

18 Menachem Av 5772  
August 6, 2012



Brachos Daf 5

Produced by Rabbi Avrohom Adler, Kollel Boker Beachwood

Daf Notes is currently being dedicated to the neshamah of

**Tzvi Gershon Ben Yoel (Harvey Felsen) o”h**

May the studying of the Daf Notes be a zechus for his neshamah and may his soul find peace in Gan Eden and be bound up in the Bond of life

## ***Shema by One's Bed***

Rabbi Yehoshua ben *Levi* said: Even though one recited *shema* in the synagogue (*by the evening prayers*), there is nevertheless a *mitzvah* to recite it again by his bed (*before he goes to sleep, for this will protect him from demons*).

Rabbi Yosi proves this from the following Scriptural verse: *Tremble and do not sin; say in your hearts while on your beds, and be utterly silent; selah.*

Rav Nachman said: if he is a Torah scholar, it is not necessary for him to recite it again (*for the Torah thoughts which occupy his mind will protect him from any demons*). (4b – 5a)

## ***Fighting the Evil Inclination***

Rabbi Levi bar Chama said in the name of Rish Lakish: A person should always stir up his Good Inclination to fight against his Evil Inclination, as it is stated: *Tremble and do not sin*. If he is victorious, it is good; but if not, he should occupy himself with the study of Torah, as it is stated: *Say in your hearts*. If he is victorious, it is good; but if not, he should recite *kerias shema*, as it is stated: *on your beds (referring to shema)*. If he is victorious, it is good; but if not, he should remind himself about the day of death, as it is stated: *and be utterly silent; selah.* (5a)

## ***Torah at Sinai***

And Rabbi Levi bar Chama said in the name of Rish Lakish: It is written: *I shall give you the stone Tablets, the Torah, and the commandments which I have written, to teach them.*

The “*Tablets*” refers to the Ten Commandments. The “*Torah*” refers to Scripture. “*The commandments*” refers to the *Mishna*. “*Which I have written*” refers to the Prophets and the Writings. “*To teach them*” refers to the *Gemora*. This verse teaches us that all this was given to Moshe by Mount Sinai. (5a)

## ***Bedtime Shema***

Rabbi Yitzchak said: Whoever recites *kerias shema* by his bed (*before going to sleep*), it is as if he is holding on to a double-edged sword (*to kill all the supernatural forces who rise up against him*).

And Rabbi Yitzchak said: Whoever recites *kerias shema* by his bed (*before going to sleep*), the demons will stay away from him. (5a)

## ***Protection***

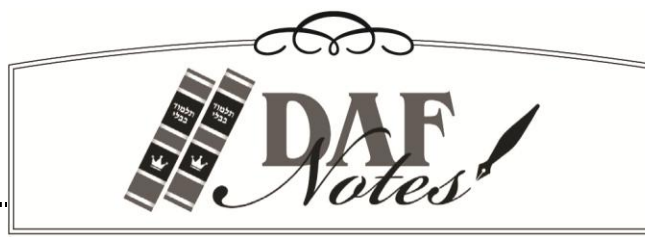
Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish said: Whoever occupies himself with the studying of Torah, afflictions will be kept away from him.

Rabbi Yochanan said: This, even schoolchildren know, for it is stated [Shmos 15:26]: *And He said, If you listen to the voice of Hashem, your G-d, and you do what is just in His eyes, and you listen to His commandments and observe all His decrees, all the sicknesses that I have placed upon Egypt I will not place upon you, for I am Hashem your healer.*

Rather, Rabbi Yochanan said: Whoever has the ability to study Torah, and does not do so, the Holy One, Blessed be He, will bring upon him revolting afflictions that will make him nauseated.

Rabbi Zeira said, and other say that it was Rabbi Chanina bar Pappa: Come and see the difference between the characteristic of the Holy One, Blessed be He and that of a flesh and blood person. When a person is forced to sell something which is dear to him, the seller is sad and the buyer is happy; however, by the Holy One, Blessed be He, that is not the case. He gave the Torah to the Jewish people, and He was happy. (5a)

## ***Afflictions of Love***



Rava, or according to others - Rav Chisda, said: If a person sees that he is being afflicted, he should investigate his actions. If he searched but could not find anything, he should attribute his suffering to the sin of neglecting to study Torah. If he examined his deeds and still could not find anything, it is known that these must be afflictions of love.

