

Potomac Torah Study Center
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NOTE: Devrei Torah presented weekly in Loving Memory of Rabbi Leonard S. Cahan z"l, Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Har Shalom, who started me on my road to learning almost 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his recent untimely death.

Devrei Torah are now Available for Download (normally by noon on Fridays) from www.PotomacTorah.org. Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah.

As with so many of the mitzvot in the Torah, the service of Bikkurim (ch. 26) goes back to a specific incident in the history of our people. When Yaakov left his family home to travel to his father's relatives in Haran, God came to him in a dream and promised that He would bring Yaakov back and give the land to his descendants (Bereshis 28:1-15). Yaakov vowed that if God did indeed protect him, enable him to prosper, and return to his family in peace, then he would establish a house for God and tithe to Him (28: 20-22).

Rabbi David Fohrman observes that although Yaakov did return to the land, he never had peace in his family. The family (with four wives and a dozen sons who were never all at peace with each other) ended up in Egypt, became slaves, and did not return for hundreds of years. God then freed B'Nai Yisrael from Paro, protected them for 40 years in the Midbar, and brought them into the land during the time of Yehoshua. For the first time, Yaakov's family was back in the land, at peace, and able to thank God for fulfilling the terms of Yaakov's prayer. As Yaakov's descendants, the people had the obligation to fulfill Yaakov's promise. Moshe directed them to bring the first fruits of their labor to the place that God would select, give it to the Kohen, set the basket on the alter, and recite a specific text. This text, which must be recited in Hebrew, is familiar to all of us: "An Aramean tried to destroy my forefather. He descended to Egypt and sojourned there, few in number, and there he became a nation – great, strong, and numerous." The Egyptians mistreated us. We cried out to Hashem. The God of our forefathers took us out of Egypt with a strong hand and with an outstretched hand. . . (Devarim 26:5-10). This ceremony recognizes our connection back to our Patriarchs and the obligations we all have to the promises that our ancestors made to Hashem. We perform this ceremony each year at our Seder, and it is the same promise that we had to fulfill with first fruits in Israel.

Rabbi Yehoshua Singer (below) quotes Rashi in explaining that only on that day, near the end of Moshe's life, did Moshe feel that B'Nai Yisrael really understood the message of Hashem's miracles. The key for Moshe was when he gave a Torah to the tribe of Levi and charged them with passing it down to future generations, all the other tribes asked for their own copies of the Torah as well – so they would have proof that they also had a part in the Torah. What we learn from Rashi is that God's greatest wish was for each Jew to connect with Hashem. During the entire period of the Exodus, God was waiting for the people to ask for a personal connection with Him – the request that each tribe made on that day. As Rav Kook explains (below), the Bikkurim ceremony was a way for each individual to connect his private activities, the fruits of his labor, to the nation's holiest aspirations.

As we go through Elul and come closer to the High Holy Days, Moshe's words reinforce the message of teshuvah. God is always present in our lives. We must search for Him, because God hides His face. God exists in a different dimension, a different world than us. We could not survive in God's world. To appreciate God, we must look at the miracles that surround us every day and realize that they are gifts from Hashem. God judges us during the High Holy Days and sets the course of our lives for the coming year. The proper attitude is for each of us to feel that we are at a tipping point, where one more mitzvah could save us or one more sin could push us over the other way. God is always watching and waiting for us to include Him in our lives. This message is the lesson of Bikkurim, as it is of so much that we read in Devarim and study (especially during Elul).

My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, recognized that humans cannot perform all the mitzvot perfectly, and every human has room to improve. He emphasized that it was never sufficient to be satisfied with the status quo. An important message of Elul and of the High Holy Days is that we should look for ways to improve each day and each year. Select a mitzvah to improve and work on adding that mitzvah. Gradually over time, add additional mitzvot. This process improves ones life – an important lesson of teshuvah.

Please daven for a Refuah Shlema for Nossan ben Pessel, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Eli ben Hanina, Yoram HaKohen ben Shoshana, Gedalya ben Sarah, Mordechai ben Chaya, Baruch Yitzhak ben Perl, David Leib HaKohen ben Sheina Reizel, Zev ben Sara Chaya, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, HaRav Dovid Meir ben Chaya Tzippa; Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Amoz ben Tziviah, Reuven ben Masha, Moshe David ben Hannah, Meir ben Sara, Yitzhok Tzvi ben Yehudit Miriam, Yaakov Naphtali ben Michal Leah, Ramesh bat Heshmat, Rivka Chaya bat Leah, Zissel Bat Mazal, Chana Bracha bas Rochel Leah, Leah Fruma bat Musa Devorah, Hinda Behla bat Chaya Leah, Nechama bas Tikva Rachel, Miriam Chava bat Yachid, and Ruth bat Sarah, all of whom greatly need our prayers. Note: Beth Sholom has additional names, including coronavirus victims, on a Tehillim list.

Hannah & Alan

**Drasha: Parshas Ki Savo: Man's Search for Meaning
[Supreme Spirituality of Bafoofsticks]**
by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky © 1999

[Please remember Mordechai ben Chaya for a Mishebarach!]

This week's portion discusses the entry into the land of Israel and the responsibilities that are intrinsically tied with its inheritance. There are countless blessing mentioned that follow a Torah lifestyle and unfortunately myriad curses when those values are abandoned.

But after the litany of blessing and curses, Moshe tells the nation, "you have seen everything that Hashem did before your eyes in the land of Egypt to Pharaoh and all his servants and to all the land. Your eyes beheld the great signs and wonders, but Hashem did not give you a heart to comprehend, eyes to see, or ears to hear until this day" (Deuteronomy 29:2-3). Moshe was obviously referring to the day that the Jews received a Torah comprehension of events. But it defies logic. After all, what does one need to understand about wonders? Water turning to blood, supernatural invasions of wild animals, locusts, and fire-filled hail need no rocket scientist to fathom G-d's power. Surely the splitting of the sea is as amazing an event that will marvel one's eyes and stir the senses of any people.

What then does Moshe mean when he tells the nation that Hashem "did not give you a heart to comprehend, eyes to see, or ears to hear until this day" ?

Rav Noach Weinberg, dean of Aish HaTorah Institutions, tells the story of the young man who came to him in search of spiritual meaning.

The young man entered the portals of Yeshiva Aish HaTorah for a few days and then decided to leave the yeshiva in his quest for spiritual meaning across the Land of Israel. The student stopped at synagogues in Meah Shearim, visited the holy sites in Tiberias and Tzefat, and after two weeks of spiritual-hunting returned to Jerusalem and headed straight back to the Yeshiva.

"Rabbi Weinberg," he exclaimed. "I spent two weeks in travelling the length and breadth of Israel in search of spirituality, and I want you to know that I found absolutely nothing!"

Rabbi Weinberg just nodded. "You say you traveled the entire country and did not find any spirituality?"

“Yes sir,” came the resounding reply. “None whatsoever!”

“Let me ask you,” continued the Rabbi, “how did you find the Bafoofsticks?”

“Bafoofsticks?” countered the student. What’s a Bafoofstick?”

“That’s not the point,” responded the rabbi, “I just want to know how you feel about them.”

“About what?

“The Bafoofsticks”

The young man looked at the rabbi as if he had lost his mind. He tried to be as respectful as he could under the circumstances. “Rabbi!” he exclaimed in frustration, “I’d love to tell you how the Bafoofsticks were. I’d even spend the whole day discussing Bafoofsticks with you, but frankly I have no idea what in the world is a Bafoofstick!” Rabbi Weinberg smiled. He had accomplished his objective. “Tell me,” he said softly. “And you know what spirituality is?”

Moshe explains to the nation that it is possible to be mired in miracles and still not comprehend the greatness that surrounds you. One can experience miraculous revelations but unless he focuses his heart and mind he will continue to lead his life uninspired as before.

In fact, even blessings need to be realized. In offering blessing the Torah tells us, “the blessings will be upon you and they will reach you” (Deuteronomy 28:2). If blessings are upon us of course they reach you! Why the redundancy? Once again the Torah teaches us that it is possible to be surrounded by blessing and not realize it. There are people who are surrounded by health, wealth, and great fortune, but their lives are permeated in misery. They have the blessing, but it has not reached them.

We need more than physical or even spiritual blessing. We need more than experiencing miraculous events. It is not enough to see miracles or receive the best of fortune. We must bring them into our lives and into our souls. Then we will be truly blessed.

Good Shabbos!

To Declare and To Confess

by Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2011, 2020

Ki Tavo opens with two rituals: the bringing of the first fruit, the bikkurim, where one declares his gratitude for God’s goodness, and the dispensing of the tithes at the end of three years where one states that he has dispensed these tithes according to the law. Both of these rituals consist of the bringing of agricultural gifts and the recital of a declaration. Given these parallels, it is interesting and initially surprising to note that the Rabbis treated the two declarations quite differently. First, there is the naming. One is called a mikra, a recital. The other is called a viduy, a confessional. The mishna in Sotah teaches yet another difference:

The following are said in any language: ... the viduy of the tithes...

The following are said only in Hebrew: the declaration of bikkurim... (Mishna Sotah 7:1-2)

While the viduy can be said in any language, the Bikkurim Declaration can only be said in Hebrew. These two differences parallel one another. A mikra, a recital, suggests a fixed, formal text, a text that should be said in the official language, Hebrew. In fact, mikra comes from the same root as kra, a verse, and actually suggests the reading of a verse, which would naturally be in Hebrew. A viduy, a confessional, on the other hand, suggest a personal declaration, something whose language, if not the very text itself, would not be fixed and would be expected to be in the reciter’s native language. While the text is fixed for viduy as well, the use of any language reflects the more personal nature of this recital.

It seems that there are different types of experiences and different types of declarations. There are those experiences that are fundamentally private and individual, but that then need to be linked to the larger community. Then there are experiences that are fundamentally communal, and the challenge is for each individual to find his or her personal connection. And then there are experiences which are fundamentally personal and should remain personal.

An example of the first type is the feeling of gratitude that one experiences after a year of hard labor in the field has finally produced its first fruit. Each farmer's struggles and challenges are different from his neighbor's, each one is dealing with different quality and amount of land, different tools and farmhands, different infestations, and with different family dynamics and responsibilities. The feeling of gratitude here is very personal – it was his sweat and his prayers, with God's help, that finally resulted in these fruit. Such a person comes to the Temple with this personal connection: "I declare today... that I have come to the land... and now, behold I have brought the first of the fruit which the Lord has given me." (Devarim 26:3 and 10). The work that this person has to do is to find a way to connect his experience with the larger collective narrative. His blessing is a result of his hard work and his prayers, but it is also a result of a blessing that God has given, and a relationship that God has with, the entire People. Hence the first verse ends "... that I have come to the land which the Lord has sworn to our fathers to give to us." And hence the narrative in the middle starts in the first person singular, but quickly proceeds to the first person plural: "A wandering Armenian was my father... and the Egyptians did evil unto us and afflicted us and placed upon us hard labor. And we cried out... and God took us out of Egypt... and brought us to this land..." (ibid., verses 5-9). To the gratitude for God's goodness to the individual has to be added the gratitude for God's goodness to the People.

This same recital, however, also serves the opposite function when it is used in a different context. For it is this selection of verses that is used as the basis for the mitzvah of relating the story of the Exodus on the first night of Pesach. The challenge on that night is not to connect the personal to the collective, but the collective to the personal. That night is devoted to the retelling of the foundational story of the People. It – unlike the bringing of bikkurim – is done by the entire People at the same time. And it is a story that did not come from each individual's personal experience, but rather from the past events that occurred to a nation. The challenge there is to find how to connect this national story to one's own personal narrative. How does all of this relate to me? The Torah stresses the importance of giving this story a personal perspective: "And you shall tell your (sing.) child on that day saying, 'It was for this that the Lord acted for me (sing.) when I left Egypt.'" (Shemot 13:8). It is for this reason that we drop the personal declaration: "I declare today..." and start rather with our point of departure, the communal story. However, the mitzvah of this night is to tell the communal story and personalize it: doresh m'arami oved avi, one expounds from the verse: "A wandering Armenian was my father." (Mishna Pesachim 10:4). The mitzvah here is not to "recite from 'A wandering Armenian'" (Mishna Bikkurim 3:6), but to expound. It is for each individual to discuss and interpret the verses, the story, in a way that makes sense to him or her, in a way that it connects to their own personal narrative.

