



המִזְרָחִי

HAMIZRACHI

PARSHA WEEKLY



PARSHAT KI TAVO

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ISRAEL
Parsha Picture

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...הַבָּאתִי אֶת רִאשֵׁית פְּרִי הָאָדָمָה
אֲשֶׁר נִמְתַּחַת לְיַהְוֵד וְהַנְּחַתָּה לְפָנֵי הַ...
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Based in Jerusalem and with branches across the globe, Mizrachi – an acronym for *merkaz ruchani* (spiritual center) – was founded in 1902 by Rabbi Yitzchak Yaakov Reines, and is led today by Rabbi Doron Perez. Mizrachi's role was then and remains with vigor today, to be a proactive partner and to take personal responsibility in contributing to the collective destiny of *Klal Yisrael* through a commitment to Torah, the Land of Israel and the People of Israel.

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The Pursuit of Happiness

The Blessing and the Curse

**Rabbi Doron Perez**

Executive Chairman, World Mizrachi

My grandparents were married for 75 years. They were the only people I had ever personally met who or even heard of who had been married that long.

After a long and full life, they passed away about 5 years ago when they were both 97 years of age. Originally from Lithuania and later South Africa, my grandparents made Aliyah in 1979. They left all their children and grandchildren behind in the hope that they would follow. They were leaders of the Jewish community and great Zionists and believed that this was the right thing to do. Indeed, they were privileged that all their children and grandchildren followed suit and all live in Israel today.

My grandparents always seemed to have a loving and happy marriage. So, when I got married, I decided to ask my grandmother a question about the secret to happiness in marriage. I was totally unprepared for the answer that I received. When I asked her whether her 55 years of marriage at that time had been happy ones, she responded as follows: "You know, I've never really thought about it."

I could not believe that a person who had been married that long had never even thought about whether or not her marriage was a happy one. It made me realize how different our generation is as we seem to be obsessed with the pursuit of happiness in all aspects of our lives.

Herein lies a remarkable irony: the generation that relentlessly pursues happiness seems to be the most distant from it.

This is the central theme in cultural critic Ruth Whippman's book, *America The Anxious - How Our Pursuit of Happiness is Creating a Nation of Nervous Wrecks*.¹ She quotes a study by psychologists from Berkeley University who show that "paradoxically, the more people valued and were encouraged to value happiness as a separate life goal, the less happy they were."

The American writer and thinker Henry David Thoreau put it well when he said "Happiness is like a butterfly. The more you chase it, the more it eludes you. But if you turn your attention to other things, it comes and sits softly on your shoulder."

Happiness as a State of Being

Why is this the case? Why is the quest for happiness the very sign that we won't find it?

The answer is that happiness is not something we find when we search for it but is a by-product of living life in the correct way. Happiness is not a transient emotion or a destination to be pursued but rather a **state of being**. The more one lives in sync with one's core values the more happiness finds us. The moment we detach ourselves from living life and begin to search for happiness as an end in and of itself, the more it evades us. Happiness is not a destination but rather a result of the journey of an inspired life process.

The Rebbe's Recipe

The happiness required by our sages in the month of Adar clearly highlights this critical insight. Across the globe, commu-

nities sing the iconic words of our Sages:² **תַּשְׁנַכֵּן אֶיךָ מִרְבֵּין בְּשָׁמֶךָ** “one who enters the month of Adar should increase their happiness.”³

The Rebbe of Ruzhin⁴ notes the usual wording in this statement and learns this same fundamental of true happiness. He noticed that the Rabbis say that when we enter the month of Adar we **increase** our joy, and when we enter the month of Av we **decrease** our joy. The language of the Rabbis implies that the Jewish people must *constantly* be in a state of *simchah*, all year long! We are merely commanded to increase or decrease our constant joy at different points throughout the year.

In other words, the Rebbe is calling for a paradigm shift in our attitude to happiness. *Simchah* is neither a transient emotion nor a fleeting feeling, but rather as mentioned – a *state of being*. Happiness is meant to be our ‘default position’; it is the basic spiritual frequency of inspired G-dly living. Yes, the intensity of our *simchah* will increase or decrease throughout the year as we experience the natural ups and downs of life. But *simchah* should be the constant spiritual undercurrent of life; it is a sign of being in tune with our spiritual mission.⁵

The Root of the Curses

So central is happiness to serving G-d that the Torah states clearly in the horrific curses mentioned in this week’s Parasha the following astounding point- the root cause of all the curses is serving G-d without *Simcha*!

*“All these curses befall you... since you did not serve Hashem your G-d with happiness and with gladness of heart ...”*⁶

Incredibly, the scrupulous observance of Torah and *mitzvot* is not enough. Divine service devoid of joy is a foreign form of worship that totally misses the mark and with dire and drastic consequences. The Sages of the Talmud interpret this specific verse to mean that joyous singing and music are to be an integral part of the **שְׁעִיר הַמִּזְבֵּחַ**, daily service of the Temple.⁷ Therefore, the *korban tamid*, the daily communal sacrifice brought every morning and afternoon, had to be accompanied by the beautiful singing of a choir of Levites,



Happiness is not a transient emotion or a destination to be pursued but rather a state of being.

who would sing the psalm of the day.⁸ The point is clear – daily service of G-d must be joyously celebrated. Service of Hashem without happiness is inauthentic to Torah Judaism.

If the laws and commandments of the Torah are the body of Judaism, then *simchah*, happiness, is its soul.

Our relationship with Hashem is far broader than the observance of religious law; it is a celebration of spiritual life. It is living with an inner sense of contentment and *joie de vivre*, constantly rejoicing over the privilege of living in G-d’s world and in His presence.

Israel – The Happy Country

Perhaps this is the reason why Israel is continually rated among the happiest countries in the world according to the UN World Happiness Report conducted annually over the last 10 years. The report ranks 160 countries by how happy their citizens perceive themselves to be, according to six key variables: GDP per capita, social support, life expectancy, freedom to make choices, freedom from corruption and generosity. Year in and year out, Israel is in the top 10 to 15 countries, scoring ahead of countries such as the UK, Germany, Luxembourg, the US and almost 150 other countries.

What is striking about these findings is that Israel ranks ahead of dozens of countries that don’t face the ongoing challenges of aggressive Terror States on their borders (Hamas in Gaza and Hezbollah in Lebanon), a threat of nuclear extinction (Iran’s publicly stated aspirations and nuclear program), ongoing Palestinian terror attacks and therefore the need for a mandatory military draft. Incredibly, despite these unique threats and being

situated in one of the toughest regions in the world, Israel scores high every time. How can this be explained?

It seems to me that living in Israel, despite all the challenges, comes with a great sense of **being** Jewish. Israel is the only country that G-d promised to the Jewish people and no other nation has so long and deep a connection to a land as the Jewish people’s connection to Eretz Israel. It is somehow linked to the essence of Jewish life, to our ultimate purpose. Journeying to the Land like Abraham, walking the same streets as Samuel and fighting like King David to defend the same country gives those living in Israel a unique sense of connection to Jewish history and destiny. An indescribable feeling of being Jewish – a deep collective state of being. There is something unique about being in Israel, a spiritual synchronicity, a type of X-Factor of being plugged into Jewish destiny and hence a state of happiness.

Conclusion

Whether we live in a world of blessings or curses depends primarily on ourselves – on the way we choose to live our lives. Living life with a deep sense of meaning and purpose; mission and destiny create a state of being of happiness and blessing. Being aligned with our spiritual mission. It is a natural result of living a life with as close a reflection as possible of the life we wish to live and the type of person we aspire to be.

-
1. St. Martin’s Press 201.
 2. Ta’anit 29a.
 3. Rashi explains that *simchah* is actually required for two months, beginning with Adar and continuing throughout Nissan as well, as both are months of redemption.
 4. Rabbi Yisrael Friedman (1796–1850) was the one and only Rebbe of Ruzhin.
 5. See Malbim, Yeshayahu 35:1, and my “Israel – the Happiest Place in the World”, HaMizrachi Vol. 2, No. 5.
 6. Devarim 28:45–47.
 7. Arachin 11a.
 8. Tamid 7:4.

PIRKEI AVOT

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הַלְّ אָמֵר, אֶל תִּפְרֹשׂ מִן הַצְבָּהוּ, וְאֶל תִּאֲמִין בְּעַזְתָּךְ עַד יוֹם מוֹתֶךָ, וְאֶל תִּדְיוֹן אֶת חַבְרָךְ עַד שְׁתַגְיִעַ לְמִקְומֶךָ, וְאֶל תִּאמֶר
דָּבָר שֶׁאָיֵף לְשֻׁמָעָר, שְׁסֹוףָ לְהַשְׁמָעָר. וְאֶל תִּאמֶר לְכַשְׁאַפְנָה אֲשֶׁרֶת, שְׁמָמָא לְאַתְפָּנָה: (אבות ב:ה)

The Damage of Distance

The fifth *Mishnah* of Avot's second *perek* quotes five warnings issued by Hillel, the first of which cautions us against separating from the *tzibur* (community).¹ The Rambam sees such separation as uniquely severe and presents the separatist as losing his portion in Olam Haba. He explains that separating from the community is one of the five things that block the path to *tshuvah* because the separatist misses the opportunity (to be inspired) to do *tshuvah* together with the community.

Rabbeinu Yonah (*Sha'arei Teshuvah* 3:168) adds that the separatist seems to object to (and also causes others to disrespect) the holy values the Jewish People are committed to. Conversely, the Maharal (*Derech Chaim* 2:4) explains that one connected to the *tzibur* benefits from the “*koach hatzibur*” — the community’s unique strength and eternal destiny.

Many also see the *tzibur*’s unity as having ontological significance. The Ritva and the Maharal use this to explain the Torah’s juxtaposition of the prohibition against sectorial subdivision to the words “*banim atem l’Hashem elokeichem*.” As the children of G-d, we should represent His oneness with our own. When we separate from the *tzibur*, we imply godly divisiveness (*chas v’shalom*).

Rav Kook took this further by comparing a separatist to the woman who was willing to accept Shlomo HaMelech’s decision to cut a disputed baby in half. Like a physical human being, the Jewish people are an organic whole and must remain unified.

Through Thick...

The Rishonim discuss the times when it is most important to emphasize our connection with the *tzibur*. The Rambam and Rabbeinu Yonah mention community gatherings for the purpose of *mitzvah* performance. Mass fulfillment of Hashem’s Will glorifies His presence; everyone should join.²

...And Thin

The Rambam also mentions times of *tzarah* (distress). The Meiri explains that even one able to save himself should endeavor to save the broader community. He references the words of Mordechai to Esther: “Don’t think that you are safe in the king’s palace. If you are quiet at this moment (and do not help the Jews), the Jews will be saved another way, and you and your family will be the ones lost.”

In addition to offering assistance, one should also empathize. The Gemara (*Ta'anit* 11a) teaches that one who does not identify with the community’s suffering will also be excluded from their eventual consolation.³ The Gemara then uses this idea to explain why Moshe Rabbeinu chose a stone (as opposed to a pillow) to hold his arms up during the war with Amalek. Moshe did not want to feel comfortable while the community felt distress.⁴

Moshe Rabbeinu actually demonstrated this same *middah* from the very beginning of Sefer Shemot, where the Torah describes him as “seeing” both his Jewish brothers and their pain. Rashi explains that the second “seeing” means that “his eyes and heart sympathized with them.”

This motivated Moshe to physically help them carry their loads. Hashem shows his empathy in the very next *perek* by choosing specifically a thorn bush as the context within which to appear to Moshe. Like Moshe, Hashem also identifies with the Jewish People’s pain.

Don’t Daven Divided

Rabbeinu Bachaya adds a third area, that of *tefillah*. Communal prayer generates heavenly goodwill and gives even a *rasha* the opportunity to have his prayers accepted. For this reason, even when unable to get to shul, we should at least daven at the same time as the community.

The Zohar explains that the Ishah HaShunamit took this even further. Her words to Elisha, who asked if he could request something on her behalf, were “*betoch ami ani yoshevet*.” The Zohar explains that it was Rosh Hashanah and Elisha was asking if he could daven for her (as she was barren and prayers for barren women are answered on Rosh Hashanah). She responded that she did not want anyone to daven for her especially; rather, she wanted to be davened for as part of the Jewish People.

