

Torah Wellsprings

*Collected thoughts
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Accepting Hashem's Decree

When Reb Hirsh of Riminov's *zt'l* daughter became sick, those close to him came to inform him that the situation is dire, *r'l*. He responded by reciting the *pasuk*, ואתחנן אל ה' בעת ההיא לאמר ה' אלקים...¹ explaining, "My entire life I prayed that בעת ההיא, when there will be a time of בעתה, fear and fright,¹ לאמר ה' אלקים, that I will say, even then, 'Hashem is G-d!' I strive to believe, even then, that everything that happens is from our compassionate Father Who does things that are only to benefit us."

Chazal tell us that when the goyim entered the Beis Hamikdash, they found that the *keruvim* were embracing. The Rishonim note that this seems to contradict the Gemara (*Bava Basra* 99) that says, "When the Yidden weren't serving Hashem, the *keruvim* turned away from one another." How were the *keruvim* facing each other a few days before the Churban, at a time when the Jewish nation was committing the serious *aveiros* of *avodah zarah*, *giluy arayos*, and *shefichus damim*?!²

The Ateres Moshe of Makav (p.313) answers that the Gemara (*ibid.*) says that when the Yidden did Hashem's will (עושין רצונו של מקום) the *keruvim* faced one another. At that moment the Yidden were actually עושין רצונו של מקום, - doing Hashem's will by accepting the decree of *galus*.²

In the *selichos* of Yom Kippur, we recite the story of a Roman ruler who decreed that ten great *chachamim*, *tanaim*, be executed to atone for the ten brothers who sold Yosef.

The *chachamim* said, "Give us three days, and we will check whether this was actually decreed in heaven. If it was, we will accept the decree of the One who is compassionate."

They asked Reb Yishmael Kohen Gadol to go up to heaven to determine whether this decree was indeed from Hashem. Reb Yishmael purified himself and uttered Hashem's name with awe, and he went up to heaven. He asked the *malach* Gavriel whether the Roman's edict was also decreed in heaven.

The *malach* replied, "Accept this on yourself, beloved tzaddikim because I heard from behind the curtain in heaven that this is your fate."

They reached the extremely high *madreigah* of accepting Hashem's decree wholeheartedly.

Similarly, at the time of the Churban, the Jewish nation knew that they sinned, and they accepted the punishment that Hashem decreed on them. By doing so they fulfilled the verse of עושין רצונו של מקום, doing Hashem's will, and in this merit, the *keruvim* faced each other.

The Midrash (*Koheles Rabba* 2:4) writes, "There was a בר נש, a person (a high-ranking

1. One of the translations of בעתה is בעתה, fear.

2. The *Or HaChaim* (*Shemos* 1:1, and *Bereishis* 46:7) discusses the praise of Bnei Yisrael that they accepted Hashem's decree and went down to Mitzrayim willingly (unlike Eisav who escaped to Har Seir, so he wouldn't have to suffer the yoke of *galus* in Mitzrayim.) It states (*Shemos* 1), וימת יוסף... וכל הדור ההוא, that the slave-labor in Mitzrayim didn't take place in their lifetime. The *Or HaChaim* writes, "Perhaps this is their reward for accepting the King's decree willingly. That freed them from the hardships of *galus*. As Chazal say, סמא דיסורי קבולי, the remedy for *yesurim* is accepting them."

officer in Bavel) who invited the *chachamim* to his home to celebrate a *sheva brachos* meal on the fourth day of his son's *chasunah*.

"In the midst of the party, he said to his son, 'Go to the attic and bring down our finest, old wine.' Up in the attic his son was struck by a snake and died.

"The father waited a long time for his son to come down. He said, 'I will go upstairs and check up on my son, to see how he is and why he isn't coming down.'

"The father found his son lying dead among the wine barrels.

"המתין אותו חסיד עד שאכלו ושתו", the chassid didn't say anything about the episode until all the guests finished their meals. When they were ready to *bentch*, he told them, 'Rabosai! You didn't come here to say the *sheva brachos*. You came here to say the blessings for mourners. You didn't come to a chuppah. You came to bring my son to his grave.'³

Initially, the Midrash calls the father *ההוא* "that person." Afterwards, the Midrash refers to him as *חסיד*, which means he was a very righteous person. How did this man's status change so quickly from being a regular person to being a chassid?

Reb Moshe Shmuel Shapiro *zt'l* (*rosh yeshivas* Be'er Yaakov) replies that he deserved the title chassid because he didn't fall apart when the festive party turned into a funeral. Instead, he accepted Hashem's decree and trusted that whatever happened was meant for his best. For that, he deserves to be called chassid.

It states (6:5) *ואהבת את ה' אלקיך בכל לבבך ובכל נפשך ובכל מאודך*, that we should love Hashem with all our heart, soul, and resources. The Nesivos Shalom *zt'l* (*Michtavei Kodesh*, p.149) understands that the *pasuk* discusses three levels of love. First, *בכל לבבך*, we must love Hashem with all our heart. Second, and even more, we must love Hashem *בכל נפשך*, with all our soul. Finally, the highest level of love is to love Hashem *בכל מאודך*, with all our resources. We will explain:

Rashi explains that *בכל נפשך* means that we love Hashem more than we love our life. For example, if goyim force us to worship *avodah zarah*, we prefer death over transgressing Hashem's mitzvah.

But that isn't yet considered the highest expression of love.

An even greater showing of our love for Hashem is through *בכל מאודך*. Rashi explains (in one approach) that *בכל מאודך* means *בכל מדה ומדה*, "שמורד לך בין במדה טובה בין במדת פרעניות [Love Hashem with whatever] life He has prepared for you, whether you perceive it at times to be good or punishment." This means accepting Hashem's decrees, no matter what they are.

