

Torah Wellsprings

*Collected thoughts
from
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Ki Savo



Parshas Ki Savo

Bikurim

The Midrash states Hashem created the world for *bikurim*.

We will state four points that make this mitzvah so unique:

- 1] Bikurim teaches us that everything comes from Hashem.
- 2] Bikurim teaches us to praise Hashem.
- 3] Bikurim trains us to be happy.
- 4] Bikurim brings much more goodness from Heaven.

We will study these benefits, one by one:

- 1] Bikurim helps us recognize that all good comes from Hashem.

It states (26:3), ובאת אל הכהן אשר יהיה בימים ההם ואמרת אליו באתי אל הארץ אשר נשבע ה' לנו, לאבותינו לתת לנו לננו, "Go to the *cohen*...and say to him, 'I came to the land....'"

Rashi writes, ואמרת אליו: שאינך כפוי טובה, "Tell the *cohen* you aren't a *kafuy tovah*." A *kafuy tovah* is someone who claims he didn't receive anything at all. He thinks everything he owns is by chance, or by "the strength of his hand." By bringing *bikurim* one acknowledges that Hashem gave him the land and its

produce. And this awareness extends to all the good he enjoys in life. He recognizes they are all from Hashem.

Chazal tell us about the very joyous manner *bikurim* were brought to the Beis HaMikdash. The Mishnah (*ch.2*) states, "An ox walked in front of them. Its horns were covered with gold, and it wore an olive-leaf wreath. A flute played before them... Officers came from Yerushalayim to greet them... The craftsmen of Yerushalayim would stand up for them..."

The Alshich asks, "Why all this joy and excitement over a few fruit which costs less than a half-dinar? An even greater wonder is the Midrash that states, 'Hashem created the world for *bikurim*.'" What is unique about *bikurim* that makes it so special?

The Alshich answers, "When a person is in the land that is flowing with milk and honey, living comfortably and fearlessly under his fig tree and vine, his home filled with goodness... he may think, 'I earned this on my own.' Hashem gave us the mitzvah of *bikurim*..." to remember that everything we have is from Hashem.¹

1. (I heard the following story from the *baal maaseh*, the father in this story):

A couple was very excited. Their son was about to get engaged to a girl who seemed to be the perfect *shidduch* for their son. They planned to finalize the engagement that very night. But then the father remembered that no one told his mother-in-law, an *almanah*, that a *shidduch* was brewing. "She will feel slighted and left out if we make the *shidduch* without consulting with her" he told his wife. So, he and his wife paid a visit to the mother-in-law, and during the conversation they told her about the *shidduch* in the offing.

The Kav HaYashar (18) writes, “Everyone experiences miracles. Especially in recent times, when there is so much strife and hardships in the world, and it is perpetually getting worse. There are evil decrees, war, hunger, people caught in captivity, distress, various diseases. When Hashem...saves a person from all of the above, he should continuously be thinking about Hashem’s kindness. Whoever is able to live with peace and security and with *parnassah*, he must praise Hashem.”

Reb Yitzchak Mordechai Silberstein *shlita* (may he have a *refuah sheleimah*) writes in the introduction to his *sefer*

Rimzei Machshavah: “My brothers and dear friends, I’m speaking to you from my life experiences: I’m paralyzed for five years now. I can’t move a limb. No one can say, ‘It will never happen to me’ because...one’s ability to move his hands and feet is a gift from Hakadosh Baruch Hu. If he can breathe on his own, that’s a gift from Hakadosh Baruch Hu. Hakaodsh Baruch Hu doesn’t owe anyone anything, and in a moment, everything can stop, *rachmana litzlan*.”

Indeed, we certainly have a lot to praise Hashem for, but people tend to forget. The mitzvah bikurim is our reminder that the good we have is Hashem’s kindness to us.

The mother-in-law immediately made some inquiries, and then said, “In my opinion, it’s such a good *shidduch*. You should finish it today.”

The parents smiled, because that was exactly what they were planning to do.

The mother-in-law added, “But I suggest you tell my elderly mother about it. Visit her, and nonchalantly mention the *shidduch*. It will be a mitzvah. She will feel honored.”

When they told the grandmother about the *shidduch* she said she remembers that she used to play with this girl’s grandmother when she was a little girl. She also made some inquiries and they were all very positive. She said, “Grab this *shidduch* with two hands. In my opinion, finish it tonight.”

And that is what they did.

That night at the *vort*, the mother-in-law thought her encouragement made the *shidduch*, and her elderly mother was convinced that the *shidduch* was made because of her involvement. They didn’t know the *shidduch* would have happened that night without them.

Later that night, after all the guests left, the father thought about how his mother-in-law, and her mother, thought their input finalized the *shidduch*, and he found it amusing. They were so proud... they didn’t know that the *shidduch* would have been finalized that night regardless.

