

# Torah Wellsprings

*Collected thoughts  
from  
Rabbi Elimelech  
Biderman  
Shlita*

*Ki Savo*



# Torah WELLSPRINGS

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## Torah Wellsprings - Ki Savo

### Hashem - The Source of all Bounty

This week's parashah discusses the brachos and klalos (blessings and curses) to be said at Har Gerizim and Har Eivel. The first curse goes to those who engage in idolatry. It states (27:15): ארור האיש אשר יעשה פסל ומסכה, תועבת ה' מעשה ידי חרש ושם בסתר וענו כל העם ואמרו אמן, "Cursed be the man who makes any graven or molten image, an abomination to Hashem, the handiwork of a craftsman and sets it up in secret. And all the people shall respond, saying, 'Amen!'"

The Gemara (Sotah 37:) asks, "Is a curse enough for an idolator?"

Rashi explains, "He is *kofar b'ikar* (he doesn't believe in Hashem). So how is a curse sufficient punishment?"

The Gemara answers that the pasuk isn't referring to the punishment of someone who worships avodah zarah. Instead, the pasuk discusses the punishment of a parent who causes his son to worship avodah zarah. The parent is punished with a curse for causing his child to commit this severe sin.

How did the parent cause the child to worship avodah zarah? Rashi explains that the child was born from a forbidden marriage (*ervah*), so the child is a mamzer. The son, the mamzer, is embarrassed by his status because he can't marry into the Jewish nation and is also distressed from being unable to find a wife, so he goes to the goyim and worships avodah zarah there. The father is guilty of bringing this child into the world and is punished with a curse for causing his son to worship idols.

Reb Moshe Feinstein zt'l offers another explanation for this pasuk. Before we state his lesson, we quote Rashi (27:12), who explains the procedure of how the brachos

and klalos were transmitted at Har Gerizim and Har Eivel:

"Six shevatim went to the top of Har Gerizim, and six shevatim went to the top of Har Eivel. The kohanim, the levi'im, and the aron were in the middle. The levi'im turned towards Har Gerizim and began with a brachah. ברוך אשר לא יעשה פסל ומסכה, 'Blessed shall be the person who doesn't make a graven or molten image.' The shevatim standing on both mountains answered amen. The levi'im then turned towards Har Eivel, and they said the curse. They said, 'Cursed shall be the man who makes any graven or molten image...'"

So, there's a curse for a person who worships avodah zarah and a brachah for not worshipping avodah zarah.

There are two questions: One is, as we asked above, if he worshiped avodah zarah, the punishment should be much more severe than a curse!

The second question is that we assume that brachos go to someone who does something extraordinary. Not worshipping avodah zarah is a basic tenet that every Yid must keep. Does one deserve a special brachah for that?

Reb Moshe answers that the pasuk isn't referring to actual idol worship. The pasuk refers to a person who thinks his parnassah comes from the work of his hand. This is hinted in the words מעשי ידי חרש, "The handiwork of a craftsman." He conceals what he does for a living, as is indicated in the words ושם בסתר, "and sets it up in secret" because he fears someone might take away his parnassah. A person that doesn't believe that his parnassah is from Hashem is punished with a curse. On the other hand, someone who believes his parnassah comes from Hashem deserves to be blessed because

it seems to our natural eyes that *parnassah* comes from the work of our hand, and this person elevated himself to the level that he understands that everything is from Hashem.

The parashah begins with the mitzvah of *bikurim*. The purpose of this precious mitzvah is to help us remember that our *parnassah* comes from Hashem. We bring the first fruits to the Beis HaMikdash to show our gratitude to Hashem because we acknowledge that we didn't earn this on our own. We recognize that our livelihood is a gift from Hashem.

The Alshich HaKadosh elaborates, "When a person lives comfortably and fearlessly in the land where milk and honey flow, and rests under his fig tree and under his vine, and his home is filled with goodness, he might think, 'I earned this all on my own.' Hashem gave us the mitzvah of *bikurim*..." to remind us that it is from Hashem.

Rashi (26:3) writes, **ואמרת אליו: שאינך כפוי טובה**, "Tell the *kohen* you aren't a *kafuy tovah*. A *kafuy tovah* is someone who denies having received any benefit from another. A *kafuy tovah* is a person who claims he earned his livelihood by "the strength of his hand." By bringing *bikurim*, we acknowledge that Hashem gave us the land and its produce.