Rava said in the name of Rav Sechorah in the name of Rav Huna: If the Holy One, Blessed be He, desires someone, He will bring afflictions on him. However, this is only if he accepts them with love. The *Gemora* derives this from a verse which links afflictions to a *korban asham*. Just as a *korban* requires the owner's consent, so too these afflictions require his consent.

If a person accepts these afflictions, he will be blessed with offspring and long life, and his Torah will remain in his hand.

Rabbi Yaakov bar Idi and Rabbi Chiya bar Chanina argue regarding the extent of these afflictions of love. One of them says that it is considered afflictions of love if it does not prevent the person from studying Torah. The other one says that it is considered afflictions of love if it does not prevent the person from praying. They each cite a Scriptural verse to prove their point.

Rabbi Abba, the son of Rabbi Chiya bar Abba, said that Rabbi Chiya bar Abba said in the name of Rabbi Yochanan that both of those are still considered afflictions of love (even if they prevent the person from studying Torah, and even if they prevent the person from praying).

The *Gemora* notes that Rabbi Yochanan uses one of their verses as follows: It is written: *Fortunate is the man whom G-d afflicts and whom you teach from Your Torah*. He says: Do not read it as if it said "You teach him," rather read it as if it said, "You teach us." We derive from the Torah that a person is considered fortunate if Hashem afflicts him. It is taught through a *kal vachomer* (literally translated as *light and heavy, or lenient and stringent; an a fortiori argument; it is one of the thirteen principles of biblical hermeneutics; it employs the following reasoning: if a specific stringency applies in a usually lenient case, it must certainly apply in a more serious case*) as follows: If the loss of a tooth or an eye, which is only one of the limbs in a person's body, nevertheless, a slave gains his freedom because of it, then afflictions, which cleanse the person's entire body, should certainly free a person from sin because of them!

And this is similar to what Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish said, for he said: The word covenant is written with respect to salt and the word covenant is written with respect to afflictions. Just as salt sweetens the meat, so too, afflictions will cleanse a person from his sins.

The *Gemora* cites a *braisa*: Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai said: There were three gifts that the Holy One, Blessed be He, gave to the Jewish people, and they all were given only through afflictions. They are:

Torah, *Eretz Yisroel* and the World to Come. The *Gemora* cites Scriptural verses proving this statement.

A *Tanna* taught before Rabbi Yochanan: Anyone who occupies himself with the study of Torah, in doing acts of kindness with others and buries his sons, his sins will all be forgiven. The *Gemora* cites the various Scriptural verses which prove this.

Rabbi Yochanan said: *Tzara'as* (a group of skin conditions, for which the Torah decrees *tumah*) and (the burial of) children are not regarded as afflictions of love.

The *Gemora* asks: *Tzara'as* is not regarded as afflictions of love!? But we learned in a *braisa*: Anyone who has any of these four appearances of *tzara'as*, they are nothing but an "altar of atonement" (which the *Gemora* assumes as being identical to "afflictions of love")!?

The *Gemora* answers: *Tzara'as* is an "altar of atonement" (which comes upon a person to atone for his sins), but it is not an "affliction of love."

Alternatively, the *Gemora* answers that the *braisa* is referring to those people who reside in Bavel (and that is why the *tzara'as* is an affliction of love, for they are not required to leave the city, and they are not so humiliated), and Rabbi Yochanan is referring to those people who reside in *Eretz Yisroel* (and since they are so embarrassed, it cannot be afflictions of love).

Alternatively, the *Gemora* answers that the *braisa* is referring to *tzara'as* which is hidden (underneath his clothes, and he is not shamed), and Rabbi Yochanan is referring to *tzara'as* that is out in the open.

The *Gemora* asks: And "children" is not an affliction of love? What case was he referring to? If he was dealing with someone who had children and then they died, did not Rabbi Yochanan himself say, "Here is the bone of my tenth son!?" [Rabbi Yochanan buried ten children in his lifetime. He would carry around the bone of his tenth son as a sign of bereavement. And obviously, a righteous person like Rabbi Yochanan would only suffer from afflictions of love!]?]