We, too, express this idea by formulating our prayers in the plural. We daven, not only for ourselves but also for all those who need what we need. The Gemara gives the example of *tefilat haderech* (the traveler’s prayer) which employs a plural formulation. We use this model for our *Shemoneh Esreh* and for most of our *tefilot*.

Even when we pray on behalf of individuals, we pray for them as part of the

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Halachic Q&A



Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon

Head, Mizrachi Rabbinic Council | Founder and Chairman, Sulamot

Question: Can a soldier in the army go home for Shabbat knowing there is a chance of an emergency call-up on Shabbat?

Answer: The Gemara in Shabbat 19a deals with a case where one sets sail before Shabbat for a trip that may endure through Shabbat. The Gemara says that a person may set sail as long as he leaves three days before Shabbat. This three day limit only applies if one travels for a “dvar reshut” (mundane manner), however, for a mitzvah, one can set sail even within three days of Shabbat.

The Rishonim give different explanations to clarify which prohibition exists with being on a boat on Shabbat. The Rif writes that there is a lack of oneg Shabbat. An alternative approach is taken by Rabbeinu Chananel, who believes the issue involves techumin. Once the boat is en-route for three days, it is elevated enough (above ten tefachim), absolving the issue of techumin. Tosafot’s explanation concerns a fear that one may fix something on the ship.

The Ba’al Hameor provides a different approach. He understands that being on the boat presents a pikuach nefesh (life-threatening) situation and would require desecration of Shabbat. There is a major chidush (novelty) according to this understanding of the Gemara: one may set out on a trip knowing they will need to desecrate Shabbat because of pikuach nefesh, provided that he leaves three days in advance.

What is the logic for the Ba’al Hameor? If one leaves too close to Shabbat, he appears to be putting himself in a situation where he will need to desecrate Shabbat. While it is permitted to desecrate Shabbat under pikuach nefesh circumstances, the chachamim did not want one to put themselves in that situation as it looks like Shabbat is not important to him. When one leaves earlier in the week, this does not appear to be the case.

However, according to this approach, if somebody travels for the sake of a mitzvah, he may leave within three days, as the Gemara says.

Through the lens of the Ba’al Hameor, our question at hand is parallel to this case. The soldier leaves to go home knowing there is a chance of an emergency call-up (pikuach nefesh) and will need to desecrate Shabbat.

Two questions remain to be answered. Do we paskin like the Ba’al Hameor? If so, is going home for Shabbat considered a dvar mitzvah (thus allowing him to come home in the days prior to Shabbat)?

The Shulchan Aruch (OC 248:2) quotes the opinion of the Rif, and soon after (248:4) brings the opinion of the Ba’al Hameor. The Mishnah Berurah explains how the Shulchan Aruch takes both opinions into account. One may leave within three days in the case of a tzorech mitzvah, in accordance with the Ba’al Hamoer, even if there will be chilul Shabbat due to pikuach nefesh. If there is no tzorech mitzvah, one may not leave within three days even if

there is no concern of chilul Shabbat, in accordance with the Rif (concern of oneg shabbat).

Therefore, if our case is defined as a tzorech mitzvah, it will be permitted. Do we define going home for Shabbat as a tzorech mitzvah?

The Rema is lenient in his understanding of tzorech mitzvah, and quotes the opinion of Rabbeinu Tam who even defines going to see a friend as a dvar mitzvah. While the Mishnah Berurah says that we should not rely on this opinion lechatchila, our case of going home for Shabbat with family is more than just going to see a friend. Having a break at home is very important for a soldier as part of preparation or continuation of war. This is especially true when he is going to see his parents and during a time of war.

Additionally, it is not always the case that a soldier who returns on Shabbat needs to violate Shabbat, and therefore this case is more lenient than the ruling of the Ba’al Hamoer.

In a similar ruling, Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach allowed for a pregnant woman to stay home for Shabbat and not stay within walking distance of the hospital, even though she would need to desecrate Shabbat if she needed to go to the hospital.

Summary: A soldier may go home for Shabbat knowing there is a chance of an emergency call-up on Shabbat.

● Translated from Hebrew and abbreviated by Yaakov Panitch.

תקצ'יר פרשת כי תבוֹא

הרבנית שרון רימון



בדרכ טבעיות, אך בהסתכלות אמונהית ההתערבבות האלקית בטהילה זו נראית ממד ברורה.

אם כן, ההשתדלות של בני האדם (וחהם) בעולם הזה צריכה להיות בשני מישורים. המישר האחוד הוא המשור הרוחני: מוטלת על האדם חובה ללבוד את ה' כל יכולתו, לשאוף לקיים את המצוות בשלמותו, וככל שיתקדם בעבודת ה'vrch יושפע עלייו שפע ברכה. המישר השני הוא המישר הגשמי: על האדם לעשות את החשידות המעשית, הגשמי, ולא לסגור על הנס, מפני שאין אדם מושלם אשר יוכל להיות בטוח שכלה הנגагה בעולם תהייה על דרך הנס.

ישראל ההשגהה על עם ישראל והאגואה העתידית מאופיינים בעוצמה גבוהה המחברות בין המעשים הרוחניים והמעשיים) של עם ישראל, בין הברכה המיוחדת של הקב"ה. השגחותו של הקב"ה מחברות באופן מתמיד אל העבודה הרוחנית ועל העבודה המעשית של עם ישראל. השילוב בין הדברים, והידיעה שיד ה' פועלת בכל, היא הנותנת לעם ישראל את דרכו המיחודה כעמו של הקב"ה.

בדומה לשכר הפרטוי, גם השכר המובטח לעם ישראל בכללו אינו בא בדרך נסית גליה העוררת את חוקי הטבע, אלא הן הנגагה האלקית נסורת המדריכה את הטבע. **ככל שעם ישראל מחויב יותר אל האלקיות, שהיא מקור השפע,vrch ברכת ה' שופעת עליהם ומתייבה אותם בצדקה יותר ברורה.** וככל שעם ישראל מתרחק מאלקיו,vrch נחסם צינור השפע.

על אף שהשפע המועד לכלל ישראל אם ישמרו את המצוות הוא שפע גשמי טبعי שאינו עוקר את חוקי הטבע ממקומם, כאשר שפע זה מושפע על העם כולו או על ארץם, ניכרת ממנה הנהגתו והשגותו של ה' בצדקה גלויה וברורה.

כאשר מתחבננים במהלך ההיסטוריה של עם ישראל, לא ניתן להתעלם מהנהגתו ה' המכוונת. עם ישראל חוות במשך דורות רבים את הקלותות המתוירות בפרשנותו, אולם, עם ישראל שרד את כל אותן שנים בצדקה מפלייה שאינה מסתדרת עם המציאות הקיימת של עמים אחרים. כיוון אנו יכולים להמשיך את דברי רmb"ז: עם ישראל זוכה לחזור לארצו, כביכול לעולם התחרותים.

G ברשות הברכות והקללות עוסקת بصورة אחד מעיקרי האמונה החשובים, לפיו ה' משגיח על מעשי בני האדם ומשלים להם כгалומות – שמירת המצוות מביאה על האדם והעם שפע ברכה, ואיך מוצאות גורר קללה. רmb"ז, בפרשו לפרש הברכות והקללות מדגיש את העקרון שקיים המושג משפייע לא רק על עולמו הרוחני של האדם, אלא יש לו גם השפעה רבתה על עולמו הגוף. רmb"ז מכנה זאת "נס נסתר". אך גם לא נenna תופעה זו כ"נס", נוכל להבין שהיא מצבעה על קשר הדדי קיומי בין גורף לפניו, בין העולמות הרוחניים האדם לעולמו הפיזי, ובכלל בין העולמות העליונים לעולמות התחרותים.

רmb"ז מבahir שהנסים הגלויים, כגון יציאת מצרים, מיודיעים על השחתה ה' על התערבותו במציאות, ומתוך כך ניתן להכיר גם בננסים הנסתרים, בהתערבות האלקית במציאות היום-יום. בפרשת הברכות והקללות מתוארים השכר והעונש שקיבל כלל עם ישראל ולא שכר ועונש פרטיים.

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broaden community. For example, the Mi Shebeirach we recite on behalf of specific sick people (who we mention by name) adds the words "b'toch sha'ar cholai Yisrael (amongst the other Jewish sick)." Similarly, when we console mourners, we pray that Hashem consoles them "amongst the other mourners for Zion and Yerushalayim." We petition Hashem as part of the broader tzibur.

Individuality, Not Individualism

We live in a world that emphasizes individualism. Judaism values individuality, not individualism. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks zt"l explains that there is "all the difference in the world between individuality and individualism. Individuality means that I am a unique and valued member of a team. Individualism means that I am not a team player at all. I am interested in myself alone, not the group... Judaism

values individuality, not individualism. As Hillel said, 'If I am only for myself, what am I? (Mishnah Avot 1:14)."

May our development of our unique individuality facilitate a stronger connection to and appreciation of the broader Jewish community.

● Summarized by Rafi Davis

1. We find in the discussions of Chazal and the Rishonim different ways of talking about our relationship with the tzibur. The first is simply that a person should act the way a Jew should act, the opposite of which the Gemara calls being *poresh m'darkei hatzibur* (Masechet Rosh Hashanah 16b) — separating oneself from the proper behavior exhibited by the rest of the community. In this vein, we're told that "kol haporesh mi'darkei tzibur ein mitaskin imo b'chol davar" — A person who "leaves Klal Yisrael," in the sense that he doesn't act as a Jew, is cut off; when he

dies, people are not supposed to sit *b'aveilus* over him (Masechet Evel Rabbati, Chapter 2, Mishnah Torah L'Rambam, Hilchot Avel 1:10). The fact that not conducting oneself properly is described as being "*poresh min hatzibur*" indicates that there is significance to being part of the *tzibur* that goes beyond acting properly. That is the emphasis of our Mishnah.

2. See Talmud Bavli, Masechet Chagigah 9b which speaks severely about one choosing to not join his friends involved in fulfilling a mitzvah.
3. There are two levels to this: Simply, you can say he is not rewarded to receive their *nechama*. On a deeper level, he doesn't naturally feel the *nechama*, because he didn't fully internalize the *tzarah* of the *tzibur*.
4. The Gra (in his commentary to our Mishnah) references this act of Moshe. This Midrash uses this idea to explain why Yitro (as opposed to Moshe) was excluded from the Sinaiitic revelation. Yitro had not felt the pain of the Jewish People in Mitzrayim and therefore could not be part of the consolation of Hashem's revelation.

The Most Mitzvot



Sivan Rahav Meir and Yedidya Meir
World Mizrachi Scholars-in-Residence

The words “soul searching” or “confession” can be menacing. They usually remind us of that which is not OK, of that which we have to fix. But this week’s Portion, Ki Tavo, presents a different kind of confession: Vidui M’aser (confession upon tithing). After performing the instructions related to Ma’aser (tithing), one says a series of moving verses. Here is just part of this confession: “I have not turned aside from Your commandments nor have I forgotten any of them... I have obeyed the LORD my G-d; I have done everything You commanded me.” This is a positive kind of confession, in which one looks back on all the good things one did, and also talks about it.

Rabbi Kook writes about it wonderfully: “A person needs to sometimes rejoice by expressing with his lips the good things that he did... Therefore we need the confession over the Mitzvot from time to time, in order to strengthen our heart in the path of G-d, just as we need the confession over transgressions”.

Meaning, along with the confession over transgressions (“Ashamnu, Bagadnu... We have been guilty, we have dealt others treacherously...” and the entire confession of the Ten Days of Repentance) Rabbi Kook also talks about “confessing our Mitzvot”. One should sometimes confess one’s good deeds, because soul searching is not only about that which we need to fix. It is also a call to pay attention to everything that is good and beautiful, fixed and excellent – with us and with all those who surround us.

