

SHAILOS L'CHAZARA

Review Questions

Likkutei Sichos Vol. 2

לקוטי שיחות · חלק ב

Parshas Tavo

פרשת תבוא

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TEACHER'S EDITION

Answers are printed in italics on the answer lines, with the section (§) of the sicha.

★ easy ★★ medium ★★★ harder

Each sicha has questions, a true chassidishe story, and a lesson for you.

The First and the Best, for Hashem!

ביכורים ותוכחה

Likkutei Sichos vol. 2, Parshas Tavo, p. 390 (Hebrew edition pp. 95–97), sections 1–3. §1 is from Kovetz Lubavitch (year 4, issue 2); §§2–3 are from the sicha of Shabbos Parshas Nitzavim 5714 (1954).

The point: *This week's parsha speaks about bikkurim, the first fruits. A Jew takes the choicest fruits, and the very first ones, even before he takes any for himself, and brings them to the Beis HaMikdash to thank Hashem for blessing the fruits of the land. Bikkurim were not burned on the mizbe'ach like other korbanos; they were given to the kohen. We learn two things. First: a person plowed, planted and worked hard for these fruits, and still he takes the BEST and the FIRST and makes them holy. Sometimes a person argues, "After all my hard work, fine, I'll give some, but why the best?" But when he thinks about it, he sees that this argument only comes when faith is missing, when he imagines "my strength and the power of my hand made me this wealth", instead of "the fruit that You, Hashem, gave me". That is the opposite of simple faith, and simple faith is found in EVERY Jew without exception; it only needs to be revealed so it affects daily life. Second: since bikkurim were eaten by the kohen and not burned, we learn that even physical pleasure, when a person prepares himself and makes himself holy like a "kohen", can be used for holiness, so that eating serves Hashem just like a korban burned on the mizbe'ach. This is one of the foundations of Chassidus: we serve Hashem not only in davening and learning, but also in eating and in business. So bikkurim exist even in galus and outside Eretz Yisrael: when a person says from the depth of his heart about everything he has, "You, Hashem, gave me", it becomes holy. And just as the bikkurim brought a bracha to bring them again next year with joy, so using what Hashem gives the way He wants brings a bracha for even more next year. (§1) Before Rosh Hashanah (Parshas Tavo) and before Shavuos (Parshas Bechukosai) we read the tochacha, the rebuke. But another parsha is read in between, so that the tochacha doesn't come right before the Yom Tov. Why read it then at all? Because the tochacha is not a punishment, chas v'shalom; it is a cleaning of the vessel. Before you pour something precious into a vessel, you first wash it. Every Rosh Hashanah a NEW light comes that never came before, and the vessel must be pure to receive it. True, for a moment it is painful, especially for a prince who is an only son (and every Jew is Hashem's only son), and that is why we put a parsha in between. But our merciful Father is willing that for a short moment it shouldn't be so smooth, because of the precious gift He will give afterward. (§2) The tochacha in Bechukosai has 49 curses, and in Tavo 98, double. Why? Shavuos comes from above to below, like a new convert who is like a newborn baby: the avodah of tzaddikim. Tishrei is teshuvah, from below to above (the letters of "Tishrei" go backwards: tav, shin, reish), the avodah of baalei teshuvah, and baalei teshuvah stand higher than tzaddikim. The second luchos, given after teshuvah, were "double" the first. So before Rosh Hashanah the cleaning is double. So too galus and Geulah: the sin was "double", the galus was "double", and the Geulah will be a double comfort, "Nachamu, nachamu". (§3)*

QUESTIONS ★ easy ★★ medium ★★★ harder

- ★ What are bikkurim? Which fruits did a Jew bring, and to whom were they given?

The first fruits. He brought the choicest and the very first, before taking any for himself, to

the Beis HaMikdash, and gave them to the kohen. (§1)

2. ★★ Why might a person argue against giving the BEST fruits? Where does this argument come from?

"After all my hard work, why the best?" It comes only when faith is missing: "my strength made me this wealth" instead of "You, Hashem, gave me". (§1)

3. ★★ What does the sicha say about simple faith in every Jew?

Every Jew has simple faith, without exception. It only needs to be revealed so it affects daily life. (§1)

4. ★★★ Bikkurim were eaten by the kohen, not burned. What does this teach about eating and business?

Even physical pleasure, when a person prepares and makes himself holy like a "kohen", can serve Hashem like a korban. A foundation of Chassidus: serving Hashem also through eating and business. (§1)

5. ★★ How do we have bikkurim even today, in galus?

