

## Moshe Prayed that the Tanna Rabbi Eliezer Would Descend from Him and He Is the First Tanna Mentioned in Torah She'b'al Peh

In this week's parsha, parshas Chukas, we learn about the mitzvah of the "parah-adumah"—the "red heifer"—(Bamidbar 19, 1): 'וידבר ה' אל משה ואל אהרן לאמר, זאת חוקת התורה אשר צוה ה' לאמר, דבר אל בני ישראל ויקחו אליך פרה אדומה תמימה אשר אין בה מום "אשר לא עלה עליה עול"— Hashem spoke to Moshe and Aharon, saying: This is the statute of the Torah, which Hashem has commanded, saying: Speak to Bnei Yisrael, and they shall take to you a perfectly red cow, which has no blemish, upon which a yoke has not come.

In the Midrash Tanchuma (Chukas 8), our blessed sages reveal to us a private conversation that took place between Moshe Rabeinu and HKB"H regarding this parsha:

"בשעה שעלה משה למרום, שמע קולו של הקב"ה יושב ועוסק בפרשת פרה אדומה, [ואומר] הלכה בשם אומרה, רבי אליעזר בני אומר (פרה פ"א מ"א) עגלה בת שנתה ופרה בת שתיים, אמר משה לפניו, רבונו של עולם העליונים ותחתונים שלך הן ואתה אומר הלכה בשמו של בשר ודם.

אמר לו [הקב"ה], צדיק אחד עתיד לעמוד בעולמי, ועתיד לפתוח בפרשת פרה אדומה תחילה, רבי אליעזר אומר עגלה בת שנתה ופרה בת שתיים. אמר לפניו רבון העולמים יהי רצון שיהא מחלצי, אמר לו חייך שהוא מחלצוך, הדא הוא דכתיב (שמות יח-ד) ושם האחד אליעזר, ושם אותו המיוחד אליעזר."

**When Moshe ascended to the heavens, he heard the voice of HKB"H, sitting and studying the passage of the parah-adumah. He uttered a halachah in the name of the one who said it: Rabbi Eliezer, my son, says: "The 'eglah' must be no more than one-year old and the 'parah' no more than two-years old." Moshe said to Him, "Master of the Universe, the upper and lower realms are Yours, and You are citing a halachah in the name of a human being?!"**

**He replied to him, "An individual tzaddik is destined to rise in My world, and he is destined to begin the passage of the 'parah-adumah' with the following words: Rabbi Eliezer**

**says: "The 'eglah' must be no more than one-year old and the 'parah' no more than two-years old." He responded, "Master of the Universe, May it be Your will that he will be a descendant of mine." He said to him, "On your life, he will be your descendant." This is the significance of that which is written: "And the name of the other was Eliezer"—indicating that the name of that unique individual is Eliezer.**

### Rabeinu HaKadosh Began the Mishnayos with the Name of Rabbi Eliezer

It is fitting that we present an explanation from the great luminary, Rabbi Yechezkel Landau, ztz"l. In his sefer, the Tzlach, on Maseches Berachos (2a), he explains—based on this Midrash--why Rabeinu HaKadosh chose to mention the Tanna Rabbi Eliezer in the very first Mishnah of Torah she'b'al peh: "מאימתי קורין את שמע בערבית, משעה שהכהנים נכנסין לאכול בתרומתן, עד סוף האשמורה הראשונה דברי רבי אליעזר"—**from when may we recite the Shema in the evening? From the time the kohanim (who were tamei) may enter to eat their terumah, until the end of the first watch; these are the words of Rabbi Eliezer.** Since Moshe prayed that Rabbi Eliezer would descend from him, Rabeinu HaKadosh wished to make Moshe Rabeinu proud by opening Torah she'b'al peh with the ruling of Rabbi Eliezer.

Notwithstanding, the commentaries are puzzled by the Midrash itself. What possessed HKB"H to utter the halachah in the name of Rabbi Eliezer. After all, in that Mishnah (Parah 1, 1), the sages dispute the view of Rabbi Eliezer: עגלה "זחכמים אומרים, עגלה—**the sages say: The "eglah" may be even two-years old, and the "parah" may be even three-years old or four years old.** Furthermore, the Rambam (Parah Adumah 1, 1) rules according to the opinion of the sages. That being the case, why did HKB"H choose to utter the halachah in the name of Rabbi Eliezer rather than in the name of the sages?

