

Torah Wellsprings

*Collected thoughts
from
Rabbi Elimelech
Biderman
Shlita*

Ki Savo



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CONTACT INFORMATION

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Torah Wellsprings - Ki Savo

Kabbalah Tovah

A poor couple received a letter from the king. The letter informed them that the king would visit their home in thirty days.

The couple was very excited and honored and had to prepare. The *baal habayis* told his wife, "The walls of our home haven't been painted in years, and all of our windows are broken. The legs of the chairs are of different height, and when someone sits down, he falls off. We know how to balance ourselves on the chairs because we are used to them, but we can't have the king sit on one of our chairs lest he fall off. Tomorrow, I will call handymen to fix up our entire house."

The wife replied, "For the past thirty years, I have been telling you that we have to fix up the house, but you kept saying that we can't afford it. If you go ahead now, it will involve taking out a loan and then paying it back over the next thirty years. The king knows we are poor. He isn't expecting to arrive at a mansion. He will accept whatever we can do."

Her husband answered, "The king told us weeks in advance that he's coming to us. He didn't tell us at the last minute. That means the king wants us to prepare for his visit."

The wife replied, "There are less expensive ways to prepare for the king's visit. Instead of painting the walls, we can hang white sheets on them. For the broken windows, we will place towels in them to keep the cold out."

The husband said, "I agree with your plan, but there is one thing we have to fix: the chairs. There is no way we can have the king sit on one of our broken chairs."

The *baalei mussar* give this mashal to explain the essence of Elul. Hashem will visit us on Rosh Hashanah, and we must prepare ourselves. We won't be able to fix everything, but we must do what we can. Therefore, we should take on a *kabbalah tovah*, which will be one step toward improving ourselves.¹

1. The Midrash (Bamidbar Rabba 15:8) states, "Can it be that Hakadosh Baruch Hu needs our light? Behold it states (Tehillim 139:12) *גַּם חֹשֶׁךְ לֹא יַחְשִׁיךְ מִמֶּנִּי*, "Even darkness obscures not from you." And it states *וְלַיְלָה כִּיִּם יֵאָרֵר*, *כְּחֹשֶׁךְ כְּאוֹרָה*, "Night shines like day, darkness and light are the same." So why did Hashem command us to light the menorah in the Mishkan and Beis HaMikdash?"

The Midrash answers with a mashal of a king who had a friend whom he loved. Once, the king told him, "I am going to eat a meal in your home. Please prepare for me."

The friend prepared a chair, table, lighting, and his simple utensils. The king and his royal entourage arrived, accompanied by servants who honored the king immensely. They carried a gold lamp before the king. When the friend saw all the honor the king received, he was embarrassed with his simple utensils, so he hid everything he prepared. The items were fitting for regular people but not for a king.

Seeing nothing prepared, the king asked "Didn't I tell you that I will eat with you today? Why didn't you prepare anything for me?"

The friend replied, "When I saw the great honor bestowed upon you, I was embarrassed with my simple utensils, so I hid them."

The king replied, "I swear, I will not use any of the utensils I brought. You are my friend whom I love, so I will only use your utensils."

The king has gold and all types of honor and pleasure in his palace. He didn't come to his friend's home

Two people did a great favor for the king. The king awarded them by granting them the privilege of going into his treasury for a half-hour and taking out whatever they wanted.

The date arrived, and when the designated hour neared, they arrived in front of the treasury, each holding a sack. The treasury minister met them and said, "When I give the signal, you can go inside. You have a half-hour. Whatever you take out is yours!"

When the minister gave the signal, they rushed towards the treasury entrance. They had never been there before, and they didn't know about the narrow hallway which they had to pass to get to the treasury. As they rushed through this narrow path, their sacks tore on the walls. "What should we do now?" they wondered. They only had a half-hour; time was ticking, and they didn't have sacks to carry the material.

One of them sat in the hallway and began sewing up his sack. He needed a usable sack before he went inside.

The other person ran into the treasury and immediately began filling his torn bag with the precious gems and items he found in the treasury. "There is no time to fix the bag," he said.

The other man came in with only five minutes left and quickly threw precious items into his mended sack.

Five minutes later, the treasurer came in and said, "Time is up. You have to leave the treasury."

The one with the mended bag had some treasures in it. But the other one, the person who didn't wait to mend his bag, didn't fare

as well. When he lifted his bag (which was now heavy from all the items he had collected), the bag tore even more, and all the precious items fell to the ground. He was left without anything at all.

The *nimshal* of this tale comes to teach the importance of making *kabalos tovos*. The holy, special days of Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Succos, and Simchas Torah are approaching. These are like Hashem's treasury; we can take out treasures from these days for the rest of the year. But we accomplish this with *kabalos tovos*. The *kabbalah tova* is like sewing up the bag and tying things up so we don't lose what we gain. Some say, "There is too much to do during these days, many mitzvos to perform. A small *kabbalah* doesn't mean much to me. I don't have time for it." But at the end of the *yomim tovim* period, they discover they have nothing tangible. In contrast, those who make a *kabbalah tova* have something they can take with them.

