

Torah Wellsprings

*Collected thoughts
from
Rabbi Elimelech
Biderman
Shlita*

Netzavim

Vayeilech



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CONTACT INFORMATION

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Torah Wellsprings - Netzavim - Vayeilech

Praise Hashem for the Good and for...

The Mishnah (Brachos 9:5) says, חייב אדם לברך, על הרעה כשם שהוא מברך על הטובה. The Gemara (ibid. 60b) explains this to mean that a person should be happy with everything that occurs to him – the good and the bad, because even those that seem bad are all for the good. The Or HaChaim says that this is alluded to in the beginning of this week's parashah. It states (30:1) וְהָיָה כִּי יָבֹאוּ עָלֶיךָ כָּל הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה, "It will be, when all these

things come upon you the blessing and the curse..." It is known (see Bereishis Rabba 42:3) that whenever it states וְהָיָה, it is an expression of joy. The pasuk is saying that we should be happy with the brachos and with the curses. Therefore, the Torah emphasizes, כָּל הַדְּבָרִים, הָאֵלֶּה, "all these things". Both the blessings and the curses, one should accept with joy and with emunah that they are certainly from Hashem, and therefore, they are certainly for the good.¹

1. It states (Tehillim 145:16) פֹּתֵחַ אֶת יָדְךָ וּמַשְׁבִּיעַ לְכֹל חַי רֶצֶן, "You open Your hand and satisfy every living thing with its desire." This pasuk discusses parnassah. It is also pointed out by kabbalistic sources that the sofei teivos (final letters) of פֹּתֵחַ אֶת יָדְךָ spell חת"ך, which is Hashem's name that relates to parnassah. The literal translation of חתך is cutting. The Yesod HaAvodah zt'l explains that חתך, cutting, refers to the times when people feel that something precious is being ripped and torn away from them. They feel that life isn't as it should be. One must know that these hard times are the catalysts for parnassah. These are times of חת"ך, cutting, which is Hashem's name, related to His bestowing parnassah.

Therefore, a person should praise Hashem for the hard times as well. They are always beneficial.

It can be compared to a tailor who is cutting an expensive roll of fabric into small pieces. People shout at him, "What are you doing? This is precious material. Why do you cut it?" But soon they will see how these pieces turn into beautiful garments. They will see that the tailor didn't cause a loss; he turned the fabric into something far more precious than before. The same are the "cuttings" we feel in life. They are all for our good. They are the source of Hashem's blessings.

One of Hashem's remarkable wonders, recently brought to light, unfolded in the distant expanses of Alaska. For many who live there, a major source of parnassah comes from the salmon that fill its rivers—fish harvested, exported, and sold across the globe. Under normal circumstances, approximately 120 million salmon are caught each year. But recently, the numbers dropped dramatically. At one location on the western-southern tip of Alaska, fishermen were catching only about 600,000 salmon—barely a tenth of their usual harvest. In the past, that same area produced close to five million.

The sudden decline baffled everyone, prompting scientists to investigate. They ran tests, asked questions, and followed the evidence until they uncovered the root of the mystery. It turns out that human beings are not the only ones who catch salmon—wolves do as well. The wolves pull the fish from the water and carry them into the tall grass near the shore, where they can eat undisturbed. There, they consume only the head of the fish and leave the rest lying in the grass. The remains decompose and become natural fertilizer, enriching the soil and enabling the grass to grow tall and strong.

But the fishermen, upset that wolves were "taking away" their parnassah, began driving the wolves out of the area. And then something unexpected happened. Without the wolves depositing fish remains in the high grass, the grass stopped growing properly. This created two major problems.

First, the tall grass reinforces the shoreline and prevents the soil from washing into the ocean. Without it, the soil began eroding into the sea, disturbing the delicate environment in which salmon swim.

Second, young salmon begin their lives near the shore, in areas surrounded by this vegetation. When the grass was no longer being naturally fertilized, fewer salmon were born.

Also, it states (31:21) וְהָיָה כִּי תִמְצָאן אֹתוֹ רָעוֹת רַבּוֹת, "It will be, when they will encounter many bad things and troubles, this song will testify to them..." The pasuk is very hard to understand. If there are רָעוֹת רַבּוֹת וְצָרוֹת, many bad things and troubles, why is there singing?

Sfas Emes (5651) answers with the principle that we should always praise Hashem, for the good and for (what seems to be) bad. As it states (Tehillim 101:1) לְדוֹד מִזְמוֹר חֹסֵד וּמִשְׁפָּט אֲשִׁירָה לְךָ, "To Dovid, a song. I shall sing of kindness and judgment; to You, Hashem, I shall sing." Dovid HaMelech sang to Hashem when he experienced חֹסֵד, Hashem's chesed, and when he received מִשְׁפָּט, troubles and hardships. Dovid knew that everything is from Hashem and for the good. Whatever occurs to us, we should sing and praise Hashem.

Another source is (Tehillim 56:11) בְּאַלְקִים אֶהְיֶה לְדָבָר, "With Hashem's [justice] I will praise... With Hashem's [kindness] I will praise..." Either way, for good or the opposite, we praise Hashem.

The Sfas Emes says that this is the reason it states (31:22) וְעֲנֵתָהּ הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת. The pasuk is discussing tzaros, but, regardless of this, וְעֲנֵתָהּ הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת, we respond with songs to Hashem.

