

Torah Wellsprings

*Collected thoughts
from
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Re'eh



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Table of Contents

Torah Wellsprings - Re'eh

Tzedakah.....	4
Tzedakah Brings Wealth and Opens the Gates of Bracha	6
Encouraging Those in Need.....	8
The Tzedakah of Kind Words	9
Remembering Hashem Even When Everything is Good.....	10
Serve Hashem – Not Yourself.....	11
Teshuvah in Elul	15

Torah Wellsprings - Re'eh

Tzedakah

This week's parashah discusses the mitzvos of giving tzedakah and of giving interest-free loans to the poor.

It states (15:7-10) **כִּי יִהְיֶה בְּךָ אֶבְיֹן מֵאַחַד אֶחָיֶךָ בְּאַחַד שְׁעָרֶיךָ בְּאַרְצְךָ אֲשֶׁר ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לְךָ לֹא תִאֲמָץ אֶת לִבְּךָ וְלֹא תִקְפֹּץ אֶת יָדְךָ מֵאֶחָיֶיךָ הָאֶבְיֹן, כִּי פִתְחוּ תִפְתָּח אֶת יָדְךָ לוֹ וְהַעֲבַט תַּעֲבִיטֵנּוּ דֵּי מַחֲסָרוֹ אֲשֶׁר יִחְסֹר לּוֹ, הַשְׁמָר לְךָ פֶּן יִהְיֶה דָבָר עִם לִבְּךָ בְּלִיעַל... וְרָעָה עֵינְךָ בְּאַחָיֶיךָ הָאֶבְיֹן וְלֹא תִתֵּן לוֹ וְקָרָא עָלֶיךָ** "אֵל ה' וְהָיָה בְּךָ חֲסָא, נָתַן תִּתֵּן לוֹ וְלֹא יָרַע לִבְּךָ בְּתַתֵּן לוֹ "If there shall be a destitute person among you, and of your brethren in any of your cities in your land that Hashem your G-d gives you, you shall not harden your heart or close your hand against your destitute brother. You shall open your hand to him; you shall lend him his requirement, whatever is lacking to him. Beware, lest there be a lawless thought in your heart.... and you will look malevolently upon your destitute brother and refuse to give him – then he may appeal against you to Hashem, and it will be a sin upon you. You shall surely give him, and let your heart not feel bad when you give him..."

Notice that if a person doesn't want to help the poor, the Torah calls this **בְּלִיעַל**, "lawless" as it states (ibid.) **הַשְׁמָר לְךָ פֶּן יִהְיֶה דָבָר עִם לִבְּךָ בְּלִיעַל**, "Beware, lest there be a lawless thought in your heart..." This selfish thought is called **בְּלִיעַל**, which the sefarim say stands for **בלי עול**, without the yoke of heaven. If he doesn't help the poor, this means he hasn't accepted the yoke of heaven.

Even worse, the Gemara (Bava Basra 10a) states, **כל המעלים עיניו מן הצדקה כאילו עובר עבודה זרה**, "Whoever turns his eyes away from

giving tzedakah, it is like he worshipped *avodah zarah*." It states further on in this week's parashah (13:14) **וַיֵּצְאוּ אֲנָשִׁים בְּנֵי בְלִיעַל מִקֶּרְבְּךָ... לֵאמֹר גִּלְכָּה וְנַעֲבֹדָה אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים** "Let us go and worship the gods of others..." The Gemara understands from this that **בליעל** means idol worship. Thus, when the Torah tells us that people who don't give tzedakah are also **בְּלִיעַל**, this means the cruel thought of not giving tzedakah is compared to *avodah zarah*.

But what is the connection? Why is refraining from giving tzedakah compared to *avodah zarah* and to throwing off the yoke of heaven?

The *meforshim* explain that refraining from giving tzedakah comes from a lack in *emunah*. Therefore, it is called **בליעל**, because when one believes that all the money he has is given to him from Hashem, he is willing to perform Hashem's directives. Compare it to a wealthy person who comes to Yerushalayim, finds someone he trusts, and gives him a lot of money. He says, "You can keep 90% of the money, but the final ten percent, I want you to distribute among the poor of Yerushalayim. The person won't mind doing so because he understands that it isn't his money. It was given to him with these conditions, and he will be happy to give a tenth to tzedakah. Similarly, those who believe in Hashem will feel comfortable giving tzedakah. Refraining from tzedakah means he lacks this *emunah*. Therefore, it is compared to *avodah zarah* and to casting off the yoke of heaven (**בלי-עול**). He has cast off himself the yoke of *emunah*.¹

1. The Toras Chaim (Bava Basra 10a) writes, "Giving tzedakah is a form of **קבלת עול מלכות שמים**, to accept the yoke of heaven. So too with the mitzvos of **ביכורים תרומות ומעשרות שמיטות ויובלות** – all of which require a person to give away a portion of his possessions. Their underlying purpose is to remind us that the earth and everything within it belong solely to Hashem. Once a person knows this, he understands that all he "owns" is not truly his, and he naturally accepts the yoke of Heaven.

Nesivos Shalom zt'l writes that when the Torah discusses tzedakah, it states specifically (15:10) *וְלֹא יֵרָע לְבָבְךָ בְּתִתֶּנּוּ לוֹ*, "let your heart not feel bad when you give him..." This expression is not found regarding any other mitzvah. This is because the purpose of the mitzvah of tzedakah is to train us to believe *לֹא הָאָרֶץ*, the world, with everything in it belongs to Hashem, and nothing belongs to the person. As it states in Avos (3:7) *תֵּן לוֹ מִשְׁלוֹ, שְׂאֵתָהּ*, "Give Him from His, because you, and everything you own is His." And it states (Divrei HaYamim 1, 29:14) *כִּי מִמֶּנֶּךָ הָכֵל וּמִיָּדְךָ נָתַנוּ לָךְ*, "For everything is from You, and from Your hand have we given to You." It is Hashem's money, and He tells us how to spend it just like the wealthy person who gave money to distribute to the poor. Obviously there will be no negative feelings involved.²

Reb Elchanan Wasserman zt'l hy'd (Kobetz Shiurim 51) explains the connection between

not giving tzedakah and avodah zarah in the following way: Avodah zarah is when one believes that an idol, formed from clay or gold, can help him or harm him, in some way. Those who don't give tzedakah share a similarity, R'l. They think the money that is lying in their pocket can help them. Therefore, it is compared to avodah zarah. The truth is that no one can help, but Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

Reb Elchanan adds that when one doesn't give tzedakah, this means he lacks emunah in Hashem. If he believed in Hashem, he would recognize the great benefits that he could earn from giving tzedakah, and he would be happy to perform this great mitzvah.

