

Elul 2022: Week 2 Additional Study Texts

Selections from *Alei Shur*<sup>1</sup>

Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe

### “Sustaining our World”

*Alei Shur* Vol. 2, pgs. 215-216

Rav Simcha Zissel (of Kelm) writes that patience [*savlanut*] is the root of all [positive] *middot* and exalted traits. His source is the RaMaK’s “Tomer Devoah,” who writes lofty ideas in his explanation of the thirteen attributes of [God’s] compassion, revealed to us by the prophet Micha at the end of his words (the book of Micha).<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, [*savlanut*] is the first of the thirteen attributes of [G-d’s] compassion, through which God “carries/bears [*nosei*]” God’s world. Without it [*savlanut*] we would be unable to exist for even one day. Regarding this trait we are enjoined to emulate God’s ways; through it [*savlanut*] humanity, too, “carries/bears” their world. Like God, a person bestows goodness, kindness, light of face [*ha’arat panim*],<sup>3</sup> and peace upon their surroundings. If, Heaven forbid, one is unable to act as a “Sovereign who bears insult,”<sup>4</sup> but rather when another individual insults the person or commits a transgression [i.e., wrong’s the person in some way], and the person immediately hides their face and ceases to bestow goodness, kindness and peace, this person too [aside from the original transgressor] destroys the world! Now, my wise student of Torah, meditate deeply upon this- how you carry/bear your world, bestowing life and kindness, goodness and peace on everything that surrounds you. Reflecting upon this will bring you to realize that only through cultivating your attribute of *savlanut* can you truly bear the burden of your world, always, unceasingly, not causing destruction, Heaven forbid. Destruction literally, without exaggeration!

From the words of the “Tomer Devorah” we learn something novel. Until now we understood that patience / *savlanut* requires that one not get angry- but that is not enough. One who possesses *savlanut* continues bestowing goodness after being insulted or wronged, exactly as before. The person doesn’t withhold kindness from the one who insulted or wronged him/her. This requires an ability to think deeply/precisely and to make fine distinction between subtleties. Only a subtle thinker realizes that they must continue bestowing goodness and kindness without any modification [from the way you acted before the insult or transgression of the

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<sup>1</sup> Translated by Avi Fertig.

<sup>2</sup> Rav Wolbe quotes here the part of the first chapter of *Tomer Devorah*, which we have provided as your primary source text for this week.

<sup>3</sup> “Light of face” refers literally to a kind countenance or facial expression, but more deeply to a person’s ability to shower kindness on others through his/her inner essence. In *lashon ha’kodesh* (the Holy Tongue) the word for face (*panim*) is written the same as the word for “inner,” (*pnim*), only the vowels are changed. The deep idea is that one’s facial expression is a revelation of one’s inner self, or essence.

<sup>4</sup> A reference to “Tomer Devorah.”

other person] even when a response to the insult or sin may be called for. A measured response should come, but never amid the abandonment of the goodness and kindness that is the physical and spiritual sustenance of the other individual.

**“Ma’avir al ha’middot / Passing over one’s middot”**

*Alei Shur* Vol. 2 pp. 430-1

After all the powerful ideas we have studied together in our previous chapters concerning the judgment on Rosh HaShana, the necessity remains for us to discuss some practical way to prepare ourselves for the Day of Judgment.

The sages say:

What is the meaning of [God’s name] *Ekeye asher Ekeye*<sup>5</sup>- *as you are with Me, I will be with you*; if you open your hands and are charitable, I, too, will open My hand, as it is written [in Scripture] (Devarim/Deuteronomy 28:12): *God will open God’s storehouse of goodness*. And if you do not open your hands, what is written [in Scripture] (Iyov/Job 12:15): *The waters cease and they will dry up...* (Midrash quoted in *Ramban Shemot/Exodus 3:14*)

Indeed, this is exactly the way it is, *God is a shadow of your right hand* (Tehillim/Psalms 121)- a person points a finger, and is shown a finger, a person shows their hand, and is shown a hand. This is a valuable and far-reaching method with which God deals with us; the entire way God acts toward us depends on our actions! And so it is with the judgment:

Rava said: Whoever is *ma’avir* (literally, to pass over) on their *middot*, [God] will be *ma’avir* on their sins. (Tractate Rosh HaShana 17a)

Rashi explains: One who is, “*ma’avir* on their *middot*” means that one does not calculate the exact measure [of retribution] that those who cause them pain truly deserve, rather one “leaves” their *middot* and [drops the matter] and goes on their way. [The Talmud’s usage of the word *ma’avir* is thus] similar to the [Talmudic concept] that one must not pass up a *mitzvah* [*ma’avir al ha’mitzvah*], or not to pass by food. The meaning of God “passing over our sins” is that God’s *middah* of judgment relinquishes its right to [punish for] sin, rather it lets them go.

This is a gloriously hopeful opening for [our preparation of] the Day of Judgment, for what would we do with all our sins if God would act towards us with strict justice?! The Rabbis reveal that this (our judgment), too,<sup>6</sup> depends on our actions, because God deals with our judgment the way in which we deal with others; if we are *ma’avir* on our *middot*, and do not act strictly with others who cause us pain- [God, too,] will

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<sup>5</sup>Literally meaning, “I shall be as I shall be.” See *Shemot/Exodus 3:14*.

<sup>6</sup> I.e., not only does God *act* toward us the way we act toward others, but God also *judges our sins* the way that we judge others.

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not be strict in judging us. This demands an enormous amount of vigilance in our *middot* as we prepare for the Day of Judgment and during the Days of Judgment themselves. We must practice vigilance from anger and harshness/being inflexible during these days. If we mention [in our Yom Kippur prayers], *For You are a forgiver of Israel and the Pardoner of the tribes of Jeshurun*<sup>7</sup> then the person who utters such a prayer must also be a “forgiver” and a “pardoner.”

Behold, the very essence of our judgment requires an enormous strengthening of our positive *middot*. But this is not all, because *kabbalat ole malchut Shamayim*-accepting the yoke of the Heavenly Kingdom (accepting God’s sovereignty over us) demands [positive] *middot* as well.

And this is what Chazzal tell us (*Sifrei parashat V’sot Ha’beracha*):

“*God became King over Jeshurun*”- When [the nation of] Israel is unified below, the great Name [of God] is exalted above, as the verse states: “*God became King over Jeshurun*,” when? “*When the leaders of Israel gathered the tribes of Israel in unity*. (Devarim/Deuteronomy 33:5) When are “the tribes of Israel gathered in unity?” When they form one legion and not when they split into many legions.

There is no king without a nation, and there is no nation without unity. It is impossible to approach the “Day of our Sovereign” when among us there is dissention in our hearts. We therefore have an enormous responsibility to strengthen our love of humanity and the pursuit of peace as we approach the Day of Judgment ...

It comes out then that working to perfect our *middot* is not only an opening of hope for us to merit a positive judgment, but that *kabbalat ole malchut Shamayim* is impossible without it. Thus, during the month of Elul there is a double obligation to strengthen our commitment to act with positive *middot*, to distance ourselves from anger and harshness, hatred, jealousy, as much as possible. It is also fitting that before we pray, we mentally commit ourselves to love humanity and to be *ma’avir* on our *middot*.

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<sup>7</sup> This name refers to Israel in our most lofty state, as the word *yashar* denotes, “upright/straight.”