When a person says from the depth of his heart about everything he has, "You, Hashem, gave me", it becomes holy. (§1)

6. ★ When do we read the tochacha? Why is another parsha read between it and the Yom Tov?

Before Shavuot (Bechukosai) and before Rosh Hashanah (Tavo). So it doesn't come right before the Yom Tov: a prince can't bear even a little that isn't right. (§2)

7. ★★★ If the tochacha is not a punishment, what is it? Give the sicha's mashal.

A cleaning of the vessel. Before pouring something precious into a vessel you wash it; every Rosh Hashanah a new light comes, so the vessel must be pure. (§2)

8. ★★ Why is our Father willing that for a short moment it shouldn't be "smooth"?

Because of the precious gift He will give afterward. (§2)

9. ★ How many curses are in the tochacha of Bechukosai, and how many in Tavo?

49 in Bechukosai, 98 in Tavo: double. (§3)

10. ★★★ Why does Rosh Hashanah need a double cleaning? Explain “or yashar” and “or chozer”.

Shavuot is from above to below (tzaddikim, like a convert who is a newborn). Tishrei is teshuvah, from below to above (tav-shin-reish), and baalei teshuvah stand higher than tzaddikim, so the cleaning is double. (§3)

11. ★★ How do the second luchos show that teshuvah is higher?

They were given after teshuvah, the day after Yom Kippur, and they were “double” the first luchos. (§3)

12. ★★ What will be “double” in the Geulah?

A double comfort, “Nachamu, nachamu”, to match the double galus. (§3)

A CHASSIDISHE STORY

The Rusty Coin

The Alter Rebbe once traveled to collect money to free Jewish captives. In one town lived a rich man famous as a miser. Whoever came to his door got one rusty copper coin, and everyone threw it back at him.

The Alter Rebbe insisted on visiting him with two rabbanim, and told them not to say a word. The rich man brought out his purse and handed over the rusty coin. The Alter Rebbe smiled warmly, thanked him, wrote him a beautiful receipt full of brachos, and shook his hand with admiration. Outside, one rabbi hissed, “You should have thrown it back in his face!”

Suddenly the door opened. “Rabbis, please come back!” The rich man gave a thousand rubles. Again the Alter Rebbe thanked him warmly and wrote a receipt. They left, and again the door opened: “I’ve changed my mind. I’ll give the whole sum!” Five thousand rubles.

“How did you get that miser to give?” asked the amazed rabbanim.

“That man is no miser,” said the Alter Rebbe. “No Jewish soul truly is. But how could he want to give, if he never felt the joy of giving? Everyone he gave his rusty coin to throw it back in his face.”

Source: Tuvia Bolton, “The Rusty Penny” (chabad.org)

Think: “No Jewish soul is truly a miser.” How does this fit with what the sicha says about every Jew and giving the best to Hashem?

Every Jew has simple faith; it only needs to be revealed (§1). Holding back comes from forgetting that Hashem gave it. When the Alter Rebbe revealed the good in him, he gave everything, even more than “the best”.

THE LESSON FOR YOU

Give Hashem the first and the best, not the leftovers, because everything you have, He gave you. And you can serve Hashem even with eating and with what you own.

For example: You got \$20 for your birthday. Before spending any of it, put the first \$2 in the pushka, gladly, saying "Hashem, You gave me this." And make a brachah slowly on the first bite of birthday cake.

Not Just “For the Good”: It IS Good!

גם זו לטובה

Likkutei Sichos vol. 2, Parshas Tavo, p. 393 (Hebrew edition pp. 97–99), sections 4–7. From the sicha of 20 Menachem Av 5711 (1951).

