

## DVAR TORAH BREAKING BAD HABITS

Breaking bad habits is difficult, but not impossible. The Sfas Emes, building on one of Rashi's comments on this week's parshah, gives us two principles that can help us be successful.

### I. Get at the Roots

Our parshah includes the order to destroy idolatry in the land of Israel. The Torah's very strongly worded command (Devarim 12:2) uses the expression **אבד תאבדון**, you should surely destroy. Rashi (based on the double wording – see the Mizrahi here) says: **אבד ואח"כ תאבדון מכאן לעוקר עבודת כוכבים שצריך לשרש אחריה** – First destroy, then [once again] destroy. From here we learn that one who removes idolatry must remove its roots. For instance, to destroy an *asheirah* (a tree worshipped as part of an idolatrous cult), it is not sufficient to keep cutting off the trunk as the tree grows; the tree must be totally uprooted.

The Sfas Emes suggests that this rule about removing idolatry teaches us how to destroy the evil within. It is not sufficient to stop improper behavior – like a bad habit or lapse in keeping halachah – but we must get at its roots. We must try to get to the internal sources of our problems: character flaws, inner psychology, and spiritual roots. If we don't get at the roots, the problems will keep growing back like green shoots coming out of the stump of a hearty tree.

It goes further, though. When we sin, says the Sfas Emes, we negatively affect the world and cause some type of flaw in the spiritual roots of the world. That has to be addressed to right the wrong.

### II. We Can't Do It Alone

This requires assistance from Above. First, we need assistance to do what we can – like all of our endeavors require Divine assistance – but we also need assistance to get at the deep roots that are beyond our grasp. This, says the Sfas Emes, is another way of reading the double expression **אבד תאבדון**: you **must** uproot as deep as you can (the verb **אבד** is in the command form), and God will take care of the rest and remove the spiritual roots of the sin (**תאבדון** is here in the future form – “you **will** be able to destroy” because God finishes off the roots).

This special need for Divine assistance with regards to both personal and national repentance is built into the fifth blessing of the Shemoneh Esrei, *Hashiveinu*. Three times daily we pray that God should aid us to return to Him and achieve *teshuvah shleimah*, complete repentance. **Complete** teshuvah not only helps us stop our bad habits once and for all, but removes the inner roots of the sin, both within us and Above.



Also in this week's Daf Keshar:

· Source Guide: [The Brave Boy & the Humble Amora](#) · Rav Yitzchak Hirshfeld: Recommendations for Elul & Yamim Noraim

## SOURCE GUIDE THE BRAVE BOY & THE HUMBLE AMORA

This week's haftarah includes a piece of the messianic vision involving a precious *kadkod* stone, that aroused the curiosity of the great Amora Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi.

<p><b>Yishayahu (Isaiah) 54:12-13</b>                  (12) And I will place <i>kadkod</i> stones as your windows and your gates will be made out of <i>ekdach</i> stones, and all of your borders precious stones.                  (13) And all of your sons will be learned about God, and there will be abundant peace among your sons.</p>	<p><b>ישעיה נד:יב-יג</b>                  (יב) וְשִׁמְתִי פְדָכָד שְׁמֹשֶׁתֶיךָ וְשַׁעְרֶיךָ לְאַבְנֵי אֶקְדָּח וְכָל גְּבוּלְךָ לְאַבְנֵי חֲפָיִן :                  (יג) וְכָל בְּנֶיךָ לְמוֹדֵי ה' וְרַב שְׁלוֹם בְּנֶיךָ :</p>
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In this week's study guide we will learn a midrashic anecdote about how Eliahu the Prophet revealed the identity of the *kadkod* stone to Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi. The Midrash appears in the Yalkut Shimoni (Yishayahu 54 Remez 478), and in the Pesikta Rabati (Piska 32 – Aniah So'arah) with slight variations. Even though the significance of the *kadkod* stone remains shrouded in mystery, the story surrounding its discovery teaches a very powerful message.