A few words from Rashi (1040-1105), the great French Torah commentator, tell the whole story. After wandering in the

desert, the nation of Israel settles the Land of Israel and has now been living there for hundreds of years. A farmer goes out to his orchard and sees the first fruits of a tree beginning to ripen. He picks these fruits, takes them to Jerusalem, and in an emotional ceremony gives a speech that is exclusively about gratitude for the past and hope for the future. What is so emotional about the first figs from your tree? Even if you had just one tree growing in your backyard, you still had to perform this ceremony. But what is the point of it? Rashi explains what it’s all about: “not to be ungrateful”.

It’s a lesson in giving thanks for what we have. To rejoice in it. To take notice of where it came from and not to take anything for granted. Our purpose, with our entrance into the Land of Israel and ever since, is to live with this attitude. To continually identify instances of goodness and lovingkindness, to make a big deal out of them, and to express thanks for them.

This perspective can assist us: to look around and always see the good, to be thankful and express gratitude to G-d for all that we have.

■ ■ ■

How do we relate to the many “firsts” in our lives? This week’s Torah portion describes the first fruits ceremony: A farmer goes out to his orchard, sees the first ripe fruit on a tree and, instead of taking a bite, puts it in a basket and takes it with him to Jerusalem in a festive procession. There he expresses thanks for his life’s journey and for all the journeys of the nation of Israel. Instead of going into his home and eating his first fruits, he connects the fig and the pomegranate that he grew to the entire history of his people.

Our commentators explain that the firsts in our lives and the initial moments of all our endeavors deserve special attention and elevation. Just like the farmer who refrains from taking his first fruits for himself, but connects them to eternity, we need to sanctify all of our new ventures: the start of a new school year that is always accompanied by excitement, the start of a new calendar year that is always initiated with blasts from the shofar, with an apple dipped in honey, with festive meals and inspirational prayers.

The Baal Shem Tov, founder of the Chasidic movement, called upon us to elevate our daily “first fruits,” the moments upon awakening each day, in the following manner: “It is essential to pay attention to the firsts of each day: the first thought, the first word spoken, the first action.” Do we awaken with a positive or a negative thought? What is the first sentence that leaves our mouth, a complaint or something positive? And what is the first thing that we do? Is it an action that will pull along behind it more positive actions and good deeds throughout the day? The first fruits ceremony is not just ancient history. It is something we can replicate again and again if we only pay attention to the many firsts we encounter in our daily lives.

■ ■ ■
במיטוס, בדרך חזרה לנו ירושה, עברתי על הפרשה, ומאתרי רענון מרגע לקראת שבת. המזווה הראשונה בפרשה, מצוות הביכורים, קוראת לנו להרים את המבט, להסתכל על התמונה הרחבה. החקלאי יוצא לשדה, רואה את הפרי הראשון שהבשיל, עולה אליו לירושלים בתהלה ביכורים שמחה, ואז נושא שם נאום ארוך שמתראר את כל תולדותינו, מהירידה למצרים דרך השעבוד ועד להגעה לישראל. על חאננה קטנה או רימון קטן שגדל באرض ישראל, הוא נותן שיעור היסטורי של אלפי שנים. התורה מכונה אותנו להתבונן בסיפור הגודל: כך לומדים לחיות את כל ה”יש” ולא להסתמך ב”אין”, גם מרגינשים

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For the Shabbat Table



Rabbi Danny Mirvis

Deputy CEO, World Mizrachi

Rabbi at Ohel Moshe Synagogue, Herzliya Pituach

And you shall take from the first of every fruit of the ground that you bring in from your land that Hashem your G-d gives you and you shall put it in a basket and you shall go to the place that Hashem your G-d shall choose to rest his name there" (Devarim 26:2).

This week's Parsha commences with the laws of Bikkurim - bringing the first fruits to the Beit HaMikdash. The Torah specifically requires these fruits to be placed in vessels as they were brought up to Yerushalayim. The Mishna provides us with further details about these vessels:

"The wealthy would bring their Bikkurim in trays of silver and gold and the poor would bring them in reed baskets of peeled willow, and the baskets and the fruits would be given to the Kohanim" (Bikkurim 3:8).

Whereas the expensive trays of the wealthy would be returned to their owners, the modest baskets of the poor were taken by the Kohanim together with their fruits. At first glance, this seems entirely unfair. Why was this extra tax



We should not only display sympathy for those less fortunate than ourselves, but empathy for the extent of their plight.

placed on the poor? One can assume the wealthy did not make their own trays and would not feel a great financial loss if they were to give them away. Why were the less fortunate, who had to go out and collect reeds and weave their own baskets, required to donate them as well?

In truth, this donation was not a poverty tax but a special privilege awarded to the less fortunate. In the words of the Midrash, this donation was:

"In order to bring merit to the poor people" (Sifrei, Ki Tavo 4, according to the Malbim's edition).

On a basic level, we can explain that this donation benefited the poor by allowing them to receive merit for giving to the

התורה מבקשת שנרגיש בכל יום שוב למרגלאות הר סיני. שנחוש בכל יום מחדש שהוא מורתה. שכאש אנו לומדים, לא נוריש תתיישנות אלא התחדשות, לא נמנום אלא התעוררות. וכך כל בוקר הוא הבוקר הראשון ללימודים, ואפשר לפתחו בודר חדש. זה חתיכת איךול לפתחת שנת הלימודים, או בכל מסלול אחר: "בכל יום יהיו בעיניך חדשים". בהצלחה לכלנו.

אליה ימים מרגשים. הורים מלוחים ילדים למוסדות החינוך, ורבים מתחלים ביום אלה מוסגות חדשות בכל התהווים. ככל יותר חגיינים יותר מהחיצים גם יותר מצטלים. ועוד חדש? ועוד חדשים? מה קורה בעומק השנה, בשגרה? מישחו יצלם את הילד בבורך בדרך ללימודים בעוד שבוע? "

"ק"י יום זהה הא' אלקייך מצוק לעשאות את החוקים קאלה" – כך נאמר בפרשנה. למה נכתב כאן "היום הזה"? הרי התורה ניתנה מזמן, בהר סיני, ואנחנו קוראים את הפסוקים האלה עכשיין, אף שניים אחר כך. ר"ש"י מסביר כך: "בכל יום יהיו בעיניך חדשים, וכך בו ביום נצטויה עליהם".

Beit HaMikdash. However, I would like to suggest that the merit of such a gift was not only spiritual, but also had clear emotional and psychological benefits for the poor.

Our natural response to those less fortunate than ourselves is to want to give to them and to prevent them from having to give. Whilst this response comes from a pure and kind place and only wishes to help the poor, it can be damaging and hurtful as well. Sometimes, greater than the financial pressure of poverty are the psychological burden and emotional pain. Financially, it would make more sense to keep the golden trays and return the baskets, but why should the poor not be able to give? Why should they be denied the dignity of working hard and making a donation of their own?

We should not only display sympathy for those less fortunate than ourselves, but empathy for the extent of their plight. True Chessed is not only about giving to others, but providing them with the space and dignity to give as well.

Shabbat Shalom!

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משמעותה, כי אנחנו חוליה קטנה בשורשת ארוכה. גם אם קשה ומורכב, מבט כזה מזכיר את כל מה שעבר עליון בכל הדורות, וננתן עידודו לחושר במסימתו. אולי במקומות תאנה קתנה, אפשר לשאת את הנאים זהה השבוע על פתק קטן בקהל. בפרשה קוראים פסוקים שאנו מכירinos מההגדה של פסח, שנונתים הקשר רחוב לכל מה שקרה לנו: "וירעו אותנו המצריים, ויענוונו, ויתנו עליינו עבודה קשה... וויצוינו את ה', ממצרים ביד חזקה ובזרוע טוויה... ויביאנו את המקום הזה וייתן לנו את הארץ הזאת, ארץ זבת חלב ודבש".

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The Pursuit of Joy



Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks zt”l

Happiness, said Aristotle, is the ultimate good at which all humans aim.¹ But in Judaism it is not necessarily so. Happiness is a high value. *Ashrei*, the closest Hebrew word to happiness, is the first word of the book of Psalms. We say the prayer known as *Ashrei* three times each day. We can surely endorse the phrase in the American Declaration of Independence that among the inalienable rights of humankind are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

But *Ashrei* is not the central value of the Hebrew Bible. Occurring almost ten times as frequently is the word *simcha*, joy. It is one of the fundamental themes of Deuteronomy as a book. The root *s-m-ch* appears only once in each of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, but no fewer than twelve times in Deuteronomy. It lies at the heart of the Mosaic vision of life in the Land of Israel. That is where we serve G-d with joy.

Joy plays a key role in two contexts in this week's parsha. One has to do with the bringing of first-fruits to the Temple in Jerusalem. After describing the ceremony that took place, the Torah concludes as follows:

"Then you will rejoice in all the good things that the Lord your G-d has given you and your family, along with the Levites and the stranger in your midst." (Deut. 26:11)

The other context is quite different and astonishing. It occurs in the context of the curses. There are two passages of curses in the Torah, one in Leviticus 26, the other here in Deuteronomy 28. The differences are notable. The curses in Leviticus end on a note of hope. Those in Deuteronomy end in bleak despair. The Leviticus curses speak of a total abandonment of Judaism

by the people. The people walk *bekeri* with G-d, variously translated as "with hostility," "rebelliously," or "contemptuously." But the curses in Deuteronomy are provoked simply "because you did not serve the Lord your G-d with joy and gladness of heart out of the abundance of all things." (Deut. 28:47)

Now, joylessness may not be the best way to live, but it is surely not even a sin, let alone one that warrants a litany of curses. What does the Torah mean when it attributes national disaster to a lack of joy? Why does joy seem to matter in Judaism more than happiness? To answer these questions we must first understand the difference between happiness and joy. This is how the first Psalm describes the happy life:

Happy is the man who has not walked in the counsel of the wicked, nor stood in the way of sinners, nor sat where scoffers sit. But his desire is in the Torah of the Lord; on his Torah he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree planted by streams of water, bearing its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither; and in all that he does he prospers. (Ps. 1:1-3)

This is a serene and blessed life, granted to one who lives in accordance with the Torah. Like a tree, such a life has roots. It is not blown this way and that by every passing wind or whim. Such people bear fruit, stay firm, survive, and thrive. Yet for all that, happiness is the state of mind of an individual.

Simcha, joy, in the Torah is never about individuals. It is always about something we share. A newly married man does not serve in the army for a year, says the Torah, so that he can stay at home "and bring joy to the wife he has married"

(Deut. 24:5). You shall bring all your offerings to the central sanctuary, says Moses, so that "there, in the presence of the Lord your G-d, you and your families shall eat and rejoice in all you have put your hand to, because the Lord your G-d has blessed you." (Deut. 12:7) The festivals as described in Deuteronomy are days of joy, precisely because they are occasions of collective celebration: "you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, the Levites in your towns, and the strangers, the fatherless and the widows living among you." (Deut. 16:11) *Simcha* is joy shared. It is not something we experience in solitude.

Happiness is an attitude to life as a whole, while joy lives in the moment. As J. D. Salinger once said: "Happiness is a solid, joy is a liquid." Happiness is something you pursue. But joy is not. It discovers you. It has to do with a sense of connection to other people or to G-d. It comes from a different realm than happiness. It is a social emotion. It is the exhilaration we feel when we merge with others. It is the redemption of solitude.

Paradoxically, the biblical book most focused on joy is precisely the one often thought of as the unhappiest of all, *Kohelet*, Ecclesiastes. *Kohelet* is notoriously the man who had everything, yet describes it all as *hevel*, a word he uses almost forty times in the space of the book, and variously translated as "meaningless," "pointless," "futile," "empty," or as the King James Bible famously rendered it, "vanity." In fact, though, *Kohelet* uses the word *simcha* seventeen times, that is, more than the whole of the Mosaic books together. After every one of his meditations on the pointlessness of life, *Kohelet* ends with an exhortation to joy:

I know that there is nothing better for people than to rejoice and do good while they live. (Kohelet 3:12)

So I saw that there is nothing better for a person than to rejoice in his work, because that is his lot. (Kohelet 3:22)

So I command rejoicing in life, because there is nothing better for a person under the sun than to eat and drink and rejoice. (Kohelet 8:15)

However many years anyone may live, let him rejoice in them all. (Kohelet 11:8)

I posit in the Koren Succot Machzor that Kohelet can only be understood if we realise that *hevel* does not mean “pointless,” “empty,” or “futile”. It means “a shallow breath”. Kohelet is a meditation on mortality. However long we live, we know we will one day die. Our lives are a mere microsecond in the history of the universe. The cosmos lasts forever while we living, breathing mortals are a mere fleeting breath.