It states in this week's parashah (29:23) that when the goyim will see Eretz Yisrael in

ruins, they will say, וְאָמְרוּ כָּל הַגּוֹיִם עַל מָה עָשָׂה ה', "All the nations will say, 'Why did Hashem do so to this land? What is the reason for this great rage of fury?'" Notice that the pasuk says the goyim, the nations of the world, will ask this question. The Jewish nation won't ask it. The Jewish nation will also see the terrible churban, the desolation of the land, but they won't ask questions. Tiferes Shlomo (Rosh Hashanah (ד"ה ויאמר explains that this is because the Jewish nation believes that everything is for the good.

Tiferes Shlomo writes, "The goyim think that the galus is due to aveiros, and that Hashem gave them the punishment they deserved... But Bnei Yisrael are outstanding with their belief, מֵאֲמִינִים בְּנֵי מֵאֲמִינִים, and they believe that the galus is a great secret. In the future, everyone will know that it was all for the good. As it states (Tehillim 96:11) יִשְׁמְחוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם וְתִגַּל הָאָרֶץ, 'The heavens will rejoice and the earth will exult'. תִּגַּל has the letters of גְּלוּת. This means that the Jewish nation rejoices with galus, as well, because they know that everything is for the good. The goyim will wonder about the great punishment that occurred to the Jewish nation, but the Yidden will not be surprised, and they won't be upset. They will know that in the future, everything will be understood, how it was all for the good... As it states (29:28) הַנִּסְתָּרוֹת לֵה' אֱלֹקֵינוּ, 'The hidden things belong to Hashem,

This entire episode reveals one of Hashem's endless wonders: the world is arranged with perfect unity, each creature supporting another in wondrous, hidden ways.

And beyond the scientific marvel, there is a powerful lesson for life. People often assume that something is a problem, a curse—when in truth it is a blessing. The fishermen believed the wolves were diminishing their parnassah, but in reality, the wolves were sustaining the very ecosystem that allowed the salmon to thrive.

We must learn from this that sometimes when we think we are losing, we are actually gaining. When we see חֵתֶךְ—something cutting away from our parnassah—it may be the very source from which Hashem intends our parnassah to come.

Another lesson emerges as well: "extra" hishtadlus can sometimes diminish parnassah. These fishermen exerted more effort than required, banishing the wolves to protect their livelihood. But instead of increasing their income, their parnassah dropped by 90%. The proper path is to make reasonable hishtadlus and rely on Hashem, Who provides sustenance to all His creations.

our G-d.' Hashem knows the secrets, the reasons, and we believe that it is all for the good.

For it states (Eichah 3:38) *מִפִּי עֲלִיּוֹן לֹא תֵצֵא הָרָעוֹת*, which means Hashem only does good. Even when things seem very bad, like the bitter galus that we are in today, and which we were in for almost two thousand years, the secret of how it benefited klal Yisroel will be understood in the future.

Everyone should understand that his personal galus, the personal hardships he is going through, are all for the good. Although Hashem's ways are concealed from us, we strengthen ourselves with pure emunah in our Father in heaven, for He is טוב ומטיב לכל, good and does kindness to all.

As the Zohar (vol.3 p.159a) explains the pasuk in our parashah (29:28) *הַנְּסֻתֹת לַה' אֵלֵינוּ*, "The hidden things belong to Hashem." We shouldn't even attempt to understand Hashem's hidden ways, because who can understand the depths of Hashem's thoughts, which are concealed and hidden from all? We must solely strengthen ourselves with emunah in our compassionate Father, המנחם, Who leads His world with kindness, and His creations with compassion.

Being Happy, Even Through Yesurim

HaRav Shach zt'l (introduction to Avi Ezri vol.2) explains wondrously the following pasuk from this week's parashah (31:17) *וְהִסְתַּרְתִּי פָנַי מֵהֶם וְהִנֵּה לֹאכֵל וּמִצְאָהוּ רָעוֹת רַבּוֹת וְצָרוֹת וְאָמַר בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא*, "I will hide My face from them, and they will be consumed, and many troubles and tzaros will befall them, and they will say on that day, 'Is it not because our G-d is no longer in my midst, that these troubles have befallen me?'" The pasuk begins with two types of

hardships, for it states *רָעוֹת רַבּוֹת וְצָרוֹת*. Afterwards, the Jewish nation says, *הֲלֹא עַל כֵּי אֵין אֱלֹהֵי בְּקֶרְבִּי מִצְאָנִי הָרָעוֹת הָאֵלֶּה*. This time, only רָעוֹת is mentioned and not צָרוֹת. This needs an explanation.

