

Beit Hamidrash Hameir Laarets | Issue 251

Ki Tisa | A Person's First Fruits to G-d

MESILOT

Pathways to the Soul

Illuminating teachings and insights on the weekly Parsha
of Rabbi Yoram Michael Abargel Zt"l

From the weekly lessons of his son
Rabbi Yisrael Abargel Shlita

Dedicated to the hatzlacha of
Chaimov Family
In loving memory of Baruch, son of Rosa

...PATHWAYS TO THE SOUL...

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Parshat Ki Tisa

On the Laws of Meat and Milk

Between *Mincha* and *Arvit*, a synagogues rabbi stood and taught the following halachot:

"As is known, the Torah mentions three times the prohibition against cooking meat and milk together.

In Parashat *Mishpatim*, it says: *"The choicest first-fruits of your soil you shall bring to the house of the L-rd your G-d. You shall not boil a kid in its mother's milk"* (Exodus 23:19).

In this week's parashah, Parashat *Ki Tisa*, this verse appears again: *"The choicest first-fruits of your land you shall bring to the house of the L-rd your G-d; you shall not boil a kid in its mother's milk"* (ibid. 34:26).

And in Parashat *Re'eh* it appears a third time: *"You shall not eat anything that has died*

naturally; give it to the stranger in your community that he may eat it, or you may sell it to a foreigner – for you are a holy people to the L-rd your G-d. You shall not boil a kid in its mother's milk" (Deuteronomy 14:21).

The Torah wrote *'You shall not cook a kid in its mother's milk'* three times, to teach us that there are three separate prohibitions: eating, cooking, and benefiting (it is forbidden to derive any benefit from the mixture, or from any money made by it).

The meat-and-milk prohibition (*basar be-chalav*) is a very severe one. For that reason, countless stringencies have come into practice in halacha, from the time of our Sages until today.

The holy *Zohar* (Parashat *Mishpatim*, p.125a) is extremely stringent on this matter, writing as follows:

"Anyone who eats this food – meat in milk together as one, whether at the same time or in one meal – for forty days, a form of a roasted kid appears on his skin, visible to those Above, and a band of unclean forces draws near to him.

Additionally, he causes impure judgments to be aroused in the world – judgments that are unholy. And if he fathers a son during those forty days, they assign to him a soul from the Other Side – meaning an impure soul from the side of defilement..."

The rabbi continued with a story, "Rabbi Yoram Michael Abargel ZY"A (of blessed memory) related that there was a certain yeshiva student, already close to thirty years old, who had not been successful in finding a match.

This young man came to Rabbi Yaakov Yisrael Kanievsky ZY"A (the Steipler Gaon) to ask for a blessing that he would merit to find his soulmate quickly. The Steipler asked him to call for his yeshiva's *mashgiach* (spiritual

supervisor). When the mashgiach arrived, the Steipler instructed him to study with this young man the laws of meat and milk, and he blessed the young man that with G-d's help, as soon as he finished learning those laws, he would find his match.

The mashgiach did not quite understand the meaning of the Rav's instruction. Nevertheless, he followed it exactly: each day, he learned those laws with the young man. And indeed, immediately upon completing their study, the young man found a fine and suitable match.

Some time later, that young man asked the mashgiach: 'Why did Your Honor decide to learn the laws of meat and milk with me?'

The mashgiach answered: 'This is what the Steipler directed me to do.'

He asked him: 'Did you tell the Rav anything about me?'

He replied: 'I told him nothing about you at all; rather, the Rav himself told me to do this.'

Parshat Ki Tisa - On the Laws of Meat and Milk

The young man replied: 'I will reveal to you something that only G-d alone and the Steipler know about me.

Sadly, I have a special enjoyment in eating food made of meat and milk together, and however much I tried to overcome it, I could not succeed. Apparently, the Rav, with his holy spirit, saw this and understood that this was what was holding up my match, and by learning these laws thoroughly, this unholy desire would depart from me. And that is exactly what happened – I studied those halachot in depth with you, and the strange desire vanished from me...'

The mashgiach was very astonished by these words. He went and asked the Steipler how he knew that this young man had been eating meat and milk together.

The Steipler explained to him: 'When he came to me for a blessing, I saw on his forehead the image of a *g'di* (young goat). It is explained in the holy Zohar (ibid.) that one who eats meat in milk has the image of a roasted

kid inscribed on his skin. From this, I understood that he was transgressing the prohibition of eating meat and milk.

Since he wanted me to bless him, I said that if he would learn the laws of meat and milk, with G-d's help, a holy spark of inspiration would enter him and prevent him from continuing to transgress this severe prohibition..."

The rabbi concluded, "Therefore, we must learn the laws of meat and milk properly, so that we will not stumble in them, Heaven forbid."

Yossi walked home later, full of thoughts: "Our holy Sages, in their breadth of understanding, knew all of the hidden secrets of the world. They counted all the letters of the Torah and arranged them by topics and categories, and within these letters, all of the laws of nature were revealed to them from Heaven."

It is by inspiration of this idea and the verses of the Torah that we quoted above that the booklet before you was written.

The Struggle Over Elul

Our forefather Isaac was forty years old when he was fortunate to marry Rebecca. They waited about nineteen years for a child, and they were informed that Rebecca, his wife, was expecting twins.

But this was no ordinary pregnancy – these twins were the very opposite of what twins normally are. Even in their mother's womb, they had already started fighting, and it ended with a "business deal" forged between them: *"When we emerge from our mother's womb, there will be worlds and epochs awaiting us... let's divide them even now – half and half."*

The Midrash says: Two worlds lay before them – this world and the World-to-Come. They agreed to split them between themselves: Jacob chose the World-to-Come, and Esau chose this World.

