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גלב"ע י' שבט תש"ס



**HAVINEINI  
HOTLINE**

US - 718.686.8300

E"Y - 072.257.7726

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## Contents

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### **Acquiring Your Portion of Torah through Yissurim... 5**

*The Source and the Questions* ❖ *What Rava Didn't Say* ❖ *A Prayer and a Pasuk* ❖ *Not Just for Giants* ❖ *What Rava Meant* ❖ *Sometimes It's Clear* ❖ *Turning to Daas Torah* ❖ *Attributing Suffering to Bitul Torah* ❖ *The Suffering of the Imahos* ❖ *Yissurim Prod Us to Fulfill Our Mission* ❖ *In Summary*

### **Sweetening Bitter Souls with Torah..... 15**

*The Torah is a Tree of Life* ❖ *All Beginnings Are Difficult* ❖ *The Bitterness of Changing Habits* ❖ *The "Bitterness" of Torah* ❖ *From Bitter to Sweet* ❖ *Three Classrooms of the Soul* ❖ *Not for Me!* ❖ *A Comfortable Trap* ❖ *Three Days of Deprivation* ❖ *Getting through the Adaptation Period* ❖ *In Summary*



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## Acquiring Your Portion of Torah through Yissurim

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In the previous shiurim, we explained that when encountering *yissurim*, our first *avodah* is to accept them with *simchah* and to thank Hashem. We then explored ways to implement Chazal's instruction to review our actions and identify wrongdoings that may account for any suffering we are experiencing.

One of the most painful aspects of suffering is confusion. We turn to the Torah for guidance in all situations, but if we look at the words of Chazal without learning them properly, we may feel even more confused. The concepts discussed in the previous shiur prompted many excellent questions. In this shiur we will try to shed light on these questions by returning to the sources.

### The Source and the Questions

Rava (some say Rav Chisda) said (Brachos 8a): אם רואה אדם שיטורין – If one experiences suffering, he should take stock of his actions, as the *pasuk* says (Eichah 3:40), בַּחֲפָזָה דַּרְכֵינוּ וְנִחְקְרָה – *let us search and examine our ways*. If he finds wrongdoing, he should do *teshuvah*, as the *pasuk* continues, וְנָשׁוּבָה עַד ה' – and let us turn back to Hashem.

The simple reading of this *gemara* leads people to ask some difficult questions.

- A theoretical tzaddik who reviews his actions and finds a couple of small wrongdoings can correct them. Unfortunately, that's not my reality. When I look at my actions, I find numerous shortcomings and can't correct them all at once. Does that mean I am doomed to a life of constant suffering?

- How do I implement the instruction to do *teshuvah* for my wrongdoings? Where should I begin? With my chronic lateness to *davening*? Or perhaps I should focus on *mitzvos bein adam lachaveiro*? I know I must turn to the Torah for guidance, but I can't find clear instructions for this process in the Torah, in the words of Chazal, or in the Rishonim. How is it possible that the Torah, which always enlightens us by guiding us to a clear path in *avodas Hashem*, leaves us in darkness and confusion when it comes to suffering?
- Imagine the following scenario: In a given community, all the couples - except for one - are blessed with children. When this couple asks why they don't have children, are we supposed to tell them to search through their deeds for the sin that caused their suffering? Won't they cry out, "Can it be that all the other couples in our community are pure tzaddikim and are therefore parents of children? Are we the only couple who are such *resha'im* that we are doomed to remain childless until we find the sin that caused our situation?"
- What about people who are born into suffering from day one? For example, some children are born with debilitating diseases or disabilities. Do we tell such people to search for the wrongdoings that are the cause of their suffering?

The Gemara's statement concludes with the following:

תורה פשפש ולא מצא יתלה בביטול תורה – If he searched and didn't find [wrongdoing], he should attribute his suffering to *bitul Torah* (wasting time that should have been used for Torah study).

This only elicits further questions.

- How should a woman, who doesn't have the same obligation to learn Torah that a man does, implement Chazal's instruction to attribute her suffering to *bitul Torah*?
- Everyone knows they can and should aspire to utilize their time more efficiently for Torah study. Is there anyone who can honestly say he

is not guilty of *bitul Torah*? Once again, the words of Chazal imply that we are doomed to a life of suffering, whether due to our multiple *aveiros* or to our *bitul Torah*.