There is a difference between רָעוֹת and צָרוֹת. רָעוֹת are the troubles, for example, health issues or financial struggles. But צָרוֹת (from the root צר, narrow) is about emotional pain. It is how the person feels when he has רָעוֹת, troubles. He feels צר, that there is no room in his heart to tolerate the hardships. At first, it was both: *רָעוֹת רַבּוֹת וְצָרוֹת*, emotional and physical pain. But then they realized that this is because *עַל כֵּי אֵין אֱלֹהֵי בְּקֶרְבִּי*. They realize that they feel so bad because they don't recognize that Hashem is with them, caring for them, and taking care of all their needs for them. When people feel alone and distant from Hashem, they have both emotional and physical pain. They have *רָעוֹת רַבּוֹת וְצָרוֹת*, both types of trouble. But those who know that Hashem is with them, *מִצְאָנִי הָרָעוֹת הָאֵלֶּה*, it is only רָעוֹת, troubles, but there are no צָרוֹת. There is no emotional pain. They can accept their situations with calmness and with joy, knowing that they are in Hashem's hands. As it states (Tehillim 23:4) *גַּם כִּי אֵלֶךְ בְּגִיאַת צְלֻמוֹת לֹא אֵירָא רָע כִּי אִתָּךְ יֵרָע כִּי אֵתָּה עִמָּדִי*, "Even when I walk in the valley of darkness, I will fear no evil for You are with me."²

Everyone has troubles, and some suffer very serious problems, r'l. They are often sad, and they say that sadness is the most natural, and, in fact, the only reaction to their situation. They say, "How can I be happy in my situation? Is it possible for a person in my situation to be happy?"

Many believe that their punishment comes from Heaven, and that a part of it is their sadness. They can't imagine separating their tzarah from their despondency;

2. It states at the beginning of this week's parashah, *אַתֶּם נִצְבִים הַיּוֹם בְּלִפְנֵי ה'* אֱלֹהֵיכֶם, "You are all standing this day before Hashem, your G-d." The word נִצַּב means to stand firm. The pasuk says *אַתֶּם נִצְבִים*, you stand firm with your emunah, and you strengthen yourself with the emunah that you are *בְּלִפְנֵי ה'* אֱלֹהֵיכֶם, standing before Hashem your G-d, Who watches over you and over all His creations.

therefore, they consider it to be a part of their punishment.

The Ben Ish Chai (Aderes Eliyahu, parashas Vayakhel) elaborates that all this is an error. (a) It is possible to be happy, even when enduring great hardships. (b) Sadness isn't decreed from Above. It isn't part of one's punishment. One chooses sadness on his own.

The Ben Ish Chai writes, "Know, my friend, *atzvus* (sadness) harms the body, physically. Many diseases come from being sad, *r'l*. It isn't solely an emotional suffering; it can develop into physical pain, as well."

After writing this introduction to let us know the physical dangers of being sad, the Ben Ish Chai annuls the myth that it is impossible for someone suffering to be happy, and the myth that sadness is a punishment, decreed from Above. He writes, "The punishment of sadness is self-imposed. Every punishment is indeed decreed from heaven, as Chazal (Chulin 7b) say, 'A person doesn't hurt his finger below, unless it was decreed above in heaven.' But when one is sad, he brings the sadness on himself. This

is because *atzvus* is a very disgusting temperament, and Hakadosh Baruch Hu hates it. [Therefore, Hakadosh Baruch Hu certainly wouldn't decree that a person be sad.] Even if someone committed aveiros, it isn't correct to be excessively sad because of that."

The Ben Ish Chai goes on: "When Heaven decrees on a person *yesurim*, Hakadosh Baruch Hu wants him to accept the *yesurim* with joy and with a good heart. This proves that he can be happy. How can it be that it was decreed on him to be sad, if he is obligated to accept the *yesurim* with joy? This is a test constantly given to mankind, to see whether the person will receive the *yesurim* with joy or not. "Furthermore, most of the time, sadness comes when there is a lack in *emunah*. If one would have *emunah* and trust in Hashem Yisbarach, as one should, he wouldn't be sad. So, how can he claim that his sadness is decreed from Heaven? It must be that this great wound is the person's own doing. He brought it on himself. Therefore, it is his obligation to place his trust in Hashem yisbarach and to arouse his heart to happiness."³

3. The mashgiach, Reb Elya Lopian *zt"l*, once wasn't feeling well and asked that a doctor be called. When the doctor arrived, he began his examination and asked, "Are you feeling well?"

Reb Elya answered, "Yes, I feel fine.

The doctor continued, "Do you have any pain anywhere in your body?"

Reb Elya replied, "No, I have no pain."

The doctor grew upset. "If everything is fine, why did you call me? Why did you trouble me to come here for no reason?

Reb Elya responded calmly, "Even so, if you give me medical treatment, I will feel better." The doctor performed a procedure and then left.

Afterward, Reb Elya's family asked him why he told the doctor he was feeling well when it was obvious that he was not. Reb Elya answered them with a *mashal*: "A young child runs around and suddenly falls and hurts himself. The child feels intense pain overtaking his entire being, and his shouts are so loud, they reach the heavens. His compassionate mother runs over to calm him. She hugs him and gives him candy. Suddenly, the child is calm; he isn't hurting anymore. What happened? Was the candy medicated? How did the pain disappear so quickly? But the answer is that whenever there is pain, it is 10% physical pain and 90% emotional pain. (As Reb Elya said it, 90% is יסורי הנפש and 10% יסורי הגוף). The mother removed the emotional pain, and then the child was able to endure the 10% of physical pain. The physical pain, without the emotional pain, is almost nothing at all. It is bearable. It almost doesn't hurt."