Additionally, they are puzzled by the conclusion of the Midrash, where HKB”H responds to Moshe: **“On your life, he will be your descendant.” This is the significance of that which is written: “And the name of the other was Eliezer”—indicating that the name of that unique individual is Eliezer.** Now, it is true that Rabbi Eliezer, who was a levi, descended from Moshe, who was also a levi. However, how is it possible to conjecture that the passuk regarding the naming of Moshe’s son: **“And the name of the other was Eliezer”**—alludes to Rabbi Eliezer, the Tanna, who was destined to descend from him? After all, Moshe’s son was born while he was still in Midyan, prior to the exodus, and before Moshe ascended to the heavens to receive the Torah. So, what possible connection exists between Moshe’s son Eliezer and the Tanna Rabbi Eliezer?

### Eliezer Had the Power to Overcome the Klipah of יאו”ש—Despair

To resolve these issues, we shall embark on our sacred journey by focusing on the unique character of the divine Tanna, Rabbi Eliezer ben Hurkanus. As we have already learned, HKB”H uttered a halachic ruling in his name, and this prompted Moshe to yearn and pray: **“יהי רצון שיצא זה מחלצי”**—that it would be G-d’s will that Rabbi Eliezer would descend from him. Furthermore, Rabeinu HaKadosh began the first Mishnah in Torah she’b’al peh with his ruling.

Additionally, it is worthwhile examining the very name **“אליעזר”**, which is only mentioned twice in the entire Torah. The first time it is mentioned is in relation to Avraham Avinu’s loyal servant. Avraham prays to HKB”H that he will be privileged to have offspring (Bereishis 15, 2): **“ויאמר אברם ה’ אלקים מה תתן לי—ויאמר אברם ה’ אלקים מה תתן לי—and Avram said, “My Lord, Hashem/Elokim: What can You give me being that I go childless, and the steward of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?”** The second reference is in relation to Moshe Rabeinu’s son (Shemos 18, 4): **“ושם האחד אליעזר כי אלקי אבי בעזרי—ויצילני מחרב פרעה—and the name of the other was Eliezer, for “the G-d of my father came to my aid, and He saved me from Pharaoh’s sword.”**

We will begin to shed some light on the matter with a precious introduction from the wonderful teachings of the great Rabbi Tzaddok HaKohen, zy”a, in Divrei Sofrim (16). He addresses a passuk in parshas Lech Lecha. It describes how Avraham went out to battle the four kings in order to rescue his nephew Lot (Bereishis 14, 14); **“וישמע אברם כי נשבה אחיו, וירק”**

**את חניכיו ילידי ביתו שמונה עשר ושלוש מאות וירדוף עד דן—and Avram heard that his brother was taken captive, and he armed his initiates who had been born in his house—three hundred and eighteen—and he gave chase as far as Dan.** Rashi comments: **Our Rabbis said, it was only Eliezer, and that is the numerical value of his name (318).**

Rabbi Tzaddok explains why Avraham took precisely 318 members of his household with him or Eliezer alone—whose name equals 318. He explains that the word **יאו”ש**, meaning despair and hopelessness, equals 317. Thus, the number 318, which exceeds 317 by one, alludes to a person’s overcoming the klipah of **יאו”ש**. Accordingly, Avraham took with him precisely 318 household members or Eliezer alone. He was demonstrating that despite the fact that he was vastly outnumbered, he prevailed over the klipah of **יאו”ש**, confronted the four kings and defeated them.

Thus, we see that the name Eliezer alludes to the capacity to overcome despair and hopelessness. This, in fact, is why Moshe named his son Eliezer. The passuk explains his rationale: **“And the name of the other was Eliezer, for ‘the G-d of my father came to my aid, and He saved me from Pharaoh’s sword.’”** Rashi provides the following clarification: **When Datan and Aviram revealed the matter involving the Egyptian, and he (Pharaoh) wanted to kill Moshe, his neck became like a marble pillar.** Pharaoh’s sharp sword was already poised against his neck; nevertheless, Moshe did not despair, and he was saved. Therefore, he named his son **אליעזר**, which exceeds the value of **יאו”ש** by one.