Reb Elchanan quotes the following Gemara (Bava Basra 10a): "Just as a person's parnassah is determined on Rosh Hashanah,

However, one who refuses to give tzedakah, thinking that he earned his wealth by the strength of his hand, has thrown off the yoke of Heaven. Therefore, it states *פֶּן יִהְיֶה דָּבָר עִם לְבָבְךָ בְּלִיעֵל*, 'Beware, lest there be a lawless thought in your heart...' This can be read as *בְּלִי עוֹל*, 'without the yoke of heaven'. This is why it is compared to avodah zarah."

This lesson is also taught by Reb Yaakov of Lisa (renowned for his sefarim Nesivos HaMishpat and Chavas Daas). He writes in his sefer Nachlas Yaakov, "If a person would believe that everything is from Hakadosh Baruch Hu, he would certainly give tzedakah. He obviously thinks that he earned the money with his own strength, and therefore, it is compared to avodah zarah."

2. The Rambam writes (Hilchos Matnos Aniyim 10:4) "Whoever gives tzedakah to the poor but does so with a sour face – turned towards the ground – even if he gave a thousand gold coins, he lost the merit of this mitzvah. *אֵלֶּא נֹתֵן לוֹ בְּסָבָר פָּנִים יְפוֹת וּבְשִׂמְחָה*. Rather, he should give with a joyous countenance and with happiness. He should also join the poor in their cries, bearing their tzaros together with them, as it states (Iyov 30:25) *אִם לֹא כִבִּיתִי לְקִשָּׁה יוֹם עֲגָמָה נִפְשִׁי לְאֶבְיוֹן*, 'Did I not weep for the unfortunate, did I not grieve for the destitute?' He should share comforting words with him, as it states (Iyov 29:13) *וְלֵב אֶלְמֶנָה אֲרִנֵּן*, 'I gladdened the heart of the widow.'" We learn from this Rambam that a central part of tzedakah is to give the money with a happy countenance and with joy in one's heart. As we explained above, this is also written in the Torah when it states *וְלֹא יֵרָע לְבָבְךָ בְּתִתֶּנּוּ לוֹ*, "let your heart not feel bad when you give him..." We now understand that there are two reasons one should give tzedakah with joy: (1) It strengthens one's belief that his money comes from Hashem. So, he has no reason to be pained by giving away money that is not his own! (2) The Rambam teaches that it is important to give tzedakah with joy, so as not to embarrass the poor person or make him feel like a burden. He should give the money with joy and add on comforting words.

The Maor v'Shemesh (Pinchas ב"ר נד) explains that we don't say a brachah for giving tzedakah because we don't perform the mitzvah properly, with joy. He writes, "A rule of tzedakah is that one must give it with much joy. As it states *וְלֹא יֵרָע לְבָבְךָ בְּתִתֶּנּוּ לוֹ*, 'let your heart not feel bad when you give him...' Behold, I heard from the holy rav... Reb Menachem Mendel zt'l [of Riminov] that he saw in a סֵפֶר קְדִמּוֹן, old sefer, that the reason we don't say a brachah on tzedakah, as we do for other mitzvos, is because one has to give tzedakah with joy, and most people don't give tzedakah with joy. Therefore, we don't say a brachah."

so, too, how much money he will lose that year is also determined on Rosh Hashanah. If he merits it (*Yeshayah* 58:7) הָלוּא פָּרַם לְרַעֵב לֶחֶמְךָ, 'Surely you should break your bread for the hungry'. If a person doesn't merit it, וְעֲנִיִּים מְרֹדִים תִּבְיֵא...." The Gemara is saying that there is an amount of money destined to be lost each year. But the person can decide where the money that he will lose will go. If he gives tzedakah, that's considered losing it, and it's instead of losing the money in other ways. If a person doesn't merit it, וְעֲנִיִּים מְרֹדִים תִּבְיֵא. Rashi explains that this means Roman tax collectors will come to his home demanding that he give them all his money, as was the way of the Romans. So, a person can decide where he loses the money. Either to Roman tax collectors, or he can give tzedakah.

The Gemara tells that Reb Yochanan Ben Zakai had a dream that his nephews (his sister's sons) would lose seven-hundred Dinars that year. Reb Yochanan spoke to his nephews and convinced them to give a lot of tzedakah. They gave 683 dinars to charity. On Erev Yom Kippur, the Romans came and took seventeen dinars from them. Reb Yochanan Ben Zakai told his nephews, "Don't fear that the Romans will return and take more money from you. They don't have permission to take more than seventeen dinars."

His nephews asked how he knew this, and he told them his dream: that they were destined to lose seven hundred dinars that year. Therefore, he convinced them to give tzedakah. They gave 683 dinars, so that amount was saved. The soldiers couldn't take more than 17 dinars.

They asked, "Why didn't you tell us your dream, and we would have given all 700 to tzedakah?"

Reb Yochanan Ben Zakai replied, "I thought it was better that you don't know. That way, you performed the mitzvah of tzedakah l'shmah."

The minhag Yisrael is to give tzedakah when saying וְיִבְרַךְ דָּוִיד in וְאַתָּה מוֹשִׁיל בְּכָל

Avraham 51:7). The Be'er Moshe (from the Rebbe of Ozredov zt'l on this week's parashah) explains that when one believes וְאַתָּה מוֹשִׁיל בְּכָל, that Hashem rules over everything, even his money, it will be easy for him to give tzedakah. Furthermore, he explains, this is a good time to give tzedakah because giving tzedakah is an act of emunah, and it will strengthen his belief in וְאַתָּה מוֹשִׁיל בְּכָל, "You rule over everything."

