

תורת אביגדור
הגאון ר' אביגדור מיללער זצ"ל

Rav Avigdor Miller on the Parsha
Adapted from his Tapes, Sforim and Writings of Talmidim

פרשת כי תבא

Mishpachat Levy
Edition 

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Rav Avigdor Miller ztz"l on

פרשת כי תבא

FOLLOW THE OX

In this week's *parsha*, we are introduced to the mitzvah of *bikkurim*, the bringing of the first fruits of your field to Yerushalayim, and presenting them to the *kohanim* in the *Beis Hamikdash*. The farmer is commanded to bring his fruit-laden baskets to Hashem and speak out words of praise and gratitude. It has been many months of long hours of difficult and tiring work in the field, harvesting the various fruits and grains. And the time of harvest has come to an end, and now the home is filled with all good things. A long year of hard work has paid off with enough food for the family to live happily for another year. But before the farmer and his family has the chance to settle down to enjoy the fruits of his labor they are expected to pause their lives in order to take part in the ceremony of bringing *bikkurim* to the *Beis Hamikdash*.

All the field owners of the local towns and villages would gather together in the closest city to begin the joyous procession towards *Yerushalayim*. They carried gold, silver and wicker baskets filled with the *bikkurim*, and the baskets themselves were beautifully adorned and decorated with other fruit. An ox,

specially decorated for the occasion, with his horns plated with gold would lead the procession. When the signal was given, the large group of men, women and children would begin the parade toward the *Ir Hakodesh*.

HOMELESS FOR A FEW WEEKS

And what a sight it was! There was joyous music, dancing, and singing words of gratitude to Hashem as more and more people from the towns along the way joined the already large group. The farmer and his family were pulled along in a wave of fellow Jews, and they all were singing and dancing to the sweet sound of the flute, as they made their way to *Yerushalayim*. And it wasn't a simple trip at all. People gathered their families and had to travel for days, and sometimes weeks. And they slept in the streets and town squares at night.

And upon arrival at the outskirts of *Yerushalayim*, the dignitaries of the city would come out to greet them and escort them into the Holy City. And as they carried their *bikkurim* through the streets of *Yerushalayim* toward the *Beis Hamikdash*, all the craftsmen and merchants lining the streets and marketplaces would stand up in honor of these מביאי ביכורים.

A HUGE THANK YOU PARTY!

Now, my little words won't even begin to do justice to the pomp and panoply of how this mitzvah of *bikkurim* was performed. ושמחת בכל הטוב - "And you should rejoice in all the good that I have given you" (ibid. 26:11), and the *Am Yisroel* went *all out* in joyous celebration of this *mitzvah*. It was an experience that one would expect to be once in a life-time - but for the lucky farmers it was one that was repeated every year. And for what? What was the purpose of all of these glorious festivities? Why all the traveling, all the time and effort, for this one *mitzvah*?

And the answer is that it was all for the purpose of *saying thank you to Hashem*. It's remarkable! A nation should stop everything to say thank you!? Yes; in the throes of busy life, whether in the field or in the city, we often forget to take the time, and more importantly, the mental stamina, to appreciate the

overwhelming benefits that are showered upon us daily. And so the *mitzvah* of *bikkurim* provided the Nation with the opportunity to take a pause - a long pause - in their lives, and dedicate it to the recognition of the *chasdei Hashem*. The entire *mitzvah* of *bikkurim*, thanking Hashem for a successful harvest, is rooted in the obligation to be continuously thanking Hashem for the endless *chasodim* that He is continuously bestowing upon us. And so, the joyous festivities surrounding the *mitzvah* of *Bikkurim*, was *purposefully planned that way* so that the *Am Yisroel* should recognize that they have no more important purpose in life, no better career, than the *joyous expression of gratitude to Hashem*.

THE BIKKURIM DAY PARADE

In those glory days of our Nation, they weren't making cross-country trips with the families to see the Grand Canyon or Niagara Falls. No, they trekked across the country for the real purpose in life - to give thanks to Hashem. To take part in such a procession, a parade of thousands dancing in the streets, *making their way to say thank you to Hashem*, was a life changing event. You can't imagine what that did for a person to participate in such an experience. *It went into their blood*; that they were alive for one purpose and one purpose only- to gain a tangible Awareness of the endless kindnesses of Hakodosh Boruch Hu and living lives of gratitude to Him.

And we are expected to learn this lesson of *bikkurim*, and do the same in our lives. The obligation to thank Hashem for the numerous benefits that He heaps upon us daily is not merely one of our many obligations in this world. It is actually *the most pressing* of all obligations, and the sin of ingratitude towards Hashem is actually the sin of all sins.

Of course, the best thing would be if we would stop our lives, and dance and sing in wild enthusiasm, as the ones who brought the *bikkurim* did. And if you would realize how many endless benefits Hashem is providing you with always, you *would be dancing always in delirious joy*.

And that's what Dovid Hamelech tells us in *Tehillim*: What is the good that one should seek in this world, asked Dovid? What is the best of all careers that a young man, even a young man of sixty, should choose for his stay in this world? And he answers : טוב להודות לשם - "It is good to give thanks to Hashem" (*Tehillim* 92:2). Now, what is Dovid telling us here? That giving thanks to Hashem is *also* a good thing?! Like ice-cream is good and watermelon is good, saying thank you to Hashem is *also* good? No, for that we don't need Dovid Hamelech. What he's saying is that many things might be good; but to give thanks to Hashem is *the* good in this world, the *greatest* good for a man.