Then the father thought some more and he realized that *he* didn’t make the *shidduch* either. This *shidduch* was determined forty days before his son was formed. The *shidduch* would have happened even without his input. Because Hashem does everything, and it only seems that people do things.

Chazal say a *bas kol* announces, בית פלוני לפלוני שדה פלוני לפלוני. Where one lives, the *parnassah* one chooses, and all aspects of one’s life are directed and determined by Hashem. It seems as though we make decisions, but everything is from Hashem.

There was a wealthy man who felt very lonely, and he sought attention. So he went to a high roof and threw down coins to the people below. He thought people would honor him for his generosity, and that everyone would be talking about him. He hoped that would quench his thirst for attention and a connection with people. But when he looked down he saw the people scrambling to gather the money and no one looked up to see who was throwing the money.

So the wealthy man, desperate for some connection with people, began throwing stones. Now everyone looked up to see who was throwing stones at them.

The *nimshal* is: People don't recognize Hashem when Hashem bestows His kindness on them. People recognize Hashem when hardships come. Bikurim is designed to teach us to recognize Hashem in the good times, as well.

2] Bikurim teaches us to praise Hashem.

The next step after being aware of Hashem's kindness is to thank Him. Therefore, the Torah states (26:5), ועניית ואמרתי לפני ה' אלקיך ארמי אבד אני and Rashi writes:

ועניית: "This means one should raise his voice. ארמי אבד אני: and tell Hashem's kindness..."

As the Sefer Chareidim writes, "Bikurim is to remind people to praise Hashem..."

3] Bikurim trains us to be happy.

The result of recognizing Hashem's

kindness and praising Hashem is happiness. He focuses on all the good he receives from Hashem, and his heart is filled with joy. As the Sefer Chareidim writes, "They shouldn't complain like the unsatisfied people who cry and complain their entire lives, as though they don't have anything... Actually, everything in their life is good..."

Therefore, about bikurim it states (26:11), ושמחת בכל הטוב אשר נתן לך ה' אלקיך, ולביתך, "Be happy with all the good that Hashem gave you..."

4] Bikurim (and its lesson of recognizing Hashem and praising Hashem) brings down much goodness from Heaven.

Tzaddikim taught that when one praises Hashem for the good he enjoys in life, Hashem says, "Do you think this is good? I'll show you what good is!" and Hashem bestows greater kindness on him.

The Rebbe of Ruzhin *zt'l* once heard his daughter upset about something and she moaned. The Rebbe told her that it isn't good to complain, "Because a sigh brings on more *tzaros*, and praise brings more goodness."

The Rebbe of Ruzhin told his daughter the following story: There was once a wealthy man who always focused on what he didn't have. Heaven said, "You think your situation is bad, you'll be shown what's really bad," and he lost all his money.

Now he complained even more. Heaven said, "You think that this situation is bad,

we will show you what's bad," and he became a leper. Now he wasn't even able to go to people's homes to ask for handouts, because no one let him near. They were afraid of catching his contagious disease. He complained some more, and once again, Heaven showed him that matters could become worse. He became hunchbacked, and it was hard for him to eat. When he hit this very low level, he said, "At least I'm alive."

Heaven said, "You think this is good, you'll be shown what's really good," and his hunched back straightened out. He praised Hashem for this, and therefore he was granted another gift. He was healed from his leprosy. Now he could speak with people, and ask them for help. He praised Hashem for Hashem's kindness.

Heaven said, "You think this is good, you will be shown what's really good." Someone gave him a big loan. He reopened his business, and his financial success returned to its original status. So we see that praising Hashem brings goodness, and complaints bring on hardships.

When Dovid HaMelech was king there was a *mageifah* in which one hundred people died each day. The Levush writes, "Dovid investigated the cause of the plague, and understood with his *ruach hakadosh* that it was because people weren't praising and blessing Hashem properly for all the goodness Hashem bestows on them... Therefore, Dovid established for Bnei Yisrael that they should say one hundred *brachos* each day. Since then, the plague ceased."

Because when we praise Hashem, Hashem bestows even more kindness. Thus, bikurim, which teaches us to praise Hashem, will earn for us even greater dividends from heaven.

Also, even before one praises Hashem, just his acknowledgement that everything comes from Hashem is conducive to receiving Hashem's blessing.

