

# *Torah Wellsprings*

*Collected thoughts  
from  
Rabbi Elimelech  
Biderman  
Shlita*

*Ki Savo*





# Torah WELLSPRINGS

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# Torah Wellsprings - Ki Savo

## Emunah In Difficult Times

It states (Tehillim 92:3) להגיד בבקר חסדך ואמונתך בלילות, "To declare your kindness in the morning and your emunah at night." The night represents difficult times, and the morning represents the times when Hashem's chesed is revealed. At night, when we go through hardship, we must be strong with our emunah and believe it is all good.<sup>1</sup>

The Akeidas Yitzchak of Alexander zt'l and several of his chasidim were in a concentration camp, and the Nazis told them to prepare for the showers. They knew that this meant the gas chambers and then the crematoria. During the last moments of their lives, the chasidim asked their Rebbe to tell them a dvar Torah. It was an awesome moment. He spoke to them about the pasuk להגיד בבקר חסדך ואמונתך בלילות, "To declare Your kindness in the morning and Your emunah at night." He asked, "The Jewish nation has emunah, so it should have said ואמונתנו בלילות, "our emunah" at night. Why does the *pasuk* say ואמונתך בלילות, "Your emunah at night"?

He answered that אמונתך is speaking about Hashem's emunah. What is 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, and the challenges are intense, Hashem believes that we will pass the test and continue to believe in Him.

## For the Good

At times, the Torah has קרי וכתוב, which means a word is written one way, and it is read another way. Generally, the קרי וכתוב are similar. For example, in parashas Ki Seitzei,

it states several times נערה, and we read it נערה. How we read it isn't very different from how it is written. But in this week's parashah, when we read the *tochachah*, the curses, the קרי וכתוב are very different from each other (see 28:27 and 28:30). The Stropkover Rebbe zt'l explained that this is because when it comes to the *tochachah*, what we see is very different from what it is in reality. It seems to us that it is all bad when in reality it is all for our good.

Rashi (Bereishis 18:16) states, כל השקפה שבמקרא, לרעה, "Whenever the Torah states השקפה, it is bad. The exception is the pasuk (in this week's parashah 26:15) השקפה ממעון קדשך."

We can explain that this is because it states השקפה ממעון קדשך מן השמים, "Gaze down from Your holy abode, from the heavens..." We mention that Hashem looks down from Heaven, and when we remember that even the hardships are under Hashem's hashgachah, we know that everything is for the good.

A water carrier would carry two pails of water over his shoulders and sell it to the townspeople. Once, one of the barrels fell on a nail, which created a small hole at the bottom of the pail. When he filled up the buckets with water, by the time he got to the customer's home, one pail was empty. He didn't have money to buy another pail, so this went on for a long time.

When he got old, he didn't have the strength to carry the pails anymore, but he still had parnassah. He explained, "There was a small hole in one of the pails, so I planted vegetables along the route that I

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1. In English, the morning hours are called a.m. and the evening hours p.m. The pasuk (Yirmiyahu 7:28) states אברה האמונה ונכרתה מפיהם, "They have lost emunah. It is uprooted from their mouths." מפיהם reads as p.m. At nighttime, which represents difficult times, it is harder to have emunah. But the Jewish nation is strong, and they maintain their emunah at all times.

carry my water. The vegetables grew from the dripping water, and from those vegetables I have parnassah."

So, the hole in the pail was for his benefit. This is how it is with all the difficulties in life. They are all for the good.

The Sfas Emes (Re'eh, תרל"ה) writes that one should train himself to be happy with the good and with the bad. They should be the same to him. "If a person doesn't change [and become upset] when confronted with midas hadin [hardships], then the curse won't remain with him. It will go away. However, chas v'shalom, if a person will make too much of an issue of the hardships that befall him, this gives chizuk and support for the bad [to continue]. Therefore, Chazal say אין מפסיקין בתוכחה, that we don't interrupt in the middle of the *tochachah*. This means we don't interrupt and stop our deveikus and bitachon in Hakadosh Baruch Hu, no matter what we are going through [and with this attitude, the hardships will go away]."