It states in this week's parashah (31:17) וְהָרָה אִפִּי בּוֹ יוֹם הַהוּא וְנִצַּבְתִּים וְהִסְתַּרְתִּי פָנַי מֵהֶם "My fury will rage against them on that day, and I will abandon them and hide My face from them". This pasuk seems to be referring to the times that Hashem is angry with His nation, to the extent of וְהִסְתַּרְתִּי פָנַי, that He doesn't want to look at them. However, Daas Zekeinim m'Baalei HaTosfos writes, זהו דרך חבה כאדם שחטא לו בנו ואומר לרבו להלקותו והוא אינו יכול לראות בצרת בנו שרחמיו עליו ומסתיר פניו שלא יראה בהכאת בנו "This is an expression of love. It can be compared to a child who sinned against his parent, so the father tells the teacher to hit his son. However, the father can't bear to see his son in pain, due to his compassion on him, so he turns his face away, so as not to see his son being hit." We see that even when it is a time of וְהִסְתַּרְתִּי פָנַי מֵהֶם, that Hashem conceals His face from the Jewish nation, it is all coming from Hashem's love to the Jewish nation.

There are two expressions of דין and רחמים. Hardships are called דין, and Hashem's compassion is called רחמים. Kad HaKemach (Rosh Hashanah) notes that דין is in the singular, while רחמים is in the plural. This tells us that whenever there is דין, hardship, Hashem's רחמים compassion is much greater.

The מגדלות מרקחים (from Reb Levi Yitchak of Tzelem, zt'l, son of the Arugas HaBosem zt'l) says that according to the rules of the Torah, יחיד ורבים הלכה כרבים, that when there is a dispute between a singular view against the majority view, the halachah is like the majority opinion. As we saw, the Kad HaKemach writes that דין is singular and רחמים is the majority. Therefore, the halachah of the Torah should be that

overpowers דין, and the person should receive Hashem's compassion.

With this idea, מגדלות מרקחים explains the pasuk (Tehillim 119:156) רַחֲמֶיךָ רַבִּים ה' כְּמִשְׁפָּטֶיךָ חַיִּי. This can be translated as follows: Hashem, your rachmanus is רַבִּים, many (because רחמים is in plural tense). Therefore, the halachah should be like the majority (יחיד ורבים הלכה כרבים). כְּמִשְׁפָּטֶיךָ, in accordance with the halachos of Your Torah, חַיִּי, grant me life and compassion and save me from דין, hardships and distress.

The Power of Teshuvah

The Lechovitzer zt'l tells us a wondrous idea. He says that those who do teshuvah become great and precious before Hashem, and they are like the *avos hakedoshim* – Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. How do they reach such high levels? The answer is that this is the strength of teshuvah.

He says that this is alluded to in the pasuk (30:8-9) וְאַתָּה תָּשׁוּב תִּשְׁמָעַת בְּקוֹל ה' וְעָשִׂיתָ אֶת כָּל מִצְוֹתָיו... כִּי יָשׁוּב ה' לְשׁוֹשׁ עָלֶיךָ לְטוֹב בְּאֲשֶׁר שָׂשׂ עַל אֲבֹתֶיךָ, "You will return [in teshuvah] and listen to the voice of Hashem and fulfill all His commandments... Hashem will once again rejoice over you for good, as He rejoiced over your forefathers". The primary purpose of creation is to take the bad and make it good. Baalei teshuvah accomplish this. They were previously in a bad place, and they became good and righteous. Therefore, כִּי יָשׁוּב ה' לְשׁוֹשׁ עָלֶיךָ, Hashem will have a lot of joy with your avodah, בְּאֲשֶׁר שָׂשׂ עַל אֲבֹתֶיךָ, as Hashem rejoiced with the avodah of the holy avos.⁴

Reb Elya explained, "When I have yesurim – even severe pain – I have emunah that this was given to me by my Father in heaven. I believe that He is taking care of me, and that He loves me. I am totally calm because everything is happening in the best way. I don't have emotional pain, and therefore, I almost don't feel the tiny percentage of physical pain. However, my limbs did feel physical pain, and I needed medical treatment. Therefore, I called the doctor. Nevertheless, since I wasn't feeling any emotional pain, the physical pain was very bearable. That is why I told the doctor that I felt well."

4. The Beis Avraham zt'l noted that it is easy to make jewelry from gold and silver. But it is a great *chidush* and *chachmah* to create jewelry out of rags and ripped clothing. Therefore, when a person is at a low spiritual level, his teshuvah is special and carries great significance before Hashem.

The Chasam Sofer zt'l (Shoftim ו"ה ואם ירחיב) teaches this same lesson from another pasuk in this week's parashah. It states (30:5) וְהִטַּבְךָ (וְהִרְבֶּךָ מֵאַבְתְּרֶיךָ), "He will do good to you, and He will make you greater than your forefathers." The pasuk is referring to teshuvah, and it tells us that the baalei teshuvah become greater than the holy avos! This is as Chazal say, "The place where baalei teshuvah stand, the greatest tzaddikim cannot stand."⁵

It states (29:10) מְחַטְבֵי עֵצִים וְשֹׁאֲבֵי מַיִם, "your woodcutters and your water drawers." They will also join and be part of Hashem's covenant. Rashi writes that the pasuk is referring to Canaanites who converted.

Reb Noson Gestetner (in his sefer להורות נתן) asks how Rashi knows this. Perhaps it is referring to woodcutters and water drawers from people who were born Jewish!

Reb Noson answers that a Jew is never referred to by his occupation. He might work for a living as a woodcutter or as a water drawer, but that will never define who he is. A Yid will always be a Yid. The work he does doesn't define his essence. The same can be said regarding a Yid who chalilah performed aveiros. This will never change who he is. He will always remain a Yid, no matter what happened.

