

KOL TODA

Gateways to Gratitude: Giving Thanks to Hashem

GRATITUDE TO HASHEM

PREPARATION FOR THE *YOM HA'DIN*, THE DAY OF JUDGMENT

We have now reached the month of Elul – a month of preparation for the Day of Judgment, Rosh Hashana. The days of Elul are known as *yemei ratzon* – days of desire, of willingness, of finding special favor in Hashem's Eyes. These days are designated & especially favorable for *teshuva*, repentance & returning to Hashem. The upper Attribute of Mercy is aroused & Hashem's Hand is open to accept penitents. We all want to be judged favorably, & need to carefully scrutinize our deeds, repent for our errors, & correct them. Many times we want to change, to become better, but the sack of *averos* seems just too big. It seems like too much to even start with.

Our Rabbis give us a wonderful remedy for this.

The *Midrash Rabba* on *sefer Shemos* (33:19) tells us: "...And I will show favor when I wish to show favor" – & to whom I wish to show favor, "and I will have compassion when I wish to be compassionate" – & with whomever I wish to be compassionate. Let us take a closer look at those words. Is it easy to merit a good judgment from Hashem? Is there anything for free in the World of Truth? And to whom does Hashem wish to show favor & compassion?

Another surprising proclamation is seen in the words of *Chazal*: "Whoever is forbearing & yielding with others will have all of his sins pardoned." This formula seems puzzling. One who forgoes his personal pride & honor to deal with people forbearingly & forgivingly, has certainly acted greatly. But why should this bring him atonement for his sins? He has clearly performed a mitzva, but it would seem that he should be rewarded for that, not pardoned for sins. Nowhere else have we found that performing a mitzva (aside from repentance, of course) grants a person atonement for sins!

Yet there is a special manner in which Hashem runs the world. It is called *midda k'neged midda*, "measure for measure." When a person is forbearing & yielding & he forgives other people even if they do not deserve to be forgiven – Hashem, in turn, will forgive all his sins, even if he failed to properly ask for Hashem's forgiveness.

In the same way, when one accepts life's challenges with a joyful countenance, does not complain about his difficulties, & thanks Hashem for everything He does to him, Hashem accepts all his behavior, including his mistakes, & does not pay him back for all of his sins. Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler, *ztz"l*, in *Michtav MiEliyahu* (part 5) writes: "You should know, my beloved, that there is blessing & clemency. Blessing comes from the Attribute of Kindness & Compassion, but pardoning comes from the Attribute of Judgment. When one suffers *l'shem Shamayim*, for the sake of Heaven, & accepts everything with love... he merits the pardoning legally, & Hashem will pardon him & give him more & more goodness in this world & the World to Come. The reason is that Hashem's judgment is *midda k'neged midda*, & when one turns about the Attribute of Judgment – which is to say, the pain & suffering – into the Attribute of Compassion – which is to say that he accepts it all with love – then according to the law of *midda k'neged midda*, the Attribute of Judgment Above also must turn into the Attribute of Compassion."

When one believes in *hashgacha pratis*, Divine Providence, & has *emuna* that everything is for the good; when he does not question Hashem's actions, & always thanks Him for everything that happens to him – he merits, *midda k'neged midda*, that Hashem will be happy also with him & receive him with a joyful countenance. In this manner, he will merit to receive from Hashem's *Otzar Matnas Chinam*, His Treasury of Free Gifts.

(See further in Rabbi Yisrael Yaakov Lugassi's book "Ner LeRagil", chapter 9)

DANCING FOR HASHEM

Rebbe Menachem Mendel of Rimanov, *ztz"l*, was attached in all his being to his Rebbe & mentor, Rebbe Elimelech of Lizhensk, *ztz"l*. Many times he would make his way from Rimanov to Lizhensk in order to breathe in the pure & holy atmosphere of his Rebbe's court, & to make holy deposits in his spiritual bank account. But he was very poor & traveling cost money that he didn't have. Many times he had to take extreme measures to be able to reach the distant town of Lizhensk.

One time, in the deep of winter, he had not a penny in his pocket. He desperately wanted to go to his Rebbe. Having no better option, he decided to take the job of the wagon driver's apprentice. His job was to take care of the horses while the driver went into the warm tavern to eat & rest. For that work he was given a free ride to Lizhensk.