The *halacha* is that the entire *tochachah* must be read in one *aliyah*. Tosfos explains that Hashem says that it isn't proper for people to bless Him [with borchu and with the brachos on the Torah] when His children are suffering.

The Sfas Emes zt'l says we can use this as a technique to be saved from all yesurim. Praise Hashem even when going through hard times, and Hashem will take away the yesurim. Hashem will say, "It isn't proper that my children should suffer when I am being blessed."<sup>2</sup>

## Struggles in Avodas Hashem

It states (28:1, 7) והיה אם שמוע תשמע בקול ה' אלקיך לשמור לעשות את כל מצותיו... יתן ה' את איביך הקמים עליך וגפנים לפניך, "If you will listen to the voice of Hashem, your G-d, to obey and to observe all of His mitzvos... Hashem will cause your enemies who rise up against you to be beaten before you..." We wonder, if we perform Hashem's mitzvos, why should there be any enemies?

But the answer is that there will always be enemies, and there will always be struggles. That is a reality of life that cannot be changed. Hashem promises though that if we perform Torah and mitzvos, we will prevail over our enemies and overcome all struggles.

The same applies to avodas Hashem. Avodas Hashem wasn't intended to be easy. Avodas Hashem means never giving up and serving Hashem even when it is hard.

The Torah doesn't mention the mitzvah of bikurim until this week's parashah. The Beis Yisrael zt'l says that this indicates that even if one transgressed the entire Torah, he could begin now. Even at the end of the year, and even after committing many aveiros, r'l, we can start anew. Bikurim is synonymous with newness (the new crop of fruit); no matter what occurred, we can begin anew.

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.

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2. It states that the *tochachah* comes (28:47) תחת אשר לא עבדת את ה' אלקיך בשמחה ובטוב לבב מרוב כל, "because you did not serve Hashem, your G-d, with happiness and with gladness of heart, when [you had an] abundance of everything." There was a time (before the *tochachah* came) when everything was good in your life. Why didn't you serve Hashem with joy then? For this lack, the *tochachah* came.

The Arizal says that the pasuk is telling us that our joy for the mitzvos should surpass every other joy. He says that the pasuk תחת אשר לא עבדת את ה' אלקיך בשמחה ובטוב לבב מרוב כל means that our joy when we serve Hashem should be מרוב כל, more than all other joys, such as the joy that we have when we have a lot of money and other enjoyments in life.

But all our deeds are incredibly precious. The Arizal taught that a simple act that people do in the later generations can 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.

### Caution from Theft

Reb Yaakov Abudram and Reb Naftali Azaryah were goldsmiths in Paris, France, and they often did business together. One year, they fasted on erev Rosh Hashanah, and they davened that Hashem should reveal to them how much money they would earn the following year.

They both had a dream that night. One dreamt that he would earn 200 gold coins, and the other dreamt that he would earn 150 gold coins.

They went to Reb Yechiel of Paris zt'l (one of the baalei haTosfos) and told him about their dreams. Reb Yechiel told them that throughout the year, they should write down exactly how much money they earn and return to show him their papers at the end of the year.

Sometime in the middle of the year, there was a din Torah between these two smiths. They invested in a certain business together, there were profits, and they disagreed on what they had initially agreed on, regarding how to divide the profits. Reb Yaakov Abudram said they invested the same amount of money and agreed to split the profits 50/50. Reb Naftali Azaryah claimed that he put down 2/3rds of the investment, and they agreed that he would receive 2/3rds of the gain. Ultimately, the debate was over 10 gold coins. If Reb Naftali Azaryah got his way, he would receive ten coins more.

Reb Yechiel ruled that since the money was already in Reb Yaakov's possession, Reb Naftali didn't have a right to the ten gold coins. This is based on the rule המוציא מחבירו עליו הראיה; you can't take money away from another person without proof.