Rabbi Tzaddok adds a vital point. When we review the evolution of the Jewish people, we find that it is founded on the capacity to overcome **יאו”ש**. Avraham Avinu was an elderly man of one-hundred years old and Sarah Imeinu was barren. It would have only been natural for him to succumb to the depths of despair and hopelessness. Nevertheless, he continued to believe that Hashem would fulfill his promise to grant him offspring, as it is written (Bereishis 15, 6): **“והאמין בה’ ויחשבה לו צדקה—and he trusted in Hashem, and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.** In the merit of that emunah, they gave birth to Yitzchak Avinu, from whom the holy dynasty of Yisrael descended.

This is the message conveyed by the navi (Yeshayah 51, 2): **“הביטו אל אברהם אביכם ואל שרה תחוללכם—look to Avraham your forefather and to Sarah who bore you.** They merited establishing the continuous succession of generations by

overcoming the klipah of יאו"ש; they refused to give up hope. Thus, we learn a valuable lesson; we should never fall, chas v'shalom, into the depths of despair. We must remain steadfast in our emunah in Hashem, as the Gemara says (Berachos 10a): "אפילו חרב חדה מונחת על צווארו של אדם אל ימנע עצמו מן הרחמים"—**even if a sharp sword lies on a person's neck, he should not refrain from praying for mercy.**

### Eliezer Did Not Give Up Hope of Going from Cursed to Blessed

Let us add a spicy tidbit to his incredible explanation based on what we have learned in the Gemara (Berachos 7b): "מנא לן דשמא גרים, אמר רבי אלעזר דאמר קרא (תהלים מו-ט) לכו חזו מפעלות ה' אשר שם שמות בארץ, אל תקרי שמות אלא שמות". The Gemara teaches us that one's name has an effect on one's life; a passuk from Tehillim is quoted to substantiate this fact. Further substantiation is provided by the Midrash (Yalkut Shimoni Yeshayah 449): "אילו זכו הדורות, היה הקב"ה קורא שם לכל אחד ואחד, ומשמו היו יודעים את טיבו ואת מעשיו... אמרו רבותינו, כשהיה רבי מאיר רואה אדם, היה למד שמו ומשמו. **Had the generations been worthy, HKB" H would have named each and every person; from his name we would have known his nature and his accomplishments . . . Our Rabbis said that when Rabbi Meir would see a man, he would learn his name and from his name he would know his accomplishments.**

Now, the Torah requires a person to circumcise his non-Jewish slave, as it is written (Bereishis 17, 12): "ובן שמונת ימים ימול לכם כל זכר לדורותיכם, יליד בית ומקנת כסף מכל בן נכר אשר לא מזרעך **at the age of eight days, every male among you shall be circumcised, throughout your generations—he who is born in the household or purchased with money from any stranger who is not of your offspring.** Rashi explains: "Born in the household"—that a slave-woman gave birth to him in the household. "Purchased with money"—that the master purchased him after he was born. Thus, we can conjecture that when Avraham circumcised his loyal servant, he chose the name Eliezer wisely; for, he understood via his "ruach hakodesh" that this name reflected his nature and actions.

Let us elaborate. When Avraham sent him on a mission to find a suitable wife for Yitzchak, it states *ibid.* 24, 39): "ואומר אל **and I said to my master, "Perhaps the woman will not go after me?"** Rashi points out: The word "perhaps" (אולי) is spelled like "to me" (אלי). Eliezer had a daughter and he was searching to find a pretext so that

**Avraham would tell him to turn to himself—to marry his daughter to him (to Yitzchak). Avraham said to him, "My son is blessed and you are cursed, and one who is cursed cannot cleave to one who is blessed."**

Rashi is referring to the fact that Avraham's slave Eliezer was a descendant of Canaan, who was cursed (*ibid.* 9, 25): "עבד עבדים יהיה לאחיו—a slave of slaves shall he be to his brothers. Therefore, he longed to attach himself to Avraham, a descendant of Shem, in order to escape the category of the cursed and be included among the blessed. Yet, when Avraham told him harshly: "My son is blessed and you are cursed, and one who is cursed cannot cleave to one who is blessed"—he could have very easily given up hope of ever being included among the blessed. Despite his disappointment, he did not despair; instead, he continued to fulfill the mission Avraham had assigned him loyally, in order to remain attached to his kedushah.

