

Torah Wellsprings

*Collected thoughts
from
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Ki Savo



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Torah Wellsprings - Ki Savo

Everything Comes from Hashem — Not from One's Own Strength

This parashah begins with the mitzvah of *bikurim*. A landowner comes to the Beis HaMikdash and announces in a loud voice:¹ וַיָּבֵאוּ אֶל הַמִּקְדָּשׁ הַזֶּה וַיִּתֵּן לָנוּ אֶת הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת אֲרָץ (26:9-10) זֶבֶת חֶלֶב וְדָבָשׁ, וְעַתָּה הִנֵּה הֵבֵאתִי אֶת רֵאשִׁית פְּרֵי הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר 'נתתה לי ה' "...Hashem brought us to this place, and He gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. Now, behold, I have brought the first of the fruit of the ground which you, Hashem, have given to me."

The Akeidah (Shaar 98) explains that the mitzvah of *bikurim* teaches us that Eretz Yisrael, and all the bounty we earn, is from Hashem. They aren't the product of our hard work or wisdom. As it states (26:2) וְלִקְחֶתָּ מֵרֵאשִׁית וְלֵאמֹר, "You shall take of the first of all the fruit... of your land which Hashem, your G-d, is giving you." The pasuk is relaying: You think it is אֲרָצְךָ, your land. The Torah clarifies, וְלֵאמֹר, Hashem gave it to you. This is an important message that we must always remember. Everything we have is from Hashem, and nothing is attained on our own.

The Mishnah (Bikurim 3:1) says, בֵּיצֵד מִפְּרִישִׁין הַפְּבוֹרִים. יוֹרֵד אָדָם בְּתוֹךְ שָׂדֵהוּ וְרוֹאֶה תְּאֵנָה שֶׁבִּפְרָהּ, אֲשָׁפּוּל, שֶׁבֶבֶר, רִמּוֹן שֶׁבֶבֶר, קוֹשֶׁרוֹ בְּגָמִי וְאֹמֵר, הֲרִי אֶלּוֹ בְּפוֹרִים, "How does one separate *bikurim*? A person goes down to his field, and sees a fig tree, which began to grow fruit, or a grapevine or pomegranate tree, and ties the fruits with a גָּמִי, reed, and he says, "These are *bikurim*."

Rebbe Naftoli of Ropshitz zt'l said that the new fruit was tied with a גָּמִי, reed, because גָּמִי is *roshei teivos* for (Tehillim 111:2) גְּדֹלִים מַעֲשֵׂי ה' "Great are Hashem's deeds." גְּדֹלִים can also be translated as agricultural growth. The crops that grew, and everything we have, it is all מַעֲשֵׂי ה' Hashem's wondrous deeds.

It states slightly further in the parashah (26:14) לֹא אֲכָלְתִּי בְּאֹנִי מִמֶּנּוּ. The Divrei Binah writes that בְּאֹנִי can be translated as "strength" (as it states Bereishis 49:3, כֹּחִי וְרֵאשִׁית אוֹנִי, "My power and my initial strength"). Every person must say, לֹא אֲכָלְתִּי בְּאֹנִי מִמֶּנּוּ, "I don't eat due to my strength." My *parnassah* isn't my strength, wisdom, or abilities. It is all a gift from Hashem.

When the Beis HaMikdash stood, we had the mitzvah of *bikurim* to teach us that all the good we have is from Hashem. But how will we internalize this lesson in our times, when we don't have the ability to perform the mitzvah of *bikurim*?

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 davening three times each day." Tefillah takes the place of *bikurim*. Tefillah is comprised of praises and requests. Praises remind us that all the good we have is from Hashem. Requests teach us this lesson as well. We are reminded that we can't do anything on our own, and we need Hashem's help.

1. When a person brings *bikkurim*, he is commanded to recite words of gratitude in the Beis HaMikdash (26:3-10), and he must proclaim them with a raised voice. The Torah says וְעָנִיתָ, and Rashi explains that he must speak these words loudly.

The Beis Yisrael adds an insight: just as in times of *tzar* a Jew cries out to Hashem with a full voice, so too, when he recounts Hashem's kindness and salvation, he should express his thanks out loud.

A Joyous Life

With the mitzvah bikurim, which teaches us to know that everything we have is from Hashem (and in our days, with the mitzvah of tefillah, which teaches us this same lesson), we learn how to live with joy and without worries. We bring a couple of examples, as taught in the holy sefarim.

(1) Life Without Worries

The mitzvah of *bikurim* begins with the pasuk וְהָיָה כִּי תָבוֹא אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לְךָ נַחֲלָה, "It will be, when you come into the land which Hashem, your G-d, gives you for an inheritance..." וְהָיָה is an expression of joy. Beis Yaakov (from Reb Yaakov Aharon Yanavsky zt'l, Rav of Alexander) explains that when a person knows that everything is from Hashem, he will always be happy because he has nothing to worry about. When one thinks he acquires matters on his own – with his wisdom and with his strength – he is afraid because perhaps next time he won't succeed. Therefore, the mitzvah of *bikurim* begins with וְהָיָה, because no one is happier and calmer than the person who knows that everything we have is from Hashem.