And then there are times where the experience begins at the personal level and should remain at the personal level. A confession, a taking stock of oneself and one's actions, is – both in process and substance -unique to each individual. It is also something that should remain private: "King David said: 'Let not my sins be recorded, as it says, 'Happy is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered'" (Psalms 32:1; Yoma 86b). Publicizing one's confession risks turning it into an exhibitionist act and a matter of public concern at a time when – both out of respect for the individual and to do the real work that is required – it should remain private and personal. Of course, one should never fully remove him or herself from the collective. After the hard work of confessing is done, one returns to acknowledging his or her place among the People and God's relationship with the entire People: "Look down from your holy abode, from the Heaven, and bless your People, Israel, and the land that you have given us..." (Devarim 26:15).

It is because this experience is personal and private that a person can also take pride in his or her accomplishments: "I have listened to the voice of the Lord, my God. I have acted according to everything that You have commanded me" (Devarim 26:14). Why, in fact, is this called a confessional if a person is listing all of the good things he or she has done? The answer is that the process of confessing, the process of teshuva, does not just consist in our owning up to our sins and shortcomings. If a person only focuses on the bad, he can become laden with guilt and unable to move on. A person has to first give him or herself credit and recognition for the good, for the fact that he or she has "done everything (or most of the things) that You have commanded me." This will give the person the strength to work on his sins and shortcomings, and the encouragement to further develop and act on these strengths in the future. And if a person is being deeply honest with himself, and therefore prepared to own up to both the good and the bad, then just as the person recognizes that he deserves to be punished for his sins, he is entitled to recognize that he deserves to be rewarded for all of his good deeds: "Look down... and bless your People, Israel."

As we approach the period of saying selichot, where every day we make a recital of viduy, a confessional of our sins, let us take a moment's pause to think about how to make this viduy a truly personal one. The liturgical viduy is a fixed text, written in Hebrew, written in the collective voice, and listing very generic sins. While some of our teshuva is a collective experience, perhaps particularly the confessionals that are done in the synagogue and as part of the repetition of the Amidah, let us make sure that we also find the time to do a personal viduy. Let us take the time to say a viduy in our own language, in the first person singular, listing our specific and particular shortcomings and sins. But if we are going to do this hard work, let us not forget to also do a viduy of all of our good deeds, our mitzvot, our accomplishments. By combining these two we will – with God's help – have the strength to work on our shortcomings and the encouragement to build on our strengths.

Shabbat Shalom!

Parshas Ki Savo -- Today!

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine © 2020 Teach 613

The assembly was a great one. Moshe stood before the people, flanked by the leaders and elders. Moshe called out, "Today you have become a people!"

One would expect this declaration to be made, perhaps, on the eve of the Exodus, or maybe as they stood at the foot of Mount Sinai. Remarkably, the day on which this occurred was unremarkable. Rashi explains that the message here is, "Every day, it shall be in your eyes as if today you have entered the covenant."

Too often, people say that Torah was for times of old. Moshe's message is that Torah is for the "Todays" of all generations.

This message is emphasized by another statement made in this week's Parsha: that the Torah should be translated into 70 languages. The commentaries explain that this emphasizes that wherever a person finds him or herself, Torah is relevant.

Similarly, the Torah declares that Torah guidance shall be given to you by the mentor "that lives in your day." The Talmud wonders-- But of course, the mentors of the day would be the ones consulted! One cannot consult mentors of the past! The Talmud explains that the message is that we should not say that Torah guidance was only relevant in some other generation, when great sages lived, but not in ours. The Torah is saying that "the sages of your day" will be your leaders. To them, you shall turn for guidance.

But, in addition to saying that Torah is relevant today, I believe that the Torah is sharing a strategy for success with its emphasis of the word "Today." The Torah is advising us to live in the present. Too often, when the present gets difficult, we are tempted to live in the past or in the future. Certainly, one must have an eye on the past, to learn from it, and realize its implications. Certainly, one must have an eye on the future, and understand where today's developments will direct us. But, ultimately, we need to live in the "Today."

Sometimes people find themselves living in the past. They recognize mistakes they or others have made, and can't seem to get over them. The concept of "Today!" means that we recognize today as a time staged well by the past, but a day that stands alone as a day of opportunity to try our best within the parameters and limitations which have been set.

Likewise, when the going is difficult, some people will project to some time in the future, and begin to live that time. While this technique might be helpful, and may actually be wisely recommended in some cases by a mental health professional, it is not a style of living that is meant to be the consistent way to live. Our task is to live "Today."

In years past, an expression often heard in the Jewish world when the going got tough was "Oh, don't worry, Moshiach is coming." I have no doubt that Moshiach is coming. I also realize that sometimes the situation is so hard that only tapping into our core belief of ultimate redemption can nurture us through. But, the consistent demand of Torah is not to live in the past or the future, but rather to meet the challenges of today with prayer, strategy, and fortitude.

In the time of the COVID pandemic in which we live, similar challenges have presented themselves. Some live in the future, when a vaccine will be safely shared with all. While I surely hope that will be soon, basing life on a vaccine that does not yet exist is not called living “today.” There are others who live in the past. They live as life was before the pandemic-- as if the pandemic is over. That too, I believe, is not called living “today.” Living “today,” may not take on one monolithic look for all, but it does incorporate and address the complex and challenging “today” in which we live.

As schools and yeshivos open, each with its own strategy in place, as shuls prepare for the Holidays each in their own way, and as parents grapple with standards for their children to interact with others, we pray that the decisions we make will be wise and blessed ones.

And on a personal level, as we approach Rosh Hashana and take stock of our own lives and what we would like to focus on in the coming year, it is so appropriate to live “today.” Living with guilt or anger of the past is something we need to work beyond. The stage has been set for today, to live today the best way we can. Likewise, while our yearnings for the ultimate redemption are in our hearts and on our lips, we live “today,” in the present, and our tasks are many; the needs are great.

We applaud the many who have taken life “one day at a time,” persevering through uncertain and complex times. Those in health care who stood and continue to stand at their watch, those in leadership, and those devoted to communal work whose decisions and fortitude affect so many. The stage of life is currently set with great complexity, but it is also laden with gifts of great opportunity. That is probably why, by the way, “today” is called “the present.”

With best wishes for a wonderful Shabbos.

Godliness and "Fraudliness"—Thoughts for Parashat Ki Tavo

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel*

“...for you will keep the commandments of the Lord your God and walk in His ways.” (Devarim 28:9)

The Torah presents us with a remarkable challenge: to walk in God’s ways. But how does one do this? How are we to become Godly people?

The classic rabbinic interpretation is: Just as God is compassionate, you be compassionate. Just as God is gracious, you be gracious. Walking in God’s ways entails demonstrating empathy for others; being sincere and thoughtful. At the root of these qualities is: humility. A person must have self-respect, but not be egotistical. One should reflect a religious attitude that is internal, deep, and humble.

Rabbi Hayyim Palachi, a sage of 19th century Izmir, pointed out that to “walk in His ways” entails positive action. It is not enough to feel empathy for the poor, or to wait for a needy person to come to you to ask for help; rather, you must “walk” and actively pursue opportunities to help others. The hallmark of a religious person is good and upright action.

Think of the genuinely pious people you have known in your lives. Think of those special individuals who fulfilled the challenge of walking in God’s ways. When I recall such individuals, I am struck by their natural religiosity, their inconspicuous piety. They served God and their fellow human beings with simplicity, without expectation of thanks or reward. They shunned publicity. They were not “play actors,” but conducted themselves in a heartfelt, genuine manner.

Jewish folklore speaks of 36 hidden righteous people upon whom the world depends. These 36 are “hidden,” even to themselves. They do not think of themselves as being extraordinary and would blush to learn that they were indeed among these 36 special people. Genuinely righteous people do not seek the limelight, do not want their photographs plastered on billboards or published in the newspapers. If they are public personalities, they nevertheless shy away from self-aggrandizement and excessive publicity. They see themselves as servants of the Lord; they keep their egos in check.

Real Godliness is—real, honest, authentic. The opposite, though, is “fraudliness.” Religious “fraudliness” is characterized by ego-centrism, lack of empathy, lack of humility. “Fraudliness” is manifested in calling attention to one’s supposed religiosity, in using religion as a tool for self-promotion and ego-gratification. Just as Godliness inspires and elevates us, “fraudliness” repels us and offends us.

In his book, "A City in its Fullness," the Israeli Nobel-prize winning author S. Y. Agnon writes of a conversation between two men who attended prayer services led by a reader with a beautiful voice. The marvel, though, wasn't his voice. Both men had experienced something much deeper than the aesthetic pleasure of hearing a pleasant voice. "It wasn't a voice we heard; it was prayer."

The leader of prayers with a beautiful voice impacted on worshippers because he was able to pray sincerely, to transcend the beauty of his own voice. His chanting inspired the congregation because it lifted them spiritually, it brought them to a higher dimension beyond the egotism of a good voice. His voice presented the words of prayer; but his prayer emerged not from his voice but from his soul.

Such is the nature of Godliness: to use our God-given talents to raise ourselves and others to a more spiritual level of perception.

"Fraudliness" is —fraudulent. It is pretend religion. It is egotism dressed in the cloak of religion.

Godliness is—Godly. It is genuine, humble, compassionate and honest.

The Torah challenges us: "...for you will keep the commandments of the Lord your God and walk in His ways." (Devarim 28:9)

This is a significant challenge. The way we respond defines whether we are on the road to Godliness or "fraudliness."

* Jewishideas.org. **The Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals has experienced a significant drop in donations during the pandemic.** The Institute needs our help to maintain and strengthen our Institute. Each gift, large or small, is a vote for an intellectually vibrant, compassionate, inclusive Orthodox Judaism. You may contribute on our website jewishideas.org or you may send your check to Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, 2 West 70th Street, New York, NY 10023. Ed.: Please join me in helping the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals at this time.

Parshas Ki Savo

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer*

One of the most fundamental elements of repentance and growth is recognizing Hashem's love for us, the depth of His relationship with us and the strength of His commitment to us. A relationship is always a two way street. In order to truly devote ourselves to Hashem's will, we have to know that Hashem cares about us.

Rash"i underscores this principle at the end of this week's Parsha. Moshe tells the Jewish people that only at the end of the forty years of travel through the desert had Hashem given us "a heart to understand" Hashem's miracles. (Devarim 28:3) Rash"i explains that the understanding being referred to is the recognition not only of the miracles themselves, but of the purpose and meaning of the miracles. Only now did we recognize the kindness of the Holy One, Blessed is He, and to cling to Him. Rash"i is stating clearly that our desire to connect with G-d and be close to Him should be rooted in our recognition of His kindness.

This is even more clear when understood in the context of the moment. Where did Moshe see that the Jewish people had now reached this level of understanding? Rash"i tells us that this was the day when Moshe had finished writing the entire Torah and had entrusted it to the tribe of Levi and charged them with ensuring the preservation and transmission of Torah to future generations. The rest of the nation came to Moshe with a concern that in future generations the tribe of Levi may claim that the Torah was only given to them, and not to the other tribes. Moshe then wrote a Sefer Torah for each tribe. Upon hearing this concern that Torah should remain with their descendants for all generations, Moshe rejoiced and said "Now I see that you are clinging to G-d and want G-d." Upon seeing that we wanted that connection to last, Moshe understood that we had truly recognized the message of the miracles. Apparently, the only way we could have reached such a depth of commitment to G-d, was if we first understood the depth of His love and commitment to us.

Hashem's love for us is far greater than we can appreciate. Recognizing this is the first step of growth. The Talmud (Avodah Zora 5) highlights for us just how deep Hashem's love for us truly is. The Talmud explains that just as Moshe's praise for our recognition was based on us clearly expressing our recognition, so too Moshe's statement that until then

we had not recognized Hashem's miracles was based on what we had displayed. When we stood at Har Sinai and received the first two commandments directly from Hashem, we were overcome with awe and reverence for G-d. Sensing that the experience was more than we could bear to repeat, we asked Moshe to tell us the rest of the commandments. Hashem then declared "Who would give that they should have this heart to revere Me and keep my commandments for all time?!" Moshe was now rebuking the nation and telling them that they had been ungrateful then, and it was only today that they had become appreciative of Hashem's kindness to love Him in return. We should have responded to Hashem's declaration and said "You give it to us!" Moshe's rebuke is rather difficult to understand. How can we say that we were ungrateful because we didn't ask Hashem to give us more?