WHAT'S THE REAL SHIVISI HASHEM?

You have to know that you're in this world for one reason only - to become more and more Aware of Hashem. That's why you're alive right now! And that's why *l'hodos* is the best good in this world - because enjoying the gifts of Hashem is the best way of living a life infused with Awareness of Him. A person who trains himself to recognize the endless benefits bestowed upon him every second of his life is *living Awareness of Hashem*. That's the real *shivisi Hashem l'negdi tamid*. Don't tell me stories about a *tzadik* who keeps the letters of Hashem's name before his eyes. We're talking now about something much better, about keeping Hashem Himself before your eyes! That's our purpose in this world - to train ourselves as much as possible to live with a tangible Awareness of Hashem. And when you take the time to appreciate your eyes, and your lungs, and your home, and your teeth, and your feet and your fingers, and the thousands of other gifts from Hashem, then you've chosen the best career in life.

That is the Awareness that Hashem is demanding of you. Hashem is calling out to you, "Look at what I'm giving you all day long. I'm giving you eyes. Think about Me. And thank Me. Isn't it fun to walk around with two cameras on your face?" The eyes are such wonderful cameras. All the scientists admit there is no camera in the world that can compare to the eye. It's so efficient it functions automatically. It focuses for near objects and in one second you can change the focus for a distant object. It changes in

the dark to allow more light to come in. When there's more light it closes up a little so too much light shouldn't come in. It's wonders of wonders how this camera functions. And if you are a wise man, a man who wants to succeed in his purpose in life, you'll call out to Hashem in gratitude all day long. The more you say thank you, the more you bow down in gratitude, the more you stop in the middle of the day for a few seconds to think and to thank, the more you appreciate the details of all the simple pleasures of your life, you are becoming more Aware of Hashem. You'll begin to see Hashem, to actually see Him, all day long, in all the benefits He is gifting to you. Every sincere thank you to Hashem, is another degree of Awareness, another degree of perfection in the eyes of Hashem. And there are infinite degrees of this Awareness that man can achieve during his life.

And do you want to know a secret? Hashem is providing you with His benefits all day long, all night long, *just for that purpose*, so that you should thank Him and become more Aware of Him! Why do you think you have lungs? Just to breathe, to oxygenate your cells?! Your legs are just for walking?! No, your lungs are for thanking, and your legs are for thanking, and your teeth and your fingers, your house and your children, your everything is to bring you to more and more Awareness of Hakodosh Boruch Hu! The sole reason why you enjoy a slice of bread and a drink of water; why you enjoy your ability to use your eyes and move around without a wheelchair; why you enjoy a soft breeze and a clear blue sky; and the thousands of other kindnesses you enjoy every single day, is all for one purpose only—so that you'll have the opportunity to recognize and appreciate your Creator and become Aware of Him. The endless benefits that we receive are intended as reminders of the One bestowing the benefits.

THE KEY WORD

Once we understand that all of the *chasdei Hashem* are a tool for us to achieve our purpose in this world, we can understand a *possuk* in our *parsha* that at first glance seems quite perplexing. Hashem warns us of the many troubles and travails

that will befall our Nation throughout our history when we fail to live up to the standards He demands of us. And although there are many reasons why Hashem might deem it necessary to bring troubles upon us, the only one that He deems important enough to mention specifically is the following: תחת אשר לא עבדת את השם - "And all this will befall you because you did not serve Hashem your G-d, with joy and with a merry heart, from an abundance of everything" (ibid. 28:47).

Because we didn't serve Hashem with happiness, with a merry heart, is that a reason to suffer the terrible punishments?! So we weren't happy, so what? We put on *tefillin*, we kept Shabbos and learned Torah. Everything we did!

So when we look at the *possuk* we see a very interesting word. It says תחת אשר לא עבדת. The word תחת in the *possuk* actually implies something more than "because." Translated properly, תחת means "instead of." And therefore the *possuk* actually reads as follows: "And all this will befall you, *instead of* you serving Hashem in joy and with a merry heart." Hashem is telling us here that the choice is ours: We can choose to serve Hashem with a joyful and merry heart, in appreciation of an abundance of everything; That's one way of becoming Aware of Him. But if we don't choose that option, Hashem won't allow us to fail. He will prod us toward Awareness of Him in other ways. And that by means of all of the troubles of the תוכחה - the method of תחת. *Instead of* becoming Aware of Hashem by calling out to Him in happiness and joy, it will now be the troubles that you face, that will prod you to Awareness of Him. Instead of calling out to Him מרוב כל, in happiness, you will be calling out to Him בעירום וחוסר כל, because of what you need from Him. It's not a punishment. It's just either-or. Hashem wants you to succeed at what He created you for - Awareness of Him - and it's your choice how you're going to get there.

HIS FIRST HEADACHE IN 65 YEARS!