The point: Chazal have two sayings that everything is good: “Kol d’avid Rachmana l’tav avid”, “Everything Hashem does, He does for the good” (in Aramaic, the language of Targum), and “Gam zu l’tovah”, “This too is for the good” (in Lashon HaKodesh). Lashon HaKodesh is a holy and CLEAR language, so “gam zu l’tovah” means that it is clearly seen that everything is good. In “kol d’avid Rachmana l’tav avid”, it is also for the good, but it is not seen so clearly. We understand the difference from the stories the Gemara brings for each. (§4) For “kol d’avid Rachmana”: Rabbi Akiva went on a trip with a candle (to learn at night), a donkey (to carry his things) and a rooster (to wake him for Tikkun Chatzos). (The Rebbe adds: today a traveler takes a checkbook and a toothbrush!) The town wouldn’t let him in, so he slept in the field. A wind blew out the candle, a lion ate the donkey, and a cat ate the rooster. Rabbi Akiva said, “Everything Hashem does is for the good.” That night bandits attacked the town and captured its people. Had he been in the town, or had the candle been lit, or the donkey and rooster made noise, the bandits would have found him. By losing everything, he was saved. (§4) For “gam zu l’tovah”: the Tanna Nachum Ish Gamzu got his name because about everything he said, “Gam zu l’tovah.” Once the Jews sent him to the Roman emperor with a box of precious stones as a gift. At night the jewels were stolen and the box was filled with dirt. He said, “Gam zu l’tovah. The Jews sent me, I’ll do my shlichus, and Hashem will help.” When the emperor opened the box and saw dirt, he wanted to punish him as a rebel. But Hashem sent Eliyahu HaNavi, disguised as an officer, who said: “Maybe this is the dirt Avraham Avinu used to win his wars.” They tried it in a war, and the emperor’s enemies were defeated. (§5) The difference: Rabbi Akiva really did have loss and pain. He lost his donkey and rooster and sat in the dark in a field. It was all FOR the good, but the things themselves were painful. Nachum Ish Gamzu had no loss at all. On the contrary: precious stones might not have been accepted (the emperor has plenty), but the dirt was! For Rabbi Akiva the pain saved him from a bigger pain; for Nachum, the thing itself was good. (§6) That is the advantage of “gam zu l’tovah”: “zu”, THIS very thing, is good. At first there was hiding, eyes were closed, and it looked like a loss; when the hiding is removed, it turns out it was good from the start. Nachum Ish Gamzu was Rabbi Akiva’s teacher, so Rabbi Akiva lived a generation later, when the darkness of galus was greater (every generation it grows), and it was not possible to SEE that everything is good in itself; only “everything Hashem does is for the good” could be seen in the world. Nachum’s generation was close to (or still in) the time of the Beis HaMikdash, so “gam zu l’tovah” could be revealed. Now we are coming close to the Geulah, when Hashem will “take the sun out of its sheath”, and it will be seen openly in everything that “gam zu l’tovah”, and we will say, “This is Hashem, we hoped for Him.” (§7)

QUESTIONS ★ easy ★★ medium ★★★ harder

- ★ What are the two sayings of Chazal that everything is good? In which languages are they said?

“Kol d’avid Rachmana l’tav avid” (Aramaic) and “Gam zu l’tovah” (Lashon HaKodesh). (§4)

- ★★ Why does it matter that “gam zu l’tovah” is in Lashon HaKodesh?

Lashon HaKodesh is a holy and clear language, so “gam zu l’tovah” means it is CLEARLY seen that everything is good. (§4)

3. ★ What three things did Rabbi Akiva take on his trip, and why?

A candle to learn at night, a donkey to carry his things, a rooster to wake him for Tikkun

Chatzos. (§4)

4. ★★ How were all of Rabbi Akiva's losses for the good?

Bandits attacked the town that night. If he had been in town, or if the candle, donkey or rooster

had given him away, they would have caught him. (§4)

5. ★★ What happened to Nachum Ish Gamzu's gift? What did he say, and why did he go on anyway?

The jewels were stolen and replaced with dirt. He said "gam zu l'tovah": the Jews sent him, so he

would do his shlichus and Hashem would help. (§5)

6. ★★ How did the dirt turn out to be good?

Eliyahu, disguised as an officer, said it might be Avraham Avinu's dirt. They tried it in war and

the emperor's enemies were defeated. (§5)

7. ★★★ What is the big difference between Rabbi Akiva's story and Nachum Ish Gamzu's?

Rabbi Akiva had real loss and pain that saved him from worse: FOR the good. Nachum had no loss at

all; the dirt itself was better than jewels: the thing itself was good. (§6)

8. ★★ What does the word "zu" (this) teach in "gam zu l'tovah"?

THIS very thing is good, not only a means to something good. At first it is hidden; when the

hiding is removed, we see it was good from the start. (§7)

9. ★★★ Why could Nachum see "gam zu l'tovah", while Rabbi Akiva could only see "for the good"?

Rabbi Akiva lived a generation later, when galus was darker, so it couldn't be seen. Nachum's

generation was close to the time of the Beis HaMikdash. (§7)

10. ★★ What will happen as we come close to the Geulah?

