

פרשת חזקיה

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A WELLSPRING OF CHIZUK

Shiurim of Rabbi Yissocher Yehuda Berko שליט"א
Rav of Pardes HaTorah



פרשת כי תבא - חדש אלול

WEEKLY PARSHA • TWO MINUTE TAKE-AWAY
WALKING IN THE WAYS OF OUR TZADIKIM

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The Power of Words

THE REQUIREMENT TO READ PARSHAS KI SAVO BEFORE ROSH HASHANAH

Parshas Ki Savo occupies a unique place in our calendar. The Gemara in *Maseches Megillah* notes a requirement to ensure that *Ki Savo* is read annually before *Rosh Hashanah*, a ruling codified in the *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chaim* 428).

Rebbi Shimon ben Elazar explains that when Ezra HaSofer established the Torah reading cycle, he specifically mandated that *Ki Savo* be read leading up to the New Year.

Historically, certain communities – such as the *Bnei Ma'arava* in *Eretz Yisrael* – followed a triennial cycle, finishing the Torah only once every three years. Their *Simchas Torah* celebrations were far less frequent than ours today.

However, the rule regarding *Ki Savo* was absolute. Even if these communities were in the middle of a different section of the Torah, they would break their local cycle to align with the rest of the world for this specific reading.

Reb Tzadok HaKohen notes that this requirement functions similarly to the four special *parshiyos* read before *Purim* and *Pesach* (*Shekalim*, *Zachor*, *Parah*, and *HaChodesh*). It was deemed essential to prioritize this reading during this exact week. But what is the underlying reason for this urgency?

ENDING THE YEAR AND ITS CURSES

Rebbe Shimon ben Elazar explains that *Parshas Ki Savo* contains many curses. By reading them before *Rosh Hashanah*, we symbolically petition the *Ribbono Shel Olam*: תכלה שנה

וקללותיה - Let the old year and its curses come to an end.

One might wonder how the mere recitation of these warnings can nullify actual suffering or anxiety. Furthermore, *Tosafos* and the *Rambam* point out that we don't read *Ki Savo* on the Sabbath immediately preceding the holiday. Instead, we read it two weeks prior.

Furthermore, *Tosafos* and the *Rambam* offer another perspective. They point out that we don't read *Ki Savo* the week immediately preceding *Rosh Hashanah*. Instead, we move it up one week earlier. It's read two weeks before the *yom tov*.

We leave a "buffer" week with *Parshas Nitzavim-Vayeilech*. We do not want to associate the harsh curses too closely with the New Year. By reading the curses two weeks early, we effectively banish them. Then, we read *Nitzavim* – full of blessings and solidarity – so that we enter *Rosh Hashanah* surrounded by positive energy.

ATONEMENT THROUGH SPEECH

The *Tiferes Shlomo* provides an incredible insight. He explains that when the *Beis Hamikdash* stood, a person who sinned would bring a *karbon* to achieve atonement. What does atonement mean? It meant that all the *brachos* in his life - his livelihood and health - were restored.

For us, though, how do we find atonement without the *Beis HaMikdash*? *Chazal* tell us ונשלמה *our lips shall replace the bulls – the karbanos*. "If we speak, study, and daven about the *karbanos*, it's considered as if we actually offered them in the *Beis Hamikdash*. Such is the power of our speech.

The *Tiferes Shlomo* says that before *Rosh Hashanah* אם ח"ו נגזר אשר לא טוב הנה יצאנו חובותינו *"if, Heaven forbid, a negative decree was issued,"* בקריאת הדברים האלה *"we fulfill our obligation through reading these posukim."* By reading the *parshah* of curses, it's as if the person has already endured them. He continues, וממילא *"consequently, they will all be transformed into blessings for us."*

The *Tiferes Shlomo* applies this principle to the curses of *Ki Savo*. If a negative decree has been issued, reading these verses allows us to fulfill our "obligation" to suffer through the speech itself. By reading the curses, it is as if we have already endured them, allowing them to be transformed into blessings for the coming year.

The *Tiferes Shlomo* is teaching us a fundamental principle: when you read the words of the Torah, it's not merely performing a ritual, there's a practical spiritual effect.