The holy Zohar adds (Zohar Chadash Yitro 78b) that they

not only divided up the worlds, but also the *dominion over the months* of the year: First they divided the winter months: Tishrei, Cheshvan, Kislev, Tevet, Shevat, Adar. Jacob took the first months of *Tishrei, Cheshvan, and Kislev*. Then they divided the summer months into Nissan, Iyar, Sivan, Tammuz, Av, and Elul. Jacob chose *Nissan, Iyar, and Sivan*.

Esau, on the other hand, took for himself the months of *Tevet, Shevat, and Adar* from winter, and *Tammuz, Av, and Elul* from the summer months.

Esau realized that the month of Elul came into his portion, and he rejoiced greatly, saying: "The month of Elul comes right before Rosh Hashanah – the great and awesome Day of Judgment. Since it's under my control, I will make sure to trip up the Jewish people with sins for the duration of the month, and they will not

Parshat Ki Tisa - The Struggle Over Elul

succeed in arriving prepared for Judgment Day..."¹

Jacob and Esau were ultimately born, and each went on his own path.

Esau was drawn to vanities – hunting expeditions and the pursuit of the material – as it says: “*Esau was a man who knew hunting, a man of the field.*” (Genesis 25:27) Whereas Jacob was drawn to holiness and spirituality, as it is said: “*Jacob was a wholesome man, abiding in tents [of study]*” (ibid.).

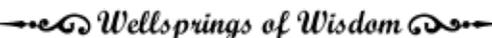
Our forefather Jacob foresaw with his holy spirit that his brother Esau would descend into terrible wickedness and would cause Jacob’s descendants dreadful troubles – which came to pass over the course of three weeks, as recorded in the Mishnah (Ta’anit 4:6): “Five misfortunes befell our fathers on the 17th of Tammuz, and five on the 9th of Av.

On the 17th of Tammuz, the Tablets [of the Law] were shattered, the daily offering was discontinued, the city [Jerusalem] was breached, Apostomus burned the Torah, and an idol was set up in the Sanctuary.

On the 9th of Av – it was decreed upon our ancestors that they would not enter the Land [of Israel], the Temple was destroyed the first time and the second time, Betar was captured, and the city was plowed over.”

Jacob said: If Esau is capable of causing such disasters within twenty-one days (from the 17th of Tammuz to the 9th of Av), what will he further continue to inflict over the course of the *ninety days of the months of Tammuz, Av, and Elul*?

Jacob began to pray powerful prayers, with immense mystical intentions (*kavanot*) and unifications, divesting himself of all physical sensation – until



1. The Bnei Yissaschar wrote (*Ma’amarei Chodshei Tammuz-Av, Ma’amar I, sec. 6*).

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he succeeded in *snatching the* month of Elul away from Esau !

This is the mystical meaning of what is written: “*that which I took from the Amorite with my sword and bow*” (Genesis 48:22). That is, I succeeded in taking the month of Elul – which is referred to by the name “the Amorite” (Emori) because of the prayers (*amirot*) spoken in it – by the power of my prayers (which are called swords and bows).

The month that passed from Esau to Jacob’s hands – through Jacob’s awe-inspiring spiritual labor – was transformed into a month of mercy, and from then on, anyone who wishes to can draw close to the King of the Universe during that month !

And the struggle between Jacob and Esau, which already began in the womb, has continued and will continue throughout all the years of the world – until the time of the Redemption, when Esau’s offspring will be crushed.

As it is said: “*The House of Jacob shall be fire, and the House of Joseph a flame, and the House of Esau straw; they shall burn them and devour them, and no survivor shall remain of the House of Esau – for the L-rd has spoken.*”
(Obadiah 1:18)

Let us now learn further about a most pivotal struggle that occurred between Jacob and Esau.

Four Distinct Blessings

On the eve of Passover in the year 2171 from creation, our forefather Isaac, by now 123 years old, called his son Esau and said to him: “Know that the coming night is an extremely auspicious

night! It is Leil Pesach – the night of Passover – a night when the entire world sings praise to G-d, and the treasuries of heavenly dew are opened so that blessings flow freely.

Parshat Ki Tisa - Four Distinct Blessings

Therefore, I wish to bless you specifically on this night, and I ask you to bring me delicacies such as I love, so that my soul will be bound with yours in my enjoyment of what you have prepared – and my blessing will be given with a full heart and a willing spirit!”

At that time, Rebecca, Isaac’s wife, was in her tent, and behold – she heard through divine inspiration what Isaac had said to Esau. Rebecca panicked, knowing the great danger in granting the blessings to the wicked Esau !

Rebecca called Jacob and said to him: “Please, go to the flock and bring me two good young goats, and I will prepare them as a delicacy for your father, such as he loves. Then take it to your father, so that you will receive from him the blessings that he intended to give to Esau !” (see Genesis 27:9)

Jacob listened to his mother’s voice, brought his father the two young goats, and

Isaac blessed Jacob with great and lofty blessings.

Isaac finished blessing Jacob, and Jacob turned to leave the tent – and lo, he saw Esau coming, with his game in hand... Jacob looked at Esau’s grim face, at his eyes reflecting wickedness and cruelty, and he became afraid of him and fled.

Esau entered and stood before his father, and when he realized that Jacob had taken the blessings, he was filled with rage...

Jacob and Esau had struggled over these blessings, and Jacob had won! This struggle was perhaps the most critical battle in all of history. As the holy Zohar states (Toldot 142a): *“Rabbi Yosi said: If, G-d forbid, Esau had been blessed at that time, Jacob would have never been able to prevail !”*

Esau decided not to surrender, and he planned to catch Jacob soon and

Parshat Ki Tisa - Four Distinct Blessings

ensure that no trace of him remained!²

But divine providence continued to accompany Jacob. G-d revealed to our matriarch Rebecca that Esau intended to kill Jacob... Rebecca called Jacob and said to him: "It has been revealed to me by the Holy Spirit that Esau wants to kill you. You have no choice – you must go into exile! Pack up your things, take what you need, and escape to Charan, to my brother Laban's house!"

