

Good Shabbos, everyone.

I want to begin by wishing you and your families a *shana tova u'mesuka*...a year filled with good health and happiness, *bracha* and *hatzlacha*! We are looking forward to an uplifting *Yamim Noraim* season here in Shomrei. May *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* answer our *tefillos* לטובה...for an inspired and inspiring year...Amen.

Last week we read about the *mitzvah* of *Bikkurim*—and we discussed the important Elul message of celebrating potential. But there is a second Elul message in *Bikkurim*, which is important to think about at this time of the year.

The **Rambam** writes in his *Perush HaMishnayos* that those who brought *Bikkurim* were not celebrated and honored only because of their individual contributions, but also because they came as a group—celebrating the power and the unique qualities of the *kahal*, the community.

רמב"ם פירוש המשניות: והעיקר אצלנו אין בעלי אומניות רשאים לעמוד מפני תלמידי חכמים אבל חייבנו לאלו לעמוד לפי שהנכנסים הם קהל וכבוד צבור שאני ואמרו בגמא בדרך היו אומרים שמחתי באומרים לי בית ה' נלך ובירושלים היו אומרים עומדות היו רגלינו בשעריך ירושלים

Sometimes we feel insignificant. We wonder: in the grand scheme of things, within this large community, in this very big world, what can our individual actions accomplish?

But we must remember that we are part of something greater than ourselves--a community...and beyond that, we are part of a continuum of Jewish history...

And the beauty of being part of Klal Yisrael is that everything we do has a greater impact. The total is much greater than the sum of its parts...

A farmer brings one fig or one date...what looks like a small gesture...but he is joined by hundreds of other farmers...and suddenly there is a beautiful and plentiful collection of fruit for the *Beis Hamikdash*...and that is cause for celebration...for singing and dancing...

The **Zohar** teaches: The best way to be *zoche badin*, to receive a positive judgment, is to align yourself with the community; to be a member of a community and an eternal nation, and then you will be judged according to the national merits of the community, Hashem's Holy nation.

Similarly, **Rav Yisrael Salanter** taught that those who do *chesed* have a better chance of receiving a good judgment on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Even if they don't deserve to live by their own merit, they will be granted life because people need them.

And this is not only a "merit," it is also a great responsibility. Our community and our people are counting on us. As the Rambam writes in *Hilchos Teshuva*, Perek 3:4---our actions affect the entire community, and he specifically encourages extra acts of charity during the *Aseres Y'mei Teshuva*.

רמב"ם הלכות תשובה פרק ג:ד

לפיקה צריך כל אדם שייראה עצמו כל השנה כלה כאלו חציו זכאי וחציו חייב. וכן כל העולם חציו זכאי וחציו חייב. חטא חטא אחד הרי הכריע את עצמו ואת כל העולם פלו לכף חובה וגרם לו השחתה. עשה מצוה אחת הרי הכריע את עצמו ואת כל העולם פלו לכף זכות וגרם לו ולהם תשועה והצלה שגאמר (משלי י כה) (וצדיק יסוד עולם) זה שצדק הכריע

את כל העולם לזכות והצילו. ומפני ענין זה נהגו כל בית ישראל להרבות בצדקה ובמעשים טובים ולעסוק במצות מראש השנה ועד יום הכפורים יתר מפל השנה.

*Accordingly, throughout the entire year, a person should always look at himself as equally balanced between merit and sin and the world as equally balanced between merit and sin. If he performs one sin, he tips his balance and that of the entire world to the side of guilt and brings destruction upon himself.*

*[On the other hand,] if he performs one mitzvah, he tips his balance and that of the entire world to the side of merit and brings deliverance and salvation to himself and others. This is implied by [Proverbs 10:25] "A righteous man is the foundation of the world," i.e., he who acted righteously, tipped the balance of the entire world to merit and saved it.*

*For these reasons, it is customary for all of Israel to give profusely to charity, perform many good deeds, and be occupied with mitzvos from Rosh HaShanah until Yom Kippur to a greater extent than during the remainder of the year.*

I recently heard an interesting story from **Rav Meilech Biderman**. A community near Radin asked a *bachur* from the yeshiva there to join them for Rosh Hashanah because they wanted him to share *divrei Torah* and *mussar* on Rosh Hashanah and to rouse them to do *teshuvah*. The *bachur* initially refused because he wanted to be with the Chafetz Chaim on Rosh Hashanah. When the Chafetz Chaim heard about this, he told the *bachur*: "***A mentch leibt nicht far zich — man doesn't live for himself.***" In other words, a person comes down to this world to help others. And someone who can help others on Rosh Hashana should seize the opportunity. After hearing these words, the *bachur* changed his mind and went to the neighboring town for Rosh Hashanah.