The Alshich writes, "When one thinks his wealth is the product of his own might and wisdom, Hashem will take it away from him. But when one knows everything he has was given to him by Hashem, Hashem will allow him to keep it. This can be compared to a wealthy person who hired a gardener to tend to his orchard. When the figs and grapes of the orchard ripened, the gardener placed them in a beautiful dish and brought them to the landowner. He said, 'Look at the sweet fruit your field is producing. It's yours because it grew in your orchard...' When the [landowner] saw the *derech erez* of his gardener, he replied, 'You can keep all the rest of the crop.' This is the explanation of the mitzvah bikurim. We bring the first crops of wheat, barley, olives, and grapes to the Beis Hamikdosh, and we acknowledge that it isn't our own. Everything we have belongs to Hashem... And then, Hashem will allow us to keep the rest of the crops."

Bikurim in our Generation

We learned wonderful benefits of bikurim, but what should a person do today, when we don't have 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. Therefore, he instituted davening three times a day." All the lessons of bikurim are taught to us now through the daily *tefillos*. The praises and the requests of *tefillah* remind us that all the good we have, and all the good we need, comes from Hashem.

Shabbos Selichos

It states (*Yeshayah* 42:18), החרשים שמעו והעורים הביטו לראות, "Deaf ones, listen! The blind, see!" The Chidushei HaRim *zt'l* asks, how can the deaf hear? How can the blind see? He answers, "There are moments that are so lofty that even the deaf hear and the blind see." He was referring to those who are deaf and blind to spirituality. At special occasions, even they can begin to become attached to spirituality.

This is applicable for Shabbos Selichos. Even if someone pushed off doing *teshuvah* until now, now everyone is aroused and they want to improve their ways.²

This year, we have two Shabbosim during the days of *selichos* before Rosh Hashanah. Chazal say, "If Klal Yisrael keep two Shabbosim they will immediately be redeemed." Reb Yechezkel Levinstein *zt'l* (and also the Chidushei HaRim *zt'l*) teach that this also applies to an individual. When klal Yisrael keep two Shabbosim they will be redeemed from *galus*, and when an individual keeps two Shabbosim, he will be redeemed from his personal struggles and problems. Therefore, as there are two Shabbosim before Rosh Hashanah, Reb Yechezkel would urge his students to take advantage of them, to be redeemed and to merit a good year on Rosh Hashanah.³

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2. It isn't too late to do *teshuvah*. Although most of Elul passed, we can begin now. Our custom is to blow shofar every day in Elul. The shofar rouses us to do *teshuvah*. If one didn't wake up to *teshuvah* on the first day of Elul, we blow shofar the second day. Perhaps he will do *teshuvah* then. And if he wasn't roused, we blow shofar the next day, too, because we always give another chance to do *teshuvah*.
 3. A *mashal* is told about a supervisor whose job was to check the hostels for the mentally ill. He came to one hostel and asked the person in charge how he determines who is mentally ill and needs to be hospitalized? The home manager replied, "We put him near a bathtub, and we give him a spoon, a pot, and a bucket and we tell him to empty out the water from the bathtub. We watch what he does, and then we can determine what treatment he needs, and whether he is insane or not." The supervisor found this technique intriguing. "I understand" he said, smiling broadly. "If he takes the water out with the bucket, that means he is wise and well. But if he uses a spoon or a pot, he is a fool."

The First Day of Selichos

The *sefarim* write that the *yamim noraim* begins on the first night of *selichos*. Rebbe Uri of Strelisk *zt'l* said, “The *בתיבה טובה* of Rosh Hashanah begins on the first night of *selichos*.”

Motzei Shabbos, the first night of *selichos*, we say the *piyut* “*במוצאי מנוחה*.” This prayer is written according to the order of the alef beis. As it states: *את ימין* the first word of this phrase is an *א*, and then it states *בצדק נעקד* beginning with a *ב*. Similarly, each phrase begins with the next letter of the alef beis. The exception of this rule are the letters *ג* and *ס*, as

they are written in two words, as *גא סגבם*, instead of two phrases.

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

The letter *ת* of this *selichos* is *תראם ניסך*, *עושה גדולות*, "show them Your miracles..." Because during these days of *selichos*, we want Hashem should show us miracles, and grant us our heart's desires.

Some people fast on the first day of *selichos*; some say the entire *Tehillim*. Rebbe Yissacher Dov of Belz *zy'a* said that his *avodas Hashem* on the first

“By the way” the hostel manager said to the supervisor, “we have a very modern facilities, and you may want to spend some time living here...”

“What are you talking about!” the supervisor said. “I am well, *baruch Hashem*.”

“But you failed the test” the manager said. “If you want to take the water out of the bathtub, all you have to do is take away the plug.”

The *nimshal* is, the Torah says *את ערלת לבבכם*, “Circumcise your heart.” If a person wants to improve his ways, have good *middos*, love Torah, etc., the counsel is simply to “circumcise the heart.” Take away the plug that is preventing your heart from opening up, and then everything will naturally fall into place.

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

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

But when the *shamesh* came to a house where everyone was sleeping, he would bang on their window.