"However," Reb Yechiel added, "Reb Yaakov has to swear that the money is his."

Reb Yaakov didn't want to swear, so he paid the ten gold coins to Reb Naftali.

On the last night of the year, Reb Naftali and Reb Yaakov came to Reb Yechiel of Paris to show him their ledgers of how much money they had earned that year.

Reb Yaakov earned 190 gold coins (ten less than his dream), and Reb Naftali earned 160 (ten more than his dream).

Reb Yechiel said to Reb Naftali, "Do you remember the dream you had at the beginning of the year? It seems you didn't have a right to the ten gold coins you received from Reb Yaakov!"

Reb Naftali countered, "It was just a dream. It doesn't have any halachic significance."

Reb Yechiel explained, "I didn't say that according to halachah you must give back the ten coins. It was just advice, based on how things appear."

Reb Naftali decided that since it wasn't halachah, just a recommendation, he wouldn't give back the ten gold coins.

The following day, on erev Rosh Hashanah, Reb Naftali and Reb Yaakov went to their stores to do business until midday. Reb Yaakov earned ten gold coins that morning. (This isn't surprising. He was destined to earn 200 gold coins that year). But no one came into Reb Naftali's store. At midday, Reb Naftali Azaryah closed his store. As he was walking home, he passed a storefront where glass items were sold. He tripped and fell on an expensive piece. The goyishe owner of the store hit him and brought him



to the judge, who obligated him to pay ten gold coins for the damages.

Reb Naftali's wife didn't know where her husband was, and why he wasn't coming home. When he finally arrived, it was Rosh Hashanah, and he said, "I want to go to Reb Yechiel."

In the home of the holy baal haTosfos, Reb Yechiel of Paris, Reb Naftali asked him for forgiveness for not listening to him.

Reb Yechiel told him, "You don't have to ask me mechilah. You didn't do anything to me. You have to ask mechilah from Reb Yaakov."

The next day, before tekiyas shofar, Reb Yechiel told this story to his congregation, to teach them to be cautious not to steal the money of others.

### **Teshuvah for a Moment**

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

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 this process prevents us from falling even farther away.

Someone asked the Slonimer Rebbe zt'l the same question. What is the purpose of Elul and teshuvah if it won't last? He said that chimney cleaners bathe each night, although they know they will become dirty again the next day. They still choose to cleanse themselves because they appreciate the feeling of being clean. Similarly, during Elul, we strive to purify ourselves. Even if

the effects are temporary, the effort is worthwhile. A moment of spiritual cleansing is precious to Hashem and to us.

Sailors use rope to tie their ships to the pier. Since the rope is in the water and has wear and tear, the sailors must constantly change the rope.

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

The sailors replied, "What other solution do you have? 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. It is indeed likely that we will fall away from our resolutions for the new year, but we need Elul to anchor ourselves down. If we don't have Elul, we will undoubtedly fall away from Hashem.

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

### **Bending Your Heart**

Shulchan Aruch (תקפ"ו סעי' א) teaches that ideally, a shofar should come from a ram, and it should be bent.

The Mishnah Berurah explains that the shofar should be from a ram to arouse Heaven's memory of akeidas Yitzchak, and it should be bent to remind the community that they should bend their hearts before Hashem.

The Mishnah Berurah writes that it is more important that the shofar be bent. Therefore, if a person has only two shofars, one from a ram but is straight, and the other is a bent shofar from another animal, he should take the bent shofar.

The Mishnah Berurah writes, "The chachamim established that the shofar should be bent, as a reminder to bend our hearts to Hashem when we pray. However, no halachah requires that the shofar be from a ram. This is a custom that all Yidden practice for generations, because it arouses the memory of akeidas Yitzchak, and it is a hidur mitzvah, a more beautiful mitzvah [but it isn't an obligation]."

So, a bent shofar is more important than a shofar from a ram.