But how is that a greater level of love, even greater than sacrificing one's life for Hashem (*בכל נפשך*)?

The Nesivos Shalom explains that it is easier for one to die for Hashem than to live with *emunah* that everything Hashem sends us is for the best. Therefore, *בכל מאודך* is indeed the highest level. We praise Hashem and love Him during good times and during difficult times, which is the greatest test and the highest expression of love.⁴

3. The Midrash concludes that Reb Zakay came and said (*Koheles* 2:2), *לשחוק אמרתי מהולל ולשמחה מה זו עושה*, that one should never be too happy, because the happiness can turn around and result in sadness, *r'l*.

4. Someone told the Beis Yisrael *zt'l* that he lost his inspiration and joy in *avodas Hashem*. He expressed it as, "Everything is dry."

The Beis Yisrael asked him, "Are you prepared to give your life so that you will not transgress the cardinal *aveiros* of *avodah zarah*, *giluy arayos*, or *shefichus damim*?"

Implanting *Emunah* into the Heart

A doctor asked the Divrei Chaim of Sanz *zt'l* what he does for a living. He replied that he builds bridges. The doctor asked him, "Where are you building a bridge?"

The Divrei Chaim explained, "I'm building a bridge between the mind and the heart. I work that my heart should believe what my mind knows."

Reb Leib of Duker *zt'l* (a student of the Magid of Mezritch *zt'l*, quoted by the Yesod HaAvodah of Slonim *zt'l*, letter 25) writes, "Know, my son, that the *emunah* of the intellect is distant from *emunah* of the heart. It is even further away than the distance between heaven and earth."

How does one bridge the gap of the intellect to the heart? This is accomplished by constantly reviewing. As it states in this week's *parashah* (4:39) וידעת היום והשבות אל לבבך כי "You shall know today, and you shall review it in your heart, that Hashem is G-d in heaven above and on the earth below. There is no other."

Perhaps this is the reason we read the *Aseres HaDibros* three times a year (*Yisro*, *Ve'eschanan*, and *Shavuot*). The *Aseres HaDibros* discusses *emunah* (as it states, ואנכי ה' אלקיך), and it was a significant moment when Hashem revealed Himself to the Jewish nation. We repeat this episode three times a year because *emunah* needs review.

The Chidushei Harim (*Likutei HaRim*, *Ve'eschanan* היום וידעת היום) writes, "Chassidim know a lot [about *emunah*], nevertheless, it needs to be, והשבות אל לבבך, that they bring the *emunah* down to their heart. We have to

know, אין עוד, that there is none other than Hashem. Many people think that this is an easy concept to understand because who doesn't know that there is none other but Hashem. But, this isn't a simple realization. One has to review it ten times, a thousand times, until he knows in his heart אין עוד, that there is no other than Hashem."

This is also the reason why we read *kriyas Shema* several times a day. We have to repeat to ourselves, again and again, that ה' אחד.

The *Shema* of *אחד* is written with a large ד. The Baal HaTanya said that a large ד looks like a hammer. "We must hammer into our minds ה' אחד, that Hashem is one."

Also, in *mussaf* of Rosh Hashanah, we say ten *pesukim* of מלכיות, proclaiming that Hashem is king. We repeat this theme ten times because with each *pasuk*, we hammer it deeper into our minds and closer to our hearts that there is a Hashem, and everything is from Him.

The Mishnah (*Idiyos* 5:6) cites from the *tana* Akavya ben Mehalal: מוטב לי להקרא שומה כל ימי, "I prefer to be called a fool my entire life than to be considered a *rasha* for a moment before Hashem."

The Yesod HaAvodah (letter 28) explains this in the name of Reb Moshe Kobrin *zt'l*: "It is better that one should shout all day long that he believes in Hashem, even if he isn't yet on that level of awareness and people look at him as a fool. This is preferable than to be a *rasha* for one moment, and *chas veshalom*, to deny אחת, the *emunah* in Hashem..."⁵

"I am."

"Why is that? It's because the Torah obligates us to love Hashem בכל נפשך, and Rashi explains, אפילו הוא נוטל, 'even if He takes your soul.' So, you should also be careful to fulfill לבבך, to love Hashem even if Hashem takes away your heart. You lost your heart, you lost your inspiration, but you can still remain loyal to Hashem and His mitzvos.

5. Rebbe Moshe Kobrin *zt'l* concluded, "Perfect *emunah* is *ruach hakodesh*."

But we must be patient because *emunah* in the heart isn't acquired in a day. It is a gradual process. Each time you speak about *emunah*, you are drawing closer to internalizing it within.

The following *mashal* helps us understand:

An orthodontist told a child needing braces that it would take about a year before his teeth are straightened out. The child responded, "I prefer that you tighten the braces so that my teeth are fixed right away. That will be easier for me than a long, drawn-out process."

The orthodontist explained to the child, "If we do it too quickly, your teeth will fall out. The only way to straighten teeth is to do it gradually."

The same is true with acquiring *emunah*. Don't expect perfection in a day. It requires a lot of review. With every life experience, repeat to yourself and to others, that it was *bashert*. Review other aspects of *emunah*. If you keep at it, you will know in your heart, *כי ה' הוא האלקים*.

We return to the *mashal*:

After a month of wearing the braces, the child returned for a checkup. The orthodontist was pleased. "You are progressing nicely."

The child protested, "What progress? My teeth are as crooked as before. I don't see any improvement!"

But there was an improvement; only it wasn't very noticeable. After the child wears the braces for a year, it will be noticeable.

