

Torah Wellsprings

*Collected thoughts
from
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Netzavim

Vayeilech



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Torah Wellsprings - Netzavim - Vayeilech

The Power of Teshuvah

The Rambam (Hilchos Teshuvah 7:6-7) describes the closeness to Hashem one can attain through teshuvah. He also describes the difference between before and after teshuvah. "Teshuvah is amazing because it brings a person close to the Shechinah, as it states (Hoshea 14:2) 'שובה ישראל עד ה' אלקיך', 'Return Yisrael [until you reach] Hashem your G-d,' and it states (Amos 4:6) 'ולא שבתם עדי נאם ה'', 'You have not returned to Me,' and it says (Yirmiyahu 4:1) 'אם תשוב ישראל נאם ה' אלי תשוב', 'If you repent...you return to Me.' [These sources tell us that if you do teshuvah, you get close to Hashem]. Teshuvah draws near those who are far away. Yesterday, he was hated by Hashem, disgusting, distanced, an abomination. Today, he is loved, precious, a close friend... How great is teshuvah. Yesterday, he was separated from Hashem, the G-d of Yisrael, as it states (Yeshayah 59:2) 'עוונותיכם היו מבדילים ביניכם לבין אלקיכם', 'Your sins have separated yourselves between you and your G-d.' He shouted [to Hashem], and his tefillos weren't answered, as it states (Yeshayah 1:15) 'כי תרבו תפילה', 'Even if you pray a lot, I will not listen.' He performed mitzvos, and they were ripped up in his face, as it states (Yeshayah 1:12) 'מי בקש זאת מידכם רמס חצרי', 'Who sought this from your hand, to trample My courtyards?' [And it states] (Malachi 1:10) 'מי יסגר דלתים', 'If only there were someone among you who would shut the doors [of the Beis HaMikdash], so that you could not sacrifice on My mizbeach in vain.'

"But now [that he did teshuvah] he is attached to the Shechinah, as it states (Devarim

4:4) 'ואתם הדבקים בה' אלקיכם', 'But you who are attached to Hashem your G-d.' He shouts and is answered immediately, as it states (Yeshayah 65:24) 'והיה טרם יקראו ואני אענה', 'It will be that before they call, I will answer.' He performs mitzvos, and they are accepted with pleasure and with joy, as it states (Koheles 9:7) 'כי כבר רצה האלקים את מעשיך', 'for Hashem has already desired your deeds.' And not only that, but Hashem yearns for your mitzvos, as it states (Malachi 3:4) 'וערבה לה' מנחת יהודה וירושלים כימי עולם וכשנים קדמוניות', 'The korbanos of Yehudah and Yerushalayim will be pleasing to Hashem as in the days of old and previous years.'"

Two yungerleit were studying this Rambam, and it was hard for them to comprehend how teshuvah could accomplish so much. Yesterday, he was hated and an abomination to Hashem, and in one day, after doing teshuvah, he is loved by Hashem. How could that be?

Reb Nachum Yasser zt'l overheard their conversation and told them, "I have a son who left religion r"l. If he would come here now and tell me he wants to do teshuvah, I would love him more than ever. The change in my feelings towards him will transform in a second." This is what occurs when a person does teshuvah. The past is forgotten, and he becomes beloved by Hashem.¹

In Romania, during the Holocaust, there was an apostate Yid who wrote a column in the goyishe newspapers, which significantly increased the goyim's hatred towards Yidden. The columnist was once a talmid

1. Reb Nachum Yasser zt'l came to Rebbe Shlomke Zvhiller zt'l and told him he was distressed about his son. He stayed behind in communist Russia and became irreligious. Rebbe Shlomke told him, "I also have an apostate son living in Russia. But we did what we could. It isn't our fault. And besides, our children's children will do teshuvah, and they will marry one another."

Not too long ago, in Beitar, it occurred. Rebbe Shlomke's and Reb Nochum's grandchildren came from Russia to Eretz Yisrael, did teshuvah, and they married each other.

chacham, so he knew all the Chazals and sources that express "something negative that we say against the goyim," and he built his articles based on these ideas. Who can measure how much blood was shed as a result of these poisonous columns?

After the war, he wanted to do teshuvah, but no beis medresh in Bucharest would accept him. Everyone despised him for what he did. There was one exception, that was the beis medresh of the Skulener Rebbe zt'l. The Skulener Rebbe said, "Hashem accepts baalei teshuvah, and we should as well." The Rebbe didn't permit anyone to say anything degrading to this man.

This story demonstrates the wonder of teshuvah. No matter what a person does, Hashem accepts our teshuvah.

Chazal (Yoma 86.) states, גדולה תשובה שמגיעת עד כסא הכבוד, "Teshuvah is great; it reaches up to Hashem's throne." Rabbeinu Chananel explains that even if his aveiros were so severe that they brought tumah and contamination all the way up to Hashem's throne, he can do teshuvah and be forgiven.

Doing Teshuvah is Easy

Chazal tell us that we want to make the process of teshuvah easy, so people won't refrain from doing teshuvah.²

And it isn't hard to do teshuvah. With regret, viduy, and accepting to improve, one's aveiros are removed.

