

PENINIM ON THE TORAH

PARSHA BOOKLET

Rabbi H. Leib Scheinbaum

PARASHAT MATTOS

If a man takes a vow to Hashem... whatever comes from his mouth shall he do. (30:3)

The Talmud Kesubos 62b relates a fascinating story. The great Tanna Rabbi Akiva was a shepherd for Kalba Savua, one of the richest Jews at the time. Kalba Savua's daughter noted the modesty and refined character manifest by R' Akiva, who, at the time, was no more than an ignorant shepherd. She approached him, asking, "If I become betrothed to you, will you go to the yeshivah to study Torah?" He replied in the affirmative. He betrothed her in secret, and she sent him away to the yeshivah to study Torah. When her father heard what she had done, he cut her off financially. Suddenly, Kalba Savua's daughter was transformed from an enormously wealthy young lady to someone facing abject poverty.

Kalba Savua made a vow prohibiting his daughter from benefitting from his possessions. A vow of this kind is binding and can be annulled only by a sage or a panel of three competent laymen who form a *bais din*, court of law. Twelve years went by, and Rabbi Akiva returned as one of Klal Yisrael's preeminent teachers. Accompanied by twelve thousand students, he entered the city. As he approached his home, he overheard a certain old man asking Rabbi Akiva's wife, "How long will you wait for him? You are leading a life of living widowhood." Her response has become a classic, "If he would listen to me, he would sit in the yeshivah for another twelve years!" Upon hearing this, R' Akiva turned around and returned to the yeshiva for another twelve years.

Upon his second return, he was accompanied by twenty-four thousand students. His wife went out to greet him. When she reached him, she fell on her face and began to kiss his foot. When one of R' Akiva's attendants was about to push her away, the sage commented, "Leave her alone. The Torah that is mine and the Torah that is yours belong to her."

So ends the saga of the great Rabbi Akiva, relating how he became the great Torah leader. It was all because his future wife saw the enormous potential that was just begging to be released from within him. The story, however, continues. When Kalba Savua heard that a great sage was coming to town, he decided to meet with him, so that he might obtain an annulment of his vow. According to halachah, the sage or the *bais din* must find a *pesach*, an opening, a circumstance, which if it had been fully considered by the vower, would have prevented him from declaring the vow in the first place. It can then be annulled. Perhaps, R' Akiva could discover such a circumstance, because Kalba Savua was

getting older and he no longer wanted to see his daughter languishing in poverty.

Kalba Savua approached R' Akiva, totally unaware that, in fact, he was his son-in-law, to ask him to annul his vow. R' Akiva asked, "Did you make the vow even if your son-in-law would eventually become a great Torah scholar?" He replied, "Rebbe, even if he were to become proficient in just one chapter of Mishnah, or even just one halachah, I would not have made the vow." R' Akiva looked at him and said, "Ani hu, I am he." Kalba Savua's reaction was one of intense joy, as he bequeathed half of his possessions to his son-in-law.

This ends our story and brings me to a comment made by Tosfos, which is the real purpose of my relating the story. There is a halachic principle that a sage may not annul a vow on the basis of a circumstance that was non-existent at the time of the vow. This is referred to as a pesach b'ta'us. If so, how could R' Akiva have annulled the vow based upon a circumstance that had as yet not materialized, since he was certainly not yet a sage when the vow had been made? If R' Akiva had been a scholar and Kalba Savua unaware of this circumstance, then there would have been grounds for declaring this vow null and void. R' Akiva, however, was not yet much of anything. He was a refined, humble man who exemplified incredible character, but he was not yet a scholar.

Tosfos comments: "Although he was not a sage when the vow was made, the fact that he had entered a yeshivah to study Torah and had begun to immerse himself in the Torah was sufficient that it could be expected that he would become a great sage." The potential was present, and the wellsprings of Torah were being tapped. What more did he require?

Tosfos is teaching us a powerful lesson, one that I feel every parent and certainly every teacher should review - constantly. Once one enters a yeshivah to study Torah - once one begins studying Torah, the potential within him is aroused and he becomes a potential sage. The rebbe that walks into his class to deliver a Torah lesson should view his students as potential gedolei hador, Torah leaders! He should teach with that attitude, because that is what they are. Once a Jewish child begins studying Torah, there is no limit, no boundary, to what he can achieve. If, however, the rebbe does not realize this and adjust his attitude to this fact, he may stunt the child's ability to achieve distinction and maximize his own potential.

I believe that this is what Tosfos is conveying to us. The potential is there. It is like a faucet waiting to be opened. His entrance into the yeshivah for the purpose of limud haTorah opens that faucet and stimulates the flow - one that continues to run throughout his life.

Whatever comes from his mouth shall he do. (30:3)

Much has been written concerning the effect of man's tongue. Hashem imbued us with the power of speech for a lofty purpose. While speech is the manner in which human beings communicate, we rarely take into consideration that we use the same medium through which we communicate with people, to communicate with Hashem. Yes, we talk to G-d with the same mouth that we talk to people. While everybody is aware of this, we rarely give it much thought. The following inspirational story should give us something to consider.

The kitchen workers in the Yeshivah of Ponevez, complained to the venerable Rosh Yeshivah, Horav Elazar M. Shach, zl, about a group of bachurim, students, who, after studying until the wee hours of the morning on Shabbos night, decided to "break into" the kitchen and help themselves to

some of the cholent that had been prepared to be served Shabbos morning. Rav Shach was shocked to hear this, and immediately declared that those bachurim who had perpetrated the disgraceful act were disqualified from rendering testimony before a bais din, judicial court, on the grounds that they were thieves. Taking property from the yeshivah without permission is an act of theft. "If they are hungry," he said, "they can come to my house and I will give them food. They do not have to concern themselves with waking me. I am up at those hours!"

When the Rosh Yeshivah gave his weekly shmues, ethical discourse, to the yeshivah, he devoted a portion of it to the cholent fiasco. He explained that when Bisyah, the daughter of Pharaoh, brought the infant Moshe to the palace, she attempted to have him nursed by one of the maidservants, to no avail. Moshe refused to nurse, until a Hebrew nursemaid, who was actually his mother, Yocheved, was summoned. Why did Moshe reject the other nursemaids? Chazal explain that he thought, "Shall the mouth that is destined to speak with the Shechinah drink milk from women who themselves eat unkosher food?" Based upon the Talmud's statement, the Rashba issues a halachic ruling, which is adopted by the Rema in Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah 81:7, "A Jewish child should not be given to a non-Jewish nursemaid."

Rav Shach wondered how the Rashba could draw a general conclusion applicable to all Jews from the specific case of Moshe. The Talmud is clear in its reasoning: Moshe Rabbeinu's mouth had to remain pure because it was destined to speak with the Shechinah. Clearly, this reasoning does not apply to the average Jewish child! The Rosh Yeshivah declared that, indeed, it does apply to each and every Jewish child, because every child recites brachos daily. When we say, Baruch atah Hashem, "Blessed are You, Hashem," we are addressing G-d directly, in second person! "So," concluded Rav Shach, with a rhetorical question, "a mouth that has taken into itself stolen food - how can it dare speak to the Shechinah in prayer and in the recitation of blessings?"

Perhaps this story might serve as "food" for thought. Certainly, it should give us something to "talk" about.

*Moshe sent them - a thousand from each tribe for the legion - them and Pinchas ben Elazar the Kohen.
(31:6)*

Actually, it was Moshe Rabbeinu whom Hashem had instructed to lead the legion that would take revenge against the Midyanim. Why did he send Pinchas? Chazal explain that while Moshe had no problem leading the assault against Midyan, he felt that it was not right for him to go, since Midyan was the country in which he was protected from Pharaoh. How could he lead the army against his benefactors? The Talmud concludes with an analogy: "The well from which you drink water, do not throw stones into it."

We find a similar reaction when Moshe was instructed to raise up his staff and strike the Nile River, which would turn to blood. He felt that since the water protected him as a newborn, it would be an act of ingratitude to strike it.

Concerning the next two plagues, frogs and lice, Hashem commanded Aharon HaKoen to strike the ground. After all, the ground hid the Egyptian that Moshe had killed. He should not be the one to strike it. It was not as if the water or the earth would arise and "complain": "How could you, Moshe, after all we did for you." Nonetheless, it would have an effect on Moshe's subconscious. He was ungrateful.

Hakoras hatov, recognizing the source of one's benefit, and showing appreciation to one's benefactor, regardless if it is a human or an inanimate object, and certainly to Hashem, the Source of all good, is more than an obligation. It defines one's humanness. One who is not makir tov is simply not a mentch. He is not a refined member of the specie of creation referred to as a human. His actions bespeak the antithesis of how a human being should act.

Yosef HaTzaddik was thrust into a dungeon because of false allegations which Potifar's wife made against him. She substantiated her spurious claim by presenting his garment, which he left in her possession when she made advances towards him. Why did he simply not overpower her? Certainly, he had the ability to do so. It was because of this that he was sent to the dungeon, only to be released some time later as a result of the dreams of the chamberlain and baker. Otherwise, he might have languished in prison indefinitely, all because he refused to respond aggressively to Potifar's wife. Why was he so non-combative?

The Ramban explains that when Yosef was sold to the Egyptians, he was raised in Potifar's home. It was Potifar's wife who instructed him in the management of the house. Indeed, she played a critical role in his guidance - even if it might have been for personal gratification. Thus, Yosef was not prepared to fight with the woman who had helped him in his new home.

Horav Yisrael Abuchatzera, zl, the "Baba Sali," was a holy and pure, saintly individual who left an indelible mark on thousands of followers. When he emigrated to Eretz Yisrael in 1951, he settled in the small Negev town of Netivot. There he became a beacon of light and inspiration to thousands of people from all segments of the Jewish spectrum. When the Baba Sali came to Eretz Yisrael he was hosted by Reb Chazan Dehahn, a pious activist who had arrived two years earlier. The Baba Sali spent several weeks in the Dehahn home before relocating to his first home in Yerushalayim.

The Dehahns were not the only people who had vied for the sage's presence in their home. In fact, countless adherents competed for this singular honor. Nonetheless, the sense of appreciation manifested by the Baba Sali towards Reb Chazan Dehahn was incredible. Indeed, it showed that to him hakoras hatov was an obsession. After all, how can one forget the kindness shown to him by another fellow?

The Baba Sali's custom was to serve elaborate meals to those who came to him for advice or blessing. This custom was sharply curtailed during the Three Weeks from Tammuz 17 through Tisha B'Av, because of the spirit of mourning that prevailed in the home. He would receive visitors on a limited basis, but would not serve them a meal. With the commencement of the Nine Days, an atmosphere of sorrow seemed to engulf the household, since now they were sharing in the exile of the Shechinah.