The *Gemora* answers: When Rabbi Yochanan said that "children" is not an affliction of love, he was referring to those who did not have children at all. It is, however, an affliction of love if one has children and they die in his lifetime.

Rabbi Chiya bar Abba fell ill and Rabbi Yochanan went in to visit him. Rabbi Yochanan asked him, "Are your sufferings dear to you?" Rabbi Chiya bar Abba replied, "Neither they nor their reward!" Rabbi Yochanan said to him, "Give me your hand." Rabbi Chiya bar Abba gave him his hand and Rabbi Yochanan revived him.



Rabbi Yochanan once fell ill and Rabbi Chanina went in to visit him. Rabbi Chanina asked him, "Are your sufferings dear to you?" Rabbi Yochanan replied, "Neither they nor their reward!" Rabbi Chanina said to him, "Give me your hand." Rabbi Yochanan gave him his hand and Rabbi Chanina revived him.

The *Gemora* asks: Why could not Rabbi Yochanan revive himself?

The *Gemora* answers: Prisoners cannot free themselves from jail.

Rabbi Elozar fell ill and Rabbi Yochanan went in to visit him. He noticed that he was lying in a dark room so he exposed his arm and light radiated from it. He then noticed that Rabbi Elozar was crying, and he said to him, "Why are you crying? Is it because you did not study enough Torah? Surely we learned in a *Mishna* regarding the *korbanos*: The one who offers a lot and the one who offers a little have the same merit, provided that their heart is directed towards Heaven. And if it is perhaps due to your lack of sustenance (*that is also not a reason to cry*), for not everybody has the privilege to enjoy two tables (*both in the spiritual world, with your learning, and the physical world, with wealth*). And if it is perhaps because of your children (*who passed away*), this here is the bone of my tenth son!"

He replied to him, "I am weeping on account of this beauty that is going to rot in the earth." Rabbi Yochanan said to him, "On that account you surely have a reason to cry," and they both wept. In the meantime, Rabbi Yochanan asked him, "Are your afflictions welcome to you?" Rabbi Elozar replied, "Neither they nor their reward." Rabbi Yochanan said to him, "Give me your hand," and Rabbi Elozar gave him his hand and Rabbi Yochanan revived him.

Rav Huna had four hundred barrels of wine which had turned into vinegar. On hearing about his misfortune, Rav Yehudah the brother of Rav Salla the Chasid, accompanied by the Sages, or, according to some, Rav Adda bar Ahavah, accompanied by the Sages, came to visit him. They told him, "Let the master investigate his affairs (*to determine why he suffered such a loss*)." He exclaimed, "Do you suspect me of doing something wrong?" They responded, "Shall we then suspect The Holy One, Blessed be He, of punishing unjustly?"

Rav Huna then said, "If you have heard something against me, then say it." So they said to him, "We heard that the master does not give his sharecropper a share in the branches (*besides the wine which was divided between them*)." But Rav Huna explained, "He has stolen all the branches from my vineyards and has left nothing for me." "There is an expression," they replied, "He who steals from a thief feels the taste of stealing" (*one cannot steal from a thief*). He said, "I accept upon myself to pay him."

Some say that the vinegar miraculously turned back into wine, and others say that the price of vinegar rose to equal the price of wine. (5a – 5b)

## **Abba Binyamin**

The *Gemora* cites a *braisa*: Abba Binyamin says: All my life I took great pains about two matters: I made certain that my prayers were recited before my bed and that my bed should be placed from north to south.

The *Gemora* explains that he could not have meant that he prayed literally in front of his bed, for the *halachah* is that when one prays, there should be nothing separating between him and the wall. Rather, he meant that he prayed close to the time that he arose from his bed. [*He did not work or study Torah before saying the Shema and Shemoneh Esrei.*]

And that which he said that his bed was placed between north and south was because Rabbi Chama son of Rabbi Chanina said in the name of Rabbi Yitzhak: Whoever places his bed north to south will have male children.

Rav Nachman bar Yitzchak said: his wife will not miscarry.

