

The Blessing of Material Wealth: Living Modestly in the Service of G-d

The new year is ushered in by a month replete with *kedusha, tefillah, Torah, Yom Tov seudos*, all shared with family and friends. There are many hallmarks of this month, including the many *mitzvos* and customs associated with each day of Tishrei.

However, the singular *avodah* that begins in Elul and runs through *Shmini Atzeres/Simchas Torah* is the exalted *avodah* of *tefillah*. From Tehillim 27, *L'Dovid Hashem ori v'yishi*, "To David, Hashem is my Light and my Salvation," recited daily, beginning on the first of Elul; to the daily selichos prayers; the *Malchiyos, Zichronos* and *Shofaros* passages of Rosh Hashana; the wordless prayer of the shofar; the *Tashlich* service performed near water; and the supplications and confessions of Yom Kippur... the prayers we offer during Elul and Tishrei are profound and innumerable.

Not only are we praying for these Days of Awe, we are praying for the year to come. We beseech G-d for our health and wealth, for our family and friends,

for Jewish communities near and far, for stability in the foreign lands in which Jews live and peace and blessing in the Land where we all are meant to live.

Recounting the awesomeness of these days in the *Unesaneh Tokef* prayer, widely understood as one of the most stirring *tefillos* of these days, we say:

בראש השנה יכתבון וביום צום כפור יחתמו.
כמה יעברון וכמה יבראון. מי יחיה ומי ימות.
מי בקצו ומי לא בקצו. מי באש. ומי במים ... מי ינוח.
ומי ינוע. מי ישקט ומי יטרף. מי ישלח. ומי יתקטר.
מי יעני ומי יעשר. מי ישפל ומי ירום.

On Rosh Hashana will be inscribed and on Yom Kippur will be sealed how many will pass and be created; who will live and who will die; who at his predestined time and who before his time; who by water and who by fire ... Who will rest and who will wander, who will live in harmony and who will be harried, who will enjoy tranquility and who will suffer, who will be impoverished and who will be enriched, who will be degraded and who will be exalted.

It is during these days of prayer that our *parnasah*, our physical sustenance



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for the upcoming year, is inscribed and sealed. Chazal teach:

כל מזונותיו של אדם קצובים לו מראש השנה ועד יום הכפורים.

One's entire livelihood is allocated to him during the period from Rosh Hashana to Yom Kippur.

Beitzah 16a

Our *tefillos* of Elul and Tishrei revolve around praying for mercy and goodwill, both for our spiritual and physical needs. Indeed, it was on the very first Rosh Hashana of Creation — *ha'yom haras olam* — that man was created as a

composite of both material and physical elements:

וַיִּצְרֶה אֱלֹהִים אֶת הָאָדָם עָפָר מִן הָאֲדָמָה וַיִּפַּח בְּאַפָּיו נֶשְׁמַת חַיִּים וַיְהִי הָאָדָם לְנֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה. And G-d fashioned the man, dust from the earth (material elements), and He blew into his nostrils the soul of life (spiritual elements), and the man became a living spirit.

Bereishis 2:7

Hence, if man is made up of dust from the earth and a soul that emanates from Hashem Himself, we must supplicate G-d to provide sustenance for both aspects of ourselves. As G-d creates, sustains and provides for all, we turn to Him to inscribe us in the book of provisions for life.

Like all our *tefillos*, the prayer for physical sustenance is one that continues daily throughout the entire year, known as *Birkas Ha'Shanim*, the ninth *bracha* recited in the daily Amidah:

בְּרַךְ עָלֵינוּ ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֶת הַשָּׁנָה הַזֹּאת וְאֶת כָּל מִינֵי תְבוּאָתָהּ לְטוֹבָה... בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', מְבָרֵךְ הַשָּׁנִים

Bless upon us, Hashem our G-d, this year and all the varieties of its produce for good... Blessed are You, Hashem, Blessor of the years.

R' Samson Rafael Hirsch teaches:

Emphasis is placed here on both aleinu (upon us) and le'tova (for the good), for a year may be blessed and still not afford blessings to us. Such a year cannot then be a blessed one as far as we are concerned. It is quite possible for the soil to yield abundant produce and the fields to flourish

without man benefitting from them. As the Sages teach הגפן תתן פריה והיין ביוקר, "the vine may give of its fruit and still the wine may be expensive" (Sotah 49b). Field and pasture may abound with luscious fruit and yet, because of human folly, crookedness and perversity in human relationships, dearth and famine will hold sway and spoil our lives. Therefore, we ask G-d not only to bless the fields but also to arrange circumstances in such a manner that the blessed year may prove a blessing to mankind also, and that the abundant harvest of field may thus bring happiness and prosperity to people's homes.

The Hirsch Siddur, Feldheim, p.153-154

Do we daven for our material needs (and wants) to be fulfilled only to enjoy a good time in this world, amassing an abundance of material wealth?

