

at the greatness of the *mitzvah*, but at the greatness of He Who commanded it.” If *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* commanded us to do it, it must be an immensely great and profound matter.

And if we look into the practice that we think is so small and insignificant, the chances are we will see how great and important it really is.

In the morning we recite the blessing of *שעשה לי כל צרכי*. In this blessing we thank *Hashem* for granting us shoes to wear. What is so special about shoes that justifies a special *berachah* over them?

Imagine someone travelling by bus to an important and fateful meeting. On the way, he slips his feet out of his shoes to make himself more comfortable. A mean prankster sitting behind him quietly drags one shoe away and throws it out the window. Sometime later, the traveler arrives at his bus stop, and looks around furiously for his shoe. The driver is pressuring him to hurry. The passengers all around are helping to search for the shoe. In the end, he gets off the bus without a shoe.

You can already imagine the end of the story: everything he went through until he got back home, all the pain and anguish, all the embarrassment...

So is a shoe really so small and insignificant after all?

If *Hashem* gives us shoes, there is so much *chesed* in it. And what does He expect from us? To remember the *mitzvah* of *tefillin* when we are putting our shoes on. Just as we tie the *tefillin* on our left, so we tie the left shoe first. The deeper significance goes like this: just as we tie and declare the rulership of *Hashem's* Oneness onto our hearts and minds by means of *tefillin*, so we need to tie the remembrance of *Hashem* onto all our acts and ways.

בְּכֹל דְרָכֶיךָ יְדָעוּ – Know *Hashem* in all your ways.²

Behavior such as this rectifies us from head to foot, so to speak, and ties us tightly to *Hashem* and His *kedushah*. ●

2 *Mishlei* 3:6.

Letter to a Ben Yeshivah Who Went to Learn In America

אֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ דִרְשׁ אֶתָּה תָמִיד עֵינֵי ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ בָּה מֵרֵשִׁית הַשָּׁנָה וְעַד אַחֲרִית שָׁנָה:
(דברים יא, יב)

A land that Hashem Your G-d seeks out; the eyes of Hashem your G-d are always on it, from the beginning of the year until the end of the year. (*Devarim* 11:12)

Dear..., *shalom uverachah!*

It occurred to me several times that I should write



you a few words, and, as we know, the word תוכחה comes from the root of להוכיח, which means to prove and clarify something, and does not necessarily imply reproval.

I want to be honest with you. I am very worried about you, and I am not sure you did the right thing by travelling to an impure land. After all, the Holy Land has *kedushah*. The *Vilna Gaon* writes about it:

It is desired by *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, it is desired by all of Yisrael. All those above and below long for it.¹

The *siyata d'Shmaya* is many times greater when one is standing before the King in His home and courtyard.

I want to make the following request of you, which comes from the depths of my heart: Please, do not leave *Hashem's* presence! *Chazal* say:

Someone who lives outside the Land is like someone who does not have G-d.²

This applies everywhere in *chutz lá'aretz* except for the tents of Torah. The *Vilna Gaon* writes that a *beis midrash* outside of *Eretz Yisrael* has *kedushas Eretz Yisrael*. But if a person leaves the tents of Torah, even for a short time, he is going out to the land of other nations, and impurity attaches itself to him, *chas v'shalom*.

The Rambam writes in the last *halachah* of *Hilchos Teshuvah*:

It is clear and well known that love of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* does not become tied to a person's heart until he properly immerses himself in it, always, and leaves everything in the world, other than it.³

This shows that the *halachah* of loving *Hashem* is not just to attach oneself to that which brings a person close to *Hashem*, but also to leave everything

else.

My father recounted to me that when R. Baruch Ber Lebowitz came to America to collect money for Yeshivas Kamenitz, and was riding in a car through Manhattan, they pointed out to him the tall buildings, but he didn't want to look out of the window. He said, "I didn't come to see America; only for the yeshivah."

And this is not some kind of exceptionally high *madreigah*. It is obvious that every country has its unique characteristics and special sights, and this is very attractive, like an *אשה זרה*, an unfamiliar woman (*Mishlei ch. 5*), whom everyone who looks becomes attached to and is destined to die disgracefully. It is the same with a person who is drawn after the beauty of a country. In Hebrew, the word for land and for country, *ארץ ומדינה*, are in the feminine gender. It attracts just like an unfamiliar woman does, and is damaging like she is.

Thus R. Baruch Ber did not want to look at the beauty of a foreign country, like he would not look at an unfamiliar woman. *Tzaddikim* would satiate their eyes only on the Holy Land, as it says, "A land that... the eyes of *Hashem* your G-d are always on it, from the beginning of the year until the end of the year."

The Rambam writes: "A person needs to know that nothing lasts forever and ever, except for knowledge of the Rock of the World."⁴ We need to work very hard on not running after worldly desires. This applies not only to lusts that the Torah expressly forbids but also to desires that seem to be perfectly okay. Instead, we need attach ourselves to Torah and eternity.