### The Midrash

The Midrash opens with a conversation between Eliahu Hanavi and the Amora Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi:

<p><b>Yalkut Shimoni (Yishayahu 54 Remez 478)</b>                  "... Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi stood with Eliahu z"l. He (Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi) said to Eliahu, "Won't the master show me those <i>kadkod</i>s?" He said "Yes", and showed them to him through a miracle.</p>	<p><b>ילקוט שמעוני ישעיהו - פרק נד - רמז תעח</b>                  ... רבי יהושע בן לוי קם עם אליהו ז"ל א"ל לית מרי מהמי לי הדין כדכודי א"ל אין והראה לו ע"י נס.</p>
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Note: In the Pesikta's version the two of them are standing on Mount Carmel. That location was the scene of Eliahu's great confrontation with the idolatrous prophets of the *baal* (see *Melachim I* Chapter 18). Might there be some special significance to that location in conjunction with this story?

What was the miracle?

<p><b>Yalkut Shimoni (Yishayahu 54 Remez 478)</b>                  The following episode occurred: There was a boat out in the Great Sea and all of its passengers were non-Jews, except for one young Jewish boy. A storm came upon it at sea.                   Eliahu, z"l, revealed himself to that boy and said to him, "Go as my messenger to Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi and show him those <i>kadkod</i> stones and I will save the entire boat in your merit." He (the boy) said, "Rabbi Yehoshua is the greatest of the generation he won't believe me." Eliahu replied, "He is an exceedingly humble person and he will believe you, and when you show them to him, don't show them before other people. Rather, take him to a cave three <i>mil</i> (a <i>mil</i> is approximately a kilometer) away from Lod and show them to him there."                   Immediately a miracle happened and they got out of there in peace.</p>	<p><b>ילקוט שמעוני ישעיהו - פרק נד - רמז תעח</b>                  מעשה בספינה שהיתה מפרשת בים הגדול והיתה כולה נכרים, והיה בה תינוק יהודי אחד ובא עליה סער גדול בים.                   אתגלי אליהו ז"ל על ההוא ינוקא, א"ל זיל בשליחותי לגבי רבי יהושע בן לוי ומחמי ליה אינון כדכורי ואנא משויב להדא אלפא בזכותך. א"ל רבי יהושע גדול הדור הוא לית הוא מהימן יתי, א"ל ענוון סגיא הוא ומהימני יתך, וכד תחמי יתיה לא תחמי ליה קדם בר נש אלא דבריה למערתא רחיקא מן לוד תלתא מילין ותחמי ליה יתהון תמן.                   מיד נעשה נס ויצא משם בשלום, :</p>
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### Think about the story:

Why is it so important that no one else be present when Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi is shown the stones? Put yourself in the place of that child: would you have responded to Eliahu as he did? Here's what happened next:

<p><b>Yalkut Shimoni (Yishayahu 54 Remez 478)</b> The young boy went to Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi and found him sitting in the great Yeshivah of Lod. He (the boy) said to him, "My master, I have something to tell you." Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi got up – and you see Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi's humility that he followed him three <i>mil</i> without asking him what he wants. When they reached the cave he said, "My master, these are the <i>kadkod</i> stones."  When he saw them, all of Lod shone from their light, and he cast them to the ground and they were hidden.</p>	<p><b>ילקוט שמעוני ישעיהו - פרק נד - רמז תעח</b> אזל ההוא ינוקא לגבי רבי יהושע בן לוי ואשכחיה יתיב במתיבתא רבא דלוד, א"ל מרי מילתא אית לי למימר לך, קם ליה רבי יהושע בן לוי איתא חמון ענותנותיה דרבי יהושע בן לוי דאזיל בתריה מהלך תלתא מילין ולא א"ל מה את בעי, וכיון דמטון למערתא א"ל מרי אילין אינן אבני כדכודי:  וכד חמי יתהון ליה הבהיקה כל לוד מאורו והשליכן לארץ ונגנזו:</p>
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Note the two aspects of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi's humility: He gets up when the child says he must tell him something; then he follows the child three kilometers without asking the natural questions like "Where are you taking me?" "Whatever you have to tell me, can't you just tell me here?"