Similarly, people try to attain *emunah*, but they often feel that there wasn't any progress. They think they are stuck at the same level as when they began. In truth, they are growing; only these matters are difficult to discern and to measure. If they continue to speak about *emunah*, they will attain *emunah sheleimah*, and recognize the enormous strides they made in *emunah*.

It states in this week's *parashah* (4:25) *אתה הראת לדעת כי ה' הוא האלקים אין עוד מלבדו*. The *Zohar* (vol.2 p.161.) explains:

"אתה הראת", 'You showed us the *emunah*.' When did that happen? When the Yidden left Mitzrayim, they didn't know anything about *emunah*. They worshipped *avodah zarah* in *galus* and forgot the fundamentals of *emunah* that they used to have, which the twelve tribes inherited from their father, Yaakov. Moshe came and taught them about Hashem. They witnessed the miracles at the Yam Suf and Hashem's greatness that was displayed in Mitzrayim. Moshe gave them the Torah and taught them the ways of Hakadosh Baruch Hu. Moshe told them, 'Until now, I had to teach you like someone teaching young children. As it states, *אתה הראת לדעת*, you were taught so that you will know Hashem..."

The *Zohar* concludes, "Those who come to this world should study Torah to know Hashem... Because whoever is in this world and he doesn't try to know Hashem, it would be better if he wasn't created."

In contrast, knowing Hashem is the ultimate perfection. Reb Aharon HaGadol of Karlin *zt'l* explained the words, *אין עוד*, that we don't need to know anything else. The ultimate goal of Torah and mitzvos, and all we need to know is *כי ה' הוא האלקים... אין עוד*.

The 15th of Av

כתיבה וחתימה טובה is *gematriya* חמישה עשר באב. Some tzaddikim began *bentching* (blessing) their chassidim a *כתיבה וחתימה טובה*, a good, new year, on this day. It is the beginning of the days of awe, *teshuvah*, Elul, Rosh Hashanah, and Yom Kippur.

Tzaddikim said that starting this day, one can hear how they are moving and preparing the chairs in heaven for the judgment of Rosh Hashanah.

Shabbos Nachamu

An ancient *sefer* (written by an Italian *gadol*) called *Sefer Minhag Tov*, writes, "It is a good custom not to take a haircut before *erev* Shabbos Nachamu, and when *erev* Shabbos Nachamu arrives, one is obligated to take a haircut, and he should be happy and welcome the Shabbos with joy and with a good heart. He will be consoled with many condolences, and Hashem will console us with the redemption of Yerushalayim."

Similarly, the Mahari'l states that on Shabbos Nachamu ישמחו כל העם ויבטחו בנחמת הגואל, "The entire nation shall be happy and trust in the condolences of the redemption."

The Mishnah (*Taanis* 26:) states, לא היו ימים טובים לישראל כחמשה עשר באב, "The Jewish nation never had such good *yomim tovim* as the fifteenth of Av." The Ritvah writes, ומפני זה נהגו, "Therefore, there's a custom to conduct a festive meal on Shabbos after Tisha b'Av."

בן שועיב, student of the Rashba, writes, מצוה לעשותו כיום טוב, it's a mitzvah to celebrate this Shabbos as though it were a *yom tov*.

The Chasam Sofer (*Masay*) teaches in the name of the Yerushalmi that Av is a month comprised of two months. Av is until Tisha b'Av, and after Tisha b'Av a new month begins, called Menachem.

Several times, in the Chasam Sofer's *teshuvas*, he writes the date "the month Menachem."

It states (*Yeshayah* 66:23), והיה מדי חודש בחדשו. The words חדש בחדשו imply that there is a

month that begins in the middle of the month. The Chasam Sofer says that this is Menachem, which starts in the middle of Av.

Hashem is with Us

This Shabbos is called שבת נחמו, the Shabbos of condolence, because of the *haftarah* that begins, נחמו נחמו עמי, "Be consoled, my nation."

But how can we be consoled? We lost the Beis HaMikdash and were banished into *galus*.

The answer is, נחמו נחמו עמי יאמר אלקיכם, remember that אלקיכם, Hashem is our G-d. We are in *galus*, but Hashem is with us, and that realization is a cause of great joy.⁶

Shir HaShirim (4:8) states אתי מלבנון כלה. Hashem says to the Jewish nation, "You will go with Me to *galus*..."

The following words are אתי מלבנון תבואי. Rashi writes, "And when you return from this exile, I will return with you. And also, in *galus*, I am with you, through all your *tzaros*."

Our condolence is that Hashem is always with us.

It states (*Yeshayah* 51:12) אנכי אני הוא מנחמכם, "I, and only I, am the one who consoles you." The double אנכי is our condolence. Because at the revelation of *matan Torah*, Hashem said אנכי. Also, regarding the darkest moments of *galus* it states אנכי הסתר אסתיר ("I will hide ..."). אנכי represents the peak of revelation and the depths of *galus*. אנכי אני הוא מנחמכם means that

6. There was a child in the amusement park who was afraid to ride the roller coaster. The father said, "I will go with you," and the child wasn't afraid anymore.

Similarly, when we know Hashem is with us in *galus*, we aren't afraid of all the dangers and perils that occur.

A tightrope walker rode a unicycle over a tightrope, while holding a child on his shoulders. People asked the child, "Weren't you afraid?"

The child said, "The tightrope walker is my father. When I'm with my father, I am never afraid."

during good times when Hashem reveals His kindness to us, and even during times of concealment and galus, it is the same אנכי. It is the same Hashem who is with us. And this awareness consoles us.