Kohelet is obsessed by this because it threatens to rob life of any certainty. We will never live to see the long-term results of our endeavours. Moses did not lead the people into the Promised Land. His sons did not follow him to greatness. Even he, the greatest of Prophets, could not foresee that he would be remembered for all time as the greatest leader the Jewish people ever had. *Lehavdil*, Van Gogh sold only one painting in his lifetime. He could not have known that he would eventually be hailed as one of the greatest painters of modern times. We do not know what our heirs will do with what we leave them. We cannot know how, or if, we will be remembered. How then are we to find meaning in life?

Kohelet eventually finds it not in happiness but in joy – because joy lives not in thoughts of tomorrow, but in the grateful acceptance and celebration of today. We are here; we are alive; we are among others who share our sense of jubilation. We are living in G-d's land, enjoying His blessings, eating the produce of His earth, watered by His rain, brought to fruition under His sun, breathing the air He

Happiness is an attitude to life as a whole, while joy lives in the moment.

breathed into us, living the life He renews in us each day. And yes, we do not know what tomorrow may bring; and yes, we are surrounded by enemies; and yes, it was never the safe or easy option to be a Jew. But when we focus on the moment, allowing ourselves to dance, sing, and give thanks, when we do things for their own sake not for any other reward, when we let go of our separateness and become a voice in the holy city's choir, then there is joy.

Kierkegaard once wrote: “It takes moral courage to grieve; it takes religious courage to rejoice.”² It is one of the most poignant facts about Judaism and the Jewish people that our history has been shot through with tragedy, yet Jews never lost the capacity to rejoice, to celebrate in the heart of darkness, to sing the Lord's song even in a strange land.

There are Eastern faiths that promise peace of mind if we can train ourselves into habits of acceptance. Epicurus taught his disciples to avoid risks like marriage or a career in public life. Neither of these approaches is to be negated, yet Judaism is not a religion of acceptance, nor have Jews tended to seek the risk-free life. We can survive the failures and defeats if we never lose the capacity for joy. Every Succot we leave the security and comfort of our houses and live in a shack exposed to the wind, the cold, and the rain. Yet we call it *zeman simchatenu*, our season of joy. That is no small part of what it is to be a Jew.

Hence Moses' insistence that the capacity for joy is what gives the Jewish people the strength to endure. Without it, we become vulnerable to the multiple disasters set out in the curses in our parsha. Celebrating together binds us as a people: that and

the gratitude and humility that come from seeing our achievements not as self-made but as the blessings of G-d. The pursuit of happiness can lead, ultimately, to self-regard and indifference to the sufferings of others. It can lead to risk-averse behaviour and a failure to “dare greatly”. Not so joy. Joy connects us to others and to G-d. Joy is the ability to celebrate life as such, knowing that whatever tomorrow may bring, we are here today, under G-d's Heaven, in the universe He made, to which He has invited us as His guests.

Toward the end of his life, having been deaf for twenty years, Beethoven composed one of the greatest pieces of music ever written, his *Ninth Symphony*. Intuitively he sensed that this work needed the sound of human voices. It became the West's first choral symphony. The words he set to music were Schiller's Ode to Joy. I think of Judaism as an ode to joy. Like Beethoven, Jews have known suffering, isolation, hardship, and rejection, yet they never lacked the religious courage to rejoice. A people that can know insecurity and still feel joy is one that can never be defeated, for its spirit can never be broken nor its hope destroyed. As individuals we may aspire to the goodness that leads to happiness, but as part of a moral and spiritual community, even in hard times we find ourselves lifted on the wings of joy.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Do you agree with Kierkegaard that “it takes religious courage to rejoice”?
- How is the festival of Succot connected to joy?
- In the essay for Eikev, Rabbi Sacks noted that gratitude was a dominant theme in Devarim. Here he teaches us that another key theme is joy. Which links can you find between these two themes?

1. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 1.

2. Journals and Papers, vol. 2, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1967, p. 493.

The Second Bris



Rabbi Hershel Schachter

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The Sifrei in Parshas Re'eh distinguishes between the two parshiyos describing sefiras ha'omer. שבעה שביעות תספר לך – “Seven weeks you shall count for yourself” (Devarim 16:9) describes a mitzvah on the Beis Din HaGadol. A different passuk, טפרתם לכם ... שבע שבנות ... תשפחו חמשים יומ – “You shall count for yourselves ... seven weeks ... you shall count fifty days” (Vayikra 23:15-16), describes a count performed by each individual (Menachos 65b).

The basis of the distinction made by the Sifrei is the rule quoted in the name of the Vilna Gaon (Divrei Eliyahu, p. 94): Whenever a mitzvah is repeated in the Torah, once in the singular and once in the plural, the singular form is addressed to Klal Yisrael as a whole while the plural form devolves upon the individual.

The Beis Din HaGadol, which represents Klal Yisrael in totality, discharges the obligation upon Klal Yisrael as a whole when they count the seven weeks from Pesach until Shavuos. The reason this mitzvah falls within the purview of the Sanhedrin is that this count establishes the correct day of the Yom Tov of Shavuos, which is part of the more general mitzvah of kevias haluach (establishment of the calendar). The second aspect of the mitzvah, reflected in its repetition in Parshas Re'eh in the plural form, is directed to each and every individual, who should also engage in such a count.

The Vilna Gaon generalizes this rule, and it can thus be applied to the two parshiyos of tochechah found in the Torah as well. The tochechah in Bechukosai was proclaimed on the occasion of the bris of Ma'amad Har Sinai, after the Aseres HaDibros: אלה החקים והמשפטים והתורות אשר נתן לך – “These are the

decrees, the ordinances, and the teachings that Hashem gave, between Himself and Bnei Yisrael, at Har Sinai” (Vayikra 26:46). The tochechah in Ki Savo represents a second bris: אלה דברי הברית אשר צו לך – “seven weeks you shall count for yourself in the Land of Mo'av beside the covenant that He sealed with them at Chorev [Har Sinai]. (Devarim 28:69)

There is a noteworthy difference between the two tochechos. In Parshas Bechukosai, the entire tochechah is expressed in the plural form, אם בחקוקתי חלכו – “If you follow my decrees” (Vayikra 26:3), whereas in Ki Savo, the blessings and curses appear in the singular, as in, היה אם שמע השם בקלי לך – “It shall be that if you hearken to the voice of Hashem, your G-d” (Devarim 28:1). We therefore understand that the tochechah in Bechukosai is speaking to the yachid (individual), as opposed to that in Ki Savo, which addresses the tzibbur (congregation).

The passuk at the beginning of Parshas Netzarim explains why another kerisas bris (sealing of the covenant) at Arvos Mo'av was required to obligate Bnei Yisrael in mitzvos:

ולא אתם לבדכם אני כורת את הברית הזאת ואת האלה הזאת כי את אשר ישנו פה עמנו ועמד היום לפני ד' אלקינו ואת אשר איןנו פה עמננו היום.

Not with you alone do I seal this covenant and this imprecation. But with whoever is here, standing with us today before Hashem, our G-d, and with whoever is not here with us today. (29:13-14)

The Gemara in Shavuos (39a) explains that the original bris at Har Sinai was made only with those people alive at

that time, not with the future generations. All the neshamos of Bnei Yisrael were present at Har Sinai so that they would be affected by the gilui Shechinah (Divine Revelation), as the passuk teaches, – ובעבור תהיה יראו על פניכם לבתיהם תחתטו – “So that awe of Him shall be upon your faces, so that you shall not sin” (Shemos 20:17). An impression was made on the neshamos of the members of the Jewish Nation at Har Sinai. They could be identified as – רחמנים בישנין גומלי חסדים – “those who are merciful, bashful, and who perform acts of kindness” (Yevamos 79a), to the extent that if one is lacking these middos, we must check his ancestry, for he must not have been present at Har Sinai (Shulchan Aruch, Even Ha'ezer 2:2).

Nevertheless, while it is true that all of the neshamos were present, the bris of Har Sinai is not legally binding on a neshamah, only on a person. We, today, would not be obligated to observe the mitzvos were it not for the second bris at Arvos Mo'av. It was this bris which obligated the future generations.

Why is there such a difference in terms of the binding power of the two different brisos? Future generations of Jews can only be bound by an earlier bris if there first exists the concept of Klal Yisrael as a unit. Until Bnei Yisrael entered Eretz Yisrael, they were only yechidim, and the original bris at Har Sinai was therefore a bris with yechidim. This is why the first tochechah is in the plural, lechol echad v'echad. The entity of “Klav Yisrael” was born only once the Jewish Nation entered its land, because only after Bnei Yisrael had a National Homeland could they attain the status of a Nation. Because this second bris, proclaimed in the singular, was a bris with the Jewish Nation as a whole, it remained binding on all

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Take an Oath



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This week we will discuss an insight from the Steipler on *מסכת נדירים*, one that ultimately relates to an understanding of the *נודע ביהודה* from many years earlier on this week's Parsha. The Gemara in *מסכת נדירים* talks about someone who makes a *שבועה* in order to fulfill a Mitzvah. Even though in general we discourage people from swearing, if someone is concerned that he will not fulfill a Mitzvah, he can take an oath that obligates him to do the Mitzvah. The Gemara asks that seemingly this *שבועה* has no effect, since we already swore at Har Sinai to keep all of the Mitzvot, and we have a concept that a second oath cannot fall upon a preexisting oath. “*והלא מושבע וועומד מהר סיני הוּא*”? The Gemara concludes the person is nonetheless allowed to swear to fulfill a Mitzvah, since it has the power to motivate a person to fulfill the Mitzvah, “*לזרוזי נפשיה*”, and therefore can carry weight even though we were already obligated to do the Mitzvah beforehand.

Yet, many commentators question this answer of the Gemara, as seemingly it doesn't really solve the problem. If the *שבועה* does not take effect, since there was already a preexisting *שבועה* from Har Sinai, then how does it have the power to motivate someone? How can a person be motivated by a *שבועה* that in fact does not really add anything? The Steipler answers this question with an insight into human nature. Very often, people rationalize different actions, and explain

Even when we convince ourselves that the *shevua* that we took at Har Sinai doesn't apply, for whatever the reason, we will be motivated to keep the Mitzvah because of the additional oath that we took, even if on a technical level it did not add anything.

to themselves why certain Mitzvot don't apply in certain cases. “Perhaps today I should not get up for Davening, since I will have a better day if I sleep later, and therefore the obligation of Davening doesn't apply today.” People find all sorts of excuses for the various actions that they do. Therefore, the purpose of taking *שבועה לזרוזי נפשיה* is to motivate us even during those situations. Even when we convince ourselves that the *שבועה* that we took at Har Sinai doesn't apply, for whatever the reason, we will be motivated to keep the Mitzvah because of the additional oath that we took, even if on a technical level it did not add anything. This is the understanding of the Gemara in *מסכת נדירים*.

However, this insight was really said many years before from the *נודע ביהודה* on this week's Parsha. At the end of all of the

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the future generations who are part of the tzibbur. When any country makes a treaty, it is understood that the agreement is binding even after a new president is

elected and even on citizens born after the treaty was signed, because these people are a continuation of the original nation. The same is true of the *bris of Arvos Mo'av*.

curses, we have one Pasuk that concludes this section.