Moshe was telling us that had we really understood the message of Hashem's miracles, we would have understood that G-d's greatest wish in this world is for us to connect with Him. His love and commitment to us is boundless. From that perspective, when G-d said "Who would give" we would have understood that He was yearning to give us that relationship – He was just waiting for us to want the relationship enough to ask. It was only because we didn't recognize Hashem's kindness that we did not realize that He was waiting for us to ask.

As we approach the High Holidays and seek to inspire ourselves and to find ways to grow and to further our commitment to Torah and mitzvos, we need to first appreciate that this is a commitment to our Creator. The Creator who forms and maintains all of this massive, complex world for each and every one of us.

* Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD.

Ki Tavo: [place holder]
by Rabbi Moshe Rube*

[Rabbi Rube hopes to return with a Dvar Torah for next Shabbat]

* Rabbi, Knesseth Israel Congregation, Birmingham, AL

Rav Kook Torah **Ki Tavo: Two Paths of Bikkurim**

Fresh and Dried Fruits

The mitzvah of bringing the first fruits (Bikkurim) to the Temple, the spiritual focal point of the nation, contains an important message for our own service of God. The Bikkurim offering demonstrates how each individual is able to connect his private activities — the fruits of his labors — to the nation's holiest aspirations.

The Mishnah explains how the first fruits were brought to the Temple:

"Those close to Jerusalem would bring fresh figs and grapes, while those further away would bring dried figs and raisins." (Bikkurim 3:3)

The Mishnah describes the Bikkurim offerings of two groups of people: those who lived near to Jerusalem and could bring fresh fruits; and those who lived further away, and had to be content with bringing an offering of dried fruit that could withstand the long journey.

Two Paths: Torah and Prophecy

These two situations — living in close proximity to Jerusalem and living some distance away -- correspond to two spiritual paths the Jewish people have taken throughout history: the path of Torah and the path of prophecy, each with its own advantages and benefits.

The path of Torah is paved through the development of the Oral Law, as the nation applies Halachah to all aspects of life. The fruit of these legalistic efforts, however, may seem dry and uninspiring. This is particularly true when this path is compared to that of prophecy, which deals with Divine wisdom and lofty matters, and is closely connected to meditative prayer and the Torah's mystical teachings.

When the Jewish people lived in the Land of Israel and the Shechinah dwelled in their midst, their spiritual world centered primarily on prophetic enlightenment. We have been promised that the gift of prophecy will return to us - and on an even higher level — thus providing a lofty holiness that engages the heart and soul with knowledge of God. When we will be able to guard this gift, we will merit it once more — when we are back in our land, close to God's Presence, and protected from the misguided beliefs of foreign nations.

However, after we were banished from our beloved homeland, it became necessary to take the second path - a path capable of retaining its special character, despite exile and dispersion. This is the path of Torah, as the Sages wrote: 'From the day the Temple was destroyed, the Holy One has only the four cubits of Halachah in His world' (Berachot 8a). The legal system of Halachah may appear to be dry and barren; but like the dried fruits of the Bikkurim offering, it contains hidden reserves of spiritual life and vitality. It is this path of Torah that preserved the Jewish people throughout the difficult challenges of a long and bitter exile.

Complementary Paths

The switch between the path of prophecy and the path of Torah took place during the Second Temple period, when prophecy ceased. In preparation for the exile that would follow, those spiritual forces of the nation that had previously focused on prophecy now concentrated their talents on the discipline of Halachah, developing and refining the study of Torah. These efforts enabled the Jewish people to survive as a separate nation in foreign lands, distinguished from other nations by an all-encompassing Halachic lifestyle.

These two paths are reflected in the paradigm of the Bikkurim offerings. Those close to the spiritual center prefer the delicious fresh fruits. However, the gifts from those living far away — dried figs and raisins that may appear to be shriveled and lifeless, but have the advantage of retaining their flavor despite the long journey — are also valued and beloved. Together, the two conduits of Torah and prophecy provide endurance and vitality for the nation's special service of God.

(Sapphire from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. II, p. 412.)

Ki Tavo (5771) – Freedom means telling the story © 2011 By Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, Former UK Chief Rabbi,*

Here's an experiment. Walk around the great monuments of Washington. There at the far end is the figure of Abraham Lincoln, four times life size. Around him on the walls of the memorial are the texts of two of the greatest speeches of history, the Gettysburg address and Lincoln's second inaugural:

"With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right. . ."

A little way away is the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial with its quotations from each period of the president's life as leader, most famously "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself."

Keep walking along the Potomac and you come to the Jefferson Memorial, modelled on the Pantheon at Rome. There too you will find, around the dome and on the interior walls, quotations from the great man, most famously from the Declaration of Independence: "We hold these truths to be self-evident . . ."

Now visit London. You will find many memorials and statues of great people. But you will find no quotations. The base of the statue will tell you who it represents, when he or she lived, and the position they occupied or the work they did, but no narrative, no quotation, no memorable phrases or defining words.

Take the statue of Winston Churchill in Parliament Square. Churchill was one of the greatest orators of all time. His

wartime speeches and broadcasts are part of British history. But no words of his are inscribed on the monument, and the same applies to almost everyone else publicly memorialized.

It's a striking difference. One society – the United States of America – tells a story on its monuments, a story woven out of the speeches of its greatest leaders. The other, England, does not. It builds memorials but it doesn't tell a story. This is one of the deep differences between a covenant society and a tradition-based society.

In a tradition-based society like England things are as they are because that is how they were. England, writes Roger Scruton, "was not a nation or a creed or a language or a state but a home. Things at home don't need an explanation. They are there because they are there."

Covenant societies are different. They don't worship tradition for tradition's sake. They do not value the past because it's old. They remember the past because it was events in the past that led to the collective determination that moved people to create the society in the first place. The Pilgrim Fathers of America were fleeing religious persecution in search of religious freedom.

Their society was born in an act of moral commitment, handed on to successive generations. Covenant societies exist, not because they have been there a long time, nor because of some act of conquest, nor for the sake of some economic or military advantage. They exist to honour a pledge, a moral bond, an ethical undertaking. That is why telling the story is essential to a covenant society. It reminds all citizens of why they are there.

The classic example of telling the story occurs in this week's parsha, in the context of bringing first fruits to Jerusalem.

The priest shall take the basket from your hands and set it down in front of the altar of the Lord your God. Then you shall declare before the Lord your God: "My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down into Egypt with a few people and lived there and became a great nation, powerful and numerous . . . So the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror and with signs and wonders. He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey; and now I bring the firstfruits of the soil that you, Lord, have given me." (Deut. 26: 4-10)

We all know the passage. Instead of saying it on Shavuot when bringing firstfruits, we now say it on Pesach as the central part of the Haggadah. What remains remarkable is that, even in biblical times, every member of the nation was expected to know the story of the nation, and recite it annually, and make it part of his or her personal memory and identity – "My father . . . so the Lord brought us out."

A covenant is more than a myth of origin – like the Roman story of Romulus and Remus or the English story of King Arthur and his knights. Unlike a myth, which merely claims to say what happened, a covenant always contains a specific set of undertakings that bind its citizens in the present and into the future.

Here for example is Lyndon Baines Johnson talking about the American covenant:

"They came here—the exile and the stranger— . . . They made a covenant with this land. Conceived in justice, written in liberty, bound in union, it was meant one day to inspire the hopes of all mankind; and it binds us still. If we keep its terms, we shall flourish."

Covenant societies – of which the USA is the supreme contemporary example – are moral societies, meaning not that their members are more righteous than others but that they see themselves as publicly accountable to certain moral standards that are part of the text and texture of their national identity. They are honouring the obligations imposed upon them by the founders.

Indeed, as the Johnson quotation makes clear, covenant societies see their very fate as tied up with the way they meet or fail to meet those obligations. "If we keep its terms, we shall flourish" – implying that if we don't, we won't. This is a way of thinking the West owes entirely to the book of Devarim, most famously in the second paragraph of the Shema:

If you faithfully obey the commands I am giving you today . . . then I will send rain on your land in its season . . . I will provide grass in the fields for your cattle, and you will eat and be satisfied. Be careful, lest you are enticed to turn away and worship other gods and bow down to them. Then the Lord's anger will burn against you, and he will shut up the

heavens so that it will not rain and the ground will yield no produce, and you will soon perish from the good land the Lord is giving you. (Deut. 11: 13-17)

Covenant societies are not ethnic nations bound by common racial origin. They make room for outsiders – immigrants, asylum seekers, resident aliens – who become part of the society by taking its story and making it their own, as Ruth did in the biblical book that bears her name (“Your people will be my people and your God my God”) or as successive waves of immigrants did when they came to the United States. Indeed conversion in Judaism is best understood not on the model of conversion to another religion such as Christianity or Islam, but as the acquisition of citizenship in a nation like the USA.

It is utterly astonishing that the mere act of telling the story, regularly, as a religious duty, sustained Jewish identity across the centuries, even in the absence of all the normal accompaniments of nationhood – land, geographical proximity, independence, self determination — and never allowed the people to forget its ideals, its aspirations, its collective project of building a society that would be the opposite of Egypt, a place of freedom and justice and human dignity, in which no human being is sovereign; in which God alone is king.

One of the most profound truths about the politics of covenant – the message of the first fruits’ declaration in this weeks parsha – is:

If you want to sustain freedom never stop telling the story.

* <https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation-5771-ki-tavo-freedom-means-telling-the-story/> Note: because Likutei Torah and the Internet Parsha Sheet, both attached by E-mail, normally include the two most recent Devrei Torah by Rabbi Sacks, when I include one of his Devrei Torah, I use something from an earlier year.

Blessings and Curses

By Adin Even-Israel (Steinsaltz)*

Blessings and Curses

Unlike Parshat Ki Tetzei, which has an abundance of laws, Parshat Ki Tavo contains few halachot. Instead, Parashat Ki Tavo is replete with curses.

The Talmud states, following the implication of the passage, “These shall stand to bless the people...and these shall stand for the curse”,¹ that at Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal there were two formulas. Those standing for the curse pronounced the curses as they appear in the Torah, and those standing for the blessing pronounced an opposite formula: “Blessed is he who does not make a graven or molten image,” “Blessed is he who does not dishonor his father and mother,” and so forth.²

If a “blessing formula” was in fact pronounced, why does the Torah cite only the curses and not use the positive language of the blessings? Why is the blessing formula only implied and not written in the Torah explicitly? While it is true that the Torah generally tends to be concise, positive language could still have been used, especially in light of the Talmud’s assertion that the Torah goes to great lengths, often employing circumlocutions, in order to use clean, decent language.³

Too Much Good

It is far simpler to create a curse than to create a blessing. This is not because people are generally wicked, but because the moment something diverges from its usual order, it is already a curse. Normally, there is more of a basis for curses than for blessings, because only the optimal state is considered a blessing. Whether it is too hot, too cold, or too rainy, if it is not perfect then it is a curse. Thus, the margin for the optimal is very narrow, and if conditions incline even slightly to one side, it is already no longer optimal. As the Talmud says, “Your people...can endure neither too much good nor too much -punishment”.⁴ Even if one is given more and more of something, he will not necessarily be better off.

The pauper says, “Give me neither poverty nor riches, but provide me with my daily bread”.⁵ That is to say, both a pauper and a wealthy person face unique problems and trials connected to their station. One should not strive for maximum

prosperity, because this does not guarantee that the situation will truly be better. In fact, after a little too much prosperity, it stops being pleasant; after a little more, it becomes unpleasant; and finally, it becomes painful. In anything concerning the physical pleasures of this world, there is a stage at which the more one receives, the more unpleasant it becomes.

