

Torah Wellsprings

Collected thoughts
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Ki Savo



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Ki Savo

From Hashem

Think about the good you have in life and remember that Hashem gave it to you. Do you own

your house? How did you get it? It was from Hashem.

Do you have a wife¹ and children? Hashem gave them to you.

1. A couple was about ready to finalize a *shidduch* for their son, but then the father remembered that he didn't tell his mother-in-law anything regarding this *shidduch*. "She will feel honored if we tell her what's going on and that we want to hear her opinion," he told his wife.

So, the father called his mother-in-law and told her about the *shidduch* that was offered for their son. He didn't tell her that they were ready to finalize the *shidduch*.

The mother-in-law said she knows people who know the girl's family, and she will make a few phone calls and inquire.

An hour later, she called back and said, "In my opinion, you should grab this *shidduch* with both hands. Nevertheless, it will be nice if you call my mother and tell her what's going on. She will feel honored to be involved in the *shidduch*."

When the elderly grandmother was called, she said that she knows the grandparents of the girl. When they were young, they played together... She said that she will make some inquiries about the girl.

A half-hour later she called back and said that she heard wonderful information, and she encourages the *shidduch*.

The *shidduch* was made, and there was a joyous *vort*. When the last

Do you have health? Do you have friends? Do you have eyesight, can you talk and speak?

Don't take anything for granted. Everything you own and appreciate was given to you by Hashem.

The *Akeidah* (*Shaar* 98) tells us that *bikurim* teaches us this lesson. *Bikurim* is brought by a landowner in Eretz Yisrael and had good, sweet fruits grow in his orchard. The Torah obligates him to thank Hashem, so he will know that Hashem gave him these kindnesses and everything else that he enjoys.

The Alshich HaKadosh writes, "When a person lives comfortably and fearlessly in the land where milk and honey flows, he rests under his fig tree and under his vine, his home is filled with goodness... he might think, 'I earned this all on my own. Hashem gave us the mitzvah of *bikurim*...' *Bikurim* reminds us that everything we have is from Hashem.

The Alshich writes, "When one thinks his wealth is the product of his might and wisdom, Hashem will take it away from him. However, when one knows everything was given to him by Hashem, Hashem will allow him to

guests left, the father was thinking, "My mother-in-law thinks she made the *shidduch*, and her mother thinks that she made the *shidduch*, and they don't know that the *shidduch* would have happened without them, too, because we were ready to go ahead with the *shidduch* before we called them."

Then the father thought, "I didn't make the *shidduch* either. Hashem made the *shidduch*. It was destined from Heaven. It wasn't me, it wasn't my mother-in-law, and it wasn't her mother. It was Hashem.

keep it. We can compare it to a wealthy person who hires a gardener to tend to his orchard. When the figs and grapes ripen, the gardener places them in a beautiful dish and brings them to the landlord. He says, 'Look at the sweet fruit your field is producing. It's all yours, for it grew in your orchard...' The property-owner sees the *derech erez* of his gardener, so he replies, 'You can keep the rest of the crop.' This is the explanation of the mitzvah *bikurim*. We bring the first crops of wheat, barley, olives, and grapes to the Beis Hamikdosh, and we acknowledge that it isn't our own. Everything we have belongs to Hashem... And then, Hashem permits us to keep the rest of the crops."

So let us also be cognizant of all the kindness Hashem bestows on us, and then Hashem will allow us to keep it.

Parnassah is from Hashem

Rashi (27:12) writes, "Six *shevatim* went up on Har Grizim and six on Har Eivel, and the *kohanim*, the *levi'im* and the *aron* were in the valley in between. The *levi'im* turned towards Har Grizim and they said the *brachos*..."

The first *brachah* is, ברוך האיש אשר לא יעשה פסל ומסכה מעשה ידי חרש ושם בסתר "Blessed is the person who didn't make an image of *avodah zarah* - the workmanship of a craftsman - and put it in a concealed place" (see 27:15)

Reb Moshe Feinstein *zt'l* asks: Why does this person deserve to be blessed? Not worshipping *avodah zarah* is a basic, the foundation of Yiddishkeit. Does he deserve a blessing just for that?

Reb Moshe replies that there are different types of *avodah zarah*, and some of them are very hard to keep. As Reb Avraham the son

of the Rambam teaches, when one thinks that he earns his *parnassah* by the work of his hands, this is subtle *avodah zarah*. Because it isn't the work of our hands that brings in *parnassah*, rather Hashem's blessings.