As a result, he ultimately succeeded in divesting himself of the label of "cursed" and becoming "blessed." For, we learn in the Midrash (B.R. 60, 7) regarding the passuk (Bereishis 24, 31): "ויאמר בא ברוך ה', כנען הוא אליעזר, ועל ידי ששרת אותו צדיק באמונה, יצא מכלל **'He said, 'Come, O blessed of Hashem!': Canaan is Eliezer; by serving that tzaddik faithfully, he went from the category of the cursed to the blessed.** It was precisely for this reason that Avraham named him אליעזר, possessing a numerical value of 318. Avraham was alluding to his nature and deeds—the fact that he was destined to overcome the klipah of יאו"ש, which equals 317. For this same reason, Avraham chose him to go out to battle with him—a meager number of combatants against the armies of four formidable kings.

### Rabbi Eliezer Attained His Torah by Overcoming יאו"ש

Following this line of reasoning, let us proceed to explain why Rabeinu HaKadosh chose to open the first Mishnah in Torah she'b'al peh with the ruling of the divine Tanna named appropriately Rabbi Eliezer. In Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer (Chapter 1), our blessed sages teach us that Rabbi Eliezer began to learn Torah under the tutelage of Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai, with extreme dedication, when he was already twenty-eight years old:

"מעשה ברבי אליעזר בן הורקנוס, שהיו לאביו חורשים, והיו חורשים על גבי המענה [אדמה רכה], והוא היה חורש בטרשין [אדמה קשה], ישב לו והיה בוכה. אמר לו אביו מפני מה אתה בוכה, שמא מצטער אתה שאתה חורש בטרשין, עכשיו אתה חורש על גבי המענה. ישב לו על גבי המענה והיה בוכה, אמר לו מפני מה אתה



בוכה, שמה מצטער אתה שאתה חורש על גבי המענה, אמר לו לאו. ולמה אתה בוכה, אמר לו שאני מבקש ללמוד תורה. אמר לו והלא בן עשרים ושמונה שנים אתה, ואתה מבקש ללמוד תורה, אלא קח לך אשה ותוליד לך בנים ואתה מוליכך לבית הספר.

עשה שתי שבתות ולא טעם כלום, עד שנגלה לו אליהו זכור לטוב, ואמר לו בן הורקנוס למה אתה בוכה, אמר לו מפני שאני מבקש ללמוד תורה, אמר לו אם אתה מבקש ללמוד תורה, עלה לירושלים אצל רבן יוחנן בן זכאי.

עמד והלך אצל רבן יוחנן בן זכאי, ישב לו והיה בוכה, אמר לו מפני מה אתה בוכה, אמר לו מפני שאני מבקש ללמוד תורה. אמר לו בן מי אתה, ולא הגיד לו. אמר לו מימיך לא למדת קריאת שמע ולא תפלה ולא ברכת המזון, אמר לו לאו, אמר לו עמוד ואלמדך שלשתן. ישב והיה בוכה, אמר לו בני מפני מה אתה בוכה, אמר לו שאני מבקש ללמוד תורה, והיה אומר לו שתי הלכות כל ימי השבוע, והיה חוזר לו עליהן ומדבקן.

עשה שמונה ימים ולא טעם כלום, עד שעלה ריח פיו לפני רבן יוחנן בן זכאי, והעמידו מלפניו [שסילקו מלפניו מפאת ריח פיו]. ישב והיה בוכה, אמר לו מפני מה אתה בוכה, אמר לו מפני שהעמדתני מלפניך כאדם שמעמיד מלפניו מוכה שחין, אמר לו בני, כשם שעלה ריח פיך מלפני, כך יעלה ריח חוקי תורה מפיה לשמים.

