

## **“If you follow My decrees . . . then I will provide your rains in their proper time” Man Who Was Created from Soil Must Engage in Torah-study— which Is Compared to Water--to Produce Mitzvos**

In parshas Bechukosai, which we will read this Shabbas, it states (Vayikra 26, 3): **“אם בחוקותי תלכו ואת מצוותי תשמרו ועשיתם אותם, ונתנה הארץ יכולה, ועץ השדה יתן פריו”**—If you follow My decrees and observe My commandments and perform them; then I will provide your rains in their time, and the land will give its produce and the tree of the field will yield its fruit. Rashi comments: “if you will follow My decrees”—one could construe that this refers to the fulfillment of mitzvos, yet the fulfillment of mitzvos is the next thing stated in the passuk; so what does “if you follow my decrees” refer to? It implies that you should occupy yourselves in laborious Torah-study.

HKB”H gave us the Torah and provides us with all that is good in this world—children, sustenance and food. Let us consider why He chose to express the reward for the performance of mitzvos specifically in terms of rainfall which irrigates the soil: “then I will provide your rains in their time, and the land will give its produce and the tree of the field will yield its fruit.” This reward is expressed again in similar terms in the second paragraph of krias shema (Devarim 11, 13): **“והיה אם שמוע תשמעו אל מצוותי אשר אנכי מצוה אתכם היום... ונתתי מטר ארצכם בעתו יורה ומלקוש ואספת דגנך”**—and it shall be that if you listen to My commandments that I command you today . . . then I will provide the rain of your land in its time, the early rain and the late rain; and you shall bring in your grain . . .

Correspondingly, when HKB”H informs us of the anticipated punishment for neglecting the Torah’s decrees, the punishment is expressed in terms of the withholding of rainfall (ibid. 16): **“השמרו לכם פן יפתה לבבכם וסרתם ועבדתם אלהים אחרים והשתחויתם להם, וחרה אף ה’ בכם ועצר את השמים ולא יהיה מטר והאדמה לא תתן את יכולה”**—beware for yourselves, lest your heart be seduced and you will turn astray and you will serve other gods and bow down to them. Then the wrath of Hashem will blaze against you; He will restrain the heavens and there will be no rain, and the ground will not yield its produce. We must endeavor to understand the tremendous significance of the rainfall—which HKB”H constantly reiterates as being the reward for the performance of mitzvos.

Concerning the rains, our blessed sages viewed a day of rainfall as an extraordinary event. The Gemara states (Taanis 7a): **“אמר רב יהודה, גדול יום הגשמים כיום שניתנה בו תורה, שנאמר (דברים לב-ב) יערוך כמטר לקחי, ואין לקח אלא תורה, שנאמר (משלי ד-ב) כי לקח טוב נתתי לכם תורתי אל תעזבו”**—a day of rainfall is as significant as the day on which the Torah was given! Clearly, any intelligent person must feel obligated to examine the connection between these two phenomena—the rainfall and the giving of the Torah.

### **Let My Soul Be Like Soil to Everything**

Let us begin our journey with a magnificent introduction from the incomparable teachings of the great Rabbi of Rophshitz, zy”a, in Zera Kodesh (Ha’azinu). He addresses the formula of the prayer we recite thrice daily at the conclusion of the Shemoneh Esreh (Elokai Nitzor): **“ונפשי כעפר לכל תהיה”**—let my soul be like soil to everything. We express our desire to be like the soil, which HKB”H endowed with a unique characteristic. It is able to sort out from the manure the beneficial elements representing the sparks of kedushah. From these nitzotzei kedushah the earth can produce healthy plants to feed and nourish mankind. In turn, man will then recite the appropriate berachos over them, completely rectifying all the nitzotzos they contain--effecting their ultimate tikun.

As a servant before his master, I wish to grab hold of the Zera Kodesh’s coattails and expand on this exalted concept. The holy Baal Shem Tov, zy”a, reveals a vital principle to us regarding the passuk (Tehillim 107, 5): **“רעבים גם צמאים נפשם בהם תתעטף”**—hungry and also thirsty, their soul diminished within them. HKB”H intentionally created man so that he could not exist without food or drink. For, concealed within the food and drink are holy sparks relevant to and belonging to a person’s soul. By consuming the food and drink for the sake of Heaven and reciting the appropriate berachos with proper intent, a person rectifies and elevates the sparks contained in them.