When learning mussar we can derive from this that when one bends himself to do Hashem's will, it is a more significant accomplishment for him than the remembrance of the avos. A shofar from a ram arouses the merits of the avos, but a bent shofar, represents when one bends himself to do Hashem's will. That is a greater merit.

To understand this better, consider the following example:

Sometimes, in Eretz Yisrael, you will get a ride in a taxi with a secular Jew who is proud of his religious ancestors. "Did you know that my grandfather was a rabbi? And on my mother's side, we are descendants from Reb Akiva Eiger..."

The passenger taking the ride might reply, "If you would place a yarmulka on your head, it would be your greater accomplishment than all the grandfathers that you have." This is the lesson we are discussing. We want the merits of our forefathers. It means so much to us. That is why we ideally choose a shofar from a ram, so the merits of Avraham and Yitzchak at akeidas Yitzchak will be remembered in heaven, which will help us be blessed with a good year. But an even greater accomplishment is to have a bent shofar, to bend your heart and your will to do Hashem's commandments.

This year, the first day of Rosh Hashanah is on Shabbos, and we won't blow shofar. The chachamim forbid blowing shofar on

this Shabbos because we are concerned that someone might carry the shofar four amos in a public domain. We wonder, because of those few fools who will make this mistake and carry a shofar on Shabbos, we should lose out on the great merit of blowing shofar on Rosh Hashanah?! We will lose out on the zechus avos, the merits of our forefathers, that the shofar arouses!

The Or Someiach answers that an even greater merit than zechus avos is when we bend our hearts to do Hashem's will or when we bend our hearts to help our fellow man. We therefore forego the great merit of shofar, to help those who might make a mistake and carry the shofar on Shabbos. We bend our hearts to help our fellow man, and that is a greater merit.

The Chofetz Chaim zt'l sent his son-in-law, Reb Hershel Levinson zt'l, to Reb Chaim Brisker zt'l, to ask him whom he should appoint to be the rosh yeshiva in Radin. Reb Chaim Brisker advised that they appoint Reb Moshe Ladinsky zt'l because he knew the entire Torah in depth.

Reb Moshe Ladinsky was the rosh yeshiva for about twenty years, and the students loved him. However, the spirit of the day changed, and the popular style of study became what is known as "the Brisker derech halimud." This new and ingenious approach to Torah study was sweeping the yeshiva world, it was the talk of the time, and the students of the Radin yeshiva didn't want to be left out. The Chofetz Chaim therefore invited Reb Naftali Trop zt'l to be among the rosh yeshivos in Radin. Reb Naftali was an expert in this new approach to study, and inevitably, he became the primary rosh yeshiva. Reb Moshe Ladinsky lost his prestige.

The Chofetz Chaim spoke to Reb Moshe Ladinsky and explained that he had no choice. The bachurim wanted the Brisker derech, and if he didn't hire Reb Naftali Trop, the bachurim would leave the yeshiva.



Reb Moshe Ladinsky replied, "If it is better for the students, then by all means, you did the right thing!"

The Chofetz Chaim was overwhelmed by Reb Moshe's answer. After so many years of devotion to the yeshiva, he didn't take it as an insult that someone took his place.

The Chofetz Chaim told him, "The merit of your *vitur* will protect you. You will live longer than me and Reb Naftali Trop." Indeed, Reb Naftali Trop was niftar in תרפ"ט, the Chofetz Chaim were niftar in תרצ"ג, and Reb Moshe Ladinsky was niftar in תרצ"ה. The merit of his *vatranus* granted him a long life.

This is an example of "bending one's heart," to be *mevater* for another, to let others have their way. This is the greatest merit of all.

### Tefillah

The Tur וכל המוסיף לבקש רחמים states, תקפ"א "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 has a chain of grocery stores in Eretz Yisrael, sometimes does things that are, let's call it "unusual." Like 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 consumers, "Whatever you have in your shopping carts at this moment, you can take home for free."