Once, during the Nine Days, a visitor who was distantly related to the Abuchatzera family arrived at the Dehahn home with a request to see the Baba Sali, who at the time was living in Yavneh. He was dissuaded, because the sage's practice was not to greet visitors during this period. Nonetheless, the individual insisted on going, explaining that he was on a tight schedule and had to return immediately after Tisha B'Av.

The man would not accept no for an answer. He had to see the Baba Sali. Reb Chazan relented and they went to the home of the sage, where they were warmly greeted by the Rebbetzin. The sage was not happy about their arrival, because of his inability to serve an elaborate meal to such distinguished guests. It simply did not coincide with the atmosphere of mourning. It was the Rebbetzin who solved the quandary. Reminding her husband that it was the yahrtzeit-- annual anniversary-- of the passing of the Ari HaKadosh, he could commemorate the auspicious day with a seudah, meal, in honor

of the yahrtzeit and invite his distinguished guests to join him.

While the Baba Sali was basically pleased with the suggestion, he still felt that a quickly-prepared dairy meal was an unsatisfactory substitute for the type of meat dinner he would normally have served these guests. He felt that he was indebted to Reb Chazan. Thus, following the meal, he asked his guests to return for the Shabbos meal and also for the meal following the fast of Tisha B'Av. The guest, citing his tight schedule, demurred, but Reb Chazan agreed to attend. During the meal, Reb Chazan noted that the sage was unusually sad. He conjectured that this was due to the fact that Shabbos was actually Tisha B'Av and, thus, the sage was beside himself in sorrow. After a brief inquiry, he discovered that even when Tisha B'Av coincided with Shabbos, the Baba Sali would never alter his joyful demeanor. Shabbos was Shabbos! Not to allow an opportunity to learn something important to be wasted, Reb Chazan asked the sage why he was so perturbed. The Baba Sali replied that he had a dream that night that was a portent of tragedy, which he refused to divulge, because he did not want to disturb the joy of Shabbos.

That night, following Kinot, the Baba Sali and his entire family gathered in his private study and listened to the sage relate the sorrowful events of his dream. He revealed that he had seen a fire burning, and that this fire represented the passing of his daughter-in-law in France. Several hours later, the tragedy was confirmed by normal channels of communication.

Following the fast on Sunday evening, crowds of sympathizers lined up to offer their condolences to the grief-stricken family. Each of these individuals received the Baba Sali's personal attention and appreciative response. As soon as Reb Chazan entered the room, the Baba Sali arose quickly and asked him to join him in the kitchen.

"You are surely hungry and thirsty following such a long fast. The family members are presently engaged in their bereavement. May I have the privilege of serving you?" asked the Baba Sali.

"Chas v'shalom, Heaven forbid," was Reb Chazan's immediate reply. "The Rav should be my waiter? Baruch Hashem, I can take care of myself. I will see to some. Let the Rav go back into the room with the other mourners."

"It is nothing to talk about," said the Baba Sali. "I will not allow the mitzvah of hachnosas orchim, welcoming visitors, to slip by, especially to the man who welcomed me so graciously when I first came to Eretz Yisrael. I will never forget your kindness and warmth when I had nothing - no resources, no home."

What a powerful lesson in hakoras hatov. Perhaps we should all ask ourselves how many people who were involved, in one way or another, in our personal development have we forgotten or ignored, some on purpose, others simply through thoughtlessness? The Baba Sali did not forget - even at a time when it would have been certainly understood that his mind was on his personal loss. No. That is not hakoras hatov. How far are we from such a level of spiritual integrity?

Behold! They (the Midyanite women) caused Bnei Yisrael, by the word of Bilaam, to commit a betrayal against Hashem regarding the matter of Peor. (31:16)

It is regrettable that there are still apologetic Jews who feel that they have to find some way to qualify the fact that we are the am ha'nivchar, chosen people. This is after we have endured centuries of persecution, pain and misery. Even after the Holocaust, there are still those who lack the moral

character to hold up their heads with pride and declare; "Yes, I am a Jew, and I am proud of it!"

If we peruse the parsha, we note the incredible divide that exists between Klal Yisrael and the gentile nations. Chazal teach us that after the Flood, the nations of the world decided to restrict themselves in the area of arayos, immorality and forbidden relationships. They understood that in order for members of society to exist as human beings, they must act as humans - not as animals. The perverse lifestyle, the accepted decadence that had prevailed prior to the Flood, was no longer acceptable. Tznius, moral purity, and chastity were to be the only ways in which the new world could continue to exist.

This was supposed to be the new standard of living. Hashem provided the gentile nations with "spiritual" leadership. After all, they would need guidance. Bilaam was gifted, talented and supposedly very spiritual. He was a prophet who had achieved an extremely high level of prophecy. He would mentor the nations and guide them on the proper path. Is it then not shocking that this paragon of "spirituality" advised his people to engage in moral filth, to break down the boundaries of morality, to destroy the accepted laws of chastity, so that by prostituting themselves they would be able to cause the Jews to sin? This is the navi umos ha'olam, prophet of the gentile nations, who was there to ensure their spiritual ascendancy.

In contrast, our leadership exemplified tznius at its zenith. Shaul Hamelech was known for his modesty. His daughter, Michal, who became David Hamelech's wife, personified what she had observed at home. Yes, there is a stark contrast between them and us, yet we still have those among us who find it difficult to accept that we are a "kingdom of Priests and a holy nation."

When the sons of Yaakov Avinu heard of their sister Dinah's violation by Shechem, the Torah writes: "They were extremely angry because he had committed a disgraceful act against Yisrael" (Bereishis 34:7). Horav Eliyahu Munk, zl, notes that this is the first place in the Torah that the descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov are referred to by the name Yisrael. This is a name that signifies our mission in this world, "to struggle for G-d." The name Yisrael is first used in the defense of moral purity. This is our sacred ideal. It is one we must safeguard and hold sacrosanct. Indeed, it defines our very Jewishness and bespeaks our uniqueness in the world. Without it - we are like everybody else.

B'chol yom avorchecha va'hallelah Shimcha l'olam va'ed. Every day I will bless You, and I will praise Your Name forever and ever.

David Hamelech emphasizes the significance of blessing Hashem every day, regardless of what challenges that day may bring. We all know that there are good days and seemingly "bad" days. We are not to respond positively to Hashem only on those days which we feel are "good"... We bless Hashem kol yom, every day.

The Psalmist uses two words avorechecha, I will bless You; and ahallelah Shimcha, I will Praise Your Name. Is there a difference between blessing and praise? Furthermore, why is blessing equated with "every day," while praise is something that goes on forever and ever? Horav Chaim Kanievsky, Shlita, explains that we are not permitted to add any blessings of our own to the ones that Chazal have composed. Therefore, when one is about to "bless" Hashem using the blessings formulated by Chazal, he is limited to those blessings that are designated for specific days and periods. In contrast, when one "praises" Hashem, there are no time or quantity limitations. Praise is always forever and ever.

He shall not desecrate his word. (30:3)

A Jew's word is sacred, so that to renege his word is to violate it. Chazal assert that while a Jew may not break his own word, a Torah scholar or a *bais din* of three competent Jews may permit him to "take back" his word. This teaches us the awesome power of *talmidei chachamim*, Torah scholars. While we are well aware that *bais din* has the power of *hefker bais din hefker*, being able to nullify and renounce ownership of a person's property, it would seem that this is applicable only concerning monetary possessions, while Biblical prohibitions, such as those created through a Jew's sacred word, are different. These prohibitions apparently remain beyond the scope of the Torah scholar. We see from this *pasuk* that this is not the case. Everything within Jewish life falls under the domain of the *talmid chacham*.

The *Kli Yakar* explains why a *talmid chacham* or a *bais din* of three common Jews have the power to nullify a vow, just as a husband may annul his wife's vow and a father may nullify his daughter's vow. He says that prior to marriage, a young woman is under the *r'shus*, authority, of her father. Once she marries, she is in the *r'shus* of her husband. She may not do anything without her father's or husband's permission. Thus, when she makes a vow, it is as if she were saying, "I am making this vow providing that my father or my husband agree with its ramifications. If they do not grant permission for this vow, I take it back." Likewise, every Jew places his trust in the *chachamim* of each generation. He is under their authority and guidance. What they declare is accepted. Therefore, when a Jew makes a vow, he is basically saying, "I will or will not do this based upon the approval of the *chachamim*." They have the right to nullify the vow, because its sacredness is dependent upon them.

Horav Yaakov Neiman, *zl*, derives from here that the Torah wants the Jew to remain attached to *chachamim* throughout his life. This is the meaning of *emunas chachamim*, trust and faith in the Torah scholar, so that if they do not agree with what he has in mind to do, he will not do it. One should not do anything without their approval.

Indeed, *emunas chachamim* is one of the forty-eight ways to acquire Torah. We believe that a Jew should not rely on his own subjective decision. The Torah decides if, when and how one should take action. The Torah input is rendered by the Torah scholar who interprets the law and determines how to integrate its word in every given situation.

In *Pirkei Avos*, our Chazal have taught us that we acquire Torah through forty-eight qualifications. Among them is *emunas chachamim*. As Hashem's representatives, the trust we place in our sages reflects the trust we place in Hashem. It goes without saying that the Torah scholar's behavior must be worthy of reverence. Indeed, the trust we place in our Torah leadership consists of two aspects: trust in his personal character; and trust in his wisdom. How does this trust work?

The very first teacher of Klal Yisrael was Moshe Rabbeinu. When the time came to share his Torah with the seventy elders Hashem said, "Gather for me seventy men of the elders of Yisrael...and I will draw from the spirit which is upon you, and I will put it upon them." (*Bamidbar* 11:16) The *Midrash* adds, "To what was Moshe then compared? To a burning candle set in a menorah from which many lights are kindled, yet its own light is not diminished. In this same manner, the wisdom of Moshe does not diminish."

This is the way in which Torah is transmitted from *rebbe* to *talmid*, teacher to student. It is not the transmission of cold, scientific knowledge. It is the lighting of one candle from another, until the new candle can shed a ray of Divine light into the darkness of human existence. A flame is not shared

because the light is often not bright enough or strong enough to spread around. When each light connects with another wick, however, and serves as its power source for creating its own light, the entire room is illuminated.

In order to achieve this phenomenon, to study with a rebbe who has grown wise in Torah and to have his knowledge begin to glow within you, one must have faith in him--in his wisdom and in his sincerity and integrity-- and believe in what he represents. One must believe that he carries the flame of Torah that has been passed through the generations from Moshe, the quintessential teacher of our People. Without this implicit faith and trust, one closes the door on the channels of meaningful learning. He closes the door on Har Sinai!