People think they can't change and feel this way because they have the "everything or nothing" approach. They don't appreciate the value of a small step of improvement and how much we can gain from a *kabbalah tova*.

It can be compared to the one step that gets a person into an elevator. It's a small step, but it's what will raise him to great heights. Without that one small step, he will remain below.

Tzaddikim advised taking on a *kabbalah tova* before the new year arrives. They called it a new garment for the new year. One good deed leads to the next one. It is a step towards improvement. Try it and

to indulge in the luxuries he has in abundance in the palace. He came to enjoy the simple table, chair, and lamp his dear friend toiled to prepare for him.

The same applies to *avodas Hashem*. Hakadosh Baruch Hu doesn't expect from a person levels beyond his reach, such as the intense fear and the love of the *malachim*, because Hashem has that in heaven. Hashem takes pleasure in our mundane utensils, from our everyday battles with the *yetzer hara* to overcome jealousy, hatred, bad *taavos*, etc. This is what provides great pleasure to Hashem.

become amazed at how much growth a person can attain with a small kabbalah tovah.²

Toil in Avodas Hashem

Chazal say, לפום צערא אגרא, Hashem gives reward in accordance with the hardship. When it is hard to perform a mitzvah, the reward will be greater. This also applies to the teshuvah and the improvement we seek to attain during these days of Elul. It is very hard to change our ways, which makes our teshuvah so precious to Hashem.

Because change and teshuvah are so hard to do, *kabbalos tovos* are very important. It is a tangible, clear direction toward improvement.

There is a surprising Gemara (Chagigah 5:), which says, שלשה הקב"ה בוכה עליהן בכל יום, "Hakadosh Baruch Hu cries over three people every day." One of the people for whom Hashem cries every day is the one who doesn't have time to study Torah, and he studies Torah regardless³.

2. The following story took place in 1960, and it was well known at the time.

The Pittsburgher Rebbe zt'l lived in Ashdod and, from time to time, traveled to his chassidim in America. Once, he was flying to New York, and another eight Yidden were on the plane. Midflight, the passengers noticed that the aircraft was rapidly losing altitude. Panic reigned on board. No one knew what was happening. Finally, a flight attendant announced that they were experiencing engine trouble and hoped to find a runway nearby.

Otherwise, they realized the plane would plummet into the forest below r'l.

The Yidden on board recited *viduy* and *kriyas Shema* and davened for a miracle. It was a frightening moment. Hashem answered their tefillos. With Hashem's compassion, they located a small airport, and the plane landed safely.

It was time to daven Shacharis. The nine people who were on the flight approached one of the men working at the tiny airport and asked if they could have a private place to daven shacharis. They explained they needed a place away from all the confusion and turmoil in the airport.

Without warning, the airport employee passed out. When he awoke, he spoke to them in Yiddish. He said, "Don't judge me by my appearance. I am a Yid, and I was brought up in a chassidic home in Williamsburg. I was orphaned from my father when I was ten, and made some foolish choices in my life, and now I live and work here, distant from all Yidden. Last night, my father came to me in a dream and said, 'Today is my *yahrtzeit*. I want you to say Kaddish for me.'

"I replied, 'How can my Kaddish help you? I'm so distant from Yiddishkeit.'

"My father replied, 'No, my son. Your Kaddish will help me immensely.'

"But there is no minyan where I live. How can I say Kaddish?'

"My father replied, 'If I send you a minyan, will you say Kaddish for me?'

"I said I would. And here you are, nine people, sent down from heaven, so I can say Kaddish with a minyan." He brought the group to a private place, davened with them, and said Kadish. It was a very emotional moment for him and the entire minyan.

This person was at a very low level. For years, he was living among goyim. But he discovered that he wasn't as detached as he thought. His mitzvos had importance, and his kaddish was meaningful in heaven.

Therefore, even those who are on low spiritual levels should take on a kabbalah tovah. It is significant and can act as a catalyst for their ascent to significant spiritual levels.

3. Reb Moshe Aharon Stern zt'l, the mashgiach of Kamenetz, related that in Brisk when the Maharil Diskin

This Gemara is difficult to understand because we would assume that Hashem would be happy with a person who is moser nefesh to study Torah study.

Furthermore, the Yismach Moshe zt'l (Yayin HaRekach on Shas) asks that this Gemara will cause people to be less devoted to Torah study, since there are people who toil in Torah, even though they don't have time to do so, and their intention is to create a nachas ruach for Hashem. But if they hear that their studies cause Hashem to cry, they will surely stop. They want to make Hashem happy, not sad!

The Yismach Moshe answers with a Taz (Orach Chaim 288:2) who quotes a Chazal that Reb Akiva was once crying on Shabbos, and his students were shocked because it is forbidden to cry on Shabbos. He replied that his crying brings him pleasure. The Taz

explains, "I think that due to his great deveikus with Hakadosh Baruch Hu, his eyes would shed tears. We find in Zohar Chadash that Reb Akiva would cry a lot when he read Shir HaShirim..."