He wanted the people to pass by the cashiers to record what was taken from the store, but they didn't have to pay for it. As people stood in line by the cashiers, one person 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."

A similar story occurs when two friends go out to eat a meal in a restaurant. One of them is wealthy, and he buys the foods he enjoys. The other one is poor, so he keeps his eyes on the prices and buys within his means. When it is time to pay, the wealthy friend takes out his credit card and says, "It is on me." The poor friend thinks, "If I had known beforehand that you would pay for everything, I would have ordered what I really wanted."

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.

The Rebbe Reshab zt'l said, "Elul is the season for Tehillim." Soon, we will say Selichos. All tefillos are worthwhile this time of year. Say techinos, say tefillos in your own words. We were told beforehand how much we could gain from it.

### Opportunities for Tefillah

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) כי תראה חמור שנאך רבץ תחת משאו וחדלת מעיב לו "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*, unloading because you help unload the donkey. Chazal (Pesachim 113:) ask why the Torah discusses שונאך, 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) 'קרויב ה' לכל קוראיו' 'Hashem is close to all those who call upon Him...'"<sup>3</sup>

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 that is 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!"

In the Rosh Hashanah machzor, on the second day, after Zichronos, there's a tefillah that begins with these words, *אפחד במעשי אדאג*, "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.

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3. We add that in Elul, Hashem is always near, as it states (Yeshayah 55:6) *דרשו ה' בהמצאו קראוהו בהיותו קרוב*, "Seek Hashem when He can be found; call upon Him when He is near." The pasuk uses two terms, *בהמצאו*... *בהיותו*, קרוב, "When He can be found... when He is near." The Gemara (Rosh Hashanah 18.) translates *בהמצאו* that Hashem is found during the Aseres Yemei Teshuvah. The Gemara doesn't tell us when Hashem is near (*בהיותו קרוב*), 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) *רב חסד ואמת*, "Abundant in loving kindness and truth." The Arizal said that *רב חסד* is Elul and *אמת* is Tishrei. In the tefillah of Unesaneh Tokef (from the Rosh Hashanah/Yom Kippur tefillah), it states *ויכון בחסד כסאך ותשב עליו באמת*, "He prepares his throne with chesed and sits on it with truth." This can be translated to mean that if we prepare ourselves *בחסד*, during Elul, then on Rosh Hashanah, Hashem will sit on the throne with *אמת*, and will perform kindness for the Jewish nation.

## Elul – Wake Up!

The Rambam tells us that the shofar is calling to us, *עורו ישנים מתרדמתכם*, "Awaken all people who are in a slumber." The call of the shofar – of Rosh Hashanah and Elul – tells us to inspect our deeds and improve our ways.

A talented and popular speaker from Eretz Yisrael organized a trip to kivrei tzaddikim in Poland, and several people from Eretz Yisrael signed up. The trip would begin on a Monday morning in Elul, and they would be returning home by the following Sunday night.

The speaker would speak well, and the audience would be inspired and entertained, but a lot of organizing was still needed for this trip to be a success. Hotels needed to be booked in advance, food for a week's time needed to be prepared or arranged, buses needed to be ordered, and recreational activities and interesting places to visit in addition to kivrei tzaddikim were also part of the itinerary. For many days and nights, this popular speaker was busy with arranging all these details, and on the night before the trip, he was exhausted.

The flight from Eretz Yisrael to Europe was scheduled for 5:00 a.m. The organizer planned to be awake most of the night until someone picked him up to go to the airport at 2:00 a.m. to make last-minute arrangements. At 1:30 a.m., he was finally ready for the trip, so he took out a pen and paper and began planning his first speech.

As planned and on schedule, at 2:00 a.m., the driver arrived at his door to pick him up and take him to the airport, but he didn't hear him knock, and he didn't hear the subsequent phone and bell ringing. He had fallen into a deep sleep, and he didn't wake up until 2:30. At that point, they had to rush to catch the flight. For him to miss the flight would be terrible because, as we wrote, he was in charge of every detail of this trip.