It states about Avraham (Bereishis 15:6) וְהָאֱמִן. Noam Eliezer of Skulen zt'l explains that Avraham excelled with his emunah in Hashem, and thereby, he also excelled with his deeds of tzedakah. His belief in Hashem gave him strength to part from his money and to aid others.

Tzedakah Brings Wealth and Opens the Gates of Bracha

It states (15:10) נָתַן תַּתֵּן לוֹ וְלֹא יָרַע לִבְךָ בְּתַתֵּן לוֹ כִּי בְּגִלְלֵי הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה יִבְרַכְךָ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל מַעֲשֶׂיךָ וּבְכָל מַשְׁלַח יָדְךָ, "You shall surely give him, and let your heart not feel bad when you give him for because of this Hashem, your G-d, will bless you in all your work and in all your endeavors."

Sefer HaChaim (from the Maharal's brother, *Parnassah v' Kalkalah* ch.8) explains that דָּמִים has two translations. The Torah's translation of דָּמִים is blood, and Chazal's translation of דָּמִים is money. This is because there are a couple of associations between money and blood. Blood is the foundation of life, and Chazal (Pesachim 119a) say about money מַעֲמִידוֹ עַל רַגְלֵי, it helps the person stand up on his feet. So, both money and blood are associated with life. Furthermore, there are times that a person must do הַקִּזַּת הַדָּם, letting out blood. (As this was a common medical procedure of the past. People would remove excess blood for a refuah.) The blood he takes off heals him and keeps the rest of the blood healthy. So, too, when one has money, one must give part of it away to tzedakah. That will ensure that the rest of his money will remain with him, and not get ruined.

A hint to this is the pasuk (Vayikra 19:9) לֹא תִכְלֶה פֶּתַת שְׂדֶךְ, "You shall not destroy the

corners of your field." The pasuk is discussing the mitzvah of *peah*, to leave the crops in the corners of the field for the poor. The pasuk warns us *שִׁדְךָ ... לֹא תִכְלֶה*, be cautious that your entire field shouldn't become ruined. Because if you don't give this tithe, it can result in all the crops getting ruined.

Another hint is from the Chazal (Kiddushin 47a) *מלווה להוצאה ניתנה*. This is hinting to us that the money we have is a *מלווה*, a loan, given to us *להוצאה* so that we will give it out to the poor.

Sefer HaChaim concludes, "Just as a person must teach his children *emunah*, so must he teach his children the path of *tzedakah*. As it states about Avraham (Bereishis 18:19) *כִּי יִדְעֵתִי לְמַעַן אֲשֶׁר יַצִּיחַ אֶת בְּנָיו וְאֶת בֵּיתוֹ אַחֲרָיו* "For I love him because he commands his sons and his household after him, that they should keep the way of Hashem to perform *tzedakah*..."

This week's parashah discusses the mitzvah of providing loans, as it states (15:8) *וְהָעֵבֶט תַּעֲבִיטוּ דִּי מַחֲסֹר אֲשֶׁר יִחְסֹר לוֹ*, "You shall lend him sufficient for his needs, which he is lacking." The Chinuch (480) writes, "The purpose of this mitzvah is to establish the attribute of generosity in our hearts and to distance us as far as possible from stinginess. Anyone familiar with the Torah's paths and

comprehends its beautiful ways knows with certainty that when he is generous with his money, he will gain more. And whoever refrains will lose. This is because Hashem acts with people according to their deeds. Being stingy with money erects an iron wall that separates the person from Hashem's *brachos*. Generosity is, in itself, a blessing; therefore, those who act with kindness receive blessings."³

The Avodas Yisrael (Ki Sisa, ר"ה וחנתי, Ki Sisa) explains the pasuk in this week's parashah (Devarim 13:18) *וְנָתַן לָךְ רַחֲמִים וְרַחֲמָן*, that Hashem gives us opportunities to perform deeds of *rachmanus* upon others, and we gain from that because this results in *וְרַחֲמָן*, Hashem will have compassion upon us.

The Avodas Yisrael teaches that this is alluded to in the words (Shemos 33:19) *וְחִנֵּיתִי אֶת אִשְׁרֵי אָדָם*; this means Hashem gives people the opportunity to have compassion on others, and then Hashem can have compassion on him.

This is written in the Gemara (Shabbos 151b) *כל המרחם על הבריות מרחמין עליו מן השמים וכל שאינו מרחם על הבריות אין מרחמין עליו מן השמים*, "Whoever has compassion on others, Heaven will have compassion on him. Whoever doesn't have compassion on others, he won't receive compassion from Above."⁴

3. People once came before the Yismach Moshe to complain about a wealthy man who refused to give *tzedakah*. The Yismach Moshe spoke with this wealthy person and said, "If anyway you aren't giving *tzedakah*, why are you stingy?"

The man didn't understand the question. He said, "I don't give *tzedakah* because I am stingy."

The Yismach Moshe explained that Hashem makes wealthy people stingy, so that they will be rewarded for the mitzvah of *tzedakah*. By overcoming their stingy nature, their *tzedakah* becomes very precious before Hashem. Otherwise, *tzedakah* would be like nothing to them, like giving water, since they have so much money, and they wouldn't get full credit for their *tzedakah*. So, the entire reason the wealthy are stingy is to increase the value of their *tzedakah*. But you aren't giving *tzedakah*, so why are you stingy? Why are you a *kamtzan*? There is no purpose for your stinginess."

4. The Gemara (Bava Basra 9a) writes *גדול המעשה יותר מן העושה*, that those who encourage others to give *tzedakah* are greater than the actual givers of *tzedakah*.