Hashem is always close to the Jewish nation, as it states (4:7) כי מי גוי גדול אשר לו אלקים קרובים אליו כה אלקינו, "Which great nation has a god close to them like Hashem our G-d." The Midrash (*Devarim Rabba* 2) elaborates:

A ship arrived at an unknown island, and the gentiles on board sent the only Yid on board to the island to buy food and provisions. The Yid asked them, "Why are you sending me? I am a stranger to this island, just like you."

They told him, "You are not alone. Wherever you go, Hashem is with you. As it states, אשר לו אלקים קרובים אליו..."⁷

A fire once broke out in the home of Reb Shmuel Minkes zt'l (a student of the Baal HaTanya zt'l), and Reb Shmuel was seen outside dancing. People feared that he lost his mind due to the financial loss. Why else would he be dancing at this time?

He explained to them, "If I were a non-Jew, my god would be burned in the fire together with my wealth. But I'm a Yid, and my G-d still exists. That's why I'm so happy."⁸

Four Tips for Your Tefillos to be Answered

This *parashah* is called ואתחנן, which means תפילה. It states ואתחנן אל ה' בעת ההיא לאמר, "I prayed to Hashem at that time, saying..." The Or HaChaim HaKadosh writes that Moshe davened in the most ideal way for his tefillos to be answered, and his approach in tefillah is a lesson for all of us on how we should daven, so that our tefillos will be answered. The *pasuk* alludes to four steps of tefillah:

1) It isn't proper to ask from Hashem like you deserve that Hashem should answer you or that He must grant you your requests. Instead, you should pray with humility, understanding that you don't deserve anything. This is alluded to from the word ואתחנן, which means pleading, as a poor person who humbly pleads for aid. As it states (*Mishlei* 18) תחנונים ידבר רש, "The poor plead."⁹

7. The Beis Avraham would often repeat this Midrash. It shows that even non-Jews know that Hashem is with the Jewish nation. We are never alone.

8. Once, Reb Zalman Brizel zt'l couldn't find a parcel filled with money. His entire household was panicking and looking for the money, but Reb Zalman was dancing. The family asked him, "Why are you so happy? Did you find the money?"

"No," he replied. "But I decided, I lost the money, should I also lose my mind from despair?"

9. Before *Shemonah Esrei* in the morning, we say עוזר דלים, "Hashem helps the poor." The Arizal says that one should imagine that he is poor and helpless, and with that mindset, he turns to Hashem in prayer.

The Pela Yoetz (*Kniyah*) writes that tzaddikim were once davening with lots of *kavanah*, and it was revealed to them from heaven that although their tefillos were wonderful, they deserved punishment since they didn't have humility. However, there was one person in the group who davened with humility, and in his merit, everyone was saved.

Once, a woman asked the Chofetz Chaim zt'l to daven for her son who was very ill. The Chofetz Chaim came to the beis medresh and said, "Ribono Shel Olam, over the years, You did so much kindness with me. You helped me write the *sefarim Mishnah Berurah*, *Shemiras HaLashon*, and other *sefarim*. It is not because I deserved those favors that You performed them for me. It was because of Your unlimited kindness. Please do for me one more favor and answer my tefillos and heal this ill person."

Take note that the Chofetz Chaim didn't say, "In the merit that I wrote all these *sefarim*, answer my tefillos.

2) The next condition for tefillah is hinted in the words, אל ה'. The Or HaChaim writes, שבקש ממקור הרחמים, to plead from the source of compassion.¹⁰

3) בעת ההיא teaches us to daven when there is an *eis ratzon*, auspicious times for tefillah. Because there are times that are more *mesugal* for tefillah, and we should strive to daven at those times.¹¹

4) לאמר means that when one davens, one should express himself clearly. He shouldn't speak in vague, ambiguous terms, leaving room for doubt in the meaning of his words.¹²

We shouldn't say, "Hashem knows what I mean." Instead, speak clearly and say exactly what you want to say.¹³

The Or HaChaim (ibid.) quotes the following Midrash (*Esther Rabba* 7:24):

He prayed with humility, and with the recognition that everything he has is because of Hashem's kindness.

A student of the Chazon Ish zt'l once said to his Rebbe, "tzu kumt mir a mazal tov – I deserve a mazal tov. I just had a child."

The Chazon Ish rebuked him, because no one can say he deserves Hashem's kindness.

A childless woman was complaining to Reb Shlomo Zalman Aurbach zt'l about her life. Reb Shlomo Zalman explained to her that she can't have complaints against Hashem, because Hashem doesn't owe her anything. However, if she will do for Hashem more than she is required to do, Hashem will do for her more than she deserves, and she will merit children.

She became a volunteer in Shaarei Tzedek hospital in Yerushalayim to help the ill. This was a kind deed that was not required of her.

A year later, she had a daughter.

10. Tzaddikim say: When one davens, one must believe that (1) Hashem can help. (2) He wants to help. (3) And my tefillos can make a difference.

11. The Gemara says, "When is it an *eis ratzon*? It is when the *tzibur* davens."

Reb Pinchas Koritzer zt'l says that for an hour, each day, the אור הגנוי (concealed light) shines, and whoever prays at that time, his tefillos will be answered. Since we don't know when the *or haganuz* shines, it is good to pray at several times during the day. Maybe he will pray at the time when the concealed light shines, and it is an *eis ratzon* for his tefillos to be answered.

12. There was a couple in Yerushalayim that had only one daughter. They wanted more children, and they would daven, "Fill our house with children." With those somewhat ambiguous words, they prayed for more children.

Their one and only daughter merited to have many children. Unfortunately, she was divorced, and she and her children moved into her parents' home.

The parents' tefillos were answered. Their home was now "filled with children," but that wasn't what they meant. It is imperative to be specific and express oneself properly while davening.