Abba Binyamin also said that if two people entered a synagogue to pray and one of them finished praying and left without waiting for his friend, his prayer is torn up before him (*it is not accepted*). If he does wait for him, he will merit many blessings. (5b – 6a)

## **INSIGHTS TO THE DAF**

### ***Fighting the Evil Inclination***

Rabbi Levi bar Chama said in the name of Rish Lakish: A person should always stir up his Good Inclination to fight against his Evil Inclination, as it is stated: *Tremble and do not sin*. If he is victorious, it is good; but if not, he should occupy himself with the study of Torah, as it is stated: *Say in your hearts*. If he is victorious, it is good; but if not, he should recite *kerias shema*, as it is stated: *on your beds (referring to shema)*. If he is victorious, it is good; but if not, he should remind himself about the day of death, as it is stated: *and be utterly silent; selah*.

The *Gemora* in *Sukkah* (52a) states that the Evil Inclination has seven names. Why is it important for us to know that the Evil Inclination has seven names?

Rabbi Chaim Dov Keller, Rosh HaYeshiva of Telshe in Chicago, said that when Yaakov encountered the angel of Esav, Yaakov inquired as to the



name of the angel. The angel responded, "Why then do you inquire of my name?" The obvious question is: Why did Yaakov inquire of the angel regarding his name, and why did the angel refuse to divulge his name? The answer is that Yaakov was not merely seeking to validate the name of the angel. Yaakov was saying to the angel, "You are the Evil Inclination, and you are my enemy. I need to know your name, i.e. your nature, so I and my descendants can know how to do battle with you throughout the generations." The angel responded, "You cannot fight me, because I always appear with a different name, i.e. in every generation a new group arises that attempts to topple the citadel of Torah and its observance." Similarly, the *Gemora* there records the various names of the Evil Inclination, so we can actually discern its true nature and battle with him until we are successful in vanquishing him.

## Ha-mapil

By: Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

Rabbi Yitzchak said: Whoever recites *kerias shema* by his bed (*before going to sleep*), it is as if he is holding on to a double-edged sword (*to kill all the supernatural forces who rise up against him*). And Rabbi Yitzchak said: Whoever recites *kerias shema* by his bed (*before going to sleep*), the demons will stay away from him.

How strict need one be about talking, eating or drinking after reciting the *berachah* of *Ha-mapil* prior to retiring for the night?

*L'chatchilah*, *Ha-mapil* is recited right before falling asleep. Indeed, according to one opinion, one may recite *Ha-mapil* only in the last few moments before falling asleep, when his eyelids are fluttering and he can barely remain awake. Although we do not rule in accordance with this view, we still attempt to recite *Ha-mapil* at the last possible moment before getting into bed or before falling asleep. Accordingly, one is encouraged to prepare himself for sleep in such a way as to eliminate any interruptions between *Ha-mapil* and falling asleep.

But this cannot always be arranged: Some people toss and turn for a while before finally falling asleep; others can only fall asleep after reading or learning for a while in bed; some parents know that no sooner than they have recited *Ha-mapil*, a child will require attention. Should these people omit *Ha-mapil* from their nightly *Kerias Shema al ha-mitah*?

Some Poskim suggest that they should. They explain that *Ha-mapil* is similar to *She'hakol* or *Borei peri ha-eitz* which must be recited right before drinking or eating with no interruption allowed. One who recites a *She'hakol* or *Borei peri ha-eitz* and does not immediately eat or drink has recited a *berachah levatalah*. In our case, too, one who interrupts between *Ha-mapil* and falling asleep is reciting a *berachah*

*levatalah*. It follows, therefore, that one who knows or suspects that he will have difficulty in falling asleep should omit *Ha-mapil*.

The vast majority of Poskim, however, disagree. *Ha-mapil*, they explain, is not a *berachah* for an individual's personal sleep; rather, it is a general blessing of praise to Hashem for giving His creations the opportunity to refresh and rejuvenate themselves through sleep and rest. It is a *berachah* similar to *Elokai neshamah* and the other morning *birchos ha-shachar* which are general *berachos* of praise to Hashem. Accordingly, while *Ha-mapil* is recited near the time when one is ready to retire for the night, there is no concern of *berachah levatalah* if sleep did not immediately follow the recitation of the *berachah*. Even *l'chatchilah*, therefore, one could recite *Ha-mapil* although he is well aware that he will be forced to make an interruption after reciting the *berachah*.