When one has this belief, he deserves a blessing.

Reb Moshe explains that *מעשה ידי חרש* means he doesn't worship his workmanship and his talents, the work of his hands.

When one thinks that he earns his *parnassah* with the work of his hands, he conceals what he does from others, because he doesn't want that others should do the same and compete with him. However, when one believes that *parnassah* comes from Hashem, he will not hide what he does. He knows that no one can take away the livelihood

that Hashem wants to give him.

This is the meaning of *ושם בסתר*. They are secretive on how they earn money, because they are afraid people will copy them. But when one believes his *parnassah* is from Hashem, he isn't afraid to tell others.

We'll add that when one knows his *parnassah* is from Hashem, he lives a blessed and fortunate life. He has time to daven and to learn and to enjoy life. He isn't worried that he won't have enough money, because he knows that Hashem is taking care of his *parnassah*.

In contrast, when one thinks his *parnassah* is entirely up to him, he lives a cursed life. He is always worried that he won't have enough. He doesn't find time for Torah and tefillah, because he thinks that this takes away from his *parnassah*. Therefore, certainly, *ברוך האיש*, certainly,

those who have *emunah* live a life of blessings.

Because *parnassah*, and ultimately, everything you enjoy in life is from

Hashem. *Bikurim* reminds us to praise Hashem for these matters, and as we wrote above, then Hashem will permit you to continue receiving these blessings.²

2. A Yid studied many years in university to be a doctor, and graduated at the top of his class. He was certain people will flock to him, so he opened a first-class medical clinic in an expensive area. The rent was high, but he was certain he could cover the expenses.

But things didn't happen as he expected.

The clinic was empty, too often. People weren't rushing to him, as he thought they would. Those who came recognized that the clinic isn't very active, which made them wonder whether the doctor was as competent as he advertised.

One day, after *shacharis*, the rabbi of his shul asked him how his new clinic was coming along.

"Terrible," he replied. "I'm not sure what the problem is, but either people stopped getting sick or they are going to my competitors."

The rabbi answered with wise counsel. "When someone calls for an appointment," he said, "don't tell him to come in right away. Tell him that the only open slot is in three months. That way, people will think you are a very busy, sought after doctor, and that will build your reputation.

The plan worked. Word went out that there is a superb doctor who heals the ill when other doctors fail. "It is worth waiting the three months for the appointment," people were saying.

One day, the rabbi wasn't feeling well, and after *shacharis*, the rabbi spoke with doctor and requested an appointment. The doctor replied, "There's a slot open in three months from now..."

Praise Hashem

Chazal (*Devarim Rabba* 4:1, *Masechta Sofrim* 12:1-2) teach, אין מפסיקין בתוכחה. This means we don't give *aliyos* in the midst of the *tochachah*. The person who gets the *aliyah* for the *tochachah* reads the entire *tochachah*.

Chazal explain that this is because Hashem says, אין שורת הדין שיהיו בני מתקללין אני מתברך, "it isn't proper that my children should be cursed and I receive *brachos*." At an *aliyah*, *brachos* are recited, and Hashem says that it isn't fitting for Him to receive blessings when we are being cursed.

We can learn from this a counsel to annul and abolish *yesurim*. When we go through hard times, we should praise Hashem. We should focus on what's good in our life, and praise Hashem for those matters, and then Hashem will say, "It isn't proper that my child be cursed and suffer when I am being blessed," and Hashem will remove the *yesurim*.

The Kaf HaChaim (281:8) writes in the name of Reb Yehudah HaChassid that when one is going through hard times, he should accept on himself to say *Nishmas* before ten people when his salvation comes.

The rabbi replied, "I'm the one who taught you to do this. Are you going to pull that trick on me, too? You should arrange an appointment for me immediately!"

The *nimshal* is: A poor person davens for wealth and Hashem grants it to him. But then he doesn't have time for Torah and tefillah. He is too busy with his business. Hashem says, "You don't have time even for Me? I'm the one who gave you your wealth. I'm the one who made you so busy in the first place. You should certainly have time for me."

He writes, "Many got their salvation in this manner."

Some make a *kabbalah* to say מזמור לתודה when they get their *yeshuah*.