13. The Or HaChaim explains that when Moshe Rabbeinu prayed to go to Eretz Yisrael, he used these four steps of prayer: (1) He prayed humbly, pleadingly. As Rashi writes, ואתחנן – חנון is an expression of requesting a מתנת חנם, an undeserved gift. Tzaddikim are able to request [that Hashem answer their tefillos] due to their good deeds, but they don't do so. They only ask for a מתנת חנם, a gift that they don't deserve." (2) Moshe prayed אל ה', to Hashem, the מקור הרחמים, the root of compassion. (3) He davened at an *eis ratzon*. As the Or HaChaim writes, "And who knows when it is an *eis ratzon* like Moshe did?! And perhaps this was at the time that Hashem told Moshe ועתה רש ארץ סיחון ועוג, that he should conquer the lands of Sichon and Og. (4) Moshe expressed himself fully in his tefillos.

A traveler was exhausted after walking a long distance. He raised his eyes to heaven and said, "Ribono Shel Olam! Send me a donkey!" This was an ambiguous prayer because he didn't express the reason that he wanted a donkey.

He walked on and met a high-ranking official. The official was standing next to a donkey and its new offspring. The official couldn't travel on with the newborn, so he commanded the Yid to carry the baby donkey to the official's home.

As the Yid walked, with the donkey on his shoulders, he said, "This happened to me because I davened for a donkey, but I didn't express myself clearly. I didn't say that I want a donkey *to ride on*. My prayers were answered; I received a donkey. But instead of riding on it, I have to carry it."

Reb Moshe Midner *zt'l* asked: Why is expressing oneself coherently and clearly in tefillah so important? Hashem knows what we need, even if we don't express ourselves. Furthermore, why was the person mentioned in the Midrash punished that he had to carry the baby donkey? Why did he deserve punishment for not expressing himself appropriately in his tefillos?

Reb Moshe Midner replied that the root of the problem is that he didn't realize that when one davens, he is like a son asking something from his father. If this person realized that he is Hashem's son, he would express himself clearly. For example, he would say, "Father, I've been walking for so long, and I am tired. Please give me a donkey so that I can ride on it." He wouldn't mince words; he would express himself well. But he didn't express himself well because he didn't feel close to Hashem.

Reb Moshe Midner taught this lesson to his friend, Reb Hershel Mikrinki *hy'd*, seven weeks before Reb Moshe's *petirah*. He

concluded, "Whenever you need salvation, I recommend that you say two chapters of *Tehillim* and then express your needs before Hashem yisbarach in your own words. Express yourself well. Don't hint, don't be ambiguous, don't be stingy with your words. And then Hashem will answer your tefillos. And I request that when you do this, mention my name: Moshe ben Rachel, so I too will benefit from this" (*Sod Siach Chassidim*).

It states in this week's *parashah* (4:7), כִּי מִי גוֹי גָדוֹל אֲשֶׁר לֹא אֱלֹהִים קְרוּבִים אֵלָיו כֹּה אֱלֹהֵינוּ בְּכָל קְרָאנוּ אֵלָיו, "Which great nation has a god close to them as Hashem our G-d is close to us whenever we call out to Him."

The Yerushalmi explains that to the human eye, it appears that *avodah zarah* is close to its worshippers because it is together with the idol worshippers in their homes. And it also seems to us that Hashem is very far away because we don't see Him. But the opposite is true. As the *Yerushalmi* writes:

"No one is closer [than Hashem and the Jewish nation]. Hashem seems to be far away because the distance from the earth to heaven is [very far]... Yet, when a Yid comes to the beis hakneses and stands behind the *amud* and davens silently, Hakadosh Baruch Hu listens to his *tefillos*. Is there anything closer? Hashem listens to him as though he is whispering into Hashem's ear."

When we have this *emunah*, we will express ourselves well, and expressing oneself well is a *segulah* for the tefillos to be answered.

The Midrash (*Devarim Rabba* 2:11) writes, "Hakadosh Baruch Hu told Moshe, 'I swear that whenever the Jewish nation calls to Me, I will answer them. As it states, כֹּה אֱלֹהֵינוּ בְּכָל קְרָאנוּ עֵלָיו, whenever we call to Hashem, Hashem is near, to answer our tefillos.'"

More Segulos for Tefillos to be Answered

Another counsel for tefillos to be answered is to daven with *kavanah*. As it states, ואתחנן אל ה' בעת ההיא לאמר and the *roshei teivos* of בעת ההיא לאמר spell ה"ב, the heart, indicating that Moshe davened with all his heart and soul (Chida, Nachal Kedumim, Ve'eschanan 1).¹⁴

The Baal HaTurim writes that the *gematriya* of ואתחנן is שירה. He explains that Moshe said שירה, songs of praises to Hashem, so Hashem would listen to his tefillos.

We do the same as we begin our tefillos with *pesukei d'zimra* and praises, and that helps our tefillos to be answered.

The Imrei Shaul of Modzitz *zt'l* explains that praising Hashem implies that he is confident that Hashem will help him. So, he sings and praises Hashem even before salvation comes. That trust is *mesugal* for his tefillos to be answered. As it states (*Tehillim* 106:44), וירא, Hashem checks to see whether בצר להם, when people are going through hard times, בשמעו את רנתם, they are already praising Hashem and thanking Him for the salvation that they know will come.¹⁵

14. Even when we don't have *kavanah*, we should continue davening. A hint to this concept is in the *piyut* (Hoshana Raba), שופכים לך שיה בלא לב ולב, "They pour out their words, without a heart and with a heart." We can explain that they don't have a heart and concentration when they daven, but they *want* to daven with *kavanah*. Their desire to daven properly should be enough הושיע נא, that Hashem should answer their tefillos.