An incident is described involving Rabbi Eliezer ben Hurkanus. His father had workers plowing the field. They were plowing soft furrows, while he was plowing tough, rocky terrain. He sat down and began to cry. His father asked him why he was crying. Are you upset because you are plowing tough, rocky terrain? He replied in the negative. Then why are you crying? He answered that it was because he wanted to learn Torah. His father said to him, “But you are twenty-eight years old, and you want to learn Torah? Instead, take a wife for yourself, she will give birth to sons, and you can take them to the school.

Two Shabbatot passed and he didn’t eat anything, until Eliyahu Zachur LaTov appeared to him. He asked him, “Son of Hurkanus, why are you crying?” He replied, “Because I want to learn Torah.” He said to him, “If you want to learn Torah, go up to Yerushalayim to Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai.”

He got up and went to Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai. He sat down and began to cry. He inquired of him, “Why are you crying?” He replied, “Because I want to learn Torah.” He asked him, “Whose son are you?” He did not tell him. He asked him, “Have you never learned to recite Krias Shema, to daven or to recite Birkat HaMazon?” He replied, “No.” He said to him, “Stand up, and I will teach you all three.” He sat down and began to cry. He asked him, “My son, why are you crying?” He replied, “I want to learn Torah.” He would teach him two

halachos during the week; he would review them repeatedly until they sank in and he understood them well.

Eight days passed, and he didn’t eat anything, until his foul breath affected Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai; he sent him away. He sat down and began to cry. He asked him, “Why are you crying?” He replied, “Because you sent me away from you like a person who sends away a repulsive person.” He said to him, “Just as your foul breath rose before me, so, too, will the pleasant scent of Torah-precepts rise from your mouth to the heavens.”

Thus, we find that at the age of twenty-eight, Rabbi Eliezer didn’t even know how to recite the Krias Shema or to daven. It would have only been natural for him to give up hope of ever being able to learn. Therefore, it was orchestrated from above that he be named אליעזר, which equals 318—one more than יאֹר—alluding to the fact that he overcame the klipah of despair and hopelessness.

### According to Rabbi Eliezer the Parah Adumah Is a Precept without a Rationale

Based on what we have learned, I would like to propose an explanation for Rabbi Eliezer’s ruling apropos the mitzvah of the “parah-adumah”: “עגלה בת שנתה ופרה בת שתיים”—the term “eglah” (as in “eglah-arufah”) refers to an animal in its first year of life, whereas the term “parah” (as in “parah-adumah”) refers to an animal in its second year of life. I would like to refer to Rashi’s commentary on this week’s parsha (Bamidbar 19, 22); he cites Rabbi Moshe HaDarshan’s viewpoint that the rationale for the law of the “parah” is to provide atonement for the “cheit ha’eigel”: “משל לבן שפחה שטינה פלטין של מלך, אמרו תבוא אמו ותקנה בצואה, כך תבוא פרה ותכפר על העגל”—it is analogous to the son of a maidservant who soiled the palace of a king. They said, “Let his mother come and wipe away the excrement.” Similarly, let the “parah” (cow) come, and atone for the “eigel” (calf).

In his derashot, the Chasam Sofer explains that this rationale is plausible only according to the ruling of the sages—that the “parah” must be in her third or fourth year of life. For, only then is she capable of giving birth, as we have learned in the Gemara (Bechoros 19b). Hence, only when she is three years old is it applicable to say: “תבוא פרה ותכפר על העגל”—let the mother cow come and clean up after its calf. According to the viewpoint of Rabbi Eliezer, however, we cannot say that the “parah” represents an atonement for the “eigel,” such that the mother

is cleaning up after its child. For, he rules that a kosher “parah” must be in its second year of life; thus, it is not yet capable of giving birth and being a mother.