The Taz is saying that Reb Akiva wasn't crying out of sadness; he was crying from the pleasure of deveikus.

The Yismach Moshe explains that when a Yid doesn't have time to study Torah, but he overcomes all challenges and finds time to study Torah, Hashem has immense pleasure from this. He loves the person and draws the person near to Him. This deveikus causes Hakadosh Baruch Hu keviyachol to cry from pleasure and joy.

Let this remind us of Hashem's great joy whenever we are moser nefesh to serve Him and whenever we have mesirus nefesh to do

was the rav, there was a rosh hakahal who had a daughter with many good qualities. When she reached marriageable age, shadchanim came up with many good bachurim, talmidei chachamim, for his daughter. The rosh hakahal had set aside a large dowry for his daughter.

After looking into many suggestions, it boiled down to two outstanding bachurim, and the rosh hakahal didn't know which one to choose for his daughter. One of the bachurim suggested wasn't an iluy, he wasn't a genius, but he made up for that with his immense hasmadah. The other bachur was a genius, but his hasmadah was standard. Not knowing how to proceed, he went to the Maharil Diskin for advice.

The Maharil Diskin replied that he should undoubtedly take the greater masmid. Although Chazal (Pesachim 49.) say, "A person should sell everything he owns to marry off his daughter to a talmid chacham," and behold the genius bachur is a greater talmid chacham, I still recommend the masmid because Chazal (Avos 4:9) also say, כל המקיים התורה מעוני סופה לקיימה מעושר, whoever studies Torah when he is poor, will end up studying Torah though wealth. I say that this also refers to poor acumen abilities. If he continues studying Torah, he will become wiser and deeper and, ultimately, a great Torah scholar. So, ultimately, you will end up with a son-in-law an iluy, and a masmid as well! But the other one, he will remain a genius, but hasmadah doesn't grow on its own.

The rosh hakahal followed this counsel. This son-in-law indeed grew immensely in Torah, and became renowned as the great gaon, Reb Yosef Zundel zt'l of Eishishok, author of many wondrous sefarim on the four sections of Shulchan Aruch. (The sefarim are called גני חיים on Orach Chaim, אולם המשפט on Choshen Mishpat, חדר דעה on Yorah Deiah, and חוקי העזרה on Even HaEzer.) He was respected and loved by all the gedolei hador of his generation. The Chofetz Chaim, who lived in Radin, near Eishishok, would come to speak to him in learning and to get his advice on many subjects. The Chofetz Chaim also asked him for a askamah on his sefer Likutei Halachos.

In a similar vein, we can explain the Mishnah כל המקיים התורה מעוני סופה לקיימה מעושר applies to someone who studies Torah when he is at a low spiritual level, struggling with many challenges. If he studies Torah and keep the mitzvos at these times, heaven will grant spiritual wealth, and he will be able to serve Hashem on a higher level, with a happy heart.

teshuvah, even if the teshuvah lasts only for a short time.⁴ These moments of mesirus nefesh and teshuvah draw us close to Hashem.

A bachur went off the derech, r'l, but then he began the process of teshuvah. Gradually, he was returning. When the yom tov of Shavuos arrived, he refrained from doing *melachos*, and for him, this was a great accomplishment – a step in the right direction. After Shavuos, he told his Rav, "I kept Shavuos, but I was occupied with סור מרע, not doing any aveiros on this day. I am jealous of all the others who were also occupied in the עשה טוב, performing the mitzvos of the day. I didn't go to the *beis medresh* to daven like they did. I didn't stay up learning Torah like they did..."

The Rav replied that he doesn't have to be jealous of others because he passed a difficult test, and that makes his "little", greater than their "lot". The Rav said, "When there was a Beis HaMikdash, the *levi'im* played music. It inspired people and caused a deep yearning for Hashem. There were also *kohanim* in the Beis HaMikdash, who were slaughtering animals, placing their fingers into the blood, and sprinkling it on the *mizbeiach*. Now, let's consider who performed a greater avodah before Hakadosh Baruch Hu. Was it the service of the Levi'im, whose music inspired people to very high levels of deveikus to Hashem or was it the service of the *kohanim* who brought the *korbanos*? It is certain that the *kohanim's* service was greater because אין כפרה אלא בדם, atonement comes from the blood of the *korbanos*. About the *korbanos*, it states ריה

4. Reb Avraham Pollak zt'l, the mashgiach of Slabodka, asked the Chazon Ish zt'l, "Why do we go through the process of teshuvah in Elul and during the yamim noraim? When Cheshvan comes around, we will return to our old selves!"

The Chazon Ish answered that it is all worthwhile for a few days of closeness to Hashem. A moment of teshuvah is significant, even if it doesn't last.

At another time, the Chazon Ish explained that if it weren't for these days, we would easily fall "into the mud" of aveiros and bad habits. So, perhaps the teshuvah won't last, but at least it prevents us from falling even deeper into the quagmire of sin.