The driver was very anxious and worried that they would miss the flight, and he

rebuked the speaker/organizer for falling asleep at this critical time.

The speaker didn't respond. He accepted the humiliation in silence. Anyway, there was no time to respond because he had to quickly gather his bags and get into the car.

In his haste and confusion, he also grabbed a bag of garbage and took it with him, thinking it was part of his luggage. His wife had put it next to the door to be tossed into the garbage bin outside.

At the airport, he placed his bags on a conveyor belt, and when the garbage bag passed through the machine, the machine started beeping. The bag contained empty metal cans of tuna, corn, and so on. The TSA staff opened the suspicious bag, and needless to say, the smell was terrible. There were also screws in the garbage bag, which could be used for creating a bomb.

He was immediately called to the side for questioning. This was the last thing he needed at this hectic time. Fortunately, they quickly realized it was a mistake, and they accepted his explanation that he was rushing and tired and didn't realize what he was taking.

This delay proved to be beneficial for him because they helped him get on the plane in time. Aboard the plane, he decided to put aside the drashah he had halfway prepared, and he told them the story of what happened to him in the few hours before the flight. He explained to the group that this is the lesson of the shofar. The shofar is calling to us to awaken. If we don't heed its call, we will come along with the garbage.

(This is what happened to him. He didn't hear the phone and doorbell ring, so he ended up taking along garbage.) But if you wake up in time, you can cleanse yourself from the bad and come to Rosh Hashanah with taharah from aveiros.

A train conductor noticed a fool walking on the tracks. The conductor quickly sounded his horn, but the fool didn't get off the tracks.



The fool said to himself, "The bell sounds hoarse. I remember that last year, the train's bell had a clearer trill."

The conductor pulled his bell even louder, and the fool said, "Ah! That's better! He is getting closer to the sound of the bell from last year," but he still didn't get off the tracks. The end of the story is self-understood.

Some listen to the shofar and say, "Last year, the *baal tokeya* blew nicer tekiyas." They are missing the point. The shofar is telling us to change our ways, and if we don't realize that, then we miss the message of the shofar.

Reb Shalom Shwadron zt'l told a similar mashal. Someone stopped his car in the middle of the street, leaned back, and began reading the newspaper. The cars started piling up behind him, and they beeped their horns viciously, urging him to drive on.

Annoyed by all the noise, he gets out of his car and shouts, "Do you think I don't hear you? Why do you keep on beeping your horns? I heard you already."

One wise person responded, "Until you move your car, we will keep beeping our horns. And that you say that you heard us already isn't so. As long as you feel comfortable staying in your place, you don't understand what our horns tell you."

The shofar is telling us a message, and we must pay attention.

This year, we won't be hearing the shofar on the first day of Rosh Hashanah, and therefore, it is especially important to listen well to the shofar of Elul.

Reb Shlomo Kluger zt'l said that this is alluded to in the pasuk (Tehillim 81:4) תקעו בחדש שופר בכסה ליום חגנו.<sup>4</sup> We can translate to mean that we should blow shofar בחדש, in the month Elul, בכסה ליום חגנו, when the shofar

will be concealed and put away by the yom tov (as it will be this year).

Reb Yerucham zt'l, the mashgiach of Mir, was in a mineral-water health resort, and he overheard a conversation between two yungerleit who had just arrived. One yungerman told his friend, "Let us go to our hotel room and arrange our bags, and then we can go to the springs. We arrived during the hours that the springs are open for use, and if we arrange our room quickly, some time will be left for us to catch some bathing in the water springs before they close for the day."

The other replied, "We can organize our bags later. Now the springs are open, so let's take advantage of them."

Reb Yerucham repeated this episode, saying it is a lesson for Elul. People have many things that they need to take care of, but now it's Elul. We should make good use of our time.

### Praise Hashem

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."

The 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."