What is the practical *halachah*? In deference to the minority opinion, *l'chatchilah* one should plan that no interruption will take place after reciting *Ha-mapil*. All eating, drinking, talking or any other activity should take place prior to reciting *Ha-mapil*. But when this is difficult to do, or *b'dieved* if one recited *Ha-mapil* and now needs to eat, drink, answer an important phone call or do any other necessary activity, he may do so and he need not be concerned about reciting a *berachah levatalah*.

Similarly, if after reciting *Ha-mapil* one realized that he forgot to *daven Ma'ariv* (or repeat the evening *Kerias Shema* at the proper time), count *Sefiras ha-Omer*, or recite *Kiddush levanah* (on the last possible night), he must make up whatever *tefillah* he missed and not be concerned that he is reciting a *berachah levatalah*.

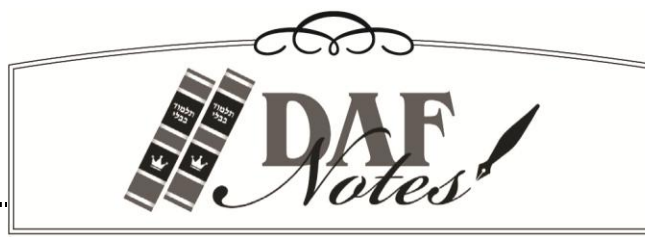
Based on the above, the Poskim infer the following: One who needs to use the bathroom after *Ha-mapil* recites *Asher yatzar*; if he sees lightning or hears thunder, the appropriate *berachos* are recited; if, for some reason, one needs to recite *Ha-mapil* in a location other than his sleeping quarters, it is permitted to do so, as we are not concerned about the laws of *shinui makom*.

It follows, therefore, that there is no excuse to skip *Ha-mapil* before retiring for the night. Omitting *Ha-mapil* because one fears being interrupted between making the *berachah* and falling asleep, is not justified.

## Afflictions Purge a Person's Sins

Rabbi Yochanan states that a person is considered fortunate if Hashem inflicts him. It is taught through a *kal vachomer* as follows: If the loss of a tooth or an eye, which is only one of the limbs in a person's body, nevertheless, a slave gains his freedom because of it, then afflictions, which cleanse the person's entire body, should certainly free a person





from sin because of them! Rish Lakish derives this same lesson from a different source. He says: The word *covenant* is written with respect to salt and the word *covenant* is written with respect to afflictions. Just as salt sweetens the meat, so too, afflictions will cleanse a person from his sins.

The Bobover Rebbe in Kedushas Tziyon notes that there is a distinction between the two expositions. According to Rabbi Yochanan, the afflictions will only cleans a person if they emanate from Heaven, similar to the *halachos* of a slave, where he will only be set free if his master knocks out his tooth or eye. He will not gain his freedom if someone else injures him. However, according to Rish Lakish, any type of afflictions will cleanse him, in the same manner as the salt sweetening the meat. It makes no difference as to who applies the salt.

Based upon this, Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank explains the following. It is written [Shmos 6:5]: *And also, I heard the moans of the children of Israel, whom the Egyptians are holding in bondage, and I remembered My covenant.* The Jewish people thought that the Egyptians were their masters and they were those who were afflicting them. They did not realize that their suffering was decreed from Heaven. Because they didn't know who was causing them their hardships, they did not gain their freedom. It was only because Hashem remembered His covenant, that all afflictions cleanse a person from his sins, that was the reason they were released from the bondage.

Reb Meir Shapiro adds to this: If a slave does not come to court and testify that his master knocked out his tooth or eye, he will not gain his freedom. If he says that it happened by happenstance, he will not go free. So too, it is with afflictions. If a person does not believe with complete faith that the afflictions are affecting him because of Divine Providence, the afflictions will not purge him of his sins. However, if this principle was derived through the *gezeirah shavah* from salt, it would not make any difference.