Someone asked the Slonimer Rebbe zt'l the same question. What is the purpose of Elul and teshuvah if it won't last? He replied that chimney cleaners bathe each night, even though they know they will become dirty again the following day. They still clean themselves because they appreciate the feeling of being clean. Similarly, during Elul, we strive for purity. Even if the effects are temporary, the effort is worthwhile. A moment of spiritual purity is precious to Hashem and to us.

Sailors use ropes to tie their ships to the pier. Since the ropes sit in the water and are subject to constant wear and tear, the sailors must change them quite often.

Someone once watched sailors changing a torn rope for a new one, and he asked, "What is the purpose? Soon this new rope will also be worn out, and you will have to change it again."

The sailors replied, "Do you have a better solution? If we don't tie down the ships, they will float away into the sea."

Reb Chaim Friedlander zt'l told this mashal to explain the importance of Elul. We will likely drift away from our resolutions (*kabalos tovos*) for the new year, but we need Elul to anchor ourselves down on the path of improvement. Without Elul, we would undoubtedly fall away from Hashem.

It is recommended that a person take on a kabbalah that is easy to keep. It can last for a long time if it isn't too hard. However, as we see now, even if chas v'shalom the teshuvah doesn't last, the process is in itself precious and has many benefits.

ניחה, that it created pleasure for Hashem. This is because Hakadosh Baruch Hu's primary nachas ruach is when a Yid deals with blood, which represents toil in avodas Hashem. To us, the blood appears dirty, but it represents a service full of hardship and toil when we overcome our bad tendencies, and this is what creates a nachas ruach for Hashem.⁵

On the pasuk (Tehillim 89:7) 'כי מי בשחק יערוך לה' ידמה לה' בני אלים, the Midrash (Tanchuma, Tzav 1) states, "Hakadosh Baruch Hu says, 'If I wanted a korban, wouldn't I tell Michael [the malach] who is near Me to bring me a korban? But whom do I ask? I ask Yisrael to bring me the korban.'"

Rebbe Menachem Mendel of Kotzk zt'l explains: Certainly, the *malachim* also perform Hashem's will. The difference between a human being and a *malach* is that a human is made of *gashmiyus*, while the *malachim* are entirely spiritual. *Malachim* don't have a body that prevents them. When they are obligated to do something for Hashem, they do so immediately and perfectly. In this world, people won't succeed in performing Hashem's will without first preparing themselves. The pasuk says, 'כי מי בשחק', a person isn't in heaven, like those who can serve Hashem immediately and perfectly. And this is the reason Hashem desires our service because it comes through toil and effort.⁶

5. Reb Levi Yitzchak Bender zt'l related that after the petirah of the Chozeh of Lublin zt'l, a wealthy person came to the Chozeh's widow and asked her to sell him the Chozeh's yarmulka. The Rebbetzin agreed to sell it for two thousand gold coins. The wealthy man agreed to that price and went home to bring the money. Meanwhile, the Chozeh's Rebbetzin washed out the yarmulka. She figured that since the buyer was spending such a large sum of money, the yarmulka should at least be clean.

When the wealthy man returned with the money, she gave him the yarmulka. He said, "This isn't the yarmulka we discussed."

She replied, "It is the same yarmulka. I just washed it."

The wealthy man said, "I wanted the sweat-soaked yarmulka. That's why I agreed to pay so much money." He didn't want to pay so much money for the yarmulka, without the signs of the toil and effort that was in it.

Similarly, let us recognize that it isn't our beautiful deeds that Hashem enjoys most. It is the toil, the sweat that we invest in the mitzvos. It is the battles we wage against the yetzer hara that give the most pleasure to Hashem.

Of course, when avodas Hashem is easy, we shouldn't slack off. Don't think that these times aren't precious just because they come easily. We share a humorous story to bring out this point:

A Chasan came to his rav after his chasunah and asked which arm he should put on tefillin. The rav was surprised by this question and asked, "Which arm did you use until now? "

He replied, "I know that the tefillin goes on the left arm, but my wife tells me that I have two left hands. So, now I don't know which arm to put on tefillin."

So, the left arm, which resembles tests and struggles, is very precious to Hashem. However, one must be cautious that he doesn't turn both arms into left arms. There will be times when avodas Hashem comes easy, and he should make sure to utilize these times properly.

6. This can be compared to a person who was r'l involved in a terrible car accident and broke many bones. He arrived at the hospital unconscious. He awoke weeks later, and everyone rejoiced. But now he had to undergo painful physical therapy, so he could move again like before. The therapist asked him to lift a paper cup. He only managed to lift it an inch or so; he was so weak.

After a couple of weeks of no progress, the therapist decided it was time to become stricter with this

Reb Shlomo Karliner *zt'l* said, "The reason *yungerleit* don't grow in *avodas Hashem* is because they don't value their deeds." Instead, they compare their mitzvos to how *tzaddikim* (past or present) performed them and feel that their deeds are worthless.