When one recognizes that everything he has comes from Hashem, Hashem's blessings will remain with him. The Alshich writes, "When a person thinks his wealth came from his might and wisdom, Hashem will take it away from him. When one knows that everything was given to him by Hashem, Hashem will allow him to keep it. We can compare it to a wealthy person who hires a gardener to take care of his orchard. When

the figs and grapes ripen, the gardener places the fruit in a beautiful dish, brings them to the landowner, and says, 'Look at the sweet fruit your field is producing! It's all yours, for it grew in your orchard.' The landowner sees the *derech erez* of his gardener and replies, 'You can keep the rest of the crop.' This is the meaning of the mitzvah *bikurim*. We bring the first crops of wheat, barley, olives, and grapes to the Beis HaMikdash and acknowledge that it isn't our own. Everything we have belongs to Hashem. And then, Hashem permits us to keep the rest of the crops."<sup>1</sup>

The end of last week's parashah discusses the war against Amalek and this week's parashah begins with the mitzvah of bringing *bikurim*. We can explain the connection because Amalek came to the Jewish nation when they were *kafuy tovah*. They didn't recognize all the kindness Hashem performed for them in the desert. Rashi (Shmos 17:8) writes that Hashem said, "I am always with you, preparing all your needs, and you ask, **ה'יש ה' בקברנו אם אין**, whether Hashem is with you?! I swear that the dog [Amalek] will come and bite you, and you will shout out to Me, and then you will know where I am. This is compared to a person carrying his son on his shoulders and going on the way. The son saw an item and said, 'Father, give it to me,' and the father does so. This happened a second time and a third time. Then they met a person, and the son asked him, 'Did you see my father?' The father says, 'You don't know where I am?' and he throws his son down, and a dog comes and bites him." *Bikurim* follows the story of Amalek because the remedy against Amalek is to recognize Hashem's kindness, which we enjoy all the time.

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1. During *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah*, in the brachah *Modim* we request that Hashem inscribe us for a good year. We say, **וכתוב לחיים טובים כל בני ברייתך**, although *Modim* is a brachah for gratitude and not for requests. It is because when we praise Hashem, we can ask, too.

The Tiferes Shlomo (Vayeira וַיִּזְכֹּר) writes that when one praises Hashem for the kindness Hashem performed, this draws down Hashem's kindness for continued kindness in the future. The hint is **הודו לה' כי טוב**, when you praise Hashem, **כי לעולם חסדו**, the kindness will continue.

About bikurim, it states (26:11), ושמחת בכל, "You shall rejoice with all the good that Hashem gave you..." Bikurim is a segulah for simchah because it trains us to have hakaras hatov, to know that everything we have comes from Hashem. There is no greater joy than that!

The Midrash (*Tanchuma Ki Savo* 1) teaches, "Moshe saw that in the future the Beis HaMikdash will be destroyed and the mitzvah of bikurim will cease, so Moshe instituted that we should daven three times each day." It seems that tefillah takes the place of bikurim. This is because the praises and even the requests of Shemoneh Esrei remind us that everything we have is from Hashem, which is the lesson of bikurim.

### Praise Hashem

Bikurim reminds us that all the good that we have comes from Hashem. This leads us to our next discussion of praising Hashem.

The Sefer Chareidim writes, "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 during recent times, when there is so much strife and hardship in the world, and things are perpetually becoming worse - there are 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 who can live with peace and security and has 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 praise Him.<sup>2</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 of אלו"ל which is roshei teivos for ועתה 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 wonderfully good 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 about something good that occurred. They are all that we were saved from tzaros. For example, among the ten miracles are: "A woman didn't miscarry, 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

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2. 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.

miracles, and one should praise Hashem for them. This is hinted in the words (Tehillim 107:1) הוֹדוּ לַיהוָה כִּי טוֹב, 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 וייעתר) 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, גברא דמריה סייעיה, 'How little does the person need to be concerned and worried, a person whom Hashem helps him.'"

There was a bachur, a yasom, who 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 Aurbach 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 did for him, and when he says Modim in Shemonah Esrei, he should remember all those points, and he should thank Hashem for them. Reb Shlomo Zalman said 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) וענית 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 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 them וְאָכַלְתָּ וְשָׂבַעְתָּ וּבֵרַכְתָּ, that they only have to bench (after a meal) when they ate 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 when the Jewish nation is still hungry, when all their needs don't seem to be fulfilled. Nevertheless, they praise Hashem for what they received, and therefore, Hashem shines His countenance on them.

A granddaughter of the Birkas Avraham zt'l of Slonim sighed and said "Oy" when she was 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 to them and said, "I am the *malach hameves*." They were very afraid.

The *malach hamaves* said to 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 Greatness of Every Yid

Many *yungerleit* in Eretz Yisrael don't own a car. Although financially easier, and the bus system is good, taking buses can make traveling long and tiresome. Sometimes, a person can spend most of his day on busses.