In light of this, there is more of a basis for curses than for blessings in our world. But despite this, we have one powerful claim to make before G d when we pray for blessing: By now, all the curses described throughout Tanakh – those in Leviticus, those here in Deuteronomy, and those in Ezekiel – have all been fulfilled. I knew a woman who was the only girl to survive the Vilna Ghetto. She and her family were very far from Judaism, and she said that she was moved to return to observance when she encountered the Tokheha section in Parashat Bechukotai; she saw that everything that is written there came true. People did not think or believe that these things could come about, and the fact that all the curses came true caused her to experience a change of heart. While all the curses seem to have been realized, however, we are still waiting for the fulfillment of many of the blessings.

The Talmud relates that Rabbi Akiva and his colleagues once saw a fox emerging from the site of the Holy of Holies, and Rabbi Akiva laughed, saying, “So long as Uriah’s prophecy [‘Therefore shall Zion for your sake be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the House as the high places of the forest’]⁶ had not been fulfilled, I was afraid that Zechariah’s prophecy [‘Old men and women shall yet sit in the broad places of -Jerusalem’]⁷ might not be fulfilled. Now that Uriah’s prophecy has been fulfilled, it is quite certain that Zechariah’s prophecy will be fulfilled”.⁸

In this sense, we, too, should laugh. G d was faithful in bringing upon us the curses, so He will surely bring upon us the blessings as well. So long as all these things had not been fulfilled, one could say that it will happen in far-off times. But now that, in our times, curses that no one would have believed would occur have come about, the blessings, too, will surely be fulfilled.

Even the final curse, “There you will offer yourselves for sale to your enemies as slaves and maids, but there will be no buyer”⁹ – which no one would have believed could occur – we have witnessed in recent memory.

Leaving the Sheltered Environment

In this Parsha, as in other places in the Torah, many harsh things are described. Why are so many curses necessary? Why is it necessary to threaten the people with such dire consequences for disobedience? Why can’t the Torah always speak pleasantly?

Seeing as the Torah nevertheless frequently insists on expressing itself in the form of curses, apparently this is necessary. Although the Torah certainly contains its share of blessings, it is truly difficult to be a Jew, and the curse section written here only emphasizes just how difficult it is. While we can understand the need for both the carrot and the stick, it is still a great challenge to accept this reality.

One of the main purposes of yeshivas, beyond allowing students to study Torah for its own sake, is to prepare students for the future. Despite this, a yeshiva is essentially a closed place, a sheltered environment, and a yeshiva student cannot truly feel how difficult it is to be a Jew. In such an environment, one struggles primarily with subtleties and nuances of faith and Torah. To be sure, there are occasionally major struggles, but the challenges and temptations faced by a yeshiva student are immeasurably fewer than the temptations that exist outside. As a result, it is sometimes hard to leave such a sheltered environment, and because of this, many students indeed avoid leaving this shelter at all. However, when these students are forced to leave, for one reason or another, this becomes a moment of dangerous crisis.

There was a time when psychologists discouraged parents from telling their children frightening stories. Now, however, the opposite is encouraged; the claim is that if children never hear about the dark side of life, they will grow up with a distorted view of life. If we shield them from evil, telling them that the world is entirely delightful and everyone is good, they will have difficulty coping with the real world when they grow older.

Death, for example, is frightening, and there were societies – such as the kibbutzim of the past – that distanced children from any exposure to it. I once attended the funeral of a teacher in a certain kibbutz, and I didn’t see anyone under the age of twenty-three; they had all avoided coming. This attitude is an attempt to push aside the fact that such a thing exists.

A person like that who emerges from a sheltered environment and faces reality will have a harder time dealing with it. At

one stage or another, everyone encounters lies and deceit, and when a child grows up under the illusion that there are no thieves and liars in the world, the result may be a major personal crisis.

The Challenge

Despite the Torah's message that, "It is not in heaven...It is not beyond the sea...It is something that is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it",¹⁰ in our world it is hard to be a Jew. The Torah merely says that it is possible, that the Torah contains nothing that a person cannot live up to. But this does not mean that it is easy, because we live among human beings and not in a sheltered environment where there is almost no exposure to the evil inclination.

To be sure, our sages advise us that "if this repulsive scoundrel [the evil inclination] confronts you, drag him to the beit midrash",¹¹ but sometimes we forget that the scoundrel is with us in the beit midrash as well. As the Kotzker Rebbe once remarked, "this scoundrel" implies that there is yet another scoundrel: the one in the beit midrash.

All of this is not meant to frighten us. The purpose of the curses is to make us aware that following the Torah presents a great challenge, and the more we are exposed to the world, the greater the challenge becomes. It is a challenge that comes along with both blessings and curses. We must remain undaunted by these curses, rising to meet the challenge.

FOOTNOTES:

1. (Deut. 27:12–13)	6. (Mic. 3:12)
2. (Sota 32a)	7. (Zech. 8:4)
3. (Pesachim 3a)	8. (Makkot 24a)
4. (Taanit 23a)	9. (Deut. 28:68)
5. (Prov. 30:8)	10. (Deut. 28:68)
	11. (Deut. 28:68)

* Rabbi Adin Even-Israel (Steinsaltz) (1937-2020) was internationally regarded as one of the leading rabbis of this century. The author of many books, he was best known for his monumental translation of and commentary on the Talmud. To learn more visit his website.

An Insight on Parshat Ki Tavo: We Are One

By Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky*

We are One

Moses told the Jewish people, "When you enter the Land of Israel, you must take the first of all the fruit of the earth...and go to the place on which G-d will choose to rest His name i.e., the holy Temple. (Devarim 26:2)

This commandment, called Bikkurim, became operative only after the entire Jewish people were settled in their land. As can be seen in the Book of Joshua, this process took 14 years. Until the conquest and settlement of the land was complete, no one was obligated to bring their first fruits annually to the Temple.

The reason for this is because the ritual of the first fruits expresses our thankfulness for G-d's goodness, and as long as there remained even one Jew who had not yet received his portion in the Land of Israel, the people as a whole could not experience complete joy and thanksgiving.

The same applies to us today: As long as there is even a single Jew who is materially or spiritually deprived, the rest of us cannot experience complete joy. The material or spiritual plight of our fellow Jews -- and through them, the plight of all

humanity and creation in general -- should inspire us to action designed to remedy this situation.

– **Kehot's Daily Wisdom #1**

* **An Insight from the Rebbe.**

Gut Shabbos,
Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
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Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

A Nation of Storytellers

Howard Gardner, professor of education and psychology at Harvard University, is one of the great minds of our time. He is best known for his theory of “multiple intelligences,” the idea that there is not one thing that can be measured and defined as intelligence but many different things – one dimension of the dignity of difference. He has also written many books on leadership and creativity, including one in particular, *Leading Minds*, that is important in understanding this week’s parsha.[1]

Gardner’s argument is that what makes a leader is the ability to tell a particular kind of story – one that explains ourselves to ourselves and gives power and resonance to a collective vision. So Churchill told the story of Britain’s indomitable courage in the fight for freedom. Gandhi spoke about the dignity of India and non-violent protest. Margaret Thatcher talked about the importance of the individual against an ever-encroaching State. Martin Luther King told of how a great nation is colour-blind. Stories give the group a shared identity and sense of purpose.

Philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre has also emphasised the importance of narrative to the moral life. “Man,” he writes, “is in his actions and practice as well as in his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal.” It is through narratives that we begin to learn who we are and how we are called on to behave. “Deprive children of stories and you leave them unscripted, anxious stutters in their actions as in their words.”[2] To know who we are is in large part to understand of which story or stories we are a part.

The great questions – “Who are we?” “Why are we here?” “What is our task?” – are best answered by telling a story. As Barbara Hardy put it: “We dream in narrative, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticise, construct, gossip, learn, hate and love by narrative.” This is fundamental to understanding why Torah is the kind of book it is: not a theological treatise or a metaphysical system but a series of interlinked stories extended over time, from Abraham and Sarah’s journey from Mesopotamia to Moses’ and the Israelites’ wanderings in the desert. Judaism is less about truth as system than about truth as story. And we are part of that story. That is what it is to be a Jew.

A large part of what Moses is doing in the book of Devarim is retelling that story to the next generation, reminding them of what God

had done for their parents and of some of the mistakes their parents had made. Moses, as well as being the great liberator, is the supreme storyteller. Yet what he does in parshat Ki Tavo extends way beyond this.

He tells the people that when they enter, conquer and settle the land, they must bring the first ripened fruits to the central sanctuary, the Temple, as a way of giving thanks to God. A Mishnah in Bikkurim[3] describes the joyous scene as people converged on Jerusalem from across the country, bringing their first-fruits to the accompaniment of music and celebration. Merely bringing the fruits, though, was not enough. Each person had to make a declaration. That declaration became one of the best known passages in the Torah because, though it was originally said on Shavuot, the festival of first-fruits, in post-biblical times it became a central element of the Haggadah on seder night:

My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down into Egypt and lived there, few in number, there becoming a great nation, powerful and numerous. But the Egyptians ill-treated us and made us suffer, subjecting us to harsh labour. Then we cried out to the Lord, the God of our ancestors, and the Lord heard our voice and saw our misery, toil and oppression. So the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror and with signs and wonders. (Deut. 26:5-8)

Here for the first time the retelling of the nation’s history becomes an obligation for every citizen of the nation. In this act, known as *vidui bikkurim*, “the confession made over first-fruits,” Jews were commanded, as it were, to become a nation of storytellers.

This is a remarkable development. Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi tells us that, “Only in Israel and nowhere else is the injunction to remember felt as a religious imperative to an entire people.”[4] Time and again throughout Devarim comes the command to remember: “Remember that you were a slave in Egypt.” “Remember what Amalek did to you.” “Remember what God did to Miriam.” “Remember the days of old; consider the generations long past. Ask your father and he will tell you, your elders, and they will explain to you.”

The *vidui bikkurim* is more than this. It is, compressed into the shortest possible space, the entire history of the nation in summary form. In a few short sentences we have here “the patriarchal origins in Mesopotamia, the emergence of the Hebrew nation in the midst

of history rather than in mythic prehistory, slavery in Egypt and liberation therefrom, the climactic acquisition of the land of Israel, and throughout – the acknowledgement of God as lord of history.”[5]

We should note here an important nuance. Jews were the first people to find God in history. They were the first to think in historical terms – of time as an arena of change as opposed to cyclical time in which the seasons rotate, people are born and die, but nothing really changes. Jews were the first people to write history – many centuries before Herodotus and Thucydides, often wrongly described as the first historians. Yet biblical Hebrew has no word that means “history” (the closest equivalent is *divrei hayamim*, “chronicles”). Instead it uses the root *zachor*, meaning “memory.”

There is a fundamental difference between history and memory. History is “his story,”[6] an account of events that happened sometime else to someone else. Memory is “my story.” It is the past internalised and made part of my identity. That is what the Mishnah in Pesachim means when it says, “Each person must see themselves as if he (or she) personally went out of Egypt.”[7]

Throughout Devarim Moses warns the people – no less than fourteen times – not to forget. If they forget the past they will lose their identity and sense of direction and disaster will follow. Moreover, not only are the people commanded to remember, they are also commanded to hand that memory on to their children.

This entire phenomenon represents a remarkable cluster of ideas: about identity as a matter of collective memory; about the ritual retelling of the nation’s story; above all about the fact that every one of us is a guardian of that story and memory. It is not the leader alone, or some elite, who are trained to recall the past, but every one of us. This too is an aspect of the devolution and democratisation of leadership that we find throughout Judaism as a way of life. The great leaders tell the story of the group, but the greatest of leaders, Moses, taught the group to become a nation of storytellers.

You can still see the power of this idea today. As I point out in my book *The Home We Build Together*, if you visit the Presidential memorials in Washington you will see that

each one carries an inscription taken from their words: Jefferson's 'We hold these truths to be self-evident . . .', Roosevelt's 'The only thing we have to fear, is fear itself', Lincoln's Gettysburg Address and his second Inaugural, 'With malice toward none; with charity for all . . . Each memorial tells a story.'

London has no equivalent. It contains many memorials and statues, each with a brief inscription stating who it represents, but there are no speeches or quotations. There is no story. Even the memorial to Churchill, whose speeches rivalled Lincoln's in power, carries only one word: Churchill.