Rebecca, who did not want to tell Isaac about Esau's desire to kill Jacob (so as not to transgress the prohibition of *rechilus*,³ tale-bearing), went to Isaac and said to him: "Jacob needs to get married, and I want him to take a wife from my own family."

Isaac summoned Jacob and blessed him a second time:

"May El Shaddai bless you, make you fruitful and numerous, and may you be a great assembly of peoples" (Genesis 28:3). He then sent him to the house of Laban, Jacob's uncle.

Jacob stayed in Laban's house for twenty years, and at the end of those years he returned to the land of Israel. On the way, Esau's guardian angel encountered him and wrestled with him...

Jacob defeated the angel, and the angel began to weep and plead. As it is said: *"He wrestled with an angel and prevailed – he wept and entreated him"* (Hosea 12:5). Jacob told him, "If you want me to release you, then bless me!"

And so it was. The angel blessed Jacob: *"No longer shall your name be called Jacob, but*

~ Wellsprings of Wisdom ~

2. *Rashi's words* (Genesis 27:42): "In his eyes, you are already dead, and he has drunk the cup of consolation over you."

3. The *Ohr Ha-Chayim* explains (Genesis 27:46): "She did not wish to reveal the matter to Isaac because of

the prohibition against tale-bearing, and she therefore offered a different pretext; but what she did divulge to Jacob, on the contrary, fulfilled the commandment to 'Not stand idly by the blood of your fellow' (Leviticus 19:16)."

Parshat Ki Tisa - Creation of the World – For G-d’s Reign

rather Israel, for you have striven with G-d and with men, and have prevailed” (Genesis 32:29).

Jacob continued on his way, and then he merited yet a fourth blessing, as it is said: “*G-d appeared to Jacob again upon his return from Paddan-Aram, and He blessed him” (Genesis 35:9).*

The holy Zohar reveals (Toldot 146a): “*At that time, when Jacob saw himself bestowed all of these blessings, he said to himself: ‘With which of these blessings shall I now make use?’ He*

decided: ‘I will make use of only one blessing – the least powerful of them all – the blessing my father blessed me with when I went to Laban’s house (“May El Shaddai bless you...”).’

‘All the other blessings I will save for the future – for an awe-filled time when my children will need these blessings...’”

Let us now digress to discuss the spiritual battles and wars that the Jewish people must face, fortified by the many blessings that Jacob received.

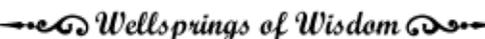
Creation of the World – For G-d’s Reign

The holy Zohar (Mishpatim 125a) expounds upon the verse “*The choicest first-fruits of your soil you shall bring to the house of the L-rd your G-d; you shall not cook a kid in its mother’s milk”* at great length, and we shall present the crux of the matter.

As is known, in six days G-d created the entire reality that we know and perceive. All of creation came about through His

speech, as it is said: “*By the word of G-d the heavens were made, and by the breath of His mouth all of their hosts” (Psalms 33:6).*

In *Pirkei Avot* (5:1), our Sages taught more specifically: “*With ten utterances the world was created.*” Through each utterance, a particular part of creation came into being. These are the ten Ma’amarot (Divine utterances), namely:⁴



4. Cited in *Avot de-Rabbi Natan* (ch. 36).

"And G-d said: 'Let there be light...'"

"And G-d said: 'Let there be a firmament...'"

"And G-d said: 'Let the waters be gathered...'"

"And G-d said: 'Let the earth sprout forth vegetation...'"

"And G-d said: 'Let there be luminaries [in the heavens]...'"

"And G-d said: 'Let the waters swarm with living creatures...'"

"And G-d said: 'Let the earth bring forth living creatures...'"

"And G-d said: 'Behold, I have given you every seed-bearing plant...'"

"And G-d said: 'Let us make man...'"

"And G-d said: 'It is not good for man to be alone...'"

King David taught an important principle: *"Forever, O L-rd, Your word stands firm in the heavens"* (Psalms 119:89). The Midrash on Psalms (Psalms 119, sec. 36) asks: What does it mean that a

word stands in the heavens? And why must it stand there?

The Midrash answers with an example: On the second day of creation, G-d said the utterance *"Let there be a firmament in the midst of the water"* (Genesis 1:6), and through it the firmament was created. But do not think that G-d's words *"Let there be a firmament in the midst of the water"* were a one-time statement. Rather, at every single moment, G-d's words continue to be uttered, "Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters," and by the power of that utterance that stands forever in the heavens, the firmament continues to stand and exist.

If G-d were simply to stop saying these words of *"Let there be a firmament,"* the firmament would cease to exist – the state of all things would revert to absolute nothingness, just as it was before the Six Days of Creation!

Thus, it is the word of G-d that brings forth, animates, and sustains the firmament, and

indeed, all creations, at each and every moment.

The Midrash's teaching applies to all created things in the world – whether inanimate, plant, animal, or human – all of them live and endure only by virtue of the ten Divine utterances that G-d is uttering at every moment.

G-d continuously brings forth, gives life to, and sustains all of reality at every moment. If He were to withhold, for even a millisecond, the flow of life from any creature, that creature would revert to nothing – exactly as it was before the Six Days of Genesis !

Chassidic teaching (Tanya, Iggeret HaKodesh, Epistle 25) adds that these words of G-d are called the Shechinah, for it “dwells” and clothes itself within the created beings to give them life.

And when the word of G-d is drawn into revelation, that revelation is called the dwelling of the Shechinah. Likewise, a person who merits a revelation of the Shechinah, and whom

the Shechinah dwells upon is termed holy.

Until here, we have explained *how* G-d created the world. But we have not explained *why* He created it.