“*אלה דברי הברית אשר צוה ירור את-משה, לקרים את-בני ישראל-באארץ מואב מלבד קברית, אשר פנעה אמתם בחורב*”

This was the covenant that Hashem told Moshe to make with the Jewish nation in the Land of Moab, which is besides the covenant which took place many years earlier at Har Sinai. The *נודע ביהודה* asks on this Pasuk, the same question from the Gemara in *מסכת נדירים*, that if in fact there was a covenant from Har Sinai, why was it necessary for them to make another covenant in the Land of Moab? If a person was going to violate the covenant made at Har Sinai, and do *עבודה זרה* even though the Torah says it is not allowed, then they will violate the covenant made in the Land of Moab as well. What did this *שבועה add*?

The *נודע ביהודה* concludes similarly to the way the Steipler concluded, by explaining that people often rationalize the Mitzvot in the Torah. There was a concern that people throughout the generations will think that the Mitzvot in the Torah don't apply, and therefore they needed this oath taken in the Land of Moab to motivate them, at the very least to keep their words. Sometimes, the value of keeping a *שבעה* that you took has the power to motivate you, even at a time when other forms of obligations cannot.

● Edited by Jay Eisenstadt and Ari Levine.

● Adapted from Rav Schachter on the Parsha.

Why are stones so important in our tradition?

**Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis**

Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth

In Chumash, we find numerous examples of the significance of stones. One is in Parshat Ki Tavo. The Israelites were just about to enter into the land of Canaan, Hashem commanded us to take stones “*כְּתַבְתָּ עַל־הַסּוּסִים אֶת־כָּל־דָבָרִ חֲנֹוך־תָהָא*” Hashem asked us to engrave within the slabs of the stones all the words of the Torah.

Why particularly stones? In Parshat Vayechi, Yaakov, who was about to pass away summoned his children. Of his son Yosef, he said “*אֵין יִשְׂרָאֵל – הִיא הַסּוּס*” – he is the stone of Israel”. What did Yaakov mean? Targum Onkelus, the Aramaic translation, explains that the word ‘*בן*’ is a composite term. It is made up of two words, ‘*אָב*’ and ‘*בָן*’ meaning father and son – together making ‘*אָבָן*’. So Yaakov was saying of Yosef that he was the stone of Israel – he sustained the family of Israel in Egypt. Parents and children alike – everybody together.

Emerging from this peirush of Onkelus we have a very profound message. In the same way as an ‘*אָבָן*’ – a stone is indestructible in the face of natural elements, so too the Jewish people will never be destroyed for as long as parents convey the lessons

A stone is indestructible in the face of natural elements, so too the Jewish people will never be destroyed for as long as parents convey the lessons of our tradition through to their children who, in turn, will pass it on to the generations to come.

of our tradition through to their children who, in turn, will pass it on to the generations to come. This is what we are being reminded of when Hashem tells us to engrave words of Torah on stone – it implies that we have a responsibility to keep Torah alive through the successful education we give to our children.

And now we can understand the significance of the matzevah – a monument of stone to the deceased – because the stone inspires us to remember that everything that those who passed away lived for, can be kept alive if we convey their traditions

successfully from parents to children and onto the generations to come.

We now have added insight into an important verse in Tehillim, which we recite in Hallel. “*אָבָן מָאָסָה הַבּוֹנִים הַיְתָה לְרֹאשׁ פֶּגַח*” – the stone that the builders have rejected has become a cornerstone” We’re referring here, of course, to the tragic manner in which our enemies have so often sought to reject the Jewish people. But nonetheless, we have continued to give a contribution of immense value to societies right around the globe.

Perhaps there is an added meaning: “*אָבָן מָאָסָה הַבּוֹנִים – הַיְתָה לְרֹאשׁ פֶּגַח*” – even where those who are building the future of our world reject the notion of ‘*אָבָן*’, if they reject the possibility that an ancient tradition can be just as fresh and just as relevant today as it always was because it has been passed down from generation to generation and from parents to children – “*הַיְתָה לְרֹאשׁ פֶּגַח – אָמִירָא!*” – Am Yisrael will still triumph.

We have prevailed and today, thanks to our values, thanks to our morals and our ethics we are the cornerstone of our civilisation.

Just for Not Being Happy?



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תחת אשר לא עבדת את ה' אלהיך בשמחה ובטוב לבב מרוב כל דבריהם כח:מז

Because you did not serve Hashem, your G-d, with **happiness** and with gladness of heart, when [you had an] abundance of everything. (Devarim 28:47)

After citing several atrocities, the Torah provides a reason why these calamities will befall Am Yisrael: “Because you did not serve Hashem, your G-d, with **happiness** and with gladness of heart.” Is it possible that we can be punished so severely because we did not serve Hashem **joyfully**? If one fulfills all 613 mitzvot but without a smile, is he deserving of such harsh punishment?

The Ohr Hachayim Hakadosh, in perhaps one of his most famous lines (some copies of his commentary on the Torah quote this line on the cover), explains the concept of “simcha” as follows: Based on the pasuk ושמחתה בכל הטוב - “happiness from all the good” (Devarim 26:11), he posits that this relates to the entire Torah. If people would comprehend the sweetness of the Torah, they would fulfill all the precepts of the Torah wholeheartedly, and not be swayed by their desires for physical pleasures. The evils of the *tochacha* befall upon us when we perform mitzvot out of routine without appreciating their awesome nature and value.

Alternatively, based on the interpretation of simcha earlier in the parsha, we can derive an important lesson here as well. When one brings *bikkurim*, the first fruits, the term *simcha* appears as we stated above ושמחתה בכל הטוב. The following pasuk (Devarim 26:12) relates to *ma'aser* that we are to provide to Shevet Levi, and to the poor and underprivileged. Rav Aviner in Tal Hermon suggests that after bringing one's *bikkurim* and expressing gratitude



Is it possible that we can be punished so severely because we did not serve Hashem joyfully? If one fulfills all 613 mitzvot but without a smile, is he deserving of such harsh punishment?

for one's produce, **true simcha** can only be obtained by sharing the wealth with others. That is why the *mitzvah* of *ma'aser* follows the *mitzvah* of *bikkurim*.

This is consistent with the Rambam's opinion expressed in Hilchot Shabbat and Yom Tov 6:18 where he describes *simchat yom tov* as follows:

כשהוא אוכל ושותה חייב להאכיל לגר ליתום
ולאלמנה עם שאר העניים האמללים.

When one partakes in the Yom Tov seuda, he should be sure to feed the convert, orphan and widow along with other less fortunate individuals.

In other words, according to the Rambam, the *mitzvah* of *simcha* on Yom Tov requires that one share the experience with others. Based on this interpretation, we can explain the punishment for not worshiping Hashem “*b'simcha*” as not caring for the underprivileged. True *simcha* has to be shared with others. One cannot sit in his *daled amot* and expect to fulfill all of

his obligations. Part of being a good Jew means being concerned with the well-being of others. Personally fulfilling all 613 mitzvot while ignoring the needs of others, is not *Ratzon Hashem*. Tragedies will ensue if we focus on ourselves and ignore the necessities of those around us.

As we approach the Yamin Noraim, let's take a moment to consider the hardships experienced by those around us. To contemplate what we can do to enhance the *simchat Yom Tov* of those less fortunate. May we be *zocheh* to spread the joy and be blessed with a healthy and happy new year!

Parshas Ki Savo: Reflections



Michal Horowitz
Judaic Studies Teacher

This week's parsha, *Parshas Ki Savo*, opens with the mitzvah of *Bikkurim*, the bringing of the first fruits of the *shivas ha'minim* (Deut. 8:8) up to the Temple. In a most beautiful and moving passage, the verses describe the process of the *Bikkurim* offering, as well as the text that is recited by the farmer (landowner) who offers his first fruits to the *kohen* in the Temple (Devarim 26:1-11).

The Mishnah (Bikkurim 3:1-4) elaborate on many details of the wonderful procession of landowners who go together up to Tzion, with baskets of fresh and dried fruits, and an ox with gilded horns and olive wreath ahead of their procession. In addition, there is the musical accompaniment of a flute along their journey, as they ascend to the House of G-d.

When the landowners arrive with their fruits baskets to the Temple Courtyard, the *Leviim* sing: *I will extol You, O Lord, for You have raised me up, and You have not let my enemies rejoice over me* (Ps.30:2).

The mitzvah of *Bikkurim* is so important that the Medrash teaches us that the whole world was created for *Bikkurim*!

The opening words of Torah are **ברא אלקים את השמים ואת הארץ**, which can be explained as: *For first Hashem created the heavens and the earth*. What is 'for first'? Explains the Medrash: **ראשית אין בראשית אלא בפירות** – First, *ראשית*, is none other than *Bikkurim* (Bereishis Rabbah 1:4).

For *ראשית* Hashem created the world, and this is for the sake of *Bikkurim*, which are called *ראשית*.

And you shall take from the first of every fruit of the ground that you bring in from your land (Devarim 26:2).

At face value, it is difficult to understand what is so fundamentally important about

this *mitzvah*, that the sages teach that for this alone, Hashem created the world.

A well known explanation is that the *mitzvah* of *Bikkurim* represents the *middah* of *hakaras ha'tov*, recognition of the good that Hashem bestows upon us, and for this *middah* alone, it was worthy for Hashem to create the world. When the farmer goes down to his field and sees the fig beginning to ripen, he ties around it a *גמי*, a reed, and declares, "Behold this (fruit) is *Bikkurim*" (Rashi to Devarim 26:2). The bounty of the earth does not grow by the might and power of our hand, but by the benevolence of G-d. It is the process of *Bikkurim* that expresses our recognition of this good, and our thanks to Hashem.

In fact, Rashi (to Devarim 26:3) teaches that when the landowner arrives in the Temple and recites the required passage before the *Kohen*, as he offers his first fruits, he is showing that *he is not unappreciative*.

With this week's *dvar Torah*, I do not offer any insights that solve the mysteries or perplexities of the Torah, nor do I offer a unique or novel *he'orah*. I simply offer reflections related to this unique *Elul* and the *parsha*.

For Bikkurim the world was created. For the person who is *makir tov*, who recognizes the good in his life, and expresses thanks to Hashem, the whole world was created.

When life becomes more challenging, confusing and confounding, when no one seems to have the right answers or solutions and we are all faced with the reality of *this world*, the *עולם*, where so much is *נעלם*, hidden from us, it is important to remember the *mitzvah*, and purpose, of *Bikkurim*.

We must always search for the blessings in life, for the goodness that Hashem bestows upon us, and for the recognition of that good.

Miriam Peretz, mother to two IDF soldiers killed in battle [Uriel (1976-1998) and Eliraz (1978-2010), HY"H], writes: "There's nothing worse than losing two sons. Yet I, who experienced the worst that could possibly happen, am busy all day long finding G-d's kindness. One day I decided to do an exercise. I took a piece of paper and drew two columns. At the top of the first I wrote "List of my complaints to G-d," and for the second, "List of G-d's Kindnesses." The first list was short: Uriel, Eliezer [Miriam's husband, Eliezer, died at the age of 56 between the deaths of her sons], and Eliraz, who were all taken from me before their time. The second list was practically endless: my daughter Bat-El got married, little Gili danced and sang at the wedding. Uriel's friend came to visit, my daughter-in-law Shlomit invited me to spend Shabbat at their home, despite a slipped disc I can still go up the stairs and climb up to my children's graves, I can open my eyes, stand on my feet, enjoy the blossoming of the trees, laugh with my grandchildren and the list goes on and on.

"My dance with G-d has become a daily event. I feel a deep connection to Him... I say, 'Thanks for what I have right now.' Not for the good that might come tomorrow or the next day, but for now. I say, 'Thanks G-d, for not forgetting me, for never being too busy for me. You're always available to listen to my pain'" (Miriam's Song, p.375-376).

As we usher out a complex, challenging, and trying year, let us pray that the new one brings only blessings upon our people, our Land and this world. And while we yet long and pray for better days and times, let us remember that when we offer our first fruits, we must surely count our blessings. For *Bikkurim*, the whole world was created.

G-d's Thirteen Middot Ha-Rachamim (Part I)



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Our recitation of the thirteen 'middot ha-rachamim' is certainly the focal point of the 'selichot' prayers and the highlight of 'ne'ilah' on Yom Kippur. But how are we to understand this recitation? Is it a 'hokus pokus' type magic formula through which one can achieve automatic atonement?