America has a national story because it is a society based on the idea of covenant. Narrative is at the heart of covenantal politics because it locates national identity in a set of historic events. The memory of those events evokes the values for which those who came before us fought and of which we are the guardians.

A covenantal narrative is always inclusive, the property of all its citizens, newcomers as well as the home-born. It says to everyone, regardless of class or creed: this is who we are. It creates a sense of common identity that transcends other identities. That is why, for example, Martin Luther King was able to use it to such effect in some of his greatest speeches. He was telling his fellow African Americans to see themselves as an equal part of the nation. At the same time, he was telling white Americans to honour their commitment to the Declaration of Independence and its statement that 'all men are created equal'.

England does not have the same kind of national narrative because it is based not on covenant but on hierarchy and tradition. England, writes Roger Scruton, "was not a nation or a creed or a language or a state but a home. Things at home don't need an explanation. They are there because they are there."^[8] England, historically, was a class-based society in which there were ruling elites who governed on behalf of the nation as a whole. America, founded by Puritans who saw themselves as a new Israel bound by covenant, was not a society of rulers and ruled, but rather one of collective responsibility. Hence the phrase, central to American politics but never used in English politics: "We, the people."

By making the Israelites a nation of storytellers, Moses helped turn them into a people bound by collective responsibility – to one another, to the past and future, and to God. By framing a narrative that successive generations would make their own and teach to their children, Moses turned Jews into a nation of leaders.

[1] Howard Gardner in collaboration with Emma Laskin, *Leading Minds: An Anatomy of Leadership*, New York, Basic Books, 2011.

[2] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, University of Notre Dame Press, 1981.

[3] Mishnah Bikkurim ch. 3.

[4] Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zachor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory*, Schocken, 1989, 9.

[5] Yerushalmi, *ibid.*, 12.

[6] This is a simple reminder not an etymology. Historia is a Greek word meaning inquiry. The same word comes to mean, in Latin, a narrative of past events.

[7] Mishnah Pesachim 10:5.

[8] Roger Scruton, *England, an Elegy*, Continuum, 2006, 16.

The Person in the Parsha

Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

In the Good Old Days

It was the kind of thing you would hear from old men. "Things just ain't the way they used to be." "This new generation is going to hell in a handbasket." "I remember when things were different and better, back in the good old days!"

Now that I am becoming a bit older myself, I find that I sometimes parrot some of those phrases. Increasingly, my attitude has become negative and critical of the contemporary world around me. It is at such moments that I feel convinced that things were indeed much better in the past, and certainly much different.

My tendency to value the past over the present is especially marked when it comes to reflecting upon leadership phenomena. It is easy to say that presidents and prime ministers were once great statesmen and that the individuals now holding those positions are at best mediocre. Authors, poets, artists, and even the composers of days gone by definitely seem superior to individuals currently in those roles.

It is especially in the area of religion that the past took on an aura of holiness, of grandeur, of purity, that seems to be totally absent in today's religious world. It is easy to come up with the names of fifteen or twenty outstanding rabbis in the previous generation or two, or even three. It is hard to find more than a few in today's generation.

Is this attitude, which I suspect is prevalent even among individuals far younger than me, fair? Is it correct? Or is it based upon nostalgic memories which distort the realities of the past, as well as the conditions of the present? Dare I even speculate that this attitude stems from a cynicism which, some would say, is typical of older people?

Personally, I have found correctives for this attitude in my own experience and in my Torah study.

My personal experience was fortunately blessed by my acquaintance with a number of older men, among whom I count my own and my wife's grandfathers, who all felt that the current generation was in many ways superior to the earlier generations that they knew. In their conversations, they not only did not glorify the past, but well remembered that past

Likutei Divrei Torah

generations had their own blemishes, some of which were quite severe.

This week's Torah portion, *Parshat Ki Tavo*, opens with the mitzva to bring the first fruits of one's new harvest to "the place where the Lord your God will choose to establish His name," (Deuteronomy 26:2), which we know eventually was designated as Jerusalem. The next verse continues, "You shall go to the kohen (priest) in charge at that time..." After reciting the proper recitations, the fruits were given to that kohen.

Rashi notes how very odd it is that we are told to bring those fruits to the kohen "in charge at that time." To what other kohen could we possibly have given them? To the kohen of a time gone by?

To those of us who were paying careful attention to the Torah portion that we read just two weeks ago, *Shoftim*, this question sounds very familiar. For in that parsha, we encountered two similar phrases, not with reference to the kohen, but with regard to the judges whom we consult.

Thus, we read that we were to "appear before...the magistrate in charge at that time, and present your problem." (Deuteronomy 17:9) Later in that same parsha, we learned that "the two parties to the dispute shall appear...before the magistrates in authority at that time." (Deuteronomy 19:17)

The Talmud derives a powerful lesson from these three phrases which all stress "...at that time." The lesson is that we are not to denigrate the judges or priests of our time. We are not to say that the judges of yore were well-suited to their positions, but that the judges of our own times are inferior and indeed unqualified. Jephtha, the leader of a rag tag group of warriors, was for his generation every bit as qualified to be a judge as was Samuel, the prophet of a later time.

I have always understood this teaching to mean that it is futile to compare the leaders of one generation to those of another. Each generation has its own special character and unique requirements, and the leaders who emerge, especially in the religious sphere, are precisely the ones most appropriate for that generation. As Rav Kook, the first Chief Rabbi of the Land of Israel whose yahrzeit we recently commemorated, put it, "Every generation shines with its own qualities."

If this lesson applies to what our attitude should be to the judges of our time, how much more it applies to what should be our proper attitude toward the contemporary kohen. We are not to say that the kohanim of yesteryear were spiritually worthy of offering the priestly blessings, whereas today's kohen is unqualified to do so. Rather, we ought to follow Maimonides' ruling that everyone born a kohen is fit to utter the priestly blessing

"even if he is not learned, not punctilious in his observance of mitzvot, and even if there are persistent rumors about him." (Mishneh Torah, Laws of Prayer 15:6)

I close by quoting the words of the wisest of old men, indeed, the wisest of all men, King Solomon:

"The end of a matter is better than the beginning of it.
Better a patient spirit than a haughty spirit...
Don't say, 'How has it happened that former times were better than these?'
For is not wise of you to ask that question." (Ecclesiastes 7:8-10)

Dvar Torah Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

Invite everyone to the simcha...

Here are two ways to create happiness! Parashat Ki Tavo commences with the mitzvah of 'bikkurim' the bringing of the first fruits in Temple times. The person bringing the fruits would then make a declaration in the temple through which they would recognise all of their tribulations in the past and the way in which Hashem has brought them to that point. And then the Torah says 'you must treat this occasion as a Simcha, as a joyous event – "v'samacha b'chol ha'tov asher natan lecha Hashem Elokeicha uleveteicha", you must rejoice with all the good that the Lord, your God has brought for you and your household, "ata, v'ha'levi, v'ha'ger asher b'kirbecha", you and the Levi, and the stranger in your midst.

But, how do you fulfil – 'v'samacha' – make this into a Simcha? Be happy? Hakatav VehaKabbala gives this perush: He says: sing! Sing songs and include others, like the Levi'im and the strangers. Widen the gathering, because ruach is attained through many people singing together in a spiritual way.

Ibn Ezra, however, gives a very different perush. He highlights the fact that our celebration includes the Levi and the Ger. The Levi who can't earn a 'parnassah' – a living, who works in the temple and therefore needs your support. The stranger in your midst who may be struggling financially. If you include them in your celebration, share your food with them, make them happy, then you, as a result, will become happy.

According to the Ibn Ezra, therefore, happiness is not a state of mind that you achieve by going out of your way to stimulate it by singing. Rather, says the Ibn Ezra, it will happen automatically! It will happen because you are sharing what you have with others, you are including them in your Simcha, and when you give in life, that is how you receive!

So therefore from the mitzvah of Bikkurim we learn, that when it comes to our own simchas, our joy is enhanced by including many others in our celebration, and in life, it is by giving

what we have to others that we ourselves become happy.

OTS Dvar Torah

An Abundance of All Things

Dr. Hannah Hashkes

Parashat Ki Tavo sets an opposition between gratitude and loyalty to the Torah on the one hand and ungratefulness and neglect on the other hand. The Parasha begins with the mitzvot of Bikkurim and Ma'aser, and spells out the prayer that accompanies their presentation. **מִקְרָא בִּיכּוּרִים** emphasizes God's directing hand in Israel's arrival at freedom and bounty, while the prayer that follows completion of Ma'aser acknowledges the bond with Hashem through the mitzvot. But the following parts of the Parasha, the ceremony of Ebal and Grizim and the passage of rebuke, teach that prosperity that is the result of gratitude and loyalty is lost when Israel does not recognize to whom they owe it.

One of the noted failures in of the rebuke passage is the failure to serve Hashem "בְּשִׁמְחָה", "in joyfulness, and with gladness of heart, by reason of the abundance of all things" (28:47). This verse chimes the verse following the Bikkurim prayer for its use of the same term, "בְּשִׁמְחָה" – you should "rejoice in all the good which the LORD thy God has given you" (26: 11). This repetition suggests that the difference between prosperity and destruction is a spiritual mood, joy in Hashem's sovereignty and fulfilling commandments with enthusiasm.

In his book Meshekh Hokhma, Rabbi Meir Simha Hacohen of Dvinsk explains the nature of this spiritual mood. The commandment "בְּשִׁמְחָה" is taught by referring Ben Zoma's teaching in Avot (4:1): a happy person is one who is content with his given lot. The failure to rejoice in the service of God is a distorted response to having it all, "מִרְיוֹן כָּל". When prosperity results in neglecting to remember the source of abundance, prosperity will end.

Rabbi Meir Simha Hacohen adds an innovative understanding of Israel's obligation of gratitude. He was a prominent Eastern European rabbi of the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. Jewish life as he knew it, could not have matched the prosperity described in the Bikkurim section nor the harmonious existence of mount Grizim's blessings. His world was rooted in the darkness of galut, in decades fraught with wars, prosecution, and growing assimilation. And yet, to his understanding there has been a reason for the spiritual stance of joy, because "abundance of all things" also means the abundance of knowledge. Abundance of knowledge in modern times makes life is much easier than in the past. However, it is not only because knowledge makes our material life easier, it is also owing to the common belief in God and disappearance of idolatry. He mentions the insurmountable task that Avraham had in

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teaching the existence of God as well as the effort of our forefather's in Egypt to remain holy in an idolatrous empire. But today we can rejoice in abundance of the world's "just and erudite opinions that shine in the divine intellect".

Today, a century later, it seems as if the world has turned around completely. Our material life is that of "abundance of all things" but the mounting knowledge and the cultural mood pose great challenges to the continued loyalty to Hashem. We find ourselves again in the situation of Avraham, combating the doubt and ridicule of the commitment to the Torah. We are challenged by the pluralism of ideas that denies any truth or common goals for mankind. We are challenged by radical individualism that denies that a person can have a moral or religious obligation based upon communal commitments; we are challenged by a growing sense of human control of our environment denying dependence on the creator of the world.

Although he interpreted his generation's challenges differently, the Meshekh Hokhma teaches us how to avoid a distorted response. We should rejoice in this knowledge, find Hashem's hand in it, and use it to serve Hashem with thankfulness for the gifts it brings us. He teaches us that similar to our forefathers in Egypt, we must invest many efforts in our spiritual state, and let our joy in the service of God light the paths surrounding us. Similarly to Avraham, we are called to make great educational efforts in order to pass to our children and students the gift of a knowledge of God, filling the earth, **כְּמַיִם מִכּוֹרִים**, as the waters cover the sea (Isaiah 11:9).

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Mordechai Willig

Gratitude

I. "You shall say to him (the kohein), I declare today to Hashem, your G-d, that I have come to the land that Hashem swore to our forefathers to give to us" (Devarim 26:3). Rashi explains: that you are not an ingrate. Ingratitude to Hashem leads to the curses related to not listening to Hashem's voice and failing to perform His commandments (28:15). After a long litany of horrific curses, the Torah states (28:47), "because you did not serve Hashem, your G-d, with joy and goodness of heart, out of an abundance of everything." Hashem's kindness demands that we express our gratitude, verbally to the kohein, and by our actions, i.e. by performing His mitzvos. Being an ingrate compounds a sin and yields a terrible curse.