It states (30:4) אִם יִהְיֶה נִדְחֶךָ בְּקֶצֶה הַשָּׁמַיִם מִשָּׁם וְקִבְּצְךָ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ וּמִשָּׁם יִקְחֶךָ, "Even if your exiles are at the end of the heavens, Hashem, your

G-d, will gather you from there, and He will take you from there." The holy sefarim explain that the pasuk is alluding to people who sinned so much that they are נִדְחֶךָ בְּקֶצֶה הַשָּׁמַיִם, banished to the ends of the heaven. מִשָּׁם, from that distant place, וְקִבְּצְךָ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ, Hashem will bring them back to Him.

The Kобрiner zt'l (Toras Avos) and the Beis Aharon zt'l (131a) say that בְּקֶצֶה הַשָּׁמַיִם refers to the attribute of kedushah (see Zohar vol.2, 137a). Aveiros related to kedushah (such as guarding the eyes, etc.) contaminate a person immensely and distance him from Hashem. Nevertheless, מִשָּׁם וְקִבְּצְךָ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ וּמִשָּׁם יִקְחֶךָ, Hashem will take him back from there. So great is the power of teshuvah.

The best time to do teshuvah is today. Behold it states (29:9, 11) אַתֶּם נֹצְבִים הַיּוֹם בְּלִפְנֵי לַפָּנִי, "You are all standing *today* before Hashem... to join Hashem's covenant... which Hashem, your G-d, is making with you *today*." הַיּוֹם, means each day of a person's life.

It states (29:18) וְהָיָה בְּשִׁמְעוֹ אֶת דְּבָרֵי הָאֱלֹהִים הַזֵּאת, "And it will be, when such a person hears the words of the *tochachah*, that he will bless himself in his heart, saying, 'I will have peace.'" Targum Yonoson writes וְיִתְיַאֵשׁ בְּלִבּוֹ, "he loses hope". The people who don't renew their avodas Hashem, it's because they lost hope of ever becoming better.

5. It states at the beginning of the parashah (29:11) לְעַבְדְּךָ בְּכִרְיִת... אֲשֶׁר ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ פָּרַת עִמָּךְ הַיּוֹם, "to join Hashem's covenant... which Hashem, your G-d, is making with you today." The Divrei Chaim of Tzanz zt'l said that the final letters of בְּכִרְיִת spell פָּרַת עִמָּךְ הַיּוֹם, which is an ugly stain. It represents aveiros. The pasuk is teaching that even those who have become sullied by aveiros are still wanted by Hashem; He seeks to enter into a covenant with them as well. לְעַבְדְּךָ בְּכִרְיִת literally means "to have you pass through into the covenant." But what is the deeper meaning of לְעַבְדְּךָ — this notion of *passing through*? Rashi writes, מַחֲצִיזָה, "This is what people who make a bris would do. They would set up a *mechitzah* (wall or partition) on one side and a *mechitzah* on the other, through which the respective parties of the covenant passed through."

One of the tzaddikim of our generation shlita explains that if a person desires to be in Hashem's bris (covenant) and wants to do teshuvah, he has to make מַחֲצִיזָה מִכָּאן וּמַחֲצִיזָה מִכָּאן, a wall behind him, and another wall in front of him. The wall behind him means he should not think about the mistakes he committed in the past. The wall in front of him means he should trust in Hashem. In this manner, he can be in a bris with Hashem.

The truth is there is no reason to lose hope because every Yid is connected with Hakadosh Baruch Hu. No matter who he is, he has endless abilities. He has a *nekudah pnimius*, a spark of holiness, which is holy and pure and connected with Hashem. With this holy spark, he can connect with love to his Father in heaven. Therefore, it states (Devarim 32:9) *יַעֲקֹב הָקָל נִחְלָתוֹ*, which means each person is connected to Hakadosh Baruch Hu with ropes. With his holiness and with his connection to Hashem, a Yid is always able to do teshuvah and to elevate himself to the highest level.⁶

Unity: A Counsel for a Good Year

It states *אַתֶּם נֹצְבִים הַיּוֹם בְּלִפְנֵי ה'* אֱלֹהֵיכֶם, "You are all standing today before Hashem, your G-d". The Zohar says that *הַיּוֹם* refers to Rosh Hashanah. The pasuk is teaching us a counsel

for a good judgment on Rosh Hashanah. The counsel is *בְּלִפְנֵי*, that there be unity among all Jews.

The Midrash (Tanchuma 1) writes on the words *אַתֶּם נֹצְבִים הַיּוֹם בְּלִפְנֵי*, "Even if I made it dark for you, I will make it bright for you again. When will this occur? This will occur when you are united as one." When there is unity among Yidden, Hashem bestows His kindness upon them.

The Midrash proves this from the pasuk (Devarim 4:4) *חַיִּים בְּלִפְנֵי הַיּוֹם*, "You are alive, all of you, this day." When there will be *בְּלִפְנֵי*, unity among Yidden, there will be *חַיִּים*, life.

The Midrash writes, "In the way of the world, if a person takes a bundle of reeds, can he break them all at once? But if he would take one reed at a time, even an infant can break them. We find that Yisrael will be

6. I heard from the maggid, the gaon Reb Avraham Yudelovitz shlita: When we were young, we used to play with the escalators in the large business buildings. The game was simple: we would ride the escalator in the opposite direction. If the escalator was going down, we went up; if it was going up, we went down. But to succeed, we had to move faster than the escalator—otherwise we would be pushed back and fall.