Such happened to a *yungerman* from Kiryat Gat. After he davened *shacharis* at the

*netz*, he took a bus to Yerushalayim, to be *menachem avel* a friend. As soon as he arrived at his friend's house and sat down, he got a phone call. He would have ignored it, but it was his father, so he went to the back of the room and answered the call.

"I have a medical procedure in Ramat Gan today, around noon, and I want someone to be there with me. Can you be there?"

"Certainly. I'm in Yerushalayim now, but I'll be there as soon as possible."

He apologized to his friend that he couldn't stay longer, was *menachem avel* quickly and left to catch the next bus to Bnei Brak, from where he would take yet another bus to Ramat Gan.

On the bus to Ramat Gan, his father called to tell him that the procedure was completed. and that he didn't need to come. As it turned out, he spent half of the day on buses, and the only mitzvah he performed was a brief *nichum aveilim*.<sup>3</sup>

He got off the bus and crossed the street. It was time to head home. He would take a bus back to Bnei Brak and then another bus to Kiryat Gat. The automated sign at the bus stop showed that the next bus would arrive in half an hour. He had some time to refresh himself. He went to a convenience store and asked the non-religious storekeeper if he could use the restroom. The storekeeper readily agreed.

The *yungerman* asked, "Can I leave this bag with you for a moment until I come out?"

"Why don't you take it into the bathroom with you and watch it yourself?"

"I have my tallis and tefillin in this bag, and it isn't proper to bring them into the bathroom."

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3. He will also be rewarded for traveling to perform mitzvos, and for trying to do mitzvos, nevertheless, it appeared to him that most of the day was wasted.

The storeowner's eyes sparkled. "Can I put on your tefillin?"

"Of course! It will be my privilege."

When he returned, he found this irreligious Yid wearing tefillin on his tattooed arm on his bald-shaven head, wearing a tiny kipa.

The storeowner said, "I'm not religious, but I put on tefillin every morning. Today, I didn't have time to put on tefillin in the morning, and I came to work without tefillin. I prayed that Hashem help me wear tefillin today. I was certain Hashem would help. And as you see, now I'm wearing tefillin."

The *yungeman* thought, "I thought I did almost nothing this morning, but I helped a Yid wear tefillin."

And then the *yungerman* had another inspiring thought: "Yesterday, if you would have asked me the worth of an irreligious Yid's mitzvas tefillin, I would have said not much. How precious could it be? But I discovered how important it was for him to put on tefillin, and Hashem had me make

this long trip just to help him. So, I guess I misjudged to what extent Hashem loves our mitzvos."<sup>4</sup>

Bikurim teaches us this lesson as well.

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>5</sup>

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4. A wealthy man sent his servant to deliver a gift of wine to Rebbe Nochum of Chernobyl zt'l.

Rebbe Nochum asked the delivery man, "Did you put on tefillin today?"

The man replied, "I did not. I awoke late, and if I would have put on tefillin, I would be late for my work. I wanted to put on tefillin later in the day, but I had already eaten, so it is too late to put on tefillin."

Reb Nochum Chernobyler explained to him that it wasn't too late, and he should put on tefillin now.

After the man left, Reb Nochum Chernobyler said, "This man is obviously not learned, and he certainly doesn't have very holy thoughts when he wears tefillin. Who even knows how kosher his tefillin are! Yet, I was able to recognize on him that he didn't put on tefillin today." Every mitzvah, even those performed by simple people, are precious in Hashem's eyes, and influence the person performing them.

5. 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 fruit 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, the genuine value is endless.

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 Selichos

It states (*Yeshayah* 42:18), החרשים שמעו והעורים הביטו לראות, "Deaf ones, listen! The blind, see!" The Chidushei HaRim *zt'l* asks, how can the deaf hear? How can the blind see? He answers, "There are moments so lofty that even the deaf hear and the blind see."

The Navi was referring to those who are spiritually deaf and spiritually blind. They don't have any connection to spirituality. But, nevertheless, on very special occasions, even they can see and hear.

This is applicable to Shabbos Selichos. It is a time when everyone is inspired with a holy urge to improve their ways.

This year, we have two Shabbosim during the days of *selichos* before Rosh Hashanah. Chazal say, "If Klal Yisrael keeps two Shabbosim, they will immediately be redeemed." Reb Yechezkel Levenstein *zt'l* and the Chidushei HaRim *zt'l* teach that this also applies to the individual. When an individual keeps two Shabbosim, he is redeemed from his personal struggles and problems.