Here's a man who for sixty-five years he woke up every morning with no headache. Every day for sixty-five years! You

know how many days that is?! It's more than twenty-thousand days. Twenty thousand mornings that were headache free! And now he wakes up one morning and he can't even think, he can't walk. A true story; a man called me up and told me this. So I was thinking "Did you ever wake up in the morning and thank Hakodosh Boruch Hu for *not* having a headache?" No, *it never even crossed his mind to thank Hashem*. Do you know what a miracle the brain is? How could it be that your brain is functioning so smoothly?! There are so many circuits, so many electric circuits that are working in your brain every second, and you don't get a headache. Every second there are more electrical circuits working in your brain than in the main headquarters of the telephone company of Greater New York. And you don't have any pain! It's *nissei nissim!* And therefore you're a millionaire. And you should be crying out in joy. And so Hashem waits. And waits. But He won't wait forever.

HASHEM KNOWS HOW TO GET YOUR ATTENTION

And then finally the morning comes when Hashem says **תחת אשר לא עבדת את השם אלקיך בשמחה ובטוב לבב**. Instead of giving you the opportunity to become aware of Me because of the quiet mornings with no pain, the happiness of waking up with no migraines, so *tachas*, instead of that, Hakodosh Boruch Hu uses a different method of getting your attention, and giving you the opportunity for perfection in Awareness of Him.

And so, the following morning you wake up with a painful headache. And in desperation you call out to Hashem for His help. And it is this calling out to Him, this newfound awareness of Hashem, what you were created for. The next *davening*, you're saying the bracha of **רפאינו** with more *kavanah*, with a more sincere heart than anyone else in the shul. Trust me, Hashem knows how to get your attention. He knows exactly how to get you to call out to Him. And because you chose to achieve awareness through **רפאינו** instead of through **מודים**, Hashem looks down at you with mercy and says, "Why did you wait so long? Why couldn't you have just called out to Me in gratitude during

מודים and then you wouldn't have to call out to me in pain during רפאינו?"

YOUR ROLLS ROYCES

And that's one the very great problems we face today; the desire for luxuries and "good times" and people forgetting the *chasdei Hashem* in our normal day to day lives.. How can people so obtuse, so ungrateful? And don't be thick skinned and say, "I'm different. I'm born with a *mazal*. I'm supposed to have good luck and nothing but good luck all my life. "Ohhh," Hakadosh Baruch Hu says. "I might have to remind you." And if your good luck stops, *chalilah*, for a little while so you look back at the good old days. "Ay yah yay! Where was my head? What was I thinking? I didn't enjoy life when I had it. I didn't thank Hashem when I had my kidneys and was still able to urinate normally. I didn't say thank you when my head didn't hurt, and when my eyes were healthy." Because what happens? Hakodosh Boruch Hu gives and He gives more to people, and כדי דיבור תוך they forget the One who is giving.

We're given so many pleasures, and unfortunately we fail to appreciate any of them. So let's stop now and think about those great benefits. Do you know how happy, how full of gratitude a person can become just from walking?! When you walk, you're exercising your whole body. Your limbs, your organs are all working together to keep you going. It stimulates the blood circulation, and your respiratory system. And of course the air is delicious. The Brooklyn air is really good, a pleasure. Breathe in deeply and take some of that wonderful cocktail of different gases into your lungs. Walking out on the street is from the great pleasures of life. Ahh! The ability to walk; to be among the living, to be free. You're not secluded in a house or jail. You're not imprisoned in a wheelchair. You have two Rolls Royces underneath you; greater than any automobile. It's your own feet! It's the biggest happiness that you can walk; it's ניסים ניסים!

Do you know when you walk what the muscles are doing? Every muscle has a reflex. One is pulling and one is shoving; and

they're pulling and shoving, pulling and shoving back and forth every second in perfect coordination. It's a miracle. How you walk is one of the most wonderful arrangements that you'll find in the world! By the way, when you're walking, you know that your thighs are moving in a socket. The thigh moves in the socket of the body. So why isn't there a feeling of friction? Your thigh is moving in the socket so why don't you feel any friction? There's no noise as you move your legs. Is one bone scraping against the other? No; because in between there's lubrication. Wonders of wonders. As you walk you should hear scraping, moving. There's no noise because there's lubrication; no friction. It's constantly lubricated with a kind of jelly, and the jelly is always being refreshed by additional materials. It's a wonder of wonders how you bend your knee back and forth and you don't feel anything. You hear any noise? Try it. Bend your knee right now. You hear any noise? Scraping one bone against another? No, there's nothing. It's so smooth that you never even think about it. And that's the great tragedy of life, that we never think about it. And therefore we say to Hakadosh Baruch Hu: ברוך אתה השם המכין מצעדי גבר, You established the footsteps of a man. How wonderful it is to be able to walk!

GAN EDEN ON OCEAN PARKWAY

Now, all of you here are listening respectfully; maybe you even agree with me. Probably not, but it could be. However that's not enough. It takes work to acquire *da'as*, understanding, and you have to have *da'as* to be a *samei'ach b'chelko*. Now, pay attention to this story. Once upon a time in one of my previous *kehillos* - I'm in this business a long time - there was a wealthy man. Now, he never learned how to be happy with walking in Brooklyn. He had to travel to Paris, let's say. Not let's say. That's what he did! He wants to walk to walk the streets of Paris; he thinks that that's where he he'll enjoy walking. Or maybe he has to walk the paths in the shadow of the Alps. He did that as well. Otherwise he won't enjoy life. To be happy walking down the street right here on Ocean Parkway?! He thought I was *meshugah*. And so he traveled to Paris.