At the beginning of Parashat Re'eh, the reason is given. Thus it is written there: “*See, I set before you today a blessing and a curse*” (Deuteronomy 11:26) – the world was created for the sake of choice – so that the individual would choose G-dliness.

The verse elaborates that when G-d created the world, He laid out in it two paths: the Path of Blessing, as well as the Path of Curse:

The Path of Blessing – when a person walks in the ways of G-d, keeps His laws, studies His Torah (both the Written and the Oral Torah), and observes His commandments – he is walking on the path of *blessing*, and all blessings, salvation, and success are to be found with him.

However, the Path of Curse – when a person follows his

Parshat Ki Tisa - The Holy Spark in Everything

own willful heart, ignoring the Creator of the World and His decrees, being wicked toward Heaven and bad toward his fellow creatures – he then enters the path of *curse*, where all of the soul's ills reside: self-loathing, fears, despair and disappointments, and all of life's losses.

G-d created the human being and granted him the power of free choice, and said to him:

‘The choice is in your hands – you choose your path! But if you will heed Me, choose the Path of Blessing...’

‘It is for this purpose that I created everything – so that you will crown Me as King over you!’

Thus, everything was created in order that we accept G-d’s Kingship over us – which we achieve by choosing the good and walking upon the Path of Blessing.

The Holy Spark in Everything

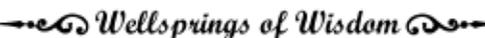
Everything that exists and endures throughout all of creation – from the highest spiritual entity to the very lowest, most material entity – is sustained and lives only by virtue of the Divine spark inside it.

As Rabbi Adin Even-Israel (Steinsaltz) wrote:⁵

“Every creature draws, directly or indirectly, from G-d’s holiness. G-d alone is the basis and foundation of all

existence in every form and manifestation, and there is no existence except through His power and by Him.

Our Sages, of blessed memory, have revealed that at the very beginning of it all – before creation – it arose in G-d’s will to create a being (the human) who would stand between good and evil, and that this being would choose the good.



5. In his work *Biur Tanya* (ch. 6, p. 145; ch. 37, p. 212).

Therefore, He created two systems: one system of holiness, and opposite to it a system of impurity, and G-d placed the human being in the middle.

Although all created beings draw their vitality from G-d, *there is still a difference between the two opposite systems:*

The holy entities draw their life from the innermost aspect of holiness, because they desire closeness to G-d and are nullified to Him, and G-d desires them. In contrast, the impure entities draw their life from an external and “outer” aspect (not from G-d’s inner will).

To explain further: No creature – including the klipah (the impure “husk”) – has its own independent source of life apart from holiness. Thus, the klipot also receive their vitality, in an indirect way, from the source of all life in holiness.

However, G-d does not desire the klipot. Therefore, He grants them vitality only in a very narrow, constricted

measure – just enough for their bare existence. However, He gave them the ability to gain *extra* vitality and gratification by ensnaring human beings and bringing them to sin.

The route from holiness to klipah passes through the human being. The human, having free will – able even to act against the divine will, against holiness, and against the very source of his own life – is the one who, by committing one of the 365 prohibitions, transfers vitality from holiness to the klipah, “*which I hate,*” as G-d says (Jeremiah 44:4).

In theory, if it were possible to isolate the klipah entirely from human beings, it would cease to have any significance – in fact, it would cease to exist as klipah...

The existence of the klipah – its growth and the nourishment of its life – is, in this sense, a parasitic existence. The klipah is a parasite upon the human: it survives by drawing its vitality from him, and, as typically happens in such

cases, it also destroys him and thereby ultimately destroys its own source of life...