Rebbe Boruch of Gorlitz zt'l once saw his brother, Reb Meir Noson zt'l, in a dream. This brother was niftar young, and Rebbe Boruch saw that he was dressed in a very beautiful *beketche*, but he didn't have any shoes on his feet. Reb Boruch told his father, the Divrei Chaim of Tzanz zt'l, about the dream. The Divrei

The Shevet Mussar (431) tells a story of a rasha who committed aveiros his entire life. When he was old and on the verge of dying, the family said to him, "Why didn't you eat anything today?"

He replied, "If you give me a cooked egg, I will eat it."

Before he ate the egg, a poor person came to the door asking for food. The ill man told his family, "Give the egg to him."

This was the first time and only time he gave tzedakah. Three days later, he died. He came to his son in a dream and said, "My dear son, accustom yourself to give tzedakah, and you will merit Olam Haba. I gave tzedakah once in my lifetime, and the mitzvah tipped the scales in my favor, and I merited Olam Haba."

How did this baal aveirah merit Olam HaBa from performing one mitzvah? Shevet Mussar explains that this tzedakah saved the poor man's life. Therefore, the *niftar* was awarded with all the mitzvos that this person did in his lifetime, and for all the mitzvos that the poor man's future children performed. This is an example of the great rewards that can come from giving tzedakah.

Encouraging Those in Need

Many phrases that discuss tzedakah are written in double. For example, (14:22) עֲשֵׂה וְנָתַתָּה, (15:8) פֶּתוּחַ יָדְךָ וְנָתַתָּה, and the reward is also doubled as it states (15:4) כִּי בָרַךְ יְיָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ. The Kli Yakar (14:22) writes, "All phrases about tzedakah are doubled because [there are two ways of giving tzedakah]. One can give tzedakah with one's

hand, and one can give tzedakah with one's mouth, by saying kind words. This is the meaning of פֶּתוּחַ תְּפִתָּה, open your hand and open your heart. For both aspects of tzedakah, he will be rewarded. Therefore, it states כִּי בָרַךְ יְיָ בְּרִיכָה.

The Gemara (Bava Basra 9:) states, הַנּוֹתֵן פְּרוּטָה לְעֵנִי מִתְבָּרֵךְ בְּשֵׁשׁ בְּרוּכוֹת וְהַמְפִּיֵּס בְּדִבְרִים מִתְבָּרֵךְ בִּשְׁלֹשָׁה בְּרוּכוֹת, "One who gives a prutah to the poor receives six brachos, and if he says kind words to appease him, he is blessed with eleven brachos." (Tosfos explains that if he does both, he gives tzedakah and says kind words, he will receive eighteen brachos.)

The Rambam (Matnas Aniym 10) writes, "If a poor person asks you for tzedakah, and you have nothing to give him, appease him with words. It is forbidden to shout at the poor or to raise your voice at him because his heart is broken and humble. It states (Tehillim 51:19) לֵב נִשְׁבֵּר וְנִדְכָּה אֱלֵקִים לֹא תִבּוֹז, 'A broken and crushed heart, Hashem will not despise.' And it states (Yeshayah 57:15) לְהַחְיֹת רוּחַ שְׁפִלִים, 'to revive the spirit of the humble and to revive the heart of the crushed.' Woe to the person who shames the poor. Woe is to him. Rather, be like his father, both with compassion and with words, as it states (Iyov 29:16) אֲבִי אֲנִי לְאֲבִיּוֹנִים, 'I was a father to the needy.'"

It states, (15:11) עַל כֵּן אֲנִי מִצְוֶה לְאָמֹר פֶּתַח תְּפִתָּה אֵת, "Therefore, I command you, saying, you shall surely open your hand to your brother, the poor, and the needy in your land." Reb Yisroel of Ruzhin zt'l says that the pasuk לְאָמֹר פֶּתַח תְּפִתָּה can be read as follows, אֲנִי מִצְוֶה לְאָמֹר, I command you to tell the poor, פֶּתַח תְּפִתָּה the

Chaim moaned and said, "My son Reb Meir Noson, in his short lifetime, learned a lot of Torah and davened many tefillos and therefore has beautiful clothes, but he never got around to go from door to door to collect money to help the poor. Therefore, in Gan Eden, he doesn't have shoes for his feet."

5. The Noam Elimelech (Devarim) writes, "The Poskim say that the Avos didn't keep the mitzvah of tzedakah with perfection because there were no Yidden around them to give tzedakah. [They could only give tzedakah to goyim.] When a person gives tzedakah, he can reach even higher levels and accomplish all salvations [because he can give to Yidden]. Through tzedakah, one can arouse immense compassion Above, without needing to come onto the merit of the Avos..."

day will yet come when you will be the one who is opening up your hand to help the poor."⁶

The Tzedakah of Kind Words

The Chinuch (mitzvah 479) writes, "Now, my son, don't think tzedakah is only to give to the poor, to people who don't have bread or clothing. The Torah wants us to be kind and to help people in any way we can. Whoever helps his friend with money, or in any other way, such as with kind words, it is considered tzedakah, and his reward is great."

The Chinuch reveals a wonderful *chidush*: Tzedakah isn't solely with money, and it isn't only for the poor. You can give tzedakah by sharing kind words, compliments, and

good counsel. Even a smile can be counted as tzedakah. Tzedakah means to help your fellow man in any way you can.⁷

We have a hint to this lesson from the pasuk that discusses tzedakah. It states (15:10) *נָתַן תְּתֵן לוֹ ... כִּי בְגִלְלֵי הַדִּבָּר הַזֶּה יְבָרְכֶךָ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל מַעֲשֶׂיךָ* וְכָל מִשְׁלַח יָדְךָ, "You shall surely give him... for because of this Hashem, your G-d, will bless you in all your work and in all your endeavors." It states *כִּי בְגִלְלֵי הַדִּבָּר הַזֶּה*, and *הַדִּבָּר* can be translated as *דיבור*, speech. The pasuk can be read as follows:

נָתַן תְּתֵן לוֹ ... כִּי בְגִלְלֵי הַדִּבָּר הַזֶּה, *יְבָרְכֶךָ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל מַעֲשֶׂיךָ* ובכל משלח ידך, Hashem your G-d will bless you in all your work and all your endeavors." The brachos that come from giving tzedakah aren't only when we

6. The Matteh Efraim *zt'l* was very wealthy and owned a bank. Once, a poor person came to the bank and asked for a large loan. The Matteh Efraim handed him a form to fill out and advised him that he would have to find two co-signers, *areivim*, to guarantee the loan

The poor person asked many people to guarantee the loan, but he couldn't find even one guarantor. Everyone was afraid he wouldn't be able to repay the loan, and they would be obligated to cover the debt. So the poor man returned to the bank and wrote on the line designated for the *areivim*, *לִי הַכֶּסֶף וְלִי הַזָּהָב נְאוּם ה'*, *נִבְרָא*, "I have silver and I have gold, says Hashem..." implying that Hashem would guarantee the loan.