### What Rava Didn't Say

Some try to explain that a child born into suffering must be a *gilgul*, a reincarnation of a person from a previous generation who must return to this world and suffer to atone for his sins in a previous life. However, if that were the case, Chazal should have included in their teachings, "If one searched and found no wrongdoing, he should attribute his suffering to his previous lives." However, *Chazal did not include that in their guidance!*

Another common answer given to people who are suffering is אַתְּ חַטָּאתֶיךָ יִצְטַקְּךָ – *Hashem chastises those He loves* [in order to increase their reward in *Olam Haba*] (Mishlei 3:12). While this concept can be found in Chazal, why didn't Rava utilize it in the aforementioned *gemara* that specifically provides guidance to someone who is suffering?

### A Prayer and a Pasuk

Soon after hearing these questions, I traveled to the *tziyun* of the Beis Aharon of Karlin on his *yahrtzeit*, the seventeenth of Sivan. While reciting *perek* 119 of Tehillim, I asked Hashem to enlighten me and enable me to understand this complex topic. When I reached *pasuk* ע"א, I began to see the *gemara* in *Brachos* in a new light.

Dovid Hamelech says in Tehillim (119:71), טוֹב לִי כִּי־עָנִיתִי לְמַעַן אֶלְמַד חֻקֶיךָ, – *It is good for me that I have been made to suffer, so that I might learn your laws.*

This denotes that each person enters this world **in order to acquire and fulfill his "portion of Torah."** There is a facet of Torah that only

you can grasp, based on your particular situation and experiences. As the Chida (Rabbi Chaim Yosef David Azulai) teaches (*Chasdei Avos* 3:8):

Each Jew received his portion of Torah at Sinai. If he is G-d-fearing, he will bring to light that which his soul received there. That “*chiddush*” cannot be brought to light by any other person because that is his portion.

This does not only refer to acquiring an understanding in learning Torah per se, but also to **a person’s *chiddushim* in *avodas Hashem***, his unique ways of serving Hashem that are connected specifically to his *neshamah* and cannot be developed by anyone else. Hakadosh Baruch Hu places each of us in situations that force us to struggle, and through our struggle we come to understand and reveal distinctive aspects of *emunah*, *bitachon* and closeness to Hashem. Only that specific Jew in those specific circumstances can access and grasp that “portion of Torah.” **And only through this process can he acquire his portion in Torah and fulfill his purpose as part of Hashem’s master plan.**

R. Shimon Bar Yochai (Brachos 5a) teaches us: “Hakadosh Baruch Hu gave three great gifts to the Jewish People, yet we can only receive them through suffering. They are: Torah, Eretz Yisrael, and *Olam Haba*.”

The Maharsha (*Chiddushei Aggados*, Brachos 5a) explains that these gifts are only accessible through suffering because they cannot be acquired through pleasure. One who wishes to receive his portion in Torah must undergo suffering because only in the context of suffering will he achieve the new understanding of Torah that will enable him to make his unique contribution to Klal Yisrael and fulfill his unique role in Hashem’s world.

### Not Just for Giants

Let’s take the example of the Chazon Ish, who was an undisputed giant in all areas of Torah. As he grew in Torah, he had to deal with adversity in so many aspects of his life (including childlessness). Many



people don't realize that it was only by dealing with adversity that he was able to achieve his unique greatness in Torah, *avodah* and *chesed*.

This concept is not limited to *gedolei Yisrael*. Each of us can only progress spiritually and acquire our portion in Torah and *avodas Hashem* by dealing with the difficult situations that Hakadosh Baruch Hu specifically designs for us.

Recently, I spent Shabbos with over three hundred couples whose children are seriously ill. I must say that I never experienced such a special Shabbos in my lifetime. The *emunah*, *anavah* and nobility that emanated from all of those families shone forth with a light that penetrated my heart.

### What Rava Meant

Let's return to the original statement of Rava: אם רואה אדם שיסורין באין – עליו יפשפש במעשיו, פשפש ולא מצא יתלה בביטול תורה – If one sees that suffering has come upon him, he should sort through his deeds. If he has sorted and not found, he should attribute his suffering to *bitul Torah*.

Rashi explains: לא מצא עבירה בידו שבשבילה ראויין יסורין: פשפש ולא מצא – He did not find a sin that is a **fitting cause for these yissurim** to come."