Because praising Hashem - either before the salvation or after - is *mesugal* for attaining the *yeshuah*.³

But how do you praise Hashem when everything is so hard and difficult?

There are two answers. The first is to focus on the good in your life. Because even when you are going through hard times, there is a lot of good in your life, too. Focus on those matters, and you will be able to praise Hashem.

Secondly, we believe that even the hardships are for our good. When you

have this *emunah*, you can praise Hashem for the struggles, as well.

Every *pasuk* of the *tochachah* contains Hashem's name הוי"ה, the name of compassion. This reminds us that everything we go through is Hashem's compassion. The *yesurim* were sent to cleanse us from our *aveiros*, to rouse us to *teshuvah*, or because something even better will come from it. They are always for our good. With this belief, we can praise Hashem even for the *yesurim*. And when we do so, Hashem turns everything around and matters become good, as we understand the definition of good.

And even before the salvation comes, he is already looking at life with

3. This is as it states (23:6), ויהפוך ה' אלקיך לך את הקללה לברכה, "Hashem will turn over the קללה and make it a *brachah*." If you turn over קללה and read it backwards, it spells הלל קה "praise Hashem." Because by praising Hashem you turn over the curse and it becomes a blessing.

a healthier attitude. Instead of moping over the hardships, his heart is full of gratitude for all the good he has in life.

This isn't a simple level to attain, because generally, when one is going through hard times, he wants to focus on his troubles, he doesn't want to focus on the good, the silver lining in his life. Even when his salvation comes, people's tendency is to thank Hashem quickly, and to quickly forget all about it. Praising Hashem is therefore not a very easy mitzvah to perform.

There was a person who was very ill. The doctors predicted he can live another half a year, not more. This ill person went to many tzaddikim to receive their *brachos*, he davened at *kiorei tzaddikim*, he said the entire *Tehillim* every day, and he performed many *segulos*.

He was also very occupied with doing

teshuvah. He did whatever he could to remove this harsh decree.

A month before his predicted demise, he went to the doctor and the doctor said that the illness cleared up and everything was well. It was a miracle.

He thanked Hashem with all his heart. The next day, he said *Nishmas* with ten people at the Kosel, and then rented a hall and made a *seudas hoda'ah*, attended by friends and family. Shabbos he donated the *kiddush*.

But since then, he is busy with his life, and he rarely thinks about his salvation. Once in a while he remembers, and he says "*baruch Hashem*" with all his heart, but those moments are far apart.

For five months, *teshuvah* and *tefillah* were constantly on his mind, and then, after a week of gratitude, he forgot what happened.

Because that is people's nature; they remember Hashem when they have a problem and they forget Hashem when they receive their salvation.

The Or HaMeir brings a *pasuk* in last week's *parashah* discusses this tendency. It states (25:13), לא יהיה לך בכיסך אבן, Rashi explains ואבן גדולה וקטנה.⁴ שלא יהא נוטל בגדולה ומחזיר בקטנה, "Don't take with a bigger stone and return with a smaller stone."⁵

The Or HaMeir explains, "When people daven for

parnassah, they pray with a full mouth – with large letters. This means they place a lot of *kavanah* into the tefillah. They want the פ of פרוסה should be larger and greater than the entire world. The letter ו should be even greater, and the letters וי פ' should be extremely tall letters to draw down the blessings of *parnassah* with these letters. His tefillos are answered, and Hakadosh Baruch Hu grants him immense wealth. Nothing is lacking. Now, he desires to give gratitude to Hashem

4. Literally, the *pasuk* is discussing stones used as weights, and prohibits people from using inaccurate weights, which are greater or lesser than the weight they represent.

5. The explanation is as follows:

A wholesale merchant comes to your store and he wants to sell you a product based on the weight. If you use your scale to measure out the product, your weights must be accurate. For example, you can't use a weight that is larger than a pound, tell the wholesaler that it weighs a pound, and thereby you get more for what you pay.