The principle of *emunas chachamim* is one that is a requisite in understanding, appreciating, accepting and transmitting Torah. It is a principle that has eluded all those who have eschewed Torah study and *mitzvah* observance. When we study from our rebbeim, we absorb more than mere facts, laws, interpretations and elucidations. We delve into the depths of the Torah to perceive its profundities, to understand its message and the mission it wants us to accomplish. How do we achieve this? When we learn, we connect with the rebbe, who has connected with his rebbe, to the point that we link our spirit with that of Chazal and beyond, back to Moshe Rabbeinu. We become part of them as if we ourselves are hearing the words expressed at Har Sinai. This is the meaning of Chazal in the Talmud *Yevamos 97a*, "Wherever an oral teaching is quoted in the name of the sage (who established it), his lips move in the grave." In the union of spirit and spirit, the student with the rebbe, the thoughts of the departed sage link and live, continuing to speak through the student.

Emunas Chachamim is "money in the bank," or, at least, that is the level of security one should feel when trusting our rebbeim. Horav Sholom Schwadron, zl, cited by Rabbi Paysach Krohn in "The Maggid Speaks," would often relate the following incident to emphasize the essence of *emunas chachamim*. A prominent, philanthropic woman named Chavala would make the effort to bring *challos* to the Shaagas Arye every Erev Shabbos. As a result, he blessed her that one day she would attain great wealth and have the privilege of building two synagogues: one in Minsk, her place of residence; and one in Eretz Yisrael.

With time, the first blessing was realized, as she amassed great wealth and built what became known as Chavale's Shul in Minsk. She aged and decided that she had better immigrate to Eretz Yisrael, so that she could observe the second part of her blessing fulfilled. Prior to leaving Europe, she decided to bid goodbye to all of those rabbis with whom she had become acquainted throughout the years. When she came to say goodbye to Horav Chaim, zl, m'Volozhin, he asked why she was leaving. She explained that she was going to Eretz Yisrael to build a shul as part of a blessing from the Shaagas Arye. Rav Chaim heard this and asked incredulously, "If you have the assurance of the Shaagas Arye, a *tzadik* of great renown, what is your rush?" He manifested true belief.

Bnei Reuven and Bnei Gad had abundant livestock... Bnei Gad and Bnei Reuven came and said... "If we have found favor in your eyes, let this land be given to your servants." (32:1,2,5)

The commentators are vexed by a number of ambiguities in the request presented by Bnei Gad and Bnei Reuven. What prompted them to forego their portion in Eretz Yisrael and trade it for a place in Ever HaYarden? Did they not see what had occurred concerning the *meraglim*, spies? If they had been in doubt about taking a position vis-?-vis not going to Eretz Yisrael, that debacle should have

changed their mind. The Sefas Emes cites his grandfather, the Chidushei HaRim, zl, who heard a profound interpretation of this incident from Horav Simcha Bunim, zl, m'Peshischa. "U'mikneh rav," which is translated as abundant livestock, may be interpreted as a great kinyan, acquisition, referring to the relationship they had with their rav, Moshe Rabbeinu. In other words, due to the unique relationship Bnei Gad and Bnei Reuven had with their rebbe, Moshe, they refused to leave the land in which their rebbe would be buried. They were willing to forego their portion in Eretz Yisrael. It was not their lack of reverence for the Holy Land that catalyzed their request. Rather, their reverence and love for their quintessential rebbe motivated them to remain in Trans Jordan.

Horav P. Friedman, Shlita, questions why Moshe was buried in Bnei Gad's portion of the land. After all, the request to remain on the other side of the Jordan was made by both tribes - equally. Should they not have both "shared" in this distinction? He cites the Talmud Sotah 13b where it is stated that Moshe actually died in Reuven's portion and was "carried" four mil into Gad's portion to be buried there. This is indicated by the pesukim in the Torah which place Moshe's death on Har Nevo, which was in Reuven's portion and his burial in Gad's portion. How did he get there? Hashem took him. We wonder why He did it this way. The burial could have been facilitated in such a manner that Moshe would have died and been buried in the same place.

Rav Friedman explains that specifically because both tribes had a "mikneh" rav, acquisition in the rav, it was only right that both should possess an equal share in his passing from this world.

With this in mind, we wonder why Moshe took these two tribes to task. Their reason for remaining was praiseworthy. Indeed, they should have been commended for their reluctance to leave their rebbe. Horav Elyah Schlessinger, Shlita, cites the Midrash which criticizes these two tribes for making what should have been the *ikar*, primary, into the *tafeil*, subordinate, focus. They seemed to have prioritized their material possessions over their children, which is clearly a case of misplaced priorities. There is, however, more to it. Horav Shmuel Rozovsky, zl, derives an important lesson from Chazal's vernacular. Chazal state, "They made their *ikar* into *tafeil*, and their *tafeil* into *ikar*." This would imply that they did two things wrong. The criticism was that: they made their principle into something secondary; and they converted their subordinate into their primary. We are taught here that just as it is wrong not to give precedence to the primary, it is equally wrong to prioritize the secondary. When we grant significance to something that should have secondary status, we ultimately denigrate that which should have primary significance.

Moshe was afraid that they were making living in Ever haYarden--near his gravesite-- into an *ikar*, thereby elevating this experience to *mitzvah* status. Yes, they would give greater credence to Moshe's grave than to Moshe's Torah. When one elevates that which should remain subordinate, he will eventually devalue and replace that which is, and should continue to be, his prime focus in life. How often do we see *tzedakah*, charity, taking the place of Torah study? This applies to a host of other wonderful deeds where we displace *mitzvah* enhancements for the actual *mitzvah*. Moshe understood their error and its ramifications for the future.

And Moshe was angry with the commanders of the army. (31:14)

The soldiers returned from the front. Their battle with the Midyanim was successful. Yet, Moshe Rabbeinu became angry with the army's leadership for preserving the lives of the Midyanite women

who were responsible for luring the Jewish men into sins of immorality and idolatry. These sins brought about a plague that claimed the lives of 24,000 Jews. Moshe's anger spurs a strong comment by Chazal. In the Talmud Pesachim 66b, they say, "Whoever becomes angry, if he is a wise man, his wisdom departs from him." Because Moshe became angry, the laws concerning the guidelines on how to kosher any utensil that absorbed a forbidden food were "forgotten" by him, so that they had to be transmitted instead by Elazar HaKohen. Chazal add that this applies equally to a prophet who loses his prophecy as a result of anger. They go so far as to posit that even if it was decreed by Heaven that he would achieve distinction, such as Eliav, the brother of David HaMelech, he will lose it as a result of anger.

We should add that the anger the Torah attributes to Moshe Rabbeinu is not the loss of control of emotions that is common with us. Moshe had a lapse, and Chazal derive a lesson from this isolated instance. We, however, suffer terribly from this character flaw. It destroys marriages, families and friendships. Relationships of all kinds are not safe from its devastating and far-reaching consequences. It is the result of a lack of self-control. It strikes everyone unless he takes great care to work on himself.

L'shem Shomayim, anger for the sake of Heaven, is not justifiable, claims Horav Chaim Vital, zl, in the name of his rebbe, the Arizal. Anger is never the correct path to choose. Even when one must admonish congregants, the Shulchan Aruch cautions that this be done with an external expression of anger, but, in his heart, the Rav should remain calm and collected.

In his commentary on Chumash, anthologized by Rabbi Sholom Smith, Horav Avraham Pam, zl, notes the tragedy of the lifelong emotional scars inflicted by parents who lose self control and berate their children with derogatory and demeaning names. While these parents certainly do not want to hurt their children, little do they realize the long term effects of their words and the damage is regrettably done.

Rav Pam notes that it is especially during the pressure-filled hours of Erev Shabbos and Erev Yom Tov that the anxiety level is increased and people are more prone to outbursts of anger. He cites an incident when a husband's unthinking, but no-less unpardonable, outburst at his wife destroyed the tranquility of a Pesach Seder and severely shook up the family's harmony. Had the husband exerted just a little self control and *mentchlichkeit*, humaneness, his wife's error could have easily been glossed over.

When a person allows anger to take control of his emotions, he is certain to err and often overlooks the obvious solutions to his problems. Learning to suppress anger can save one much heartache and grief, ultimately benefitting him at times when a clear head is necessary. This alone should be one's greatest motivation for correcting a serious character flaw.

Bnei Reuven and Bnei Gad had abundant livestock - very great. Bnei Gad and Bnei Reuven came... They said, "If we have found favor in your eyes, let this land be given to your servants as a heritage. (32:1,3,5)

There is much to be learned from the dialogue that ensued between Moshe Rabbeinu and Bnei Gad and the Bnei Reuven. Let us examine the conversation that took place and address some of the issues that surfaced. First, we find two tribes who, due to their abundance of livestock, expressed a desire to remain in Ever HaYarden. The Torah does not tell how and why these tribes had more livestock than everyone else. The Ohr HaChaim Hakadosh attributes it to their military skills in being

able to plunder more effectively than the other tribes. The Midrash HaGadol asserts that, in fact, they did not have a greater share of livestock. It is just that they attributed greater significance to their herds than the other tribes did. In any event, they wanted to stay in Trans Jordan. Moshe understandably was very disappointed with their attitude, and he criticized them for forsaking their brother tribes during a time of crisis. They were all in this together. Bnei Gad and Bnei Reuven quickly responded that they had no intention of reneging their responsibilities. They would fight side by side with their brethren. They just wanted to return and settle in this land after the war. First, however, they wanted to build shelter for their livestock and cities for their children.

Upon reviewing the text, we note that the Torah begins by saying that Bnei Reuven, the oldest son, and Bnei Gad had abundant livestock. It then continues by relating that Bnei Gad, the younger son, came forward and addressed Moshe. Why did Bnei Gad speak before Bnei Reuven? Where was their respect for their older brother? Second, the entire dialogue that took place seems to have involved only Bnei Gad and Bnei Reuven, while, in truth, the Trans Jordan was settled by another tribe - half of the tribe of Menashe joined them. What happened? We do not find them asking for land in Eiver HaYarden.

The Kli Yakar explains that Bnei Gad had more livestock than Bnei Reuven. Their enormous wealth went to their heads. In the ensuing arrogance, they denied the respect they should have rightfully given to their older brother. As far as the second question is concerned, in his commentary to the beginning of Sefer Devarim, the Netziv, zl, explains that specifically because of a deficiency in the spiritual character and values of these two tribes, it was necessary that another tribe be sent along to offer a positive influence. Menashe had no desire to live in Trans Jordan. They were sent to assist in maintaining the spiritual status quo among the two tribes that chose to live there.