The Matteh Efraim had *rachmanus* on him and lent him the money.

Half a year later, the Matteh Efraim wasn't feeling well, so he asked his wife to run the bank that day. That night, the Matteh Efraim and his Rebbetzin were discussing what happened in the bank that day, and she told him that she lent a large sum of money to a *poritz*. The Matteh Efraim asked, "How did you have money to lend? There was no cash available in the bank!"

She replied, "Someone came in the morning and repaid a debt."

He checked his records and remembered that the poor man's debt was due that day. The Matteh Efraim asked his wife, "Did the poor man come in himself, or did someone come in to pay the debt on his behalf?"

She answered that someone had come and paid the debt on his behalf.

The Matteh Efraim understood that Hashem sent Eliyahu HaNavi to repay the loan. Hashem was the *areiv*, so Hashem sent Eliyahu HaNavi to pay it back. The Matteh Efraim wondered, "Why did I not merit to see Eliyahu HaNavi?"

He understood that it was because he initially required the poor man to provide *areivim*. "I should have lent him the money immediately without obligating him to find *areivim*. I knew how hard it would be for him to find *areivim*". Since he caused him distress, he didn't merit seeing Eliyahu.

7. Shulchan Aruch (Yorah Deiah 253:4) rules that when a wealthy man is traveling and doesn't have money, he has the halachah of a poor person and may receive support from tzedakah. So, we see that a wealthy person can be considered poor when he needs something and doesn't have a way to attain it. We can take this idea further to other needs, such as a kind word. If someone wealthy lacks it, and we give it to him, it is a form of tzedakah.

give money. It is also when we share kind, helpful, friendly words with our fellow man. Many people lack these encouraging words, and when we give it to them, it is like giving them tzedakah.

and give chizuk to broken-hearted people. He calls it "tzedakah that doesn't cost money."⁸

Remembering Hashem Even When Everything is Good

We tend to remember Hashem when we go through hard times. We run to tzaddikim for brachos, and daven long tefillos, etc. When good times come, we suddenly forget Hashem.

There is a story told of a man who wanted attention, so he stood on the rooftop of a

Shevet Mussar says he once spoke to a broken-hearted person for a long time to give him hope and chizuk. A few days later, the man told him that if it weren't for that conversation, he would have committed suicide. The conversation saved him. Therefore, the Shevet Mussar encourages everyone to be generous with their words

8. Reb Gad'l Eisner said, "I studied in depth the sugyah of 'man,' and I discovered that one kind word can turn a person around, and everything can be fixed."

One form of this tzedakah is to make a person feel needed and wanted. There are many lonely people, and with some kind words, we can help them so much.

The Kuntress HaSefeikos writes that if a person would go up to heaven, he wouldn't enjoy it until he comes down and tells his friends and family about what he saw there because that is what man is all about. Therefore, one of the kindnesses, tzedakah, and chesed that we can do for people is to hear them out and to listen to them when they tell us about their experiences. They might be lonely, with no one to speak to, which is a very painful existence. When we listen to them, it is a great chesed.

It is very hurtful when people speak lashon hara about you. No one wants to be the talk of town. But there is something even more painful than that. And that is when *no one* speaks to you or about you, and you feel ignored and forlorn. This is a very painful experience. People prefer to be talked about, even negatively, rather than be ignored as if they don't exist.

Chazal say מצורע חסוי, a metzora is considered dead. This is because the metzora is banished from the camp and dwells alone. (Vayikra 13:46) בדר ישב מוחזן למחנה מושבו, "He shall dwell isolated. His dwelling shall be outside the camp." He lives alone, distant from people, and that loneliness is very painful.

There are many lonely people, and with a smile and a kind word, you can make their day... and sometimes, even change their lives.

In Parashas Eikev (10:19), the Torah commands us, "And you shall love the ger," directing us to show love to geirim, converts who have come to shelter beneath the wings of the Shechinah. The Sefer HaChinuch (mitzvah 431) reveals a profound expansion of this mitzvah: its charge is not limited to converts alone, but extends to any person who finds himself in a state of "gerus" – someone who feels like a stranger, unsettled, or new in his surroundings, such as a newcomer to a neighborhood or community. We are obligated to extend warmth, support, and friendship to such an individual.

The Chinuch writes further: "We can derive from this precious mitzvah to have compassion on a person in a city that is not his homeland, whose family does not live there." The Torah itself hints at the underlying reason by adding, גֵּרִים הֵייתֶם בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם – "for you were strangers in the land of Egypt." The Torah reminds us that we once tasted the pain and loneliness of being alone, among strangers, in a foreign land. When we recall our own experience of that distress, our hearts will naturally open with compassion toward anyone who now stands in that same place.