The Rashba was asked the following question: If a slave initiates a fight with his master and strikes the first blow, and the master counters with some strikes of his own and knocks out the slave's tooth, will the slave gain his freedom?

He replied that the slave goes free. The proof is from the aforementioned *Gemora*, where Rabbi Yochanan derived that afflictions will cleanse a person from his sins through a *kal vachomer* from the laws of the slave. How can the two be compared? Afflictions come to a person because he has sinned! It was his own fault! Perhaps, then, those afflictions will not purge him from his sins! Evidently, we see that a slave also gains his freedom, even if he was the one who initiated the fight!

## DAILY MASHAL

### *Divine Providence*

The *Gemora* records the following incident: Rav Huna had four hundred barrels of wine which had turned into vinegar. On hearing about his misfortune, Rav Yehudah the brother of Rav Salla the Chasid, accompanied by the Sages, or, according to some, Rav Adda bar Ahava, accompanied by the Sages, came to visit him. They told him, "Let the master investigate his affairs (*to determine why he suffered such a loss*)." He exclaimed, "Do you suspect me of doing something wrong?" They responded, "Shall we then suspect The Holy One, Blessed be He, of punishing unjustly?"

Rav Huna then said, "If you have heard something against me, then say it." So they said to him, "We heard that the master does not give his sharecropper a share in the branches (*besides the wine which was divided between them*)." But Rav Huna explained, "He has stolen all the branches from my vineyards and has left nothing for me." "There is an expression," they replied, "He who steals from a thief feels the taste of stealing" (*one cannot steal from a thief*). He said, "I accept upon myself to pay him." Some say that the vinegar miraculously turned back into wine, and others say that the price of vinegar rose to equal the price of wine.

Rabbi Pinchas Winston discusses the concept of divine Providence in Parashas Vayishlach. The angels returned to Ya'akov, saying, "*We came to your brother, to Eisav; moreover, he is heading toward you, and four hundred men are with him.*" Ya'akov became very frightened, and it distressed him. (Bereishis 32:7) *Hashgochah Pratis* (Divine Providence) is an important but confusing topic. There are almost as many opinions about whether or not G-d "interferes" in the lives of man, and if so, to what extent, as there are people in the world to have opinions.

It has not always been that way though. Once the Jewish people enjoyed prophecy, and it was hard to ignore one's Divine messages when they showed up in the form of righteous people who spoke explicitly about what was bothering Heaven. On the contrary, it was pretty much impossible to rationalize speaking *loshon hara* where *tzara'as* showed up on one's house, clothing, or body.

But alas, the *yetzer hara* of a person is strong, and it is even possible to ignore the messages of G-d's prophets. A person who doesn't want to change his lifestyle will always find a reason to ignore the truth, to ignore *Hashgochah Pratis*. Even great people, people who prefer to do the right thing and walk with G-d, can be somewhat blind to the reason behind the misfortunes they have suffered, as the story of Rav Huna shows.



However, most people are not Rav Huna, and they certainly aren't Ya'akov Avinu either. People who are so truth-oriented that even when they have barely done a wrong, on the contrary, they themselves have been wronged, can still take a Divine message personally and make amends. They would rather leave the message fuzzy, inject a bit of randomness into life, as if ignoring G-d somehow changes the meaning of the message and smoothes over whatever is wrong. In some cases, they use their misfortune as an excuse to turn their backs on G-d, unlike Ya'akov Avinu, who had trouble everywhere he went from an early age until the day he died.

## ***Deal with the Fuel and Not with the Warning Light***

by: Rabbi Yerachmiel Kram  
Deiah veDibur – Metzora 5763

*Gedolei Yisrael* knew the secret of the red light. Whenever troubles visited them, they related to the symptom as a signal from Heaven to tackle the real problem. The *Gemora* tells of Rav Huna whose wine cellars suffered a terrible disaster: four hundred barrels of wine went sour. He was very upset and went to the *beis midrash* to tell his comrade *amora'im* about it.