Not long afterwards he became ill. For a couple of years he was lying in bed. And I went to visit him in the hospital. He's lying in his bed and he can't even walk to the bathroom. Now he looks back, "Oh, the good old days when I could walk to the bathroom. It was fun to walk! Oh what a happiness it would be for me if I could just walk to the bathroom. To walk in the street? That would be *mamash Gan Eden!*" That's what he told me while he was lying in the hospital bed! And *it is Gan Eden* to walk in the street!

TORTURED IN THE HOSPITAL

Now, I'm not the person to judge anybody. I was very sorry for him. After all, he was a loyal *shomer mitzvoos*. But now we begin to understand what Hakodosh Boruch Hu wants from us in our lifetime. He wants us to appreciate what He's giving you. Here's a man in a nursing home. He can't afford a room by himself so he shares it with one more person. Now suppose he has gas. But he's not able to walk to the bathroom. He has to wait for the nurse to come in to put a pan under him. But now he has gas and he would like to relieve himself; but the other person, his roommate is a bad-tempered neighbor and he can't . He has to suffer torture. In the good old days he was able to get up and walk to the bathroom. Now he looks back and sees how happy he was then. Now he's gaining *da'as*, understanding what it's means to be able to walk. - תחת אשר לא עבדת את השם אלוקיך בשמחה ובטוב לבב - "You could have served Me in happiness," says Hashem. "If you would have applied your mind to it, you would have been delirious with happiness right here walking on Kings Highway." And now Hashem is reminding you: ובאו עליך כל הקללות האלה - "And all of these curses will come upon you" (ibid. 45). He lost the happiness of walking and now he remembers Hashem.

Now don't think I'm making excessive demands upon you. This *avodah* is required of every person! To appreciate the ability to walk is a *chiyuv gamur*. And if you won't enjoy walking on the Brooklyn street then what will it help you now to walk on the avenues of Paris or to wander the paths of the Swiss Alps. All these things are missing the point - the point of gratitude to

Hashem for the ability to walk. And that's a big crime. It's a major crime of our existence.

Our primary obligation in this world is to thank Hakadosh Baruch Hu. That's what *avodas Hashem* really means, to express constantly our gratitude. Don't tell me you're a servant because you do this or that, you shake. No. And even if you do *mitzvos*; *mitzvos* you have to do anyhow. But the most important *mitzvah* is to thank Hakadosh Boruch Hu from the morning till the evening. And it's not being done; it's not being done!

THANK HASHEM FOR YOUR BUTTONS AND ZIPPERS

You have to get busy thanking. For what? For everything. For tens of thousands of benefits. In the morning some people rattle off all the *brachos*. It's a pity to live life that way, a waste. You have to take your time. מַלְבִּישׁ עֲרֻמִּים, He clothes the naked. You can't just say that one thing. There are many kinds of clothing. You have to thank Hashem for buttons and for zippers and for pockets and for lining and for seams and buttonholes. I have pants with pockets in them. And sometime I even have money in my pocket. I have buttons on my coats, and a lining too. I have a hat and a necktie, and a belt. A belt! You make a *bracha* on a belt, אוֹזֵר יִשְׂרָאֵל הַגְּבוּרָה. Did you ever stop to think about your belt? A nechtigeh tug! You're saying the words and you're not even thinking one bit about the belt. And it's not enough just to think about the belt. You have to think about the details. It's made out of leather, genuine leather. Where did that leather come from? You think it grew in the backyard of the clothing store? You have a metal buckle; it lasts a long time that metal buckle. You have to think about the holes. All kinds of holes. You need a hole for before lunch, a hole after lunch. Don't laugh; you need it. That's how to think about your belt.

THEY'RE WORKING FOR YOU IN ALABAMA

And you have to think about your shoes. You have rubber heels, and leather tops, and hard heels, different kinds of leather. And it's dyed different colors. And you have shoe strings with metal tips, plastic tips. If you didn't have metal tips you wouldn't

be able to stick it through the holes. You'd have to spit on it and twist it to get it through. This is serious. Suppose you didn't have shoe strings. You'd walk in the street, plop plop, plop plop. And now a car is coming, you can't run; you'll lose your shoes. So you have to stop right now and say boruch Hashem for shoelaces. The cotton comes from Alabama. If you have metal tips it comes from Montana, from the iron mines.

Each item deserves to be considered separately. You have to thank Hashem for everything. I'm not exaggerating at all. This I have as a *kabbalah* for my *rebbe*, *zichrono levracha*. You have to thank Hashem for all the details of your clothing. "Oh," you say, "that's already too extreme what you're demanding of us." The answer is that this is what Hashem is demanding. Absolutely! That's how you have to live.