Rebbe Mottele Slonimer zy'a (Maamar Mordechai p.342) told the following story:

Two great tzaddikim made a pact that whoever dies first must appear to his friend

in a dream to tell him what happened in his judgment.

Shortly after, one of them was *niftar*, and he came to his friend in a dream and said, "The court in heaven only found one aveirah in my record. Once, when I was serving as *av beis din*, one of the litigants placed money into my pocket without me knowing about it. I accidentally transgressed the *aveirah* of *shochad* (the prohibition for a judge to take a bribe), and the beis din told me that I must go to Gehinom.

"I pleaded to the court that they find me another solution because I didn't want to go to Gehinom. The beis din brought me to a huge building, gave me a tiny hammer, and said, 'Break down this building with the hammer. When you finish, you can go to Gan Eden.'

"It was a very large building, and the hammer was tiny. I figured that it would take me years before I finished. At first, I was devastated. But then I thought, 'Why did I study Torah every day of my life? Why did I put on tallis and tefillin every day? It was because I wanted to do Hashem's will. Now, it's Hashem's will that I should demolish this building with this tiny hammer. It is Hashem's will, so I will do this service with joy. I don't care how long it takes.'

"I swung the hammer at the building with all my might, and the entire building collapsed. I was swiftly brought to my place in Gan Eden."

There are several lessons to be learned in this story. For our purpose, it teaches us that although some things appear very difficult,

2. An example is תקנת השבים (see Gittin 55.). If someone steals a beam and uses it as a foundation for his home, technically, he should break his entire building down and return the beam. But the chachamim were lenient with him and allowed him to pay the value of the wooden beam. Rashi explains, "If you require him to break his mansion, he will refrain from doing teshuvah."

Another example is stated in Shulchan Aruch (128:35) ויש להקל על בעלי תשובה שלא לנעול דלת בפניהם, "We should be lenient with people who do teshuvah so that we don't close the door on them."

verging on the impossible, they are far easier than we imagine. The tzaddik in this story thought it would take him years to knock down the building, and he did it in a moment. Similarly, teshuvah is a lot easier than it appears. Hashem helps us change our ways, and Hashem accepts our repentance, even when it isn't perfect. So, the process is a lot easier than we think.

People think it takes years to change, but it isn't correct. One must begin, even with a small step, and he will be amazed at how quickly things will progress, and he will soon be at levels he never thought were possible.

The parashah discusses the mitzvah of teshuvah, and it teaches it in four steps. It states (30:1, 2, 6, 8) והשבת אל לבבך... ושבתי עד ה' אלקיך ושמעת בקולו... ומל ה' אלקיך את לבבך ואת לבב זרעך לאהבה את ה' אלקיך... ואתה תשוב ושמעת בקול ה' ועשית את כל מצוותי, "You will think in your heart... and you will return unto Hashem... Hashem, your G-d will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, to love Hashem... You shall return and listen to the voice of Hashem and perform all His commandments..."

The Or HaChaim says that four steps of teshuvah are stated here. The first is והשבת אל לבבך, "You will think in your heart." This refers to making a *cheshbon hanefesh*. Briefly, the Ohr HaChaim (30:2) writes להכיר שלא טוב עשה, he should recognize that he didn't act correctly.

The next step is ושבתי עד ה' אלקיך, "you will return to Hashem." The Ohr HaChaim explains that this means he will study Torah. He writes, "This is the beginning of teshuvah that the baal teshuvah must do."

The third stage is ומל ה' אלקיך את לבבך ואת לבב זרעך לאהבה את ה' אלקיך... Hashem, your G-d, will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, to love Hashem... The Ohr HaChaim explains that this means he will refrain from transgressing the *לא תעשה*, prohibitions. The heart desires aveiros, prohibitions, but when our hearts are tuned to love Hashem and to love Torah, we won't want aveiros. We will only want the sweetness of being close to Hashem.

The fourth stage of teshuvah is ושמעת בקול ה' ועשית את כל מצוותי, "You shall return and listen to the voice of Hashem and perform all His commandments..." The Ohr HaChaim explains that this refers to being cautious to keep the *mitzvos aseh*, positive commandments.

So, we have four steps of teshuvah: (1) *cheshbon hanefesh* and contemplation, (2) studying Torah, (3) refraining from *lo saasehs*, prohibitions, (4) keeping the *mitzvos asei*.

But notice that Hashem helps us in the process of teshuvah, as it states ומל ה' אלקיך את לבבך ואת לבב זרעך לאהבה את ה' אלקיך, "Hashem, your G-d will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, to love Hashem." The Rabbeinu Yonah (beginning of Shaarei Teshuvah) writes, "The Torah tells us that Hashem will help those who do teshuvah when they can't accomplish it on their own. Hashem will bring a pure spirit into their hearts to love Hashem, as it states... ושבתי עד ה' אלקיך... ומל ה' אלקיך את לבבך ואת לבב זרעך לאהבה את ה' אלקיך... Hashem will help you love Him." So, we do the first steps. We try to do teshuvah, and Hashem helps us in the process. And with Hashem's help, the process is much quicker and easier than we imagined.³

3. The government dispatched a supervisor to inspect a government-subsidized hostel for individuals with mental disabilities, ensuring proper management. During the visit, the supervisor inquired about the criteria used by the home's management to determine who qualifies as mentally unwell and requires the services of their facility.