The *nimshal* is:

Sometimes afflictions come to awaken people to do *teshuvah*. The fortunate people wake up and do *teshuvah*; they don't need punishments to rouse them. There are people who are aroused to *teshuvah* when they see their neighbor's suffering, *chalilah*. However, those who aren't aroused, they may need knock on their window, afflictions may *chalilah* come, to rouse them to *teshuvah*. It's best when one awakens himself, without *yesurim*, *chalilah*.

day of *selichos* is more intense than his service on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

For generations, Belzer chassidim have the custom to say the entire *Tehillim* on this day, in beis medresh, ברוב עם.

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

Rebbe Dovid of Lelov went to his Rebbe, the Chozeh of Lublin *zt'l*, and since he was poor, he had to travel back home to Lelov by foot. Someone stopped his horse and buggy next to Rebbe Dovid, and asked him where he was heading.

"To Lelov."

"Come aboard. I live in a village nearby."

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

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

a ride wasn't there yet, so he went back to his room.

A few times he entered the beis medresh, looked around, and returned to his study.

At this time, the one who gave him a ride was in his village. 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 saying *selichos*.

Afterwards, 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, and the *brachos* take effect. I bless you that you and your descendants should have immense wealth and long lives."

This story was told by this man's descendant to my grandfather Reb Moishe Mordechai of Lelov. He said, "I'm his great-grandson, and I can testify that the *brachah* was fully materialized. All subsequent generations had wealth and everyone lived long."

The Tur (581) writes, "Most people fast on the first day of *selichos*. " The Imrei Pinchas (445) writes that Rebbe Pinchas of Koritz *zt'l* " was very *machmir* to *tovel* on the first day of *selichos*, early in the morning, and also on *erev* Rosh Hashanah, early in the morning and on the two days of Rosh Hashanah... Although he was lenient [with *mikvah*]...

nevertheless, he was more stringent with these *tevilos*.”

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*. He began *Ashrei* as usual; his voice didn't show his emotions. But when he came to תהילת ה' until the end of *selichos*, he cried copiously. It was almost impossible to hear his voice, because he was crying so much.

Selichos

Someone asked Reb Yosef Chaim Zonenfeld *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 mean that I must awaken early, and I won't have enough sleep.”

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

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

We don't fast in our generation; however we should remember that these aren't regular days. These are special days for repentance, for rousing Hashem's compassion, for introspection and seeking ways to improve.

A kind king used to ride down the main streets of his capital city on his birthday. Multitudes of citizens would stand on the road side, 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 their letters. Their letters would praise the kind king and state their requests. The king read all their letters and granted them their requests.

There was one person who would give his letter directly to the king's hand, every year, but his requests were never fulfilled. He investigated the matter and discovered that the king traveled with an advisor. That advisor hated this citizen. When he brought the letter to the king, the advisor would tell the king to ignore the letter, claiming he wasn't an honest and deserving citizen.

The man realized that he shouldn't wait for the king's birthday to ask his requests, because the king's advisor will speak slander him. The only solution was to come earlier.

The following year, this man went to the king's palace *before* the king's birthday, and spoke directly with the king. The king's advisor wasn't around, and the kind king filled his request.

The Yeitav Lev told this story during the days of *selichos*, and then the Yeitav Lev cried out, “Beloved Yidden! On Rosh Hashanah Hashem is surrounded by prosecuting angels who speak out against us. They claim we don’t deserve a good year. Therefore, every year on Rosh Hashanah, we have the mitzvah of shofar, which protects us from their protests. We will be wiser if we speak with Hashem face to face now, during the days of *selichos*. Our adversaries aren’t around, and Hashem will answer our prayers. Now is the time to beg Hashem for health, *parnassah*, *nachas*, and all your heart’s desires. If we will do so, Hashem will have mercy on us and grant us a sweet and successful new year.”

There are always at least four days of *selichos* before Rosh Hashanah. The *Mishnah Berurah* (581:6) writes, “One of the reasons is because *korbanos* are checked [for blemishes] for four days before they are sacrificed⁴... On Rosh Hashanah, one should consider himself as though he is sacrificing himself. So he needs four days to check himself from all blemishes and sins, and to do *teshvuah* on them” so he will be a fitting *korban* on Rosh Hashanah.

Remorse

Before *selichos* of י"ג מדרות (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, it isn’t just words that we have a tradition to say.

Once, before *selichos*, Rebbe Aharon of Belz ז"ל told the *chazan*, “הוייער, הוייער, הוייער, daven loudly! This will rouse the *tzibur* to say *selichos* with *kavanah* and with *hislahavus*. Don’t be afraid that you might become hoarse, because there are other people who can take your place.”

Selichos is to sincerely regret our sins and to make a commitment to work towards improving our ways. Without regret, and without inspiration, a major component in the *selichos* is lacking.