Rebbe Yehoshua of Belz zt'l says חַיִּיךְ, "life" alludes to one's *parnassah*. The Torah says (28:66) וְהָיָה חַיִּיךְ תִּלְאִים לְךָ מִנֶּגֶד, "Your life will hang in suspense before you." This means your *parnassah* is already set and determined from Rosh Hashanah. Therefore, you have nothing to worry about it. Nevertheless (ibid.) וּפְחַדְתָּ לַיְלָה וַיּוֹמָם, "You will be in fear night and

day", וְלֹא תִאֲמַיִן בְּחַיִּיךָ, "you will not believe in your life." They have nothing to fear, yet their nature is to be afraid, and they don't believe that they will have *parnassah*.

The Ropshitzer Rav zt'l (Zera Kodesh, Toldos, (ד"ר זערא קודש) 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... About him, Chazal (Yoma 22:) say, כָּמָה לֹא חָלִי וְלֹא מְרִיזֵשׁ גְּבֵרָא, דְּמֵרִיזָה סִייעִיהּ כָּמָה סְמוּךְ וּמוֹבִטָה וְאִין צָרִיךְ לַחֲלוּת וְלִדְאָג מִכָּל רַעָה מִי שְׁהִקְבִּי' בְּעִזּוֹרָה. Rashi explains, צָרִיךְ לַחֲלוּת וְלִדְאָג מִכָּל רַעָה מִי שְׁהִקְבִּי' בְּעִזּוֹרָה. This means when a person sees that Hakadosh Baruch Hu is helping him, how confident he can feel! He doesn't have to worry at all! He can feel assured that Hashem will help him." This is the feeling of confidence and certainty one attains from the mitzvah *bikurim*, because it reminds us that everything we have, it is from Hashem.

(2) Life Without Complaints

The 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. Everything in their life is good."² *Bikurim* teaches us the attitude of recognizing the good, and not to focus on the bad and constantly complain.

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

2. A *bachur* who was an orphan was forced to leave yeshiva so he could take over his late father's business and support his mother, the *almanah*. His Rosh Yeshiva, Reb Yehudah Zev Segal of Manchester zt'l, gave him the following advice: "Every night, when you daven Maariv, and you say the words עַל נִסֵּיךָ שֶׁבָּכַל יוֹם עָמְנוּ, think of a miracle that happened to you that day."

This *bachur* is today a chashuve Yungerman in London. He says, "For the past forty years, every night I do what my Rosh Yeshiva recommended. I can testify that there isn't a single day that I can't find a miracle for which to praise Hashem! "

Reb Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt'l shared a *segulah* that protects a person from all worries. One should write on paper all the kindness that Hakadosh Baruch Hu did for him, and when he says Modim in Shemonah Esrei, he should recall all those points and thank Hashem for them. Reb Shlomo Zalman said that this is בְּדוּק וּמוֹסָה, a proven and true *segulah*, to free a person from all worries.

constantly becoming worse. There are evil decrees, war, hunger, captivity, distress, and various diseases. When Hashem saves a person from all these tragedies, he should constantly be thinking about Hashem's kindness. Anyone who can live with peace and security and has *parnassah* should praise Hashem."³

Particularly, in Elul, at the end of the year, we should praise Hashem for all the kindness we enjoyed throughout the year. Therefore, we read about *bikurim* in Elul because Elul is an ideal time to recognize Hashem's kindness and to praise Hashem.⁴

A hint that Elul is a time to praise Hashem is from the acronym of *אלול* - *ועתה* (1 Divrei HaYamim 29:13) "And now, Hashem, we give thanks to You, and praise Your glorious Name." Also, *אלול* is *roshei teivos* for (Shemos 15:1) "ויאמרו לאמר אשירה לה" "They said, 'I will sing to Hashem.'" And *Tehillim* (ch.100) has a hint to *אלול*, because it states (100:3) *ולו אנחנו עמו וצאן* (100:3), *אלול*, because it states (100:3) *ולו אנחנו עמו וצאן*, *אלול*, because it states (100:3) *ולו אנחנו עמו וצאן*, *אלול*, because it states (100:3) *ולו אנחנו עמו וצאן*, *אלול*, because it states (100:3) *ולו אנחנו עמו וצאן*. The letters *לול* spell *לול*. This chapter

speaks of joyous praises to Hashem. It is the chapter that begins with *מומור לתודה*, a psalm of gratitude.

Living Life Successfully

Praising Hashem has many *segulos*, and we will list three of them here:

(1) The Good he received will remain with him

One *segulah* is that when a person praises Hashem for the kindness he received, Hashem will allow him to keep the goodness. *Chas v'shalom*, if a person doesn't praise Hashem, he is at risk of losing it.