It is therefore quite ironic: the powers of Evil draw their

sustenance from holiness, and the greater the holiness, the more sustenance the evil can draw from it.⁶ Therefore, evil always seeks out the place where there

~~~~~*~* **Wellsprings of Wisdom** *~*~~~~~

**6.** In those days, many Jews earned an honorable living by running roadside inns and taverns, and in almost every small town throughout Russia and its neighboring lands, one could find a Jewish proprietor.

This was the case until the wicked Russian Tsar decreed that all Jews be expelled from the villages to the large cities, leaving tens of thousands destitute and stripped of their livelihoods.

The holy Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, the Baal HaTanya, was heartbroken. He traversed the land collecting funds to aid the victims and to bribe the ministers in hopes of softening the implementation of the decree.

During his journey, he reached Volhynia near Tulchin, home of the holy Rabbi Baruch, grandson of the Baal Shem Tov, and turned aside to visit him.

Rabbi Baruch received him with great honor and soon asked, "Why have you entered my domain?"

The Baal HaTanya answered, "Firstly, 'The earth and all it contains belong to the L-rd' (Psalms 24:1), including this

land. Secondly, I cannot bear the suffering of those driven from their homes, and I am gathering money to bribe the ministers and ease the decree."

Rabbi Baruch asked, "Surely harsh judgments can be sweetened by merely passing your hand across the forehead; why is money required?"

He replied, "Jacob our father could also have sweetened judgments, yet he still sent gifts to appease Esau (Genesis 32:19–21); he did not rely on mysticism alone."

Rabbi Baruch persisted, "Could you not have taught the Jewish people my grandfather, the Baal Shem Tov's 'Echad' – his wondrous insights in the unity of G-d – and thus sweeten the judgments?"

The Baal HaTanya responded, "On the contrary – precisely because of your grandfather's 'Echad', the evil decree was issued," and he explained:

After the Spanish Expulsion, the Jewish refugees were unwanted everywhere, for the ministering angels of each nation argued that when Jews settle in a land, they build study-halls and synagogues, they learn and pray, and proclaim "The

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is more holiness. As our Sages said: *“Whoever is greater than his fellow, his evil inclination is greater than his”* (Sukkah 52a). And the higher and more internal the level of holiness from which the evil leeches, the deeper and more impactful the strength of that evil...

Based on this concept, the holy Zohar (Mishpatim 125a) continues and says: This is the meaning of the verse, *“You shall not cook a kid in its mother’s milk”* (Exodus 23:19):

“Kid” refers to the forces of impurity, which seek to nurse (and draw vitality) from the “mother’s milk,” which is the holy Shechinah (the Divine Presence).

The holy Torah thus warns: *“You shall not cook”* – aside from the literal prohibition of meat and milk (as per the simple text and as ruled in halacha), this also serves as a general warning: do not cause, through your sins, the forces of impurity (“kid”) to be nourished from the vitality of holiness.

*~ Wellsprings of Wisdom ~*

L-rd is One," extinguishing the unholy angels' own existence; therefore, the earthly kings refused them.

Only the angel of Poland said, “I do not fear them. They will trade and cheat, study Torah not for its own sake, pray and say ‘One’ without intent – thus inverting Echad – and I shall draw great spiritual nourishment from them,” and he admitted them into his lands.

Thus, the earthly Polish king accepted their bribe: a pile of silver as high as a mounted Cossack’s spear, which the Jewish people paid, and were then allowed to settle there.

Soon they built synagogues and study-halls, learned Torah, prayed, and

recited the Shema – yet without proper intent – and the Polish angel was content until your grandfather the Baal Shem Tov arrived and taught a new and deeper way of declaring Echad – the unity of G-d.

The prince protested that he had bargained only for the old ‘Echad,’ not for this new one, and he now wished to expel them.

Hence, the earthly rulers resolved anew to banish the Jews.

Thus, it is because of your grandfather's 'Echad' that this expulsion decree has returned, and bribery is again required to annul it... (Shmuot V'Sippurim, Part II, p.

**Parshat Ki Tisa - The Modern-Day Bikkurim of a Jew**

The verse then concludes: “*The choicest first-fruits of your soil you shall bring to the house of the L-rd your G-d*” – teaching us that through the mitzvah of Bikkurim (first-fruits), which is an act of

kindness, the holy Shechinah becomes filled with benevolent kindness as well. Thus, the "kids" – the klipot – will not be able to draw nourishment from the Shechinah's bounty, which remains guarded and protected.

**The Modern-Day Bikkurim of a Jew**

It is explained in the Zohar (ibid.) that in the era of the Holy Temple, the Jewish people would, by offering the *Bikkurim*, cut off the additional, illicit nourishment of the klipot from the Shechinah.

Nowadays, however, in our many sins, we have no Temple and no Kohen, no meal-offering and no first-fruits.

But we too have a way to “bring Bikkurim” even today, in our times: The essence of Bikkurim is dedicating the first and best to G-d. That idea remains true even today – namely, when a person merits to dedicate the first part of his day and the first of all his faculties to G-d, it is as if he brought Bikkurim!

To bring an excerpt from *Chelev Ha-Aretz* (vol. I, p. 349):

The Creator made man upright, and He created in him three primary vessels and faculties – three channels through which man merits to serve his Maker and fulfill His will with fidelity and perfection.

These vessels are: thought, speech, and action, which express all of a person's wants, passions, and yearnings. Through them, a person expresses the thoughts of his heart and performs all of his deeds throughout his lifetime in this world.

The power of these vessels is very great – both for good and for bad (to repair or, Heaven forbid, to ruin). Therefore, man is tasked

**Parshat Ki Tisa - The First Thoughts of The Day**

with the great mission of guarding their holiness, purity, and clearness, like the apple of his eye.

Our Sages wrote that a main source of attachment to G-d and the divine vitality drawn into a person each day derives from that first *thought*, that first *word*, and that first *action* with which he awakens.

Our holy Sages explained that this is the concept of ‘the mitzvah of Bikkurim’ in present times: when the Holy Temple stood, a person would bring the first-fruits that had ripened, to the Temple; but now that the Temple has been destroyed (in our sins), we must

bring the first of our service and the first-fruits of each day to our Creator.

