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 היום שניתנה בו תורה, שנאמר (דברים לב-ב) יערוף כמטר לבקי, 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 Raphshitz, 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, 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):

"משעי יקר ליה מקר
—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.

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):

"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... Accordingly, 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 לך פן יפתה לבבכם וסרתם ועבדתם אלהים אחרים והשתחוויתם להם, וחרה אף ה' בכם ועצר את השמים ולא יהיה מטר והאדמה לא תתן את יבולה"

—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. HKB"H constantly reiterates as being the reward for the performance of mitzvos.

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): "ע;padding"—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):

וירא ה' את אדם ואיתא thereof—Hashem created man of the earth, 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 HK''H created man from the earth for the sake of his death and burial. Nevertheless, let us propose a novel explanation as to why HK''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, HK''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, “I''shem shamayim.”

Thus, we can understand why HK''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 HK''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): “וַיַּעַמֵּן הָעֵץ הַדָּתָה גָּדוֹל וְאֵלֶּה יְמֵי גָּדְלָה פָּ לוֹ אֵלֶּה יְמֵי קֶשֶׁךְ מָצַן מֹת"—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 HK''H to issue the death decree compelling them to eventually return to the soil, as it is written (Bereishis 3, 19): “וְיֵשָׁר נָקָי"—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... condominates הקדוש

In addition, let us introduce that which is written concerning 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 HK''H formed our bodies; let us possess the ability to sort out the holy sparks in all that surrounds us in this world.

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): “כל מה שברא הקב''ה לא ברא אלא לכבודו”—everything HK''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 HKBV’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 יהיו tạmא על ידי שנפשי כעפר כל תהיה – בחינת כל, והיה זroatך כעפר הארץ. יש להבין ענין הברכה הזאת שיהיו כעפר הארץ כל כך—which implies that all our deeds, if done for the sake of Heaven, will be elevated. 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):

“וכל צרכי גופך יהיו כולם לעיבור בשמה.”

It is for this reason that we pray: “Let my soul be like the soil to everything.” For resembling the soil, it will provide and influence all creatures with all that is good. 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.”—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.

The Tiferes Shlomo here teaches us a tremendous chiddush. 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.”—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.
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: "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 nitzotzim kedushah even from manure and refuse. Here is what he writes:

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 nitzotzim 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 Rofshitz, 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): "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 nitzotzim 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 nitzotzim from the realm of the klipos. For, the nitzotzim 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): "אֶלָּא שֹׁלָנְךָ מִצְמָח עַל חָוָה—אֲבוֹתֵךְ כְּעַל רָעָב שְׁמָעוּ"—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 nitzotzim 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 nitzotzim kedushah that have been scattered and dispersed throughout the world. Along these lines, the Gemara states (Pesachim 87b): "אין חבוש מתיר עצמו מבית האסורים"—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 nitzotzim 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 nitzotzim 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 nitzotzim 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: "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 nitzotzim 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
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): "ולLayoutPanel moreh תורדה הדרק (ששעינו נון) הוא כל צמא העבר מלמד בין קוקופר מים בין כל מים מตนוף מירים בין沃לך לשמה נמיול,无意ו המוזר או מפרשים אם מדיעת שמה"—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. Rashbi expresses this idea as follows (Bereishis 6, 9): "שיער קוקופר עלולה הארץ לאריה מבעשועים נובים"—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 nitzotzei scattered throughout this world. This explains very nicely the continuation of the prayer (ibid.): "אמרנש כפרכב על תיה. מה של מחומר"—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): "וענה מה נמשלו דברי תורה למים—which is compared to water that falls from above to irrigate the soil; 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: " “…תירעיך מבוע עלי החמים"—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: א東西 תורדה—according to Rashi this refers to the occupation with Torah-study—to irrigate man’s soil with the sea of Torah; א東西 מייחח הנוחות האוח—is comparable to 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. If man upholds his end of the bargain, the Torah promises him, “midah k’neged midah”: נInteropמנים בלב: "תנתי עליים הדרק, נדנתי אתך לאל יתברך"—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.”