The Alshich writes, "When a person thinks his wealth came to him 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.... This is because Hakadosh Baruch He desires to give us good, and all He requests from us is that we should have *hakaras hatov*, to recognize that Hashem is the master and He does

3. Praise Hashem when they earn a large sum of money, receive a promotion, or are given honor. They also thank Hashem when they recover from illness. But we must also remember to praise Hashem for the troubles from which He spares us. If we have health, *parnassah*, and nothing bad has occurred, that is even more reason to praise Hashem.

The Mishnah (Avos 5:5) lists ten miracles that occurred regularly in the Beis HaMikdash. Notably, the entire list consists of miracles that were *not* responses to crises—no one was poor and suddenly became wealthy, or ill and then healed. Rather, each miracle reflects how Hashem spared us from potential troubles.

For example, among the ten miracles we read: "No woman ever miscarried because of the aroma of the *korbanos*; the meat of the offerings never spoiled; no fly was ever found in the slaughterhouse; and the rain never extinguished the fire on the *mizbeiach*."

These miracles were not dramatic salvations from disaster—they were quiet protections, preventing problems from ever arising. And for this, we praise Hashem. Being saved from troubles, even before they begin, is itself a profound reason to thank Him.

Also, in our personal lives, we must offer praise for being saved from *tzaros*. This is hinted in the words (Tehillim 107:1) *הודו לה' כי טוב*. This means we praise Hashem when everything is good, too. There doesn't have to be a problem and then a salvation. Being spared altogether from troubles is sufficient reason to praise Hashem.

4. 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.

kindness with us always, and that we should bless Him and praise Him constantly. Behold, when a person sees himself living in a land flowing with milk and honey, sitting peacefully and without fear under the fig tree and under the grapevine, his house is filled with all goodness, which he didn't fill, and he has vineyards and olive trees which he didn't plant, an abundance of wheat and barley, his yetzer hara and his straying heart may tell him, 'My strength and the might of my arm gave me all this wealth.' It is the Creator's way that when a person carries such thoughts, chas v'shalom... Hashem will take away all this goodness that He gave him. Therefore, Hashem commanded us with the mitzvah of *bikurim*. Once a year, a person should go to Hashem's House with the fruits of the first fruits in a basket in his arms, and he should place it before Hashem Yisbarach, and say, 'This is Yours. This is all from You. You gave me this good produce.' This is a great explanation for the mitzvah of *bikurim*, so we will remember that everything we acquire in this world, it is all from Hashem."

The Alshich tells the following mashal: "It can be compared to a wealthy person who hired a gardener to tend to his orchard. When his figs and grapes ripened, the gardener placed the fruit in a beautiful dish and brought them to the landowner. He said, 'Look at the sweet fruit your field is producing! It's all yours, for it grew in your orchard.' The landowner saw the *derech eretz* of his gardener and replied, 'You can keep the rest of the crop.' This is the concept 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."

(2) He will receive goodness, even when not deserving.

Praising Hashem is *mesugal* for more kindness, even when he doesn't deserve it.

There seems to be a contradiction in the pesukim. One pasuk (Devarim 10:17) states אֲשֶׁר לֹא יִשָּׂא פָנָיו, that Hashem doesn't shine His countenance on us when we don't deserve it. But it also states (Bamidbar 6:26) יִשָּׂא ה' פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ, "Hashem will shine His face on you." It seems that even when we don't deserve it, Hashem will shine His face upon us, and He grants us much kindness. So, which one is it? The Gemara (Brachos 20) says that the *malachim* asked this question to Hakadosh Baruch Hu. Hashem replied, "How can I not favor the Jewish nation? I commanded them וְאָכַלְתָּ וּשְׂבַעְתָּ וּבִרְכַּת (after a meal) when they are full and satisfied. But Klal Yisrael are *machmir*, and they bench after eating a *kezayis* or a *k'beitzah*." We can explain that the Gemara is hinting to the special benefits we earn from praising Hashem. There are times when a Yid is still hungry, which means his needs were not yet fulfilled. Nevertheless, he praises Hashem for what he received. For this, Hashem will shine His countenance on him and grant him kindness, even beyond what he deserves.⁵

(3) For Praising Hashem, One Receives Life

The Midrash (quoted in *Orchos Yosher, Gemilus Chasadim*) tells a story about two people who were traveling together. One of them was a talmid chacham, the other was an unlearned innkeeper. When they met a poor person, the talmid chacham gave tzedakah, and the innkeeper didn't. The Midrash states: They walked further, and the *malach hamaves* appeared to them and said, "I am the *malach hamaves*." They were very afraid.

5. A granddaughter of the Birkas Avraham zt'l of Slonim once suffered a difficult moment, and she sighed and said "Oy!". Her grandfather told her to say, "Oy du!" (du means "you", in Yiddish). Together, Oy-du is אוֹדָה, which means praise Hashem. This is because when one realizes that the hardships come from Hashem, he will praise Hashem.