All our deeds are incredibly precious. The Arizal taught that a simple act done in the later generations could be as precious to Hashem as the mitzvos that the *Tanaim* performed. Although they performed mitzvos with perfection that we can't even comprehend, Hashem measures each generation according to their tests. In our times, there is a lot of *tumah* in the world, making it extremely difficult to perform mitzvos. Therefore, each good deed means so much.

The Akeidas Yitzchak of Alexander *zt'l* and several of his chassidim were in a concentration camp, and the Nazis told them to prepare for the showers. They knew that it meant the gas chambers and then the crematorium. During the last moments of their lives, the chassidim asked their Rebbe to tell them a *dvar Torah*. It was an awesome moment. He spoke to them about the *pasuk* (Tehillim 92:3) *להגיד בבקר חסדך ואמונתך בלילות*, "To declare Your kindness in the morning and Your *emunah* at night." It seems that it should state *ואמונתנו בלילות*, "*our* *emunah* at night," because is it not the Yidden who have *emunah*?

He answered that *אמונתך* is speaking about Hashem's *emunah*. Hashem has *emunah* in

us. Hashem trusts that we will pass the tests that He sends us. And even when it is nighttime, which represents intense challenges, Hashem believes that we will pass the test.

The Tochachah and the Concealed Good

Immense growth comes from the times when it is hard to serve Hashem, and we add that immense growth also comes from the hardships of life.

The Gemara (Menachos 29:) states, *עתידי רבי, עקיבא לדרוש על כל קוץ וקוץ תילי תילים של הלכות*, "Reb Akiva will teach many halachos from each edge of the letters." The Or LaShamayim *zt'l* (Lech Lecha ד"ה ויאמר ה') explains that from every קוץ, thorn, and hardship, Reb Akiva grew, and because of them he became an expert in Torah. Each challenge in life elevates a person immensely.

The Chofetz Chaim *zt'l* compared the tests and hardships of life to gold miners. These people pan through dirt and mud, break through heavy rocks, and become covered in black and mud, but they are extremely happy because gold is so valuable. They don't care if people laugh at them because they know that they are earning large amounts of wealth.

The same can be said about people who experience difficult tests and challenges in life. They appear black; they work hard but aren't upset because they know they are earning so much.

patient. The therapist said, "You can't have lunch before you lift this cup for me."

The patient cried out, saying, "What do you want from my life? Why are you tormenting me? Outside there is a crane. It can easily lift up buildings. I will arrange for the crane to lift the cup for you."

The therapist replied, "Oy, you didn't understand me. I don't need this cup. I am doing all this for your sake, that you should regain strength in your limbs."

We can similarly say that when a person says, "What do they want from my life? I don't have the stamina and patience to study Torah and daven, and I don't have the strength to wage the battles sent my way. Ribono Shel Olam, you have enough *tzaddikim* in the world. They can do this "work" for You. Let them do all the Torah and *tefillah* You want." The answer is, "This work isn't for Me. It is for your benefit. All the hardships are for your good."

The Tur **תקפ"א** states, **וכל המוסיף לבקש רחמים**, "The more you ask from Hashem [in Elul, and the more you invest in tefillah] it is to your benefit." One only gains from tefillah in Elul.

A religious Yid, who owns a chain of grocery stores in Eretz Yisrael, sometimes does things that are "unusual." A couple of years ago, before Chanukah, he sold olive oil for one shekel a bottle. Last year, close to Pesach, he came up with another "unusual" idea. He came to one of his stores and announced loudly to all the customers, "Whatever you have in your shopping carts at this moment, you can take home for free."

He wanted them to pass the cashiers to record what was taken, but they didn't pay for anything. As the people stood in line, one said to his friend, "I saw an expensive wine that I wanted for the seder, but I decided against it. Now I regret that I didn't take it."

His friend said, "I took one box of kosher l'Pesach cereal. If I had known that everything would be free, I would have taken three boxes. I wish I knew beforehand."

The lesson for us is, as the Tur writes, "The more you ask from Hashem [in Elul], it is your benefit." We know beforehand how much we can gain with our tefillos in Elul, so we should take advantage of this great opportunity.

It is possible to turn every situation and everything one studies into a tefillah. Here are a few examples:

It states in parashas Mishpatim (Shemos 23:5) **כִּי תִרְאֶה חֲמֹר שֶׁנֶּאֱדָר רִבִּי תַּחַת מִשְׁאֹו וְחִדְלָת מַעֲזֵב לוֹ עֹזֵב** "If you see the donkey of someone you hate crouching under its burden, would

you refrain from helping him? – you shall help him repeatedly." This mitzvah is called *perikah*, helping to unload the donkey. Chazal (Pesachim 113:) ask why the Torah discusses **שׂוֹנֵאֵךְ**, someone you hate. Is it permissible to hate one's fellow man? The Gemara answers that if he saw the owner of the donkey perform severe aveiros, he has a mitzvah to hate him. Even so, he must overcome his hatred and help him unload the donkey.

Chazal say that the mitzvah of *perikah* is solely when he meets up with the donkey collapsing under his load. If one is very far away (like on another mountain) and sees the owner struggling with his crouched donkey, he isn't obligated to go there to help him.