Bnei Gad and Bnei Reuven were guilty of misplacing their priorities. They were concerned for their livelihood more than for their children; they placed their present before their future. Furthermore, the effect of their behavior hurt their present and had a far-reaching effect on their future. Children respond to the way in which they are raised. The values they see imparted in their home remains with them for a long time. When children grow up in a home in which the priorities are misplaced, it influences the way they view life. On the other hand, if children see true commitment and mesiras nefesh, self-sacrifice, for their values, it will accompany them throughout life.

I recently had occasion to read an incredible story about a young boy and his mother in Rabbi Yechiel Spero's, *Touched By A Story*. The story clearly affected the child as he grew up to become one of America's gedolim, Torah giants, a Rosh Yeshivah who, during his life, inspired thousands and whose legacy continues its impact even after his passing. The story goes back to the beginning of the twentieth century when most Jews subsisted on an income slightly above the poverty level. While materialistic needs were not a high priority, every once in awhile a person would take some of his hard-earned money and use it for material goods that had a connection to a spiritual principle. A young boy by the name of Yitzchak learned the value of spirituality from his parents.

One year, shortly before Pesach, Yitzchak's father decided to buy his wife a new dress l'kavod Yom Tov, in honor of the approaching festival. His wife toiled throughout the year. She never asked for anything. The least he could do is give her the opportunity to honor the festival in a manner that would also engender personal enjoyment for her. Buying a dress in those days was not as simple a task as entering a store and picking one off the rack. It meant picking out material and paying a number of visits to the seamstress. Finally, the dress was finished. It was an expensive proposition, but well worth it. The whole family waited excitedly for the mother to don her new dress, but she said that she was

waiting for Pesach. Disappointed, the children began to count the days until they would see their mother in her new dress.

Yitzchak was a precocious eleven year old. He studied diligently in the yeshivah where he was one of the most outstanding students. His humility matched his scholarship. Thus, he rarely called attention to himself. That year, a few days prior to Pesach, he came home and excitedly shared with his family that he was about to make a siyum on Meseches Bava Kama. His mother was so proud of him, but Yitzchak simply shrugged it off.

The next evening, Yitzchak went home and was greeted by an incredible sight. The table was set with the finest dishes, the candles were lit, and his mother was wearing her new dress! What was happening? he wondered. It was not yet Yom Tov. "Mama! Why are you wearing the new dress? It is not yet Yom Tov!" young Yitzchak blurted out.

His mother smiled at him and said, "Yes, I was saving the dress for Yom Tov, but you told me yesterday that you had completed a Mesechta and were about to make a siyum. This might be a simple feat for you, but, for me, this is the greatest Yom Tov. There is nothing more important to me than my son learning Torah!"

This was a mother's lesson to her young son. Torah study reigned supreme. A siyum was likened to Pesach. Gadlus ba'Torah, achieving greatness in Torah knowledge, was a major accomplishment that overshadowed and outshined everything else. Yitzchak remembered his mother's lesson well throughout his life, as he grew in Torah, as he achieved the pinnacle in Torah knowledge and leadership. As Yitzchak became the venerable Horav Yitzchak Hutner, zl, Rosh HaYeshivah of Mesivta Rabbeinu Chaim Berlin, legendary rebbe and mentor to thousands, his mother's lesson became his legacy.

Take vengeance for Bnei Yisrael against the Midyanites. (31:2)

The Midrash relates that Yehoshua was destined to live one hundred and twenty years, as did Moshe Rabbeinu, his rebbe. Yehoshua died when he was one hundred and ten years. Why was his lifespan shortened by ten years? When Moshe was instructed to exact vengeance from the Midyanites prior to his death, he immediately took steps to follow Hashem's command with alacrity and determination - despite his anticipated death following the war. When Yehoshua was instructed to battle the thirty-one kings, he delayed. He conjectured, "Moshe, my rebbe, died immediately following the war with Midyan. Why should I hasten my own death? I will prolong the war, so that I will live longer." In response, Hashem, shortened Yehoshua's life.

Certainly Yehoshua could not have been interested in extending his life for personal reasons. He always followed Hashem's command to the letter of the law. Why would he look for excuses to delay his fulfillment of Hashem's command? Horav Elya Lopian, zl, explains that Yehoshua observed what had occurred following Moshe's death. The spiritual regression that prevailed was the result of feelings of dejection that engulfed the people following the loss of their rebbe and spiritual leader. The well, the Manna, and the clouds of Glory all disappeared with Moshe. The idyllic world as Klal Yisrael knew it was gone. Even Yehoshua, Moshe's successor, forgot three hundred halachos the day Moshe died.

When Yehoshua realized the spiritual loss that accompanied Moshe's death, he felt that he must

do everything within his power to live. True, Moshe was compared to the sun, and Yehoshua was likened to the moon. While the moon's illumination is not as brilliant or as powerful as that of the sun, it is not something to ignore. The world could not afford to lose the brilliant spiritual light that Yehoshua generated. He wanted to live, so that he could protect his people.

Is this so bad? Yehoshua's intentions were noble. In that case, why did Hashem punish him by taking ten years off his lifespan? We derive from here that a person may not make cheshbonos, calculations. He must follow Hashem's command, regardless of what negative consequences he thinks will result. Moshe was acutely aware of the prophecy concerning Klal Yisrael's spiritual descent following his passing. He says in Devarim 31:29, "For I know that after my death you will surely act corruptly, and you will stray from the path." Nonetheless, he did what he had to do, readily complying with the will of Hashem.

Yehoshua meant well. He thought of Klal Yisrael and, like the dedicated leader that he was, he sought to delay carrying out Hashem's command so that he could benefit his flock. Hashem did not see it this way. One does not make cheshbonos, nor does he second-guess the Almighty. We must accomplish our own tasks - He will do His.

*A thousand from a tribe, a thousand from a tribe, for all the tribes of Yisrael you shall send a legion.
(31:4)*

The Midrash teaches that actually three thousand men represented each tribe: twelve thousand were soldiers who went into battle; twelve thousand took care of the armaments and weapons; and twelve thousand prayed for the soldiers.

Consequently, for each soldier that went to the battlefield, a counterpart prayed for his health, welfare and success. This is enigmatic. First, this was a milchemes mitzvah, a war that Hashem commanded them to wage. Their success was guaranteed by Hashem. Why was tefillah, prayer, necessary? Second, if tefillah was that essential to their success, why did they need one person to pray for each soldier? Would it not have sufficed to have Moshe Rabbeinu and the people pray for everyone collectively? Last, it seems to be implied from the Midrash that the individuals who prayed also went out to the battlefield - or, at least, they did not simply pray at home. Why? Could they not have served their purpose by praying in the bais ha'medrash at home?

Horav Yechezkel Levinstein, zl, explains that a great danger lurks for he who enters the battlefield. The idea of kochi v'otzem yadi asah li es ha'chayil hazeh, "My power and the strength of my hand made for me this great might" is a compelling force to overcome. The fear that the soldier might think that he has the strength - he has the ability to vanquish his adversary - is a real fear. To counter this impulse, for each soldier who went into battle another soldier stood near the battlefield, praying for him to emerge victorious. This image catalyzed two victories: the soldier emerged unscathed both physically and spiritually.

And Moshe sent them... as an army, with Pinchas ben Elazar to lead them. (31:6)

Hashem had instructed Moshe Rabbeinu to take vengeance against the Midyanites to punish them for attempting to corrupt Klal Yisrael spiritually. Interestingly, Moshe Rabbeinu carried out the Divine decree, but through the medium of Pinchas, whom he delegated to lead the army. Why did

Moshe, who was the consummate servant, who followed every Divine command to the letter, not immediately seize the opportunity to carry out the command personally - as directed? Chazal explain that Moshe felt that it was inappropriate for him to lead the battle personally, due to a debt of gratitude that he owed Midyan. It was in the country of Midyan that he sought asylum when he fled Egypt. He reasoned that Hashem surely could not have meant that he, Moshe, personally should lead the battle, because the "ways of the Torah are gentle" (Mishlei 3:17). Hashem would want him to delegate this mission to another person.

Yet, Moshe's feeling of impropriety was not sufficient for him to deviate from Hashem's instruction. He relied on a precedent. When the time came for the plague of blood to be executed against Egypt, Hashem instructed Aharon to strike the Nile River. Why Aharon and not Moshe? Chazal explain that the river had provided a sanctuary for Moshe as an infant when he was cast into the river. When we are enjoined to show our gratitude even to an inanimate object, how much more so should we parallel this behavior towards people?

We derive from Chazal that the Torah is sensitive to - and considerate of - everything and everyone. Gratitude is an attribute that is of cardinal importance to the Jew. It should be part of the Jew's moral compass, without which he is missing an integral component of his personality. When Moshe was instructed to act in a manner that was counter to his sense of gratitude, he immediately understood that this could not be consistent with the Divine will. He must seek an interpretation. He must find a precedent that would illuminate the command, "The ways of the Torah are gentle" - No command would undermine this rule.

We find a parallel in a previous command that Hashem gave to Moshe. When Moshe was living in Midyan in the home of his father-in-law, Yisro, he was instructed by Hashem to leave and lead the Jews from Egypt. Moshe's response, as noted by Chazal, was that he would ask permission of Yisro and then go to Egypt. This is incredulous! Hashem instructed him to leave, and Moshe responded, "I will check with Yisro." Does this sound rational? How can one refuse to comply with Hashem's directive?

Horav Yechezkel Levinstein, zl, explains that since the obligation for ha'koras ha'tov, paying gratitude, is so great, Moshe was certain that Hashem took into consideration in His directive that Moshe would have to take leave of Yisro. After all, is that not simple derech eretz, menchlichkeit, human decency and manners? Yisro took Moshe into his home and provided him with a haven from Pharaoh's wrath. How could he suddenly leave without asking Yisro's permission? Clearly, this is what Hashem wanted him to do.

Two nations, Ammon and Moav, are never to be accepted as converts to the Jewish People, because they forgot what Avraham Avinu did for their ancestor, Lot. Thus, because they did not offer us bread and water when we wandered in the wilderness, they can never become accepted as Jews. Is this punishment not just a bit harsh? No, explains Horav Elya Lopian, zl. In fact, it is not even a punishment. It is a metzius, essential truth. Since they did not have gratitude, they are missing the necessary component that would allow them to connect with Judaism. They could be wonderful people and even G-d-fearing, but, if they do not possess ha'koras ha'tov, they cannot become Jewish. Appreciation is part of the Jewish gene. It is a major factor in our DNA. They simply do not have what it takes.

In his commentary to Parashas Vayigash, the Shalah Ha'kadosh writes that during the Egyptian famine, when Yosef purchased the land from the Egyptians, he did not touch the land belonging to the Egyptian priests. This sentiment goes back to the time in which he was judged concerning the incident with Potiphar's wife, when he was tried before a tribunal of priests. They acquitted him, because they

believed that he was telling the truth. In return for their sparing his life, Yosef refused to make them give up their land.