In our daily lives, we are all familiar with the complexity of relationships, no less so is the nature of our relationship with G-d. In fact, from a certain perspective, we could consider Chumash as the story of the development of the special relationship that forges between G-d and the people of Israel.

Gan Eden reflected an ideal (intense) relationship between man and G-d. However, due to man's sin, that relationship became tainted and Adam and Eve were banished from that garden.

Despite this banishment, G-d continued His relationship with mankind, but at a more distant level. Therefore, when Adam's offspring developed into a totally corrupt society, G-d found it necessary to destroy that society with a Flood, saving only Noach and his family.

After the **mabul**, G-d's relationship with mankind entered a new stage, reflected by G-d's covenant with Noach. Note that for the first time, we find a **brit** between G-d and mankind, a concept that will be found later as well in G-d's relationship with Am Yisrael.

G-d's hopes for the generation of Noach's offspring were shattered by the events at Migdal Bavel. In the aftermath of these various 'failures' of mankind, Sefer Breishit shifted its focus to the story of how G-d chose Avraham Avinu to become the forefather of His special nation, whose goal would be to steer mankind back in the proper direction.

As those events unfold, we find once again, how this evolving relationship is defined by various **britot** between G-d and Avraham; the classic examples being: brit bein

ha-btarim and brit mila – or what is commonly referred to as '**brit avot**'.

Sefer Shmot begins as G-d redeems Bnei Yisrael from their bondage in Egypt, as He promised Avraham Avinu in brit bein ha-btarim. But according to that covenant, Bnei Yisrael were also destined to inherit the Land of Israel (after their redemption), thus fulfilling brit avot.

However, to enhance the very purpose of brit avot, G-d convenes an additional covenant with Bnei Yisrael at Har Sinai, before they enter the land. According to this covenant, not only will Bnei Yisrael become a 'great' nation, they are to become a **holy** nation – a '**goy kadosh**'.

Upon their acceptance of this proposal, the next step will be to receive the laws that will make them a goy kadosh. Hence, Bnei Yisrael are instructed to prepare themselves for this special occasion, better known as Ma'amad Har Sinai, where they will receive the first set of laws, better known as the 'Ten Commandments'.

"I am the Lord your G-d...
You shall have no other G-ds besides Me...
Do not bow down to them or worship them, for I the Lord am a KEL KANA - a ZEALOUS G-d

POKEH AVON AVOT AL BANIM –
REMEMBERING THE SIN of parents upon their children... [LE-SON'AI] - for those who reject Me, but

OSEH CHESED - SHOWING KINDNESS...
for those who love me and follow my laws – [LE-OHAVAI u-leshomrei mitzvotai]"

Note how the second Commandment includes three attributes concerning our relationship with G-d:

- 1) KEL KANA – a zealous G-d
- 2)POKEH AVON AVOT AL BANIM – LE-SON'AI
HARSH punishment for those who reject G-d

3) O'SEH CHESED LA-ALAFIM - LE-OHAVAI
Kindness & reward for those follow G-d.

Similarly, in the third Commandment, we find yet another MIDDA [divine attribute]:

"Do not say in vain the NAME of G-d – ki LO YENAKEH HASHEM – for G-d will NOT FORGIVE he who says his Name in vain." (20:7)

Let's add this fourth attribute to the above list:

4) LO YENAKEH HASHEM – He will not forgive

How should we consider these four attributes? At first glance, most of them seem to be quite harsh! Even the MIDDA of – OSEH CHESED – Divine kindness, does not necessarily imply MERCY. Carefully note in 20:6 that G-d promises this kindness **only** for those who **follow** Him, and hence not for any others.

Although these **middot** do have their 'down side', for they threaten immediate punishment for those who transgress ('le-son'a'), they also have their 'up side', for they assure immediate reward for those who obey (le-ohavai). In other words, these **middot** describe a very intense relationship, quite similar [and not by chance] to G-d's relationship with man in Gan Eden.

Yet another example of this intense relationship, and yet another attribute, is found at the conclusion of the unit of laws in Parshat Mishpatim. Recall that immediately after the Ten Commandments, Moshe was summoned to Har Sinai to receive a special set commandment to relay to Bnei Yisrael. At the conclusion of those laws, G-d makes the following promise: "Behold, I am sending an angel before you to guard you on the way and help bring you into the Promised Land."

Be **careful** of him and **obey** him, Do not defy him –
ki lo yisa le-fish'eichem
for he shall not pardon your sins –, since My Name is with him...

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Elul and Faith



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We are all familiar with the notion that Elul is a time for introspection and self-assessment as we prepare for the judgment of Rosh Hashanah. However, we can perhaps gain new insight into the significance of Elul, and our obligation during this month, from a remarkable comment of the Ben Ish Hai (Rav Yosef Haim of Baghdad, 1833-1909), in his work Ben Yehoyada (Berachot 61).

The Gemara there tells the famous and tragic story of Rabbi Akiba's execution. Rabbi Akiba defied the Romans' ban against teaching Torah, and was tortured to death. As the executioner tore off Rabbi Akiba's skin with iron rakes, the Gemara relates, he explained to his student that he had waited his entire life to fulfill the Torah's command to love G-d "with all your soul," and now he was fulfilling this Misva by avowing his unwavering, unlimited commitment to G-d, even as he was being killed.

The Ben Ish Hai comments that this conversation between Rabbi Akiba and his students could not have taken place as he was dying. At the moment his soul was departing, it is inconceivable that he could have been conversing this way with his students. Rather, the Ben Ish Hai writes,

Rabbi Akiva was imprisoned during the month of Elul, and his execution took place on Yom Kippur. (This is why, incidentally, we recite the verse, "Or Zarua La'sadik U'le'yishreh Leb Simha" at the onset of Yom Kippur – because the last letters of the words of this verse spell "R Akiba.") He was tortured each and every day, by having his skin torn by iron rakes, and finally on Yom Kippur he was killed. And each time he was tortured, he told his students that He was fulfilling the command to serve G-d "with all your soul." If so, then we arrive at a new understanding of what the month of Elul is about. This is a time to follow Rabbi Akiba's example of faith, of trusting Hashem even during difficult times, of reinforcing our belief that everything He does is for the best, even if we cannot possibly see how. The history of the month of Elul goes back to the aftermath of the sin of the golden calf. On Rosh Hodesh Elul, Moshe ascended to the top of Mount Sinai one final time, to receive the second tablets, signaling the renewal of the covenant with the nation after their grievous sin. It was during this month that G-d revealed to Moshe the 13 "attributes of mercy," which of course stand at the center of our Selihot prayers during this month.

Moreover, the Rabbis teach that during this period, Moshe was given the clearest understanding of G-d's governance of the world ever revealed to a human being. He came closer than any person ever did to seeing how everything Hashem does is really good, how even the seemingly tragic events are, in fact, for the best. Significantly, this revelation took place during the month of Elul.

As we prepare for the new year, we generally compile in our minds a "wish list," a list of things we feel we lack in our lives and which we want for the coming year. We probably also have a list of complaints to G-d, of unfulfilled wishes, of things that happened during the previous year that caused us disappointment and angst. But Elul is actually the time to do just the opposite – to reinforce our faith that everything Hashem does is for the best. This is the month when Moshe was shown this very clearly, and the month when Rabbi Akiba showed us how to live with this belief. As we prepare for Rosh Hashanah, we should be focused not only on our hopes for the new year, but also on our gratitude for the previous year, and on our faith in Hashem's goodness which is always showered upon us, even when it is difficult to see.

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[On the other hand...]

"...should you obey Him and do all that I say – **I will help you defeat your enemies...**"

This **midde** of 'lo yisa le-fish'eichem' is first presented as that of the **mal'ach** of G-d. However; based on the context of these psukim, it seems rather clear that G-d's intention is for this **mal'ach** to be Moshe Rabbeinu – for He will speak to the people on behalf of G-d and lead them to the Land, and G-d's Name

is with him. Hence we can consider it an attribute of G-d, by which Moshe – as G-d's emissary – must relate to the people.

A final example of this **harsh** nature of brit Sinai is found in the Torah's account of the aftermath of Bnei Yisrael's sin with the golden calf [chet ha-egel]. Because the people had agreed to these harsh terms of brit Sinai, we find how G-d intends to punish them precisely according to these attributes of **middat ha-din**: "And G-d told Moshe, go

down from the mountain for your people has sinned... they made a golden image... and now allow Me, and I **will kindle my anger** against them that I may destroy them -**ve-yichar api bahem...**"

Here we find yet another divine attribute - CHARON AF HASHEM – G-d's instant anger.

More on this in next week's HaMizrachi Parsha Weekly

The Attitude Toward Privacy



Rabbi Moshe Weinberger

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The central feature of the parsha is the ברית, the covenant at הר גוריים and the הר עיבל. Although the Jewish people entered into a covenant with Hashem on Mt. Sinai, this next generation renewed their covenant with Hashem before entering Eretz Yisroel. Their entry into Eretz Yisroel represented not just the same covenant for a new generation, but also a change in their whole way of life. On a deeper level, every new year is a new reality according to the Baal Hatanya and other tzadikim. So as we approach Rosh Hashana, we must also enter into a new covenant with Hashem. Every week is also a new reality, so the renewed covenant between ourselves and Hashem is reflected in the language of Havdala as well.

The focus of the covenant at Mt. Grizim and Mt. Eival was the eleven specific curses called out by the Levi'im and the last curse which was all inclusive (Devarim 27:26) "cursed is one who does not uphold the words of this Torah..." These twelve curses correspond to the twelve tribes of the Jewish people who were standing to listen to them.

There was a significant difference between the terms of this covenant relative to the earlier covenants. The earlier covenants were worded generally, referring to the obligation to observe the Torah as a whole. Here, however, the eleven curses contained much more specificity. For example, one curse was (Devarim 27:16) "cursed is the man who makes an idol or graven image, which is an abomination to G-d, the work of an artisan's hand, and places it [in his home] in secret..." (emphasis added). In addition another curse is (Id. at 24) "cursed is one who smites his friend in secret..." (emphasis added).

We see an emphasis on strengthening that which people do in the privacy of their homes. This is related to the halacha that

כל ישראל ערבים זה זהה, every Jew is responsible each others' actions. That concept is based on, among other sources, the Gemara (Sanhedrin 27b), which says, "all [Jews] are responsible for one another." We are only responsible for others' actions in public, as the pasuk in next week's parsha (Devarim 29:28) says, "the hidden matters are for Hashem our G-d, but the revealed matters are for us and our children forever. Rashi there explains that we are only responsible for others' known actions, but not those that are done privately. We only became responsible for others' actions when we accepted the renewed covenant on Mt. Grizim and Mt. Eival in this week's parsha. Because others have no responsibility for our private actions, these curses were meant in part to strengthen us particularly with respect to our actions done in private.

Many people act one way in public and another way in private. Sometimes this is for the good and sometimes it is the opposite. A person could give tzedaka or perform acts of kindness to strangers or even people in his own family without anyone else knowing about it. On the other hand, others look like loving husbands and wives in public but live in a genihom of this world in the privacy of their homes. Others seem righteous and holy to the outside world but no one sees what they do on the computer at 1:30 in the morning when no one else is watching. The curses in this weeks' parsha therefore come to strengthen our resolve to act just as righteously privately as we do publicly.

While the Jewish people were known for their modest conduct in the desert (See Bava Basra 60a), they were still living very close to a large number neighbors. As we know from the days of the tenements in New York, no matter how much people respect each others' privacy, when many

people live so close together, everyone is aware of everyone else's business. But as the Jewish people were about to move into Eretz Yisroel, to the "suburbs," so to speak, with their own private homes and farms, they were about to experience a level of privacy that was quite new. They therefore needed to be strengthened in the responsible use of such privacy.

No one else knows what is inside a person's heart. Someone could seem very religious on the outside but be completely devoid of emunah in his heart. The world talks about a "new" type of orthodox Jew called "orthoprax," who lives an observant lifestyle but does not believe in the truth of the Torah, G-d forbid. I once read an article in which the author interviewed someone who described himself as a maggid shiur who gave a shiur in מדרות, complex Talmudic analysis, but who admitted that he believed in absolutely nothing. He did not believe in the Torah he was teaching to others.