Reb Yehudah Assad zt'l spoke about these halachos and turned them into a tefillah. He said to Hashem, "Ribono Shel Olam! You keep the entire Torah. This means you keep this mitzvah of *perikah* as well. So why don't you unload our burden and bundles when you find us crouching under the weight of our tzaros? You should perform the mitzvah of *perikah* and save us. If You will say that You don't want to help us because we sinned, behold the mitzvah of *perikah* is even when the owner has sinned. It seems that You aren't performing this mitzvah of *perikah* because You see us from far away, and then the mitzvah doesn't apply. So, our solution is to come near You because then You will be obligated to save us. We come near to You with tefillah, as it states (Tehillim 145:18) **קָרוֹב ה' לְכָל קוֹרְאָיו** 'Hashem is close to all those who call upon Him...'"⁷

7. We add that in Elul, Hashem is always near, as it states (Yeshayah 55:6) **בְּהִמְצָאוֹ קְרָאֵהוּ בְּהִיטּוֹ קָרוֹב** "Seek Hashem when He can be found; call upon Him when He is near." The pasuk uses two terms, **בְּהִמְצָאוֹ**... **בְּהִיטּוֹ**, **קָרוֹב**, "When He can be found... when He is near." The Gemara (Rosh Hashanah 18.) translates **בְּהִמְצָאוֹ** that Hashem is found during the Aseres Yemei Teshuvah. The Gemara doesn't tell us when Hashem is near (**בְּהִיטּוֹ קָרוֹב**), but the Meiri tells us that this is in Elul. And since Hashem is near, He will certainly perform the mitzvah of *perikah* and save us.

Among the thirteen attributes of mercy are (Shemos 34:6) **רַב חֶסֶד וְאֱמֶת**, "Abundant loving kindness and truth." The Arizal said that **רַב חֶסֶד** is Elul and **אֱמֶת** is Tishrei. In the tefillah of Unesaneh Tokef (on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur), it states **וַיִּכּוֹן בְּחֶסֶד כִּסֵּאָו וַתֵּשֶׁב עָלָיו בְּאֱמֶת**, "He prepares his throne with chesed and sits upon it with truth." This can be translated to mean that if we prepare ourselves **בְּחֶסֶד** during Elul and then on Rosh Hashanah, Hashem will sit on the throne with **אֱמֶת** and will perform kindness for the Jewish nation.

The chasid Reb Yaakov Shalom Freund zt'l said in a tefillah to Hashem, "I am not asking You for what You don't have; I am asking You what You do have. And I am not asking for something hard; I am asking for something easy. Give us a good year."

A poor man would go to the local butcher at the end of the day, and the butcher would kindly give him the leftover meats. Generally, it was the hearts and brains of the animals, the parts that most people don't want to buy.

One evening, the butcher told him that no hearts or brains were left. They were sold out that day. The poor man said to Hashem, "Ribono Shel Olam! What do I ask from you? Just for a drop of heart. Just for a drop of brains!" He turned the conversation into a tefillah.

In the Rosh Hashanah machzor, on the second day, after Zichronos, there's a tefillah that begins with these words, אפחד במעשי אדאג, בכל עת אירא ביום דין בבואו ליכרון, "I am afraid because of my bad deeds, I am worried all the time. I am afraid when my deeds will be reviewed before Hashem on the day of judgment."

In Elul, the Belzer Rav zt'l would often repeat these words, and he would say them in a haunting, *yamim nora'im* tune. And then he would say (in the same tune), "The Rambam paskens that we must do teshuvah, and the Raavad doesn't disagree. What will be the תכלית, what will be the סוף?"

These are examples of how we can arouse ourselves to tefillah. We should invest in Tehillim and the Selichos, and it is good to find time to invest in tefillah in our own words, as well. It is the season for tefillah, and we should utilize this powerful tool to its fullest.

Praise Hashem

This week's parashah begins with the mitzvah of bikurim.

The Sefer Chareidim writes, "The mitzvah of bikurim is to remind people to praise Hashem. They shouldn't complain like the unsatisfied people who cry and complain their entire lives, as though they don't have anything. Actually, everything in their life is good." This is why we take the first fruit and praise Hashem for giving us the land. We focus on the good we received, and we praise Hashem. This is the reason for this holy mitzvah.

Kav HaYashar (18) writes, "Everyone experiences miracles. Especially in recent times, when there is so much strife and hardship in the world, things are perpetually becoming worse – evil decrees, war, hunger, people in captivity, distress, and various diseases. When Hashem saves a person from all these tragedies, he should continuously think about Hashem's kindness. Anyone living with peace and security and parnassah must praise Hashem."

Particularly, in Elul, at the end of the year, we should praise Hashem for all the kindness we enjoyed throughout the year. Therefore, we read about bikurim in Elul because Elul is an ideal time to recognize Hashem's kindness and to praise Him.