In addition, let us introduce that which is written concerning the creation of man (Bereishis 2, 7): “וַיִּצְרֶה אֱלֹהִים אֶת הָאָדָם עָפָר מִן הָאֲדָמָה, וַיִּפֹּחַ בְּאַפִּיו נְשָׁמַת חַיִּים וַיְהִי הָאָדָם לְנֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה”—and Hashem G-d formed man of soil from the earth, and blew into his nostrils the soul of life; and man became a living soul. Rashi clarifies: “G-d collected soil from the four corners of the earth; so that wherever he may die, the earth there will receive him for burial. We learn from Rashi that HKB”H created man from the earth for the sake of his death and burial. Nevertheless, let us propose a novel explanation as to why HKB”H created man from the soil of the earth. He had in mind a purpose that would serve man during his lifetime, as well.

As mentioned, HKB”H created the earth with the unique ability to sort out nitzotzei kedushah even from manure and refuse. This enables the earth to yield plants suitable for human consumption. Thus, the earth begins this holy process, but it is up to man to complete the process. He must purify the holy nitzotzos by reciting a berachah over them and by consuming them for the sake of Heaven, “l’shem shamayim.”

Thus, we can understand why HKB”H formed man from soil from the four corners of the earth. He wished to endow man with the ability to complete the process begun by the earth in the production of foodstuffs. Yet, every person possesses a yetzer hara that attempts to prevent him from completing this holy task. Hence, we beseech Hashem three times a day: “let my soul be like soil to everything”—let us merit being like the soil from which HKB”H formed our bodies; let us possess the ability to sort out the holy sparks in all that surrounds us in this world.

### The Soil Purifies Man’s Body of the Serpent’s Contamination

We can add an interesting idea based on the well-known fact that death was not a part of life in this world until after Adam HaRishon’s sin involving the Eitz HaDa’as. As the passuk states (Bereishis 2, 17): “וּמִעֵץ הַדַּעַת טוֹב וְרָע לֹא תֹאכַל מִמֶּנּוּ כִּי בְיוֹם אֲכָלְךָ מִמֶּנּוּ מוֹת” —but from the Tree of Knowledge Good and Bad you must not eat; for, on the day you eat of it, you will surely die. Consequently, had Adam not sinned, the soil of his body would have retained its kedushah; and he would have continued his holy mission without interruption—to sort out the nitzotzei kedushah in this world and to bring the world to its ultimate tikun.

From the moment Adam and Chava were persuaded by the primeval serpent to betray Hashem and ignore His warning not to partake of the Eitz HaDa’as, however, the serpent succeeded in contaminating their bodies and impairing the body’s kedushah. This prompted HKB”H to issue the death decree compelling them

to eventually return to the soil, as it is written (Bereishis 3, 19): “כִּי עָפָר אַתָּה וְאֶל עָפָר תִּשׁוּב”—for you are dust and to dust shall you return. By means of burial, the body’s contamination is absorbed and removed by the earth. Our teacher, the Arizal, explains in Ta’amei HaMitzvos (Vayechi): “סוד קבורת מת... צריך שיכוונו הקוברים, שתתעכל בקרקע שתתעכל כל אותה הזוהמא שנתערבה בנפשו בחטא אדם הראשון, שתתעכל בקרקע”—those burying the deceased must have in mind that all of the contamination introduced into the deceased’s being by the sin of Adam HaRishon should be removed by the soil, leaving his body fully cleansed.

Upon careful analysis, we realize the true wonders of Hashem’s ways. He endowed the soil with the unique power to extract from the earth all of the essential elements necessary to produce man’s nourishment. Subsequently, man was created—formed from the soil of the earth—to complete the holy process. He was commanded to sort out the nitzotzei kedushah by reciting berachos and consuming them l’shem shamayim. In this merit, when man departs this world, after many, long and good years, the soil extracts the good elements from man’s body. It absorbs and removes the contaminants and impurities introduced by the serpent, so that the body remains cleansed and purified in preparation for the resurrection of the dead, “techiyat hameitim.”

