16:21,22)*

The Kli Yakar cites Chazal who say that the word, "avonosam," "their iniquities" is an acronym for two words: "avonos - tam", alluding to the sins of he who is called the tam - wholesome - Yaakov Avinu. He explains that whoever causes others to sin, carries the onus of guilt for all the sins which he catalyzed. Eisav and his guardian angel are the ones whose goal it is to bring Klal Yisrael the descendants of Yaakov - ish tam - to sin. It is, therefore, appropriate that Yaakov's sins - which were caused through Eisav's "sponsorship" - should be carried away and brought "back" to Eisav's guardian angel. The sins of "Bnei Tam" are sent l'azazel, to the saros shel Eisav, the angel who represents all that is evil in Eisav.

Horav Matisyahu Solomon, Shlita, derives from here the profundity of shiluach seir l'azazel, sending the he-goat into the wilderness. When Klal Yisrael stood before Hashem on Yom Kippur, divested of their physical dimension, they came to the realization that olam hazeh, the temporary world in which we live, is nothing more than a vestibule, a stepping-stone to Olam Habah, the Eternal World, the World to Come. They began to wonder: How did they sink to such a nadir of sin, to the depths of depravity, to transgress before the Almighty, to rebel against the Creator? They realized that it was Eisav the wicked who presented this world --with all its beauty -- as something more than temporary and fleeting. He has influenced them to the allure of this world through the blandishments of the yetzer hora, evil inclination. They regrettably fell victim to his guile and were swayed by his cunning, as he convinced them to turn their backs on the Almighty. By nature, we know the truth: It is Eisav who has alienated us by presenting olam hazeh as an end unto itself. We send the he-goat -- with everything it represents -- to the source of our iniquity.

We now also understand why the he-goat is sent away through an ish iti, designated man. Chezuni, citing Chazal, explains that an ish iti is a person who senses that his "eis", time, has come. "Iti", from the word "eis", refers to an individual whom we know, via Divine inspiration, will not live till next Rosh Hashanah. Horav Y. Weintraub, zl, who was rav in Pinsk, explains that one who is acutely aware of his impending demise rejects this world. He ignores and disregards the blandishments of this world. All of the desires and lusts that plague others have no significance to him. He becomes a spiritual person, abnegating himself of his physical dimension. He is the perfect person to effect atonement for Klal Yisrael on this holiest of days. It is specifically he who repudiates the allure of this world, who is not captivated by its enticements, that has license to send the he-goat to its death. He truly understands what Eisav

and his co-horts have done to us. He can well relate to the significance and meaning of Yom Kippur.

You shall observe My decrees and My judgements, which man shall carry out and live by them.
(18:8)

Rashi explains that "v'chai bahem," "and live by them," is a reference to Olam Habah, the World to Come. In the Talmud Chullin 142 a, Chazal state this fact in regard to the two mitzvos for which the reward of long life is recorded in the Torah: Kibud Av v'Eim, honoring one's parents; and Shiluach Ha'kein, sending away the mother bird. To support this idea, they recount a story in which a father instructed his son to climb a ladder to retrieve some young chicks in a nest after first sending away the mother bird. He carried out his father's wishes, sending away the mother bird. As he was climbing down the ladder with the young chicks, however, he slipped and fell off the ladder. He subsequently died as a result of his fall. Certainly, if arichas yamim, longevity, was to occur in this world, why did the boy die? He was fulfilling not one -- but two -- mitzvos whose reward is longevity. This supports the thesis that "chaim," life, is a reward which one "collects" in Olam Habah.

Nachlas Tzvi cites an incredible story that reinforces the concept of "life" in Olam Habah: It happened that during the Russian Kaiser's birthday, a group of young Jewish children were forcibly taken from their families and conscripted into the army. These Cantonists, as they were called, were lined up at the river under the watchful eye of the priest who was to baptize them. One can only begin to imagine the emotions of these young children at this most tragic moment. The signal was given, and they were told to enter the water. The priest was about to issue his official proclamation welcoming these innocent children into the Christian religion, when something strange happened. All of the children screamed out in unison, "Naase v'nishma," "We will do and we will listen," and they jumped into the water, but did not resurface. They went to their deaths with the same clarion cry that their ancestors proclaimed as they stood at Har Sinai about to accept the Torah.

This was not always the case. Many Jewish children have been baptized and, ultimately, lost forever to the Jewish People. The rabbis of various communities did everything within their means either to rescue these hapless children or to speak to them in a manner that would encourage them not to relinquish their faith. For example, the story is told that once Horav Yitzchok Izak Chaver, zl, the famous rav of Vilkovisk, came to a small town in Lithuania. As he entered the Jewish ghetto, he was met with the heart-rending screams of parents whose children had been grabbed and were about to be sent away - forever. Quickly, he removed his rabbinic

garb and donned the outfit worn by the Russian/Christian peasant. He went out in the street shaking back and forth, acting like a drunk in an advanced state of inebriation. Noticing the commotion he was causing, the police called him aside and asked to see his passport. Rav Yitzchak Izak continued his ruse, so that he was remanded to the jail cell for the night. This was, of course, his intent, since this was the same prison in which the children were being held in preparation for being shipped out the next day.