The manager responded, "We conduct a simple test. We place the individual near a bathtub and provide

There is another reference in this week's parashah that teshuvah is much easier than we think. It states (30:11-14) כי המצוה הזאת אשר אנכי מצוך היום לא נפלאה היא ממך ולא רחקה הוא, לא בשמים הוא לאמר מי יעלה לנו השמימה ויקחה לנו וישמענו אתה ונעשנה, ולא מעבר לים הוא לאמר מי יעבר לנו אל עבר הים ויקחה לנו וישמענו אתה ונעשנה, כי קרוב אליך הדבר מאד בפך, "For this mitzvah that I command you today – it isn't hidden from you, and it is not distant. It is not in heaven, to say, 'Who can ascend to heaven for us and take it for us so that we can listen to it and perform it?' Nor is it across the sea, to say, 'Who can cross to the other side of the sea for us and take it for us so that we can listen to it and perform it?' Rather the matter is very near to you – in your mouth and your heart – to perform it."

The Ramban explains that the pasuk is discussing the mitzvah of teshuvah. People think that teshuvah is up in heaven or across the sea and so difficult to achieve. The Torah tells us בפך ובלבך לעשותו, and the Ramban writes, "Say viduy...with your mouth and return to Hashem in your heart, and accept on yourselves today to perform the Torah..." That is all that's needed to do teshuvah.

Teshuvah According to the Generation

Sefer Chasidim (תתקמ"ה) writes, "In Hakadosh Baruch Hu's eyes, people who are less wise in the later generations are equal to the wise scholars of the previous generations. Because otherwise, every generation can say, 'Why didn't you create me in the past

them with a spoon and a bucket. They are instructed to empty the water from the tub. By observing their actions, we determine their mental state."

The supervisor's face brightened as he comprehended the approach. He remarked, "I see. If the person uses the bucket to remove the water, it indicates wisdom and soundness. However, if he resorts to using the spoon, it suggests foolishness."

Amidst the conversation, the hostel manager interjected, "By the way, our establishment offers premium, upscale rooms. If you wish, you can also reside here in the hostel. I believe it would be beneficial for you."

Indignant, the supervisor replied, "What are you implying? I am perfectly sane. I do not suffer from any mental illness."

The manager retorted, "But you failed the test. The fools choose the spoon, while those partially affected opt for the bucket. However, mentally healthy individuals merely pull out the plug, allowing the water to drain."

The nimshal is that it states (Devarim 10:16) ומלתם את ערלת לבבכם, "You shall circumcise your hearts..." To love Hashem, to love Torah, and to love your fellow man, all you have to do is circumcise your heart. Remove the plug preventing your heart from opening up, and everything will fall into place.

Some years ago (before the advent of alarm clocks), it was customary for the shamesh to go from house to house, knocking on windows and calling out, "Wake up for selichos."

Some individuals woke up on their own, even before the shamesh arrived. If the shamesh noticed a lit room and heard the residents preparing for selichos, he would pass by without knocking on their window. Others would be awakened by the shamesh knocking on their neighbor's window.

However, when the shamesh reached a house where everyone was still asleep, he gently tapped their window to rouse them. And if a gentle knock wasn't sufficient, he would knock louder.

The underlying message is that sometimes hardships or afflictions are wake-up calls to inspire people to do teshuvah. The fortunate ones respond promptly, without needing trials to motivate them. Some individuals are moved to teshuvah upon witnessing their neighbor's suffering, chas v'shalom. Yet, some require a knock on their window, so to speak, in the form of afflictions, to awaken them to teshuvah. Ideally, one should awaken themselves to teshuvah without the need for suffering, chalilah.

generations, where there were great chachamim, and then I would know a lot of Torah? [Hashem will reply], 'What difference does it make? אחד המרבה ואחד הממעיט ובלבד שיכין לבו לשמים', 'The one who does a lot is equal to the one who does little, as long as their intention is for heaven. Don't waste time; study Torah whenever you can, even if you aren't so clever.'

This lesson applies to teshuvah as well. When we compare our teshuvah to those of people who lived generations ago, our teshuvah appears paltry and insignificant. One thinks, "So, I made a few small *kabalos* in a few areas, I had a few thoughts of regret, here and there, during the days of teshuvah. So what? It seems insignificant." But it isn't so. Hashem only expects from each person

and each generation what they can do. And when we do our best, it equals the greatest *baalei teshuvah* of our history.

The Yerushalmi (Shabbos ch.5, according to one opinion) tells that Reb Elazar ben Azaryah's cow once walked outdoors with a decorative bow between its ears (which is forbidden on Shabbos). For this aveirah, he fasted until his teeth turned black.

Reb Chaim Vital zt'l asked the Arizal, if so much teshuvah is needed for a one-time, relatively minor transgression, what will be with us?

The Arizal explained to him that for our generation, a much easier teshuvah would remove the sin.⁴

4. The Chofetz Chaim told the following story:

Someone said to his friend, who was a baker, "It seems like you have a very good business. People buy bread and cakes from you every day."