Hashem will "take the sun out of its sheath", and it will be seen openly that everything is good,

"gam zu l'tovah". (§7)

A CHASSIDISHE STORY

The Torah Rolled to the Wrong Place

One Simchas Torah, in the Frierdiker Rebbe's shul, a Sefer Torah was taken out of the Aron Kodesh to read the last parsha of the Torah, V'Zos HaBerachah.

But when they took off the mantle and opened it, the reader found that the Sefer Torah had been rolled to the very BEGINNING, to Bereishis! In front of everyone, on Simchas Torah, the whole Sefer Torah had to be rolled all the way back to the end. It looked like an embarrassing mistake that wasted everyone's time.

At the Yom Tov meal, the Frierdiker Rebbe spoke about it, and he didn't see a mistake at all.

"The teachings of the Baal Shem Tov about hashgacha pratit are well known," he said. "If the Baal Shem Tov were here, he would rejoice. It was decided from the beginning of time that these particular people should use their strength to roll the Sefer Torah on that day!"

What looked like a mix-up was itself part of Hashem's plan: a special mitzvah, prepared long ago, just for them.

Source: "A Historical Analysis of 'Learning Something From Everything'" (chabad.org)

Think: Was the wrongly rolled Sefer Torah "for the good" like Rabbi Akiva, or "gam zu l'tovah" like Nachum Ish Gamzu? Why?

Like Nachum: nothing was lost; the "mistake" was itself good, a mitzvah prepared for those people

(§§6–7). It only looked bad until the hiding was removed.

THE LESSON FOR YOU

When something looks bad, say "gam zu l'tovah" and mean it: THIS itself is good, even if you can't see it yet. Soon, with Moshiach, we'll see it clearly.

For example: The trip you were waiting for got canceled because of rain, and you're stuck at home. Say "gam zu l'tovah", then look for the good in it, like the time to finish your siyum or play with your little brother, who was so happy you stayed.

We Don't Want Payment, We Want You!

לך ה' הצדקה

Likkutei Sichos vol. 2, Parshas Tavo, p. 395 (Hebrew edition pp. 99-101), sections 8-10. §8 is from the sicha of Shabbos Nitzavim-Vayeilech 5715 (1955); §§9-10 are from the sicha of Shabbos Nitzavim-Vayeilech 5713 (1953).

The point: *The avodah of Elul prepares for Tishrei. In Elul we fix the deeds of the past year and reach "achas sha'alti", "ONE thing I asked", going out of our own private matters. Through that comes the new light of Tishrei: "to You alone, with no strangers", and a good and sweet year with everything we need. That is why the word "Elul" hints to all three "lines" of avodah. "Ina l'yado v'samti lach" (the cities of refuge) is the line of Torah, since Torah is a refuge from the yetzer hara. "Ani l'dodi v'dodi li" is the line of avodah, tefillah. "Ish l're'eihu u'matanos la'evyonim" is the line of gemilus chassadim. The foundation of all of them is teshuvah, hinted in "(u'mal Hashem Elokecha) es levavcha v'es levav (zaracha)", like "Modeh Ani" at the start of the day. And through Elul's avodah we come to the Geulah, hinted in "Ashira laHashem vayomru leimor", which also spells Elul. The main point is the Shabbos before Tishrei, which blesses all the days of the week, including Rosh Hashanah. (§8) In Selichos we say, "Lecha Hashem hatzedakah, v'lanu boshes hapanim": "To You, Hashem, is righteousness, and to us is shame." Hashem is right in all His ways, and we are ashamed because of what we did this year that wasn't as it should be. But if it means "You are right", it should say "tzedek". Why "tzedakah", which also means charity to a poor person? The difference: tzedek is giving someone what he deserves; tzedakah is a free gift. Not only does he not deserve payment, he doesn't even deserve a gift (a gift is given only when the receiver gave the giver some pleasure). So we say "tzedakah" with both meanings: Hashem is right and we are ashamed, and so we feel we have nothing to demand by right; we ask for tzedakah, as in Selichos: "We have no face to ask You; we ask only for tzedakah." (§9) Really, we COULD demand by right: all Jews are princes, and for a prince every little job is a big, hard job that deserves big payment. But then what we'd get would come from a lower level, a light that belongs to the worlds, which is limited. We want higher. The Alter Rebbe would say, "I don't want Your Gan Eden, I don't want Your Olam Haba, I want only You alone." That is a very high level, but since we are his chassidim and follow in his footsteps, we have the duty and the privilege to act this way, at least in practice: to go out of ourselves and our own limits and do what Hashem wants. That is "without limits", and then what comes down to us is also without limits. That's why we ask "tzedakah alone": not because we can't demand, but because we want nothing but You. The vessel for this is not making calculations, but "v'lanu boshes hapanim", bittul. And Jews are promised it will be given, so on Rosh Hashanah we wear white, sure that Hashem will fill our hearts' requests for good, with children, life and plenty of parnassah. (§10)*

QUESTIONS ★ easy ★★ medium ★★★ harder

1. ★ What is "achas sha'alti" in Elul? What does it bring in Tishrei?