15. A man living in one of the southern cities of Eretz Yisrael was having a hard time marrying off his children. His oldest child was twenty-eight, and he had another four children above twenty.

He also had financial problems, because he had taken out a mortgage on his house to help his *chavrusah* marry off his children. His *chavrusah* was supposed to pay the monthly fees, but he wasn't able to, and the bank put up his house for foreclosure.

One evening, this man was in Yerushalayim for a *chasunah*, and he met with a relative. He told his relative about his hardships marrying off his children and his financial problems.

The relative replied, "There's a great tzaddik in Yerushalayim – the Beis Yisrael of Gur. Tell him your problems. He will certainly help you."

This man wasn't a chassid, but his relative convinced him to go. He poured his bitter heart out before the Rebbe. The Beis Yisrael asked him, "Do you ever praise Hashem? Praise should be 60% and requests should be 40%."

This man told his relative the counsel he received. The relative said, "You have a lot to thank Hashem for. You have health, a wife, and children. You always have food on your table... Focus on the good. Get into the practice of praising Hashem as the Rebbe suggested: 60% praises and 40% prayers."

Two months later, his oldest daughter was engaged. Within a half year, three of his children were married and two more were engaged.

Around that time, his *chavrusah's* mother was *niftarah*, leaving a large inheritance. The *chavrusah* immediately paid up the debt, and this man was able to redeem his house from the bank.

This man realized that the Rebbe's counsel of 60% praises and 40% requests can be found in *Hallel*. We say there יהודו לה' כי טוב six times, while אנא ה' is said four times. This is exactly as the Beis Yisrael advised: 60% praises and 40% requests. This ratio brings *yeshuos*.

How does one focus on the good? Let's see how Reb Zalman Brizel *zt'l* (one of the tzaddikim of Yerushalayim) did it.

One day, he said to son, Reb Nota, "Don't ask! I had such a hard day today!"

The Midrash (*Shocheh Tov*, *Tehillim* 91) says, "Why do Yidden daven, and their tefillos aren't answered? שאינן יודעין להתכוין בשם, it is because they don't know Hashem's name."

The Bnei Yissaschar (*Rosh Chodesh*, 1:11) asks, "This Midrash is difficult to understand because which Yid doesn't know Hashem's name?"

We answer with a *mashal*:

A man walking through the forest was attacked by thieves. He knew that there were troopers around, guarding the area, so he shouted, "Police! Police!" and the police arrived and saved him.

Why did he call for the police and not for anyone else? Because he knew that the police were around and that they can save him.

When we daven, we must know that Hashem is present, and that Hashem can save us. If we have that awareness, we will shout out to Hashem.

There are, unfortunately, people who daven to Hashem but don't rely on Him to help them. Instead, they rely on their *hishtadlus*. They daven, too, but they don't realize that Hashem source of their salvation.

We can now explain the Midrash. The Midrash says that our tefillos aren't answered

because we don't know Hashem's name. This means that we don't realize that Hashem is our only solution and that we should turn to Him, alone, with our tefillos.

The following happened to Rebbe Aharon Roth (Rebbe of Toldos Aharon) *zt'l*, while he lived in Hungary. Years later, he repeated the episode to his grandson, Reb Asher Anshil Katz *shlita*:

"I was following doctors' orders, bathing in the sea for my *refuah*. One day, there was a strong current in the water, and before I knew it, I was dragged far away from shore. What do you think I did? Do you think I said *viduy* or that I said *Kriyas Shema*? I didn't. I shouted with all my strength, 'Tatte! Father! Only You can help me!' and then a strong wave pushed me all the way back!"

Only Hashem can save us, and when we fully appreciate that, our tefillos are answered.

Belief in Hashem

A *bachur* asked the Sar Shalom of Belz *zt'l* for a *segulah* to strengthen his *emunah*. The Sar Shalom told him, "Tefillah is the best *segulah*. Because when you see that your tefillos were answered, your *emunah* is strengthened."

"What happened?"

"I awoke in the morning [at two a.m., as this was his daily schedule] and I wanted to put on my shoes, but they were without shoelaces. I understood that the grandchildren played with them and hid them somewhere."

"What did you do?"

"Don't ask. I looked all over the house for the shoelaces and I found one of them. I thanked Hashem for that, but I still couldn't go anywhere with just one shoelace. I searched the house for the other one, which isn't an easy feat for an old man like me. I finally found the other one, and I went to the *mikveh*. But when I came out of the water, my clothes weren't there. Someone took them! I considered asking Reb Kalman [a Rav who would often help Reb Zalman] to bring me another set of clothes from the house, but then I decided against it, because your mother wouldn't remain silent if she heard that someone stole my clothes."

"So what did you do?"

"What I did? I'll tell you what I did. I woke up this morning and found the shoelaces in my shoes. I went to the *mikveh*, and no one stole my clothes. Everything was fine and well."

The Ramban teaches this concept on the *pasuk* (Shemos 3:12), ויאמר לי מזה שמו מזה אומר עליהם. Moshe was asking Hashem, "How can I teach the nation to believe in Hashem?"

Hashem replied, "You don't have to teach them anything. When they see that their tefillos are answered, they will believe in Hashem."

Guard your Soul

The Gemara (*Brachos* 28:) says that before Reb Elazar's demise, his students asked him to bless them. He said, יהי רצון שתהא מורא שמים, "May it be His will that you should fear Heaven as much as you fear flesh and blood."

The Ben Ish Chai (*Drashos, Vayikra*) explains that he blessed them to fear Hashem as much as they are concerned about the physical wellbeing of their bodies – their flesh and blood.