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

Then the *malach hamaves* turned to the innkeeper and said, "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

A *yungerman* from Kiryat Gat davened *shacharis* at the *netz* and took a bus to Yerushalayim, to be *menachem avel* a close friend. He wanted to remain with his friend for a significant amount of time. He felt that it wouldn't make sense to make this long trip for a brief *nichum aveilim*.

However, as soon as he sat down at the *nichum aveilim* to speak with his good friend, his phone rang. 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 noontime. I need someone to be with me. Can you be there?"

The *yungerman* replied, "Certainly, I'll help you. I'm in Yerushalayim now, but I'll be in Ramat Gan as soon as possible."

He returned to his friend and was *menachem avel* quickly. He apologized and explained why he couldn't stay with him longer. He rushed out to catch the next bus to Bnei Brak. From Bnei Brak, he would have to take another bus to get 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.

The *yungerman* thought about his morning, and he felt that he had wasted the day. He wanted to perform the mitzvah of *nichum aveilim* properly, but felt like he didn't. Then he wanted to help his father, but that was also not necessary. As it turned out, he spent half of the day on buses, and the only mitzvah he performed was a brief *nichum aveilim*.⁶

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 get to his home in Kiryat Gat. The 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 was kind and agreed.

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

"Why don't you take it with you into the bathroom? Why should I watch it? You can watch it yourself!"

6. Of course he knew he would also be rewarded for traveling to perform mitzvos, and for trying to do mitzvos; nevertheless, it appeared to him that most of his day was wasted.

The *yungerman* explained, "My tallis and tefillin are in this bag. It isn't proper to bring them into the bathroom."

The storeowner's eyes opened wide and sparkled with hope. "Can I put on your tefillin?" he asked.

"Of course! It will be my privilege."

When he returned, he found the irreligious Yid wearing tefillin on a tattooed arm, and on an entirely bald-shaven head, as he wore a tiny "kipah".

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

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

Then the *yungerman* thought the following: "Yesterday, if you would have asked me, 'How much is the worth of an irreligious Yid putting on tefillin?', I would have said 'Not much.' How precious could it be? But today I discovered its importance. Hashem wanted me to take this long trip to help an irreligious Jew wear tefillin. So, I guess I misjudged the extent of how much Hashem loves our mitzvos."⁷

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. There is no limit to the respect one deserves for each mitzvah he performs.⁸

The Yismach Yisrael writes, "The honored *kohanim* and *gizbarim* (*gabaim*) of the beis

7. 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. If I had put on tefillin, I would be late for my work. I would have put on tefillin later in the day, but I had already eaten. I understand that after eating, it is too late to put on tefillin."

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

After the man left, Reb Nochum Chernobyler said, "This man is obviously not learned. He certainly doesn't have holy thoughts when he wears tefillin. Who even knows how kosher his tefillin are! Yet, I was able to notice on him that he hadn't put on tefillin today." This is because every mitzvah, even those performed by simple people, is extremely precious in Hashem's eyes.

8. 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 wonders, "Why all this joy and excitement over a few fruits that cost less than a half-dinar? An even greater wonder is the Midrash that states, 'Hashem created the world for *bikurim*.'" The Alshich explains that the specialness of *bikurim* is that it teaches us that everything we have is from Hashem. According to the Yismach Yisrael, we can explain that the immense joy of *bikurim* is to teach us the specialness of every mitzvah. There is no limit to their worth.

haMikdash came out to greet them to show them that even a simple mitzvah performed by 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 even if he had only 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."

Torah

The Alshich HaKadosh told the following mashal:

There was a king who enjoyed listening to the music played by one of his servants. One day, people told the king that this musician, whom he loves so much, is nothing but a murderer. The king replied, "Don't punish him! Don't do anything to him!"

Sometime later, the king was told about some other corrupt deeds this musician committed. The king said, "Don't tell me these things. I don't want to hear about them!"

But then the musician was involved in a fight, and the person he fought with cut off his hand. The musician wouldn't be able to play music anymore.

The king decreed that the musician should be killed.

The people were shocked. Until then, the king was compassionate and forgiving toward the musician. Even when he heard about his corruption, he refused to punish him. And now he ordered his death?

The king explained, "I never forgave the musician for his corrupt deeds. I believed that everything you told me was true, and I knew that he deserved punishment. But I so much enjoyed listening to his music that I wanted him to live. But now that he lost his hand, I agreed that he be punished for his sins."

Using this mashal, the Alshich explains the following Yerushalmi (Chagigah 1:7, see also Nedarim 81a) regarding the churban of the first Beis HaMikdash, "Hakadosh Baruch Hu was *mevater* for *avodah zarah*, *arayos*, and murder, but he wasn't *mevater* for bitul Torah." Hashem enjoyed listening to their Torah study, so he agreed to overlook these aveiros. But when there was *bitul Torah*, Hashem punished them for their three cardinal sins, and the Beis HaMidkash was destroyed. This is because Hashem had never forgiven them for their *avodah zarah*, *arayos*, and murder. It was only that Hashem didn't want to punish them and lose the joy of listening to their Torah study.