MITZVAH GEDOLA LEHIYOS B'SIMCHA TAMID

Now *rabosei*, don't imagine that I'm tying you down to a life of obligations. I'm introducing you to a life of happiness because as a result of this *avodah* you're going to live lives of *simcha*. Because once you begin to understand that our function in life is to express gratitude, we're going to see that it's not burdensome at all. I'll tell you why it's not burdensome. I'm telling you that you have a *chiyuv*, and you're worried about it. No, I'm telling you how to become a happy man because the more you spend time understanding what Hashem is doing for you, the more you'll begin appreciating how lucky you are. And in the course of time you'll become a man full of joy. Instead of just talking about being a *samei'ach b'chelko*, you'll actually do it. You're going to rejoice in every function of life. You'll rejoice in every function of your body. You'll rejoice with your food, whatever it is. You'll rejoice with the fact you have a roof over your head. You'll rejoice that you have a warm house in winter. You'll rejoice that you have water in your house, cold water flowing in your house. Cold water is a big thing. Most houses in the world don't have any water in the house. They have to go to the wells outside. Rejoice that you have hot water in your house; it's a luxury. Rejoice that you have bathrooms in your house. When I was in

Europe, there no bathrooms. Bathrooms were outside. In the wintertime you had to go out in the cold in the freezing winter. I had to put on my overcoat and go to the outhouse. And the odor was so bad, I would walk around for a half hour before going back into the house, in order not to disturb anyone. And we have indoor plumbing! And therefore, we have to always be saying *Modim anachnu luch* to Hashem all day long.

FALLING DOWN BECAUSE OF ALL THE CHESD

And so now we can turn back to *Bikkurim* to learn an important lesson in how to succeed at this *avodah*. The Torah tells us that after the farmer loudly declares his gratitude, he must place the basket of fruit before the *mizbei'ach*, and bow down before Hashem. והנחתו לפני השם אלקיך והשתחוית לפני השם אלקיך - "And you shall place the basket down before Hashem your G-d, and you should prostrate yourself before Hashem your G-d" (ibid. 10). The farmer would throw himself in complete prostration on the floor in humbled gratitude before the One who had given him life and all the chasodim of life.

The word והשתחוית derives from the word שח, low, as in the verse ושח רום אנשים - "The pride of men will become low" (Yeshayah 2:11). One "makes himself low" down to the earth in humility, before Hashem his Provider. Sensing himself overburdened with benefits, and standing before the Benefactor Himself, the farmer would throw himself on the floor in humble gratitude. How could he stand straight before Hashem, Who is providing him with endless benefits?! And in genuine humility, the farmer would lower himself to the ground, knowing that he could do nothing to repay Hashem for the benefits except to be humbled in gratitude before Him.

And even the farmer who wasn't aroused with these strong feelings, would also prostrate himself before his Benefactor, and by doing so awaken these latent feelings of submissive thankfulness. "I am overwhelmed by Your kindness," he would think as his body and face lay flush with the cold floor. The bowing down before the palpable presence of Hakodosh

Boruch Hu was an awesome thrill that stayed with this man forever.

BRINGING BIKKURIM TO SHUL

We look back in longing at our fathers who were *zoche* to such an opportunity. To actually stand before Hakodosh Boruch Hu in His home and throw yourself down before Him. But in our own lives, we have our own opportunity for this greatness as well. Only that we don't realize it, and we therefore remain bereft of this opportunity for greatness.

Every day, when you bow down during *Modim* you are reenacting that great moment of וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוִיתָ. As you bow down, you should be aware of Who you are bowing down to. Instead of the reflexive jerk forward of your body as you say מוֹדִים אֲנַחְנוּ לָךְ, you should say these words, at least these words, slowly. You're not meant to be a robot that is programmed to bow automatically, without thought, at the sight of the words מוֹדִים אֲנַחְנוּ לָךְ in your *siddur*. You've been qbowing down for so many years, that it's just a reflexive action on your part. Some people wouldn't even know that they had said the words of *Modim* if they hadn't been startled awake as their heads jerk forward. But you'll have to change that if you want to be a success.

You have to actually feel like you're bowing down in front of Hashem. It takes practice. As you bow down slowly, you should imagine that Hashem is right before you. You're actually bowing down to Him in gratitude, just like the farmer bowed down to Hashem, and tangibly experienced the Presence of Hashem. Even though you're not carrying a basket of *bikkurim*, and even without the *Beis Hamikdash*, you're still bowing down to the same Hashem, Who is standing before you just as He stood before the farmer.

BOWING WITH A FULL STOMACH

And the best way to use *Modim* is to prepare beforehand. Make it your business to choose one thing to thank Hashem for by each *Modim*. Thank Hashem for the fact that you have food in the house. You were able to eat breakfast this morning, no? Eating

breakfast is a pleasure. You're not bowing down to Hashem with an empty stomach. Even by *Shachris*, you're still somewhat full from last night's supper. So when you bow down, think "I'm thanking you Hashem for the bowl of cereal," "I'm thanking You Hashem for last night's supper."

There are so many things to thank for. Bow down slowly - there's no rush - and thank Hashem that you woke up without a headache today. That when you went to the bathroom in the morning everything worked. I know that you said *Asher Yatzar* already, but this time you'll bow down in sincere gratitude. It's a pleasure to be able to relieve yourself without needing doctors to use a tube to help you out. Now that's something to say *Modim* about! We had a man here in the shul who suffered terribly from this. He couldn't relieve himself, and finally they had to take him to the hospital to help him. And the doctors had to use a tube and vaseline to get the urine out of his body. And it hurt. It hurt like the dickens. He was screaming. Screaming from pain. And yet, when they finished emptying his bladder, he was so happy to have finally relieved himself. And you?! For you it's so simple, so painless. You could bend over by *Modim* and never straighten up, and it wouldn't be enough bowing just for that.