As the Jewish people entered Eretz Yisroel then, and as we enter into Rosh Hashana now, the Torah has one message for us. We must not rely exclusively on what our neighbors, friends, and family think of us. We must accept and keep the Torah because we recognize the absolute truth of Hashem's existence and presence in our lives in our hearts. As Rav Yochanan ben Zakai blessed his students before his death (Brachos 28b), "may it be [Hashem's] will that the fear of Heaven should be upon you like the fear of flesh and blood." His students said to him, 'Only that much?' He said to them, 'Would that it would be that much...' Our fear of other people knowing what we do or feel is great because we see them beside us. The Torah is asking us to feel in the privacy of our homes and our hearts that Hashem is right there with us just as surely as our neighbor is.

A Tale of Two Mountains

**Rabbi YY Jacobson**

TheYeshiva.net

Some time ago, during a visit to Israel, I traveled to the twin mountains of Gerizim and Ebal, to stand on the soil my ancestors treading 3,280 years ago, during a historic moment when they had just entered the Promised Land. Located in the north of Israel, in the area known today as Samaria (Shomron), towering over the city of Shechem and the gravesite of Joseph, the two majestic mountains dominate the horizon for the many Jewish settlements located in that area. As I entered into the wellspring flowing on Mt. Gerizim for a spiritual pre-Sabbath cleansing, I closed my eyes and allowed my imagination to take me back more than three millennia, to the time when the Jewish people, according to Moses' instructions in this week's Torah portion, Ki Savo, gathered atop these mountains shortly after their entry into the Land in order to rededicate themselves to the ethical values of Torah.

"When Your G-d brings you to the land, to possess it, you shall deliver the blessing on Mount Gerizim and the curse on Mount Ebal." Later, Moses is more specific. Six tribes were to ascend Mt. Gerizim, while another six tribes were to ascend Mt. Ebal. The elders of the Levites were to stand in the valley between the two mountains. They would loudly pronounce the 12 basic moral commandments of the Torah. As the Talmud explains, turning their faces to Mt. Gerizim, the Levites declared that fulfilling these commandments would bring blessings, to which all of Israel responded Amen. Then, turning their faces to Mt. Ebal, they declared that violating these commandments would cause detriment, to which all of the tribes again responded with an Amen.

Indeed, Moses' instructions to the people of Israel were fulfilled meticulously. This

was a profoundly dramatic moment in our early history. Entering for the first time into their homeland, the Jewish people, atop these two mountains, defined their mission statement as a people, rededicating themselves to the novel and revolutionary system of biblical ethics still unheard of in that milieu of cannibalism and pagan feasts of child slaughtering. According to the Talmud, it was at that moment that the Jewish people accepted shared duty for each other as a single spiritual organism.

Yet the obvious question is, why the need for two distinct mountains in order to proclaim the benefits of loyalty to the Torah ethic and the detriments resulting from abandoning the Torah? The answer seems to be uniquely relevant to our age. With the vivid visualization of two distinct mountains, separated by a valley, one of blessing, the other of curse, the Torah is attempting to convey the message that life can and should be divided into two distinct pathways: one path as a source of blessing and growth; the other as a source of curse and devastation. A very real gulf separates the moral life from the immoral life and it ought not to be obfuscated. With this clear designation of a mountain of blessing vs. a mountain of curse the Bible is rejecting the notion that the true progressive personality is open to all kinds of people, all kinds of lifestyles, all ideologies, all choices. According to this modern-day ethos, the primary enemy is the person who cannot be tolerant of all forms of behavior, the individual who believes that some deeds are absolutely blessed, while others are absolutely cursed.

In the introduction to his book "The Closing of the American Mind," Allan Bloom argued that higher education in the U.S. has failed democracy and impoverished

the souls of today's students. The great virtue of the day, he wrote, became the unshakable belief that all truth is relative and that no one idea or moral value is truer than any other. Openness to every culture and tolerance of every idea has become the greatest insight of our time. The notion of absoluteness, naturally, became the great foe of our times. The true believer is the real danger. The study of history and culture taught the youth of today that the greatest evils of the past came from people who thought they were absolutely right. Our mission today was not to correct the mistakes and learn what is really right, but rather to abolish the very concept of right and wrong. Everything became right. What right, students continue to ask, do I or anyone else have to say that one way is better than the other? In Bloom's own words: "If I pose the routine questions designed to confuse them and make them think, such as 'If you had been a British administrator in India, would you have let the natives under your governance burn the widow at the funeral of a man who had died?' they either remain silent or reply that the British should never have been there in the first place." In the Dec. 17, 2001 issue of Newsweek, Yale University student Alison Hornstein wisely observed: "On the morning of Sept. 11, my entire college campus huddled around television sets, our eyes riveted in horror to the images of the burning, then falling, Twin Towers... But by Sept. 12, as our shock began to fade, so did our sense of being wronged. Students' reactions expressed in the daily newspaper and in class pointed to the differences between our life circumstances and those of the perpetrators, suggesting that these differences had caused the previous day's events. "Noticeably absent," she wrote, "was a general outcry of indignation."

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Blessings



Rabbi Judah Mischel

Executive Director, Camp HASC; Mashpiyah, OU-NCSY

Rabbi Yaaqov Mutzafi, zy'a, was one of the last spiritual leaders of the ancient Jewish community of Iraq. Upon arrival in Eretz Yisrael, Rabbi Yaaqov became the leader of the Sefardic Edah Chareidit. He would often sit, adorned in his traditional jalabiya, in the "Shemesh Sedaqah" Beit Knesset on Rechov Haggai in Yerushalayim, teaching Torah, giving guidance and distributing blessings to petitioners of all stripes. He was known for his fiery drashot on the importance of emunah. In the course of one drasha, he shared the following story of a family from his hometown:

A baby born to a sweet and righteous couple was suffering from an extreme case of colic, and cried day and night. None of the doctors or specialists could figure out the cause of the incessant crying and screaming. After exhausting all medical options, the parents consulted with Chachamim and holy people and tried various segulot and mystically potent remedies, but to no avail. The child continued to scream, and his worn down parents felt helpless.

One day, while walking in the market, the mother found a page of sacred writing laying in the dirt. Though illiterate and unable to identify what it was, she recognized it was a davar sheb'kedusha, and quickly picked it up, out of respect. When she got home, the righteous woman cleaned off the page and thought to herself that perhaps Hashem was sending her a healing message for her ailing son.

With simple faith, the mother put the crumpled page under her crying baby's pillow and spoke directly to Hashem: "Ribono Shel Olam.. You know very well that I can't read or write. But I do know that this page is holy. Master of the World!

In the merit of this holy page, may my son be healed from his suffering!"

That night, for the very first time, the baby slept soundly. This miracle was a complete surprise to the child's father (and neighbors) who had become used to the non-stop screaming. After a few days of peace and quiet, the baby's father reflected on the amazing turn of events and wondered aloud as to what had changed. His wife heard him, went to the crib, pulled out the page from under the pillow and showed her husband, saying, "Is there any segulah in the world greater than words of Torah?" The husband grew pale as he scanned the page. Trembling he shouted, "Do you realize what you have done? This is a page of the Tochacha, the rebukes and fearful punishments... this is what you put under our child's head!"

Smiling, she responded, "My dear husband, you know I can't read... how could I possibly know what's written there? All I know is that it is from the Torah — the sweetest gift that our Father in Heaven has given us as an expression of His love. And look! In the merit of the Torah, Hashem has sent a complete healing to our son!"

■ ■ ■

Our sedra lays out the multitude of blessings inherent in living a life of following Hashem's will, including health, happiness and peace of mind: "And all these blessings will come upon you and hisigucha ('cleave to you'), if you obey the Lord, your G-d...." (Devarim, 28:2)

It is interesting to note that parallel language frames the ramifications that will befall us in the Tochacha if we turn our backs on Hashem: "And it will be, if you do not obey the Lord, your G-d, to

observe to fulfill all His commandments and statutes which I am commanding you this day, that all these curses will come upon you and hisigucha ('overtake you')." (Devarim, 28:2, 15)

In both passages there are two steps: first the blessings or curses "come upon you", and then "hisigucha" (they 'cleave to you' or 'overtake you'). The word hisigucha is a construction of the verb *חִשְׁגַּת*, meaning 'to grasp' or 'understand', and also 'to reach' or 'acquire'. This alludes to our process of interpretation; first something comes upon us, and then we 'acquire' an experience of it according to our hasagah, our understanding. The way we 'reach' out to and interpret phenomena is the same way we 'acquire' and experience them. Whether something is a curse or a blessing depends on our da'as, our consciousness. This is illustrated in a story of the Alter Rebbe, Reb Shneur Zalman of Liadi:

The Alter Rebbe was the regular baal korei in his shul. It happened that one year that the Rebbe was away for Parshas Ki Savo, and someone else leined instead. That week after krias haTorah, Dov Ber, the Rebbe's twelve year old son, fell ill, and it became clear that the cause had been the stress and heaviness of the reading of the Tochacha. The effect upon little Dov Ber was so intense that his father was even hesitant to let him fast on Yom Kippur almost a month later. The doctors were astounded at the physiological response, and asked the boy, "But don't you hear the Tochacha every year?" Dov Ber responded, "When my Father reads the Tochacha, you don't hear curses!"

■ ■ ■

The premise of Selichos is emunah peshutah in Hashem's promise for

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Bowing and Bikurim

Mrs. Shira Smiles

International lecturer and curriculum developer

The ceremony accompanying the bringing of **bikurim**, first fruits, to the Beit Hamikdash was joyous and celebratory. Musicians played lively tunes as the procession moved through the streets of Yerushalayim people joined the festivities paying homage to this special mitzvah. Each farmer would present his decorated baskets to the Kohen, proclaiming his gratitude to Hashem with the recitation of the designated text. The elaborate ceremony culminated in bowing as the Torah commands, “And you shall prostrate before Hashem your G-d.” (Devarim 26:10) This is curious. As this is the only mitzvah that requires prostration at the time of its performance, what significance does it hold?

Bowing, explains the Netivot Shalom, reflects the complete elimination of the self. This “bitul” is the most important prerequisite to reaching great spiritual heights. The midrash in Bereishit Rabbah (56:2) records that bowing is featured at great moments in Jewish history; Avraham Avinu at the time of the *akeidah*, the

Jews at Har Sinai at Matan Torah, and in the ultimate redemption, Hashem will bring back those who were dispersed from Egypt to Assyria. “*Vehechtachavu laHashem behar hakodesh*”, they will prostrate themselves to Hashem on the holy mountain (Yeshayahu 27:13). In bowing there is a recognition of human limitations, a realization of complete dependence on Hashem. After working the field for an entire year, a farmer’s first crops engender a feeling of pride and self-accomplishment. It is at this moment that he is required to declare that all his achievements are due to Hashem’s beneficence and are not a product of his strength and genius. The Ba’al Shem Tov Hakodesh has an oft quoted interpretation of “*Anochi omed ben Hashem ubenechem*” (Devarim 5:5). It is the *anochi*, the ego, that stands as a barrier between us and Hashem. The EGO has a tendency to ease G-d out. The Kedushat Levi teaches that only when a person undergoes the transformative experience on Rosh Hashanah, acceding the all-powerful nature of Hashem, can he access the holiness of Yom Kippur and fully prostrate himself before his Creator.

Rabbi Tatz in *Worldmask* describes the Beit Hamikdash as the place where physical and spiritual worlds fuse. Hence, ordinary laws of nature did not apply, as seen with the lechem hapanim that remained fresh for the entire week after it was baked. When people came to this place with a mindset of independence and egocentrism, they stood crowded together. At the moment they were able to see Hashem as the sovereign power, they could bow with plenty of space.

Competition, jealousy and micro-management of daily details leads to a “standing upright” attitude creating barriers between us and Hashem and between us and others as well. *Bikurim* is paradigmatic for life; awareness that all that we have is a Divine gift. Indeed, to merit a favorable judgement one should be *ma’avir al hamidot*, be forgiving of others, and not insist on one’s personal privilege. When we live in a stance of prostration, we ensure our capacity to stand upright in judgement before Hashem.