"Hashem descended to see the city and the tower that the sons of man (bnai Adam) built" (Bereishis 11:5). Rashi questions the meaning of the phrase "sons of man" - isn't it obvious that people built the tower of Bavel? Rashi answers that the phrase is indicating to us that they were the sons of Adam, the first man, who was ungrateful. When confronted by

Hashem and asked, "Did you eat from the tree from which I commanded you not to eat?" (3:11), Adam answered (3:12), "The woman that You gave to me, she gave me from the tree and I ate." Rashi adds: Here he denied the favor, i.e. he demonstrated a lack of gratitude to Hashem for giving him Chava.

The sons of Adam, like their progenitor, were ungrateful and rebelled against Hashem Who was good to them and saved them from the flood. Ingratitude to a person, Chava, led to ingratitude to Hashem Himself. A wife is the ultimate goodness for a man, as without one his life is not good: "It is not good for man to be alone" (2:18). The aforementioned "everything" (28:47) and the lack thereof (48), refers, interpersonally, only to a wife (Nedarim 41a). Adam was the first ingrate by blaming his own sin on his wife, the very source of everything good. His descendants extended this trait by their lack of gratitude to Hashem, the Source of everything good for the whole world, Who saved them from the flood.

II. Even favors of previous generations, even when overshadowed by terrible actions, demand a measure of recognition. Egyptian converts are not utterly abhorred (Devarim 23:8). Even though they threw our sons into the river, they had earlier served as our hosts in the time of need, when there was a famine in Eretz Yisrael (Rashi). As a result, a third generation Egyptian convert may marry into our nation, the congregation of Hashem (9). By contrast, converts from Amon and Moav are prohibited forever (4). "Because they did not come forward to you with food and water on the road when you left Egypt, and because he (Moav) hired Bilam to curse you" (5. See Bamidbar 22:6).

The Ramban asks: earlier (2:28, 29), the Torah states that Moav did sell bread and water to Am Yisrael. The Ramban answers: Amon and Moav were saved by Avraham's kindness. He saved Lot from captivity (Bereishis 14:14-16), and in his merit Lot and his daughters - mothers of Moav and Amon, respectively - were saved from S'dom. As such, they were obligated to repay this kindness to Am Yisrael. Instead, they treated us badly; Moav hired Bilam to curse us, and Amon failed to come forward with bread and water. Moav, and Edom, did bring out bread and water, but Amon did not do as the others did. Even though Moav is older, and his sin was one of commission, Amon's sin of omission is mentioned first, because he did not do as the others had done. Both were guilty of ingratitude and permanently prohibited to marry a Jewish woman.

More than 400 years passed between Avraham's kindnesses and Amon and Moav's sins. Even so, they were required to be kind to us. This proves that there is no statute of limitations for hakaras hatov. If it extends many generations later, how much more so does it apply to an individual who has

personally benefited from someone's kindness, even many years earlier.

III. The Gemara (Yevamos 76b) permits a Jewish man to marry a female Amonite or Moavite convert. It explains that it is the way of a man to come forward, i.e. to bring food and water beyond the borders of his land (Ramban). It is not the way of a woman to do so. Hence they are not prohibited for failing to do so.

The Yerushalmi (8:3) adds that it is the way of a man to hire, but not the way of a woman. This clearly refers to Moav. Their sin of commission, hiring Bilam, was committed by men and not women. Therefore, Amonite and Moavite female converts are permitted, as Rashi states: An Amoni may not marry a Jewish woman, implying that the reverse is permissible.

Why did Rashi, who focuses on peshat, the simple meaning, find it necessary to cite the gender distinction? The Meshech Chochma explains that in a series of laws, the greater novelty is mentioned later (lo zu af zu). Here, Moav was older, sinned first (Devarim 2:8, 19, if they too, did not come forward with bread and water, as the Gemara (76b) implies- unlike the Ramban) and more grievously (and additionally) by hiring Bilam. Why, then is Amon's sin mentioned first?

The answer is that, as Rashi adds, the Torah, by prohibiting only male converts, permits females. Moavite women enticed Jewish men (Bamidbar 25:1) and caused a terrible plague (31:16). The Medrash asks: we should prohibit Moavite women and permit the men! Thus, the permissibility of Moavite women is the greater novelty, and, as such, is mentioned later, after Amon.

IV. While we may not marry male descendants of Lot because of, according to the Ramban, their ingratitude, we also may not wage war with them (Devarim 2:9, 19). Their land is a reward from Hashem. When Avraham said that Sarah was his sister, Lot kept silent (Rashi 2:5). Hashem demonstrates gratitude centuries later, in contrast to Amon and Moav themselves. In the Divine calculation, we may not wage war, as gratitude to Lot, but we may not marry Lot's male descendants since they were ingrates.

The precise calibration goes even further. We may frighten Moav, but not Amon. This is a reward for the modesty of Amon's mother who did not publicize her father's incestuous paternity, as Moav's mother did (Rashi 2:9). Moav means me-av, from the father, while Amon, ben-Ami, is more discreet (See Rashi Bereishis 19:37).

Perhaps this distinction relates to the later treatment of Lot's female descendants. Amon's daughters are permissible because it is not the way of women to go forward with bread and

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water. This mitigating factor applies only if modesty is a value, as Amon's mother demonstrated.

The licentiousness of the Moavite women was a much more grievous sin, and therefore as the aforementioned Medrash asks, women should be prohibited and men permitted. The answer given is that the women were compelled to do so, under pain of death, by Moavite men who are, therefore, prohibited and the women are permitted. Another mitigating factor may be the licentiousness of Moav's mother. The Moavite women of Bilam's time were merely following in Moav's mother's footsteps.

V. In sum, hakaras hatov must be expressed verbally, as with bikurim, and by action, as Amon and Moav's men should have done. It applies even to the wicked, as we allow third generation Egyptians because Egypt hosted us during famine. It has no statute of limitations, as our respective laws concerning Egyptian and Amonite and Moavite converts indicates.

There can be mitigating factors, permitting Amonite and Moavite women. There must be careful calculation, as our instructions of fighting and warning against Moav and Amon reflect. We must demonstrate Imitatio Dei by rewarding kindness even to imperfect and even wicked people. And we must be ever grateful to Hashem, the only perfect Being, for His incessant goodness to us and our ancestors.

The recognition that Hashem is perfect as the G-d of history (Devarim 32:4), and His Torah is perfect (Tehilim 19:8) as the G-d of law, is indispensable for proper Jewish belief. Suggestions that all or some, or even one, of the Torah's laws no longer apply because of perceived imperfections must be categorically rejected. Post-Holocaust rejection to the immutability of obligatory Torah laws, and post-modern denial of the morality and/or applicability of some of them, are incompatible with Orthodoxy. They lack the requisite humility associated with serving Hashem with joy (Rambam Hilchos Lulav 8:15).

The sons of Adam built the tower of Bavel because, as Rashi explains, they were ingrates. Adam denied the greatest personal goodness, a wife, and they denied the goodness of Hashem Who saved them from the flood. We must be grateful to spouses and others who help and helped us even long ago, notwithstanding imperfections large and small. This helps us achieve gratitude to Hashem, Who saves His faithful from the flood of heretical babble surrounding us.

Decades ago, yeshivas and shuls, led by authentic Torah scholars, were compared to Noach's Ark, protecting their members from the tumultuous waves of the zeitgeist (Asufas Ma'arachos by Rav Chaom Yaakov Goldwicht, Bereishis I pg. 120, Lekach Tov, Noach pg. 36-37). This is even more critical today. We

must constantly thank Hashem saving us and our families from the ravages of today's neurotic society, as Rav Soloveitchik called it, and, as he said, proclaim our loyalty to Hashem's perfect and immutable Torah unapologetically (Surrendering to the Almighty, 1975). Ashreinu ma tov chelkeinu. We joyfully thank Hashem for the spiritual and physical blessings that He bestows upon us every day.

Torah.Org Dvar Torah by Rabbi Label Lam

A Dose of His Own Medicine

And it will be, if you do not obey HASHEM, 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 overtake you. (Devarim 28:15)

This is the introduction to a segment of the Torah known as "TOCHACHA" or rebuke. We might normally think of "TOCHACHA" as "telling someone off", "reading them the riot act", speaking roughly. That's not quite it, though. What is the real definition of "TOCHACHA"?

Reb Tzadok HaKohen says that the word "TOCHACHA" comes from the world "TOCH" which means inside. The words are meant to penetrate the insides of the listener. It could be that the English language synonym for rebuke tells more of the story, "reproof". There is an element of proving in "TOCHACHA".

The Talmud tells us that one of the sages met a fisherman and asked him if he learned Torah. The fisherman told the sage that he just didn't have a head for Torah learning. The sage cleverly changed the subject to discuss something the fisherman was comfortable speaking about, the subject of fishing. The sage asked many him many question about how the fisherman goes about his business of fishing. The fisherman offered oceans information about how a net is made and where to seek out the fish. The sage was extremely impressed. Then he told the fisherman, "I see that when it comes to fishing you have a very good head but when it comes to Torah learning suddenly you don't!" That's a classic reproof! Showing the person that his excuse is not valid and for his own good! That gets the speaker into the heart of the matter and the insides of the listener.

The Magdano Eliezer has a keen insight on the verse of Koheles, "Words of the wise are heard with pleasantness". The word for "word" is "DIVREI" which implies harsh words or strong words. It doesn't mean that they are always spoken in a pleasant style but because they are the words of the wise and they are spoken wisely they are received pleasantly. Not many are able to land a message that needs to be delivered but sometimes a rebuke needs to come from an unlikely source.

We were sitting by our Shabbos table with a brand new bride and groom as our guests. We knew both of them for quite a while. We could have made the Shidduch but we didn't. They were each dating for many years. It was a painfully long process for both of them. We were happy that they found each other and now they were together, as husband and wife.

Then something went terribly wrong. The conversation took a very uncomfortable turn. The groom started talking about dates he had with other girls. He must have thought that this was entertaining but the look on his bride's face indicated otherwise. She was in great pain. He didn't notice. He just continued. I tried singing but the conversation came back to the same topic again. I attempted to change the subject but he swerved back again. I even extended my leg to give him a kick but he was too far away. My wife and I were mortified and his bride was shrinking in shame. It seemed there was nothing to be done. This was going to be a painfully long night.

Now seated across from the bride was my four year old daughter Sara. She was busy studying the bride. Something must have awakened in her memory from a year earlier. The same young lady had been a guest by us for an entire Shabbos. She was dating at the time a young man, named David. He was staying by a neighbor and they ate all of the meals by us. It seems they were dating seriously at the time but it didn't work out. Based on a year old memory from the age of three, my daughter said two words that changed the room. She asked the bride intently, "Where's David?" The groom suddenly interrupted his own monologue and asked his wife in a huff, "Who's David!?" Then it dawned on him in an instant that in a small quantity this was a dose of his own medicine.

Yeshivat Har Etzion: Virtual Bet Midrash

The Covenant of Moav

By Rav Yair Kahn

I. Chorev and Moav - The section of *berakhot* and *kelalot* – the list of blessings Yisrael will receive if they abide by the Torah and the curses they will receive if they do not, found in chapter 28 – concludes with the *pasuk*, "These are the terms of the covenant that Hashem commanded to Moshe to make with *Bnei Yisrael* in the land of Moav, aside from the covenant which he made with them at Chorev" (28:69). This *pasuk* connects the covenant of Chorev (Sinai), documented in *Parashat Bechukotai* (*Vayikra* 26), with the parallel section found in our *parasha*. Our study of the covenant of Moav will therefore begin with a brief review of the Sinai covenant.

In our study of *Parashat Bechukotai*, we demonstrated that the list of calamities recorded follows a clear progression. The Torah begins with disasters that are not life threatening and continues with worse disasters that cause a loss of life. Later, the Torah describes an invasion of hostile forces, which

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not only brings death, but also compromises Yisrael's sovereignty. The Torah ends with the destruction of the *Mikdash* and exile from the Land of Israel.