You, too, have reached the age where you can look back at what you went through in earlier years of your life, and you know from experience what remains with us of all the things we chased after and considered at the time to be important. In the end, the only thing left is the few *dapim* of *Gemara* that we learned, and this is the property that has true

¹ Letter of *Vilna Gaon*.

² *Kesubos* 110b.

³ *Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Teshuvah* 10:6.

⁴ *Ibid Hilchos Stam* 6:13.

value. Besides that, nothing stays.

You have come to a foreign country. What property did you come with? Only what you learned, the Torah knowledge that you acquired, and the ability to think straight in learning. This is what you were respected for, this is what gave you some status, and all the things that we wasted so many hours on are like they never existed.

Similarly, when you come back to *Eretz Yisrael*, after a quarter of an hour you will finish telling about all the wonders of America, but the hours

of *hasmadah*, the *dapim* of *Gemara* and the *tefilos b'kavanah* – they are the merchandise that we take home with us even in this world. And surely when we go on the great journey, we will take with us only the true merchandise that will benefit us day after day and year after year, endlessly, forever.

My dear... please spill a little ink and let me know what is really going on with you, if you are immersed in your learning? Every word will be a relief for me and will be considered a *mitzvah* for you.

Shimshon Dovid Pincus



PARSHAH TOPIC

100 Berachos

וְעַתָּה יִשְׂרָאֵל מָה ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ שֶׁאֵל מְעַמְךָ. (דברים י, יב)

Now, Yisrael, what does *Hashem* your G-d ask of you? (*Devarim* 10:12)

“Now, Yisrael, what... (מה)” – Read it as ‘100’ (מאה). This refers to 100 blessings.

From here R. Meir derived: A person must recite 100 blessings every day. (*Yalkut Shimoni* 855)

100 is Perfection

Altogether there are 620 *mitzvos*, corresponding to the *gematriya* of כתר, “crown.” This includes the 613 Biblical *mitzvos* and seven Rabbinical *mitzvos* (Chanukah lights, the reading of *Megilas Esther* on Purim, washing hands before bread, etc). One of the Rabbinical *mitzvos* is to recite 100 blessings a day.

This *mitzvah* was enacted by *David Hamelech*.

Every day, 100 Jews would die [from the plague]. David came and enacted for them to recite 100 blessings. After he enacted it, the plague stopped.¹

This *mitzvah* was not just for the time of *David Hamelech*, to stop the plague. It is for all generations.

On an ordinary day we do not have trouble reaching the sum of 100 *berachos* if we pray the *Shemoneh Esrei* three times and recite the normal blessings over food. But on *Shabbos*, the regular prayers contain less *berachos*, so we need to make up for it by eating various treats and snacks, and reciting *berachos* over them, in order to reach the required 100 blessings.

The number 100 symbolizes the peak of *shleimus*, of completion and perfection. Ten is a number of *shleimus*: the world was created through ten Divine

¹ *Bemidbar Rabbah* 18:21.

utterances,² and the Torah is contained within the Ten Commandments. The number one hundred comprises ten times ten. It signifies the *shleimus* of ten also in depth, as is explained in early Torah sources. This is why 100 is *shleimus*.

When *David HaMelech* saw a terrible plague that caused such mortality he understood that the Jewish people lacked connection to the Source of vitality. The mitzvah of 100 *berachos* rectified the situation.

Why was 100 *berachos* the solution?

The Danger of Distance

To understand the answer, we must know that the more people love one another, the more fire there is when an angry rift develops between them. This is true between father and son, and between two brothers. The following incident illustrates this:

People traveled great distances to participate in a very prominent wedding that took place in the time of R. Akiva Eiger. A few minutes before the *chuppah*, two witnesses appeared and came up to the rabbi who was to officiate at the wedding. They testified before him that the bridegroom was *Halachically* unfit for marriage. The *chuppah* was cancelled, and the question was sent to the leading rabbis of the generation, including the Chasam Sofer. The Chasam Sofer tried to clarify whether the witnesses were perhaps relatives of the bridegroom in some way. This would disqualify their testimony. Indeed, it turned out that they were related.

R. Akiva Eiger was very moved by this and wrote, “My son-in-law [the Chasam Sofer] was inspired by *ruach hakodesh!*”³ Afterwards they asked the Chasam Sofer what made him suspect that the witnesses were relatives. He answered: “This was a wedding that was publicized many months beforehand. Why couldn’t these witnesses have come to the rabbi earlier and quietly tell him what they had to say? Why did they wait until the *chuppah* was about to begin, when all the invited people had already arrived, and only

then come and say what they said? Only relatives are capable of such wickedness!” concluded the Chasam Sofer.

When people who are close become alienated from one another, the fire is fierce.