We learn from the Alshich's lesson the extent to which Hashem loves the Torah study of the Jewish nation.⁹

9. Chazal say that when a person stands before the heavenly court in heaven for judgment, they ask קבעת עיתים לתורה, "Did you set times to study Torah?"

A good friend shared the following idea with me:

A plane has three cabins. The cheapest is economy class, then there is a premium class, and the most expensive is business class. In the more expensive classes, the passengers are seated in very comfortable seats, they are served first, and they are treated with honor. However, my friend noticed that when they got off the plane, regardless of what they paid, all classes wait together to claim their luggage. It doesn't seem fair. Shouldn't those who paid so much money for their trip receive their baggage first? They should be handed their bags as soon as they step off the plane.

This can be used as a mashal, teaching an important lesson about life: There are people in this world who

Har Tzvi (Chukas) notes that this world is called *אהל*, a tent, and the next world is called *עולמו*, his world. This world is called *אהל*, tent, as it states (Bamidbar 19:14) *זאת התורה אדם כי* *ימות באהל*, "This is the law: if a man dies in a tent", and the next world is called *עולמו*, as it states (Koheles 12:5) *כי הלך האדם אל בית עולמו*, "for man goes to his everlasting home."

This means this world is a temporary passing place, like a tent. The next world is the true permanent place. Therefore, the primary place to invest in is in the next world (and one of the primary ways to prepare is to study Torah). *Olam Haba* is for eternity, while this world is like living in a temporary tent.

The Or HaChaim HaKadosh (Bamidbar 26:23) explains the name *יששכר* stands for *יש שכר*, "there is reward". Yissachar had this name because Shevet Yissachar was outstanding in learning Torah, and for this there is reward. The Or HaChaim writes, "The Torah hints with this name of *יששכר* that only this has reward, and everything else [that isn't related to Torah], *מה יתרון לאדם בכל עמלו*, what gain is there with all his toils. As the Gemara (Brachos Shabbos 28b) says, [every day] when a person leaves the *beis medresh*, he should say *אני עמל והם עמלים*... *מוודה אני לפניך*... "I praise you, Hashem, that my portion is with those who sit in the *beis medresh*. I work, and they work. I work and receive reward. They

work, and don't receive reward.' The imagined good doesn't endure, and even if it does endure, it is nothing at all." Ultimately, the only reward comes from studying and keeping the Torah.¹⁰

The Or HaChaim HaKadosh in his *sefer Chefetz Hashem* (Brachos 28b) discusses the people whose desire is solely to serve Hashem and to study Torah, and they work just a little bit to support their families. He writes that even for the time that they are working, Hashem will grant them reward. This is because his intention is *l'shem shamayim* so that he can study Torah with *yishuv hadaas*. The Or HaChaim says that this is the meaning of *אני עמל ומקבל שכר והם עמלים* *ואני מקבלים שכר*, "I work and I receive reward and they work and they don't receive reward." This means that even when I work, the *gashmiyus* types of work of this world, I will be rewarded by Hashem for this. Those who work to become wealthy won't receive reward for their work. After this, in the *tefillah*, it states, *אני רץ לחיי עולם הבא*, I run to *Olam HaBa*. This phrase is also referring to *רץ*, running to work of this world. Even for this, I will receive *Olam HaBa*. This is because due to my work, I will be able to study Torah and receive *Olam HaBa*, so my work leads to *Olam HaBa*. But those who work for their

receive more honor. (Perhaps they have money or some other quality, and people honor them.) The people who receive honor think that in heaven, too, they will also be treated with honor. But when they go up there, they will stand in line before the *beis din*, with their baggage of good and bad deeds, like everyone else, and await their judgment. Their honor in this world won't grant them special status in the world of truth. When their time for judgment arrives, they will be asked the same questions as everyone else. First among them, "Did you set time to study Torah?" This question will be asked of everyone, regardless of how much honor he received in this world.

10. The following is the *tefillah* from Reb Nechunya ben Hakana in full, which one should say daily, upon leaving the *beis medresh* (see Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 110:8, Brachos 28b): *מוודה אני לפניך ה' אלקי ששמת חלקי מיושבי בית* *המדרש ולא שמת חלקי מיושבי קרנות שאני משכים והם משכימים לדברי תורה והם משכימים לדברים בטלים אני עמל והם עמלים אני עמל ומקבל שכר והם עמלים ואני מקבלים שכר אני רץ והם רצים אני רץ לחיי העולם הבא והם רצים לבאר שחת* "I praise before You Hashem, my G-d, that you set my portion among those who sit in the *beis medresh* and you didn't set my portion with those who sit at street corners. (Rashi writes that this refers to storeowners, or the ignorant, who engage in idle chatter, *שעוסקים בדבר שיחה*). I awaken early and they awaken early. I awaken early to study Torah and they awaken early for vain pursuits. I work and they work. I work and receive reward, and they work and don't receive reward. I run and they run. I run to life in *Olam HaBa* and they run to Gehinom."

pleasure don't receive reward, and it results in באר שחת, Gehinom.¹¹

11. In this week's *parashah* it states that if you will keep the Torah, והיית רק למעלה, "you will be only at the top" (*Devarim* 28:13). Klal Yisrael will be on top, but the Torah adds the word רק. *Chazal* teach us that the word רק, "only," is a limiter. Therefore, והיית רק למעלה means that if you keep the mitzvos, you will be on top, with success, and almost everything will be good – but not everything. Something will be lacking, and this is for our benefit. Because when one reaches perfection, the only way to go from there is down. So it is better when something is lacking.