When there were two Shabbosim before Rosh Hashanah, Reb Yechezkel Levenstein would urge his students to seek to keep these Shabbosim well, so they will be redeemed and merit a good year on Rosh Hashanah.<sup>6</sup>

An irreligious Jew from America was sent to prison for fifteen years. A Rav visited this prison once every two weeks to give *chizuk* to the inmates. He inspired this Yid to do Teshuvah. The Rav gave him a sefer on Hilchos Shabbos in English, and he devoured every word. He had an intense yearning to keep everything written in the sefer.

The next time the Rav visited the prison, the prisoner was extremely happy. He explained, "In two weeks, I will be freed."

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6. The old custom (before the advent of alarm clocks) was that the shamesh of the beis medresh would go from home to home, knock on the window, and shout "Wake up for selichos."

There were those who woke up on their own, even before the shamesh came. If the shamesh saw light coming from the house, and heard people getting ready to go to selichos, he would pass that home without knocking on their window. Some people heard the shamesh knocking on their neighbor's window, and that awoke them.

But when the shamesh came to a house where everyone was sleeping, he would knock on their window until they woke up.

The nimshal is that Hashem awakens us to do teshuvah. The fortunate and wise ones awaken when they hear the call of the shofar. Some see the afflictions of others, and that stops them in their tracks, and they improve their ways. Some need a drop of *yesurim*, and some don't even do teshuvah then.

It's best when one awakens himself, without *yesurim*, *chalilah*.

The Rav was shocked because he knew that he was in prison for a serious crime, and he had many years before he would be freed. The man explained that he read in the sefer that if Yidden kept two Shabbosim, they would be freed. "So I will keep two Shabbosim, and I will be freed from here."

The Rav was concerned that it probably wouldn't happen, and then his student and recent baal teshuvah might lose his belief in Shabbos. So he explained that Chazal were referring to all of Klal Yisrael. When all Yidden keep two Shabbosim in a row, Moshiach will come. But it doesn't mean it will be so for an individual who keeps two Shabbosim.

The prisoner refused to believe that. He said, "It doesn't say anywhere that an individual is different. I am certain that it applies to the individual, too."

The Rav left it at that.

Two weeks later, the Rav couldn't go to the prison as usual, but he arrived a month later and was shocked to hear that this prisoner was freed from jail. They told him that this prisoner was sure he would be free, he spoke about it all the time, and indeed he was released.

The Rav investigated the matter and discovered that the judge who ruled that he must go to jail for fifteen years had retired. Before his retirement, he reviewed all the complex cases he had judged, and after reviewing this man's case, decided that he didn't have enough evidence against him, so he ruled that he should be freed.

So, why doesn't it happen to us? We keep two Shabbosim, so why aren't we freed from our tzaros?

First of all, we are indeed freed, at least to an extent. And secondly, if we believed in our freedom like the man in this story, we would also go free.

The Chida (Maris Ayin, Shabbos 118.) writes in the name of a scholar Reb Yonoson to

explain the pasuk (Daniel 9:7) לך ה' הצדקה ולנו בשת הפנים, that Hashem gave us a great tzedakah, for keeping two Shabbosim we are redeemed from galus. This is a great chesed, because we can be redeemed for doing something so simple and easy. But, ולנו בשת הפנים, we are shamed because we have such an easy way out, yet we don't do anything about it, and we are still in galus.

The Chida elaborates on this great embarrassment. "We should be terribly upset about this because the remedy is in our hands, and it is so easy, yet for hundreds of years we didn't succeed in keeping two Shabbosim.

"The truth is, redemption will occur when all Yidden keep Shabbos, and this isn't easy to accomplish. Nevertheless, we are humiliated. The hint is that instead of שבת it became for us בשת, shame."

The Leket Yosher (Orach Chaim vol.1 p.118) writes that we begin Selichos on motzei Shabbos because on Shabbos, one doesn't work and has time to study Torah. Torah makes a person happy. Furthermore, people are happy with oneg Shabbos. The Shechinah resides where there is joy (see Shabbos 30:). Therefore, they established that selichos should begin on motzei Shabbos, amid simchah shel mitzvah.

A hint to this concept is in the Selichos by the words באלה פנים נשפוך שיחים. The literal translation is, "With what face can we pour out our words?" This expresses that due to our aveiros we are ashamed to speak before Hashem. However, we can translate it as a statement (and not as a question). We say באלה פנים, with the face we received on Shabbos, נשפוך שיחים, we can pray before You. This is based on the Midrash (Bereishis Rabba 11:2) ויברך אלוקים את יום השביעי ויקדש אותו "Hashem blessed the seventh day..." This means that Hashem blessed them with the shine of His face, and Hashem sanctified them with the countenance of His face. With this face, the face of Shabbos, we can approach Hashem and beg for forgiveness.