Elul is the month that young bachurim enter yeshiva. It is a mitzvah for the veteran students to welcome them, to make them feel needed, and at home.

building and began throwing down money. The people below rushed to gather the money, but no one picked up their eyes to see who was throwing it. The next time, he threw stones. Everyone looked up to see who was throwing the stones. This is just a mashal that when there are hardships, people recognize from where it comes, but they forget to recognize from where the good comes. Our goal should be always to recognize Hashem. When good times come, not to forget Hashem.⁹

The Izhbitze zt'l (Mei HaShiloach) explains the pasuk at the beginning of the parashah, רְאֵה אֲנִי נָתַן לְפָנֶיךָ הַיּוֹם בְּרָכָה וּקְלָלָה. The pasuk is urging us רְאֵה אֲנִי see Hashem and recognize Him both when it is בְּרָכָה וּקְלָלָה, blessings or curses. Either way, remember Hashem.

It states (Tehillim 24:1) לַה' הָאָרֶץ וּמְלוּכָהּ, which means the entire world, with everything in it, belongs to Hashem. Yet it states (Tehillim 115:16) וְהָאָרֶץ נָתַן לְבְנֵי אָדָם, which means that Hashem gave the earth to people. So, which one is it? Does the world belong to Hashem or to man?

The Gemara (Brachos 35a) asks this question, and answers לא קשיא כאן קודם ברכה כאן לאחר ברכה, "This isn't a question. One pasuk is discussing before one makes a brachah and one pasuk is discussing after one makes a brachah." Before a person makes a brachah, the world, with everything in it, belongs to Hashem. After a person makes a brachah, the world belongs to man.

Reb Moshe Soloveitchik zt'l says that we can explain the Gemara as follows: "קודם ברכה, before the brachos come, people are willing to recognize that לַה' הָאָרֶץ וּמְלוּכָהּ, that everything

is from Hashem. The difficulty is to recognize Hashem לאחר ברכה, after the brachos come.

This is also alluded to in (Rus 1:21) אֲנִי מָלְאָה, הִלַּכְתִּי וְרִיקָם הֵשִׁיבֵנִי ה', "I went away full, and Hashem has brought me back empty." Shevet Sofer zt'l (a grandson of the Chasam Sofer zt'l) explains that when it is מָלְאָה, full, and everything is going well for him, he says אֲנִי, it is from me. However, when it is וְרִיקָם הֵשִׁיבֵנִי, empty and there are hardships, then he knows that it is ה', from Hashem.

Serve Hashem – Not Yourself

Maareh Yechezkel (Dezh, Hagadah Shel Pesach) zt'l explains that a person must serve Hashem, and not himself. He explains as follows: Some people have a good custom, for example to fast every Monday and Thursday or to study eighteen chapters of Mishnayos daily, and they never miss a day. But then the opportunity to perform a great mitzvah arises, like that of *bikur cholim* or *hachnosas orchim* and the like. If he performs the mitzvah, he knows that he won't have time or the ability to perform his standard good custom. He thinks to himself, "How can I abandon my good custom, which I have performed so long?" If he thinks so, it means he has been walking in darkness, and he hasn't been performing the mitzvos for Hashem's honor. His intention was for his own pride. This is evident, because if his goal was to make a *nachas ruach* for Hashem, he would reconsider the situation and seek what to do now to make a *nachas ruach* for Hashem."

The Maareh Yechezkel draws a mashal from the businessmen of his time. They used to go to the marketplace in Leipzig, but then,

9. A boy was in the hospital awaiting surgery. The doctors handed a bunch of documents to the father, asking him to sign. The documents stated that if the surgery failed, the father would not blame the doctors, and that he released them of any liability. The father said, "Certainly I will sign the documents, but on the condition that the doctor also signs a document, agreeing that if the operation is successful, the doctor won't take credit and say, 'I succeeded. I healed the patient.' He must attest that success is from Hashem."

For it is the way of people that when everything is well and good, they forget Hashem, and when they are faced with a problem, they remember Hashem.

when Vienna opened a market and people were saying that it was a better one, they began going there. The merchants didn't say, "We have a custom to go to Leipzig. We have been traveling to Leipzig for years. We can't change our custom." Obviously, they didn't say that because their goal was to make money, and if they made more money going to Vienna, why shouldn't they do so?

After going to Vienna a few times, they realized that the merchandise sold in Leipzig was better, and they went back to Leipzig. Once again, they didn't say, "We changed our plans, we began going to Vienna, so we have to remain there." Obviously, they didn't say that. Their goal was to make money, and they did whatever was better for them.

So, why should it be different when it comes to serving Hashem? Even if a person has a good custom, if his goal is to make a nachas ruach for Hashem, he is prepared to reconsider. If he understands that Hashem will have a greater nachas ruach if this time he doesn't keep his custom, and instead he performs another mitzvah, he will do so.

Maareh Yechezkel writes that he heard in the name of the Chozeh of Lublin zt'l, that this is alluded to in the pasuk (12:4) **לֹא תַעֲשֶׂון בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים**, which means that a person shouldn't say, "This is the way I do things, and I can't ever change it." **לֹא תַעֲשֶׂון בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים**, for Hashem, don't make בְּנֵי, only in one way. Sometimes, circumstances require changes. He concludes, "When at times a person changes his ways, this proves that his intention is for Hakadosh Baruch Hu."¹⁰

10. Consider the following example—a person who is staying with his elderly mother in the hospital, to care for her needs. The hospital has a beis kneses, and one morning, the mother decides she wants to daven in the beis kneses. Her son is happy, because now he can daven there as well. But as soon as they arrive, the mother asks her son to return to her hospital room to bring her shoes. The son goes to the hospital room to get the shoes, and as he walks there, he is disappointed that he will miss davening with the tzibur. But then he reminds himself that he is performing Hakadosh Baruch Hu's will. He is performing the mitzvos of kibud av v'em, bikur cholim, and other mitzvos. He is exempt from davening now because **העוסק במצוה פטור מן המצוה**: when one is involved in a mitzvah, he is exempt from performing other mitzvos. Furthermore, he is performing mitzvos from the Torah, while tefillah is d'rabanan. He realizes that he has no reason to feel remorse that he can't daven now with the tzibur.