In contrast, there seems to be no progression in *Parashat Ki Tavo*. In fact, there seems to be no order at all. Consider *pasuk* 36, where, after warning of various calamities, Moshe mentions exile: Hashem will send you and your king that you have placed over you to a nation that you and your ancestors have not known and there you shall worship other gods of wood and stone.

Following the pattern of *Bechukotai*, the section should end here; in *Parashat Ki Tavo* the list of calamities continues, and they have nothing to do with difficulties Yisrael will face in exile. The subsequent *pesukim* deal with agricultural disasters that will occur in *Eretz Yisrael*, apparently before the exile: You shall take much seed out into the field, but shall gather little; for the locust shall consume it. You shall plant vineyards and tend to them, but you shall neither drink of the wine, nor gather the grapes, for the worm shall eat them. You will have olive trees throughout your borders, however you shall not anoint yourselves with oil, for the olives shall fall off. (28:38-40).

Did Moshe merely record a random list of calamities, lacking rhyme and reason? Moreover, the section is repetitive. We have already noted the mention of exile in *pasuk* 36. Consider the following *pasuk* that appears at the end of the section: And Hashem shall scatter you among all nations, from one end of the earth to the other end of the earth; and there you shall serve other gods of wood and stone, which you and your ancestors have not known. (28:64)

Similarly, Moshe mentions that a foreign nation will eat the produce of the land in *pasuk* 33: The fruit of your land and all your labors shall be eaten by a nation which you do not know and you shall be only oppressed and crushed all the days.

This same exact idea is repeated later in the section: A nation of fierce countenance that shall not regard the elderly, nor show favor to the young. He shall eat the fruit of your cattle, and the fruit of your land, until you are destroyed. (28:50-51)

Instead of the structured development found in the *Bechukotai* section, the section in *Parashat Ki Tavo* seems to be characterized by repetition and confusion.

II. The Berakha Section - Before trying to make organizational sense out of the *kelala* section, let us take a closer look at the *berakha* section. The section begins as follows: **If you shall hearken diligently to the voice of Hashem your God**, to observe to do all His commandments which I command you this day, then Hashem your God will set you on high above all the nations of the earth. And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, **because you shall hearken unto the voice of Hashem your God**. (28:1-2)

Several commentators were troubled by the redundancy of the opening and closing phrase, "if you shall hearken to the voice of Hashem

your God." Since the blessings are predicated on the condition that Yisrael hearken to Hashem's voice, why is it necessary to repeat that these blessings will come because Yisrael hearkens to the voice of Hashem? Various suggestions were raised to explain what the closing phrase adds that was not included in the opening line. (See Nechama Leibowitz's essays for a discussion of the topic.)

Perhaps, however, the repetition did not come to add anything that was not included in the original statement, but rather as a refrain to indicate an inner division within the *berakha* section. This assertion is based on the fact that almost the identical phrase appears twice more in this section. Moshe tells Yisrael that Hashem will make them a holy people "because you will keep the commandments of Hashem your God, and walk in His ways" (28:9). At the end of the section, Moshe tells Yisrael that they will be placed above and not beneath "because you will hearken to the commandments of Hashem your God, which I command you this day, to observe and to do them" (28:13).

Based on this suggestion, we might divide the *berakhot* section into three segments. The first segment, from the beginning of the chapter until *pasuk* eight, is prefaced by the general blessing that Hashem will set us *elyon* (high) above all other nations. After a list of generic *berakhot* dealing with prosperity and well-being (28:3-6), Moshe mentions victory over foreign enemies (28:7). Perhaps, then, the *berakha* of "*elyon*" refers to political supremacy. The Ibn Ezra also interprets "*elyon*" as a general *berakha*, but he explains it as referring to the singularity and uniqueness of Yisrael.

The second segment, *pesukim* 9-11, begins: "Hashem will establish you for a holy people unto Himself ... And all the peoples of the earth shall see that the name of Hashem is called upon you; and they shall be afraid of you." This subsection deals with the sanctity of Yisrael, which is distinct from the idea of political superiority. In fact, the distinction of these two concepts is stated explicitly: "To make you high (*elyon*) above all nations that He has made ... and that you may be a holy people unto Hashem your God, as He has spoken" (26:19). Sanctity is rooted in the fact that Yisrael is Hashem's nation. Therefore, this section not only stresses observance of *mitzvot*, but also emulating the divine traits, as it were: "And you shall walk in His ways" (28:9; see Rambam, *Sefer Ha-Mitzvot, mitzva* 8).

The third segment, *pesukim* 12-14, deals with economic independence and eminence: "Hashem will open for you His good treasure the heaven to give the rain of your land in its season and to bless all the work of your hand; and you shall lend unto many nations, but you shall not borrow. And Hashem will make you the head, not the tail ...".

Thus, the *berakhot* section can be divided into three subsections that reflect three separate aims:

1. Political supremacy: "Because you will hearken unto the voice of Hashem your God" (28:2).
2. Sanctity: "Because you shall keep the commandments of Hashem your God and walk in His ways" (28:9).
3. Economic eminence: "Because you will hearken to the commandments of Hashem your God, which I command you this day, to observe and to do them" (28:13).
4. In other words, the organization of the *berakhot* section is based on three broader goals. The specific *berakhot*, such as timely rainfall and military victory, are means to achieve those broader aims.

With this in mind, we are ready to take a closer look at the *kelalot* section and see whether a parallel division can be detected there as well.

3. The Kelala Section - The analysis of the *berakhot* section is simpler because of its relative brevity. Discerning divisions within the lengthy *kelalot* section will be a more difficult and complicated task; if you have not done so yet, it would be helpful to open a *Chumash*.

In order to illustrate a parallel between the organizational structure of the *berakha* section and the *kelala* section, we must take note of the phrase "because you will not hearken to the voice of Hashem your God," parallel to refrain "because you will hearken unto the voice of Hashem your God," which indicated the division of the *berakha* section.

The *kelala* section begins: But it shall come to pass, **if you will not hearken unto the voice of Hashem your God**, to observe to do all His commandments and His statutes which I command you this day; that all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you (28:15).

Later in this section, Moshe says: nd all these curses shall come upon you and shall pursue you and overtake you, till you are destroyed; **because you did not hearken unto the voice of Hashem your God**, to keep His commandments and His statutes which He commanded you (28:45).

This redundant phrase appears once again towards the end of the section: And you shall be left few in number, whereas you previously were numerous as the stars of heaven; **because you did not hearken unto the voice of Hashem your God**. (28:62).

I would like to suggest that this repeated phrase is the refrain of the *kelala* section and indicates a three part division, parallel to the division we observed regarding the *berakhot*.

The first segment spans *pesukim* 15- 37. The section begins with a list of *kelalot* that mirror the *berakhot* at the beginning of the first section. The subsequent list of *kelalot* begins with calamities that will befall Yisrael in the Land of Israel, including defeat at the hand of enemies and suffering the torments of the invading forces. The segment ends with exile.

I suggest that this segment, which details the military defeat and the exile, mirrors the segment of political superiority found in the *berakhot* section, which stressed victory. In fact, this *kelalot* segment concludes by

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describing how terribly Yisrael is perceived by the nations they are exiled to – "And you shall become an [object of] astonishment, an example, and a topic of discussion, among all the peoples whither Hashem shall lead you" (28:37) – which counters "*elyon* over all the nations" of the *berakha* section.

In *pasuk* 38, Moshe describes Yisrael as still being on their land, and I therefore suggest that this is the beginning of the second segment. This subsection mirrors *pesukim* 12- 13 of the *berakhot* section, which deal with economic eminence, and it is therefore reasonable that this segment describes an economic downfall. As we saw above, one of the concluding *pesukim* of this segment is almost an exact repeat of the opening line of the *kelalot* section – "All these curses will befall you, pursuing you and overtaking you to destroy you because you did not obey Hashem your God, to observe His commandments and statutes which He commanded you" (28:45) – and this repetition is an additional indication that we are in a new subsection.

I believe that the final segment begins at *pasuk* 47. This subsection focuses on the dehumanization of Yisrael. There is a detailed description on the subhuman conditions during the siege. People who were noble and aristocratic are driven to act like animals, selfishly devouring the flesh of their own children. This subsection counters the promise of sanctity found in the *berakha* section; it describes not only the desecration of *kedushat Yisrael* (the sanctity of Yisrael), but the desecration *tzelem Elokim* (the divine image) as well.

The segment ends with the chilling prophesy: And Hashem will bring you back to Egypt in ships, through the way about which I had said to you, you will never see it again. And there, you will seek to be sold to your enemies for slaves and handmaids, but there will be no buyer (28:62).

The fact that Jews are not even worthy to be bought is a subtle reference to the total desecration and profanation of Yisrael, which eventually justifies annihilation. It is reminiscent of Esther's statement: "For we have been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish; now had we been sold for slaves and bondswomen, I would have kept silent, for the adversary has no consideration for the king's loss" (Esther 7:4). We are also reminded of the Nazis, who considered Jews to be vermin earmarked for extermination. Slavery, despite the economic advantages, was an inappropriate solution to the Jewish question.

IV. Means and Ends - We have suggested an organization of the Moav covenant based on an inner division between three overarching aims: political supremacy, sanctity and economic eminence. What is the significance of these three ideas?

Political supremacy should be connected to divine sovereignty, since *malkhut Yisrael* is an earthly representative of *malkhut Hashem*. In fact, the term "*elyon*," which Moshe uses to express the supremacy of Yisrael, is often used

as a reference to Hashem (see *Bereishit* 14). Consider the *tefila* of Rosh Hashana: Reign over the entire world in Your glory and rise above the land in Your splendor and appear in the glory of Your majestic might to all the inhabitants of the world and everything that has been made shall know that You made it and every creature shall understand that You created it and all that breathe shall proclaim: "Hashem the God of Yisrael is king and His reign is over all."

Since universal recognition of *malkhut Hashem* is one of the aims of creation, the overarching significance of the political supremacy of *malkhut Yisrael* is obvious as well.

As opposed to the universalistic significance of *malkhut Yisrael*, *kedushat Yisrael* (the sanctity of Yisrael) in a large part relates to the intimate relationship between Hashem and Yisrael. In order to achieve this sanctity, we must not only observe the *mitzvot*, but also emulate the divine attributes (28:9). Moreover, we must live a life of sanctity and holiness, as it sees, "You shall be Holy, for I Hashem your God Am holy (*Vayikra* 19:2). This intimate relationship between Hashem and Yisrael, is one of the major themes of Yom Kippur, when the *kohen gadol* (high priest) enters the inner sanctum to achieve penitence for all of Yisrael. In any event, the view of *kedusha* as an overarching goal is clear.

However, we are a bit perplexed by the importance the Torah awards to economic eminence. Moreover, consider the *pesukim* that precede and perhaps introduce the covenant: "And Hashem has selected you this day to be His treasured people ... And to make you *elyon* above all the nations that He made ... and to make you a holy people to Hashem your God, as He spoke (26:18-19). *Elyon* and *kedusha* are mentioned, while economic prosperity is left out.

Perhaps, the overarching importance of economic eminence is as a means, not as an end. In *Hilkhot Teshuva* (chapter 9), the Rambam was troubled by the emphasis the Torah placed on worldly rewards. He suggests that these rewards are a means necessary to create an environment that will allow one to achieve the spiritual goals that are the ultimate goal. Similarly, we can suggest that the Torah, with its focus on reality, notes the overarching importance of economic prosperity, but only as a means to enable Yisrael to realize its destiny as a holy people and an earthly representative of *malkhut Hashem*.



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Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky
Teshuva, Love, and Joy

Joy is an integral part of our avodas Hashem. The absence of such joy is clearly indicative of a deficiency of our appreciation for the great gift of Torah which Hashem has bestowed upon us. In this week's parsha the performance of mitzvos without this enthusiasm is strongly critiqued. After a long, harsh description of the terrible tragedies that will befall the Jewish people, the Torah concludes that these will occur because we are not serving Hashem with joy and goodness of our hearts. There are times during the year when it is relatively easy to be in a state of joy. Particularly during the Shalosh Regalim, when there is actually a mitzvah to rejoice, our avodas Hashem naturally takes on the spirit of joy. However, as we approach the Yomim Noraim it becomes more difficult to instill the proper level of joy into our avodas Hashem.