Chazal (Shabbos 119:) say, "Whoever says ויכלו becomes a partner with HaKadosh Baruch Hu in creation." In business, a partner has a say in how things should run. Rebbe Yissachar Dov of Belz zt'l explains that we begin Selichos after Shabbos because on Shabbos, we become Hashem's partner in creation, and therefore when we ask for forgiveness, He will undoubtedly grant it to us.

It states (Devarim 4:39) וידעת היום והשבות אל "You shall know this day and take to your heart..." The Or HaChaim says that היום alludes to Shabbos as it states (Shemos 16:25) כי שבת היום. We should take heart that we have the special gift of Shabbos. The Or HaChaim writes, "The yetzer hara discourages people and says, 'How can you solve all your problems, which are the results of your bad deeds?' Moshe replies וידעת היום. This refers to Shabbos [Moshe told them], think about Shabbos and review it in your heart because Shabbos is equal to the entire Torah. All the bitterness of the past will be erased, and your soul will be rectified because when you keep Shabbos, it is like you kept all the 613 mitzvos."

Shabbos is a day for Teshuvah. The Siduro Shel Shabbos says that שב"ת is roshei teivos for שבת בו תשוב, on Shabbos you shall repent. The Chozeh of Lublin zt'l (Divrei Emes, Matos) writes that he heard from Rebbe Elimelech of Lizhensk zt'l that Shabbos is the shoresh, origin and root of teshuvah. This is the translation of שבת, to שוב, return to Hashem. So, we have another reason Selichos begins after Shabbos. Shabbos helps us in the teshuvah process. Shabbos inspires us to do teshuvah.

### Praising Hashem on Shabbos

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.

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' האמירך היום means that HaKadosh Baruch Hu enjoys our praise more than He desires the praise of the malachai 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 היום המיוחד, the special day, which is Shabbos [we praise Hashem]. וה' האמירך היום, and Hakadosh Baruch Hu wants this praise more than the praise of malachim" (see also Tosfos Sanhedrin 37: who quotes the teshuvos hageonim).

The Gemara (Gittin 57:) tells the story of Chanah with her seven sons who were moser nefesh and refused to bow down to an idol. Each child said a pasuk why he refused to bow down. The seventh son said, "It states in the Torah את ה' האמרת היום... וה' האמירך היום, we have sworn that we will not leave Hashem and serve a foreign god. And Hashem has sworn that He will not abandon us and take another nation." The Maharsha explains that each son was taken on another day, and the seventh son was ordered to bow down to the idol on Shabbos. This is why he chose to say this pasuk, which alludes to Shabbos.

The Minchas Elazar of Munkatch explains the pasuk that it is referring to Shabbos because it states (ה' האמרת היום):

היום הזה ה' אלקיך מצוך לעשות את החוקים (26:16) האלה ואת המשפטים ושמרת ועשית אותם בכל לבבך ובכל נפשך, "This day, Hashem, your G-d, is commanding you to fulfill these laws and ordinances. You will observe and fulfill them with all your heart and all your soul." Which day is the pasuk referring to when it states היום? The Torah was given forty years earlier on Har Sinai! So why does it say היום?

The Minchas Elazar says that היום refers to Shabbos.

We will explain the lesson in the following way:

The Bnei Yissaschar (1:9 מאמרי השבתות) writes in the name of Rebbe Tzvi Hirsh of Ziditchov zt'l that אהבה בכל gematriya שבת is "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 בפשך ובכל לבבך ובכל נפשך, with all your heart and soul.

### The First Day of Selichos

The *sefarim* write that the *yamim noraim* begins on the first night of *selichos*. Rebbe Uri of Strelisk zt'l said that the כתיבה וחתימה of Rosh Hashanah begins on the first night of *selichos*.

Motzei Shabbos, the first night of *selichos*, we say the *piyut* "במוצאי מנוחה." This prayer is written according to the order of the alef beis. It begins עין עוררה לעשות חיל, the first word of this phrase is an א, and then it continues בצדק נעקד ונשחט תמורו איל, beginning with a ב. Similarly, each line starts with the following letter of the alef beis. The exception is the letters ו and ס, as they are written in two words, as נאשגבם (the letter ו is interchangeable with the letter ש), instead of two phrases.

Rebbe Pinchas of Koritz zt'l explained that this is because ו"ס spell ני"ס, miracle, and we don't want to separate them since the days of *selichos* are *mesugal* for miracles.

The letter ת of this *piyut* is תראה ניסך עושה, "show them Your miracles..." because

during these days of *selichos*, we ask Hashem to show us His miracles and grant us all our heart's desires.