In contrast, for not keeping the Torah, it states (28:43) הַגֵּר אֲשֶׁר בְּקִרְבְּךָ יַעֲלֶה עֲלֶיךָ מֵעֵלָה מְעֵלָה וְאַתָּה תֵּכַד מִטָּה מִטָּה "The stranger who is among you will arise above you, higher and higher, while you will descend lower and lower." For falling, the Torah doesn't write רק. To fall, there is a benefit to fall to the lowest level, because then he will climb higher. After reaching the bottom, the only way to go is up.

The Chasam Sofer zt'l writes that this explanation was said by Reb Eliezer Ashkenazi (author of *Maasei Hashem*), who experienced it firsthand. This is what happened to him:

Reb Eliezer Ashkenazi was a high-ranking officer in the Egyptian king's court. The king loved him very much, and he gave him his signet ring, which was a great honor. This aroused the jealousy of all the other advisors and ministers of the king, and they eagerly waited for an opportunity to harm Reb Eliezer Ashkenazi and have him stripped of his honors.

The Egyptians king's birthday was approaching, and the king invited all his advisors and ministers to celebrate with him. Reb Eliezer was crossing a bridge over the Nile to get to the celebration, when another minister asked him whether he remembered to bring the king's signet ring. Reb Eliezer took out the ring to show him that he had it with him. The jealous officer grabbed it and threw it into the Nile. Miraculously, Reb Eliezer caught the ring midair before it fell into the waters below.

At the party, the king accorded Reb Eliezer great honor, and at the end of the party, the king even accompanied him to the palace's doorway.

When Reb Eliezer Ashkenazi returned home, he remembered Shlomo HaMelech's (the wisest of all men) lesson: לפני שבר נאון, "Before destruction comes pride" (*Mishlei* 16:18). This means that before one falls, he attains greatness. Reb Eliezer was immensely respected, and he realized that he would soon fall. Therefore, he decided that it was time for him to leave the country. He quickly filled a box with his precious gems, and that very night, he boarded a ship for Turkey.

This escape saved his life. Because Reb Eliezer Ashkanazi eventually heard that on that night, the officers slandered against him before the king, and the king ordered his arrest. His escape saved his life.

But he wasn't out of danger yet. The boat hit a rock and sank, not far from the Turkish port. His precious box of gems was lost at sea, but Reb Eliezer survived. He hung onto a wooden plank until he reached Constantinople.

Reb Eliezer contemplated what had happened to him, and he determined that he was being punished for *bitul Torah*. His closeness to the Egyptian king had taken away a significant amount of his time from Torah study. He decided to rent a small room, eat dry bread, and spend his days and nights studying Torah. A widow had a small room near her house, and every day, she would bring him some food from her meager meals. Once, she brought him a bland soup. That was all he had to stave off his hunger. When he tried eating it, Reb Eliezer found a spider in the soup. At that moment, Reb Eliezer felt that he had reached rock bottom, and that things would begin to improve. Because just as when one reaches the highest level, it is a sign that he will go down, when one reaches the lowest level, it means he will now go up.

That same day, he heard an announcement: The Turkish Sultan's chess partner had died, and the Sultan was seeking a new chess champion to play with. Reb Eliezer applied, and when the Sultan saw his expertise, he immediately hired him for this position and also appointed him to be a minister.

Reb Eliezer remembered from earlier experiences how careful he had to be to avoid *bitul Torah*. He kept a

Battling with the Yetzer Hara

The Rosh (על התורה, Bereishis 6:2) tells a wondrous concept about the month Elul. It is based on the pasuk (Bereishis 6:2) וַיִּרְאוּ בְנֵי הָאֱלֹקִים אֶת בְּנוֹת הָאָדָם. Rashi explains (in one approach) that בְנֵי הָאֱלֹקִים means malachim. When they came down to the world, they too sinned with women.

The Rosh writes: "When the malachim came down, the *besulah* (an unmarried woman) said to [the malachim], 'I won't listen to you [to sin with you] until you do for me the following: I want you to give me two of your wings.' As it states (Yeshayah 6:2) שֵׁשׁ כְּנָפִים, שֵׁשׁ כְּנָפִים לְאַחַד, that the malachim have six wings [and she wanted two of their wings]. They gave her the wings, and she immediately flew up to heaven. Thereby, she was saved from the aveirah. She grabbed onto Hashem's throne. Hashem spread His cloud upon her and accepted her, and she became part of the *mazalos* (constellations). This is the mazal בתולה (called Virgin, which is the mazal of Elul). The malachim remained upon earth and weren't able to go up to heaven (because they lacked two wings) until they saw the ladder of Yaakov Avinu's dream. As it states (Bereishis 28:12) וַהֲגִידָהּ בּוֹ, מַלְאָכֵי אֱלֹקִים עֹלִים וְיֹרְדִים בּוֹ, 'Behold, angels of Hashem were ascending and descending upon it.'"