Therefore, it is proper that a person dedicate the first of his thoughts, speech, and action of the day to his Creator. That is, immediately upon awakening from his sleep, the first thought he thinks, the first words he speaks, and the first deed he does, should all be for the honor of his Creator. Through this, he draws great light, holiness, and blessing onto these vessels – an influence that is felt throughout the entire day. By dedicating the start of the day to the service of G-d, a person merits that the whole day will follow after its blessed beginning...

**The First Thoughts of The Day**

Once we have clarified that the “daily Bikkurim” is the dedication of the beginning of one’s day to the Creator – i.e. dedicating to G-d the first thought one thinks, the first words one speaks, and the first actions one performs upon waking – we must

now explain in what particular manner a person dedicates his first thoughts to G-d.

This can be done in three various forms of expression, namely – faith in the Creator, accepting the Yoke of Heaven, and giving thanks to G-d:

1. The moment a person awakens from sleep, he should immediately contemplate the existence of the Creator, blessed be He, and affirm his complete faith in Him. As soon as he awakens from sleep, he should accept upon himself to fulfill the mitzvah of faith, knowing and believing that the world has a G-d who watches over it – as evidenced by the fact that G-d brought us out of the land of Egypt as it is written: *“I am the L-rd your G-d who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage”* (Exodus 20:2).

The Creator, alone, is great and rules over all; in His presence, everything is as nothing; He is the Root and Source of all worlds that He created out of absolute nothingness.

2. As a person reflects on the greatness of the Creator’s works – the creation of the heavens and the earth, with all the wisdom and wonders they contain – he recognizes that all of these are but a grain of sand

compared to the vast universe of the galaxies. Furthermore, all of those are nothing and naught compared to the enormous power of an angel. All the more so that all of them together are nothing compared to the exalted Holy Throne of G-d, which in turn, is absolutely nullified before G-d’s blessed Glory, since He is the Cause of all causes and the Prime Source of all worlds, and there is none besides Him.

All these great and awesome truths will immediately fill his heart with awe and great humility, and a powerful love for G-d will enter his heart. He will be overcome with yearning and an intense desire to cleave to Him, and consequently, he will accept upon himself the yoke of G-d’s kingship, with fear and love.

3. Finally, he will offer thanks to G-d for returning his soul and giving him life, renewing his strength, vigor, and ability.

**Parshat Ki Tisa - Modeh Ani – Always Intact**

He will consider in his heart how he is, in truth, absolutely nothing before G-d, and that he must stand ready and prepared to be a faithful emissary of the Al-mighty at every moment – wherever G-d sends him, he will go readily.

These reflections will lead to tremendous feelings of gratitude to the all-powerful G-d, Who has done mighty deeds with him and returned his soul to his body, and in this way, his thoughts become a throne for the holy Shechinah.

**Modeh Ani – Always Intact**

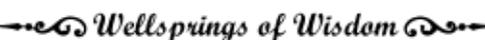
Similar to one's first thoughts upon waking, one must dedicate the first speech he utters to the Creator.

This is done by ensuring that as soon as one awakens from sleep – before he even steps down from bed – he fills his mouth with praise and gratitude to the Creator, for giving him life and restoring his soul to his body.

For this reason, from time immemorial, immediately upon awakening from sleep, a Jewish person gives praise and thanks to the Al-mighty, reciting: “*Modeh ani lefanecha, Melech*

*chai v'kayam, shehechezarta bi nishmati b'chemlah, rabba emunatecha!*” – “I gratefully thank You, living and eternal King, for You have mercifully restored my soul within me; great is Your faithfulness.”

My father, Rabbi Yoram Abargel ZY”A, related<sup>7</sup> that when he finished writing *Betzur Yarum – Sod Malchut Beit David*, he went to seek approbations from various respected rabbis. When he came to the famed Rabbi Meir Brandsdorfer ZY”A, the rabbi opened the book to peruse it, and before his eyes he saw the words of the Lubavitcher



7. We were privileged to hear this story from him during the festival of Sukkot 5772 (2011).

**Parshat Ki Tisa - Netilat Yadayim at One's Bedside**

Rebbe recorded in *HaYom Yom*  
(entry of 11 Shevat):

*“The daily schedule [of a Jew] begins with Modeh Ani, and we say it before washing hands – even with impure hands – because none of the impurities in the world can defile a Jew’s Modeh Ani. One might be lacking in one thing or another, but the Modeh Ani [always] remains intact.”*

When Rabbi Meir read this, his face lit up and he said to my father: “I don’t need to read any further – just for that statement alone, this book deserves to be published.”

My father continued traveling to other great Torah sages and received much praise for his book. In the end, however, he decided to put it away and not publish it...

**Netilat Yadayim at One's Bedside**

Finally, we shall now describe the first action that one must do upon waking in the morning. This, of course, refers to the observance of the morning hand washing (*netilat yadayim*) according to halacha. Through this, one’s entire day will proceed with extraordinary holiness – for ‘the body follows the lead of the head.’

Thus, a Jew who wishes to be saved from the evil inclination and to attain supreme holiness –

must be careful when he rises in the morning to wash his hands immediately, right by his bed, and furthermore, to be careful not to even place his feet on the floor before this washing.

By washing his hands very first thing in the morning, he thereby removes the “heat” of evil of the animal soul that pursues a person to turn him away from the paths of life – a life of Torah and holiness – and toward a life of vanity.<sup>8</sup>

...*~* **Wellsprings of Wisdom** *~*...

**8.** In this context, we share the following story (Kovetz *Nachalat Tzvi*, Part 6, p. 141):

After the passing of the holy Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhensk, two of his

Let us expand upon this point:

The holy Zohar (Vayeshev 184b) explains that at the moment a Jewish man or woman awakens from sleep, a ruach

ra'ah – a spiritually impure “evil spirit” – rests upon their hands.

This impure spirit does not leave a person's hands until he pours water over them three

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...*Wellsprings of Wisdom*...

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chassidim set out to seek for themselves a new Rebbe and spiritual guide, they chose to first travel to Anipoli to seek the saintly Rabbi Zusha, the revered brother of their late master.

On the way, night overtook them, and they stopped in a small village where no Jew resided – they could not proceed further. Having no choice, they prepared to lodge at the inn, but before lying down to rest, they wished to obtain water for *netilat yadayim*.