The first day of *Selichos* we say, רצה עתירת, בעומדם בלילות, "Desire their prayers when they stand at night."

The Munkatcher Rebbe (Shaar Yisachar Tishrei, *Selichos*, 43) explains that this means they stand up to the tests (which are called לילה, nighttime). They remain steadfast in their *emunah*, even when encountering difficult tests, and we request that in this merit, Hashem should answer their *tefilos*.

Some people fast on the first day of *selichos*, and some recite the entire *sefer Tehillim*. Rebbe Yissacher Dov of Belz zy'a said that his *avodas Hashem* on the first day of *selichos* is greater than his service on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

For generations, Belzer chassidim's custom is to say the entire *Tehillim* on this day, in *beis medresh*, ברוב עם (many people together).

When Rebbe Yissachar Dov was old and unwell, his *gaba'im* tried to convince him not to say *Tehillim* in *beis medresh* on the first day of *selichos*. But he came to the *beis medresh* with *mesirus nefesh*. He said, "How can you prevent me from the great *hisorerus* and *hislachavus* of saying the יהי רצון after *Tehillim* with the congregation?"

The Tur (581) writes, "Most people fast on the first day of *selichos*."

The Imrei Pinchas (445) writes, "Rebbe Pinchas of Koritz zt'l was very *machmir* to *tovel* on the first day of *selichos*, early in the morning, and on *erev* Rosh Hashanah, early in the morning, and on the two days of Rosh Hashanah... Although he was lenient [with *mikvah*], he was more stringent with the *tevilos* these days."

Reb Yaakov Landau zt'l, the *rav* of Bnei Brak, would generally contain his emotions without displaying them to others. But on the first night of *selichos* he was the *chazan*.

He began *Ashrei*, and his voice didn't show any emotion as usual. But when he came to תהילת ה' he cried copiously, and he continued to cry throughout the selichos. It was almost impossible to hear his voice through his cries.

Once, before *selichos*, Rebbe Aharon of Belz *zt'l* told the *chazan*, "Hoych! Hoych! Daven loudly because this will rouse the community to say *selichos* with *kavanah* and *hislahavus*. Don't be afraid that you might become hoarse because others can take your place."<sup>7</sup>

Someone asked Reb Yosef Chaim Zonnenfeld *zt'l*, "I'm a *melamed*, and it states in *Shulchan Aruch* (*Yorah Deah* 245:17) that a *melamed* must sleep well. Perhaps I shouldn't go to *selichos* because that would cause me not to get enough sleep."

Reb Yosef Chaim Zonnenfeld replied, "I don't see any *heter* for you not to wake up for *selichos*. These are special days to pour our hearts out before the King and to request for our lives."

In the past, many people fasted during the days of *selichos*. The *Leket Yosher* (*Hilchos Taanis* 12, p.114) writes, "Once I asked my rebbe, the Terumas HaDeshen, to permit me to eat during the days of *selichos*, so I could learn well, as I learn all days of the year. He replied, the scholars of the past also knew that fasting makes people weak and that it will be hard for them to learn well, nevertheless, they instituted the custom for people to fast during *selichos*. Therefore, I can't permit you to eat."

Many don't fast in our weak generation. Nevertheless, we must remember that these are special days, and we should spend them with repentance and *tefillah* to arouse Hashem's compassion.

A kind king would ride down the main streets of his capital city on his birthday. Many citizens would stand on the roadside, waving ecstatically, as they celebrated the king's birthday. At this special time, everyone had permission to come up to the king's chariot and give the king a letter. The king read all their notes and granted them their requests.

However, there was one person who never had his requests fulfilled. He brought his letter to the king every year, but his requests were never answered.

He investigated the matter and discovered that the king traveled with an advisor and that advisor was his enemy. When he brought the letter to the king, the advisor convinced the king to ignore it, claiming he wasn't an honest and deserving citizen.

The man realized that he shouldn't wait for the king's birthday to present his requests because the king's advisor will slander him. So he decided to go to the palace *before* the king's birthday. He did so and spoke directly to the king. The advisor wasn't around, and the kind king fulfilled his request.

The Yeitav Lev told this story during the days of *selichos*, and then the Yeitav Lev cried out, "Beloved Yidden! On Rosh Hashanah Hashem is surrounded by prosecuting angels who speak against us and claim we don't deserve a good year. We

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7. Reb Shalom Shwadron *zt'l* said: When somebody knocks on your door, you can decide whether you want to answer the door or not. But when you hear someone pounding on the door, you understand that the person is desperate, so you go to see who is at the door and what he wants. You might find a poor person there who says, "I need food now, or I'll die from hunger."