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4. Chazal say that the pasuk is telling us to blow shofar בכסה ליום חגנו, on the holiday that the moon is concealed, which is Rosh Hashanah.

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 praise Him.<sup>5</sup>

Some people experienced difficulties over the past year, yet they were showered with an abundance of chesed, too, and they should praise Hashem. A hint to this is in the word אלו"ל which is roshei teivos for ועתה 1) אלקינו מודים אנחנו לך ומהללים לשם תפארתך, Divrei HaYamim 29:13) "And now, Hashem, we give thanks to You, and praise Your glorious Name." And אלו"ל is roshei teivos for (Shemos 15:1) ויאמרו לאמר אשירה לה' "They said, 'I will sing to Hashem.'"

Another hint that Elul is a time for gratitude is (Tehillim 100:3) דעו כי ה' הוא אלקים הוא "Know that Hashem is G-d; He made us, and we are His people and the flock of His pasture. The word לו is read, but it is written as לא. The letters spell אלו"ל. This kapitel speaks of joyous praises to Hashem, so we have another hint that in Elul, we should praise Hashem with joy.

There is an important factor to remember when you review the year and count your blessings. We don't only praise Hashem for the wonderful things that happened to us (like when someone made a lot of money, or when someone ill became well, 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 that we were saved 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 mizbeiach." These are called miracles, and one should praise Hashem for them. This is hinted in the words (Tehillim 107:1) הודו לה' כי טוב, that we don't solely praise Hashem when there was a problem, and we were saved. We praise Hashem when everything is good, too.

There are many kindnesses that Hashem bestows 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- all types of kindness, the revealed and concealed. This is as Chazal (Yoma 22:) say, כמה לא חלי ולא מרגיש, 'How little does the person need to be concerned and worried, a person whom Hashem helps him.'"

A bachur, a yasom, needed to leave the yeshiva and go 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 על נסך שבכל יום עמנו, 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

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5. The Beis Yisrael zt'l says the mitzvah of bikurim is written towards the end of the Torah to tell us that even if a person transgressed the entire Torah, he can begin his avodas Hashem now. Just as the new fruits become a mitzvah, his avodas Hashem can begin anew, now.

should remember all 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 all worries.

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) ועניית, 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 pesukim whether Hashem will bestow His favors on us when we don't deserve it. One pasuk (Devarim 10:17) states אשר לא ישא פנים, that Hashem doesn't shine his countenance on us if we don't deserve it. But it also states (Bamidbar 6:26) ישא ה' פניו אליך, "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 them ואכלת ושבעת וברכת, that they only have to bench (after a meal) if they eat until they were satisfied, but they are machmir on themselves, and they bench after eating a kezayis or a k'beitzah." This hints at the times that 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 sighed and said "Oy" when experiencing a difficult time. Her grandfather told her to say, "Oy du" (you, in Yiddish). Together, Oydeh is אודה to praise Hashem because when you know that your hardships come from Hashem, you will praise Hashem.

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 *tzedakah*, and he 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 very afraid.

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 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."

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

### The Value of a Mitzvah

The Mishnah (*Bikurim* 3:3) states, "When the people bringing *bikurim* arrived close to Yerushalayim, the [elders from Yerushalayim] came out to greet them. All craftsmen in Yerushalayim stood up for them and greeted them." They received immense honor. The Yismach Yisrael (*Savo* 1)



explains that this is to teach us the value of *every* mitzvah performed by *any* Yid. It is to let us know that one deserves endless respect for every mitzvah he performs.

The mitzvah of bikurim is relatively easy. It isn't expensive. The first phase of this mitzvah can even be performed in one's thoughts. If one thinks, "This fruit should be bikurim," it becomes bikurim. The immense honor they received teaches us that there is no such thing as a simple mitzvah. Every mitzvah is extremely precious.<sup>6</sup>

The Yismach Yisrael writes, "The honored *kohanim* and *gizbarim* (gabaim) of the beis haMikdash came out to greet them to show them that even a simple mitzvah from the simplest person — and even just a good thought — is accepted by Hakadosh Baruch Hu with desire and compassion. All *malachim* put many crowns on his head. Each person, no matter who he is, can get *chizuk* from this. Even if he only performed one mitzvah during his entire life or had one good thought, it is also enough. He should be embarrassed about all the times he didn't grasp an opportunity to perform a mitzvah. Now that he sees the vast value of the mitzvos, he should be embarrassed that he lost out in the past on opportunities to perform mitzvos."