However, they found none. The innkeeper explained that the water was finished, and that the road to the well was long and dangerous at night; but they need not worry, in the morning the water-carriers would come and replenish the supply.

The two were disheartened: how could they allow themselves to sleep without water? One excused himself, saying, "According to Halacha, a person under compulsion is exempt," and simply went to sleep.

His companion, however, could find no rest for his soul and resolved that if

water was not available, he would not go to sleep.

Suddenly, an idea struck him: he bought a bottle of liquor from the innkeeper, placed it beside his bed, and in the morning, he washed his hands with it.

At dawn, the wagon driver urged them to hurry on their way. The two hastened to the wagon, and before long, they reached Anipoli and sought entry to the Rebbe's chambers. As they were about to pass the threshold, Rabbi Zusha turned to the second young man and instructed him to wash his hands.

Then Rabbi Zusha added: "All of the defilement that my holy brother, Rabbi Elimelech, drew out of you over fifteen years has returned to you because you traveled without washing your hands."

The disciple shuddered at these piercing words, yet both men were now convinced of the Rebbe's clairvoyance; from that moment on, they cleaved to him with great devotion and accepted his spiritual authority.

times alternately. The reason is that when he pours water on one hand, the evil spirit jumps over to the other hand; when he then pours on the second hand, it jumps back to the first; only after three alternating pours is the ruach ra'ah uprooted from its place and departs completely.

Care must be taken that the washing water reaches all of the fingers and the entire palm, up to the wrist joint (except on Yom Kippur and Tisha B'Av, when one washes only up to the knuckles).

The halachic authorities have written that when one comes to wash his hands in the morning, he should wash the right hand first. The full procedure is properly done as follows: one fills the cup with the right hand and passes it to the left (so that the left can pour over the right hand first). Then he pours over the right hand, then takes the cup in the right hand and pours it over the left, and repeats this sequence three times in total.

It is preferable not to hand the cup directly from the left

back to the right hand; rather, it is preferable to set the cup down on a surface, then pick it up with the right hand and pour over the left. This is to display the subservience of the left hand to the right, like a master commanding his servant to attend him.

After washing alternately, one should rub one's hands together three times, and then raise one's hands and fingers upward, lifting them to the level of the head.

Then – after this raising of the hands – he recites the blessing “*Al netilat yadayim*” (If one needs to use the restroom, after relieving himself, he should wash again and make the blessing then).

One should keep his hands raised and upright until he completes the blessing. Indeed, the phrase “*al netilat yadayim*” can be understood literally as “the elevation of the hands,” as in the verse, “*va-yintalem va-yenasa'em*” – “He lifted them and carried them” (Isaiah 63:9).

Additionally, one must be careful when lifting both hands to head-height, to bring the elbows (the "upper arm") inward toward the body. It is also worthy to stretch out both palms while making the blessing – like someone ready to receive something in hand – to symbolize receiving purity into them. All of these practices contain deep and awe-inspiring mystical meanings.

The holy Rabbi Tzvi Elimelech of Dinov ZY" A wrote the following (Aggadat Pirkei – sec. 9):

*"When a person wakes from his sleep, he must be careful not to lower his feet from the bed before washing his hands. For when a person places his feet on the ground without washing, he thereby, Heaven forbid, gives strength to the animal soul to chase after him and entice him.*

*This is the meaning of the verse: 'He plots mischief on his bed; he stations himself on a*

*path that is not good; evil he does not despise' (Psalms 36:5) – When a Jew places his feet on the ground before washing, behold, he is "stationing himself on a path that is not good," and this could lead him, G-d forbid, to "not despise evil."*

*In other words, instead of living a life of Torah and holiness, he will spend that whole day living a life of materialism and lust..."*

To summarize what we have learned, it is possible even today to achieve the very effect that the Bikkurim offering achieved in former times – and that is by dedicating the first part of the day to G-d. In other words: the first thought, the first word, and the first action of the morning:

The first thought – *"Shiviti Hashem lenegdi tamid"* ("I place G-d before me always").

The first words – *Modeh Ani*.

The first action – *Netilat yadayim*.

**Parshat Ki Tisa - Jacob's Final Blessings – The Ultimate Weapon**

Similarly, a Jew must also be careful to dedicate the end of his day to his Creator, just as it is important to begin his day in purity and dedicate its first moments to G-d.

Therefore, when he goes to sleep at night, he should likewise behave so that the last things he does are directed to G-d – but in reverse order – in action, then in speech, and only then in thought:

The last action – preparing the vessel for *netilat yadayim* in the morning and placing it by the bed.

The last words – the recitation of *Keri'at Shema* before sleep.

The last thought – reflecting on words of Torah until he is overcome by sleep.

When the conclusion of the day is performed in such a fashion, it helps propel him to open the next day in purity and with added blessing – as it is written: “*When I remember You on my bed, I meditate on You through the night watches.*” (Psalms 63:7)... May G-d grant us to achieve this, Amen.

*After this lengthy elaboration, we now return to the words of the Zohar with which we opened...*

**Jacob's Final Blessings – The Ultimate Weapon**

“*Come and see,*” says the Zohar (Toldot 146a), “*how many blessings Jacob was blessed with: One by his father (when he disguised himself as Esau)... one by the Shechinah – the Holy One, blessed be He, blessed him when he was returning from Laban... one by the angel who*

*was Esau's guardian... and one more blessing that his father had blessed him when he had set out to Paddan-Aram...*

*At that time, Jacob saw all of those blessings he had received, and he said, “In which of these blessings shall I now make use? In the weakest among them, the*

**Parshat Ki Tisa - To what is this comparable ?**

*last one, with which my father blessed me for a second time. Although it is truly a mighty blessing, it is not nearly as mighty with regard to dominion in this world as the first one.”*