There was a *misnaged* (someone who opposed the ways of chassidim) who caused a lot of trouble for Rebbe Boruch of Mezhibuzh ז"א. Before Yom Kippur, he came to Rebbe Boruch’l and said, “I really don’t have to ask you for *mechilah*, because everything I did was a mitzvah. [He thought it’s a mitzvah to oppose chassidim and their tzaddikim.] Nevertheless, I thought that since it’s *erev* Yom Kippur, I should ask for your forgiveness.”

Rebbe Boruch’l replied, “סלחתו בדבריך.” The implication of his response was, “I forgive you in the same spirit you are asking for forgiveness. You don’t really mean it when you say you’re sorry, and

4. *Parashas Pinchas* lists the *korban mussaf* of the *yomim tovim*. By almost every *korban mussaf* it states, והקרבתם עולה, “You shall sacrifice a *korban olah*...” The exception is the *korban mussaf* for Rosh Hashanah. There it states, ועשיתם עולה, “You shall make an *olah*.” This means, one should *make* himself a *korban* to Hashem.

I also don't really mean it when I say I forgive you."

"I'm sorry" has many meanings, depending on the circumstances. Sometimes it connotes very sincere regret, at other times it could mean almost nothing at all. When you want to pass, you might say, "Sorry, can I pass, please." And if you want to know the time, you might approach someone and say, "I'm sorry, do you have the time?" They say I'm sorry, but there is no regret at all. We seek to say *selichos* with sincere regret. When we say "I'm sorry, מלחתי בדבריך, Hashem will reply, מלח לנו, I forgive you, for I see you are sincerely seeking My forgiveness."

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

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

We also say, on the first day of *selichos*,

רצה עתירתם בעמדם בלילות, "Accept their pleas, as they awaken to pray before You at night..." עתירה means many prayers (see *Rashi, Toldos*, ויעתר לו ה'). This is because we don't ask Hashem only once or twice for life and for a good year and for atonement. We ask again and again, because we recognize our utter desperation, and the dire need we have to receive Hashem's compassion.

When a poor person asks a wealthy person in *beis medresh* for a donation, he will sometimes respond that he doesn't have money on him. However, when the pauper comes to his door, the wealthy person can't excuse himself that he doesn't have money.

This is hinted at in the words, דלתיך דפקנו, נא אל תשיבנו ריקם מלפניך, please don't let 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*.

Thirteen Middos of *Rachamim*

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

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

The Rabbeinu B'Chaya (*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 *cohen gadol* to atone for our sins. We don't have a *mizbeiach* to bring the *karbanos*. All we have are our *tefillos* and the thirteen attributes of mercy..."

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

The Rebbe of Gustanin *zt'l* said that 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, "הגון means Hashem has mercy on those who are going through hard times... [because Hashem says], 'I am compassionate, and I can't see them suffer... הגון also means מתנת חנם, an undeserved gift...' These are very encouraging words. Hashem has compassion on everyone, even on those who don't deserve it, "because I can't bear to see their pain."

Before we say the י"ג מדות we say א-ל מלך. However, each night, the first time we say the י"ג מדות, we say a different prayer, called מי א"ל כמוך.

On Yom Kippur, we only say א-ל מלך יושב על כסא רחמים... "The King who sits on the throne of compassion..." We don't say מי

א"ל כמוך. What is the explanation for these customs?

The *meforshim* explain that each night of *selichos* we must first say the י"ג מדות at least once, and then Hashem gets up from His throne of judgment and sits on His throne of compassion. We can't begin with the *tefillah* א"ל מלך יושב על כסא רחמים, because Hashem isn't on that throne yet, until after we say the first set of the י"ג מדות של רחמים. So we begin with a prayer מי א"ל כמוך, etc. and we say the thirteen attributes. Now Hashem sits on His throne of compassion and we say א"ל מלך יושב על כסא רחמים.

Yom Kippur we begin with א-ל מלך יושב על כסא רחמים, and we don't say the prayer מי קל כמוך at all. This is because on Yom Kippur, Hashem sits on His throne of compassion even before we say the י"ג מדות.

The Greatness of the Mitzvos

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

Such happened to a *yungerman* from Kiryat Gat. After he davened *shacharis* at the *netz* (daybreak) he took the first bus to Yerushalayim, to be *menachem avel* a friend. As soon as he sat down in front of his friend, he got a phone call. He would have ignored it, but it was his father, so he went to the back of the room and answered the phone.

“I have to have a medical procedure done in Ramat Gan today, around noontime. I want someone to be there with me. Can you be there?”

“Certainly. I’m in Yerushalayim now, but I’ll be there as soon as I can.”