## 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 well, we will be saved

from all problems. Chazal say, אלמלא שמרו ישראל שתי שבתות מיד נגאלין, "If Yidden will keep two Shabbosim, they will immediately be redeemed." Reb Yechezkel Levinstein explained that redemption is also for the individual. When a Yid keeps two Shabbosim properly, he will be saved from all of his tzaros. (The Chidushei HaRim zt'l also explains this Gemara similarly.)

Reb Yechezkel Levinstein would say this vort every year before Shabbos parashas Ki Savo, and at the last Shabbos of his lifetime, he couldn't come to the yeshiva due to his weakness and illness, so he sent his son-in-law to tell this vort to the yeshiva.

Reb Shimon Amshinover zt'l said that just as we prepare on the sixth day of the week (erev Shabbos) for the seventh day, for Shabbos, so, too, Elul, which is the sixth month of the year, prepares for the seventh month, for Tishrei.

The Beis Yisrael zt'l compared Elul to tosfos Shabbos, when one adds on from the sixth day to the seventh day. Similarly, Elul, the sixth month, we add on and attach it to the seventh month of Tishrei. This means Elul is mesugal for parnassah, as tosfos Shabbos is mesugal for parnassah.

It states in this week's parashah (26:17-18) את ה' האמרת היום... וה' האמירך היום.

The words האמרת and האמירך are difficult to translate. Rashi writes that these words (in such a context) aren't found anywhere else in Tanach.

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6. Communities joined together and carried bikurim to Yerushalayim with immense joy. The Mishnah (Bikurim ch.2) describes it:

"An ox walked in front of them. Its horns were covered in gold, and it wore an olive-leaf wreath. A flute played before them. Officers came from Yerushalayim to greet them..."

The Alshich writes, "Why all this joy and excitement over a few fruits that cost less than a half-dinar? An even greater wonder is the Midrash that states, 'Hashem created the world for bikurim.'" He explains that the specialness of bikurim is that it teaches us that everything we have is from Hashem.

We add that the immense joy of bikurim teaches us how special every mitzvah is. Even when a mitzvah seems unimportant to us, its genuine value is infinite.

The Or Zarua (Hilchos Shabbos 42) says that *האמרת* means praise and *היום* refers to Shabbos. *את ה' האמרת היום* means we praise Hashem on Shabbos Kodesh. *ה' האמריך היום* means that HaKadosh Baruch Hu enjoys our praise more than He desires the praise of the *malachei hashares*.

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 לאחד*, "Six wings to one, six wings to one," that the malachim sing during the six days of the week, each day they sing with another wing. On Shabbos, the malachim say to Hakadosh Baruch Hu, 'Ribono Shel Olam, we do not have a wing to sing before You! Give us another wing so

we can sing.' HaKadosh Baruch Hu replied, 'I have a wing on earth that sings before me on this day, as it states (Yeshaya 24:16) *מכנף הארץ זמירות שמענו*, 'From the wing of the earth we heard songs.' I think that this is the intention of *ה' האמרת היום*, that on this *יום המיוחד*, the special day, which is Shabbos [we praise Hashem]. *וה' האמריך היום*, and Hakadosh Baruch Hu wants this praise more than the praise of malachim" (see also Tosfos Sanhedrin 37: who quotes the teshuvos hageonim).

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." So, we can explain the pasuk, *היום הזה*, by keeping Shabbos, you will merit to keep the Torah *בכל לבבך ובכל נפשך*, with all your heart and soul.