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These reactions, and similar ones on other campuses, have made it apparent that my generation is uncomfortable assessing, or even asking, whether a moral wrong has taken place. My generation may be culturally sensitive, but we hesitate to make moral judgments.” This is a tragedy raging on American campuses across the country. The fact that so many otherwise intelligent university students cannot recognize some actions as objectively evil, despite differences in cultural standards

and values, is not only philosophically problematic, it is practically dangerous and suicidal. If we cannot define anything as evil, we cannot stand up to it. We then ensure its victory. If hijacking planes and killing thousands of civilians is not objectively bad, what then can be deemed evil? If blowing up two buses filled with civilian men, women and children, blowing to pieces ten or twenty innocent human beings is not absolutely evil, what is? 3,200 years ago, the Torah taught us that some

acts constitute blessings; others constitute curses. They ought never to be equated. They ought to be distinguished not only conceptually, but also physically. They could never be associated together in one domain. An absolute, though narrow, gulf separates the two. Distinguishing good from bad is not an act of arrogance, peacantry or a display of closed-mindedness. It is the only way to purge our beautiful world from militants who slaughter people who do not adhere to their beliefs.

The Weight Answer



Rabbanit Yemima Mizrachi
Popular Torah teacher and author

One of the terrible curses in this week's parsha, perhaps the curse of the 21st century, is the "rebuke," the rebuke and self-rebuke, or in the wonderful language of the Eben Ezra, "He shall not rejoice in his deeds, but shall not care for them until after they come." And you have so much invested in it! Why don't you know how to be happy?

Women criticize themselves and criticize themselves. Women complain about their bodies.

They hate their weight, their general appearance, their facial features, and their body language. I know very few women who are satisfied with their appearance.

Judaism commands us to respond to the body no less than to the soul.

The Rosh Hashanah reading focuses on the woman who hates her body. It has failed her, it is not fulfilling its role. She is perhaps the first anorexic ever, "and you shall neither eat nor drink." Because her body can not give birth... "Chana said before him," If I am a woman, let me give birth, and if I am an angel who does not give birth, why did you call me woman? I am the woman who is at your side!"

“

It is true that the body sometimes deceives and disappoints, but let us keep the spirit, the love, the generosity that we have adapted in these years, precisely because the body is not perfect!

And Elkanah, her husband, teaches her perhaps the greatest of all human abilities: joy, which is forgiveness. Why it exists and why it does not exist.

True, he will tell her, if you gain weight, you will hate this body. If G-d weighs our sins, it will be impossible to continue to love us. But Rosh Hashanah will not be a weight. It will be balanced.

He will tell her a sentence that only lovers can produce. He will not tell her: "It is probably true that you will not give birth." Nor will he tell her, "You only think your body is ugly, when in fact it is beautiful." He will not practice "positive body image" with her, but "positive mind." You are not a "full-figured woman" Chana! You are a "spiritual woman!" Then he says the

golden words: "Selflessness is good for you".

It is true that the body sometimes deceives and disappoints, but let us keep the spirit, the love, the generosity that we have adapted in these years, precisely because the body is not perfect!

The joy is bad, the forgiveness is not.

The Baal HaTanya speaks in the core chapter of his book about forgiving the body when it is burdened with the weight of the soul: "And behold, because his body is despised and weary in his eyes, his joy will be only the joy of the soul alone, and this is a straight and simple way to come to the fulfillment of the mitzvot and the love of your neighbor as you do to every soul (!) of Israel..." Wow.

From the outside, he will say that sometimes we can not stand each other: he looks like this, she dresses like this, but if you weigh the body with the great soul of the one who is in front of you, you will forgive him and along the way you will also forgive yourself, you will also be happy in yourself...

Stop weighing yourself and start gaining weight. You are better than ten kilograms here or there, aren't you?

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forgiveness: "Vayomer Hashem, Salachti k'devarecha, "And Hashem said, 'I have forgiven them in accordance with your word.'" (Bamidbar, 14:20). With our own 'word', our own compassionate understanding and interpretation of the mistakes that have come upon us, Hashem will forgive us.

Then, when we approach the Compassionate One with emunah peshutah and wholehearted, remorseful and honest teshuvah, the words of Selichos can turn our aveiros into expressions of yearning and even closeness to Hashem. Indeed, how great is the power of simple faith in Hashem's desire to forgive us, heal

us, and draw us close — for it turns curses into blessings!

May we all experience a year of revealed health, blessings, and closeness to Hashem.

Hebrew Language in the Parsha



David Curwin
balashon.com

Parashat Ki Tavo includes a list of curses that Israel will receive if they are not loyal to G-d. One of those curses is a number of diseases (Devarim 28:22):

...וְיִכְאֶה הַבָּשָׂרָה וְבַקְדַּתְתָּ וְבַלְקַדְתָּ...

The verse states that “G-d will strike you with” three diseases. There are several suggested translations for them. The first, שְׁמֹרֶת, is usually translated as either “consumption” or the more recent name, “tuberculosis.” Its name may come from the root בָּלֵחַ, meaning “to sweep away,” because of the way it swept away its victims.

The other two terms, לִלְקַת and לִלְקָה, are harder to translate, since both roots, קָרַח and לִלְקָה, refer to “burning” or “flame.” So, some translations and commentaries for this verse say that one means “fever”

and the other “inflammation,” and others reverse that identification.

In modern Hebrew, לִלְקַת means “malaria,” which is usually accompanied with a high fever. The root קָרַח, means “to kindle,” and can also mean “to drill” (perhaps originally due to an association with making fire by rubbing.) Another word from the same root is אֲקָרָה. Today it means “pistol, revolver,” but in the Tanakh (Yeshayahu 54:12) it is the name of a precious stone. It was traditionally identified with carbuncle, which in Latin meant “glowing ember.” This association with fire led Eliezer Ben-Yehuda in 1986 to give it to a weapon that shoots (fires) using firepower.

Today לִלְקַת means inflammation (fever is the simple word חַם). The root לִלְקָה is found in such words as חַלְקִיךְ – “to light, to kindle,” – פְּלִיקָה – “flammable,” and פְּלִקָּה

– “fuel, petrol.” However, there are also verses in the Tanakh where the root means “to chase, pursue,” such as in Bereishit 31:36 – מה עָפָתִי, כִּי לִלְקַת אָתָּה – “What is my sin that you should pursue me”. Some say that the meanings “to burn” and “to chase” are unrelated. Others either say that the original meaning was to burn, and the concept of “chasing” came later – in the sense of “hot pursuit,” or first meaning was “to chase,” and later came the idea of burning, because of the way the fire chases the wick.

One common aspect to all these disease words is their suffix ח. This appears in other biblical diseases (like צָרָעָה), and was used to create the names for diseases identified in modern times, such as – שְׁגָבָה – “influenza” and צָרָבָה – “jaundice, hepatitis.”

Parsha Riddle



Reb Leor Broh
Mizrachi Melbourne

I am an object that appears 4 times in the Parsha. The Torah uses a name for me that is not used anywhere else in Tanach. What am I?

Answer to the Parsha Riddle

There is Solomon's couch, Encircled by sixty warriors Of the
warriors of Israel,
One Midrash on this verse says that the 60 warriors refers to the 60
letters of the 3 verses making up the Birchat Kohanim (15+20+25), that
the Baal Hatatur notes that the Gematria of 60 is 60. This alludes to
the Rabbinic requirement of bringing at least 1/60th of the Bikurim
to the basket twice in the Mitzvah of Bikurim (26:2).
The basket appears 4 times in the Parsha, each time by the name נזב.

בְּנֵי נְזֵבָה, נְזֵבָה נְזֵבָה, נְזֵבָה נְזֵבָה, נְזֵבָה
In Shir Hashirim (3:7) the verse reads:-

section (28:5) & (28:17).
It appears twice in the section containing the blessings and curses
produced to the kohen.
The Baal Hatatur notes that the Gematria of 60 is 60. This alludes to
the Rabbinic requirement of bringing at least 1/60th of the Bikurim
to the basket twice in the Mitzvah of Bikurim (26:2).
The basket appears 4 times in the Parsha, each time by the name נזב.



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CALIFORNIA	Hari B'nai Zion Congregation Young Israel of St. Louis	North Shore Hebrew Academy Young Israel of Merrick NYC Department of Correction OU-JLIC at Binghamton University OU-JLIC at Cornell University Queens Jewish Center Stars of Israel Academy The Riverdale Minyan Vaad of Chevra Kadisha West Side institutional Synagogue Yeshiva University High School for Girls Young Israel of Hillcrest Young Israel of Jamaica Estates Young Israel of Lawrence-Cedarhurst Young Israel of New Rochelle Young Israel of North Woodmere Young Israel of Oceanside Young Israel of Scarsdale
COLORADO	DAT Minyan East Denver Orthodox Synagogue The Denver Kehillah	
CONNECTICUT	Beth David Synagogue Congregation Agudath Sholom Young Israel of West Hartford	
FLORIDA	Beth Israel Congregation Hebrew Academy RASG PlayHard PrayHard Congregation Torah Ohr Sha'arei Bina Torah Academy for Girls Young Israel of Hollywood-Ft. Lauderdale	
GEORGIA	Congregation Beth Jacob Congregation Ohr HaTorah	
HAWAII	Kehilat Olam Ejad Ganim	
ILLINOIS	Mizrachi–Religious Zionists of Chicago	
MARYLAND	Kemp Mill Synagogue Pikesville Jewish Congregation Bnai Jacob Shaarei Zion Congregation	
MASSACHUSETTS	Congregation Beth El Atereth Israel Congregation Kadimah-Toras Moshe Congregation Shaarei Tefillah Young Israel of Brookline	
MICHIGAN	Young Israel of Oak Park Young Israel of Southfield Congregation Kadimah-Toras Moshe	
MINNESOTA	Congregation Darchei Noam	
MISSOURI	Yeshivat Kadimah High School Nusach	
NEW HAMPSHIRE	Hillel at Dartmouth	
NEW JERSEY	Ahavas Achim Volunteer Chaplain Middlesex County Congregation AABJ&D Congregation Adath Israel of the JEC National Council of Young Israel Congregation Ahavat Achim Congregation Ahavath Torah Congregation Brothers of Israel Congregation Darchei Noam of Fair Lawn Congregation Etz Chaim of Livingston Congregation Israel of Springfield Congregation Ohr Torah Congregation Sons of Israel of Cherry Hill Ma Tov Day Camp Ohav Emeth Pal Foundation Shomrei Torah of Fair Lawn Synagogue of the Suburban Torah Center Yavneh Academy National Council of Young Israel Young Israel of Teaneck	
NEW YORK	Ramaz Ma'ayanot Yeshiva High School for Girls MTA - Yeshiva University High School for Boys Young Israel of Merrick Congregation Beth Torah Congregation Etz Chaim of Kew Gardens Hills Congregation Kehilath Jeshurun Congregation Ohab Zedek Great Neck Synagogue Iranian Jewish Center/Beth Hadassah Synagogue Irving Place Minyan Jewish Center of Atlantic Beach Kingsway Jewish Center Lincoln Square Synagogue Merkaz Yisrael of Marine Park	
OHIO	Beachwood Kehilla Congregation Sha'arei Torah Congregation Torat Emet Green Road Synagogue Fuchs Mizrachi School Heights Jewish Center	
PENNSYLVANIA	Shaare Torah Congregation	
SOUTH CAROLINA	Brit Sholom Beth Israel Congregation Dor Tikvah	
TENNESSEE	Baron Hirsch Congregation	
TEXAS	Mayerland Minyan Synagogue Robert M. Beren Academy United Orthodox Synagogues of Houston	
VIRGINIA	Keneseth Beth Israel	
WASHINGTON	Bikur Cholim-Machzikay Hadath Northwest Yeshiva High School Sephardic Bikur Holim Congregation	
VENEZUELA		
CARACAS	Ashkenazi Kehilla Mizrachi Venezuela	



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