One day, Reb Zalman Brizel *zt'l* accidentally fell into a manhole. He wasn't looking and didn't notice the manhole was uncovered until he fell in. He said that for the rest of his life, he didn't walk on the street without checking whether there is an open manhole.

This is an example of the caution people have for their health. As we are explaining, we should have at least that level of fear when it comes to our *ruchniyos*. If once someone sinned, he should always be on guard that he doesn't fall there again.

It states (4:9) רק השמר לך ושמור נפשך מאד. The Kli Yakar teaches us that the Torah is commanding us two obligations. השמר לך means we must be cautious with our health. ושמור נפשך מאד means we must be careful with our *neshamos*, by avoiding *aveiros*.

With regards to guarding the *neshamah* against *aveiros*, the Torah writes ושמור נפשך מאד, "guard your soul *very much*." It doesn't state מאד, "very much" in reference to protecting one's health.

The Kli Yakar explains that this tells us we must be more careful with our *neshamah* than with our health.

Chazal say that whenever the Torah writes רק it is limiting something. The Chozeh of Lublin explains, רק השמר לך, this means you must take care of your physical needs (to eat, to drink, and so on); however, the Torah writes רק, limiting how much we should invest in this area. But when it comes to spirituality, the Torah writes ושמור נפשך מאד and מאד means that we must be very cautious with the needs of the soul.

Bein HaZmanim

The Beis HaMikdash was made of marble. How did it burn?

The Gemara (*Rosh Hashanah* 4.) tells us that Daryavesh, the king of Babylon, permitted the Yidden to build the Beis HaMikdash, and he even donated all the costs of the building. Nevertheless, the Gemara says that he became a *rasha*.

The Gemara says, "How do we know that Daryavesh became a *rasha*? It's because it states (*Ezra* 6:4), '[He ordered that the walls of the Beis HaMikdash be built in the following manner:] Three rows of marble stone, one row of fresh wood.' Why did he do this? He thought, 'If the Jews rebel against me, I will burn the Beis HaMikdash.'" There was wood in the walls of the Beis HaMikdash. Three layers of marble, one row of wood, another three layers of marble, and one layer of wood, and so on. The fire burnt the wood, causing the entire edifice to collapse.

So, it was the middle area that burned. Let's learn from this that we must be cautious from the times that are "in the middle." An example of this is *bein hazmanim* (such as summer vacation, when yeshivos and schools are off). These in-between times are perilous. Many young people fall during such times.

We just passed a challenging year; children were home for months and months.

These 'in-between' times aren't healthy for our spirituality.

According to the Chinuch's count of the mitzvos, mitzvah (783) שפ"ז is to guard the eyes (לא תתורו אחר...עיינים). This is one mitzvah before mitzvah שפ"ח, which spells חפש, vacation. This hints that we prepare for vacation by taking it upon ourselves to be cautious with our eyes.

Kibud Av v'Em

This week's *parashah* repeats the *Aseres HaDibros*, which includes the mitzvah of honoring one's parents.

Now is an ideal time to discuss this mitzvah because children are home from yeshiva and school during this time of year, and there is often more interaction between parents and children. All in all, this is a good thing. There is nothing better for children's emotional and spiritual wellbeing than a close relationship with their parents. Still, the halachos of *kibud av ve'em* need to be adhered to properly.

The Chazon Ish *zt'l* said that just as Chazal obligate us to study about a *yom tov* thirty days before the *yom tov* arrives (see *Pesachim* 6.), similarly, before a *bachur* goes home from yeshiva for a vacation break, he should review the halachos of *kibud av ve'em*, so he will keep these halachos properly.

A great reward, even in this world, is given to those who honor their parents. The following story is an example:

A *bachur* urgently required surgery on his leg. Without the operation, he would lose his leg, and his life was in danger. The procedure was scheduled for Friday morning, but due to various delays in the hospital, the doctors informed the boy and his mother that the operation would take place Shabbos morning.

"Your son may eat, now," the doctor said. "He's been fasting all this time (because one has to fast before undergoing an operation), but as it appears, the operation will be tomorrow morning, so he may as well break his fast."

By that time, it was already Friday night. The *bachur* told his mother that he wants to first daven *kabalas Shabbos* and *maariv* before breaking his fast.

When the *bachur* completed the tefillah, his mother was still davening *maariv*. She motioned to him that he can make kiddush on his own. After all, he was fasting all day. The *bachur* replied, "No, I'll wait. I want to say Kiddush for you and eat the *seudah* together." He understood that his mother would appreciate that.

The mother completed her tefillos, the *bachur* filled his cup with grape juice for Kiddush, and just then, a nurse rushed in. "Did you eat anything yet?" she asked.

"No. I was just about to, but I didn't have anything yet," the *bachur* replied.

"Good," she said. "There was a cancelation. Someone scheduled for an operation tonight didn't show up. So, the doctor is available to operate on you."

After the operation, the doctor told them that he didn't realize how urgently the *bachur* needed the operation. Had they waited until the morning, he would lose his leg.

This was his reward for performing the mitzvah of *kibud av ve'em*.

Shema

A yeshiva student was passing through a forest when he was accosted by thieves. He pleaded for one final wish, and the thieves agreed. His request was to say Shema.

He said Shema with immense *kavanah*, as he thought this was the last Shema he'd say

his entire life. When he finished and opened his eyes, the thieves weren't there anymore.¹⁶

The student ran out of the forest and went to his Rebbe, Reb Yehudah Asad *zt'l*. He asked, "Why did this happen to me?"

Reb Yehudah Asad said, "Did you ever say *kriyas Shema* like that before?"

"No. I didn't."