It states, (1 Divrei HaYamim 29:13) ועתה אלקינו מודים אנחנו לך ומהללים לשם תפארתך, "And now, Hashem, we give thanks to You and praise Your glorious Name." The roshei teivos spell אל"ל. And אל"ל is roshei teivos for (Shemos 15:1) ויאמרו לאמר אשירה לה', "They said, 'I will sing to Hashem.'" These hints indicate that Elul is a time to praise Hashem.

Another hint that Elul is a time for gratitude is (Tehillim 100:3) דעו כי ה' הוא אלקים הוא עשנו ולו אנחנו עמו וצאן מרעיתו, "Know that Hashem is G-d; He made us, and we are His people and the flock of His pasture." The word is read as לו, but it is written לא. Together, the letters spell אל"ל. This chapter of Tehillim speaks of praising Hashem, so we have another hint that Elul is an appropriate time to focus on praising Hashem with joy.

We don't only praise Hashem for the wonderful things we receive (like *parnassah*, *refuos*, etc.). We also praise Hashem for protecting us from *tzaros*. We praise Hashem for protecting us from something that could have been so much worse.

The Mishnah (*Avos* 5:5) lists the ten miracles in the Beis HaMikdash. None of them are for something good that occurred. They are all about being spared from *tzaros*. For example, among the ten miracles are: "No woman miscarried, the meat of *kodshim* didn't spoil, there was no fly in the meat room, and rain didn't put out the fire on the *mizbeach*." These are called miracles, and one should praise Hashem for them. This is hinted in the words (*Tehillim* 107:1) הוֹדוּ לֵה' כִּי טוֹב, "Praise Hashem, for He is good." This means we don't only praise Hashem when there is a problem and we are saved. We praise Hashem when everything is good, too.

Hashem bestows many kindnesses on us that we aren't aware of. We must praise Hashem for those, too. The Ropshitzer Rav zt'l (*Zera Kodesh*, *Toldos*, ד"ה ויעתר) writes in the name of his father, Reb Menachem Mendel of Linsk zt'l, "One must praise Hashem for the kindness Hashem bestows on him all the time – and he must praise Hashem for all types of kindness he received, the revealed and concealed." Because Hashem bestows many kindnesses on people, and no one knows about them but Hashem alone.

The Midrash (*Tehillim* 136) writes, "The *pasuk* says, לַעֲשֵׂה נִפְלְאוֹת גְּדוֹלוֹת לְבָדּוֹ כִּי לְעוֹלָם חֲסִדּוֹ, 'To Him Who performs great wonders alone, for His kindness is eternal' (*Tehillim* 136:4). What does this *pasuk* mean? It is obvious that Hashem does wonders alone – Hashem does everything alone! The *pasuk* means Hashem performs great wonders *that are known to Him* alone. Only Hashem is aware of the great wonders He performs."

The Midrash gives an example: "A person is on his bed, and there is a snake [about to bite him] on the ground. The person wants to stand up. The snake senses this and flees. The person continues, completely unaware

of the miracle Hakadosh Baruch Hu performed for him!

The Zohar (*Balak* 200b) teaches, "Hakadosh Baruch Hu does so many kindnesses to people every day; He performs so many miracles for us each day. But no one knows about them other than Hashem. A man wakes up in the morning, and a snake is coming to kill him. He places his foot on the ground, steps on the snake's head, and kills it. No one knows other than Hakadosh Baruch Hu. This is an example of, 'To Him Who performs great wonders *alone*...'

"A person walks down the road, and thieves are crouching in ambush, ready to kill him. But another person comes down the road ahead of him, and the thieves kill that person instead, and his life is spared. This is an example of, 'To Him Who performs great wonders *alone*.' Only Hashem is aware of these miracles and no one else."

A bachur, a *yasom*, needed to leave the yeshiva and work to support his mother, an almanah. His Rosh Yeshiva, Reb Yehudah Zev Segal of Manchester zt'l advised him, "Every night when you daven Maariv, and you say the words עַל נֶסֶךְ שֶׁבָּכַל יוֹם עִמָּנוּ, I want you to think of a miracle that happened to you that day."

This bachur is today a *chashuve* Yungerman in London. He says, "For forty years, every night I do what my Rosh Yeshiva recommended, and I can testify with a full mouth that there wasn't one day all these years that I didn't find some miracle to praise Hashem for."

Reb Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt'l told of a *segulah* to be saved from all worries. One should write on a paper all the kindness that Hakadosh Baruch Hu does for him, and when he says *Modim* in *Shemonah Esrei*, he should think about those points and thank Hashem for them. Reb Shlomo Zalman noted that this is *בדוק ומנוסה*, a proven and true *segulah* to free a person from worry.

When one brings *bikurim*, there are words of gratitude that he must say in the Beis

HaMikdash (26:3-10), and he must say them loudly. It states (26:5) וְעִנִּיתָ, and Rashi says that he should raise his voice and say these words loudly. The Beis Yisrael explains that just as when he had tzaros, he shouted them out before Hashem, now when he is recounting his *chasadim* and his salvation, he should also express his praise out loud.