### Suggestion:

1. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi's humility is the main theme of the story – On the boat, Eliahu assures the young child that the mission will be successful because of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi's humility. It is also the main focus of the end of the story, as he obediently follows a young boy to a cave outside Lod. The connection between Torah greatness and humility is with us from the Torah's beginning, for our greatest prophet (see Devarim 34:10) was also the world's most humble person (Bamidbar 12:3). This connection between Torah greatness and humility is natural, for the more a person can get his own ego out of the way, the more he can be a conduit for the Torah, Divine Revelation.

2. Even though the young boy is only a supporting character in the story, his participation was essential, and two things are impressive about him. First, his willingness to question Eliahu about whether he will really be able to succeed in the mission shows honesty and seriousness. Second, it was brave of him to face the possibility of embarrassment in approaching the great Rosh Yeshivah.

### Additional Sources:

- See Bava Batra 75a for another Aggadta that revolves around the *kadkod* stone. Rabbi Yochanan is a central figure, and a student's lack of humility – that reflects itself in a lack of reliance on Rabbi Yochanan's teaching - ends up being his downfall.
- See Makot 11a, where Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi was considered responsible for what took place within his three *mil* radius. He usually merited a daily mystical elevation referred to as *Gilui Eliahu*, but this was withheld from him for three days when someone in his area was eaten by a lion.

The story's ending is curious: why were the stones hidden?

## TORAH FROM OUR FACULTY

### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ELUL BY RABBI YITZCHAK HIRSHFELD

The month of Elul is upon us. Some of us shudder at the thought of approaching discomfort. We suspect that we are going to be miserable until that last shofar blast of Yom Kippur frees us from the perennial nag of conscience.

Others, though, will look forward to the approaching *Yamim Noraim* with the anticipation of a prisoner about to be allowed his first bath in a year. Imagining what it will feel like to finally be clean pushes us to make sure that this will be a bath to end all baths.



Rabbi Yitzchak Hirshfeld

Let's face it. In a year we can accumulate a lot of spiritual garbage.

In one sense Yom Kippur is the *tachlit*, the ultimate goal – the day of national and spiritual cleansing – *Mikveh Yisrael Hashem*. The judgment of Rosh Hashanah forces us to undress our souls for examination. The judgment, with the soul-searching it fosters, is the soap which loosens the grimy grip of sin. And only then can Yom Kippur work its wonderful magic.

In another sense Rosh Hashanah is the *tachlit* – the day of national and personal recommitment to the service of the King of Kings. For us *beinonim*, this undertaking is facilitated by Yom Kippur removing the barriers of sin which stand between our souls and our ultimate purpose.

Some recommendations:

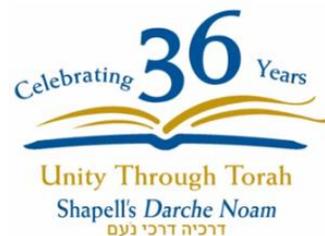
1. Go over the Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur Davening well in advance. As always, the key is in the liturgy.
2. Remember the teaching of Rebbe Yitzchak (Rosh Hashanah 166) – “*Kol shana sherosha b'tchilah mitasheret b'sofah.*” At the beginning of the year we must recognize how dependent and needy we are; how our lives, our success and well-being can never be taken for granted. Then we can be blessed with a year of wealth and riches. Hashem helps those who realize that “Hashem helps those who help themselves” is a very incomplete aphorism.
3. Remember that the terms of our partnership with Hashem in running the world imply that He waits for us to make the first move. Nowhere does this apply more than to the process of return – *teshuvah*. *Ani ledodi* – I am to my beloved – and then, and only then, *vedodi li*, my beloved is to me.

Ktivah Vachatima Tovah.

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**This issue is dedicated in memory of  
Yisrael Zvi ben Zev, z”l**

We remember all of the soldiers, the kedoshim, z”l, who gave their lives defending the people of Israel and the land of Israel in operation Tzuk Eitan. יהי זכרם ברוך.  
May Hashem send a speedy recovery to the wounded, יבל”ח, and בשורות טובות to all of Israel.  
May He bless, protect, and bring success to those striving to defend Israel.