### Elevating the Nitzotzei Kedushah in a Manner Applicable to All

Now, amongst our devout Jewish brethren there are those who cringe at the mere mention of terms such as “nitzotzei kedushah”—as if they are terms that are the sole domain of the kabbalists. Yet, it is important to recognize that this service is relevant to each and every Jew without exception. We will endeavor to explain the matter, with G-d’s help, in a manner that is applicable to all.

Everyone is familiar with the teaching in the Mishnah (Avos 6, 1): “כָּל מֵה שֶׁבְּרָא הַקָּב”ה לֹא בְרָא אֱלֹא לְכְבוֹדוֹ”—everything HKB”H created, He created solely for His honor. Consequently, every element in creation must sanctify His name in one way or another. This need to serve His honor is the root of all the holy sparks—nitzotzei kedushah—concealed within the various parts of creation.

As a result, so long as we have not yet utilized a particular item in the service of Hashem, the nitzotzei kedushah it possesses have no way to be elevated. In fact, the very opposite holds true; the fact that their holy sparks remain confined within these material objects constitutes a spiritual descent for them. Thus, they wait expectantly for a Jew to eventually come along and elevate them back to their holy source—by utilizing them to fulfill Hashem’s will—to serve His honor.

It should be clear to us, therefore, that when we use mundane objects to fulfill Hashem's mitzvos, in practice, we are elevating their nitzotzei kedushah. Here are a few examples: using the hide of an animal for writing a sefer Torah or a pair of tefillin; using a four-cornered garment to fulfill the mitzvah of tzitzit; using trees that have been cut down to build a succah; and, similarly, all physical objects used to fulfill one of the taryag mitzvos, which were created for the sole purpose of honoring HKB"H.

Furthermore, this concept applies not only to items that we utilize to perform one of the taryag mitzvos, but even to items utilized for basic human needs and functions such as eating, drinking and sleeping—so long as they are being used for the sake of Heaven, to enhance our ability to serve Hashem. For, these items are also satisfying the criterion of serving Hashem's honor. Hence, their nitzotzei kedushah are able to elevate and achieve their tikun.

This then is the meaning of the Mishnah (Avos 2, 12): **“וכל מעשיך”** --let all your deeds be for the sake of Heaven. In other words, one should always have in mind to satisfy Hashem's will, since everything He created, He created for the sake of His honor. This purpose is the basis for the halachah established in the Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 231):

**“בכל מה שיהנה בעולם הזה, לא יכוין להנאתו אלא לעבודת הבורא יתברך כדכתיב (משלי ג-ו) בכל דרכיך דעהו, ואמרו חכמים (אבות שם) כל מעשיך יהיו לשם שמים, שאפילו דברים של רשות כגון האכילה והשתיה וההליכה והשיבה והקימה... וכל צרכי גופך יהיו כולם לעבודת בוראך או לדבר הגורם עבודתו.”**

All pleasure and benefit a person enjoys in this world should not be intended for one's own personal pleasure but rather should be for the purpose of serving the Almighty. This applies to all mundane activities such as eating, drinking, walking, sitting, rising and satisfying all of a person's bodily needs.

Based on what we have discussed above, we can now appreciate that HKB"H created man's physical body from the soil of the four corners of the earth, so that he would possess the same unique ability inherent in the soil. He wanted man to have the ability to sort out the nitzotzei kedushah from every object in this world. To this end, we pray every day: “Let my soul be like soil to everything.”