There seems to be a contradiction in the pasukim on whether Hashem will bestow His kindness upon us even when we don't deserve it. One pasuk (Devarim 10:17) states אֲשֶׁר לֹא יִשָּׂא פָנָיו, that Hashem doesn't shine his countenance on us if we don't deserve it. But it also states (Bamidbar 6:26) יִשָּׂא ה' פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ, "Hashem will shine his face on you." The Gemara (Brachos 20) says that the malachim asked this question to Hakadosh Baruch Hu, and Hashem replied, "How can I not favor the Jewish nation? I commanded וְשָׁבַעְתָּ וּבִרְכָתָּ, that they only have to bentch (after a meal) if they ate until they were satisfied, but

they are machmir on themselves, and they bentch after eating a kezayis or a k'beitzah." This hints at when the Jewish nation is still hungry, when all their needs don't seem fulfilled. Nevertheless, they praise Hashem for what they received; therefore, Hashem shines His countenance on them.

A granddaughter of the Birkas Avraham zt'l of Slonim once sighed and said "Oy" when she was going through a difficult time. Her grandfather told her to say, "Oy du" (*du* is *you* in Yiddish). Together, Oydeh is אוֹדֶה to praise Hashem because when you know that your hardships come from Hashem, you will praise Him.⁸

Shabbos

There are only two more Shabbosim left in the year. Reb Yechezkel Levinstein zt'l would tell his students every year that if we keep these Shabbosim properly, we will be

8. The Midrash (quoted in Orchos Yosher, Gemilus Chasadim) tells the following story:

A talmid chacham was traveling with an innkeeper when they met a poor, blind man collecting money on the outskirts of a city. The talmid chacham gave him tzedakah and urged the innkeeper to do the same, but the innkeeper replied, "You know him, so you gave him tzedakah. I don't know him, so I won't give him anything."

The talmid chacham replied, "That is your choice."

They walked further, and the malach hamaves appeared and said, "I am the malach hameves." They were terrified.

The malach hamaves told the talmid chacham, "You gave tzedakah, so your life will be spared. You will live another fifty years."

The malach hamaves said to the innkeeper, "But for you, your final day has arrived."

The innkeeper replied, "We traveled together. Is it right that he should return home and that I should die?"

"Yes, it is fair," the malach hamaves replied. "He deserves to live since he gave tzedakah."

"Let me give tzedakah now!"

The malach hamaves explained to him that it was too late. He had lost his opportunity.

The innkeeper said, "Before you take me, allow me to praise Hashem for all the kindness He has done for me throughout my lifetime."

The malach hamaves replied, "Since you want to praise Hashem, years have been added to your life."

From this story, we learn the great benefit of praising Hashem. Tzedakah couldn't save him, but praising Hashem saved his life.

saved from all troubles. Chazal say (Shabbos 118:), אלמלי משמרים ישראל שתי שבתות כהלכתן מיד נגאלין, "If Yidden will keep two Shabbosim properly, they will immediately be redeemed." Reb Yechezkel Leinstein explained that redemption is also on an individual level. When a Yid keeps two Shabbosim properly, he will be redeemed from all his tzaros. (The Chidushei HaRim zt'l similarly explains this Gemara.)

Reb Yechezkel Leinstein would say this vort every year before Shabbos parashas Ki Savo. Shortly before his *petira*, Reb Yechezkel was too weak to come to yeshiva, so he sent his son-in-law to tell this vort to the students.

It states in this week's parashah (26:17-18) את ה' האמרת היום... וה' האמירך היום. The words האמירך and האמרת are difficult to translate. Rashi writes that these words (in this context) aren't found anywhere else in Tanach.

Or Zarua (Hilchos Shabbos 42) says that the pasuk refers to the importance of praising Hashem on Shabbos. We quote: "The Pesukei

d'Zimra of Shabbos is longer than of a weekday because, on Shabbos, HaKadosh Baruch Hu doesn't want the praise of the malachim. He only wants to hear praise from the Jewish nation. The Midrash states on the pasuk (Yeshaya 6:2) שש כנפים לאחד שש כנפים, "Six wings to one, six wings to one," that the malachim sing during the six days of the week, each day with another wing. On Shabbos, the malachim say to Hakadosh Baruch Hu, 'Ribono Shel Olam, we do not have a wing with which to sing before You! Give us another wing so we can sing.' HaKadosh Baruch Hu replies 'I have a wing on earth that sings before me on this day, as it states (Yeshaya 24:16) מכנף הארץ ומירות שמענו, 'From the wing of the earth we heard songs.' I think that this is the intention of ה' האמרת היום, that on this המיוחד, special day, which is Shabbos [we praise Hashem] Hakadosh Baruch Hu wants this praise more than the praise of malachim" (see also Tosfos Sanhedrin 37: who quotes the teshuvos hageonim).⁹

9. Rebbe Tzvi Hirsh of Ziditchov zt'l says that שבת is gematriya אהבה בכל נפש, אהבה בכל לב, אהבה בכל מאד, "Love with the entire heart, love with the entire soul, love with the entire strength."