"It isn't a good business at all," the friend responded. "If you take into account all my expenses, I hardly earn a profit. And it is so easy to lose a customer. If the bread is burned or underbaked, the consumer might never return. My customers always complain that my breads and cakes aren't tasty enough. So, it isn't a good business at all."

Sometime later, the man met with his friend again, and this time, the baker expressed how glad he was that he chose this profession.

"But the last time we spoke, you complained that being a baker isn't profitable."

The baker explained, "Our previous conversation occurred before the war started. But now, during wartime, food is scarce. Everyone comes to buy bread from me and they are not concerned about the taste. They are simply grateful to have access to any bread. They willingly pay a premium price because they understand that no other options are available."

The Chofetz Chaim told this mashal to express the benefit of serving Hashem at a time of spiritual scarcity. Years ago, such as in the generation of the rishonim, etc., and certainly when the Beis HaMikdash stood, there was a lot of spirituality in the world, and heaven was able to be "picky" on which mitzvos go up to heaven. If the mitzvah wasn't performed with joy or lacked love and fear of Hashem, and certainly if the mitzvah was performed to attain honor, money, and the like, heaven didn't accept it. But in this generation, there is a hunger in heaven, so every good deed is accepted and cherished, even if it isn't perfect. Hashem accepts it with desire and with love.

Once, the Chofetz Chaim recounted a memory to someone, reflecting on how times had changed. He recalled that years ago, when wealth was abundant, people wouldn't bother picking up a coin that dropped to the ground. However, in the present day, with money being scarce, even the sight of a single copper coin would prompt a person to bend down and seize the opportunity to retrieve it.

We attach this lesson to teshuvah. Even when our teshuvah isn't perfect, we are doing the best we can, and that is accepted in heaven. For our generation, our teshuvah is sufficient.

Shabbos Selichos

Shabbos? The Leket Yosher (Orach Chaim vol.1 p.118) answers that the correct mood for saying Selichos is when one is happy, and

Why do we begin Selichos on Motzei

A yungerman living in Kiryat Gat got up early one day to go to Yerushalayim to be menachem avel a friend. Immediately after netz minyan he ran to catch a bus to Yerushalayim. He barely said a few words of condolence to his friend when his phone rang. It was his father, asking him to come to Ramat Gan to be with him while he undergoes a medical procedure. He left Yerushalayim immediately but still arrived late for the procedure. He spent half his day on the bus and felt he didn't accomplish much. (Although, he will undoubtedly be rewarded for trying to perform the mitzvos.)

His traveling wasn't over because he now had to catch a bus from Ramat Gan to Bnei Brak and then a bus back home to Kiryat Gat.

As he waited at the bus stop, the electronic sign showed that the next bus to Bnei Brak would arrive in half an hour. With some time to spare, he entered a nearby convenience store.

Approaching the non-religious storekeeper, he politely asked if he could use the restroom. When the storekeeper readily agreed, the yungerman asked, "Can I leave this bag with you until I come out?"

Curiosity flickered in the storeowner's eyes as he responded, "Why don't you take it into the bathroom with you? That way, you can watch it yourself."

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

The storeowner's eyes sparked with interest. "Can I put on your tefillin?"

"Of course! It would be my privilege," the yungerman replied.

When he exited the restroom, the yungerman found the storeowner wearing the tefillin. A small kappel rested on his head, his tattooed arm was wrapped with the tefillin shel yad, while his bald head donned the tefillin shel rosh. Overwhelmed with emotion, the storeowner shared, "Although I'm not religious, I try to put on tefillin every morning. I didn't have time to do so today before coming to work. I prayed to Hashem, asking Him to help me get tefillin today. I was sure that Hashem would assist me. And as you can see, I am now wearing tefillin."

The yungerman now realized that his travels weren't in vain. He had journeyed to help this fellow Jew wear tefillin. This heartwarming encounter serves as a powerful reminder that Hashem cherishes the mitzvos of every individual, regardless of their religious observance or background.

And Hashem desires our teshuvah as well, no matter what level we are on.

Tzadikim have always sought to derive lessons in avodas Hashem from various aspects of the world, including the technology surrounding us. In that spirit, let us explore a lesson we can glean from the GPS.

When someone takes a wrong turn while using a GPS, it doesn't criticize or scold them, saying, "I clearly instructed you to turn left! Why didn't you listen?!" Instead, it calmly recalculates the route and guides what to do next. Similarly, we can apply this approach to our interactions with our children or students. Instead of becoming angry or frustrated when they fail to heed our advice, we should patiently and compassionately show them the right course of action.

The same principle applies to our own lives. We all make mistakes and occasionally make foolish choices. However, rather than dwelling on regret and punishing ourselves with negative thoughts, we should shift our focus to what we can do now to rectify the situation and set ourselves back on the right track.

Just as the GPS offers a new route when we take a wrong turn, we too can find a way to redirect ourselves towards growth and improvement.

people are happy on Motzei Shabbos. The happiness is due to the Torah that we studied on Shabbos and the oneg Shabbos. Happiness is important because the Shechinah resides where there is joy (see Shabbos 30:).