### The Earth Is the Mother of All Creatures in the Merit of Its Humility and Lowly Spirit

Now, let us delight in the sweetness of the Torah. We find another interpretation for the words of the prayer: “Let my soul be like soil to everything” in Tiferes Shlomo (Vayeitzei). Regarding HKB"H's promise to Yaakov in his dream (Bereishis 28, 14), he writes:

**“והיה זרעך כעפר הארץ. יש להבין ענין הברכה הזאת שיהיו כעפר הארץ... אך הנה כתיב (קהלת ג-ב) הכל היה מן העפר וגו', כי אמנם זהו בחינת העפר, אשר הוא אך המקיים את כל הברואים אשר עליה, כי מעפר יצא לחם ויניקה לכל נברא, ובלעדה לא תיכון כל בריה בעולם הזה, ובכל זאת היא שפלה מאד, ונדרת בכף רגלי ההולכים עליה תמיד.**

**ממנה ילמד האדם כי זאת היא בעצמה הסיבה, שהעפר היא המצמחת מזון לכל בריה, מפני כי היא שפלה בעצמה ואיננה חשובה לכלום, לכן היא נתונה לאם כל נברא. וזהו שאמרו חכמינו ז"ל כי מי שמשים עצמו כעפר הקב"ה מגביהו עד לשמים... וזה שאומרים ונפשי כעפר לכל תהיה, על ידי שנפשי כעפר, לכן לכל תהיה - בחינת כל, הוא המשפיע כל טוב לכל בריה.”**

He explains the significance of the blessing that Yaakov's descendants will be like the soil of the earth. It states in Koheles that everything comes from the soil. This is the nature of the soil—it sustains all of creation. It provides bread and nourishment for all creatures. Without it, nothing would survive in this world. Nonetheless, it is a lowly part of creation and is constantly stepped upon by all.

For this very reason, the soil provides the nourishment for all creatures; because it is itself lowly and seemingly unimportant. Therefore, it was made the mother of all creation. This is the meaning of the phrase: “Let my soul be like the soil to everything.” By resembling the soil, it will provide and influence all creatures with all that is good.

The Tiferes Shlomo here teaches us a tremendous chiddush. The earth merited being “the mother of all creation”—providing nourishment for all creatures like a mother providing for her offspring—solely because of her humility and lowly spirit. Despite the fact that all creatures step on her, she produces food for them. It is for this reason that we pray: “Let my soul be like the soil to everything”—let us adopt her way and behave with humility and a low profile; by doing so, let us also have the privilege of providing all that is good and positive to those who surround us.

Now, if we combine the two illuminating explanations of the Zera Kodosh and the Tiferes Shlomo, the intent of our prayer is brilliant. “Let my soul be like the soil to everything”—seeing as our bodies were formed from the soil of the earth, we pray that we merit emulating the nature of the soil—to behave with humility and a lowly spirit. By doing so, we will be like the soil—possessing the unique ability to sort out and extract the nitzotzei kedushah from everything around us and to provide food and sustenance for all creatures. In this manner, we will succeed in completing the task begun by the soil; we will consume l'shem shamayim the plants and vegetation it produced, extracting the nitzotzei kedushah they contain.



## The Rain Is a Heavenly Light Enabling the Earth to Produce Vegetation

Let us continue along on our holy journey, and examine what the Zera Kodesh himself wrote elsewhere (Bereishis) regarding the prayer: “ונפשי כעפר לכל תהיה”-- let my soul be like the soil to everything. He continues in the same vein, but adds an essential piece to the puzzle. It is specifically the combination of water and soil that has the power to sort out the nitzotzei kedushah even from manure and refuse. Here is what he writes:

“כי הנה מצינו מים מצמיח כל דבר, שעל ידי שנותנים מים עליו יש להצמיח כח לצמוח ולבוא להויה בעולם... והמים והעפר מבררין כל דבר טוב שבכל דבר שבעולם, על דרך שפירשתי ונפשי כעפר לכל תהיה, שאנו רואים שכשמזבלין את השדה מצמיח יותר, כי העפר מבררת את הטוב גם מהזבל, ונותן זה הטוב כח להצמיחה, וזהו גם כן בהתחברות מים כי עפר בלא מים אינו מצמיח.”

We find that water makes everything grow. The addition of water allows a plant to sprout and exist in the world... The water and the soil sort out the good elements from every object in the world. So, we find that when a field is fertilized, it produces more. Soil without water, however, does not produce or stimulate growth.