Did you ever bow down in *Modim* in thanks for your children? Never?! Well, you're going to have to start sometime. And not one *Modim* for all your children! One *Modim* during *Shachris* for this child, and another during *mincha* for the next child. And at *ma'ariv* you will bow down for the next one. And when you finish getting through all your children, you can start again.

A SHOPPING CART FOR A HOME

You slept in a home last night? You didn't have to find a park bench to sleep on?! You're a lucky man. You're not sleeping on some bench, with all your belongings next to you in a shopping cart. You're a wealthy man! Sometimes you see these women walking in the streets. They're pushing a shopping wagon. All their worldly belongings are in the shopping wagon. They

have nothing else, no place to sleep. They sit down on the park bench and they try to doze off. They're afraid to lie down. If they'll lie down on a bench, a woman in New York City, it's a *sakanah*. So she sits on the bench and tries to sleep. It's a *rachmanus*. A *rachmanus*! She has no place to go. She's worn out. She can't take a bath and she's full of vermin. She's not well. Every bit of food is a miracle, if she can get something to eat. And you're leaving here and going to a home tonight. Thank Hashem!

And if you forgot to plan ahead, all hope is not lost. You can stop after *המחזיר שכינתו לציין* and collect your thoughts. So stop for a few moments, like the *מביאי ביכורים* did, and prepare yourself to thank Hashem. You can't just say a general *Modim* and think that you freed yourself from your obligation. A thank you without any thoughts, without any details is worthless. It's a blank check that you're writing to Hashem, and it's almost worthless. Think of a *חסד* right there, before *Modim*, and bow down to Hashem in gratitude for that *chesed*. Try it one time. Don't simply bow down. Bow down before Hashem. You'll be a changed man.

RAV MILLER'S ILLNESS LIST

Every time you say it, prepare something. There are so many things available. Look at all the illnesses. I once made a list of about fifty illnesses. Illnesses and unfortunate circumstances. And I look at it. All the things that Hashem saved me from. You can make such a list for yourself. And it's a good idea to read that from time to time. Make such a list. So many people are sick. This man has that, this woman has this. Make a list and think, "Boruch Hashem I don't have that. Boruch Hashem I don't have that."

When I walk in the streets with *chaveirim*, younger *chaveirim*, we stop in front of medical buildings where the doctors put out their signs and we read them. We stop and read them. Eye doctor; I don't need him. Stomach specialist; I don't need him. Internist; I don't need you either! By each one we say 'Boruch Hashem I don't need you.' Try training yourself to say that. Stop in front of a medical building or a drug store. They're having a sale, all kinds of medicines. There's a bargain, they're cheap. Thank

HE, HIS WIFE OR A CHILD

CLEFT PALATE	DIVORCE
STUTTERING	GOUT
ASTHMA	MUSCULAR DYSTROPHY
HAY FEVER	MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS
ALLERGIES	CEREBRAL PALSY
ARTHRITIS	PARKINSON'S DISEASE
KIDNEY (KIDNEYS) REMOVED	COLOR BLINDNESS
COLOSTOMY	INABILITY TO SMELL
TUMOR ON BRAIN	VERY SHORT
ULCER	EXCESSIVELY CORPULENT
DEPRESSION	LIMPING
NERVOUS BREAKDOWN	INCONTINENT (URINE)
INSANITY	WHEELCHAIR
BROKEN (LEG, ARM, - BONE)	CANE
PROSTATE TROUBLE	CRUTCHES
DIABETES	EPILEPSY
HEMORRHOIDS	PARALYSIS
LIVER TROUBLE	POISONING
ONE LEG (ARM) LONGER THAN OTHER	FIRE
RETARDED (OR A CHILD)	HOLDUP (MUGGING)
DEAF	BURGLARY
DUMB	LITIGATION
BLIND (ONE OR BOTH EYES)	JAIL
AMPUTATION (LEG, ARM, FINGER)	ARMY
CHILDLESS	EXTREMELY SLOW-WITTED
NO BEARD (GONAD INSUFFICIENCY)	HEART TROUBLE
	LUNG DISEASE
	CANCER

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Rav Avigdor Miller: His Life and His Revolution, Judaica Press

Hashem, I don't need this. Thank Hashem, I don't need that. Thank Hashem I don't need that. You have to thank Hashem because there are plenty customers for them. Oh yes. Plenty of people need them.

BACK TO SCHOOL AGAIN

Now I'll give you a little more homework. When you come to the *Beis Knesses* and you hear *kaddish* being said, so you say יהי שמה רבא; "Let His great name be blessed." Do you mind? It

doesn't cost you any money to say that. You're thinking, let *other* people bless His name. That's what! Others should bless His name. One day, in the far off future, His name will be blessed. So that's what it means **יהא שמה רבא מברך**. You should do it right now. Don't wait for the future. **לעלם ולעלמי עלמא**. Start right now. No! You should bless His name. And you should do it right now. So let's get busy with a plan.