Once in jail, the rav was able to locate the children. After doing so, he revealed his true identity to them and began to speak to them about Judaism, in an attempt to inspire them for one last time before they were shipped off to spiritual oblivion. He related stories of faith and conviction, telling them how our ancestors had given up their lives so that they could live as Jews. Mesiras nefesh, self-sacrifice for Torah and mitzvos, is the primary component in avodas Hashem, serving the Almighty. He implored them to face up to the challenge that would now confront them. "Observe Shabbos, keep kosher, never forget Hashem - even if they rake your skin to death." He described the strength of conviction that was exemplified by the Asarah Harugei Malchus, ten Tanaim, whose lives were taken under the most cruel and painful means; he related the superhuman strength of Chanah and her seven sons, who gave up their lives in defiance of the king, rather than bow down to an idol.

As dawn broke, the guards came for the children. In his parting words, the rav turned to the children and spoke with great emotion, "Holy children, we now are about to separate from each other. I am going to be punished with many painful lashes because I have come to you. You are leaving to face the most trying challenges to your faith. I do not know if I will still be alive when you return, but we will meet again, in Olam Habah. I hope that I will not be eternally disgraced before the Heavenly Court." Those words, emanating from a loving heart entered into the young hearts of the children, imbuing them with the strength and determination to withstand the challenge to their faith.

You shall not present any of your children to pass through for Molech and do not profane the name of your G-d. (18:22)

The thought of delivering one's child to the Molech god is horrifying. Indeed, we have no idea of the mindset of those who fell into the grasp of the pagan gods. Idolatry was rampant. Unless one was totally suffused with Torah, he was subject to the allure and blandishment of the idols and everything for which they stood. Targum Yonasan ben Uziel goes so far as to maintain that the Molech prohibition is an admonishment against any form of intermarriage. A parent has a responsibility to see to it that his children are raised and educated in such a manner that they

will choose a mate who will maintain their standard of spiritual values and aspirations. As parents, we must take an active role in making sure that each of our children marries either a ben Torah or a bas Yisrael b'melo muvan ha'milah, in the full extent of the word. How else can we hope to have grandchildren who will adhere to our noble heritage? We are responsible for the education our children receive, as well as for the results of that education.

The Chofetz Chaim, zl., writes that an individual who sends his child to a school where he will be exposed to heretical teachings is included in the Molech prohibition. After all, in both circumstances the innocent child is being exposed to idolatry of the lowest order. One should be prepared to spend all of his money to provide a Torah education for his child. The Chofetz Chaim concludes that the prohibition against sending a child to a school that teaches kefirah, heresy, supercedes the rules of the civil government. Even if one lives in a place where the government demands all children must be educated in such a school - one is forbidden to listen. Evidently, Hashem's law takes precedence over the secular government. Regrettably, many of us do not understand and accept this idea.

Horav Moshe Shternbuch, Shlita, supplements this, positing that the parents will have to answer one day for any transgressions perpetrated by their child as a result of the deficient education he has received. Parents have an enormous responsibility in raising their children. The Almighty grants us the privilege to raise the children that He so graciously shares with us. Unfortunately, many of us lose sight of this most precious gift.

You shall safeguard My change that these abominable traditions not be done. (18:30)

We may note that shemiras ha'mitzvos, mitzvah observance, guarding Hashem's laws and precepts, is not presented here as a means for spiritual advancement. Rather, it is a preventative measure to protect the individual from sinking into the abyss of the abominate. From the zenith of virtue to the nadir of depravity - that is the essence of mitzvah observance. One who observes can, and will, rise to the pinnacle of holiness; one who does not, can quite possibly fall into the depths of immorality.

Horav David Shneuer, Shlita, feels that this is the specific reason that Chazal instituted the reading of the parsha of arayos, the chapter dealing with immoral and illicit relationships, during Minchah on Yom Kippur. One would think that at such a time, when one is physically and emotionally drained, when he has reached his lowest point of humility; when he no longer has the ability to even think about falling prey to his base desires, the Torah reading would deal with subjects that address spiritual ascendancy - not immorality and prurience.

The Torah is acutely aware of man's base nature and weakness in withstanding the evil inclinations, the challenge to his commitment. The Torah is conveying to us that, regardless of the moment, one's spiritual achievements notwithstanding, he can fall - and fall hard - even on Yom Kippur! That is the message. We only have to accept the warning.