He points out what we actually witness with our own eyes. Soil alone is incapable of sorting out the nitzotzei kedushah from objects without the addition of water. That being the case, we must explain why we only mention soil in our prayer: “Let my soul be like the soil to everything.” Since the soil can only accomplish this important task of sorting out the good elements with the assistance of water, our prayer should really be: “Let my soul be like soil and water to everything.”

I was struck by a wonderful thought to reconcile the words of the great Rabbi from Rophshitz, zy”a, based on a fantastic and illuminating introduction from the teachings of the Arizal in Likutei Torah (Tehillim 84, 7). In his own incomparable way, he focuses on the question we raised at the beginning of our discussion. Why did HKB”H choose to express the reward for the performance of mitzvos specifically in terms of giving us rain at the appropriate times? Additionally, he addresses our blessed sages’ statement in the Gemara concerning the tremendous virtue of the rains (Taanis 8b): “גדול יום הגשמים כיום קיבוץ גלויות”—a day of rainfall is as great as the day the exiles are gathered in. This statement, of course, deserves further explanation. What is the connection between rainfall and the gathering-in of exiles?

The Arizal explains the matter based on the well-known fact that when Adam HaRishon sinned with the Eitz HaDa’as Tov Va’Ra, he cause an intermingling of good and bad in the world.

The holy nitzotzos fell in among the klipos. Thereafter, it became man’s obligation and holy service to sort out the good from the bad. We must elevate and free the holy nitzotzos from the realm of the klipos. For, the nitzotzei kedushah themselves are incapable of freeing themselves from the constraints of the klipos without assistance from above. As they state in the Gemara (Berachos 5b): “אין חבוש מתיר עצמו מבית האסורים”—a prisoner does not release himself from confinement.

Thus, the Arizal teaches us that the plants, which sprout from the earth and are worthy of consumption, are forms of holy sparks that are being released from their captivity. For, there are many types of thorns and thistle stemming from the klipos which prevent and limit the plants from sprouting forth. Nonetheless, HKB”H, in His infinite mercy and kindness, causes the rain to fall from the heavens encompassing a heavenly light. The purpose of this light is to assist the nitzotzei kedushah—which represent the potential of the plant-life concealed within the depths of the earth—to reveal themselves and leave the realm of the klipos.

It is well-known that the purpose of Yisrael descending into exile is to gather in the nitzotzei kedushah that have been scattered and dispersed throughout the world. Along these lines, the Gemara states (Pesachim 87b): “לא הגלה הקב”ה את ישראל לבין האומות אלא כדי שיתוספו עליהם גרים”—HKB”H only exiled Yisrael among the nations in order to add converts to their numbers. The Arizal explains in Shaar HaMitzvos (Re’eh) that this statement is a reference to the nitzotzei kedushah which are referred to as converts--“גרים”. They are referred to as “geirim,” because they were concealed within the klipos and were finally released.

In this manner, the Arizal explains the significance of Rabbi Yochanan’s statement: “A day of rainfall is as great as the day the exiles are gathered in.” As mentioned, the purpose of the rainfall is to bring a light down from above to assist the nitzotzei kedushah within the vegetation to escape from the constraints of the klipos. This, in fact, is precisely what transpires with the gathering-in of the exiles; the nitzotzei kedushah that have been scattered throughout the world--“geirim”—are released and gathered in.

Now, we can appreciate the Zera Kodesh’s explanation. When we utter the words: “ונפשי כעפר לכל תהיה”-- let my soul be like the soil to everything—we are praying that we should merit being like the soil, which is able to sift out the nitzotzei kedushah from all matter. We neglect to mention the participation of the water in this process, because we wish to emphasize the importance of serving Hashem with humility and a lowly spirit. By praying to emulate the soil in this manner, we will merit receiving the

necessary assistance from above—just as the soil receives assistance from above in the form of properly-timed rainfall (“gishmei berachah”), due to its humility.