But there is more fundamental reason why *chessed* is so crucial to Rosh Hashanah.

In **Rav Yitzchak Hutner's *Pachad Yitzchak* on Rosh Hashana**, the first *ma'amar* is called "*Kuntres Hachessed*." In this essay Rav Hutner develops the idea that one dimension crucial to Rosh Hashanah is *chessed*, kindness.

He writes:

...שמעשי החסד ופעולות הטבה לאחרים נקבעים במטבע קדושת היום של ר"ה.  
"*acts of kindness are embedded into the framework of the holiness of the day.*"

This is based on *Sefer Nechemia*, Perek 8, where the story is told how soon after returning from exile to Eretz Yisrael, Ezra and Nehemiah gathered the Jews to the newly built Temple on Rosh Hashanah and taught them various laws of the Torah that they were neglecting. Upon learning of their numerous transgressions, the Jews begin to cry bitterly.

וַיִּקְרְאוּ בַסֵּפֶר בְּתוֹרַת הָאֱלֹהִים מִפְּרֹשׁ וְשׁוֹם שֶׁכֵּל וַיְבִינּוּ בַמִּקְרָא:

*They read from the scroll of the Teaching of God, translating it and giving the sense; so they understood the reading.*

וַיֹּאמֶר נְחֻמְיָה הוּא הַתְּרַשָּׁתָא וְעִזְרָא הַפֶּהן וְהַסֵּפֶר וְהַלּוּיִם הַמְבַיְנִים אֶת־הַעֲמֹם לְכָל־הָעָם הַיּוֹם קָדֹשׁ־הוּא לִיהִנֵּה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם אֶל־תִּתְאָבְלוּ וְאֶל־תִּבְכוּ כִּי בּוֹכִים כָּל־הָעָם פָּשְׁמַעְם אֶת־דְּבַר־יְהוָה:

*Nehemiah the Tirshathite, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who were explaining to the people said to all the people, "This day is holy to the LORD your God: you must not mourn or weep," for all the people were weeping as they listened to the words of the Teaching.*

Nehemiah comforts them, insisting that, instead of crying, they should rejoice in their renewed commitment to God and their faith that He would forgive them, and they should express this rejoicing and gratitude through feasting.

וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם לֶכְזֹ אֲכַלְוּ מִשְׂמֵנִים וּשְׂתוּ מִמַּתְקִים וְשַׁלְּחוּ מְנוּחַ לְאִין נֶכּוֹן לֹ לֹ כִי־קָדוֹשׁ הַיּוֹם לְאֲדַגְנוּ וְאַל־תִּעְצְבוּ כִי־חֲדַתָּהּ  
הַיְהוָה הִיא מְעוֹזְכֶם:

He [further] said to them, “Go, eat choice foods and drink sweet drinks **and send portions to whoever has nothing prepared**, for the day is holy to our Lord. Do not be sad, for your rejoicing in the LORD is the source of your strength.”

Additionally, Nehemiah instructs the Jews to send portions [of food] to those who lacked the means to celebrate. While most readers studying these *pesukim* would focus on the usual themes of celebrating the occasion of accepting God as King or repentance, **Rav Hutner chose to focus on a different element, namely the seemingly extraneous insistence to supply the needy with food and drink.**

חִידוּשׁ גָּדוֹל מִצֵּאֵנוּ בְּעִבּוּדַת הַיּוֹם שֶׁל רֵאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה. וְנִתְגַּלָּה לָנוּ חִידוּשׁ זֶה מִדְּבַרֵי קַבְלָה "וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם לֶכְזֹ אֲכַלְוּ מִשְׂמֵנִים וּשְׂתוּ מִמַּתְקִים וְשַׁלְּחוּ מְנוּחַ לְאִין נֶכּוֹן לֹ (נַחְמִיָּה ח). וְלִמְדִים אֲנוּ מִכֵּאן שֶׁמַּעֲשֵׂי הַחֶסֶד וּפְעוּלוֹת הַטֶּבֶה לְאַחֲרִים נִקְבָּעִים בְּמַטְבַּע קְדוּשַׁת הַיּוֹם שֶׁל ר"ה.