We understand from the above that the entire concept of the month Elul is to escape from aveiros. We must wage the battle against the yetzer hara every day of the year,

and especially in Elul, when Hashem gives us extra *siyata d'Shmaya* to win the battle.

It states (28:7) יִתֵּן ה' אֶת אֹיְבֶיךָ הַקָּמִים עֲלֶיךָ נִגְפִים לְפָנֶיךָ בְּדֶרֶךְ אֶחָד יֵצְאוּ אֵלֶיךָ וּבְשִׁבְעָה דְרָכִים יָנוּסוּ לְפָנֶיךָ, "Hashem will cause your enemies who rise up against you to be beaten before you. They will come out against you in one direction, but they will flee from you in seven directions." The pasuk is discussing the goodness that will befall the Jewish nation when they go in Hashem's ways. We wonder why a greater goodness isn't stated, that they won't have any enemies at all!

Reb Shimon Shwab zt'l (מעין בית השואבה) answers that the "enemies" can be expressed as a mashal for the yetzer hara. We can't avoid this battle. This is the purpose of creation. As Chazal (Brachos 5a) say, לעולם ירגיו, אדם יצר טוב על יצר הרע, "A person should always battle with the yetzer hara". It is a constant battle, which can't be avoided. Hashem's brachah is that He will give us success and we will win the battles.

As we wrote, when one stages this battle in Elul, it is mesugal to win the war. The Sfas Emes (Ki Seitzei 5642) teaches, "During Elul, days of teshuvah, the gates of compassion in heaven open, and Hashem's hand is outstretched to accept our teshuvah. Therefore, everyone must arouse himself to teshuvah. It can be compared to the Chazal (Brachos 6b) regarding tefillah, that Hashem says (Yeshayah 50:2) מַדּוּעַ בָּאתִי וְאֵין אִישׁ, 'Why have I come and there is no man?' [Hashem is

precise record of the hours he spent playing with the king, and he would match those hours by learning Torah late into the night. Sometimes he was very tired, but he was determined not to repeat his mistake and kept up his taxing schedule.

One night, while playing chess with the Sultan, Reb Eliezer fell asleep in the middle of the game. The Sultan didn't become angry with him. He got up and placed his own cushion under Reb Eliezer's head. When Reb Eliezer awoke, he realized that he had reached another peak, a peak of honor, and that his descent was around the corner. Therefore, he left for Posen, where he served as the rav. Later, he went to Krakow, where he became the rav, and that is where he is buried.

When the Torah tells us about the success of the gentiles, it states (28:43) הָגַר אֲשֶׁר בַּקֶּרֶב יַעֲלֶה עֲלֶיךָ מֵעַלָּה, "The non-Jew that lives among you will go up and up..." About the gentiles, the Torah doesn't write רק, only. The gentile will go up and up, without limit. Life will be perfect for them — and this will lead to their ultimate downfall.

upset when He comes to a minyan, and the *misparallelim* haven't arrived yet. Similarly, it can be said about Elul, a time for teshuvah. Hashem is upset when He doesn't see people repenting before Him in this month.] Therefore, on these days that Hakadosh Baruch Hu stretches out His hand to all those who knock to do teshuvah, everyone must knock on the doors of teshuvah".

The Sfas Emes writes that this is the meaning of the pasuk (Devarim 23:15) **כִּי ה' אֵלֶיךָ אֶלְקֶיךָ, מִתְּהַלֵּךְ בְּקֶרֶב מַחֲנֶיךָ לְהַצִּילְךָ וְלָתֵת אִיְיָיִךְ לְפָנֶיךָ**, "For Hashem, your G-d, goes along in the midst of your camp, to rescue you and to deliver your enemies before you." The pasuk means that Hashem helps those who desire to do teshuvah. **כִּי ה' אֵלֶיךָ אֶלְקֶיךָ** is *roshei teivos* because Hashem particularly helps them in Elul.

Similarly, on this week's parashah (year 5661) the Sfas Emes explains the pasuk (Mishlei 8:34) **אַשְׁרֵי אָדָם שֶׁמַּע לִי לְשָׁקֵד עַל דְּלֹתַי יוֹם יוֹם לְשֹׁמֵר מְזוּזוֹת פֶּתְחֵי**, "Fortunate is the man who listens to Me to watch by My doors day by day, to watch the doorposts of My entrances." The Sfas Emes writes, "Since it states **יוֹם יוֹם**, it seems that Hashem opens the gates of teshuvah every day of the year. (There are two doorways, one for tzaddikim and one for baalei teshuvah... Hashem digs extra deep to help the baalei teshuvah)... **לְשֹׁמֵר מְזוּזוֹת פֶּתְחֵי** seems to be referring to special times of the year when gates are opened extra wide. This is in the months of Elul and Tishrei."¹²

Many people ask, what will it help me to do teshuvah during the thirty days of Elul, if it anyway won't last for long, and soon I will return to my old ways? One must know

that even teshuvah for a short time is very precious to Hashem. Hakadosh Baruch Hu awaits our thoughts of teshuvah. They accomplish a lot, even if they won't last for long.