How would we react if a neighbor of ours told us of such a setback? We would surely advise him to inspect the quality of the grapes, the sugar, the barrels and perhaps even the temperature and climate of the cellar. But Rav Huna's colleagues advised him to inspect his deeds. When he justified himself and asked them with annoyance if they suspected him of any sin, they replied in like language, "And do you, then, suspect Hashem of not dealing justly with you?" In the end, it turned out that for certain reasons, he had not paid a sharecropper of his the full sum that was due him. After Rav Huna resolved to right this wrong, the vinegar turned back into wine. According to another opinion, nothing happened to the vinegar, but its market price suddenly rose so that he did not lose out.

Jewish Sages had the perception to realize that one does not tamper with the control light or deal with the natural reasons that might cause wine to go sour. One must go straight to the true spiritual cause and remedy the failure. Correct the fault at its source and find out why Hashem chose to make the wine go sour.

This is what Yehoshua did when thirty-six men were killed in the war against Ai. He did not establish an investigating committee to examine the military shortcomings. Instead, he turned in prayer to Hashem until he learned that the reason for this military failure related to the violation of the *cheirem* by Ochon ben Karmi.

No wormy barrels, nor the lack of bulletproof vests. Instead, they pointed directly to the root of the problem, the spiritual fault which had caused the damage. When a person is afflicted with leprosy, he must not seek natural ways to heal this condition, which, in any case, is not a natural affliction. Instead, he should inspect himself and remedy whatever caused it to erupt in the first place. He must not disconnect the warning red light, even if it makes him nervous, but must deal with the reason behind the warning control light.

## ***Suffering***

By: Rabbi Shlomo Price

The Mishnah Berurah (222:4) quotes a Midrash that it was Yitzchak Avinu who requested Hashem to bring suffering to the world, since suffering is a great thing. Hashem replied that it is indeed a wonderful idea and therefore the suffering will start with none other than Yitzchak Avinu himself. As a result Yitzchak Avinu became blind. What does it mean that suffering is a great thing? So the Mishnah Brurah explains that Yitzchak knew the severity of Gehinnom, (*which the Ramban says that it is worse than all the suffering of Job*). He therefore asked Hashem to make people suffer in this world, which will spare a person suffering in Gehinnom, and Hashem agreed. Now this is a great gift, because in reality there is no amount of suffering in this world that comes anywhere near the pain of Gehinnom, yet Hashem in His mercy agreed to count suffering like part of Gehinnom. (*In reality, Gehinnom is not a punishment, but a process of cleansing all the filth accumulated from sins, to allow us to enter into Olam haboh.*) This is comparable to a person who is owed \$5,000,000 and agrees to accept only \$5, that is \$1 for each \$1,000,000; this is a great *chesed*, and only Hashem, in His infinite mercy, would agree to such a deal. This can also be compared to a person who was sentenced to die, but the king, in his mercy, changed it to hard labor. Those who don't know that the man was supposed to die, think that the King is cruel, but the truth is that he is very merciful.

Rav Elchonon Wasserman describes it beautifully with the following parable. Once there was a man who knew nothing about agriculture who came to a farmer to learn about farming. The farmer took him to his field and asked him what he saw. He saw a beautiful piece of land full of grass and pleasing to the eye. Then the visitor stood aghast as the farmer plowed up the grass and turned the beautiful green field into a mass of brown ditches. "Why did you ruin the field?" asked the man. "Be patient and you will see," answered the farmer. Then the farmer showed him a sack full of plump kernels of wheat and asked him what he sees. The visitor described the nutritious inviting grain and then once more watched in shock as the farmer ruined something beautiful. This time he walked up and down the furrows and dropped kernels into the open ground wherever he went, then he covered them up with clods of soil. "Are you insane," the man asked, "first you