Afterwards, a consumer comes to the store and requests a pound of that item. Now you can't use a weight that weighs less than a pound to sell it. You need accurate weights so you don't cheat.

for His kindness. But when he praises Hashem, he uses small letters. He doesn't put all his strength and concentration into the letters to make the letters large and to illuminate them. The Torah hints to this with the words לא יהיה בפיך. The mouth is called a פה (as stated in *Zohar*, and stones represent letters). The Torah is warning us that the mouth shouldn't have two kinds of letters - large letters and small letters. As *Rashi* writes, 'Don't take with large and return with small.' ["Taking with large" means you daven and request with large letters, and returning with small means you don't express yourself fully in your gratitude]. Rather, also

when you are returning - when you praise Hashem for His kindness - praise Hashem with a full mouth and full concentration."⁶

Tochachah

It is known that although the *tochachah* are very harsh and painful *pesukim*, many blessings are concealed within these *pesukim*.

Reb Nochum of Chernobyl *zt'l* was ill, and the Baal Shem Tov called him for the *aliyah* of the *tochachah*. Reb Nochum says that as the Baal Shem Tov read the *tochachah*, he felt himself becoming better. He was healed with the *brachos* concealed within it.

6. *Rashi* (*Bereishis* 23:1) writes, בת ק' כבת כ'. This hints to two chapters of *Tehillim*. Chapter ק' is מזמור לתודה, and it discusses gratitude. Chapter כ' is יענך ה' ביום צרה, asking for salvation. People's tendency is to say chapter כ' with *kavanah*, but they praise Hashem quickly, and they don't place all their heart and soul into the words.

Rashi writes בת ק' כבת כ' say gratitude the same way you request salvation. Say gratitude with all your heart.

By Hashem's decree, some words of the Torah are written one way and read differently. A good example of this is the word *נערה*, which is written 14 times in *parashas Ki Seitzei* (ch.22) without the final ה. The *כתוב* (written text) is *נער* and the *קרי* (the way it's read) is *נערה*.

Generally, the *קרי* and the *כתוב* are similar, with only a slight difference between how it is written and the way it is read. *נער* and *נערה* is an example of that. The letters are almost the same. The exception is in the *tochachah*: See (28:27): It says *ובטחרים* and we read it *ובטחרים*. An entirely different word. The *קרי* and the *כתוב* are totally different.

The Rebbe of Stopkov *zt'l* says that this teaches us that when one is going through the *tochachah*, the hardships of life, he has to read it totally different than how it appears. It seems bad, but it is all for the good.

Rashi (26:15) writes, כל השקפה שבמקרא לרעה חוץ מהשקפה "Whenever it states the *השקפה* in the Torah it is for something bad. The exception is the *pasuk* (of this week's *parashah*), *השקפה*, מומעון קדשך מן השמים, 'Look down from your holy abode in heaven and bless Your nation, Yisrael.'" Reb Yaakov S. Freund *zt'l* explains that this *השקפה* is good because it is מן השמים "from heaven." And when one looks with the perspective as it is seen in heaven he knows that everything is good.

When you pinch someone, you are holding on to the other person more than usual. This hints that when there's a *tochachah*, we are pinched and it hurts, but Hashem is closest to us at those times, and His compassion on us is greater than generally.

Almost at the Peak

Chazal tell us that whenever the Torah writes

רק, "only," it is excluding something. Therefore (28:13), *והיית רק למעלה* means the Jewish nation will be on top of all nations, and they will enjoy immense success. Everything will be good for them – but not everything. Something will be missing.

The Chasam Sofer *zt'l* writes in the name of Reb Eliezer Ashkenazi (author of *Maasei Hashem*) that this is for our benefit. Because when you reach perfection, the only way to go is down. It states (*Mishlei* 16:18), *לפני שבר, גאון*, "Before breaking, one becomes great." So it is better when something is lacking.

Several times in his *sefarim*, the Chasam Sofer expresses that a perfect life isn't perfect at all. People want to have a life without any problems at all, but the Chasam Sofer clarifies that the problems are what keep us going. They give us a challenge to conquer, a reason to wake up in the morning to amend.

He tells a story of someone in his time who committed suicide. On his suicide note he wrote, "I have everything. Nothing is lacking. And that's why I'm taking my life."

When the Chasam Sofer explains the *birchas kohanim*, he expresses that the *brachos* give *parnassah*, peace, and everything good. "But this *brachah* is a *קללה נמרצת*, like a terrible curse," he writes, because he won't find purpose in life.

He answers that the answer is found in the next verse of *birchas kohanim*, *ושמו את שמוי על בני ישראל ואני אברכם*, that Klal Yisrael can make their goal in life success in Torah and in *avodas Hashem*, and that will grant them a purpose in life.