Therefore, we say in the Selichos, באלה פנים נשפוך שיחים. The literal translation is, "With what face can we pour out our words", which expresses our shame to speak before Hashem due to our many aveiros. However, we can translate it as a statement: באלה פנים, נשפוך שיחים, we can pray before You. This is based on the Midrash (Bereishis Rabba 11:2) ויברך אלוקים "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.' On Shabbos, our faces shine with joy, and it is with this face that we can approach Hashem and beg for forgiveness.

For some, happiness seems to be a contradiction to the trepid and fearful atmosphere of Selichos, but it isn't so. We can compare it to a *chasan*, moments before his *chuppah*. His friends who came to the *chasunah* might be shmoozing, joking around, and enjoying the smorgasbord, while the *chasan* is crying and saying Tehillim. He is happier than all of them, and he is using his happiness for good purposes. So, we see that joy can be expressed in various ways. Rebbe Pinchos Koritzer zt'l said that a person who is happy is able to cry at any moment that he wants to. A hint to this idea is in the words (Tehillim 89:17) בשמך יגילון כל היום, "With Your name they rejoice every day." The *roshei teivos* of בכי"ה בשמך יגילון כל היום, crying. The crying can be the result of happiness. This is the atmosphere of Selichos. It is at a time of immense joy and simultaneously of immense seriousness, fear, and teshuvah.

Rebbe Yissachar Dov of Belz zt'l gave another reason why we begin saying Selichos specifically on Motzei Shabbos. It is based on the Chazal (Shabbos 119:) that says, "Whoever says ויכלו [at kiddush], becomes a

partner with HaKadosh Baruch Hu in creation." We make kiddush and become partners with Hakadosh Baruch Hu in creation. A partner has permission to express his opinion. For example, a business partner can say how he wants the business to be run. So too, a partner in creation has a right to give his input on how he wants the world to be run. So, after Shabbos, after we became a partner with Hashem in creation, we have a right to express how we want Hashem to lead the world, and as a partner, Hashem will take our requests into serious consideration. We are partners, and our opinions matter.

We can also explain that we begin saying Selichos after Shabbos because in the merit of Shabbos, our aveiros are forgiven.

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 Lizensk zt'l that Shabbos is the *shoresh*, origin and root of teshuvah. This is the translation of שבת, to שוב, return to Hashem. The Ohr HaChaim (Devarim 4:39) writes, "Shabbos is equal to the entire Torah, and therefore, all the bitterness of the past will be removed, and your soul will be rectified because when you keep Shabbos, it is like you kept all the 613 mitzvos."

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."

Shabbos Selichos is such a time, when everyone is inspired with a holy urge to improve their ways.

Selichos

The *sefarim* write that the *yamim noraim* begin 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*.

On Motzei Shabbos, we say the selichos *במוצאי מנוחה*, and each line begins with a letter of the alef beis. The exception is *נו"ן וסמ"ך* which are written in the same phrase, two words, next to each other. It is the line that begins with a nu"n, *נא שגבם*, "Please elevate them..." (It is like it stated *נא סגבם*, because the letter *sin* of *שגבם* is interchangeable with a samech.) The *roshei teivos* of *נא שגבם*, or if you prefer, *נא סגבם*, spell *ג"ס*, miracle.

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

The final line of this *piyut* (which begins with a ת') is *תראם ניסך עושה גדולות*, "Show them Your miracles..." During these days of *selichos*, we ask Hashem to show us His miracles and grant us all our heart's desires.

We also say on this first night of Selichos, *רצה עתירתם 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. We request that in this merit, Hashem should answer their *tefillos*.

Some people fast on the first day of *selichos*, and others recite the entire *sefer Tehillim*. It is the custom of Belzer chassidim to say the entire *Tehillim* on this day, in *beis medresh*, *ברוב עם* (many people together). Rebbe Yissachar Dov of Belz *zy'a* said that his *avodas Hashem* on the first day of *selichos* is greater than his Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur service.

When Rebbe Yissachar Dov was old and unwell, his *gaba'im* tried to convince him not to go to *beis medrash* for *Tehillim* 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* together 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. But on the first night of *selichos*, he was the *chazan*. When he began *Ashrei*, his voice didn't show any emotion, but when he came to *תהילת ה'*, he cried copiously and 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 *hislachavus*. "Don't be afraid that you might become hoarse because others can take your place."

Someone asked Reb Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld *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 Sonnenfeld 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.

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 because I learn all days of the year. He replied that the scholars of the past also knew that fasting would make people weak and that it would be hard for them to learn. Nevertheless, they instituted the custom for people to fast

during *selichos*. Therefore, I can't permit you to eat."

In our weak generation, most people don't fast. Nevertheless, we must remember that these are special days, and we should spend them with teshuvah and tefillah to arouse Hashem's compassion.

Rebbe Dovid of Lelov zt'l once traveled by foot because he couldn't afford to hire a wagon. Someone stopped his horse and buggy beside Rebbe Dovid and offered him a ride.

When they arrived at their destination, Rebbe Dovid thanked him and said, "I have a beis medresh in Lelov. Come there on the first night of *selichos*."

The man thought, "I did him a favor, and now he wants to take advantage of me to make certain he will have a minyan for *selichos*. One thing is certain: I am not going to his beis medresh for *selichos*."