He says, "Do you realize what you're accomplishing? You are nullifying curses. You are tearing up harsh

decrees." How? Simply by reading them from the Torah. That's the immense power we possess in our speech. Those are the powerful effects of the words uttered from our mouths. This is not merely a ritual; it is a spiritual mechanism. When we read from the Torah, we possess the power to nullify harsh decrees and tear up negative judgments. Our words have immense, tangible effects in the spiritual realms.

HARNESSING THE POWER OF PRAYER FOR THE NEW YEAR

This provides the necessary preparation for the High Holidays. Ezra Hasofer wanted us to recognize our agency as we enter the days of *Selichos*, *Rosh Hashanah*, and *Yom Kippur*. We are not "just uttering words" during hours of prayer; we are actively shaping our reality.

By reading *Ki Savo*, we clear the slate by nullifying the curses. Then, through *Nitzavim*, we draw down the blessings we desire. This is the great encouragement of this season: the ability to cancel decrees and revoke curses through our connection to the *Ribbono shel Olam*.

This is the tremendous encouragement we need: to recognize the power of our speech. We have the ability to speak to the *Ribbono Shel Olam*, cancel curses, and revoke decrees.

As the *Chafetz Chaim* teaches, however, the strength of this power depends on how we use our mouths throughout the year. The more we guard our tongues from *lashon hara* and avoid inappropriate language, the more potent our prayers become. By protecting the sanctity of our speech, we gain the ability to overturn any decree.





DEEP INSIGHTS

The Power of One Kapitel Tehillim

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF L'DOVID HASHEM ORI

Throughout the extraordinary days of Elul, it is customary to recite *kapitel "L'Dovid Hashem Ori"* following davening of *shachris* and *maariv*. As noted in the *siddurim* of the Arizal and Reb Shabsi, this practice begins on *Rosh Chodesh Elul* and continues through *Shemini Atzeres* or *Simchas Torah*.

Siddur Reb Shabsi emphasizes that reciting this *kapitel* carries immense spiritual weight, possessing the power to nullify harsh decrees and draw down the thirteen *middos* of *rachamim* (mercy).

Despite its potency, many people fall into a mechanical routine after a few days, failing to grasp the profound depth of the prayer. To truly appreciate its significance, let us explore a remarkable story that reveals why its value is often hidden from us.

THE DIMINISHED APPRECIATION FOR "L'DOVID HASHEM ORI"

Recorded in the *sefer Nezer Hakodesh*, this account was related by Reb Shimon Zhelechover, the *mashgiach* of *Chachmei Lublin*. His *talmid*, the renowned *posek hador* Rav Wosner, famously described him in the introduction to *Shevet Halevi* as a ספר תורה שלם בנגלה ובנסתר - perfect *Sefer Torah* in both revealed and hidden wisdom.

Reb Shimon recounted a visit to the city of Sanz, where Rav Aryeh Leibush served as the Rav. He noticed that the local *minhag* did not include reciting "*L'Dovid Hashem Ori*."

Curious, he asked the residents, "Why do you omit this *kapitel Tehillim*? Even the *Shinover Rav*, the son of the *Sanzer Rav*, makes sure to say it."

Before they could respond, Reb Shimon provided the explanation

himself through a powerful story originally shared by the *Baal Shem Tov*.

The *Baal Shem Tov's rebbe*, Reb Eliyahu Baal Shem, was once summoned by a childless nobleman. The nobleman demanded a blessing for children, threatening to initiate an expulsion of the local Jewish communities – akin to the Spanish Inquisition – if his request was not fulfilled. Thousands of families were at risk.

Intervening to save his people, Reb Eliyahu promised the nobleman a child within the year. The *Baal Shem Tov* noted that this was an immense spiritual commitment for his *rebbe*, requiring intense effort, but eventually, the promise was fulfilled.

However, the story did not end there. In the *Beis Din shel Ma'aleh* (Heavenly Court), they initially sought to penalize Reb Eliyahu with sixty lashes of fire for his actions, a severe punishment mentioned in the *Gemara*.

Recognizing that his actions were performed solely for the benefit of the *Yidden*, the punishment was mitigated. Instead of physical retribution, a decree was made to diminish the public appreciation for two exceptionally powerful *tefillos*.