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

On the bus to Ramat Gan, his father called to tell him that he is already done with the procedure. His son doesn’t have to come anymore. So as it turned out, half the day passed on the bus, and all he had to show for it was a brief *nichum aveilim* – much shorter than he planned.⁵

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

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

“Why don’t you take it into the bathroom with you? That way, you can watch it yourself.”

“I have my talis and tefillin in this bag, and it isn’t proper to bring them into the bathroom.”

The storeowner eyes sparkled from interest. “Can I put on your tefillin?” “Of course! It will be my privilege.”

When he came out of the bathroom, he found the irreligious Yid wearing tefillin with a small *kappel* on his head. His tattooed arm was wrapped with the *tefillin shel yad*, and his totally bald-shaven head was wearing the *tefillin shel rosh*. The storeowner said, “Although I’m not religious, I put on tefillin every morning. Today, I didn’t have time to put on tefillin in the morning, so I came to work without tefillin. I prayed that Hashem help me wear tefillin today. I was certain Hashem would help. And as you see, I am now wearing tefillin.”

The *yungerman* thought he traveled for nothing, but he traveled to help this Yid wear tefillin. Let this story remind us how Hashem desires the mitzvos of every Yid, no matter which level he is on.

Bikurim teaches us this lesson as well.

The Mishnah (*Bikurim* 3:3) states, “When the people bringing bikurim arrived near 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.

5. He will also be rewarded for traveling to mitzvos, and for trying to do mitzvos, nevertheless, as it appeared to him, most of the day was wasted, and little accomplished.

The Yismach Yisrael (*Savo* 1) explains that this is to teach us the value of *every* mitzvah, performed by *any* Yid. It is to let us know that one deserves endless respect for each mitzvah he performs.

The mitzvah of bikurim is a relatively easy mitzvah. It isn't expensive. The first phase of this mitzvah can even be performed in one's thoughts. If one thinks, "this fruit should be bikurim" it becomes bikurim. The immense honor they received teaches us the value of every mitzvah, and even the value of an intention to do a mitzvah.

As the Yismach Yisrael writes, "The honorary *cohanim* and the *gizbarim* of the beis haMikdash came out to greet them, to show them that even a simple mitzvah from the most simple 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 in his entire life he only performed one mitzvah or had one good thought, it is also enough [to praise Hashem for this great opportunity]. And, he should be embarrassed that he lost opportunities to serve Hashem in the past. Now that he sees the vast value of the mitzvos, he should be embarrassed

that he lost out on opportunities to perform mitzvos."⁶

The Yismach Yisrael emphasizes the value of *shemiras hamitzvos*, even of lowly people. As he writes, "Each person, no matter who he is...even if he only performed one mitzvah his entire life or had one good thought, it is also enough..."

Therefore, we understand that it is an extremely great merit to help Yidden believe in Hashem and keep the mitzvos. No matter who he is, if you help him come a drop closer to *avodas Hashem*, it is a great merit.

Reb Yisrael Salanter *zt'l* taught: The Torah has very strict laws regarding a *מסית ומדיח* (someone who incites others to worship *avodah zarah*). He is killed in *beis din*, and unlike all other *aveiros*, about this sin it states (*Devarim* 13:9), ולא תחמול עליו, "Don't have pity on him." Rashi explains, לא תהפך בזכותו, "Don't seek to make him righteous and innocent." And it states, לא תאבה לו, and Rashi explains, "Don't love him. The Torah obligates וואהבת לרעך כמוך, but this person you mustn't love."

These extremely severe halachos apply even when the *מסית ומדיח* didn't accomplish anything, because no one paid attention to his call to worship

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

avodah zarah. He is nevertheless harshly punished for trying.

The reward for good deeds is always proportionately greater than the punishment for bad deeds. Reb Yisrael Salanter *zt'l* said that we can therefore be certain that if one tries to influence others to believe in Hashem and to serve Hashem, his reward will be exceptionally great.

Kabalah Tovah

The Divrei Chaim of Tzanz *zt'l* told the following story:

A poor woman found an egg. Her children saw the egg and were happy, because they thought they would have something nutritious to eat. But she had other plans. She gathered her children, and raised the egg and told them, "We will not eat this egg. We will give it to our neighbors, and ask them to place it under one of their hens, to incubate."

The children were happy once again, because they understood that when the egg hatches and grows into a chicken, they will have meat to eat. But the mother had other plans. "We won't eat the chicken. We will let the chicken lay eggs, and the eggs will turn into chickens, and then we will have more eggs. And then we will sell all the chickens and buy some goats... and then we will sell the goats and buy land..."

As she spoke, she waved her hands in excitement and joy. Suddenly, the egg dropped, and all her dreams ended right there.

The Tzanzer Rebbe *zt'l* told this story to describe how people often make grand plans in Elul, how they will improve in the upcoming year, and what they will do, but nothing materializes. They tell themselves that this year things will be different, but within a few weeks they revert to their past routines.