But for many, a perfect life is anything but perfect. As much as we don't want the problems, what would we do with our time if we didn't have problems to deal with? Life would become boring.

Therefore, we receive Hashem's blessings, והיית רק, למעלה, you will be on top, things will be good for you – but not everything. Even at the best times, something will be lacking, and that is for our benefit.

Reb Eliezer Ashkanazi experienced firsthand that it isn't good to be all the way on top. This is what happened to him:

Reb Eliezer Ashkenazi lived in Mitzrayim and was renowned for his honesty, cleverness, and vast wisdom. The king of Mitzrayim also heard of Reb Eliezer's greatness, and he appointed him to be one among his ministers.

The king of Mitzrayim didn't regret appointing Reb Eliezer Ashkanazi at this high position. Reb Eliezer's wisdom helped the king run his country smoothly and successful, and the king loved Reb Eliezer very much. He even gave Reb Eliezer his signet

ring, an honor that only Reb Eliezer received.

The other ministers, advisors, and officials in the king's cabinet were jealous that the king loved Reb Eliezer so much. They waited for the opportunity to harm Reb Eliezer Ashkenazi and lower his rank.

The king's birthday was approaching, and he invited his cabinet to his birthday celebration.

Reb Eliezer was crossing a bridge over the Nile to go to the celebration, when another minister asked him whether he forgot to bring the king's signet ring. Reb Eliezer took out the ring to show that he has it with him, and the jealous officer grabbed it and threw it to the Nile. Reb Eliezer jumped and caught the ring in mid-air, before it fell into the waters below. It was a miracle that he caught it.

At the party, the king accorded Reb Eliezer immense honor, and all the other officials cringed with jealousy. After the celebration ended, the king walked Reb Eliezer out of the palace. Once again, this roused the wrath of Reb Eliezer's fellow officials.

Reb Eliezer wasn't happy that he received so many honors at the party. He reminded himself that Shlomo HaMelech, the wisest of all men, said (*Mishlei* 16:18): לפני שבר גאון, "Before falling, one becomes great." Reb Eliezer feared that the honor he received was a sign that he would soon plummet and lose everything.

It was time to leave the country. That very night (following the king's party) he tossed precious gems into a box and boarded a ship for Turkey.

Indeed, this act saved his life. Later he heard that after he left the birthday celebration, some of the

king's officers approached the king with terrible false claims about Reb Eliezer. The king believed them and ordered his arrest. But by the time the police came to his home, he was already on his way to Turkey.

He was saved once, but soon his life was at risk again. Not far from the Turkish port in Constantinople (Istanbul), the ship hit a rock and sunk. All passengers jumped into the water and tried to swim ashore. Reb Eliezer realized, with a heavy heart, that he couldn't take along his box filled with gems, but he was fortunate to find a plank floating in the water, which helped him reach the shores of Constantinople.

Reb Eliezer recovered from his ordeal at sea, and he thought over what's happening to him. Just a few days before, he had wealth and honor. He was the Egyptian's king's highest ranking official

after the king. And now he was a stranger in a foreign land, without money and without prestige. Why was he being punished?

After contemplating this matter, he concluded that he was being punished for *bitul Torah*. When he was serving in the king's palace, his many obligations prevented him from properly studying Torah.

He made a firm resolve to correct this error.

He was ready to live simply, as long as he can devote himself to studying Torah.

Reb Eliezer heard that there was a tiny apartment for rent, which supplied daily meals. The apartment was owned by a poor Jewish widow, and the meals weren't much; mostly dried up bread. But Reb Eliezer agreed to move there. It wasn't what he was used to. Up until very recently he lived a life of luxury. But he didn't mind,

so long as he could devote himself to studying Torah.

One day, the widow didn't have dry bread. All she served was watery soup. That's all she could afford that day, and that was all Reb Eliezer had to ward off his hunger. To make matters worse, there was a spider in the soup!

Reb Eliezer realized that he had reached a nadir, and he knew that now his *mazal* will turn around and things will become better.

Because when one is at the top, the only way to go is down, and when one is at the lowest rank, the only way to go is up.

Later that day, he heard an announcement: "The sultan seeks a chess partner to play with." The sultan's previous chess partner died, and he sought a replacement.

Reb Eliezer applied for the position. The sultan played a game of chess with Reb Eliezer and was

impressed with Reb Eliezer's wisdom and expertise. He immediately hired him for the position and appointed him to be a minister.