Magid Meisharim (lessons from a holy malach who taught mussar and Torah to the Beis Yosef) states a wondrous lesson. He explains that when one does teshuvah, even if it doesn't last, Hashem will make sure that in the end, the teshuvah will endure and the person will return entirely to Hashem. His own attempts for teshuvah didn't last long, but Hashem will make sure that in the end, his teshuvah will succeed. Magid Meisharim writes the following: "When someone does teshuvah before Hakadosh Baruch Hu, and then he returns to the pleasures and desires of his body, Hashem will draw him back again to fear Him. This is the meaning of the pasuk (Shir HaShirim 8:14) **בָּרַח דּוֹדִי**, Hakadosh Baruch Hu says to him, **דּוֹדִי**, My friend, even if you will **בָּרַח**, run away from Me to go after the drawing of your body, nevertheless, since you had turned to fear Me... I will not abandon you. I will cause you to come back to fear Me again."

We understand from this lesson that all thoughts of teshuvah are extremely helpful, even if they don't last long. Hakadosh Baruch Hu will say, "Since you tried to come close to Me, I will make certain that this will occur in the end." A lot of goodness comes from every thought of teshuvah, and especially in this month of Elul. So, let us take advantage of this precious time to return to Hashem.¹³

12. The greatness of shofar is beyond our comprehension, but what we do know about the shofar is that it is an extremely holy mitzvah. Tzaddikim perform it with awe and with many tears, after a lot of preparation and deep kavanos. But let us think about this: What is a shofar? Behold, it was part of an animal just a short time ago. How did it become a holy mitzvah? But there is one major difference in this shofar between now and how it was previously. Before, it was part of the animal, and now it has been detached. Let us learn from this that when we detach ourselves from our animalistic ways, we can also become extremely holy, in a very short time.

13. The Shevet Halevi zt'l would relate to his yeshiva students a story that occurred with the Divrei Chaim

of Tzanz zt'l. Once, the Divrei Chaim entered his beis medreseh and saw people learning with lots of *hasmadah*. He told them, "This is what you do in Elul? In Elul, you should be saying Tehillim." Immediately, everyone closed their gemaros and began saying Tehillim with *kavanah*. Soon afterward, the Divrei Chaim returned and saw everyone saying Tehillim. He said, "This is what you do in Elul? What will be with the Torah? If you study Torah, you will receive a good judgment!"

Perhaps he intended that we must do both. We should say Tehillim and learn Torah. Both are needed in Elul. We can also explain that he didn't want his chassidim to feel calm and confident with their preparation for the holy days. They should fear that perhaps they aren't doing enough. If they are studying Torah, they should feel that they need Tehillim. If they say Tehillim, they should think, "But what about Torah? I need Torah, too!" In this manner, people will always be busy preparing during the holy days of Elul.

To describe the essence of Elul, the Satmar Rebbe zt'l told a story that happened in the mansion of Baron Rotchild. People lined up to tell their problems to Baron Rotchild, and the Baron would give them generously. One person needed money for a chasunah, another for health issues, a third person didn't have a house for his family, and so on. Obviously, the line was long, and each person had a story to tell so that it would take a long time. So, one day, the Baron announced: "For now on, begin describing your problems while you are waiting in line, and then when you get to me, simply summarize what you need, and I will give you money."

The Satmar Rebbe said this as a mashal for Elul. Each person has a lot to request, and there isn't enough time to request everything on Rosh Hashanah. Therefore, we begin our requests now, in Elul, and when Rosh Hashanah comes, Hashem will grant us our wishes.

Remember that on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, the fate of the entire new year is sealed. How much money will be earned is determined on Rosh Hashanah. So, the wise conduct themselves during Elul the same as every day of the year. Perhaps the person will lose some time from his work – because he will be studying Torah, saying Tehillim, and doing teshuvah – but considering the greater picture, he is earning much more, even in gashmiyus, in this manner.

The Yeitav Lev zt'l told the following mashal:

A kind king would ride down the main streets of the capital on his birthday. Throngs of 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 he granted their requests.

However, there was one person who never had his requests fulfilled. Although he brought his letter to the king every year, 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 the letter, claiming that 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 would slander him, and he wouldn't receive anything. Instead, 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 requests.

The Yeitav Lev said this mashal during the days of *selichos*, and then 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 would be wise to beseech Hashem during the days of *selichos*. Our adversaries aren't present, and Hashem will surely grant our requests. 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."