On the first night of *selichos*, Rebbe Dovid entered his beis medresh and looked around. The person who gave him the ride wasn't there yet, so he returned to his room.

A few times, he entered the beis medresh, looked around, and when he didn't see the person who drove him, he returned to his study.

At this time, the one who gave him a ride was in his village, which was near Lelov. He thought to himself, "Rebbe Dovid is a holy man. He asked me to come to his beis medresh for *selichos*. Why shouldn't I go?"

He drove to the Lelover Rebbe's beis medresh. This time, when the Rebbe came out, he saw him and immediately began the *selichos*.

After *selichos*, he told him, "You did me a favor this year, and I wanted to give you a *brachah*. I asked you to come on the first day of *selichos* since it is a great *eis ratzon* in heaven for the *brachos* to take effect. I give you a *brachah* that you and your descendants

should enjoy immense wealth and long lives."

This account was relayed to me by the great-grandson of the recipient of this *brachah*. He attested, "I am a direct descendant of this individual, and I can testify that the blessing has been fulfilled. Throughout the subsequent generations, our family has experienced prosperity, and everyone has enjoyed long lives."

Sincere Selichos

Before saying the *selichos* of י"ג מדרות (which is said a couple of days before Yom Kippur), the Beis Aharon said to his chassidim, "Don't say *selichos* as if it were a custom or routine." We are asking Hashem for forgiveness; these aren't just words we have a tradition of saying.

There was once a *misnaged* who had caused significant trouble for Rebbe Boruch of Mezhibuzh zy'a. Before Yom Kippur, this *misnaged* approached Rebbe Boruch'l and said, "I don't really need to ask for your forgiveness because I believe that everything I did was a mitzvah. [He believed that opposing chassidim was a mitzvah.] However, since it is *erev Yom Kippur*, I thought it appropriate to seek your forgiveness."

In response, Rebbe Boruch'l quoted the verse (Bamidbar 14:20), סלחתי כדברך, "I have forgiven according to your word." The implication behind his response was, "I forgive you in the same manner that you are seeking forgiveness. You don't truly mean it when you say you're sorry; likewise, I don't mean it when I say I forgive you."

The phrase "I'm sorry" can carry different meanings depending on the context in which it is used. Sometimes, it expresses genuine remorse, but there are instances when the regret is minimal or non-existent. For example, when you want to pass through a door and someone is blocking your way, you might say, "Sorry, can I pass?" Or when you approach someone and ask, "I'm sorry,

do you have the time?" In these cases, "sorry" is used as a form of speech, without genuine remorse.

During selichos, when we say "סלה לנו" (forgive us), we strive to have sincere regret. Otherwise, Hashem could respond, "I forgive you in the same nonchalant and insincere manner that you asked for forgiveness."

Reb Shalom Shwadron zt'l once said that when somebody knocks on your door, you have the choice to answer. But when someone pounds on your door, you understand that the person is desperate, so you open the door to see what is needed. There are two words that can be used to mean knocking at a door, one is נוקש and one is דופק. Reb Shalom Shwardron zt'l explained that נוקש is a knock, and דופק is when someone pounds on the door. Therefore, we say in selichos, דלתך דפקנו, "We are pounding on Your door... Don't have us return emptyhanded." We are pounding at Hashem's door, desperate for His atonement and salvation, and therefore, we plead that Hashem listen to our prayers.⁵

Tzaddikim tell a mashal of a person who was lost and was wandering around in a forest. He needed food and water and finally spotted a house. He knocked at the door, but the homeowner didn't answer. What did the man do? He knocked again; he pounded and begged for mercy, because he realized that this was his only chance for survival. Similarly, we knock at Hashem's doors, and if they are closed, we knock again, pound, and don't go away until our tefillos are answered because we realize that we don't have any other option.

We say on the first day of selichos, רצה עתירתם בעמדם בלילות, "Desire their tefillos..." There are several ways to express tefillah, and עתירה is when one davens many, many times (see Rashi, Bereishis 25:21 ויעתר ד"ה). This is because we don't ask Hashem only once or twice for life, a good year, and atonement. We ask again and again because we recognize our utter desperation and dire need to have Hashem answer our tefillos.

Thirteen Middos

The Gemara (*Rosh Hashanah* 17:) states, "If the *pasuk* hadn't said it, we wouldn't be permitted to say it. Hakadosh Baruch Hu wrapped Himself like a *shaliach tzibbur* (*chazan*) and showed Moshe [the thirteen attributes of mercy]. Hashem told Moshe, 'Whenever Yidden sin, say this before Me, and I will forgive them...'"

The Gemara says, ברית כרותה ל"ג מדות של, רחמים שאין חוזרות ריקם, Hashem made a *bris* (pact) with the ל"ג מדות, that they will always be effective. They will always arouse Hashem's compassion.

The Rabbeinu B'Chayei (*Shemos* 34:6) writes, "Whoever knows the translation of the thirteen attributes, and says them with *kavanah*, his *tefillah* will be answered - unless he has *aveiros* that prevent it. Now that we are in *galus*, we don't have a *kohen gadol* to atone for our sins. We don't have a *mizbeach* to bring the *korbanos*. All we have are our *tefillos* and the thirteen attributes of mercy."