The first was "*Kegavna*," the passage from the *Zohar* recited on Friday nights. The second was to obscure the true significance of "*L'Dovid Hashem*

Ori" during *Elul*. A decree was issued so that people would no longer recognize their transformative value.

Rabbi Shimon Zhelechover concluded with a fascinating detail: *Rebbe Elimelech* of Lizhensk, a master to great *tzaddikim*, did not recite "*Kegavna*" but made sure to recite "*L'Dovid Hashem Ori*." In effect, he accepted only half of the heavenly decree.

Conversely, the *Apter Rav* (the *Ohev Yisrael*), a student of Rebbe Elimelech, chose to recite "*Kegavna*" but did not say "*L'Dovid Hashem Ori*" during *Elul*.

APPRECIATING THE POTENCY OF THE CUSTOM

Rabbi Shimon Zhelechover's point was clear: "*L'Dovid Hashem Ori*" is so potent that when the Heavenly Court sought to penalize Reb Eliyahu, they chose to weaken our commitment to it as a way to hide its awesome power.

In these sacred days, we must wake up to the immense value of this custom. We should recognize that its impact is only diminished when we lose our enthusiasm and understanding of its true weight.

Since we are already reciting it, let us do so with renewed and deep intention. With Hashem's help, we can break through the routine, nullify harsh decrees, and draw down abundant blessings for the year ahead.



TWO MINUTE TAKE-AWAYS: CHIZUK FOR YOUR TABLE

Conquering the Yetzer Hara – Battle and Daven

THE NECESSITY OF PERSONAL EFFORT

Overcoming the *yetzer hara* requires a combination of personal effort and heartfelt prayer. The *Gemara* famously states, יָגַעַת וּמָצָאֵת תְּאֵמִין - If one toils and finds, believe him. To defeat the *yetzer hara* and prosper in Torah, davening, and *middos*, diligent work is essential. "Yagata" refers to the exertion and struggle, while "u'matzasa" represents the eventual success; "Ta'amin" confirms the credibility of one who has truly earned it. *Chazal* warn us not to trust anyone claiming success without having put in the work. Effort is an absolute necessity.

THE OBLIGATION OF DAVENING FOR SPIRITUAL SUCCESS

There is a remarkable insight in the *Sefer Chareidim*, written in the time of the *Arizal*. It explains that everyone is obligated to daven for spiritual success. Just as we are obligated to recite *Shema* and daven *Shacharis*, *Mincha*, and *Ma'ariv*, we must also plead with the *Ribbono shel Olam* to protect us from the *yetzer hara* and help us succeed in our spiritual battles.

The *Gemara* in *Berachos* records how the greatest *tanaim*, such as *Rebbi Akiva* and *Rebbi Meir Baal HaNeis*, davened daily for protection against the *yetzer hara* – even for things one might assume were beneath their level. For instance, *Rebbi Akiva* davened daily that he shouldn't fall to anger. It is astounding that the great *Rebbi Akiva*, of whom *Moshe* said the Torah should have been given through him, recognized the need to pray daily for the strength to remain calm.

Why is *davening* necessary if we are already putting in the work? Because regardless of our efforts, we always require *siyata dishmaya*. We must daven because Hashem wants to prevent us from falling into traps after we have achieved success, reminding us that our accomplishments are not solely our own.

When a person davens, they acknowledge that nothing is possible without Hashem's help. Rebbe Akiva was teaching us that regardless of one's greatness, success is impossible without constant prayer. Ultimately, after investing maximum effort, prayer is the vital second step. Through this combination, we will surely succeed.

The Secret to a Successful Day

INITIATING BLESSINGS THROUGH OUR ACTIONS

Klal Yisroel has upheld the tradition of beginning the morning by reciting *Modeh Ani*. We say these words immediately upon awakening, even before the ritual washing of our hands. The purpose of this practice is to express our profound gratitude to Hashem for the gift of life and the daily restoration of our *neshamos*.