Reb Shalom Shwardon said this is the reason we say, דלתיד דפקנו רחום וחנון נא אל תשיבנו ריקם מלפניך, "We pound on Your door, O' compassionate One. Don't have us leave empty handed." We aren't merely knocking on Hashem's door (נוקש). We are banging and pounding on Hashem's door (דפקנו), desperately begging that he bless us with salvations and a good year.

will be wiser to speak to Hashem during the days of *selichos*. Our adversaries aren't around, and Hashem will surely answer our prayers. Now is the time to beg Hashem for health, *parnassah*, *nachas*, and all our heart's desires. If we do so, Hashem will have mercy on us and grant us a sweet and successful new year."

Rebbe Elimelech of Lizensk *zy'a* wouldn't see visitors during the month of Elul. He wanted time for himself, for Torah, *tefillah*, and *teshuvah*.

One wealthy person, however, was desperate. His son became insane and needed a salvation, so he decided to bring his son to the Rebbe even in Elul.

While traveling, they met up with a poor man collecting charity. The boy said, "Give this man a generous donation." The father was startled. This was the first coherent sentence the boy had spoken in a long time. The father was so pleased with his son's improvement, that he gave a half-gold coin to the pauper.

The poor man asked them, "Where are you headed?"

The father told him that his son had gone insane, and they were going to the Rebbe Elimelech of Lizensk to get a *brachah*.

The poor man replied, "But don't you see that your son is healed? Why should you bother the tzaddik? You've certainly heard that the Rebbe doesn't want visitors during Elul."

But the father decided that since he had already traveled so far, he would continue.

When he came to Lizensk, he gave the Rebbe twelve gold coins. The Rebbe said, "Am I greater than Eliyahu Hanavi? You

only gave Eliyahu a half-gold coin, and to me, you give twelve gold coins?"

That's when the father understood that the poor man he met was Eliyahu Hanavi.

Reb Yisrael Avraham Tchernostrau (the son of Rebbe Zusha of Honipoli and nephew of Rebbe Elimelech of Lizensk) told this story and added, "Note how precious Rebbe Elimelech's Elul was to Hashem. From heaven they sent Eliyahu Hanavi to heal the wealthy man's son, to prevent them from disturbing Rebbe Elimelech's service in Elul."

Regardless of how we spent the beginning days of Elul, it is now the precious days of Selichos, and fortunate are those who take advantage of this holy time.

The Or HaMeir's sister was making a wedding for her child in Elul, and she very much wanted the Or HaMeir to attend. That would mean traveling for several days during Elul, and the Or HaMeir wasn't sure whether it was Hashem's will that he make the trip. He resolved that he would begin the journey, and if Heaven didn't want him to go, he would receive a hint from Heaven to return.

At the beginning of his journey, he saw a gentile beating an old man. The Or HaMeir was startled by this scene, and he asked the gentile what this was all about. The young man replied, "This is my father. I'm beating him because he isn't helping me, as he said he would. It's the sowing season now, and if we do not plant the crops this month, we will be lacking the entire year. We simply cannot lose this month. If we do, we will suffer the entire year."

The Or HaMeir understood Heaven's message, and he promptly ordered the coachman to turn around and return home.<sup>8</sup>

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8. There was a businessman who would often seek business advice from the Sfas Emes. Once, the Rebbe told him, "Now it's Elul. The wisest investment, which earns the greatest dividends – spiritually and materially – is to invest in this month."

The Shaarei Teshuvah (581) writes "I saw some *rabbanim*, who are always occupied with studying halachah, but during the month of Elul, they would stop a bit from their studies to say *tachanunim* (supplications, tefillos to Hashem)."

### **Teshuvah**

Around forty years ago, two bachurim got lost in a forest and couldn't find the way out. But they found railroad tracks. So they decided to follow the tracks, certain that the tracks would lead them out of the forest.

After a while, they got tired, so they lay down to sleep. One bachur slept on the side of the tracks, and one bachur slept on the tracks themselves.

But then a terrible thing occurred. A train carrying heavy building materials came speeding down the tracks. The engineer (driving the train) saw a person on the tracks but couldn't stop the train in time, so he blew the train's heavy whistle. The loud sound awoke the friend who slept at the side of the tracks, but the bachur on the tracks didn't wake up and, unfortunately, didn't survive.

Now, what did the locomotive engineer want? Did he want that the bachur to move far away from the tracks? No. All he wanted was that the bachur should take one step off the tracks.

The same is with teshuvah. Hashem isn't waiting for us to make significant changes in our lives all at once. He wants us to move

one inch away from where we are now, and that small move will make all the difference.