In his *sefer Rosh Yosef*, the Pri Megadim elaborates:

Rashi is telling us to look for an *aveirah* that matches the suffering in the pattern of *middah k'neged middah* (measure for measure). As the Alshich Hakadosh has taught us, Hakadosh Baruch Hu does not make a person suffer in order to "punish" him. Rather, *yissurim* are designed to awaken a person to be *mesaken*, to correct his behavior. Therefore, in His kindness, **Hashem sends suffering that matches the wrongdoing to send us a message about what we need to fix.**

We can now understand the *gemara* in *Maseches Brachos*. Chazal are not instructing us to investigate endlessly, turning over every stone of our

history until we manage to find a wrongdoing from our youth that could be the cause of our difficulties. *יפשפש במעשיו* means that you briefly review your actions, looking for a wrongdoing that stands out in its similarity to your difficult situation.

### Sometimes It's Clear

Just yesterday I heard the following story from one of the older Stoliner Chassidim, who had the privilege of learning under Rav Aharon Kotler in the early years of the Lakewood Yeshivah:

“The Gaon Rav Yosef Rosenblum (later Rosh Yeshivah of Yeshivas Shaarei Yosher) escaped Europe and came to Lakewood as a *bachur*. He was a tremendous *masmid* with sterling *middos*. There was, however, an aspect of his appearance that made it difficult for him to find a *shidduch*. One day, a *talmid* in the yeshivah decided to play a prank on Yosef. He disseminated “fake news” that Yosef Rosenblum had become a *chassan*. When I heard the news, I was overjoyed. I ran over to Yosef and extended my hand to wish him *mazel tov*. He ignored my hand and told me he was not engaged and that he had no idea how this rumor had started. I knew which *bachur* had initiated the prank. Soon afterwards, the prankster became a *chassan*. The *kallah* came from a very well-known, well-respected family. As the wedding date approached, the upcoming *simchah* was the talk of the yeshivah. However, when the friends of the *chassan* noticed that he was learning as usual and didn't seem to be preparing for his wedding, they asked him what was happening. He had to experience the embarrassment of telling each questioner that the *kallah* had broken off the *shidduch*.

That is an example of *middah k'neged middah* that doesn't require *ruach hakodesh*, just a swift *פשפש במעשיו*. Every person should review his actions along those lines to discern if there is a connection between his suffering and his wrongdoings. For example, one who begins to experience financial difficulties might discover that he stopped giving *maaser* to *tzedakah* or that he profited by doing something forbidden by *halachah*.

## Turning to Daas Torah

When the cause and effect is unclear, a person should ask his Rav.

*Mori V'rabi* Rav Moshe Hess *shlit"a* shared a thought from the Chasam Sofer that explains a puzzling phenomenon in Shas. Many *masechtos* begin without clear introductions and explanations. For example, *Maseches Brachos* begins בערבין את שמע בערבין – From when do we recite Shema at night? – without first explaining the mitzvah of *Krias Shema*. The Chasam Sofer explains that the *masechtos* were written that way to ensure that a *talmid* would have to learn from a *rebbe*. Only from a *rebbe* can one truly learn and be *mekabel* Torah. So too, a person can only “learn the *sugya*” of *yissurim* in his life by receiving guidance from a *rebbe*.

## Attributing Suffering to Bitul Torah

We can now understand the second part of Chazal's instruction – תורה בביטול תורה. פשפש ולא מצא יתלה בביטול תורה. As we explained from Rashi and the Pri Megadim, פשפש means that he looked for a *middah k'neged middah*. If he didn't find one, then יתלה בביטול תורה.

I would like to suggest that we can explain this attribution of *yissurim* to *bitul Torah* with the previous explanation of the *pasuk* לִי טוֹב כִּי עֲוִינִי לַמַּעַן אֲלַמַּד חֻקֶיךָ. In other words, a person should attribute his painful situation to the fact that Hashem doesn't want him to be *mevatel* his *cheilek* in Torah, to lose his unique portion in Torah and *avodas Hashem*. This aspect of Torah that is uniquely his can only be acquired through *yissurim*.

To clarify this idea, let's imagine a talented young boy who has the potential to become a *gadol* who will light up the world with his Torah; however, his friends are distracting him from his learning. We might send this boy to learn in a yeshivah far from home. It will be difficult for him. The conditions may not be comfortable. He will be homesick. However, he has to suffer in that way in order to actualize his potential.