Reb Eliezer knew that he must be cautious from *bitul Torah*. So he kept track of the hours he played with the sultan, and he made up those hours studying Torah at the wee hours of the night.

Sometimes he was very tired, but he remembered that he was once punished for *bitul Torah* study, and he didn't want to make the same mistake again.

One night, while playing chess with the sultan, Reb Eliezer fell asleep in the middle of the game. That was extremely disrespectful; the sultan could take off someone's head for such an offense. However, the sultan liked Reb Eliezer, and the sultan placed his own cushion under Reb Eliezer's head.

When Reb Eliezer awoke, he realized he reached another peak, and that meant his descent was soon coming.

So, he left Turkey and moved to Posen, where he served as the rav. Afterwards, he went to Krakow. He was the rav of Krakow and that is where he is buried.

Because this is the way of the world: When one reaches the highest levels and everything is going his way, the only way to go is down. And in contrast, when everything is bad, things have to improve. It can't become worse than it is.

In the *tochachah*, when the Torah tells us about the success of the non-Jews, it states (28:43), הגר אשר בקרבך יעלה, עליך מעלה, "The non-Jew that lives among you will ascend higher and higher..." This time, the Torah doesn't write רק, only. This is because the non-Jews will enjoy unlimited success

and life will be perfect for them — and this will ultimately lead to their downfall.

For the Jewish nation, *והיית רק למעלה*, Hashem gives success, but to a limit. It is never perfect. And this is important, so the success can endure.

The *pasuk* states (28:43), *הגר אשר בקרבך יעלה עליך מעלה ואתה תרד מטה מטה*, “The non-Jew that lives among you will ascend higher and higher and you will descend lower and lower.” The descent of the Jewish nation isn't paraphrased with a *רק*, a limitation. This means that the Jewish nation will fall to the very lowest levels of prestige, wealth, and power, and that is for their benefit. Because when they reach the lowest point, the only way to go is up.

The Judgment

Many people are described as having “*yiras Shamayim*,” but who truly deserves to be called by this special title?

The Chazon Ish *zt'l* taught that, for our generation, one who believes that everything was destined on Rosh Hashanah can be called a *yirei Shamayaim*.

Sometimes he loses money, sometimes he gains, and he knows that it was decreed on Rosh Hashanah.

Other things happen to him throughout the year, some are tragedies, such as health issues *r'l*, and he knows that it was decreed on Rosh Hashanah. He can be called a *yirei Shamayim*.⁷

7. The Steipler *zt'l* often repeated this definition of *yirei Shamayim* in the name of the Chazon Ish.

Once, a fly was bothering the Chazon Ish *zt'l*. The Chazon Ish tried to shoo it away, but it kept coming back.

In particular, his *yiras Shamayim* will be felt at this time of the year, because we are days before the Day of Judgment, when it will be decided and determined what will happen in the upcoming year. And that awareness causes us to tremble with fear.

As it states (*Amos 3:4*), אריה שאג מי לא יראה, "A lion roared. Who isn't afraid?" and the holy *sefarim* teach that ארייה is *roshei teivos* for אלול, ראש השנה, יום כיפור, הושענא רבא. These days are shouting to us: "Your future is at stake. During these days it will be determined how much money you will have, who will be healthy, and more. אריה שאג מי לי יראה, these days rouse us to daven and do *teshuvah*."

Reb Chaim Kanievsky Shlita asks that it should

state שואג, "shouts" in present tense, because each year, these holy days of *teshuvah* shout to people to daven and to do *teshuvah*. Why does it state שאג, "shouted," in past tense?

Reb Chaim answers that the *pasuk* is referring to the Elul, Rosh Hashanah, etc. of the previous year. We think about the year that is just about over, and we consider all the mishaps and tragedies that occurred, and we recognize that they were decreed on Rosh Hashanah - and that's what frightens us now.

Unfortunately, this year, there is a lot to remember. The *pasuk* says, אריה שאג, remember what was decreed last year, and this should inspire you to improve yourself this year.

The Chazon Ish's *gabai* tried to help the Chazon Ish; he tried to chase the fly away. The Chazon Ish replied, "Leave it. It's a Rosh Hashanah fly." His intention: It was decreed on Rosh Hashanah that I will need to endure this disturbance.