destroy the field, then you take this beautiful grain, and you throw it underneath." The farmer answered, "Be patient and you will see." Time went by, and once more the farmer took his guest out into field. Now they saw endless straight rows and green stalks sprouting up from all of the furrows. The visitor smiled broadly, "I apologize, now I understand what you were doing, you made the field more beautiful than ever; the art of farming is truly marvelous." "No," said the farmer, "we are not done, you must still be patient." More time went by and the stalks were fully grown, then the farmer came with a sickle and chopped them all down as his visitor watched openmouthed, seeing how the orderly field became an ugly scene of destruction. The farmer bound the fallen stalks into bundles and decorated the field with them. Later he took the bundles to another area, where he beat and crushed them until they became a mass of straw and loose kernels. Then he separated the kernels from the chaff and piled them up in a huge hill. Always he told his protesting visitor, "Be patient we are not done." Then the farmer came with the wagon and piled it high with grain which he took to the mill. There this beautiful grain was ground into formless choking dust. The visitor complained again, "You have taken beautiful grain and transformed it into dust." Again he was told to be patient. The farmer put the dust into sacks and took it back home. He took some dust and mixed it with water, while his guest marveled at the foolishness of making whitish mud. Then the farmer fashioned the mud into the shape of a loaf. The visitor saw the perfectly formed loaf and smiled broadly, but his happiness did not last. The farmer lit a fire and put the loaf into the oven. "Now I know you're insane, after all that work, you burn what you make." The farmer looked at him and laughed, "Have I not told you to be patient?" Finally the farmer opened the oven took out the freshly baked bread crisp and brown, with an aroma that made the visitors mouth water. "Come," the farmer said. He led his guest to the kitchen table where he cut the bread, and he offered his now-pleased visitor a liberally buttered slice. "Now," the farmer said, "Now you understand."

Rav Elchonon said: Hashem is the farmer, and we are the fools who do not begin to understand his ways or the outcome of his plan. Only when the process is complete will all the Jewish people know why all this happened. Then, when Moshiach has finally come, we will know why all of this had to be. Until then we must be patient and have faith that everything, even when it seems destructive and painful, is part of the process that will produce goodness and beauty.

With this, Rav Elchonon Wasserman explained the Holocaust. (This story can be found at the end of the biography of Rav Elchonon Wasserman zt"l, the greatest talmid of the Chofetz Chaim, who died in the holocaust. It mentions (Reb Elchonon, pg. 410) that Lieutenant Mayer Birnbaum met a holocaust survivor who related to him this parable told by Rav Elchonon when he was asked to explain why these horrors had befallen them.) This is the key to understanding suffering.

We now can understand the words of the Sha'arei T'shuvah (2:2-4), who says that there are two reasons for suffering: 1) To atone for his sins, and cure his spiritual sickness; 2) To remind him and to make him return from his Evil ways. The Sha'arei T'shuvah concludes that a person who repents as a result of his sufferings should rejoice over the sufferings and praise Hashem just as he would do for any other successes.

Now we can understand another story with Nachum Ish Gamzu. The *Gemora* in Ta'anis (21a) relates that a poor man who was starving asked Nachum for food. Unfortunately, by the time he unloaded his donkey to get it, the poor man died. Nachum was very shaken by what had happened and fell on the poor person and said, "My hands which didn't have pity on your hands, should be cut off. My legs which didn't have pity on your legs, should also be cut off. My eyes which didn't have pity on your eyes should be blinded." Finally he also requested that his entire body be covered with boils. His requests were fulfilled. His eyes were blinded, his hands and feet were cut off, and his whole body was full of boils. (Lev Eliyahu (vol 2, pg. 43-44) explains that although seemingly Nachum had nothing to do with the poor person's death, he nevertheless felt that had he prepared the food in advance, the poor person's life would have been spared. Nachum therefore felt that he was responsible for the poor person's death. If Nachum felt that he need atonement for such a sin, where does that leave us, who have transgressed a lot worse?) When his students saw him with all this suffering they exclaimed, "Woe unto us that we see you in this manner." Whereupon he answered, "Woe unto me if you didn't see me in this manner." What did he mean? The Steipler Gaon explains in his sefer *Chayei Olam* (chp 14,6) that Nachum knew that the punishment in Gehinnom even for an accidental sin would be much worse than the suffering that he had endured.

Every time a person suffers he should not take it as a coincidence, but rather should try to calculate what he has done to warrant this punishment. A perfect example of this is the story found in our *Gemora* with Rav Huna. Instead of just focusing on the physical and natural reasons for it (*the spoilage of his wine*), he concentrated rather on what act he could have done to warrant such a punishment. When he found the cause and rectified it, he recouped his loss.

[B"H I later found that the Chazon Ish made the same observation on this story, as cited in the sefer *Lekach Tov* (Parshas Va'eschanon, pg. 42.)