*Jacob continued and said: “I will take this latter blessing of my father, and use it in this world – so that my children will be able to bear the yoke of Esau. And I will set aside all of the others for the time when I will need them for myself and my children in the future. At the time when all the nations gather to annihilate my children.*

*Of that time, Ezekiel prophesied and said of Gog and Magog: “You will come up against My people Israel like a cloud covering the earth – it shall be at the end of days” (Ezekiel 38:16). That time will be a time of trouble for the children of Jacob, and those blessings will stand for them as shield and armor, as it is written: “All nations surrounded me... they surrounded me, they also encircled me... they surrounded me like bees” (Psalms 118:10–12) – three encirclings are written here; and corresponding to them, those three blessings of Jacob that have remained will stand and fight against [the nations]...*

**To what is this comparable ?**

To a king who had several regiments of powerful troops – many seasoned warriors well versed in battle. Naturally, they stood ready for any eventuality that may arise.

Meanwhile, the king heard of a robber who was assaulting travelers. He called his general

and said: “Send word for all the gate sentries to seize him.”

The general asked: “From all your regiments, Your Majesty is sending only the gate sentries ?”

The king replied: “Against that robber, those gatekeepers will be sufficient. I will hold back all the regiments and

**Parshat Ki Tisa - To what is this comparable ?**

warriors and save them for when they will be needed – to fight the mighty kings on the day of war that is yet to come.”

So too, Jacob said regarding Esau: “These blessings are sufficient for me at this present time. But in the future, when they will be needed by my children against all the kings and rulers of the entire world, those blessings will be awakened and will destroy them completely, and the world will be established justly and properly, as it is foretold:

*“On that day, the day Gog comes against the land of Israel – declares the L-rd G-d – My raging anger shall flare up. In My zeal, in the fire of My wrath, I declare: On that day, a great earthquake shall come over the land of Israel. The fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the beasts of the field, all creeping things that*

*move on the ground, and every human being on earth shall quake before Me. The mountains shall be overthrown, cliffs shall topple, and every wall shall tumble to the ground”* (Ezekiel 38:18–20).

*“I will then summon the sword against him throughout all My mountains – declares the L-rd G-d, and every man's sword shall be turned against his brother. I will punish him with pestilence and bloodshed; I will rain down torrential rain, hailstones, fire, and sulfur upon him and his hordes and the many peoples with him. Thus, I will magnify Myself and sanctify Myself and make Myself known in the eyes of many nations. And they shall know that I am G-d”* (Ezekiel 38:21–23).

May the wondrous and miraculous times of the future redemption be upon us speedily in our days, Amen !



## *Summary and Practical Conclusions*

1. In the time of the Holy Temple, the Jewish people would, through bringing the *Bikkurim* (first-fruits offering), eliminate the unnecessary, non-essential flow of vitality that is received by the klipot from the Shechinah. But even today, when we have no ability to actually offer *Bikkurim*, it is nevertheless possible to accomplish the same effect that the *Bikkurim* accomplished.

2. The idea of *Bikkurim* is *dedicating the first and best to G-d*. Therefore, even today, when a Jew dedicates the first part of his day and the first and choicest of his strengths to G-d, he is effectively performing the *Bikkurim* offering.

3. This dedication of the “first” must be in all three garments of the soul: thought, speech, and action. In other words, when one awakens in the morning, his first thought, first words, and first action should all be consecrated to G-d.

4. *The first thought* – upon awakening from sleep, one should contemplate the existence of the Creator, and accept upon himself the yoke of Heaven.

*The first words* – should be words of praise and thanks to G-d, for reviving him and returning his soul to his

body. Therefore, one should say: “*Modeh Ani lefanecha, Melech chai v’kayam...*” (“I thank You, living and eternal King...,” the traditional expression of gratitude to G-d upon waking).

*The first action* – performing *netilat yadayim* by one’s bedside, taking care not to set one’s feet on the floor before this washing.

5. Just as there is an ideal to open one’s day in purity and to dedicate its first moments to one’s Creator, so too must a Jew be careful to dedicate the end of the day to his Creator, and when one goes to sleep he should do so in reverse order: first action, then speech, then thought:

*The last action* – preparing the basin for *netilat yadayim* in the morning and setting it next to the bed.

*The last words* – the recitation of *Keri’at Shema* (the bedtime *Shema* prayer).

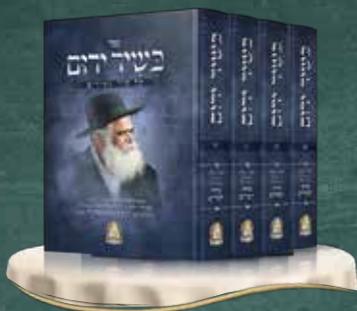
The last thought – pondering words of Torah until sleep overtakes the person.

When the day’s conclusion is carried out in this manner, he is assisted from above to open the next day in purity and with added blessing – as it says: “*If I remember You on my couch, through the night watches I meditate upon You*” (Psalms 63:7).

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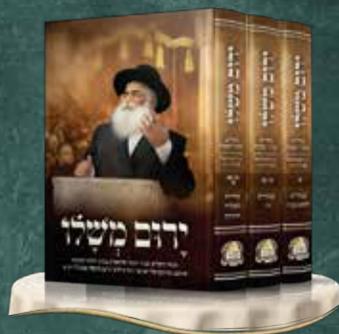


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18th of Adar ,5786



| City        | Candle Lighting | Shabbat Ends | Rabbeinu Tam |
|-------------|-----------------|--------------|--------------|
| New York    | 5:35 pm         | 6:34 pm      | 7:06 pm      |
| Miami       | 6:07 pm         | 7:00 pm      | 7:38 pm      |
| Los Angeles | 5:36 pm         | 6:32 pm      | 7:07 pm      |
| Montreal    | 5:30 pm         | 6:33 pm      | 7:02 pm      |
| Toronto     | 5:55 pm         | 6:56 pm      | 7:26 pm      |
| London      | 5:31 pm         | 6:40 pm      | 7:03 pm      |
| Jerusalem   | 5:25 pm         | 6:16 pm      | 6:57 pm      |
| Tel Aviv    | 5:22 pm         | 6:14 pm      | 6:54 pm      |
| Haifa       | 5:21 pm         | 6:15 pm      | 6:55 pm      |
| Be'er Sheva | 5:22 pm         | 6:16 pm      | 6:56 pm      |

### Pathways to the Heart

From the Words of

**HaRav Yoram Abargel zt"l**

*When you come and hear a Torah shiur, you hear some new insight or a beautiful foundational idea, and your mind absorbs the words, and from that moment, your sins of thought are erased.*

*It cannot be that your mind will receive these matters while there is something bad still there. Rather, this demonstrates that your mind is being cleansed of corrupted thoughts.*

*Therefore, when you hear words of Torah – the more you hear, and the better and more correctly you understand spiritual ideas – the more these negative matters are gradually removed.*



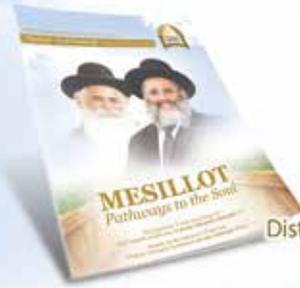
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