Similarly, people often must undergo hardship in order to actualize their potential. Only by remaining strong, developing *emunah* and *bitachon*, and drawing close to Hashem in times of adversity do they reach the pinnacle of their *avodas Hashem*.

These *yissurim* do not result from a particular sin or wrongdoing they have committed.

This concept helps us understand Rabbeinu Bachya's statement (Devarim 22:8): "Before entering this world, every *neshamah* agrees to undergo all the hardships it will experience in its future lifetime. For the *neshamah* enters the world for the purpose of acquiring its portion in Torah. Even if the process will require suffering, the *neshamah's* decision is clear."

In summary, even though our first step in times of adversity is to look for *middah k'neged middah*, **once we have done that and haven't noticed any connection, we must immediately look forward and move on in our *avodas Hashem***, attributing our suffering to the unique aspect of Torah that we are meant to bring into the world.

### The Suffering of the Imahos

In *Maseches Yevamos* (64a), Chazal ask why the *Imahos* were *akaros*, incapable of conceiving. They answer, מפני שהקב"ה מתאוה לתפילתן של צדיקים – because Hashem yearns for the prayers of *tzaddikim*. Note that Chazal did not answer that the *Imahos* were *akaros* so that they should look back and identify their wrongdoings. It was so that their suffering would bring forth the deep, heartfelt *tefillos* that Hashem wanted as part of His plan for the world.

The Satmar Rebbe asked, "Why particularly infertility? Couldn't Hashem have sent some other hardship that would induce them to *daven*? He explained that *tzaddikim* who follow Hashem with pure *emunah* might not respond to their suffering with deep heartfelt *tefillah*. Their strong *emunah* leads them to feel that if Hashem chose this situation for them, it must be best. However, the pain of infertility is

so deep and so intense that even tzaddikim will cry out from the bottom of their heart. Only that particular hardship enabled them to fulfill their unique portion in Hashem's plan.

### Yissurim Prod Us to Fulfill Our Mission

In *Maseches Bava Metzia* (75b), Chazal tell us that if someone feels his current location is bad for him, he should move to another city. The Yismach Moshe explains that this discomfort is a sign that Hashem wants him to move to another location in order to fulfill his "portion in Torah" there.

Once again, we see that **not always does challenge and suffering imply wrongdoing, but often it is there to simply prod us toward the ultimate fulfillment of our mission.** If a person is stubborn and refuses to understand that *min haShamayim* he is supposed to move elsewhere, he may bring more hardship on himself. Hashem has many ways to get someone to change locations and fulfill his portion in Torah. It is always preferable to listen to the gentle message before a harsher message becomes necessary.

Looking back at Jewish history, we find that many well-known *yeshivos* and *chesed* organizations were founded by Yidden whose challenges enabled them to discover their unique ability to contribute to Klal Yisrael.

### In Summary

- When encountering *yissurim*, our first *avodah* is to accept them with *simchah* and to thank Hashem.
- Only after achieving that should we move on to briefly reviewing our past, looking for a wrongdoing that stands out as a clear *middah k'neged middah* of the suffering we are undergoing.
- If we don't notice such an *aveirah*, we should understand that we are experiencing *yissurim* so that we will acquire our unique *cheilek* in Torah.

Let us lift our eyes to Hashem and be *mispallel*: והאר עינינו בתורתך, illuminate our eyes in your Torah. ותן חלקינו בתורתך - help us identify our portion in Your Torah. **Ask Hashem where you should be, what you should be doing, and what you are meant to teach others.**

May we all find the path to our destiny through Hashem's Mercy and revealed kindness.

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## Sweetening Bitter Souls with Torah

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At the end of *Parshas Beshalach*, Bnei Yisrael begin their journey into the Wilderness and face the difficult test of finding no source of water.