Shaarei Teshuvah (581:1) writes, "One must say selichos בנחת ובמיתון ובכוונה, pleasantly, without rushing, and with *kavanah*. It is

5. There are situations where a poor person may seek tzedakah in a beis medresh, and the wealthy people in beis medresh can say, "I'm sorry, I don't have money with me." But when the poor person comes to a wealthy person's home, he can't say, "I don't have my money with me." You are at his home. He has money. He has checks. He can give you money if he wants to.

This is hinted at in the words, דלתך דפקנו, we came to Your door, please don't make us leave empty-handed. We are at Your door. You have the ability to give us all our heart's desires; please answer our tefillos.

forbidden to say the thirteen *middos* without *kavanah*."

The Rebbe of Gustanin *zt'l* said it is a mitzvah to review the *tosfos* (*Rosh Hashanah* 17, in the *hagahah*), which teaches the meaning of the thirteen attributes of *rachamim*.

Tosfos writes, "הנון means Hashem has mercy on those who are going through hard times. [Hashem says], 'I am compassionate and can't see them suffer. הנון also means מתנת חנם, an undeserved gift.' Hashem says, 'I can't bear to see My children in pain,' therefore, Hashem forgives us, even when we don't deserve it.

Before we say the thirteen attributes, we say the tefillah א-ל מלך יושב על כסא רחמים, that Hashem is sitting on His throne of compassion. However, notice that each night, the first time we say the thirteen attributes, we don't say this tefillah. Instead, we say a prayer called מי א-ל כמוך. We say this because we can't begin the selichos with the words א-ל מלך יושב על כסא רחמים, saying that Hashem sits on the throne of compassion because it hasn't occurred yet. Hashem sits on the throne of compassion *after* we say the thirteen attributes. Therefore, the first time we say the thirteen attributes, we begin with the tefillah מי א-ל כמוך, and then we say the thirteen attributes, and then we can say א-ל מלך יושב על כסא רחמים, that Hashem sits on His throne of compassion.

On *Yom Kippur*, we say the tefillah of א-ל מלך יושב על כסא רחמים also the first time because on *Yom Kippur*, Hashem sits on His throne of compassion even before we say the thirteen attributes of compassion.

Teshuvah

Around forty years ago, two bachurim got lost in a forest and couldn't find their way out. They did, however, find railroad tracks. So they decided to follow the tracks, certain they 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 saw a person lying in his way but couldn't stop the train in time. He blew his 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 the bachur to move far away from the tracks? No. All he wanted was for the bachur to take one step off the tracks.

The same is true 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 we take is that perhaps the bachur woke up from the blast of the whistle but decided to wait another minute before getting off the tracks. What an unfortunate decision! The lesson is that when you are inspired to teshuvah, do so immediately. Take even just one step in the right direction right away (as Chazal say, עתה is an expression for teshuvah). Now, you are motivated, so don't push off your teshuvah for later.

The halachah is that someone who is tamei with זיבה (and needs seven days before he goes to the mikvah to become tahor), and he is also 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, to rid himself from the tumah that he can, although he is still tamei with zivah (see Mishnayos Brachos 3:6). The Lubavitcher Rebbe *zt'l* said that this tells us that even if we aren't able to become one hundred percent tahor, we should purify ourselves

and improve ourselves in whichever areas we can immediately. Even if you can't become completely pure, making yourself purer than you are now is also a remarkable achievement.

The Gemara (Succah 44:) tells that someone came to Reb Elazar ben Tzadok during a Shemitah year and told him that he has workers who work in his vineyards and olive groves, and he lets them eat from the fruits as part of their payment. He wanted to know whether it was permitted.

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

The man left.

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

Soon afterwards, the man returned and asked Reb Elazar ben Tzadok what he should 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 *ehrllicher* 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. When he heard it was forbidden to give the fruits to his workers as payment, he rushed to stop his workers from eating the fruit. He first had to stop the *aveirah*. After stopping them, he returned to find out the correct way to do things. He was praised for being especially *ehrllich* because he didn't wait a moment. He immediately corrected his incorrect deeds.

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 rejoice 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 וי יבא) writes, "If one decides to do teshuvah, the main part is the strong desire that is burning in him to improve his ways, and then his teshuvah is accepted immediately. The pasuk says וי יבא, which could mean that one corrupted his ways...but he wants to repent. The Torah tells us that he should come בכלל with a desire to improve", and then his sins will be forgiven.

Silence by the Tefillah

A wealthy couple had been struggling with infertility for many years. Despite spending significant money on medical treatments, they had not made any progress. During the days of Selichos, the husband approached his Rebbe and poured out his heart about their pain and strong desire to have children.

The Rebbe understood that the couple had come to him seeking his help, but he posed a question to them. He asked if they would be willing to go to a great Rebbe known for his effective blessings. The husband responded affirmatively, saying he would indeed go to such a tzaddik if directed.

The Rebbe then asked if they would be willing to follow any difficult instructions given by this tzaddik to merit having children, including having to give a lot of money. The husband declared his readiness to do whatever was necessary. He said, "Rebbe, I am prepared to give away all of my money, if necessary, to have children."