There is a powerful lesson in this childhood game. When a person wants to go against the direction of the world, he must invest effort and move with swiftness. The world, with all its temptations, naturally pulls a person downward. To succeed in avodas Hashem, one must be quick, determined, and constantly ascending.

Secondly, this mashal offers chizuk to those who, during Elul, evaluate themselves and feel that they are standing on the very same spiritual level as they were a year ago. But they should know that if they are at the same level as last year, this means that they rose a lot. The world is constantly spiraling downward, and to remain in the same place, one must expend much effort, constantly climbing upwards like a person who is standing on the top step of an escalator, which is moving downwards. If he remains at the top for some time, that means he was constantly climbing higher. Otherwise, he would have certainly fallen. So, even to remain at the same place is a great accomplishment.

The following is a very inspirational quote from the Remak (Reb Moshe Kordeivov zt'l), which he writes in Or Yakar, his commentary on Zohar. He writes, *אם יעבוד האדם שנים אלף – העיקר הוא עת הנסיון*, "If a person serves Hashem for a thousand years, the main part is the moment of test." The most important times in life are the moments of tests. Passing these tests is greater than a thousand years of serving Hashem.

A tzaddik told me that when he was in a hospital in chutz l'aretz for refuah, he met a soldier and asked him, "Is it true that as part of training for war, soldiers are made to pass through a yard filled with thorns?"

The soldier replied, "It is true." Then the soldier lifted his sleeve to show that his arm was scratched in several places because of this training. The soldier added, "A soldier who doesn't have many scratches and wounds, this means he never went to fight. It is impossible to fight without getting scraped..."

This story gives chizuk to the people who have fallen in their avodas Hashem. The fact that they fell, this means they were on the battlefield. Those who never fall haven't begun their war against the yetzer hara.

redeemed when they are united as one, as it states (Yirmiyahu 50:4) 'בְּיָמִים הָהֵמָּה וּבָעֵת הַהִיא נֹאֵם ה' 'נִבְאוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וּבְנֵי יְהוּדָה יַחְדָּו "In those days and in that time, says Hashem, Bnei Yisrael shall come, they and the children of Yehudah together..."

The Midrash concludes, "When they are united, they will receive the face of the Shechinah."

It states (Mishlei 21:21) רֹדֵף צְדָקָה וְחֶסֶד יִמְצָא חַיִּים "He who pursues tzedakah and kindness will find life, charity, and honor." Once again, we see that when a person chases after opportunities to perform tzedakah and chesed, he will have חַיִּים צְדָקָה וְחֶסֶד, life and honor on the day of judgment. Or, in other words, unity and helping one another are mesugal for a good judgment.

The Imrei Chaim of Vizhnitz zt'l explains the pasuk (29:13) וְלֹא אֶתְקַם לְבַדְכֶּם אֲנִי כִּכְתֹּב אֶת הַבְּרִית "The Imrei Emes explains that Hashem says, "וְלֹא אֶתְקַם לְבַדְכֶּם", this bris won't occur when you are alone. The bris is solely when you are in unity."

Many begin Rosh Hashanah with a tefillah called אַחֲזוּת קַטְנָה. This tefillah is said after Minchah, moments before Rosh Hashanah arrives. The tefillah is about תְּכֵלֶה שָׁנָה וּקְלִלָתָהּ, the past year, with all its curses should end, and a new, better year should begin. One of the tzaddikim of our generation, Shlita, explains that this tefillah was established to be said at this time because on Rosh Hashanah, we should daven for all Yidden. We pray for all Yidden of the world, that their tzaros of last year should end, and this coming year should be filled with goodness.

The Gemara (Rosh Hashanah 34a) discusses how we blow shofar. There is a tekiyah before, and a tekiyah after, and the middle sound is either a שְׁבִירִים, or a תְּרוּעָה, or a שְׁבִירִים תְּרוּעָה. The Gemara explains that people cry in these three different manners. Some people, when they cry, it's the sound of a שְׁבִירִים; some cry with the sound of a תְּרוּעָה;

and some cry like a שְׁבִירִים תְּרוּעָה, both together. Therefore, we blow in all three manners.

Some *Rishonim* explain that people in different places cry in different ways. There are locations where people cry the sound similar to a שְׁבִירִים, and there are places that people cry in the sound of a תְּרוּעָה, and there are places where people cry a sound of שְׁבִירִים תְּרוּעָה. Therefore, we blow in all three ways.

Notice that the takanah wasn't for each place to blow in the manner that they cry. The takanah was that everyone blow shofar in the sound of all people's cries. This is because on Rosh Hashanah, we don't want Hashem only to answer our tears. We ask that Hashem should answer the tears and the cries of all of Klal Yisrael. Wherever Yidden are crying, we unite with them. With the shofar, we remind Heaven of their tears, and we plead for them.

Shabbos Selichos

Leket Yosher (Orach Chaim vol.1 p.118) explains the reason Selichos begins on Motzei Shabbos. He writes that Selichos should be said in a happy mood, and people are happy on Motzei Shabbos. The happiness is due to the Torah that we studied on Shabbos and the *oneg Shabbos*. Happiness is important because the Shechinah resides where there is joy (see Shabbos 30:).