And so when you say **יהא שמה רבא** it's a good idea to prepare. As soon as the *chazzan* starts saying *yisgadal*, think what am I going to thank for this time? Think fast. It's better if you thought beforehand and prepare at least one thing to thank. Thank Hashem that you have a wife. How many old *bachurim* waited too long and now nobody will marry them? Boruch Hashem that you have normal children. Ooooh, the *tzaros*. I knew a man who had three children one after the other. All idiots. All idiots, *rachmana litzlan*. A terrible *rachmanus*. If you have normal children, you have to thank Hakadosh Baruch Hu for that day and night, day and night, day and night, day and night for normal children. Some people have no children at all, and they pine away their lives and look at other people. They're so jealous, and people who have children many times don't stop to think. Every child is a *matanah*. A child is a very big gift. It's a *ta'anug*. Of course **מרבה דאגה נכסים מרבה דאגה**, but we want to have more *nechasim* and have more worries! And therefore, how can a person who lives a normal life not be busy all of his days thanking Hashem?!

DARWIN ALMOST BECAME A MAA'MIN

Think of one specific thing when you say **יהא שמה רבא**. The more you appreciate the fact you have teeth. Ah, ah, ah, it's a pleasure! I once spoke to a dentist. I had a problem with my teeth so I said maybe you should put other teeth in. No, he said. There's nothing like your own teeth. You hear that? There's nothing like your own teeth. Nothing like your own eyes. Eyes, what a benefit, what a happiness. Even the *rasha* Darwin said, "When I consider the subject of eyes, I admit it is very incredible to believe that it happened by accident." He admits is very hard to believe it. "But"! He said, He butted his way through it. But, but, but.

So if you're going to be a Darwin *chas v'shalom* and forget who gave you your eyes and who gave you your teeth, then Hakodosh Boruch Hu might remind you. Remember when your tooth was bothering you, and it hurt you even to eat? You couldn't eat for three days. Your tooth was bothering you, and you thought you would have to take it out. Then all of a sudden, overnight the pain subsided and the tooth functioned well once more. Did you even say one *Y'hei sh'mei rabbah* for that?

And the list of things to thank for is endless. You're in debt, very much in debt. You remember when you once made a dumb step. You stepped off the curb without looking just as a bus was making a turn? It happened to me. So the bus driver pulled the brakes and cursed me! "I almost hit you. You crazy dope! You walked in front of my bus!" Something like that happens to everybody. And what happens? You walk away like a dumbbell, not even thinking. Where's the **יהא שמה רבא** for that?

RAV MILLER RESCUED FROM GUN VIOLENCE

When you were a little boy, you once found a bullet. It's a true story - I once found a bullet when I was a little boy. I took the bullet and stuck it between the boards of a wooden fence to experiment. I took a hammer with a nail, and I banged it against the back of the bullet. It exploded in my face. My face was full of blood. Full of blood! I *chalilah* could have lost my eyes. **יהא שמה רבא מברך** - "Thank You Hashem for saving my eyes!"

When I was four years old I fell off a pile of wood. They were building something near my house, and I was playing. And I fell off a pile of wood. I fell on my face and I had to have stitches. But that piece of wood could have come into my eyes. What was I thinking? How could I ever forget such a thing?! Hashem saved me! **יהא שמה רבא מברך**. All our lives are filled of such *sakanas*. We've been rescued again and again. **ואל תשכחי כל גמולין**, all of His kindnesses.

PREPARING FOR YOM HADIN

And this lesson of **תחת אשר לא עבדת** is even more important for us as we prepare for the Yom Hadin. A year ago we

were also standing on the threshold of a new year, and we didn't know what our *g'zar din* would be: מי יחיה ומי ימות, מי ישלו ומי יתסר - "Who will live and who will die, who will enjoy tranquility, and who will suffer." What the coming year had in store for us was a *safek*, a real doubt. And now it's a year later and you're still here. You made it. If you're here, then you made it!

And now, everyone is preparing to ask for another year. But you missed the whole point. You've missed the point completely. Hashem gave you another year of life! And not just life, but a year of happiness. The complainers will always find what to complain about, no question about it. But it was a year of thousands, hundreds of thousands, of individual happinesses. Hashem was showering benefits on you all year long. And so, before you ask for another year, how could you not spend time appreciating what Hashem gave you already? And not just saying you appreciate it; really feeling gratitude.

LOOK BACK AT THE PAST YEAR

Rabbeinu Yonah, when he wants to give an example of what is one of the most important *mitzvos asei*, he quotes the following *posuk*: וזכרת את כל הדרך - "Remember the whole way that you traveled the forty years in the wilderness." Which means that Hashem is telling the *dor hamidbar* to look back at these forty years in the *midbar* and remember what Hakodosh Boruch Hu did for them, the benefits He showered upon them. And Rabeinu Yonah says this is a *mitzvos asei* for us! He says that we see from there that it's our duty to look back at all the happiness you had in the past, all the successes of your life. And it's one of the most important of all *mitzvos*.

Now, let's learn this, because now is the time, before the next year begins, to look back and see how good the past one was and to be grateful for it. Isn't that an important idea? So we should begin to look back and וזכרת את כל הדרך, remember all the way you traveled from last Rosh Hashanah until today. And it's such an important duty, this duty of gratitude. You had an entire year,

a good year, and you're here, you're still around, to testify that it was good!