Not only should the fields be blessed, but the blessing should benefit us so that we may enjoy, be nurtured, succeed and prosper.

This leads us to wonder: Do we daven for our material needs (and wants) to be fulfilled only to enjoy a good time in this world, amassing an abundance of material wealth? Or do we ask G-d to

bestow materialism upon us so that we may become more sincere, authentic, and thoughtful *ovdei Hashem*?

Rabbi Zev Leff *shlita* writes:

The Gemara (Beitzah 16a) relates that 'the Babylonians were foolish, for they ate bread with bread.' The ba'alei mussar explain that this is an analogy for the Babylonians' philosophy of work. If one were to ask a Babylonian why he worked so hard, he would answer that it was because he had to earn a living to be able to eat. When asked why he needed to eat, he would respond, 'I have to eat to be able to have the strength to work to earn a living.' He worked to eat and ate to work — a vicious cycle.

It is not only the Babylonians whose entire lives revolve around earning a living. There are many who fall into the trap of making work their purpose in life and not a means to reach a more exalted goal... True, one must work to earn a living, but one earns a living in order to live, and one must live with the goals of acquiring Torah and yiras Shomayim in order to merit the eternity of the Next World... The weekly Shabbos is 'me'ein Olam Ha'bah' — a taste of the World to Come... With Shabbos we gain a proper perspective on work and toil in this world. Work is no longer perceived as something one does to earn a living in a vicious cycle of earning to live and living to earn, but rather, we understand that we are working to live and living to earn everlasting life, through the performance of Torah and mitzvos.

Shemoneh Esrei, R' Z. Leff, Targum Press, p.174-176.

When we utilize the material blessings G-d bestows upon us for *Torah*, *mitzvos*, and *gemillus chassadim*, as well as enjoying Hashem's world in a way that is both *yashar* and *kasher*, the physicality becomes elevated, serving the higher purpose for which it, and we, were created. Hence, we will be able



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to live a life of *tov li Toras picha me'alfei zahav vachesef*, “The instruction of Your mouth is better for me than thousands of gold and silver” (Tehillim 119:72).

Not only must our material blessings be used for *avodas Hashem* — *tzedaka, limud Torah, chinuch ha'bonim*, upkeep of our shuls and yeshivos, preparing food for Shabbasos and Yomim Tovim, acts of *chesed* such as *hachnasas kallah, hachnasas orchim*, and supporting community funds — but we must do so in a modest, reserved and humble fashion:

הגיד לך אדם מה טוב ומה ה' דורש ממך כי
אם עשות משפט ואהבת חסד והצנע לכת עם
אלקיך

He has told you, O man, what is good, and what Hashem seeks of you, but to do justice, to love loving-kindness, and to walk humbly with your G-d.

Micha 6:8

At the beginning of Devarim, the pasuk says: *p'nu lachem tzafonah*, turn to the north (Devarim 2:3). Noting

that “*tzafon*” means both “north” and “hidden,” the *Kli Yakar* powerfully comments:

שאם ימצא האיש הישראלי בגלות החל
הזה איזו הצלחה זעיר שם, אז יטמינו ויצפינו
הכל בפני עשו ... ע"כ צוה דוקא על עשו
פנו לכם צפונה שלא יתקנא בכם. וזה הפך
ממה שישראל עושין בדורות הללו בארצות
אויביהם, כי מי שיש לו מנה הוא מראה את
עצמו במלבושי כבוד ובתים ספונים וחשובים
כאילו היו לו כמה אלפים ומגרים האומות
בעצמם ועוברים על מה שנאמר פנו לכם
צפונה. ומנהג זה הוא ברבת בני עמינו והוא
המסבב את כל התלאה אשר מצאתנו.
והמשכילים יבינו ליקח מוסר.

Should a Jew find material success in exile, he should certainly “hide” and diminish the display of his wealth before the nations amongst whom we live. Hence, p'nu lachem tzafona, turn inward to yourselves, so that the nations should not be jealous of us. And this is the opposite of what Jews are doing in these generations in the lands of our enemies. For one who has means, he displays it with garments of

honor, and lavish and opulent homes, as if he has much and great wealth, and thus the nations are provoked. Thereby the Jew transgresses p'nu lachem tzafona. And this behavior is prevalent amongst our nation, and the cause for all of our travail, and the wise and discerning will understand this and take mussar.

Kli Yakar to Devarim 2:3

During this awe-inspiring month of Tishrei, when the *avodos* of *teshuva, u'tefilla, u'tzedaka ma'avirin es ro'ah he'gezeirah*, let us direct our prayers with the proper *kavanos*. We all beseech HKB”H to bless us with bountiful blessings from His *otzar ha'tov*, His vast storehouse of unlimited blessings. But the material goods He grants us in the coming year must be utilized with the dual *kavanos* of living a Torah way of life, and doing so in a modest, humble and discreet fashion.

In this way, we will work to live, and live to merit eternal life.

כתבנו לחיים, למענך אלקים חיים.

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