Reb Yaakov Meir Shechter Shlita would awaken every night at midnight to serve Hashem. He would recite Tikun Chatzos (the portions called Tikun Rachel and Tikun Leah). He lived in a tiny home and had many children, so often, he had to take care of his family in the middle of the night (so his wife could sleep). So, he would do both avodos at the same time. As he said Tikun Chatzos – Tikun Rachel, Tikun Leah, he fed and took care of his young children. He would say, "There is Tikun Rachel, and there is Tikun Leah. And sometimes, in addition, there is Tikun Feigah, and Tikun Sarah..." (referring to his daughters, whom he took care of).

Reb Nachum Yassar zt'l, one of the tzaddikim of Yerushalayim, would go every day to the Kosel HaMaaravi to daven. When he was there, he would go from minyan to minyan so that he could answer many times Amen Yehei Shmei Rabba and Barchu, etc. When he became ill, he had to remain at home. Someone came to visit him and said, "With Hashem's help, you will become well and return to the Kosel to say Amen Yehei Shmei Rabba, amen and kedushah, etc. Reb Nachum replied, "Don't say this. If Hakadosh Baruch Hu requires me to be at home, the Kosel is here, and amen and kedushah are here." He meant, Hashem wants him to be home now, so his avodah is there, at home. There is no reason to be upset that he can't go to the Kosel. He can now do what Hashem wants of him, at this time.

We can tell a mashal of a king who was kind to all, and everyone loved him immensely. His loyal ministers wanted to show their *hakaras hatov* to the king, so they worked and invested towards creating a precious crown for the king, made with many precious jewels. The head minister wanted to do something extra special, so he said that he would donate the most precious diamond in the world to be placed in the front of the crown.

The head minister sold his house and all his possessions, and sought out the most precious stone, but he couldn't find it. He began searching on islands until he found the diamond he was seeking.

When he returned to the kingdom, he stood before the king and the ministers and announced that he had found the most precious stone to place in the king's crown, and he showed it to them. The king said, "This isn't a precious diamond. It is a regular stone, called *הייק*. It looks like a large diamond, but it is an inexpensive stone."

But there was a way to test it. A diamond will only break when hit with another diamond. No hammer will break a diamond. The king said, "Someone should try to break this diamond with a hammer. If it breaks, we will know that it wasn't a diamond. It was a regular *הייק* stone that appears like a diamond. But if it doesn't break, this will prove that it is a true and wonderful diamond."

The king turned to the minister at his right side, handed him a large hammer, and asked him to hit the gift with a hammer. The minister didn't dare to do so. The same occurred with all the ministers. They didn't dare try to break the stone that the head minister brought with *mesirus nefesh*, after spending all of his money in this pursuit.

The king then turned to the head minister, gave him the large hammer, and asked him to hit the stone. The head minister did so right away. He hit the stone with all his strength, and it didn't break! This proved to them all that it was a very precious diamond, the greatest in the world, and it was placed in the front of the king's crown.

The ministers said to the head minister, "You certainly knew that this is a true diamond, and therefore, you weren't afraid to hit it with the hammer. Isn't that correct?"

"Not at all," the head minister replied. "But I told myself the following: Why did I sell all my property? Why did I go through with all the effort? It was because I wanted to do the king's will. Now it was the king's will that I hit the stone with all my strength, so I did so. My sole goal is to do the king's will, and now that was his will, why shouldn't I perform it?"

The king heard this conversation and doubled the reward of this head minister.

This is a lesson for all. There are times that people's *avodas Hashem* work out in a very good manner. They are learning well, davening well, etc. But then they undergo difficult times, and they can't serve Hashem in the manner they have done in the past. They don't have peace of mind nor time to devote themselves to Torah and *tefillah* anymore. If they were serving themselves, they have reason to be very upset. But if they are serving Hashem, it is obvious that Hashem now wants a different *avodah* from them. With this awareness, they will perform the new *avodah* to the best of their abilities, and they won't complain. Their goal is to do Hashem's will, no matter what it is.

The holy brothers, Rebbe Elimelech of Lizhensk *zt'l* and Rebbe Zusha of Anipoli *zt'l*, were once placed in a prison. Rebbe Zusha saw that his brother Rebbe Elimelech was sad, and he asked him about that. Rebbe Elimelech replied, "There is a bucket used as a toilet in the cell. Now, not only are we in jail, but we also won't be able to daven, and we won't be able to learn Torah!"

Rebbe Zusha replied, "That isn't a reason to be sad. Hashem has given us a rare opportunity to perform the *mitzvah* of not studying Torah and not daven when there is a toilet in the room. We won't be doing nothing in prison. We will constantly perform the *mitzvah* of not transgressing this *aveirah*. We will be performing Hashem's will constantly."

Rebbe Elimelech accepted that argument, and he and Rebbe Zusha became very happy. They sang and danced around the bucket. The prison guard heard the joyous dancing and came to see what was going on. He said, "So this bucket is making you happy?" and he took it away from them. Now, Rebbe Zusha and Rebbe Elimelech could once again serve Hashem through Torah and *tefillah*.

The lesson once again is that our goal is to serve Hashem – and not ourselves – and therefore, in every situation, we will find a way to serve Hashem with joy.

It states (Rus 3:10) הַיִּטְבַּת חֲסִדְךָ הָאֲחֵרֹן מִן הָרִאשׁוֹן, "Your later act of kindness was greater than the first." Avodas Yisrael (Vayeira, Haftarah) explains that this pasuk can be translated as follows: Hashem is praising the Jewish nation, and He says that our later good deeds are greater than our first ones. The first chesed (expression of our loyalty to Hashem) is (Yirmiyahu 2:2) זְכַרְתִּי לְךָ חֶסֶד נְעוּרֶיךָ אֶהְבֵּת פְּלוּלְתֶיךָ לְקֵתֶךָ, "I recall for you the kindness of your youth, the love of your nuptials, your following Me into the desert in an unsown land." In this pasuk, Hashem remembers the righteousness of the Jewish nation who followed Hashem into the unsown desert after receiving the Torah at Har Sinai, and they weren't afraid that they wouldn't have food to eat. This is their first chesed – their first kind and devoted act they did for Hashem. Then it states (Rus 3:10) הַיִּטְבַּת חֲסִדְךָ הָאֲחֵרֹן מִן הָרִאשׁוֹן, "Your later act of kindness was greater than the first." This refers to the good deeds that the Jewish nation does for Hashem in galus. These are greater deeds than the first one.