It is related that the Chafetz Chaim, zl, once passed out in the bathhouse. The heat was intense, and the Chafetz Chaim was out cold. His chances for survival were, at best, slim. Luckily, the individual who saw to the maintenance of the coals happened to enter at that moment. He was able to revive the Chafetz Chaim. As soon as he regained consciousness, the Chafetz Chaim could not thank this man sufficiently. He kissed him and blessed him with good health and longevity. He seated the individual next to him in shul, and every Yom Tov he would invite him to make a l'chaim together with him. The man lived to a ripe old age, passing away in his nineties, shortly after the petirah, passing, of the Chafetz Chaim.

Horav Moshe Feinstein, zl, was a talmid, student, of Horav Pesach Pruskin, zl. There existed a profound respect and affection between the talmid and rebbe. Indeed, when Rav Pesach's grandson got married, Rav Moshe attended the wedding. The next day, when the family was opening the gifts, they noticed that Rav Moshe had enclosed a check for \$500.00! This was during a time when \$50.00 was considered an impressive gift. They were sure that it was an error. The gadol hador meant to write a check for \$50.00 and had mistakenly added an extra zero. They decided to return the check to Rav Moshe.

When they returned the check, Rav Moshe was taken aback. "Do you have any idea how much I owe my revered rebbe? This is the least I can do when the grandson of my rebbe gets married. This is no mistake. I only wish I could afford to have given a bigger check!"

Whenever Horav Elazar M. Shach, zl, traveled with one of his students to Tel Aviv, he would make it a point to stop to visit at the home of a certain elderly gentleman. Why? It seems that this Jew was the messenger who had delivered Rav Shach's Tefillin from his father prior to his bar mitzvah. How could he ignore such a debt of gratitude?

Furthermore, there was a student in Yeshivas Ponevez whom Rav Shach went out of his way to be mekarev, reach out to. He would even give him money before the Yamim Tovim. When he was queried concerning this singular attention, Rav Shach explained the following. "When I was a young bachur, I was very poor. I owned one change of clothes, which I washed every week. I did this secretly, waiting in the freezing cold while my clothes dried. Over time, my pants wore out and a hole in them became larger and larger. I would make sure to arrive at the bais hamedrash early and remain in my seat for hours, so that no one would notice the tear. It eventually became known to one of the women in the community, who promptly sent me two pairs of pants. This bachur is that woman's grandson. I owe him ha'koras ha'tov."

Bnei Reuven and Bnei Gad had abundant livestock... they said, "If we have found favor in your eyes, let this land be given to your servants as a heritage; do not bring us across the Jordan." (32:1,5)

The Midrash makes the following statement, "Three gifts were created in the world: wisdom; strength; and wealth. Since these gifts do not originate from Hashem, there is no guarantee that they will endure. There were two wise men in the world: Bilaam from the gentiles; and Achitofel from Yisrael. They both lost their portion in both this world and the next world. There were two rich men in the world: Haman from the gentiles; and Korach from the Jews - they, too, lost their gifts. Likewise, we find Bnei Gad and Bnei Reuven, who were very wealthy and, due to their concern for their sizable

herd, asked to remain across the Yarden and not enter Eretz Yisrael. Consequently, they were the first to go into exile."

Chazal's statement is perplexing. First, Bnei Gad and Bnei Reuven were the first to be exiled, because they were more interested in their large herd than they were in participating in settling in Eretz Yisrael. They had misplaced priorities. It had nothing to do with their wealth. Second, what do Chazal mean when they say that these gifts do not come from Hashem? From whom else do they come?

Horav Baruch M. Ezrachi, Shlita, explains that certainly these gifts, as well as all gifts, originate from Hashem, the source of everything. What then is the meaning of Chazal's statement? Apparently, Chazal's statement is a reference to man's relationship to these gifts and his recognition of their true source. Undoubtedly, everything, including wealth, strength and wisdom all come from Hashem. This realization should be clear and should accompany man throughout his life. Never should he forget - for even a moment - that the power he has, the wisdom he possesses, and the wealth that he has amassed, are all gifts from Hashem. If he forgets this, he is in jeopardy of losing his gifts.

This occurred with Korach and Achitofel; it happened to Shimshon ha'gibor when he forgot the source of his strength; and it happened to Bnei Gad and Bnei Reuven. The fact that Chazal attribute the early exile of Bnei Gad and Bnei Reuven to their misplaced priorities is not inconsistent with the above reason. They are one and the same. One who understands that his wealth originates from Hashem does not worry about his large herd. Hashem will take care of his needs. How important it is for us to realize that what we possess is a gift - and Who our Benefactor is.

The land which Hashem smote... is a land (suitable) for cattle and your servants possess cattle. (32:4)

If we take note of the claim of Bnei Gad and Bnei Reuven, we will see that they were justified in asking for this land. It only made sense that Hashem would apportion the land according to the individual needs of each Shevet, tribe. They needed suitable grazing land for their sizeable herds, so why should they not receive the land of Sichon for themselves? Furthermore, as we study in Navi, each tribe was first designated his portion in Eretz Yisrael, and then he went to battle to conquer that portion of land. If so, Bnei Gad and Bnei Reuven asked now for the land of Ever HaYarden, so that they would not have to fight the battles of the other tribes.

Horav David Feinstein, Shlita, explains that Moshe Rabbeinu viewed the matter from a different perspective. While it is true that their arguments carried weight, as leader, he was concerned with the reaction of the other tribes. The rest of Klal Yisrael might think that Bnei Gad and Bnei Reuven's real motive was a lack of confidence in the nascent nation's ability to triumph over the powerful nations that lived in the land. This feeling of helplessness would soon lead to panic and disdain for Eretz Yisrael. Soon, they would be reliving the tragic night that followed the spies disparaging report. The people lost their sense of conviction after panic spread throughout the nation.

When one believes in what he is doing, when he has a sense of confidence in himself based upon a strong conviction in Hashem, he can overcome even the apparently insurmountable odds.

And you will be vindicated from Hashem and from Yisrael. (32.22)

We are exhorted not to give the appearance that we are sinning in any way. In the Talmud Yoma 38a, Chazal praise the Garmo family, who were the bakers of the Lechem HaPanim, Showbread, because there never was found among the members of their family any high-quality bread. This was done so that no one would ever suspect them of helping themselves to the Showbread. Their concern regarding what some jealous person might assert caused them to be extra-meticulous in their personal lifestyle.

Horav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld, zl, was known for exemplifying this trait. Never did he take advantage - nor did he permit any member of his family to benefit - from the numerous charity funds that went through his hands. This money was to be used to support the poor and needy of Yerushalayim. Even though he certainly came under the purview of the charity funds criteria, he would never avail anyone of the opportunity to talk.

Indeed, once his own granddaughter, who had been orphaned at a young age, came to him and asked for support. She was about to marry a budding young talmid chacham, Torah scholar, who was penniless. She asked, "Of all the money that goes through your hands to sustain Yerushalayim's poor, can you not find something for your own granddaughter? Why should I be less entitled to receive assistance than anyone else?"

Rav Yosef Chaim was visibly moved by her tearful request, and replied in turn, "Please do not press me further. Would you want me to break the strict rules of conduct that I have imposed upon myself? For my entire life, I have never personally gained from the funds that I administer. These funds were entrusted to me to share with others - not with myself. Our Torah demands that one remain vindicated from Hashem and Yisrael. I am prepared to sell my bed and all my personal belongings to help you in your time of need, but I will not personally take advantage of the tzedakah money entrusted to me. I know how much you have suffered in your life, and you truly deserve Hashem's mercy. Go in peace, and may Hashem shine His countenance upon you and grant you much joy in life, so that the wealthiest girls in town will be envious of you."

Rav Yosef Chaim's blessing came into fruition. His granddaughter went on to become the matriarch of a noble and beautiful family, whose sons were included among the most illustrious Torah scholars in Yerushalayim. This source of pride and comfort was more valuable than anything money could buy.

Arm men from among yourselves for the army that they be against Midyan to inflict Hashem's revenge against Midyan. And Moshe sent them... and Pinchas ben Elazar HaKohen, to the army. (31:3,6)

Rashi comments that Pinchas went along, so that he could avenge Yosef, his mother's ancestor. This is a reference to the time when the Midyanites sold Yosef. This statement demands clarification. The Torah clearly states that the battle with Midyan was to be fought exclusively l'shem Shomayim, for the sake of Heaven. No vestige of personal interest was to play a role in any segment of the battle. Yet, Pinchas did possess a personal interest aside from the national cause. The Midyanites had participated in the sale of his maternal ancestor, Yosef. As Rashi indicates, Pinchas was selected specifically due to the fact that he had an issue to settle with Midyan. It is intriguing that Moshe Rabbeinu would send

Pinchas on a mission that was to be carried out solely l'shem Shomayim, when, in fact, due to his personal agenda, Pinchas would be lacking in his total devotion to l'shem Shomayim.

Horav Mordechai Rogov, zl, derives from here that Pinchas was a person whose focus was directed entirely toward Hashem. While, undoubtedly, Pinchas had personal considerations for destroying Midyan, his intentions were noble as he expunged any personal benefits which were to be gained by his actions. This might be difficult for us to grasp, because, to the average person, a division of allegiances is overwhelming. Pinchas, however, was not an average person.

Rav Rogov adds that even when Pinchas fought in order to avenge the honor and dignity of his ancestor, Yosef, he did not view the battle as some form of personal vendetta, but, rather, as one fought for the national honor of the Jewish People. Hence, avenging his honor was a step forward in advancing the interests of the entire Jewish People. Pinchas' distinction was that he functioned on a plane in which his every intention was solely for the sake of Hashem.

Horav Yisrael Salanter, zl, once noted that there are two mitzvos which relate to the Yom Kippur fast. There is a mitzvah to eat on Erev Yom Kippur as well as to fast on Yom Kippur. It is definitely more difficult to eat on Erev Yom Kippur l'shem Shomayim than it is to fast on Yom Kippur. Eating on Erev Yom Kippur is a mitzvah that has a side-benefit: one is eating. Thus, to fulfill the mitzvah correctly, one must be oblivious to the benefits of the food that he is ingesting. To fast on Yom Kippur, however, is obviously l'shem Shomayim, because what other motive could one have for fasting?