וַיִּסַּע מֹשֶׁה אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵיַם סוּף, וַיֵּצְאוּ אֶל מִדְבַּר שׁוּר, וַיֵּלְכוּ שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים בְּמִדְבַּר, וְלֹא מָצְאוּ מַיִם. וַיָּבֹאוּ מַרְתָּה, וְלֹא יָכְלוּ לִשְׁתֹּת מִיַּם מַמְרָה, כִּי מְרִים הֵם, עַל כֵּן קָרָא שְׁמָהּ מַרָּה. וַיִּלְנֹנוּ הָעָם עַל מֹשֶׁה לֵּאמֹר מָה נִשְׁתָּה. וַיִּצְעַק אֶל ה', וַיֹּרְהוּ ה' עֵץ, וַיִּשְׁלַךְ אֶל הַמַּיִם, וַיִּמְתְּקוּ הַמַּיִם, שָׁם שָׁם לֹא חָק וּמִשְׁפָּט, וְשָׁם נִסָּהוּ (בשׁלח ט"ו, כב-כה)

*And Moshe led Yisrael from Yam Suf, and they went out in the desert of Shur, and they walked for three days in the desert and did not find water. They came to Marah, but they could not drink water from Marah because it was bitter; therefore, it was named Marah. The people complained against Moshe, saying, "What shall we drink?" So he cried out to Hashem, and Hashem instructed him concerning a piece of wood, which he cast into the water, and the water became sweet. There He gave them a statute and an ordinance, and there He tested them.*

These *pesukim* are not simply relating one of the miracles that took place in the desert. The concluding words, שָׁם שָׁם לֹא חָק וּמִשְׁפָּט וְשָׁם נִסָּהוּ, make it clear that Bnei Yisrael needed to learn from the events that took place in Marah in order to prepare themselves for *Mattan Torah*.

### The Torah Is a Tree of Life

*Kli Yakar* explains that Hashem tested them with the waters of Marah to see if they were worthy of receiving the Torah. In the *Mechilta*, we find the *Chachamim* debating the identity of the tree whose wood sweetened the waters. Some said it was an olive tree, some said it was the willow (*aravah*), and others said it was a poisonous tree called *harduf*. R. Shimon Bar Yochai explained that it was the Torah; the Torah is called (Mishlei 3:18) *eitz chaim* – a tree of life. (The *pasuk* says וַיֹּרְהוּ עֵץ,

which implies teaching, rather than ויראהו which is the ordinary way to say *he showed him*.) Hashem taught him a fundamental Torah lesson.

The *Kli Yakar* then presents the parallel between the test of the waters and our interaction with the Torah. The Torah is initially bitter. It is called *Tushiyah* because it weakens (*mateshes*) a person's strength. Chazal (*Devarim Rabbah* 7:3) compare Torah to the olive tree. Just as the olive is initially bitter, and ultimately sweet, so are *divrei Torah*. Moshe Rabbeinu was told *V'saggid l'bnei Yisrael* (Shemos 19:3), to transmit words which are as tough as sinews (*gidin*), demonstrating that the *mitzvos* were not given for our enjoyment.

The *Kli Yakar* then explains that spiritual illnesses are similar to physical illnesses. The medicine may be bitter, and if the patient doesn't trust the doctor, he may refuse to take the medicine. Bnei Yisrael were infected by the negative beliefs of the Egyptians. Hakadosh Baruch Hu wanted to cure them by giving them the Torah. However, since the Torah, like the olive, is bitter in the beginning, perhaps *Am Yisrael* would doubt that their spiritual "bitterness" could be cured by something bitter.

Hashem brought them to the *nisayon* of Marah. The true test was a test of *emunah*. If Bnei Yisrael would truly believe that Moshe Rabbeinu was only able to sweeten the bitter waters because of the spiritual power given to him by Hashem, they would also be able to believe that the Torah could sweeten and cure the bitterness of their souls.

That, the *Kli Yakar* concludes, is why the Torah doesn't say ויראהו, Hashem showed him a tree. It says ויורהו, he "**taught him** a tree" – he taught him the way of the Torah. Like the olive, **the path of Torah is initially bitter, but eventually sweet**. If *Bnei Yisrael* would understand and accept this principle, they would be ready to continue on to *Mattan Torah*.

### All Beginnings Are Difficult

וְעַתָּה אִם שָׁמוֹעַ תִּשְׁמָעוּ בְּקוֹלִי – *And now if you will listen to My voice* (Shemos 19:5). Rashi (based on the *Mechilta*) explains that the repetitive



phrase *תְּשׁוּמֵי תְּשׁוּבָתוֹ* indicates two stages of our interaction with the Torah: “If you accept [the Torah] now, it will be sweet from here on, because all beginnings are difficult.” This teaches us that before Bnei Yisrael received the Torah, Hashem let them know that their initial experience would be bitter and only later would it be sweet. According to the *Kli Yakar*, they were already prepared to accept this, after their experience at Marah.