What can we do to keep the *teshuvah* process going? One idea is to take on small *kabalos*. They seem small to you, but they are really great in Hashem's eyes, and they will bring you to your desired success.

A *bachur* told me that he has a problem. Each Shabbos, he buys the magazines that have pictures of Rebbes in them, and he goes through each page. This takes a lot of his time, and he doesn't know how to break the habit. I advised him to leave out a page or two that he won't look at. Shortly afterwards he came back to me to tell me that he was completely cured from his addiction. Because when one refrains a little bit, this gives him momentum to refrain even more.

Rebbe Mottele Slonimer *zy'a* writes (*Maamar Mordechai* p.342): Two tzaddikim made a pact that whoever dies first would come in a dream to his friend, to tell him what happened in his judgment.

One of them was *niftar*, and soon afterwards, he came to his friend in a dream. He said, "When the court reviewed my deeds, they said everything was perfect, but I had one sin. Once, while serving as *av beis din*, one of the

parties placed money into my pocket without me knowing about., I unwillingly and accidentally transgressed the *aveirah* of *shochad*, the prohibition for a judge to take a bribe. For this, I was told I would need to go to Gehinom.

"I told the court that I don't want to go there, so they brought me to a very large building, gave me a small hammer, and said, 'Break down this building with this small hammer. When you finish, you can go to Gan Eden.'

"I was devastated. How could I demolish a gigantic building with a small hammer? It will take many years before I finish.

"But then I thought: 'My entire life I sought to do Hashem's will. Now, it's Hashem's will that I should destroy this large building with this hammer. So I will do so with joy — even if it takes me many years.' Joyously, I raised the hammer and swung it at the building with all my might. The entire building collapsed, and I was swiftly brought to my place in Gan Eden."

This story reminds us that *teshuvah* sometimes seems impossible – like it will take many years to accomplish. But if you try, and take even just one small step in the right direction, Hashem will help you and you will attain your goals much quicker than you can imagine.

Everything in this world can be used as a *mashal* for *avodas Hashem*. One of the rather recent wonders of technology is the GPS. One lesson we can learn from it is *bitachon*. No matter where a person is, the GPS shows him how to get to his

destination. This is a reminder that no matter which situation a person is in, Hashem is with him, directing him on the right path.

Another lesson we can learn from the GPS is how to deal with people who aren't acting properly, and even though we rebuked them, they don't accept our counsel. When a person takes a wrong turn, the GPS doesn't shout at him. It just tells him what to do *now*. Similarly, we shouldn't become angry at our children or at our students who err, and who don't listen to our good advice, rather we should show them what to do now, to help them reach their destination in life.

Finally, the GPS reminds us that *teshuvah* is always an option. It's never too late. Even if he was driving the wrong way for many years, he can always find his way to his destination.

Kedushah

The Kenesiyah HaGedolah in Vienna, Elul תרפ"ג was attended by many *gedolim*, among them: the Chofetz Chaim *zt'l* and the Imrei Emes of Gur *zt'l*. The *ezras nashim* was a balcony, one flight up, around the sides of the hall. The *gaba'im* of the Imrei Emes came in and said that their Rebbe can't come to the meeting until there are curtains covering the *ezras nashim*. Some people opposed, saying that it wasn't necessary, since the women were a flight above. They decided they would ask the Chofetz Chaim and do whatever he advises. The Chofetz Chaim replied, "According to halachah it isn't

necessary. But since there are those who request it, we must acquiesce.”

The Chofetz Chaim *zt'l* explained, “The worst thing that could possibly happen to the Jewish nation is that Hashem abandons them. As long as Hashem is with us, everything will work out. As it states (*Tehillim* 23), גם כי אלך בגיא צלמות לא, “Even when I go in the valley of death I am not afraid...because You are with me.’ However it states (*Devarim* 23:15), כי ה' אלקיך מתהלך בקרב מחנהך להצילך ולתת אויבך לפניך, והיה מחנהך קדוש ולא יראה בך ערות דבר ושב מאחריך, ‘Hashem is going within your camp to save you and to give your enemies before you. Your camp must be holy, there should not be seen anything profane, for then the *Shechinah* will leave you.’ The worst scenario is when the *Shechinah* leaves us. What causes Hashem to leave Klal Yisrael? ערות דבר, lack of *tznius* and similar sins related to *kedushah*. We need Hashem’s help and protection, and therefore we should be *machmir*.”

This story was told many times by Reb Avraham Kalmanovitz, *nasi* of Mir, who was present at that gathering.