When Pinchas prepared for battle with Midyan, his objective was clear and unequivocally l'shem Shomayim. He could have had other motives, but Rashi tells us that he did not. This was the character of the person whom Hashem refers to as b'kano es kinaasi, "when he zealously avenged Me." (Bamidbar 25:11)

And he shall revoke the vow that is upon her. (30:9)

Chazal differentiate between a court's hatarah, annulment, of a vow and a husband or father's hafarah, revocation, of a vow. Hatarah is made with reason, based upon the premise that the vow was made either in error or in ignorance. For example, had the individual making the vow been aware of certain circumstances, he would never have made it. Therefore, the annulment is retroactive, indicating that it was all in error. Hafarah, on the other hand, is not retroactive. It is a power given to the husband or father to revoke the vow for the future - without reason, simply because he wanted to do so.

The Chafetz Chaim, zl, applies the concept of hafarah and hatarah in regard to the attitude of those who have become alienated from the Torah way of life. At one time, those who denied the Torah weltshauung would conjure up reasons and philosophical logic to justify their opposition to Torah and mitzvos. They manifested some degree of embarrassment, and they did not want to totally rebel against Hashem. They sought an "amicable" break from Orthodoxy. It was a form of hatarah. They sought a reason to validate their iniquity.

"Today", he asserted some 80 years ago, they no longer care what people might think. They no longer give excuses, reasons, or philosophies. They are filled with lust and seek to satisfy their passions. They have no sensitivity whatsoever to a Jewish lifestyle. They abolish the Torah with a

hafarah. They revoke its laws and undermine its moral and ethical standards. David Hamelech says in Tehillim 119:126, *Eis laasos l'Hashem heifeiru Torasecha*, 'For it is a time to act for Hashem, they have voided your Torah.'

This means that when we see that the level of iniquity has descended to such a nadir that it is, *heifeiru Torasecha*, they have revoked Your Torah, not caring enough to give a reason. They simply abandon it with disdain and derision. Then it becomes time to do something about it. This type of iniquity must be decried and battled. It is at a time like this that everyone must fight the battle for the preservation of Torah.

They approached him and said, "Pens for the flock shall we build here for our livestock and cities for our small children... Moshe said to them... Build for yourself cities for your small children and pens for your flock." (32:16,20,24)

The halachah regarding reciting a brachah over two fruits that are not from the seven species of fruit with which Eretz Yisrael is blessed is clear: one makes the brachah upon the fruit which one likes more. What if he likes one more, but the second fruit has more therapeutic value, more vitamins in it? Horav Avigdor HaLevi Nebentzhal, Shlita, contends that the fruit which is qualitatively better for the person is the one that takes precedence in regard to the blessing. The source for this halachah can be derived from Moshe Rabbeinu's dialogue with Bnei Gad and Bnei Reuven. They said that prior to leaving for the battle for Eretz Yisrael, they first wanted to provide for their sheep and their children. In his response, Moshe Rabbeinu emphasized their responsibility to their children as a priority before their obligation to their sheep. Parnassah, earning a livelihood, is certainly important, but it does not take precedence over one's own children.

Furthermore, as Horav Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler, zl, writes in his *Michtav m'Eliyahu*, the concern they had regarding their sheep was not a simple monetary one. No! Their *Avodas Hashem*, service to the Almighty, their *Kiddush Shem Shomayim*, sanctification of the Name of Heaven, was through the medium of their sheep. They were willing to forego living in Eretz Yisrael because they felt that it was difficult to raise sheep in Eretz Yisrael. Sheep need to graze. In a populated area such as Eretz Yisrael, it was inevitable that they would graze in areas that did not belong to them. In *Ever HaYarden*, Trans Jordan, there were large tracts of grazing land which were ownerless, which would provide sustenance for their sheep.

In other words, raising both sheep and children was a critical component of their service to Hashem. Yet, there are priorities; there is an *ikar*, essential, and a *tafel*, secondary. One must prioritize the *ikar* over the *tafel* - always. This was their mistake.

Rav Nebentzhal cites a number of situations in our daily life in which we err and focus on the *tafel* and ignore the *ikar*. First, there is the distinction between *kiyum hamitzvah*, the basic fulfillment of a mitzvah, and *hiddur mitzvah*, beautification, enhancement of the mitzvah. Regrettably, people go to great lengths to satisfy the precepts governing *hiddur mitzvah*, while simultaneously giving secondary significance to the actual fulfillment of the mitzvah. He cites a simple - but common - example. One purchases a very expensive, beautiful, filigreed silver Chanukah menorah. Great *hiddur*, wonderful devotion to the mitzvah. When he lights wax candles, however, instead of using pure olive oil, he indicates that the *hiddur* takes precedence over the essential mitzvah which emphasizes the importance of using olive oil, even though it might "tarnish" the beautiful silver menorah.

It happens all of the time. We build beautiful shuls, traveling far and wide to get ideas to enhance the architectural and esthetic beauty of the edifice. Do we show the same concern, however, in regard to the beauty of the davening, service, or the Torah classes that form the foundation of the shul?

People are more concerned and become petty with the price of hiring a competent rabbi/teacher to give Torah classes, but think nothing about the price of flowers for Shavuot. The list goes on. There are circumstances when a person's dedication to the mitzvah should inspire him to be mevater, forego, the mitzvah. Rav Nebentzhal writes that he witnessed an episode that demonstrated how far one can go in pursuit of a mitzvah and simultaneously disregard the spirit of the mitzvah, demonstrating a lack of concern for another Jew's feelings. He was in a shul when an individual was called up to the Torah for Maftir. Suddenly, one of the members declared that he is a chiyuv, had an obligation to fulfill, and since he had yahrzeit, he should receive Maftir. The fact that someone else had already been called up for the aliyah did not concern him at all. He could care less; he had yahrzeit. He did not mind embarrassing the person that was originally called up to the Torah or humiliating the Torah as it "waited" for the person to recite the blessing. He had yahrzeit! He forgot that the reason he had an obligation to receive an aliyah was that it serves as a nachas ruach, source of spiritual satisfaction, for the soul of the departed. What he seemed to ignore is that by hurting another Jew he certainly was not providing any satisfaction for the soul of the departed.

It is related that Horav Yisrael Salanter, zl, once came to shul on the day of his mother's yahrzeit prepared to lead the services in her memory - according to the halachah. He noticed that there was another Jew in shul who had yahrzeit for his daughter. While halachah clearly states that a yahrzeit for a mother precedes that of a child, Rav Yisrael gave the amud, relinquished his right, and told the other individual to lead the services. He saw that the unfortunate Jew was anguished over not being able to lead the services in memory of his dear daughter, so he gave him the amud. He later said, "On the day of my mother's yahrzeit, I will perform a chesed, act of kindness, to another Jew. This will give my mother greater satisfaction." This is a benchmark of a gadol, Torah giant. He understood the spirit of the mitzvah, its purpose and its goal, and consequently realized that making a Jew feel good was the greatest source of satisfaction for his mother's soul.

This idea applies equally to Torah study. We invest all of our time and energy in academia. A person is measured by his erudition and scholastic ability. Torah study and erudition is all-important, but what about Yiraas Shomayim, fear of Heaven? If one gathers together a large amount of grain and forgets to add a small preservative to retard spoilage - it will all go to waste. To focus on the academic and disregard Yiraas Shomayim is to overlook the raison d'etre of Torah study, as well as the ingredient that will ensure that the Torah he studies will be internalized and be a part of him - forever.

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

Rashi explains that Bnei Gad and Bnei Reuven indicated a shortcoming in their priorities. They placed the needs of their sheep before those of their children. Moshe Rabbeinu criticized their implication that sheep take precedence over children. We wonder why they would so misplace their priorities. Why would anyone think, even for a moment, that sheep have greater significance than children? Toras Yechiel submits that this alludes to the future, when -- in regard to the area of shidduchim, matrimony -- people will disregard the quality of the young man or woman and focus rather on the amount of money either party brings into the shidduch. Those who fall prey to this dementia, which is founded in insecurity and nurtured in avarice, have misplaced their priorities. First, one should consider the quality of the proposed shidduch. Only afterwards, when the individual's virtue has been unequivocally established, should they discuss the finances. Regrettably, Moshe's

admonishment did not move many people, as we continue to see centuries later. Today the problem of mistaken priorities has reached epidemic proportions. As Moshe explained to that generation, however, it is all in the hands of the Almighty Who determines everyone's livelihood. This has not changed either. Hashem is still the only factor in the success of each individual.

A child's educational development should be foremost in the minds of his parents. In truth, the most effective and enduring way to educate a child is for the parents themselves to serve as proper role models. In a thesis on education, Horav Moshe Aharon Stern, zl, focuses upon several other ways to ensure success in raising a child to be a G-d-fearing Jew. First, is prayer. A successful parent entreats Hashem regularly that his children should neither sin nor behave improperly.

A parent once came to the Steipler Rav, zl, and asked for a blessing that he be successful in raising his children in the derech, path, of Torah. The Steipler responded, "It is crucial that you yourself pray! Do you think that a simple blessing will suffice? I myself still pray for my son every day!" This incident occurred when Horav Chaim Kanievsky, Shlita, the Steipler's son, was fifty-two years old and was reknown as a Torah scholar whose encyclopedic knowledge was without peer and whose yiraas Shomayim, fear of Heaven, was a standard for others to emulate. Likewise, the Brisker Rav, zl, once said, "Indeed, the Chazon Ish, zl, composed special prayers for success in raising one's children."

Rav Stern cites a classic statement from the Chasam Sofer who writes, "One who works to strengthen the observance of his fellow Jews will merit to raise his own children successfully in the ways of Hashem." The Brisker Rav supplemented this, saying, "I do not know how to advise people with regard to their children's education. I have seen, however, that those who devote themselves to the spiritual development of others have good children."

Jewish children have received an education throughout the millennia that has conformed with ruach Yisrael sabah, the spirit of Yisrael of old. In other words, the traditional approach may be supplemented by contemporary methods which relate to today's youth. It would be a tragic mistake, however, to ignore the traditional approach that has been an integral part of us for years.

A Belzer chassid once came to consult with the Rebbe Yissachar Dov, bringing along his young son. The boy was not dressed in chassidic garb, which apparently bothered the Rebbe. The Rebbe alluded to this when he repeatedly asked the man, "Is this your son?" The chassid was quite aware of this issue, and he attempted to legitimize his actions lamenting, "It is impossible to raise children like they did in the old days."

The Rebbe turned to the chassid and said, "Until now I never understood the order of certain pasukim in the second paragraph of the Shema Yisrael. In between the verses which deal with Tefillin and Mezuzos, a pasuk appears which enjoins us to teach our children Torah. What is the connection between them?"