Another lesson is that the bachur may have woken up from the blast of the whistle but decided to wait another minute before moving off the tracks. What an unfortunate decision! The lesson is that when you are inspired to teshuvah, you should act right away. Take a step in the right direction right away (as Chazal say, *ועתה* is an expression for teshuvah). Now, you are motivated, so don't push off what you can accomplish at this time.

The halachah is that someone who is tamei with *זיבה* (and needs seven days before he goes to the mikvah to become tahor), and then he becomes tamei with *keri* or some other tumah that can be removed by going to the mikvah that same day, he should go to mikvah on that day, rid himself from the tumah that he can, although he is still tamei with *zivah* (see Mishnayos Brachos 3:6). The Lubavitzer Rebbe said that this tells us that even if we aren't able to become one hundred percent tahor, we are still tamei with our aveiros, we should, nevertheless, purify ourselves and improve in whichever areas we can.

So, don't think that one step in the right direction is sufficient, as you know how much you are lacking, because you can purify yourself, even if there is still a lot that needs correcting.

One step at a time, and you will reach purity from sin.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Keeping Torah and mitzvos isn't only to earn Olam HaBah; the Torah path provides the ideal and most joyous life, even in This World. It is written (*Yeshayah* 26): *כי ביה'ה ה' צור עולמים*, and the Gemara (*Menachos* 29:) explains that Hashem created Olam HaZeh and Olam HaBa with the letters *יה*. This world with a *ה*, and Olam HaBa with a *יה*. The Gemara states, "This world was created with a *ה* because the *ה* looks like a hallway (*אנסדרא*); whoever wants to leave can leave. Why is its foot hanging? If one does *teshuvah*, he can return from there" (from the upper left opening).

Reb Kreisworth *zt'l* asked since they are improving their ways, they should be returning to the *יה*, to Olam HaBa! Why do they even return to the *ה*?

The answer is that the life of religious Yidden is infinitely better and more pleasurable, even *b'gashmiyos*,

The Gemara (Succah 44:) tells that someone came to Reb Elazar ben Tzadok during a Shemidah year and asked, "I have vineyards and olive groves, and my workers eat from the fruit as payment. Is that permitted?"

Reb Elazar ben Tzadok replied that it is forbidden because the Shemidah fruits are hefker, and they cannot be used for payment.

The man left.

Reb Elazar ben Tzadok said, "I am living in this land for forty years, and I didn't see someone as ehrlich as this man!"

The man returned and asked Reb Elazar ben Tzadok what to do. Reb Elazar told him to be mafkir the olives and grapes and pay the workers with cash.

Reb Yisrael Salanter zt'l (quoted in Michtav m'Eliyahu vol.2 p.60) asks: (1) What was so special about this person that Reb Elazar ben Tzadok said he never saw such an erlicher person? (2) Why did the man leave, only to return later to ask what to do with the workers and the fruit?

One question answers the other. He first ran to stop his workers from doing this

aveirah. After he stopped them, he returned to find out the correct way of doing things. He was praised for being especially erlich because he didn't wait a moment. He immediately corrected the bad deed.

The lesson is that when you are inspired to do teshuvah, don't wait. Act on your inspiration immediately.

Rebbe Bunim of Pshischa zt'l said, "If a baal teshuvah could see that after he has thoughts of teshuvah, his neshamah is at the level of the perfect tzaddikim, he would be delighted that he left darkness and came to a great light." (Ramasayim Tzofim, ch.18:57, who heard it directly from Rebbe Bunim).

The Chasam Sofer (Shoftim, ד"ה וְכִי יָבוֹא) writes, "If one decides to do teshuvah, the main thing is the strong desire that is burning in him to return, and then his teshuvah is accepted immediately. The pasuk says וְכִי יָבוֹא, הֲלוֹי מֵאַחַד שְׁעָרַי, this means he corrupted his ways... but he wants to repent. The Torah tells us that he should come בְּכֹל אֹתוֹת נַפְשׁוֹ with a desire to improve", and his sins will be forgiven.

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than the lives of non-Jews and of those who don't follow the Torah. The letter ה therefore hints and states, "If you will do *teshuvah* you will return to the ה, to *this world*, for you will begin to enjoy this world too. You will certainly be endlessly rewarded in Olam HaBa, but even in this world, your life will be enriched when you follow Torah and mitzvos. This thought will make the process of change easier to achieve.

With just a little knowledge of what's happening today in the world, one realizes just how fortunate he is to observe the Torah. Therefore, when one keeps the Torah, he isn't only returning to the *yud*, to Olam HaBah, he is returning to this World too.