### The Torah Resembles Water Irrigating the Soil that Is Man

Continuing with this line of reasoning, let us proceed to explain the incredible association between the soil of man’s body and the soil of the earth—which inspires us to beseech Hashem: “Let my soul be like the soil to everything.” As explained, the soil is incapable of sorting out the nitzotzei kedushah from any potential food without the help it receives from the heavenly-ordained rains—which conceal a tremendous illumination that enables the soil to yield vegetation. To comprehend this concept, it is essential to investigate the nature of the water that falls from the heavens to assist man in completing the task of sorting out the sparks of kedushah.

Upon further consideration, the answer is quite clear. We have learned in the Gemara (Taanis 7a): “למה נמשלו דברי תורה למים, לומר לך מה מים מניחין מקום גבוה דכתיב (ישעיה נה-א) הוי כל צמא לכו למים, לומר לך מה מים מניחין מקום גבוה—והולכין למקום נמוך, אף דברי תורה אין מתקיימין אלא במי שדעתו שפלה—why are words of Torah compared to water? To teach us that just as water flows from higher ground to lower ground, so, too, words of Torah are only retained by someone who possesses a lowly state of mind—a sense of humility. So, we see that the Torah is compared to water that falls from above to irrigate the person that adopts a humble demeanor like the soil. It enables him to perform mitzvos and good deeds which constitute man’s offspring and produce. Rashi expresses this idea as follows (Bereishis 6, 9): “שעיקר תולדותיהם של צדיקים מעשים טובים”—the main progeny of tzaddikim are their good deeds.

Hence, we utter the following words of prayer: “Let my soul be like the soil to everything”—may we merit conducting ourselves with a humble, lowly spirit, like the soil; so that the Torah—which is compared to water and travels downward to low ground—will descend upon us to yield mitzvos. As a result, we will be able to sort out the holy nitzotzos scattered throughout this world. This explains very nicely the continuation of the prayer (ibid.): “ונפשי כעפר לכל תהיה, פתח לבי בתורתך”—let my soul

be like the soil to everything; open my heart with Your Torah. For, in the merit of acting with humility like the soil, the water of Torah will come down to us; “ואחרי מצוותיך תרדוף נפשי”—and my soul shall pursue Your mitzvos—the Torah’s nurturing will yield mitzvos and good deeds.

It appears that this is precisely the lesson conveyed by our great luminary, the Gra of Vilna, zy”a, in his commentary on Mishlei (24, 31) and, at greater length in his sefer Even Sheleimah (1, 11): “ענין “התורה לנפש דוגמת המטר לארץ, שמצמיח מה שזורע בה”—the relationship of the Torah to the soul is comparable to the relationship of the rain to the earth; it stimulates the growth of its produce. Based on what we have learned, we can provide the following addition to the words of the Gra. After all, man was formed from the soil of the earth. Therefore, just as the soil is incapable of producing plant-life with receiving water first, similarly, the soil which is man is incapable of producing mitzvos and good deeds without first being irrigated with the spiritual waters of the Torah.

We have now been enlightened and can better appreciate the depth of our blessed sages’ wisdom: “A day of rainfall is as great as the day on which the Torah was given.” For, HKB”H only irrigates the soil of the earth on a rainy day as reward for man’s diligent effort in the study of Torah—to irrigate the soil of his body and saturate it with mitzvos and good deeds. Hence, our sages prove their point from the passuk: “יערוך כמטר לקחי”—may My teaching drip like the rain. Just as the rain irrigates the soil and stimulates it to yield produce, the waters of Torah act in a similar fashion upon the soil of man.

At this point, we can provide a better understanding of the sacred words which appear at the beginning of our parsha: “אם” בחוקותי תלכו”—according to Rashi this refers to the occupation with Torah-study—to irrigate man’s soil with the sea of Torah; “ואת” מצוותי תשמרו ועשיתם אותם”—so that the Torah will stimulate man’s soil to produce mitzvos and good deeds. If man upholds his end of the bargain, the Torah promises him, “midah k’neged midah”: “ונתתי גשמיכם בעתם, ונתנה הארץ יכולה, ועץ השדה יתן פריו”—that HKB”H will irrigate the soil of the earth with rainfall. This will yield healthy plants allowing mankind to complete the task of sorting-out by consuming them “I’shem shamayim.”

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