The greatest closeness is between husband and wife. For this reason, an unbelievable amount of anger and cruelty can break out when a husband and wife who were once close become separated. In such situations, the greatest *tzaddik* is liable to turn into a wild animal.

And the husband-wife relationship is a common metaphor for the relationship between Hashem and the Jewish people. All of *Shir Hashirim* describes in these terms the closeness between *Hashem* and the Jewish people.

So when anger and alienation develop between them, the result is terrible troubles. The Chmielnicki massacres, the Holocaust, the Inquisition, and on and on. The fire is awesome.

In such situations, the first step is to come to a hasty ceasefire. The hostilities must be brought to a halt. And the outstanding symptom of hostility between two people is the fact that they do not talk to one another. They are not on speaking terms. In order for the fire to die down a little, the first step is for them to start talking.

What is *shalom bayis*? It is good communication between the couple in all areas of life. Let’s imagine a couple that loves each other very much but cannot say a good word to one another. He cannot manage to say “thank you” nicely, and she is incapable of saying “good morning” to him. Is this called *shalom bayis*?

When there was a terrible anger in the world and 100 Jews were dying of the plague daily, something had to be done fast in order to quiet down the anger a little bit. Thus *David HaMelech* instituted that every person should recite 100 *berachos* a day, for this promotes the relationship between the Jewish people and *Hashem*. They started talking to Him again, so to speak.

And these 100 *berachos* are scattered throughout

² *Pirkei Avos* 5:1.

³ See *Teshuvos R. Akiva Eiger*, Responsum 198.

all areas of life, promoting a positive relationship in all areas. Hashem gives you an apple? Say “thank you,” and recite *Baruch Atah Hashem... borei pri ha'eitz*. Hashem gives you eyes? Say “thank you,” and recite *Baruch Atah Hashem... poke'ach ivrim*. Did you ever receive an expensive camera as a gift? Each one of us has an incredibly expensive and sophisticated camera. It is called our eyes. If you want to appreciate your eyes, next time you are walking down the sidewalk, stop and close your eyes for ten seconds. When you open your eyes again and look around you will realize how wonderful your eyes are.

Did you ever think about how marvelous it is to have air to breathe? Try putting your head under water and counting to fifteen. When you take your first breath afterwards you will realize what a sweet feeling it is to have air to breathe. There are people in hospitals who are attached to artificial respirators, fighting for each breath. But we breathe in fresh air without any problem. This is a wonderful gift from Hashem. And what does Hashem ask from us in return? Just recite *Elokai, neshamah shenasata bi... v'Atah m'shamrah b'kirbi...*

We have all kinds of good foods. What does Hashem ask of us? Just to say “thank you” to Him. Can't we speak nicely to Hashem?

Relate to Hashem

You might object: there is no reason to make a big deal out of 100 *berachos* a day, as it is the least of our problems. All Torah-observant Jews pray three times a day anyway and recite *berachos* when they eat. Isn't this *mitzvah* automatically taken care of?

Not really. Many of us have not recited a true *berachah* since we graduated kindergarten. We are programmed like robots to automatically “make a *berachah*” when it is called for, but we have stopped

talking to Hashem. This is because Hashem is not so real for us.

We are polite people. If something is served to us we will not forget to say “thank you.” This is because a real, live person served it to us, and we naturally feel an inclination to thank them. But Hashem is not real and live enough for us.

Once a person sitting next to the Chafetz Chaim recited *birkas hamazon*, rattling off the passage of *Hu heitiv, Hu meitiv... le'olam al yichasreinu*. The Chafetz Chaim said to him, “Do you know that you just asked for fifteen things?” The person was surprised, and the Chafetz Chaim counted the things for him.

We ask Hashem for (1) *chein*, “grace,” that we should find favor in people's eyes and not seem ridiculous to them. Then we ask for (2) *chesed* and (3) *rachamim*. Then for (4) *revach*, “space;” we ask to have enough space and not to be cramped. Then we ask for (5) *hatzalah*, “to be saved.” How many times a day do our children cross the street? Then we ask for (6) *hatzlachah*, “success.” When we go to learn today, please give us success in our learning. Then we ask for (7) *berachah*, (8) *yeshuah*, (9) *nechamah*, (10) *parnasah*, (11) *chalkalah*, (12) *rachamim*, (13) *chaim*, (14) *shalom*, (15) *kol tov*.

Imagine your children would come to you and say at breakneck speed: “Daddy *Tateh* I need this and that and the other thing and...” Is that a way to ask for things?

We need to get in the habit of speaking to Hashem in a way that is communication. This does not require greatness on our part. It is a simple habit that anyone who wants can acquire. And we are promised success. **הבא ליטהר מסייעים אותו** – “He who seeks to purify himself is assisted by Heaven.”⁴

⁴ *Shabbos* 104a.