It was one freezing night, while they were on their way. After feeding & watering the horses, Rebbe Menachem Mendel found himself standing on the snowy roadside along with the horses. Dressed in tatters, hungry & tired, he knew he had to do something in order to remain alive & so started to dance & jump to warm himself. As he was jumping, he thought, "I am anyway jumping now. Why should I not dance with happiness? Why shouldn't I use this as an opportunity to thank my Father in Heaven?" Thus Rebbe Menachem Mendel danced & jumped with a smile shining on his face & a song of praise on his lips.

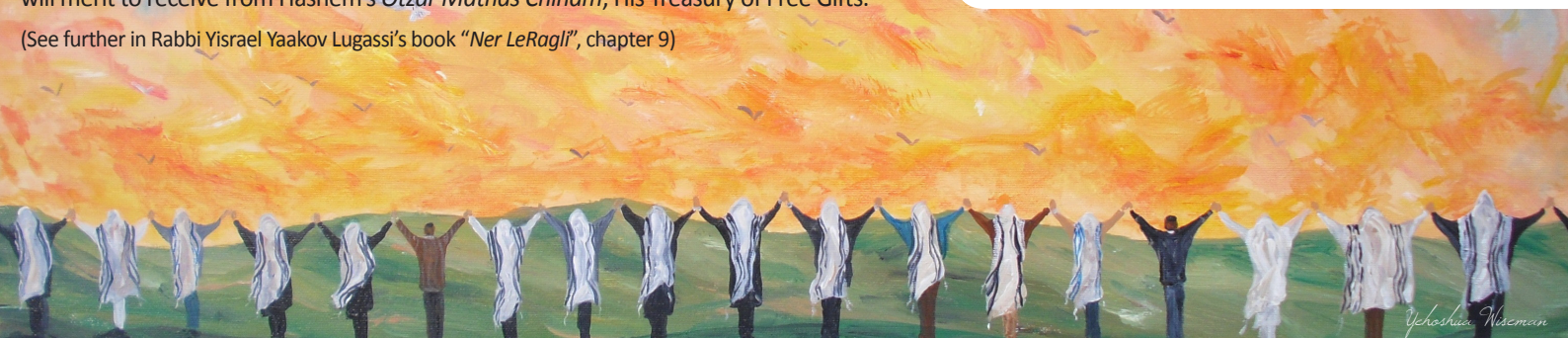
"What are you doing?" The sudden question aroused him from his reverie. Opening his eyes, he saw a wealthy looking man, one of the locals, staring at him.

"Oh, I am thanking Hashem," said Rebbe Menachem Mendel, while dancing spiritedly.

"Thanking?" asked the man. "What for?"

"Well," Rebbe Menachem Mendel stopped still. "There are people who cannot dance because they are ill. Others are so ill that they cannot feel hunger. I, *baruch Hashem*, am healthy & I feel hunger very well, & I am also able to dance...."

The man stood listening, tears glistening in his eyes. He had plenty of money, & hunger & thirst were not his problems. Rebbe Menachem Mendel's simple purity touched him & he sent for a local youngster to take the rabbi's place. He led the rabbi to his house & fed him & clothed him & gave him money for the way, sending him off to Lizhensk amidst singing & dancing. Rebbe Menachem Mendel experienced the tremendous power of gratitude to Hashem, in real time.



A WORD OF GRATITUDE

The verse in *Eicha* (3:39) exclaims: "Why should a living man complain? A man for his sins!" On this, Rashi (*Kiddushin* 80:1) clarifies: "Why should a man complain about what happens to him after all the kindness that I do for him? I gave him life and not death. Is he a man over his sins? Did he not sin against Me? Is he living due to his own merits?"

OPEN GATES OF GRATITUDE

A TRUE PERSONAL STORY

Dudi sat down heavily on a wooden bench at the end of the street. The cool night air did nothing to calm the tempest that raged in his heart. Again he opened his knapsack & poured its contents out on his lap. All of his personal belongings came cascading out all over the bench. Where could such a sum of money have disappeared to? Did anyone steal it? Could the envelope have fallen out?

He closed his eyes in attempt to escape the uncomfortable situation. The thought that he had just lost a huge sum of money that he had worked on for so many months almost caused him to collapse. He took a deep breath, as if to help him relax, & started feeling around in the bag again. After doing this for a while in vain, he leaned back & let his thoughts wander.