Therefore, we say in the Selichos, בְּאֵלֶּה פָּנִים, נִשְׁפֹּךְ שִׁיחִים. The literal translation is, "With what face can we pour out our words," which expresses our shame to speak before Hashem, due to our many aveiros. However, we can translate it as a statement: בְּאֵלֶּה פָּנִים, נִשְׁפֹּךְ, with the face we received on Shabbos, שִׁיחִים, we can pray before You. This is based on the Midrash (Bereishis Rabba 11:2) וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי וַיְקַדֵּשׁ אוֹתוֹ "Hashem blessed the seventh day..." This means that Hashem blessed them with the shine of His face, and Hashem sanctified them with the countenance of His face.' On Shabbos, our faces shine with joy, and it is with this face that we can approach Hashem and beg for forgiveness.

For some, happiness seems to be a contradiction to the fearful and awesome atmosphere of Selichos, but it isn't so. We can compare it to a *chasan*, moments before his *chuppah*. His friends who come to the *chasunah* might be shmoozing, joking around, and enjoying the smorgasbord, while the *chasan* is crying and saying Tehillim. He is happier than all of them, and is utilizing his joy wisely. Rebbe Pinchos Koritzer zt'l said that a happy person can cry whenever he wants. A hint to this idea is in the words (Tehillim 89:17) בְּשִׂמְךָ יִגְלוֹן כָּל הַיּוֹם "With Your name they rejoice every day." The *roshei teivos* of בְּשִׂמְךָ יִגְלוֹן כָּל הַיּוֹם is בְּכִי"ה, crying. The crying can be the result of happiness, and this is the atmosphere of Selichos. It is a time of immense joy and of seriousness, fear, and teshuvah.

Reb Yissachar Dov of Belz zt'l gave another reason why we begin saying Selichos specifically on Motzei Shabbos. It is based on the Chazal (Shabbos 119:) that says, "Whoever says וְיָכֹל [at kiddush], becomes a partner with HaKadosh Baruch Hu in creation." A partner has permission to express his opinion. For example, a business partner can say how he wants the business to be run. So, too, a partner in creation has a right to give his input on how he wants the world to be run. After Shabbos, after we became a partner with Hashem in creation, we have a right to express how we want Hashem to lead the world. And since we are partners, Hashem will take our requests into serious consideration.

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

The *Siduro Shel Shabbos* says that שְׁבִי"ת is *roshei teivos* for שְׁבִי"ת בּוֹ תִּשּׁוּב - on Shabbos you shall repent. The Chozeh of Lublin zt'l (Divrei Emes, Matos) writes that he heard from Rebbe Elimelech of Lizhensk zt'l that Shabbos is the shoshon, origin and root of teshuvah. This is the translation of שְׁבִי"ת, to שׁוּב, return to Hashem. The Ohr HaChaim (Devarim 4:39) writes, "Shabbos is equivalent to the entire

Torah, and therefore, all the bitterness of the past will be removed, and your soul will be rectified. This is because when you keep Shabbos, it is like you kept all the 613 mitzvos."

It states (Yeshayah 42:18), הִרְשִׁים שָׁמְעוּ וְהִעֲוִים, הַבִּיטוּ לִרְאוֹת "Deaf ones, listen! The blind, see!" The Chidushei HaRim zt'l asks, how can the deaf hear? How can the blind see? He answers, "There are moments so lofty that even the deaf hear and the blind see." Shabbos Selichos is such a time, when everyone is inspired with a holy urge to improve their ways.

Selichos

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

On Motzei Shabbos, we say the selichos of בְּמוֹצָאֵי מְנוּחָה, and each line begins with a letter of the alef beis. There is one exception. That is the letters נ"ן and סמ"ך. They are written right next to each other (and not in two separate phrases. This is referring to the words נָא שִׁנֵּם (which is like נָא שִׁנֵּם, because the letter *sin* of שִׁנֵּם is interchangeable with a samech.) The *roshei teivos* of נָא שִׁנֵּם, or if you prefer, נָא שִׁנֵּם, spell נ"ס, miracle.

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

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

We also say on this first night of Selichos, רְצֵה עֲתִירָתָם בְּעוֹמֶד בַּלַּיִל, "Desire their prayers when they stand at night." The Munkatcher Rebbe (Shaar Yisachar Tishrei, Selichos, 43) explains that this means they stand up to the tests (which are called לַיִל, nighttime). They remain steadfast in their emunah, even when

encountering difficult tests. We request that in this merit, Hashem should answer their tefillos.

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

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

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

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

Reb Yaakov Landau *zt'l*, the Rav of Bnei Brak, would generally contain his emotions. But on the first night of *selichos*, he was the *chazan*. When he began *Ashrei*, his voice didn't show any emotion, but when he came to *תהילת ה'*, he cried copiously and continued to cry throughout the *selichos*. It was almost impossible to hear his voice through his cries.

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

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

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

Leket Yosher (*Hilchos Taanis* 12, p.114) writes, "Once I asked my Rebbe, the Terumas HaDeshen, to permit me to eat during the days of *selichos*, so I could learn well because I learn every day of the year. He replied that the scholars of the past also knew that fasting would make people weak and that it would be hard for them to learn. Nevertheless, they instituted the custom for people to fast during *selichos*. Therefore, I can't permit you to eat."