Why was it so important to mention this command?

Rav Hutner used this *pasuk* as the source to conclude that ...שמעשי החסד ופעולות הטבה לאחרים נקבעים במטבע קדושת היום של ר"ה.

“acts of kindness are embedded into the framework of the holiness of the day.”

The rest of this *ma'amar* elaborates on the centrality of *chessed* to Rosh Hashanah.

Rav Hutner explains that Rosh Hashanah does not merely commemorate the creation of the world, but it also heralds the reawakening of the powerful spiritual forces of creation.

Because the world was created with kindness – עולם חסד יבנה – man is enjoined to imitate God on this day by performing acts of kindness. Rav Hutner focuses on Rosh Hashanah as a time of creation—the creation of man in the image of Hashem--as the source of this imperative to perform acts of kindness. In other words, it is the commandment of imitating Hashem that mandates kindness. Kindness is a manifestation of creativity, and it is the foremost manner through which we can imitate Hashem and His act of creation. Rav Hutner also points out that it is not a coincidence that the characteristic *midah* of Avraham, the first person to discover Hashem, was *chessed*, as this is the *midah* from which creation came about. *Chessed* is crucial to Rosh Hashanah.

Immediately before sounding the shofar on Rosh Hashanah, we recite the words of *Tehillim* (Ps.47:6) "עלה אלקים בתרועה": Loosely translated, this means that God, as it were, is exalted at the sound of the *teruah* or straight blast of the shofar. According to one interpretation of that *pasuk*, the word *teruah* is derived from the word *reia*--both words from the root of *resh* and *ayin*--which means friend or friendship. The *pasuk* is alluding to the fact that love and loyalty among friends are important to Hashem, and He is exalted when those who serve Him do so in fellowship and mutual love and esteem.

And it is not only that we imitate Hashem by doing *chessed*, but through acts of *tzedakah* and *chessed*, we create a kingdom, allowing Hashem to express His Kingship עלה אלקים בתרועה, Hashem ascends His throne, as it were, when we join together in unity and friendship.

As, **Rav Wolbe** writes in *Alei Shor*, עלי שור ה"ב עמ' תל"א :

הרי אין מלך בלא עם, ואין עם בלי אחדות, ואי אפשר לגשת ל"יום מלכנו" כשיש פירוד לבבות בינינו. זה מטיל עלינו חיוב נורא להתחזק באהבת הבריות ורדיפת שלום לקראת יום הדין.... הרי מידות טובות אינן רק פתח תקוה בשיבילנו לזכות בדין גם קבלת מלכות שמים לא תתכן בלעדיהן. הרי הרח כפול להתאמץ בחדש אלאול להתנהג בכל מידה טובה ולרחק הכעס והקפידא השנאה והקנאה בתכלית הריחוק ומן הראוי שנקבל על עצמנו לפני תפילת שחרית אהבת הבריות ולהיות מעבירים ל מידותינו.

*After all, there is no king without a nation, and there is no nation without unity, and it is impossible to approach the "day of our king" (Rosh Hashana) when there is a separation of hearts between us. This imposes on us a charge to strengthen our love of mankind and the pursuit of peace ahead of the Day of Judgment.... After all, good virtues are not only an opening of hope in our capacity to be judged. It is impossible to accept the kingdom of heaven without them. After all, it is crucial to make every effort in the new Elul to behave with every good measure and to keep away the anger and the hatred and jealousy and it is appropriate that we take upon ourselves before the morning prayer the love of mankind.*

As we prepare for Rosh Hashana, we have a wonderful opportunity and an obligation to increase our *chessed*—looking out for one another, and asking what we can do for the Jewish people and the world.

It is also a time to recognize so many who look out for us and to show *hakaras hatov* to them; to say thank you to all the people who assist us—our families, friends, *gabboim*, and so many others.

In that spirit of *achdus* and *re'us*, it is wonderful that we are hosting a *kiddush* today, where we will be enjoying each others' company and singing *shevach* to Hashem, for granting us a year of life, and davening and hoping for another year—filled with good health. May we all be *zoche* to a year of *ahava*, *achva*, *shalom* and *re'us*...amen.