"Then that's your answer. Heaven showed you how *kriyas Shema* should be said. And now that you know say it that way every day."¹⁷

The people of Chelm wanted their own train station, and their own locomotive, so they could be like Vilna, Warsaw, and other large cities. They built a train station and a train, only they forgot to lay down the tracks, and they also failed to build an engine.

Everyone in Chelm proudly gathered at their new train station to see their new train in action. But without tracks and an engine, the train didn't move. So they asked strong men to push the train.

It was a hot day, and the strong men were getting hot trying to push the train, so they took off their jackets and placed their jackets behind them.

A thief saw the jackets on the ground, grabbed them, and ran off. The men pushing the train looked back, and they didn't see their jackets. They said to each other, "Wow,

we must have pushed the train very far. The train really does travel fast. We can't even see our jackets anymore."

What lesson can we take from this funny tale?

In this story, the people of Chelm thought they traveled far, but they were really very close to where they began. This happens to us too. Sometimes, we feel far away when we are really very close.

An example is inspiration.

Very often, we experience a moment of *hisorerus* and *hislahavus*. We are inspired to serve Hashem, to do *teshuvah*, but shortly afterward, the moment wears off, and we think we are very far away from the inspiration we had before. Actually, we are still very inspired. We don't realize it, but we are still very close to the inspiration we just had. If we continue doing *teshuvah* according to the *hislahavus* and inspiration we had, we can reignite and revive it.

As the Rebbe Reb Zuscha *zt'l* taught, ואל יבא בכל עת אל הקודש, one shouldn't repeatedly come into the *kedushah*. One should go once into the *kedushah* and remain there.

The inspiration is still there. Keep it alive.

This lesson also applies to *Shema*. We say *Shema* in the morning and at night. At these times we imbue our minds with the awareness that ה' אחד, that Hashem leads the world. Soon afterwards, we get busy with

16. Perhaps he was saved because of his *emunah*, because *emunah* saves a person from all troubles. As the Nefesh HaChaim (3:12) writes, "There is a great concept and a wonderful *segulah* to remove and to abolish all *dinim*, hardships, from oneself... and no one can harm him, not even in the slightest way. The *segulah* is that a person should put in his heart that Hashem is the true G-d, and there is no other force in the world at all... Hashem will help him, and all powers will have no influence on him. They won't be able to do anything to him at all."

17. The Saraf of Novarduk *zt'l* was in the forest, thinking thoughts of mussar, when a fierce dog attacked and bit him. The Saraf fainted. When he came to, his friends asked him why he was so afraid of the dog.

He replied, "I wasn't afraid of the dog. Rather, when I saw the dog's fiery passion, I asked myself, 'The dog has this passion, because it is doing the mission Hashem gave it. Do I ever serve Hashem with such fervor? Did I ever say *kriyas Shema* with so much passion?' That's the reason I fainted."

other matters, and forget about Hashem. But the impression remains. We think we have forgotten Hashem, but we are still near, and we can reawaken the awareness anytime throughout the day.

In the introduction to *Iglei Tal* (written by Rebbe Avraham of Sochochov zt'l) he explains that we read Shema in the morning and that inspiration is enough for the entire day. At nighttime, it is a new day, so we have to read the Shema again. He writes, "I found a proof...from *Pri Eitz Chaim* [who teaches that] the impression of the Shema of the morning remains throughout the entire day, and that's the reason there is no Shema at *minchah*."

It states (*Yeshayah* 44:6) כה אמר ה' מלך ישראל וגו'אלו ה' צבאות אני ראשון ואני אחרון ומבלעדי אין אלקים, "So says Hashem, the King of Yisrael and their redeemer... 'I am first and I am last and other than I, there is no G-d."

The Dubno Magid says that this *pasuk* hints at the mitzvah of *kriyas Shema*. אני ראשון, "Remember Me early in the morning when you say Shema, and repeat Shema at night." If you do so, you will know, מבלעדי אין אלקים, that everything happens from Hashem.

Humility

It states (7:6), לא מרובכם מכל העמים חשק ה' בכם, "Hashem didn't choose you from all nations because you are many, for you are the smallest of all nations." The Gemara (*Chulin* 89.) explains that Hakadosh Baruch Hu tells Bnei Yisrael, "I desire you because אתם המעט מכל העמים, because of your humility. Even when I give you greatness, you humble yourself before Me."

The Rebbe Reb Bunim zt'l said that Yidden are called Yid, because י"ד is the smallest letter, implying to humility. This is the nature and the praise of the Jewish nation, כי אתם המעט, "because you consider yourselves small."

The Yismach Yisrael zt'l considered himself the worst Yid in Alexander. "So why did they choose me to be the Rebbe? It's because they knew that I wouldn't become a *baal gaavah*. For what do I have to be a *baal gaavah* about? I don't have even one good *middah*. Therefore, I request from you, my chassidim, don't learn from my ways. I have nothing good to teach you. But there is one thing that you can learn from me: I am deficient in Torah and mitzvos, and nevertheless, I am happy at all times. You can learn that from me. Because if the lowliest person can be happy, you too, *5rtftu* can surely be happy."

Once, the Yismach Yisrael said to his chassid, Reb Moshe Boim zt'l, "People come to me for advice, and sometimes the issues are related to *pikuach nefesh*. How do I know how to answer them? I don't have *malachim* whispering into my ears, telling me the answers. But during *maariv* I pray, ותקנו בעצה, טובה מלפניך, 'grant us with good counsel' with immense *kavanah*. And then Hashem helps me advise people."

The great *hislahavus* and *hisorerus* in the beis medresh of the Rebbe of Alexander during *maariv* was legendary. It was then that the Alexander Rebbe pleaded with Hashem, ותקנו בעצה טובה מלפניך, that he should have good counsel to direct his chassidim when they come to him for advice.