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

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

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

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

On the first night of *selichos*, Rebbe Dovid entered his *beis medresh* and looked around. The person who gave him the ride wasn't there yet, so he returned to his room. This happened a few times. The man who had given him the ride was in his village, which

was near Lelov. He thought to himself, "Rebbe Dovid is a holy man. He asked me to come to his *beis medresh* for *selichos*. Why shouldn't I go?"

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

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

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

Sincere Selichos

Before saying the *selichos* of י"ג מדרות (which is said a couple of days before Yom Kippur), the Beis Aharon said to his chassidim, "Don't say

selichos as if it were a custom or routine." We are asking Hashem for forgiveness; these aren't just words we have a tradition of saying.⁷

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

In response, Rebbe Boruch'l quoted the verse (Bamidbar 14:20), סלחתי לדברך, "I have forgiven as you spoke." The implication behind his response was, "I forgive you in the same manner that you are seeking forgiveness. You don't truly mean it when you say you're sorry. Likewise, I don't mean it when I say I forgive you."⁸

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

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

8. The phrase "I'm sorry" can carry different meanings depending on the context in which it is used. Sometimes, it expresses genuine remorse, but there are instances when the regret is minimal or non-existent. For example, when you want to pass through a door and someone is blocking your way, you might say, "Sorry, can I pass?" Or when you approach someone and ask, "I'm sorry, do you know what time it is now?" In these cases, "sorry" is used as a form of speech, without genuine remorse. We should try to say *selichos* with sincere remorse and genuine thoughts of teshuvah.

Tzaddikim tell a *mashal* of a person who was lost and was wandering around in a forest. He needed food and water and finally spotted a house. He knocked at the door, but no one answered. What did the man do? He knocked again; he pounded and begged for mercy, because he realized that this was his only chance for survival. Similarly, we knock at Hashem's doors, and if they remain shut, we knock again, and we pound, and we don't go away until our tefillos are answered because we realize that we have nowhere else to turn.

Reb Shalom Shwadron zt'l once said that when somebody knocks on your door, you have the choice to answer or ignore it. But when someone pounds on your door, you understand that the person is desperate, so you open it to see what is needed. Two words can be used to mean knocking at a door: one is נוקש, and one is דופק. Reb Shalom Shwardron zt'l explained that נוקש is a knock, and דופק is when someone pounds on the door. Therefore, we say in *selichos*, דלתוך דפקנו, "We are pounding on Your door... Don't have us return empty-handed." We are pounding at Hashem's door, desperate for His atonement and salvation, and therefore, we plead that Hashem listen to our tefillos.⁹

Thirteen Middos

The Gemara (*Rosh Hashanah* 17:) states, "If the *pasuk* hadn't said it, we wouldn't be permitted to say it. Keviyachol, Hakadosh Baruch Hu wrapped Himself like a *shaliach tzibbur* (*chazan*) and showed Moshe [the thirteen attributes of mercy]. Hashem told Moshe, 'Whenever Yidden sin, say this before Me, and I will forgive them...' The Gemara says, ברית כרותה, ל"ג מדות של רחמים שאינן חוזרות ריקם, Hashem made a *bris* with the י"ג מדות that they will always be effective. They will always arouse Hashem's compassion.

Rabbeinu B'Chayei (*Shemos* 34:6) writes, "Whoever knows the translation of the thirteen attributes, and says them with *kavanah*, his *tefillah* will be answered – unless he has *aveiros* that prevent it. Now that we

are in *galus*, we don't have a *kohen gadol* to atone for our sins. We don't have a *mizbeach* to bring the *korbanos*. All we have are our *tefillos* and the thirteen attributes of mercy."

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

The Rebbe of Gustanin zt'l said it is a mitzvah to review the *tosfos* (*Rosh Hashanah* 17, in the *hagahah*), which teaches the meaning of the thirteen attributes of *rachamim*. *Tosfos* writes, "הנחן means Hashem has mercy on those who are going through hard times. [Hashem says], 'I am compassionate and can't see them suffer. הנחן also means מתנת חנם, an undeserved gift.' Hashem says, 'I can't bear to see My children in pain,' therefore, Hashem forgives us, even when we don't deserve it.

Two tefillos are said before saying the י"ג מדות. The first time in the *selichos* that we are about to say the י"ג מדות, we begin with the *tefillah* מי א-ל כמוך. Afterwards, each time, the *tefillah* is א-ל מלך יושב על כסא רחמים.

This is because we can't say א-ל מלך יושב על כסא רחמים at the beginning of *Selichos*. The prayer א-ל מלך יושב על כסא רחמים means Hashem is sitting on His throne of compassion, but that only occurs after we said the י"ג מדות at least once. Therefore, we begin with another prayer, מי א-ל כמוך, we say the י"ג מדות of compassion, and then we can say the *tefillah* א-ל מלך יושב על כסא רחמים.

9. There are times when a poor person collects *tzedakah* in a *beis medresh*, and a wealthy person says, "I'm sorry, I don't have money with me." But when the poor person comes to a wealthy person's home, he can't say, "I don't have my money with me." You are at his home. He has money. He has checks. He can give you money if he wanted to.

This is hinted at in the words, דלתוך דפקנו, we came to Your door, נא אל תשיבנו ריקם מלפניך, please don't make us leave empty-handed. We are at Your door. You have the ability to fulfill our heart's desires; please answer our tefillos.