The Rebbe said, "Well, there was a tzaddik who lived many years ago, and he has a solution. I am referring to the great tzaddik, the Tosfos Yom Tov zt'l. At the massacres of (1647-1648) ת"ח ת"ט the Tosfos Yom Tov said that these tragedies were caused because

people were speaking during davening. He composed a *tefillah* — said in many *batei midrashim* after *kriyas HaTorah*. The prayer states, "Whoever guards his mouth from speaking during the *tefillah*... will merit healthy children, and to raise them to Torah, chuppah, and good deeds..."

The Rebbe said, "I know that when someone is accustomed to speaking during the *tefillah*, it is hard for him to stop. But since you said that you are prepared to pay any price to have children, I recommend that you follow the Tosfos Yom Tov's counsel and accept upon yourself to never speak during the *tefillah*..."

The man followed this advice diligently, and a year later, during the days of Selichos, they were blessed with a child.

He shared that restraining himself from speaking at the *tefillah* was more difficult than all the treatments he tried until then.

In Austrah, Ukraine, a devastating plague had struck, affecting people of all ages and resulting in numerous deaths. In response to this crisis, the Rav of Austrah called for a day of fasting, *tefillos*, and *teshuvah*. He urged everyone to examine their deeds and to do *teshuvah*, as the cause of the plague remained unknown. The Rav emphasized that if anyone knows of someone committing grave sins, they should come forward, as it was possible that the plague was a consequence of that person's transgressions.

Two individuals approached the Rav and shared their suspicions about a certain individual. They explained that this person used to frequent the local *beis medresh* for the *tefillos* but had recently stopped attending. They had been watching him closely and noticed that around midnight, he would light a lantern and venture into the forest alone. They speculated that he might be engaging in sinful activities there.

The Rav acknowledged that their suspicions were plausible but cautioned against jumping to conclusions. He reminded them that the individual in question had a

presumption of innocence (*chezkas kashrus*) until it was proven beyond doubt that he was indeed sinning. Therefore, the Rav instructed them to contact him when the person went to the forest that night, and they would discreetly follow him to ascertain the truth.

That night, the Rav and the two men silently trailed behind the mysterious figure, their eyes fixed on him as he ventured deeper into the forest. They watched from a safe distance as he carefully hung his lantern on a gnarled tree branch, its soft glow illuminating his tear-streaked face, and he began saying the *Tikun Chatzos* in a mournful and crying voice. It was evident that this man was a *tzaddik nistar* and was mourning for the destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash*.

As they listened to his heartfelt lamentations, another voice, filled with anguish, echoed through the dense forest. Straining their eyes, they searched for the source of the second sorrowful cry but found no one.

"Who else was crying with him in the forest?" they wondered.

Emerging from the forest, the Rav approached the man and explained that they had to follow him because of their suspicion and due to the plague, "But now we know you are a perfect *tzaddik*. Please forgive us. But tell us, who was the other person with you in the forest? We didn't see anyone."

At first, he didn't answer, but the Rav told him that since he was the Rav of the city, he must answer his question.

The man replied, "My nightly mourning makes a *nachas ruach* in heaven. In response, it was decreed that *Yirmiyahu HaNavi*, who witnessed the destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash*, should join me in saying *tikun chatzos*."

Intrigued by this revelation, the Rav seized the opportunity. "Since you have the privilege of communicating with *Yirmiyahu*

HaNavi," he implored, "please ask him why this devastating plague has befallen our city and what we can do to end it."

The tzaddik replied that he would come to shul for *Shacharis* the following morning, and then he would explain everything.

The Rav told the people of Austrah to come to the beis medresh for *Shacharis* the next day, and they will hear the reason for the plague.

The time for *Shacharis* arrived, and the *tzaddik nistar* had not yet appeared. The Rav instructed them to begin the tefillah without him. As the congregation was in the middle of the tefillah, the tzaddik entered, adorned in his tallis and tefillin. A wave of fear swept through the room, causing some to faint and others to tremble in awe.

After *Shacharis*, the Rav approached the tzaddik and asked, "Why were we so afraid when you entered the beis medresh?"

"It is because I was wearing tefillin and the *passuk* states (Devarim 28:10), וראו כל עמי הארץ, 'All nations of the world will see that Hashem's name is on

you [when you wear tefillin] and they will fear you.'"

Puzzled, the Rav inquired further, "But we also wear tefillin, and we don't see people becoming so afraid."

The *tzadik nistar* explained, "When one is cautious with the *kedushah* of tefillin and doesn't speak while wearing them, the tefillin casts fear onto those who see him. Similarly, we must be cautious with the *kedushah* of the beis medresh, ensuring that idle talk does not disrupt the tefillah. I have refrained from attending the beis medresh due to the prevalence of such speech. The plague that has befallen our community is a consequence of this transgression. The community must accept on themselves not to speak during davening, and the plague will cease."

The community made this *kabbalah*, and the *mageifah* ceased. To ensure that this message would endure, they inscribed this story upon the walls of the beis medresh. Whenever a guest arrived, they would have him read the story inscribed on the walls of the beis medresh, so they would also refrain from speaking during the tefillah.