Notwithstanding, let us explain the viewpoint of Rabbi Eliezer according to the Chasam Sofer. He follows the opinion of those Tannaim who hold that the entire matter of the “cheit ha’eigel” was in actuality a divine decree—aimed at demonstrating the path of teshuvah to the masses. For, we have learned in the Gemara (A.Z. 4b):

“אמר רבי יהושע בן לוי, לא עשו ישראל את העגל אלא ליתן פתחון פה לבעלי תשובה.” **Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: Yisrael only made the “eigel” in order to provide encouragement for ba’alei-teshuvah.** Rashi comments: **In other words, they were strong men, who were in control of their yetzers; it was not fitting for their yetzers to prevail over them. Rather, it was by divine decree that they prevailed over them, in order to provide encouragement for ba’alei-teshuvah. So that if the sinner should claim, “I will not repent, because He will not accept me”; they would say to him, “Go and learn from the incident of the ‘eigel’—they blasphemed and their teshuvah was accepted.”**

Accordingly, we can suggest that this is the basis for Rabbi Eliezer’s viewpoint. HKB”H purposely commanded that an animal only in its second year of life be brought as a “parah-adumah”; so that it would be evident that the “cheit ha’eigel” was not a sin caused by Yisrael’s failure to overcome their yetzer. For, in that case, HKB”H would have commanded them to bring a three-year-old “parah” capable of giving birth. Instead, the entire incident was orchestrated by divine decree, in order to demonstrate the path and process of teshuvah. Even if a person is guilty of avodah-zarah, one of the most severe transgressions, the path of teshuvah is still available to him.

Thus, according to Rabbi Eliezer’s viewpoint, the mitzvah of “parah-adumah” is performed with an animal in its second year of life in order to remind us that the “cheit ha’eigel” was the result of a divine decree; it was designed to demonstrate the pathway of teshuvah publicly. This explanation coincides very nicely with the details of the mitzvah: **“ויקחו אליך פרה אדומה תמימה: אשר אין בה מום אשר לא עלה עליה עול”**—**and they shall take to you a perfectly red cow, which has no blemish, upon which a yoke has not been placed.** These details allude to the mitzvah of teshuvah. Initially, the sinner is characterized as “אדומה”—stained by his transgressions. Yet, by means of teshuvah, he

rises to a state of **“תמימה אשר אין בה מום, אשר לא עלה עליה עול”**—pure and flawless, unencumbered by sins, because teshuvah has wiped his slate clean.

### The Key to the Mitzvah of Teshuvah Is Not to Fall into the Grasps of Despair

Upon careful scrutiny, it is apparent that this notion conforms amazingly with the essence of Rabbi Eliezer’s neshamah. Recall that he was named Eliezer, which has a gematria of 318, to allude to the fact that he successfully overcame the klipah of **יא”ו**, which has a gematria of 317. As a result of this accomplishment, he began learning Torah at the ripe age of twenty-eight years old. Accordingly, he is of the opinion that the “parah-adumah” was not meant to atone for the “cheit ha’eigel, which was a divine decree, but rather to demonstrate the pathway of teshuvah to the people.

Now, the key to teshuvah is not to fall prey to the yetzer, who attempts to cause a person to lose hope. It convinces a person to believe that his sins against HKB”H are so numerous that tikun by means of teshuvah is beyond the question. Due to the yetzer’s influence, the person continues to sin, chas v’shalom. In the words of David HaMelech (Tehillim 3, 2): **“ה’—מה רבו צרי רבים קמים עלי, רבים אומרים לנפשי אין ישועתה לו באלקים סלה”**—**Hashem, how numerous are my tormentors! The great rise up against me! The great say of my soul: There is no salvation for him from G-d, Selah!** Instead, a person should believe wholeheartedly that HKB”H is receptive to every Jew’s teshuvah; for HKB”H accepts the teshuvah even of a sinner who was guilty of avodah-zarah.

With this understanding, we can begin to comprehend why HKB”H chose to utter a halachic ruling in the name of Rabbi Eliezer: **“רבי אליעזר בני אומר, עגל בן שנה, פרה בת שתים”**. For, due to this halachah, it is evident that Yisrael did not actually sin with the eigel; in truth, it was arranged by divine decree in order to publicly demonstrate the pathway of teshuvah. This matter is very dear to HKB”H, Who always strives to vindicate Yisrael.