His son, Reb Shraga Moshe Kalmanovitz *zt'l* said that the Chofetz Chaim taught a *chiddush* in this lesson. He revealed that there are numerous degrees of the extent Hashem’s presence resides with the Jewish nation. It isn’t either Hashem is with them or He isn’t. There are numerous levels. Because at that gathering, the *mechitzah* was kosher, albeit not the most *mehudar*. The

Shechinah was certainly present, but the Chofetz Chaim revealed that the *Shechinah* will be even more present when they are more cautious with the guidelines of *kedushah*. And the more *kedushah*, and the greater presence of the *Shechinah*, the more protection there will be for klal Yisrael.

Reb Elchanan Wasserman *zt'l* heard the Chofetz Chaim say the following: Hashem is our guardian, as we say, שומר עמו ישראל. There are different kinds of *shomrim*. There is a *shomer chinam*, someone who guards something for free, and there is a *shomer sachar*, a guard who is paid for his services. One of the differences between a *shomer chinam* and a *shomer sachar* is that a *shomer chinam* can say, “I don’t want to guard this anymore” and return the item to the owner. No one is paying him, so it is up to the guard to decide how long he wants to do this service.

Hashem is a *shomer chinam*, because no one pays Hashem to guard over us. When does Hashem say, *chalilah*, that he doesn’t want to watch us anymore? That’s when there is ערות דבר ושב מאחריך, when there is a slack in *kedushah*.

A *mashgiach* of a yeshiva told me that he was speaking with a *bachur* about the importance of steering away from improper technical devices, and the *bachur* wasn’t getting the message. The *bachur* was saying that he is cautious, and he doesn’t go to sites he shouldn’t. As they spoke, two people were walking down the street. One was wearing a hat; the other was wearing solely a yarmulke

(*kappel*). A strong gust of wind lifted the hat of one of them, and the *kappel* of the other, and they went scrambling to pick them up again. The *mashgiach* said, "You see, the one who had two coverings remained with a covering on his head. The other one doesn't have anything on his head. Because when one adds onto his *kedushah*, he is further away from sinning."

The Toldos Yaakov Yosef *zt'l* told the following *mashal*:

A poor person knocked on the door of a wealthy man's home and asked to buy one of the pegs hanging in the foyer. The wealthy man told him it's not for sale. But the poor person kept coming back again and again, asking to buy the peg. Finally, the wealthy person agreed. The pauper paid a large sum, the wealthy man wrote out a contract. The next day, the pauper came back and hung some clothes on the peg. The wealthy man understood that it was his peg now, and he had the right to use it as he desired.

Every day the pauper kept coming back to the wealthy home to hang up another item, or to take something down. One day, he came with a carcass, and he hung it up on the peg. After a few hours the wealthy residents could not

stand the stench and they all fled the house. That's how the entire house became the pauper's.

The *nimshal* is, the *yetzer hara* comes to a person and tries to convince him to sin with something relatively small. The person keeps pushing the *yetzer hara* away, but after the *yetzer hara* bothers him so many times, he gives in to that "small thing." He figures that if he gives in, the *yetzer hara* will leave him alone. But now that the *yetzer hara* has a foothold with you, he will keep coming back, until he will bring very stinking sins, and rule over you. This is Chazal's intention (*Shabbos* 105:), "This is the craft of the *yetzer hara*, today he tells you to do this, and tomorrow he tells you to do that, until he tells you to worship *avodah zarah*, and he does so."

The Gemara (*Succah* 52.) tells that in the future, Hakadosh Baruch Hu will slaughter the *yetzer hara*. To the tzaddikim the *yetzer hara* looks like a mountain,⁷ and they will cry. Why will they cry?

We can explain it with a *mashal*:

A person was traveling through the desert, and needed a drink of water. He comes across a home, and knocks at the

7. It states, רב לכם סוב ההר, "Much have you gone around the mountain." Let us focus on the words סוב ההר, "around הר." The letters around הר spell קדוש. (Because around the letter ה, from either side, is a ו and a ד. And around the ר there's ו and ש. Together, these spell קדוש.) The הר, mountain, represents the *yetzer hara* (as we quoted from the Gemara *Succah* 52., that to the tzaddikim the *yetzer hara* appears like a mountain). If a person סוב ההר, puts boundaries around the mountain to be guarded from sin, the result is קדוש, *kedushah*, holiness.

door. An Arab opens the door, and the traveler quickly runs away. He doesn't want to take a chance with his life.

Later on he hears about another desert traveler who came to that Arab's home to get a drink of water and was murdered. When he hears this, he begins to cry because he realized with a certainty from what he was saved.

The *nimshal* is related to modern technology. Modern technology has uprooted many homes, and has spiritually harmed many men and women, of all ages. When people, who are cautious with the internet, hear (or see) these painful stories of devastations, they cry. Their tears are tears of gratitude, thankful that they are protected from all of that chaos.