"I now have the answer. We know that in order for a Mezuzah or Tefillin to be kosher, the scribe must write it exactly as it was transmitted to us at Har Sinai. Every letter must conform to the way Chazal interpreted the halachah. One cannot say that today it is difficult to write a

Mezuzah as they did in yesteryear. For, if he altered it one iota, it is pasul, invalid. The mitzvah to teach Torah to our children is placed where it is in order to teach us that just as it is forbidden to make changes in the writing of Mezuzos and Tefillin, likewise, the education we impart to our youth must follow the dictates that we received from our forbears and sages, who accepted the Mesorah, tradition, from Sinai."

A child's first classroom is the home, where his parents are his mentors by virtue of one

example they manifest. After Horav Sholom Schawadron, zl, married the sister of Horav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, zl, his father-in-law, Horav Chaim Yehudah Leib Auerbach, zl, said to him, "You should know that when your wife was a baby, we did not have enough food in the house, and she would cry incessantly from hunger. I would rock her stroller for hours on end, during which time I reviewed entire Mesechtos, Tractates, of Talmud. This had a profound influence on her."

Rav Stern related the following story to demonstrate the impact a proper education has on a child. A wealthy patron of Yeshivos, Rav Y. Dynes, lived in a certain Russian city. He merited to have two sons-in-law that were giants in Torah, Horav Avraham Yitzchak Bloch, zl, Rosh HaYeshivah of Telshe and his brother, Horav Eliyahu Meir Bloch, zl who later co-founded the Telshe Yeshivah in America together with his brother-in-law, Horav Chaim Mordechai Katz, zl. As years passed, Rav Dynes' business ventures suffered. Eventually his empire collapsed. He was wont to say, as he pointed to his two sons-in-law, "Of all my wealth, only these two diamonds remain."

Horav Elchanan Wasserman, zl, explained what merit Rav Dynes possessed to have been deemed worthy of having two such remarkable Torah scholars as sons-in-law: It was in the middle of the winter, and Rav Elchanan was making his rounds, attempting to raise necessary funds for his yeshivah. Paved roads in those days were but a dream, so it was no surprise that Rav Elchanan's shoes became muddied. He did what he could to scrape off the top layer of mud, but his shoes still remained filthy. The next stop on his list was Rav Dynes' house. Not wanting to soil the elegant rugs that surely graced the foyer of his house, Rav Elchanan used the side entrance. When the children saw the illustrious visitor who stood at the door, they quickly ran to call their father.

Rav Dynes was mortified to see Rav Elchanan standing by the side entrance, and he quickly welcomed him to his home. He was shocked that due to a few rugs, the great Rosh Hayeshivah was deterred from entering his home in the proper manner. "Rebbe, I implore you to enter my house with your dirty shoes. Disregard the rugs. I will not permit my children to think that a few expensive rugs take precedence over the honor due a gadol b'Torah, Torah giant. I have always made an attempt to impart to them the overriding importance of kavod ha'Torah, the honor due the Torah and its disseminators. You must walk on the rugs with your muddy shoes, or else my influence upon them will be undermined."

Because Rav Dynes taught his children that all of the wealth in the world is valueless if it conflicts with the honor due a Torah scholar, he merited sons-in-law who exemplified Torah scholarship at its zenith.

If a man takes a vow to Hashem...he shall not desecrate his word; according to whatever comes from his mouth shall he do. (30:3)

The Torah underscores the sacredness of the Jew's word; to violate one's word is to desecrate it. The Sefas Emes adds that the Jew's word by its very nature is holy, even if what he has said is not devarim shebikedushah, holy words, such as a brachah or words of Torah. What is the source of this sacredness? Regarding the creation of Adam HaRishon, the Torah in Sefer Bereshis 2:7 relates, "And He blew into his nostrils the soul of life." The Zohar explains that one who blows, blows from within himself; hence man's soul is a part of Hashem's essence. This soul, the G-d-given neshamah, made man into a living being, which Targum Unkelos defines as "ruach memalela," a speaking spirit. In other words, the life that is characteristic of man, which only Hashem could blow into him, is the rational soul that includes the koach ha'dibur, power of speech.

The ability to verbally express oneself intelligently -- to articulate one's innermost feeling using the power of speech -- distinguishes man from animal life. The power of speech is holy because it is the

vehicle by which the soul of man, which is a "chelek elokai mimaal," part of Hashem's essence, is transmitted into man. The expression of G-d within mankind is through the power of speech. Furthermore, as the Toldos Yaakov Yosef writes, "Speech is the kulmus ha'lev, quill of the heart, expressing one's true innermost feeling, bringing forth one's essence."

Horav Chaim Vital, zl, writes that the above pasuk, "He shall not desecrate his word; according to whatever comes from his mouth shall he do," serves as the key for understanding the function of human speech. The Torah teaches us that if one is careful about what he says, if he does not profane his speech through falsity, slander, etc., then Hashem will fulfill whatever comes from his mouth. Man will decree, and G-d will fulfill his words. The spiritual power concealed within human speech must be kept sacred at all costs. If it is safeguarded, then Hashem will bless man with the ability to accomplish miraculous feats using the power of speech.

The power of speech is incredible. The first Rebbe of Sadigur observes that the notion that man's speech is insignificant reflects the yetzer hora's, evil inclination's, enticement. The yetzer hora seeks every medium for denigrating the importance of speech, so that man will violate his G-d-given gift. The greatest indicator of this power is the fact that with a mere few words, "Harei at mekudeshes li," "Behold you are consecrated unto me," etc. a woman becomes the wife of a man, totally forbidden, by the punishment of death, to have any relations with another man. How much more so do words of Torah and mitzvos achieve in the spiritual realm. They are truly the quill of the heart and expression of the soul.

They came close to him and said, "We wish to build here sheep enclosures for our flocks and cities for our children." (32:16) Chazal criticize Bnei Gad and Bnei Reuven for prioritizing their sheep before their children.

They turned the "ikar," essential, into the "tafel," insignificant, and the unimportant into the essential. They cared more for their possessions than they did for their children. Moshe Rabbeinu reproved them when he "turned it around," giving precedence to the children over their material assets. Chazal comment, "Lefikach galu techilah." "Therefore, these tribes were the first to be exiled."

The pasuk in Eichah says, "Bachoh sivkeh balailah." "They wept bitterly in the night." The Yalkut comments that Klal Yisrael made an agreement with the Navi Yirmiyah, "You were saved from the harshness of the galus, exile. You shall weep during the day. We, on the other hand, will weep in the night." Hashem explains, "Yisrael weeps at night; Yirmiyah weeps during the day. I, G-d, will weep during the day and in the night." Horav Shlomo Breuer, zl, elucidates the words of Chazal, explaining their criticism of Bnei Gad and Bnei Reuven's misdirected allegiances.

Chazal teach us that with the destruction of the Bais Hamikdash, the Shechinah also went into galus. It waits for a home - a home in the lives of every Jew. This tragic galus causes the tears of every truly Jewish soul to flow. "Shechinah b'galusah," "The Shechinah is in exile." There is no greater reason to mourn. There are individuals, however, who believe that the "nocturnal" galus that has plagued our People -- the darkness of persecution, poverty and martyrdom -- has given way to what might seem to be a happier period. The Shechinah is no longer in galus. At least, it has been diminished. They do not realize that the "light" of material success and religious acceptance might possibly have caused the intensification of the Shechinah's galus.

There was a time during the dark periods of our nation's history in which the Shechinah found its home within us; within our sanctuaries; within our homes; within our lives. Regrettably, with the first crack of "dawn," with the first improvement of our external circumstances, many of us have abandoned the most precious treasures of the Torah and mitzvos. Suddenly, the Torah was relegated to

second place, far behind secular achievement and material success.

Do we still live up to the values that we manifest during our galus ha'lailah, nocturnal exile, when the holiness, sanctity and nobility of Jewish family life reigned supreme? Is the hallowed Jewish tradition still alive -- which considered life's noblest achievement the rearing of children "b'ruach Yisrael sabah," in the tradition of Yisrael of old? Have we taught our children the overriding prominence of Torah, avodah and gemilus chasadim, or have we worried more about the "little sheep," our material status and prosperity?

We are in a different galus, a galus of light, when we do not cry - and that in itself is indicative of the galus. If we would mourn, we would not be in galus! This is why the tribes who "seemed" to care more about their material circumstances than their spiritual needs preceded their brethren into exile. This galus affects everyone - even the most obstinate. This exile is the most dangerous state. Indeed, with every material achievement, the threat of galus is intensified - unless we respond. Unfortunately, Klal Yisrael weeps only at night, during the nocturnal galus of pain and deprivation. Yet there is another type of galus: the exile which is brought about when the simile of good fortune seems to dissipate the economic deprivation and religious intolerance to which we are subjected; for this exile, we need no tears.

Yirmiah ha'Navi weeps. He represents the sages, the Torah leaders whose function it is to watch over Hashem's children, to teach, to remain loyal to Hashem and His Torah, not only during nocturnal periods of suffering, but also in the bright light of prosperity and progress. Klal Yisrael tells him, "We will cry during the night, when we understand the exile. You will cry during the day, teaching us, reminding us that although the sun is shining, we are still in exile.

We have to remember that Yirmiyah's tears are to no avail if we do not recognize and reflect upon their significance. He is not a doomsayer. We have only to peruse Jewish history to note that with the advent of our emancipation from persecution and intolerance, a period of assimilation and religious indifference immediately dawned. The galus is twofold until that glorious day when we will all merit the advent of Moshiach Tzidkeinu.

We suggest an alternative approach towards understanding the critique against Bnei Gad and Bnei Reuven. Let us accept that there was no malicious intent behind their misdirected concerns. They made a statement, however, that bespeaks an attitude that is not reflective of Torah values. They sought "arim l'tapeinu," cities for our children. Let us analyze their request. Klal Yisroel is in the wilderness, about to enter a new land. Their concern is for "cities" for their little children! Is that not asking a bit too much? Is there no faith? One would think their primary request would be for basics: food, shelter. To put in an order for an entire completed city for their infants, however, might be considered presumptuous.

On the other hand, is that much different than the parent who wants and expects to have his little child's entire life arranged from pre-school through parenthood? We make plans for our children. Indeed, we plot out their life's course, expecting things to go exactly as we have planned. We forget, regrettably, to "consult" with the Almighty, to see what "input" He might have. Bnei Gad and Bnei Reuven had it all planned out. They were ready to settle, to build cities for their children. They should have been concerned with the immediate, the "here" and "now". They should have trusted in Hashem for the future.