This may prompt someone to ask: Why then doesn’t the halachah accord with Rabbi Eliezer even in Olam HaZeh? For, as we know, the halachah accords with the viewpoint of the sages: **“פרה בת שלש”**—the “parah” must be at least three years old. We must answer that in Olam HaZeh, it is vital to perform teshuvah for the “cheit ha’eigel,” as if it was a genuine sin. Otherwise, how could we demonstrate that it is possible to perform teshuvah

even after committing the grave sin of avodah-zarah? Yet, in the heavens, in the mind of HKB”H, the teaching of Rabbi Eliezer is treasured. The “cheit-ha’eigel” was ordained from above, so that people would not succumb to יא”ש as a result of their countless sins and, therefore, would continue to perform teshuvah.

We can now appreciate Moshe Rabeinu’s reaction. When he heard HKB”H uttering this halachah in the name of Rabbi Eliezer, he prayed to HKB”H: “יהי רצון שיצא זה מחלצני”. After all, the loyal shepherd Moshe Rabeinu was willing to sacrifice his life in order to save Yisrael from extermination after the “cheit ha’eigel.” He beseeched HKB”H (Shemos 32, 32): “יעתה אם תשא יענתה אם תשא -- and now, if You would but bear their sin; but if not, erase me now from Your book that You have written. Therefore, when he heard HKB”H relishing Rabbi Eliezer’s ruling—because it proved that Yisrael were not truly culpable in the matter of the “eigel”—he yearned that this advocate of Yisrael’s would descend from him. He wanted it publicized that teshuvah affords tikun even for transgressions of the magnitude of avodah-zarah.

This explains very nicely the concluding lines of the Midrash: **“On your life, he will be your descendant.” This is the significance of that which is written: “And the name of the other was Eliezer”—indicating that the name of that unique individual is Eliezer.** The Midrash is drawing a parallel between the naming of his son Eliezer and the ruling of his son’s namesake—Moshe’s descendant Rabbi Eliezer. Even with Pharaoh’s sharp sword lying against his neck, Moshe did not submit to the klipah of יא”ש; in that merit, he was saved. Similarly, Yisrael should never submit to the klipah of יא”ש, no matter how grim the situation appears to be and how grave are there sins. They should always resort to complete, sincere teshuvah.

### Rabeinu HaKadosh Wisely Began the Mishnayos with Rabbi Eliezer’s Name

At this point, it is with great joy and pleasure that we can comprehend Rabeinu HaKadosh’s rationale for opening Torah

she’b’al peh with a ruling from the Tanna Rabbi Eliezer: **“עד סוף האשמורה הראשונה דברי רבי אליעזר”**. As we know, the study of Torah she’b’al peh is a struggle demanding devotion and sacrifice. The yetzer hara relentlessly attempts to convince us that it is a hopeless endeavor; the Torah is too extensive both in quantity and quality; it is, therefore, impossible to attain any true Torah knowledge or proficiency. The yetzer hara wants us to fall prey to the klipah of יא”ש.

The following statement from the wisest of all men is well known (Koheles 10, 2): **“לב חכם לימינו ולב כסיל לשמאלו”—a wise man’s mind tends to his right; while a fool’s mind tends to his left.** Our sacred sources provide us with a wonderful interpretation of this statement. When a person studies any sefer—for example Gemara—the difference between a wise man and a fool is readily apparent. The wise man is always looking back at the right side of the sefer—to see how many pages of Gemara he has already learned and to constantly review them. Thus, he can measure his daily progress and he is encouraged to press on with his studies. In contrast, the fool is always looking ahead at the left side of the sefer, to see how many pages remain. As a consequence, he becomes despondent and gives us hope; he falls into the depths of יא”ש. He convinces himself that the task is too daunting and that he is not capable of learning so many pages.

Fully aware of this phenomenon, Rabeinu HaKadosh cleverly opened the first Mishnah of Torah she’b’al peh with a ruling from the Tanna Rabbi Eliezer. For, his name alludes to the fact that he successfully prevailed over the klipah of יא”ש; as we have learned, the gematria of **אליעזר (318)** exceeds the gematria of **יא”ש (317)** by one. This was intended to encourage and inspire anyone starting to study Torah she’b’al peh; so that he would not fall prey to יא”ש. Instead, he should learn from the example of Rabbi Eliezer, who only began to study Torah, under the tutelage of Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai, at the age of twenty-eight years old.

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