One year, before Rosh Hashanah, the Satmar Rebbe *zt'l* said, "There were people who were with us last year for Rosh Hashanah, and they are no longer with us..." In this way, the Satmar Rebbe was reminding everybody that due to the decree of last year's Rosh Hashanah, these people aren't with us this year. And now that Rosh Hashanah is approaching again, we should say a lot of *Tehillim* and tefillos; we should reflect on our deeds and see what we can improve on.

The year Reb Yechezkel Levinstein *zt'l* became ill with cancer *r'l* he said that if he knew on Rosh Hashanah that this will be his decreed, he would have "ripped open the heavens" with his prayers and annulled the decree.

The *pasuk* says, אריה שאג, shouted, in past tense, because we think about the אריה שאג, the calls of last year, which we didn't heed,

and which we suffered the results throughout the year, and that is what inspires us to tremble, pray, and to improve our ways this year.

A couple decorated their child's crib with colorful, beautiful pictures of animals - lions, bears, penguins, etc. - so their baby will have nice things to look at as he lies in the crib.

When the child was a few years older, the parents took their child to the zoo. When the child saw a lion, he ran towards it like someone meeting with an old friend.

Alarmed, the parents shouted, "Be careful! A lion is dangerous! As an infant, you saw a picture of a lion, but this is the real thing."

The *nimshal*:

Many people aren't afraid when the days of judgment arrive. They say, "I've experienced many Rosh Hashanahs before. In

fact, they are as many as the years I'm alive – and nothing so terrible ever happened to me. I see that there is nothing to fear."

We reply, "These days are like a roaring lion (אריה שאג), rousing us to do *teshuvah*. Baruch Hashem, things were good for you until now, but that doesn't guarantee the future. These days it will determine how the next year will appear, and logically, you should be afraid."

(Halachah states that we must have *bitachon* that Hashem will grant us a good year. And in the merit of our *bitachon*, it will be so. Nevertheless, halachah also states that we must fear the judgment.)

Many years ago, people had immense fear when Elul arrived. But gradually this fear diminished, and is bemoaned in several *mussar* and chassidic *sefarim*.

At least to an extent, Reb Yisrael Salanter *zt'l* revived the fear for Elul

that was so common in the past.

Someone told him, "Elul isn't a bear."

Reb Yisrael Salanter replied, "You're right. It is much more frightening than a bear. Dovid HaMelech wasn't afraid of a bear. As it states (*Shmuel 1*, 17:36), גם את הארי ואת הדוב הכה, עבדך, "Also a lion and also a bear, your servant smote..." Nevertheless, he said (*Tehillim 119:120*), וממושפטיד יראתי, 'I fear Your judgment.' He wasn't afraid of a bear, but he feared the awesome judgment."

In the merit of our fear, joined with our *bitachon* that Hashem, our Father, will grant us a good year, it will certainly be a good year.

Shabbos Selichos

It states (*Yeshayah 42:18*), החרשים שמעו והעורים הביטו לראות, "Deaf ones, listen! The blind, see!" The Chidushei HaRim *zt'l* asks, how can

the deaf hear? How can the blind see? He answers, "There are moments that are so lofty that even the deaf hear and the blind see." He was referring to those who are spiritually deaf and blind. At special occasions, even they can see and hear.

This is applicable for Shabbos Selichos. Even if someone pushed off doing *teshuvah* until now, now everyone is aroused and they want to improve their ways.⁸

This year, we have two Shabbosim during the days of *selichos* before Rosh Hashanah. Chazal say, "If Klal Yisrael keep two Shabbosim they will

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

The First Day of Selichos

The *sefarim* write that the *yamim noraim* begins on

8. It isn't too late to do *teshuvah*. Although most of Elul passed, we can begin now.

Our custom is to blow shofar every day in Elul. The shofar rouses us to do *teshuvah*. If one didn't wake up to *teshuvah* on the first day of Elul, we blow shofar the second day. Perhaps he will do *teshuvah* then. And if he wasn't roused on the second day, we blow shofar the next day, too, because we always give another chance to do *teshuvah*.

the first night of *selichos*. Rebbe Uri of Strelisk *zt'l* said, "The כתיבה וחתימה טובה of Rosh Hashanah begins on the first night of *selichos*.