Rebbe Elimelech, in his commentary on *Parshas Beha'aloscha*, cites the *Zohar* to explain that meriting *brachos* from *Shamayim* requires an initial action here on Earth. Whether we perform a *mitzvah*, daven sincerely, or earn merit in other ways, our efforts unlock the gates of heaven, allowing *brachos* to flow down to every *Yiddishe* child.

He outlines a spiritual progression: when we fulfill a *mitzvah* or express joyful gratitude to Hashem, our

earthly happiness sparks joy above. In response to this joy, Hashem showers us with an abundance of *brachos*.

JOY ON YOM TOV IS THE KEY TO SALVATIONS

Furthermore, he explains that Hashem asks us to visit the *Beis Hamikdash* three times a year. Regarding the *Shalosh Regalim*, the Torah states, "*tachog li bashana*" – you shall celebrate to Me in the year. The root of the word "*tachog*" is "*chag*," which signifies both a holiday and the essence of joy.

Visiting the *Beis Hamikdash* naturally prompts us to seek blessings and *yeshuos*. Hashem invites us to come during the *yomim tovim* because by celebrating miracles like *Yetzias Mitzrayim*, we are inspired with gratitude. This joy awakens joy in Heaven, and once stirred, *brachos* flow automatically upon us.

Rebbe Elimelech emphasizes that this

principle applies year-round, not just during the holidays. Whenever we need *Siyata Dishmaya*, we should approach Hashem with joy and gratitude for what He has already provided; this mindset opens the gates above and draws down new blessings.

This is the reason we begin our morning with *Modeh Ani*. By starting the day with thanks and appreciation for being alive, we immediately open the heavenly channels, causing goodness to rain down upon us.

One Small Jump, and Your Life is Saved

THE VALUE OF SMALL ACTIONS

When it comes to *teshuva* and repentance, every small action and minor effort we make to improve has immense value.

Often, the reason people fail to make lasting changes is that they overlook the power of minor improvements. They don't realize that even a slight shift – whether a single *tefillah* said with more *kavanah*, one extra act of *chesed*, or avoiding *lashon hara* just once – transforms them into a different person.

Consider this illustration: Imagine someone in a war-torn country holding a ticket for the very last flight departing in five seconds. One single action determines their fate – jumping onto that aircraft before the doors close. It is a minor movement, a quick leap, taking mere seconds. Yet, once

that plane takes off, they have left the battleground behind and escaped the terrible circumstances that once surrounded them.

The same principle applies when we depart from the battlefield of the *yetzer hara*. The moment you perform a small positive act, it is equivalent to leaping onto that last plane. Avoiding *lashon hara* once or finding a brief moment of *kavanah* during *davening* means you have caught the flight out of the war zone. While it seems like a small gesture, it has already transported you to a new realm – where you are rescued, safe, and soaring above the clouds.



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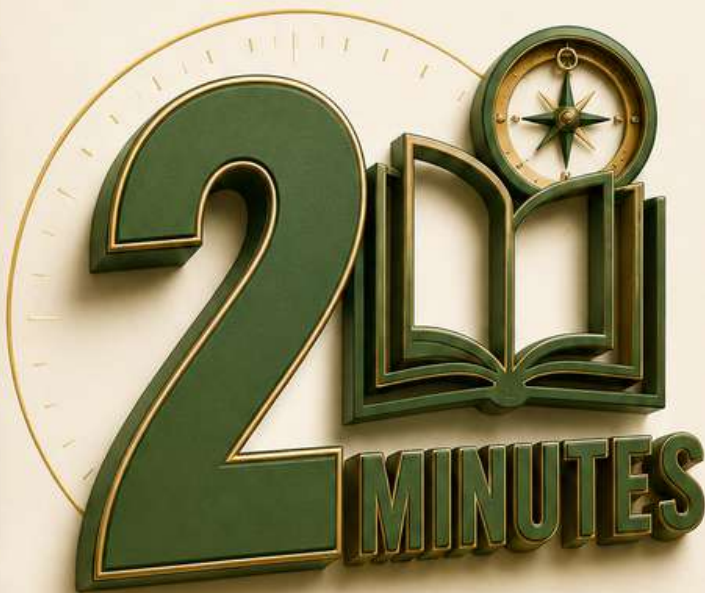
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