"One thing I asked": going out of our private matters. It brings the new light of Tishrei and a good, sweet year. (§8)

2. ★★ Which three "lines" of avodah are hinted in "Elul"? Give the pasuk for each.

Torah: "Ina l'yado v'samti lach" (the cities of refuge). Avodah/tefillah: "Ani l'dodi v'dodi li".

Gemilus chassadim: "Ish l're'eihu u'matanos la'evyonim". (§8)

3. ★★ What is the foundation of all three lines? How is it like "Modeh Ani"?

Teshuvah ("es levavcha v'es levav"). Like Modeh Ani at the start of the day: turning to Hashem before everything. (§8)

4. ★ Which Shabbos is the main one, and why?

The Shabbos before Tishrei: it blesses all the days of the week, including Rosh Hashanah. (§8)

5. ★★ What is the difference between "tzedek" and "tzedakah"?

Tzedek: giving what someone deserves. Tzedakah: a free gift, which he doesn't deserve even as a gift. (§9)

6. ★★★ Why do we say "Lecha Hashem hatzedakah" and not "hatzedek"?

It has both meanings: Hashem is right and we are ashamed, so we have nothing to demand by right; we ask for tzedakah, a free gift. (§9)

7. ★★ Why could we really demand payment from Hashem?

All Jews are princes. For a prince every small job is big and hard, so he deserves big payment. (§10)

8. ★★★ So why don't we demand payment? What did the Alter Rebbe say?

Payment would come from a lower, limited light. We want higher: "I don't want Your Gan Eden... I want only You." (§10)

9. ★★ What is the "vessel" for receiving from Hashem Himself?

Not calculations, but "v'lanu boshes hapanim": bittul, not feeling our own importance. (§10)

10. ★★ Why do Jews wear white on Rosh Hashanah?

Because we are sure Hashem will give us tzedakah and fill our hearts' requests for good. (§10)

A CHASSIDISHE STORY

The Etrog with the Smell of Gan Eden

On the first day of Sukkos, Rebbe Elimelech of Lizensk smelled the fragrance of Gan Eden in his shul. With his brother Reb Zusha he found where it came from: the etrog of a quiet stranger named Uri, a poor melamed.

Uri explained: every year he saved half his small earnings for a beautiful etrog and walked to Lemberg to buy it. This year, with fifty gulden in his pocket, he stopped at an inn and heard a wagon driver sobbing. His horse had collapsed in the forest, and without a horse his family would starve. The innkeeper offered a horse for fifty gulden.

Uri gave forty-five gulden, all he had except five, bought the man a horse, and slipped away before he could be thanked. With the last five gulden he could buy only a plain, kosher etrog, and he was too embarrassed to bring it home.

"Your etrog is special indeed!" said Rebbe Elimelech, and told him: the wagon driver, who didn't know how to daven, cracked his whip to the sky and cried, "Father in Heaven, I love You!" On Erev Yom Kippur, that simple love helped tip the scales in Heaven for all of Yisrael, and that is why Uri's plain etrog had the smell of Gan Eden.

Source: "An Etrog from the Garden of Eden", ed. Baruch Emanuel Erdstein (chabad.org)

Think: Uri gave tzedakah that wasn't "deserved", and the wagon driver said "I love You!" without asking for anything. How does this fit with "Lecha Hashem hatzedakah"?

Uri gave a free gift, tzedakah, like we ask Hashem to give us (§9). The wagon driver wanted only

Hashem, not payment, like "I want only You" (§10). That is the vessel that brings down blessing

without limits.

THE LESSON FOR YOU

Don't serve Hashem like a worker waiting for payment. Want Hashem Himself, and ask Him for blessings as a free gift, with full trust.

For example: You helped clean up after the Shabbos meal. Instead of thinking "Now I deserve extra dessert," think "I did it because Hashem wants it." And when you daven, ask Hashem for what you need, sure He'll give it as a gift.