Motzei Shabbos, the first night of *selichos*, we say the *piyut* "במוצאי מנוחה." This prayer is written according to the order of the alef beis. As it states: את ימין עז עוררה לעשות חיל, the first word of this phrase is an א, and then it states נעקד נעקד בצדק ונשחט תמורו איל, beginning with a ב. Similarly, each phrase begins with the next letter of the alef beis. The exception are the letters נ and ס, as they are written in two words, as נא סגבם, instead of two phrases.

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

The letter ת of this *selichos* is תראם ניסך עושה גדולות, "show them Your

miracles..." Because during these days of *selichos*, we want that Hashem should show us His miracles and grant us all our heart's desires.

Some people fast on the first day of *selichos*; some say the entire *Tehillim*. Rebbe Yissacher Dov of Belz *zy'a* said that his *avodas Hashem* on the first day of *selichos* is greater and more intense than his service on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

For generations, Belzer chassidim's custom is to say the entire *Tehillim* on this day, in beis medresh, ברוג עם.

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

יהי רצון after *Tehillim* with the congregation?"

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

Reb Yaakov Landau *zt'l*, the rav of Bnei Brak, would generally contain his

emotions. But on the first night of *selichos* he was the *chazan*. He began *Ashrei*, and as usual, his voice didn't show his emotions. But when he came to תהלה ה' he cried copiously, and he continued to cry throughout the *selichos*. It was almost impossible to hear his voice, because he was crying so much.

Once, before *selichos*, Rebbe Aharon of Belz *zt'l* told the *chazan*, "הויעך, הויעך, הויעך, daven loudly! This will rouse the *tzibur* to say *selichos* with *kavanah* and with *hislahavus*. Don't be afraid that you might become hoarse, because there are other people who can take your place."¹⁹

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

Reb Shalom Shwardon said this is the reason we say, דלתיך דפקנו רחום, "We pound on Your door, O' compassionate One. Don't have us leave empty handed." We aren't merely

Someone asked Reb Yosef Chaim Zonenfeld *zt'l*: "I'm a *melamed*, and it states in *Shulchan Aruch* (*Yorah Deah* 245:17) that a *melamed* must sleep well. Perhaps I shouldn't go to *selichos*, because that would mean that I must awaken early, and I won't have enough sleep."

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

In the past, many people fasted during the days of *selichos*. The *Leket Yosher* (*Hilchos Taanis* 12, p.114) writes, "Once I asked my rebbe, the Terumas HaDeshen, to permit me to eat during the days of *selichos*, so I could learn well, as I learn

all days of the year. He replied, the קדמונים, scholars of the past, also knew that a fast makes people weak and that it will be hard for them to learn well, nevertheless, they instituted the custom for people to fast during *selichos*.... Therefore, I can't permit it."

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

A kind king used to ride down the main streets of his capital city on his birthday. Multitudes of citizens would stand on the road side, waving ecstatically, as they

knocking on Hashem's door (נוקש). We are banging and pounding on Hashem's door (נדפקו), desperately begging that he bless us with salvations and a good year.

celebrated the king's birthday. At this special time, everyone had permission to come up to the king's chariot and give the king a letter. The king read all their letters and granted them their requests.

One person gave his letter to the king, every year at the birthday, but his requests were never fulfilled. He investigated the matter and discovered that the king traveled with an advisor, and that advisor hated this citizen. When he brought the letter to the king, the advisor would tell the king to ignore the letter, claiming he wasn't an honest and deserving citizen.

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

The following year, this man went to the king's palace *before* the king's birthday, and spoke directly with the king. The

king's advisor wasn't around, and the kind king filled his request.

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

Remorse

Selichos is to sincerely regret our sins and to make

a commitment to work towards improving our ways. Without regret, a major component in the *selichos* is lacking.

There was a *misnaged* who caused a lot of trouble for Rebbe Boruch of Mezhibuzh *zy'a*. Before Yom Kippur, he came to Rebbe Boruch'l and said, "I really don't have to ask you for *mechilah*, because everything I did was a *mitzvah*. [He thought it's a *mitzvah* to oppose *chassidim*.] Nevertheless, I thought that since it's *erev* Yom Kippur, I should ask for your forgiveness."

Rebbe Boruch'l replied, "סלחתך בדברך." The implication of his response was, "I forgive you in the same spirit you are asking for forgiveness. You don't

really mean it when you say you're sorry, and I also don't really mean it when I say I forgive you."

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