The Avodas Yisrael explains, "This means Klal Yisrael is now doing a greater service [for Hashem than before, because] they loyally serve Hashem and they don't follow the ways of the goyim who disgrace him. The goyim say אִיֶּה אֱלֹהֶיכֶם, 'Where is your G-d?' and they say that there is no more hope for us. Nevertheless, the Jewish nation relies on Hashem, זֶה ה' קִוִּינוּ לוֹ. Their first chesed wasn't as great, because it certainly isn't a *chidush* that they would be devoted to Hashem after they saw all the miracles that happened to them in Mitzrayim and by the sea, with the עֲנֵי הַכְּבֹד that surrounded them, the *mann*, the well, and the slav. But for us, we don't see any of these signs of Hashem. On the contrary, from all the people of the world, the Jewish nation is seen as the lowest and the most despised. They pray, and they aren't answered, and nevertheless, they trust in Him..."

The same applies when a person falls from his level. He thinks he can't serve Hashem, but it is the opposite. He can serve Hashem now better than before. When it is easy to serve Hashem, it isn't a *chidush* that he serves Him. An even greater level is to serve Hashem even when it is hard to do so.

When a person wants to see himself learning Torah for hours upon hours, and davening with *hislahavus* like the greatest tzaddikim, he might be doing this for himself. When he falls from his level, and he can only do small deeds for Hashem, he feels that it isn't worthwhile. However, when a person is serving Hashem, and not himself, he realizes that he can serve Hashem with small matters. And it is likely that his service at these times is even greater than when he serves Hashem at a high level.

The Chasam Sofer (Drashos vol.1 p.16) writes, "It is likely that Hashem has a greater nachas ruach when we perform His will in galus, among the nations who disgrace us and afflict us. This is a great praise to Hashem. This can be the meaning of the Chazal (Brachos 3a), מָה לוֹ לֹאב שֶׁהִגְלָה אֶת בְּנָיו, which can be translated, 'What did the Father lose from exiling His children?' Hashem didn't lose the nachas ruach that He receives from our avodah. Our avodah is perfect now, just like before. [It could be even greater than before because we serve Hashem despite the hardships.] However, וַאֲיֵי לֹהֵם לְבָנִים שְׁגָלוּ מַעַל, "Woe to the children who were exiled from their father's table." Woe to the Jewish nation who suffer in galus, but as far as our avodas Hashem is concerned, and as far as the nachas ruach that Hashem has from us, it could be the same as before – and even greater than before. In the past we served Hashem when He was revealed to us, and now we serve Hashem even when there aren't any miracles, and He is hidden from us. This creates an even greater nachas ruach for Hashem!¹¹

11. It states in this week's parashah (13:5) וּבֹו תִדְבְּקוּן, "You shall follow Hashem, your G-d..."

Teshuvah in Elul

The Zohar calls Rosh Hashanah היום. This week's parashah begins with (11:26) ראה אנכי נותן לפניכם היום, which can be translated as, "See that I am giving you לפניכם היום, days before Rosh Hashanah so that you can prepare yourselves for the judgment of Rosh Hashanah. This alludes to the month of Elul when we prepare ourselves with teshuvah and tefillah to merit good judgment for the new year.

The Baal HaTurim points out that the final letters of (11:27) את הברכה אשר תשמעו spell תורה, indicating that if you want to do teshuvah, begin by studying Torah.

When doing teshuvah, remember to be happy. The Chasam Sofer zt'l says that when one does teshuvah, it is a grave aveirah for him to be sad.

Take note of the many times the word שמחה is written in this week's parashah! (12:7, 12:12, 12:18, 14:26, 16:11, 16:14, 16:15) because this week's parashah is always read on either Rosh Chodesh Elul or on Shabbos Mevorchim Elul. It is a time for teshuvah, and teshuvah begins with happiness.

There are two paths for teshuvah. There is the immediate path, when one changes his ways promptly. And there is the path of gradual growth. The general path of teshuvah is gradual, but there are times when one has to make a major change, and Elul is such a time.

It can be compared to the two ways to stop a car. One is to press on the brakes, and the other way is to pull the emergency brake. When one presses on the brakes, the tires are still turning, but when one presses the emergency brake, the car stops abruptly. Elul is a time to make an abrupt change and to improve one's ways.¹²

and cleave to Him." Whenever the Torah writes the word אחר it means nearby, and when it states אחרי, it means further away (see Rashi, Bereishis 15:1).

The Chofetz Chaim and the Imrei Emes traveled together by train to the Knesiyah HaGedolah (תרפ"ג). The Chofetz Chaim asked, "Why does the Torah tell us to follow Hashem אחרי, from far behind?"

The Chofetz Chaim answered his question on his own: Even if you are far from Hashem because of your sins, do what you can and follow Hashem. Never say that you are too far away to follow Hashem."

The Imrei Emes added that the end of the pasuk states ובו תדבקון, "cleave to Him," teaches us that if we follow Hashem even when we feel distant, it will elevate us to very high levels and we will be attached to Hashem.

12. Reb Chaim Dovid Doctor (Bernhard) was a renowned baal teshuvah and tzaddik. As he lay on his deathbed, the Tiferes Shlomo came to visit him and heard Reb Chaim Dovid krechtz. He thought that he was distressed over his early years of life when he was distant from Torah. The Tiferes Shlomo told him that he shouldn't worry about those days and that ימים הראשונים יפלו, the early days will fall away and become like nothing.

Reb Chaim Dovid Doctor replied, "Chas v'shalom! I am not mevater on one day." He didn't want to lose his past because he did teshuvah and turned his past faults into merits.

This is as Chazal (Yoma 86:) say, "Teshuvah is great, because intentional sins become merits." The Gemara adds that this occurs when one does teshuvah through love.