Take vengeance for Bnei Yisrael against the Midyanites; afterward you will be gathered unto your people. Moshe sent them - a thousand from each tribe for the legion, them and Pinchas...to the legion. (31:3,6)

We find two commands regarding the Midyanites. In the previous parsha, immediately following the tragic plague that resulted from the Midyanite's advice which caused the Jews to sin with the daughters of Moav, Klal Yisrael was commanded to despise Midyan as enemies of the Jewish people. In this parsha, Hashem instructs Moshe to seek vengeance for the grave sin that Midyan catalyzed. Two mitzvos are presented: to hate and to avenge. Pinchas was chosen to lead a select group of soldiers in battle. Chazal say he was the one who initiated the mitzvah when he slew Zimri and Kosbi; he should be responsible to complete the efforts on behalf of Klal Yisrael. We must endeavor to understand the nature of this vengeance. Does Hashem need vengeance? Furthermore, did not Pinchas achieve the "covenant of peace" when he killed Zimri? Hashem commended Pinchas for his act, which stimulated a peaceful conciliation between Hashem and His people. Why is there a resurgence of vengeance? Last, why is Pinchas necessarily the one to lead the people? Was the underlying objective of this war a goal that only Pinchas could achieve?

Horav Gershon Liebman, zl, begins by first focusing upon the nature of an individual who has rejected a materialistic lifestyle, who has decided to absorb himself in the "koslei ha'yeshivah," walls of the yeshivah, to devote himself to Torah - and avodah, its service. Ostensibly, such an individual must manifest an incredible amount of mesiras nefesh, self-sacrifice, resolution and determination in order to make this decision. Must such a unique individual be a kanai, zealot, for Torah when he sees an incursion against it? Must he take a stand, go out of his way to quell any infraction against the Torah, or can he just devote himself to a life of holiness and purity?

We see that the sho Chad, bribery, infatuation with his past lifestyle, is so overwhelmingly intense that nothing short of zealousness will protect him from reverting back. Chazal tell us that one who sees a sotah, wayward wife, in her degradation should become a nazir, prohibiting himself from drinking wine. He sees the results of intoxicants; he sees the licentious lifestyle it encourages, he must run away from it. Chazal understood how absorbed an individual can become in materialism. Consequently, one must distance himself even from those behaviors that under normal circumstances are permitted, for they can catalyze inappropriate behavior.

Pinchas' nature, his zealousness, rendered him the right person to lead that battle against Midyan. He was not blemished. He overcame the blandishments of the Moavite women as he slew Zimri and Kosbi, returning dignity to the Jewish people. His zealousness for Hashem was pristine - untainted by personal agenda or vested interests. Indeed, out of an entire army of available Jewish men, only one thousand men per Shevet were selected. Moreover, Moshe was criticizing even these righteous individuals. This indicates the critical need to sever all relationships with those areas of the past that can conceivably draw one back into the tentacles of his previous sho Chad, bribery.

We see this constantly. One can be absorbed in Torah study. He may be doing well in a yeshivah gedolah, school of higher learning; yet, if something arises that raises his ire, that is in contrast to the way he has been accustomed to live; it can be the springboard for impeding his spiritual growth - completely. Indeed, he might go to the other extreme, rejecting all those who had previously helped him. We now may comprehend the motivating factor behind these kanim who pounce upon anything that might disturb the tranquility of their Torah lives. They do not rely upon themselves. They understand the stress of dealing with the past. For them, the best and safest approach is the extreme.

So there was delivered from the thousands of Yisrael, a thousand from each tribe. (31:5)

Rashi says that the term "vayimasru," "there was delivered," implies that the Jewish soldiers were actually coerced into going to battle. They were well aware that Moshe Rabbeinu's demise was dependent upon his carrying out this last war, and they did not wish to see their beloved leader die. Rashi adds that, interestingly, for much of their forty-year sojourn they either complained to -- or about -- Moshe. There was rarely a peaceful moment in their relationship. Now, when confronted with the imminence of his death, they do not wish to see him depart. This indicates their deep love for him. We must endeavor to understand this pshat, exposition, of the pasuk. Did Moshe himself not say "A bit more and they will stone me"? He fully understood their ambivalent feelings towards him. How can this be considered love?

Horav Yosef Leib Bloch, zl, explains that Bnei Yisrel's true admiration and love were manifest by the fact that they were not always enamored with Moshe. They did not continually agree with his demands. Yet, when his life was dependent upon their going to war - they refused to go. Had their relationship always been idyllic, it would have been no surprise that they would not want to see his premature death. After an intense relationship of forty years, at times contentious and at times harmonious, we see that their negativity towards Moshe was rooted in their intolerance for his rebuke. After all was said and done, however, they loved their leader and would do anything to sustain his life.

An unwillingness to accept criticism can, at times, prove to be a cause for unnecessary resentment. A mature individual deals with his resentment quickly, when he realizes that the reproof is for his own good, and emanates from his friend's/teacher's/parent's love for him. This will then awaken within him the respect and love he should continue to develop for that individual.

Moshe sent them - a thousand for each tribe for the legion, them and Pinchas. (31:6)

Rashi explains why Pinchas, and not Elazar, led the army in battle against Midyan. Hashem said that he who initiated the mitzvah, who originated the vengeance against this abominable nation, should complete the task. Pinchas, who slew Kosbi, should finish the job. What is the reason that "he who begins the mitzvah" is told to complete it? Horav Chaim Shmuelevitz, zl, comments that there is no comparison between an endeavor which is executed piecemeal and one which is performed in one complete unit. A number of people participating in a mitzvah - one after another - demonstrates the beauty of teamwork. Such a cooperative effort, however, is still not to be compared to the quality manifest when one performs the entire mitzvah by himself. A mitzvah performed in sections, one that is carried out in components, does not have sheleimus, completeness/ perfection. Sheleimus can be achieved only if a mitzvah is carried out by one person in one motion.

When Rabbi Akiva returned after twelve years of study with an entourage of twelve thousand students, crowds gathered to see the great Torah scholar. His wife, who had encouraged his decision to leave home to study Torah, was also waiting. As Rabbi Akiva came close, one of the women questioned his wife about how she had permitted him to stay away for so many years. Rabbi Akiva's wife responded emphatically, "I would be happy to let him return for another twelve years!" Rabbi Akiva heard this and immediately turned around to return to the yeshivah to study. He returned twelve years later with twenty four thousand students. The question which begs elucidation is apparent: Why did Rabbi Akiva not stop for even a moment to greet his wife, from whom he had been separated for twelve years? Would it have been such a terrible thing to do? The response which is echoed by the various baalei mussar, teachers of ethical behavior, is that two times twelve is not nearly the same as one continual period of twenty-four uninterrupted years. What Rabbi Akiva achieved in Torah study, his

brilliant erudition, his vast group of students, was due to the fact that he had studied continually for twenty-four years. He did not pause; he did not take a break; he would not even say hello to his wife after twelve years! He did not weaken his momentum. A brief interlude quells one's enthusiasm, diminishing the end result. One who begins a mitzvah should complete his action to achieve greater success.

And Moshe became angry at the officers of the army...and Elazar the Kohen told the soldiers going to war, "This is the statute of the Torah that Hashem told Moshe. (31:14)

Anger is not simply a character deficit. Chazal teach us that one who becomes angry demonstrates a lack of respect for the Shechinah. Simply, the consequences of anger can be devastating. One who becomes angry is possessed by Gehinom, purgatory. Horav Chaim Shmulevitz, zl, posits that there is a more striking effect which, regrettably, applies even when the anger is justified. In the Talmud Pesachim Chazal say that one who becomes angry loses all his wisdom and compromises his spirituality. They cite a number of examples to prove this point, incidentally one from our parsha. Subsequent to Klal Yisrael's victory over Midian, Moshe Rabbeinu became angry. As a result, he forgot the law. We note the fact that it was Elazar who related the law to the soldiers.

One should do everything possible to contain his anger. Perhaps, if one seriously considers the devastating effect of anger, he would exert more effort to control himself. This seems to apply only in the event the anger is unfounded. What about situations in which one feels his anger is justified -- or if it really is justified?

Rav Chaim claims that the detrimental results of anger, the loss of one's wisdom and stature, apparently occur regardless of the nature of the anger. Indeed, by taking into account the tragic effects of anger, one might quite possibly deter the anger from developing. Why does anger produce such a damaging effect upon a person? First, we must understand that this effect is not a punishment for a sin, but rather a natural consequence. Moshe was certainly appropriate in his response to the soldiers, but this did not preclude the loss of some of his wisdom as a consequence of his anger.

We still may wonder why wisdom which had already been acquired and stored in a person's mind should also have disappeared? We can understand how anger transforms a person's character, decreasing his stature, but how does it effect wisdom which he already possesses?

We may understand this anomaly once we take into consideration that all forms of wisdom are not equal. There is secular wisdom, and there is a higher form of wisdom - Torah wisdom. Secular knowledge does not assimilate into one's psyche. It does not relate to the personality or character of its possessor. Hence, one may be uncouth or obnoxious and yet be a scholar. Torah is spiritual knowledge. This means its source is Hashem, Who has imbued it with a special essence. Torah knowledge establishes itself only in a person who can be a proper vessel for it. One must maintain a refined character in order to be a true talmid chacham, a student of wisdom, inclined to absorb the Torah into every aspect of his personality. One who lacks spiritual integrity is no longer qualified to retain Torah. One who becomes unfit to retain Torah loses even that knowledge that he has already acquired. It no longer has a "home" in this individual. The knowledge that he already had did not become contaminated, rather the person has changed. He ceases to be an appropriate vessel for containing Torah.

Rav Chaim's thesis sheds light on why we find individuals who at one time had been talmidei

chachamim. As they steered their Torah hashkafah, perspective/philosophy, to the left, their seichel ha'yashar, ability to think correctly, seems to have been affected. Individuals who had been capable of expounding Torah and were proficient in its profundities suddenly seem to have lost their ability to analyze the logic of Torah. They conjure up svaros, logical deductions, that make sense only to themselves and their misguided followers. Why? It is because their spiritual character has been sullied. They no longer reflect the Torah that they expound in their spiritual demeanor. Torah shapes a person's moral and spiritual character. When a change transpires in one's character it indicates that he is not ascribing to the Torah with the same intensity he had previously.

Behold! You have risen up in a place of your fathers, a society of sinful people, to add more to the burning wrath of Hashem against Yisrael. (32:14)

Moshe Rabbeinu's reaction to Bnei Gad and Bnei Reuven seems atypical. What did they do that was sufficiently terrible to invoke such anger on his part? How were they jeopardizing the rest of the people with their request? Horav Eliyohu Meir Bloch, zl, offers a thoughtful explanation, addressing why Moshe Rabbeinu reacted in the way that he did. When a group of people breaks away from the community and seek to be different - even if what they are requesting is justified - it creates a rift in the general populace. The situation is no longer the same. The communal zeal that had existed before slackens. Although their intentions were noble, their reasons justifiable, they unintentionally engendered a feeling of disunity in Klal Yisrael, which, unfortunately, could not be erased.