Only a few months had passed since he had taken his first baby-steps in the world of Torah. The way was not easy. It was fraught with drawbacks & setbacks, but the sweetness & light pulled him like a magnet & within a few months he had traveled great distances. Those months seemed like years. He gave up everything in order to grow closer to the Torah that he discovered. He laughed at the difficulties, gave up a good job, dealt with the mockery of friends & relatives & spent all of his time & energy filling the holes in his soul, a vacuum that until now he did not know had existed.

Since he had left his job, Dudi did not know how he would pay back all of his loans. His parents, who were angry at him for turning his back to their way of life, refused to support him financially. Dudi began spending his nights cleaning stairs & washing floors, happy to be spending his days in the yeshiva. Yes, he was totally spent from hours of mind-twisting activities, but he just had to earn that money, to free himself from debt. Now, it was all lost. Months of hard work, sweat, & exhaustion – vanished. All the money that he had saved up to pay off his loans was gone.

"How could it be?" The thought tormented him. "After all that I did to come closer to the Master of the World, is that what I get? Such a slap in the face?" The pain & dejection brought depression in their wake as he shuffled down the darkened streets of Yerushalayim.

"What would Rabbi Zelig say of such a story?" he thought to himself. "Indeed, that would be the best thing to do! I'll go speak with the rabbi & see what he has to say."

He looked at his watch. "If I hurry up I can still hear the end of the *shiur*," he thought as he hurried through the small streets & alleyways. "I'll speak with him after the *shiur*." He walked in as Rebbe Zelig was speaking: "...Hashem wants us happy," he was saying. "Now it is the month of Elul, the month of *teshuvah*. And how does Hashem want us to be in this month? He wants us happy & thankful – thankful for the wonderful year that passed, for the wonderful things that we did. This is the step before repentance. The holy Sages tell us that if one finds himself falling, his spirit low, he must revive himself. Did he not do some great deed? Surely he did his Creator's Will many times over." The rabbi raised his voice emphatically: "When coming from a place of thankfulness, our *teshuvah* will be that much stronger & more powerful."

Dudi stood up, dazed, & walked out the back door. His plans to speak with the rabbi had changed. It was clear to him that it wasn't coincidental that he had heard those words now. He understood that the words he heard were meant for his ears. They kept playing over & over in his mind. He felt the need to think them over alone.

Yes, he had made some major changes in his life this past year. Traveling along the path of *teshuvah* was hard but gratifying. But perhaps, in truth, he was lacking in the joyfulness of expressing gratitude? Perhaps he has never yet turned to his Father in Heaven & said to Him simply, "Thank You"?

He sat down & decided to start right then & there. "Dear Father in Heaven. I am sorry that I

never expressed my gratefulness to You. Thank You for bringing me up until here. Thank you for bringing me back to You, & thank You for the assistance. Thank You for sending me Rabbi Zelig who shows me the way...."

Dudi was used to *teshuvah*, acknowledging, mentioning, & regretting his sins & working hard to not repeat them. He even carried around a small notebook in which he recorded all his sins. But now, after expressing his thanks to Hashem, he experienced a special kind of feeling come over him, something he had never felt before, new & sweet.

He felt very relieved & relaxed. He took a deep breath & let his limbs fall to his side. He smiled a little smile. He had everything. His world was complete.

For a short time he forgot about the lost money. But when he opened his eyes & spotted the knapsack he was reminded of his loss. He swiftly lifted up the pack, again unzipped it & stuck in his hand. There was the money, lying smooth in the envelope just as he had left it! "How can that be?" he almost shrieked in surprise. "I checked that pocket at least a hundred times & didn't find the money. How can that be?" He turned his pack over again, & then again. The exact same zipper case was there on both sides! He hadn't noticed that there were two of them!

A pure joy filled his heart, & a pure clean thought entered his mind:

"Could it be that Hashem wants to send me a message in this trial? Maybe Hashem wants me to open from a different angle also the spiritual bag that is on my shoulder? Perhaps the call to '*Pischa Li pesach*, Open for Me an opening,' is referring to another opening, one of gratitude?"

"Yes, it is not enough to be remorseful about past sins & to try to mend our ways. Hashem wants to see us happy, appreciating & being thankful for all His kindnesses. Hashem wants us to come & repent after we first thank Him for everything that He has done for us, & then our repentance will be much more powerful & truthful."



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