THE FIVE MINUTE PREP FOR ROSH HASHANAH

Even if you would put it into practice for only five minutes, you're already superior to everyone else. If after sitting here for an hour and a half, you'll go out and think for five minutes, you should know that you're an exception. You're a *dagul mei'rivavah*. There's nobody like you. If you do this, even on a small scale, then you shoot up and your head is way above everybody else. Because the world doesn't do it; they talk about it, but *we'll* be the ones who do it. Who thinks for five whole minutes about gratitude for Hashem for the past year? People talk about it. But that's all. **אם לא עכשיו אימתי.**

Many people, when the last day of the year approaches, they think, "Maybe we should fast; we should pray a lot." Very good, very good; why not? You want to do more good deeds? Yes, why not? But among all the good things you do, the *most important obligation* is to be grateful for the year that is going out now. *Tuf shin lamed vuv* was a good year! You had an entire year, a good year, and you're here, you're still around, to testify that it was good! ! And in case you don't think so, in case you feel it wasn't a good year, then you have to know that you are remiss in your duty of gratitude and you're not prepared at all for Rosh Hashanah.

Think of the almost 365 breakfasts that you ate this year. Did you enjoy breakfast? Now don't tell me you didn't. If you didn't then you have to come here and take a course in living a normal life because everybody should enjoy breakfast. 365 times this year you ate breakfast and most of us ate 365 lunches as well. Not to mention what you did between meals.

HOW MANY STEPS DID YOU TAKE THIS YEAR?

Do you realize how many steps you took this year? Most people take more than five thousand steps a day. Five thousand steps! And for how many of those did you thank Hashem? So you see how much debt you're in. How many times did you bend

your elbow without any pain? How many times did you cross the street and make it to the other side alive? Was there even one time that you woke up this year without the ability to see? Every morning your eyes were functioning? And your liver and your kidneys and your heart! Every day!

Three hundred and sixty five nights of sleep! All of you slept this year. You know there are a lot of people who can't sleep. And most of us slept through 365 nights. I don't think you were doing too many all-night *mishmaros*. I think we were sleeping almost every night. Did you ever take a few minutes to thank Hakodosh Boruch Hu for all those sweet hours of sleep? So many nights, and each night it was at least a few hours!

RAV MILLER'S NEW YEARS RESOLUTION

Here you are worrying about making resolutions for the coming year, and worrying about your sins from last year, and that's all well and good. It's wonderful! But you're forgetting about the biggest sin of all - the sin of ungratefulness. Remembering all the good that Hashem has showered upon you during this past year, is the first and most important preparation of all. You have to put a lot of work, a lot of thought into it. It's a *mitzvas asei!* וזכרת את כל הדרך, to look back and do what the Am Yisroel did when they brought *bikkurim* to Yerushalayim. They went *meshugah* with happiness!

So there are two paths that lie before you. The two paths of coming to Awareness of Hashem in the פסוק of תחת are available to you, and you will have to make that choice. And don't wait too long, because the Day of Hashem's Judgement is coming. If you don't choose to serve Hashem מרוב כל, then Hashem will not wait forever. And then you'll have to serve Hashem מחוסר כל. So begin this year with a new career, a career of thanking Hashem.

And if you start thanking now, and you keep it up, then you've made that choice to serve Hashem בשמחה ובטוב לבב מרוב כל, to serve Him in happiness and with a merry heart for all of the good He has bestowed upon you. You're living the lesson of the *mitzva* of *bikkurim* and that's the greatest career available to

Mankind in this world. And then Hashem will continue to give you **כל רוב** so that you can continue to walk on the path you've chosen of **עבדת את השם אלקיך בשמחה ובטוב לבב** for another year of health and happiness.

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In honor of my wife, **Temima**.

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Q&A With Rav Avigdor Miller Tz"l

Q:

Why do we wish our fellow Jews a כתיבה וחתימה טובה or a גמר טוב? Does that really help the other person?

A:

It depends. When you say to somebody כתיבה וחתימה טובה will it help him? It depends. It depends with how much sincerity you are saying it. If you're just saying it מצות אנשים מלומדה, without thinking, then it's worthless. Mamash worthless. But if you're thinking when you say it, and when he walks away you say it a second time – yes, when he walks away you should say it a second time – then it means something. You hear what I'm telling you? When he walks away, say it over again slowly. כתיבה וחתימה טובה. And even better – add your own words. "רבונו של עולם, please give this man a year of happiness and parnasa and שלום בית." He doesn't hear you. But now you mean it.

When you do it that way, הקדוש ברוך הוא Hashem listens. Hashem listens to tzadikim, and you're a tzadik if you pray for him in that way. ותן כבוד השם לעמך. Hashem listens. Certainly He listens. When tzadikim give you a bracha, it means something. Of course it means something. Tzadikim can help by giving a bracha.

And same thing with שבת שלום. When you say it the first time it doesn't mean a thing. So when he walks away, repeat it. Say "שבת שלום. Have a wonderful Shabbos. Enjoy the chulent. Hashem should give you a good nap." Ohhh, now you're talking! That's something; that's an achievement!

TAPE # E-201

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