We need to understand how the process of sweetening something bitter with bitterness works. If we were to view it simply as a supernatural miracle, then understanding wouldn't be necessary. However, the *Kli Yakar* explains this as a natural process, similar to curing bitter illnesses with bitter medicine. According to his *peirush*, the essence of the test was whether they would accept and understand that this process is one of the natural systems that Hashem created.

### The Bitterness of Changing Habits

We can understand the process by considering the experience of a person who needs to change a habit that is not in line with the Torah's teachings. (Certainly none of us can say that all our habits match the Torah's expectations.) In the beginning he finds it extremely difficult to change a deeply ingrained habit. A person who is accustomed to speaking *lashon hara*, and now must change his entire way of communication, finds that process very difficult. A person accustomed to laziness faces a difficult battle when he tries to acquire the *middah* of *zerizus*.

Nonetheless, **the painful and difficult stage ends when the person finally manages to uproot that old ingrained habit and replace it with a new habit.** As he becomes habituated to the positive behavior, it will no longer be difficult.

### The “Bitterness” of Torah

How does the “bitter” aspect of Torah manifest itself, and how does it help us transform “bitter” habits?

For a person who follows negative habits that aren't in accordance with the Torah, immersing himself in a Torah reality will cause him to experience bitterness each time he sins. At the moment of the action he may still experience its sweetness, but soon afterwards, his heart feels bitter, because he knows that he isn't living as Hashem wants him to. As Chazal say, הרשעים מלאים חרטה, the wicked are full of regret.

With the example of the bitter waters of Marah, Hakadosh Baruch Hu told His children, "I am about to give you the Torah that will instruct you to change so many negative habits in your thoughts, words, and actions. I am letting you know beforehand that the process of changing your habits will be terribly bitter. However, **you should know that the bitterness won't last long.** Once the light of Torah enlightens you, the bitterness will disappear and you will experience wonderful sweetness."

### From Bitter to Sweet

When people say כל התחלות קשות - *all beginnings are difficult*, they usually apply the saying to someone who is undertaking a new project of Torah learning or mitzvah performance. Most people don't realize that the same principle applies to the process of changing habits. It will always be difficult at the beginning, but if a person remains consistent, sweetness will replace the bitterness.

If someone points out our shortcomings in Torah and *mitzvos* and tries to educate us by quoting Chazal, too often we react with anger. That is another manifestation of the "bitterness" of Torah. **It's very difficult to accept criticism.** However, if a person is wise enough to accept the lesson with love, the Torah will light up the dark recesses of his *nefesh*, enabling him to live a much sweeter life.

### Three Classrooms of the Soul

Someone shared with me the guidance that his father, a *maggid shiur* in Bnei Brak, received from Rav Aharon Leib Steinman.

“You should know that among your students some will be outstanding (*metzuyanim*), some will be average (*beinonim*), and some will be weak (*chalashim*). For your work with the *metzuyanim*, you receive *Olam Hazeh*: it’s a pleasure to teach them. For your work with the *beinonim*, you receive your salary. For your work with the *chalashim* (the weak students), you receive your portion in *Olam Haba*.”

I think the same principle can apply to the way we work with different areas of our own *nefesh*. Some aspects of our *nefesh* are delightful to work with. We each have areas of *avodas Hashem* that we connect with so totally that we can even strengthen others. When you work with those aspects of your *nefesh*, you experience the brachah the Gemara calls עולמך תראה בחיך, when you get to see your *Olam Haba* in your lifetime in this world. Then, there are “*beinoni*” aspects of your *nefesh*, where you do the *mitzvos* because you know that it’s what you have to do. For example, a person may spend a lot of money on a *lulav* and *esrog*; he may not feel great joy in it, but he knows that he must do so because he was placed in this world to do *mitzvos*. And there are “*chalash*” aspects of your *nefesh*, parts that are very hard to work with; **they are resistant to the positive changes that are needed to meet the Torah ideal.** You should know that the difficult struggle to fix those aspects of your *nefesh* is what earns you your portion in *Olam Haba*.

### Not for Me!

The greatest lesson that Hakadosh Baruch Hu taught us with the waters of Marah is that **everything is meant to become sweet!** Some people say they would rather remain *beinonim* because they know that advancing further would have to involve a bitter struggle. They explain that they aren’t built for it because they are naturally laid back and so that type of painful effort isn’t for them.

That assessment is totally untrue, because Hashem never creates a person who is forced to remain a *beinoni*. Without doubt, everyone can progress, and there is no limit to how far we can progress. The people who speak this way are correct in realizing that progress can be painful

and difficult. However, they are mistaken in thinking that they are unable to progress. They are simply afraid to leave their comfort zone.

### A Comfortable Trap

Let's imagine a *kehillah* that is arranging a trip to *daven* in *mekomos lakedoshim*. Everyone signs up and prepares for the trip, all except one person, who decides to stay home. His friends ask him, "Why not come along? It will certainly be an enjoyable and fulfilling experience." But he is afraid of the bitterness involved, whether the expenditure, or the discomfort of the journey. He prefers to remain in his comfort zone at home, even if it means passing up the pleasurable experience of joining his friends.

Let's imagine his friends pressure him so much that he gives in and comes along. By the end of the trip, having enjoyed the experience so much, he'll thank his friends for not letting him stay home.

**The same applies to our long journey to *Gan Eden*.** When we feel reluctant to embark on the next stage of our journey, we should remember that it is an opportunity to achieve something we will enjoy forever. If we allow the bitterness of changing our habits to sweeten the bitterness of our negative behavior, we will truly taste the sweetness of Torah.

### Three Days of Deprivation

Bnei Yisrael discovered bitter water at Marah after going for three days without water; the *sefer Panim Yafos* explains that this represents the experience of someone who encounters Torah after three days without Torah. Chazal say in *Maseches Bava Kama*: if you leave Torah for a day, the Torah leaves you for two days.

He explains that the Torah is meant to enlighten every area of our *nefesh* and transform physicality to G-dliness. This is very difficult, as our spiritual aspects and our physical aspects constantly wage war on each other. If someone's *nefesh* is already infused with the *kedushah* of the Torah, and he simply needs to add even more *kedushah*, the

experience is pleasurable. But if someone distanced himself from Torah, and emptied some of the *kedushah* he had absorbed, his return to Torah will be a more difficult and bitter experience.

He explains that this is why Chazal said, במקום שבעלי תשובה עומדים אין צדיקים גמורים יכולים לעמוד. It is very difficult to light up darkness. **Each of us has dark areas in our *nefesh*** that require us to be *baalei teshuvah* and undertake the bitter struggle to light them up.

## Getting through the Adaptation Period

When someone undergoes an organ transplant, the most immediate concern is that the body will reject the organ. Hashem created our bodies with an immune system that protects our health by rejecting and fighting anything foreign. Doctors have found ways to subdue the immune system for an adaptation period following the transplant, so that the new organ can be accepted and integrated into the body. Once the patient successfully gets through the adaptation, he benefits from the health and vitality he gains from having a working organ.

**The same process occurs when a person begins to change a habit** – committing to refrain from looking at forbidden sights, or committing to learn for a predetermined length of time without interruptions and distractions. The bitterness isn't simply the result of changing habits. Every time we try to infuse the *nefesh* with the *kedushah* of the Torah, there is a force that tries to reject that light. The sense of bitterness is a result of that reaction.

The *Panim Yafos* explains that the *pasuk* in Yeshayah (40:31) describes this process: וְקוֹזֵי הַיַּחְלִיפוּ כַּחַיִּים, יַעֲלוּ אֶבֶר פְּנֵי שָׁרִים, יְרוּצוּ וְלֹא יִגְעוּ, יִלְכּוּ וְלֹא יִיָּעֲפוּ – *those who yearn for Hashem will exchange strength*. As we progress, we exchange physical powers for spiritual powers, enabling us to soar on eagles' wings to realms that we could never have accessed by physical powers. In fact, the gravity of physicality often impedes our ability to rise higher. Replacing those powers with spiritual powers enables us to run without exhaustion.

## **In Summary**

If we understand and accept that spiritual progress requires an initial period of bitter struggle, we will persevere — and then we will experience the sweetness that will help us advance by leaps and bounds.