The Rambam highlights this by explaining that the very reason we don't recite Hallel on Rosh Hashana is because they are not days of abundant joy. The poskim note that the Rambam did not say there is no mitzvah to rejoice on these days. Rather, because of the appropriate fear and trepidation that accompany the Days of Judgment, the joy that would normally be present on yom tov is mitigated. Nevertheless, a degree of rejoicing is not only appropriate on the Yomim Noraim, according to many including the Rambam it is actually a fulfillment of simchas yom tov. What is the essence of

this simcha that does accompany the otherwise awesome Days of Awe?

Chazal elaborate in Maseches Yoma about the two paths of teshuva. The lower level is teshuva that results from fear. Teshuva achieved out of love, however, is a significantly higher form of teshuva. On Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur it is almost impossible not to be stirred to perform teshuva out of fear. Simply contemplating the ramifications of the Days of Judgment will instill the feelings of awe and trepidation necessary for this level of teshuva. We are expected, however, to reach a higher level. A sincere desire to come closer to Hashem as we contemplate His endless kindness for us will be a catalyst for teshuva out of love. Culminating on Yom Kippur when Hashem extends His mercy and compassion to us, we complete our teshuva that began out of fear and return to Hashem with love.

It is this higher level of teshuva that is a source of great joy. Perhaps that is why the Torah warns us in this week's parsha about avodas Hashem that is lacking joy. Such an avodas Hashem may enable teshuva out of fear, but the height of avodas Hashem will never be reached. May we merit during the upcoming days to begin the teshuva process and reach its culmination by returning to Hashem out of love and an abundance of joy.

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Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Ki Savo

*Dedicated to the speedy recovery of Mordechai ben Chaya
A Tale of Two Speeches—One Out Loud and One in Silence*

In the beginning of Parshas Ki Savo, there are two mitzvos that involve making a speech. One of them is Mikra Bikurim, the formal declaration a person makes upon bringing the first fruits of his crop to the Beis HaMikdash. In addition to the mitzvah of bringing the first fruits, in most situations there is a second mitzvah of reading the pesukim found in our parsha beginning with the words: "Then you shall call out and say (v'anisa v'amarta) before Hashem your G-d..." [Devorim 26:5-11]

What follows is a brief synopsis of the history of the Jewish people. We had to go down to Egypt. The Ribono shel Olam took us out of Egypt. He brought us to this place, a land flowing with milk and honey. And now, behold, I have brought the first fruit of the ground that You have given me, O Hashem. In short, we extol the praises of all the things the Almighty did for us, and we acknowledge our privilege of now being able to bring the first fruits of our wonderful land as a gift offering to the Kohen.

In connection with this Mikra Bikurim declaration, the Torah writes: "V'Anisa v'Amarta." Rashi writes that this specific idiom indicates that the declaration is to be made "b'kol Ram" – in a loud voice. The Biblical passages read on this occasion are not to be said as one says the Shmoneh Esrei – silently. They are to be said out loud.

There is a second declaration associated with agricultural mitzvos that are performed in the Land of Israel. That declaration is contained in the pesukim found in the section of Vidui Ma'aser [Devorim 26:13-15]. At the end of each of the three-year mini-cycles that take

place during the first six years of the seven year Shmitah cycle, the Jewish farmer makes a declaration testifying to his observance of the laws of separating and properly distributing Teruma and Ma'aser to the Kohanim, the Leviim, and the poor during the past three-year cycle. "I have eliminated the holy things from the house, and I have also given it to the Levite, to the convert, to the orphan, and to the widow, according to the entire commandment that You commanded me; I have not transgressed any of Your commandments, and I have not forgotten. I have not eaten of it in my intense mourning; I have not consumed it in a state of impurity, and I have not given of it to a dead person; I have listened to the voice of Hashem my G-d; I have acted according to everything You have commanded me."

However, the Torah does not specify that Vidui Ma'aser must be said in a loud voice. Why is it that Mikra Bikurim must be said "b'kol Ram" and Vidui Ma'aser is apparently said silently?

The answer is obvious. The declaration of Mikra Bikurim extols the praises of the Almighty. The Jewish farmer is not praising or patting himself on the shoulder for his diligent observance of the laws. He recounts what the Ribono shel Olam did for him. At such a time it is appropriate that everyone should hear what is being said: Kol Rom. Vidui Ma'aser, on the other hand, is what I have done. I have done everything the Almighty has told me to do. When I am saying what I did right, it is not appropriate to give a klop in the Beis Medrash and say "I came to minyan every day for the last seventeen years...." We do not do that. We do not publicly pat ourselves on the back.

This is the simple answer to our question. However, I saw a very interesting insight from Rav Shlomo Kluger, which applies this dichotomy of silent recitations versus out-loud recitation to another area of Jewish practice.

The halacha is that Shmoneh Esrei should be said silently. There is one exception to this rule. It says in Shulchan Aruch that on Yomim Noraim, a person can say the Amidah louder than he recites it the whole year. This does not mean that every congregant should pretend to be the chazzan and sing the whole nussach of Rosh HaShannah and Yom Kippur while reciting his private Amidah. However, a person is allowed to say it louder than normal. Why is that?

The commentaries to the Shulchan Aruch give a couple of reasons: First, on the Yomim Noraim everyone davens out of a Machzor. During the year, people sometimes daven by heart (especially in the times of the Shulchan Aruch, not everybody had a Siddur). When Reuven is davening by heart and Shimon suddenly says something out loud, it can cause Reuven to become derailed and lose his mental place in davening. When everyone is reading out of a Machzor on Rosh HaShannah and Yom Kippur, it is much less likely for a person to get mixed up in his own Amidah recitation as a result of someone else davening out loud.

However, says Rav Shlomo Kluger, there may be another reason as well: Just like we say that Mikra Bikurim is said out loud because we speak there about the praises of the Ribono shel Olam, this too can explain the Shulchan Aruch's distinction between Yomim Noraim davening and the normal daily davening. The hallmark of the Yomim Noraim Amida is "Meloch al kol ha'Olam kulo bichvodecha..." It is all about the Kingship of the Ribono shel Olam. We acknowledge the Sovereignty of the Almighty. It is about Him, it is not about me.

The whole year the overriding themes of Shmoneh Esrei are "Almighty I need sustenance, I need cures, I need this, I need that." It is all about "me". When it is all about "you", you do that quietly. But

Yomim Noraim, we are asking the Almighty to become King of the world. It is all about Him. That is the equivalent of Mikra Bikurim where we apply the principle of "V'Anisa v'Amarta" and we proclaim it aloud, rather than in silence.

Cursed Be the Faker

Later, the parsha mentions a very unique ceremony that occurred only once in the history of Klal Yisrael. When they came into Eretz Yisrael there were two adjacent mountains—Mt. Gerizim and Mt. Eval. Six Tribes stood on one mountain and six Tribes stood on the second mountain. A series of Blessings and Curses were recited, to which everyone needed to respond Amen.

The Torah mentions which tribes were to be positioned on each mountain, and then it proceeds to list the eleven "Curses" (Arurim) which were to be part of this recitation. These are eleven sins for which a person who transgressed them should be cursed. It was like a national Kabbalas Shevuah (acceptance of a binding oath) not to be in violation of these eleven transgressions.

The specific sins for which it was proclaimed "Accursed be he who..." include the following:

Makes a graven image and places it in secret.

Degradates his father or mother.

Moves back the boundary of his fellow.

Causes a blind person to go astray on the road.

Perverts a judgment of a convert, orphan, or widow.

Lies with the wife of his father.

Lies with any animal.

Lies with his sister.

Lies with his mother-in-law.

Strikes his fellow in secret.

Takes a bribe to kill an innocent person.

Let me ask something: Are these eleven things the worst sins in the Torah? It does not say "Cursed be one who desecrates the Shabbos." It does not say "Cursed be one who eats chametz on Pesach." Some of the things mentioned do not involve the serious Kares penalty, nor even the less serious penalty of makkos (lashes). If we had to pick a list of "the worst eleven," maybe we would have listed some of the eleven items, such as those involving Avodah Zarah or Arayos. But most of them do not seem to be "all that bad" that they should be worthy of this unique curse. So why were these eleven singled out? The Sefer Darash Mordechai suggests a common denominator to all eleven items. These sins are all done behind closed doors in which a person can act hypocritically (Echad b'fnim, v'echad b'Chutz). A person can act as the biggest Tzadik out in public, and behind closed doors he can treat his parents with utter disrespect.

"Cursed be he who encroaches on the boundary of his fellow man." A person can promote himself as one of the most honest businessmen there are, and yet in the stealth of night he will move the boundary demarcation a couple of inches, and no one will know the difference. "Cursed is he who leads the blind man astray on the road." The commentaries dispute what this applies to, but according to Rambam this refers to giving bad advice. You tell a person "Listen, you invest in this deal and you will make a fortune!" when you are purposely giving him bad advice, for your own advantage. All of these things, a person can in fact externally promote himself as a most upstanding citizen, but in secret – behind closed doors – (v'sam ba'seiser) it is quite a different story.

Chazal say that in the times of Yoshiyahu haMelech, the king thought he succeeded in cleaning out all the Avodah Zarah that existed in Eretz Yisrael. The King had guards going to people's houses searching for idols. The wicked people hid their idols on the back of their doors, so that when the doors were open the idols would be hidden. As soon as the guards closed the doors behind them, the idols reappeared. That is an instance of "and emplace it in secret" (V'sam ba'seiser) [Devorim 27:15].

So, what is this unique ceremony all about? It is about being fakers. That is why these are Arur (cursed behavior). A person needs to be "Tocho k'Baro"—the same on the inside as on the outside. A person must be who he is everywhere—in the privacy of his home and in the public arena. All these people here are acting behind closed doors, secretly. Such behavior is intolerable. The Ribono shel Olam cannot suffer such hypocrisy.

One of the themes of the Yomim Noraim is "V'Taher Leebeinu l'Avdecha b'Emes" (Purify our hearts to serve you in truth). We must be honest. We must act with integrity. What you see is what you get. What is apparent to people must be what you really are. When you are "one way with your mouth and one way with your heart" or "one way outside and one way inside" then you are a faker. This is what the Torah condemns as deserving the Arur curse. That is why these eleven things—although perhaps not the most egregious of Aveiros—nevertheless have this element of fakery which the Torah singles out for explicit condemnation.

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from: Rabbi Sacks <info@rabbisacks.org>

subject: Covenant and Conversation

Be Silent and Listen (Ki Tavo 5780)

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

During our first Coronavirus lockdown, there was one question I was asked more than any other: What about prayer? Just when we needed it the most, we found ourselves unable to participate in tefillah be-tsibbur, public communal prayer. Our most sacred prayers, devarim she-bi-kedushah, are communal. They require a minyan. There was an argument between Rambam and Ramban as to whether, originally and essentially, the command of prayer was directed to individuals or to the community as a whole. But there was no disagreement between them as to the importance and value of praying as part of a community. That is supremely how we, as Jews, come before God, not primarily as "I" but as "We." How then were we to find spiritual strength without this communal dimension?

My answer was, this is indeed a terrible privation. There is no point in minimising the loss. As Yehuda ha-Levi said in the Kuzari, individual prayer is like protecting yourself by building a wall around your house. Collective prayer is like joining with others to maintain the wall around the city. The wall around the city protects everyone, not just me.^[1] Besides which, when I pray for myself, I may pray selfishly, asking for something that may directly benefit me but might also be harmful for others. If I sell ice-cream, I want the sun to

shine, but if I sell umbrellas, I want the rain to fall. Praying together, we seek, not private good but the common good.

Communal prayer is not just an expression of community. It is also a builder of community. Hence the psychological cost of the pandemic lockdown. We are social, not solitary beings. We long, most of us, for company. And even the marvels of Zoom, Skype, YouTube, Facebook Live, WhatsApp and Facetime cannot compensate for the loss of the real thing: face-to-face encounter.

But there was one gain to our praying in isolation. Tefillah be-tsibbur involves going at the speed of the congregation. It is hard to slow the pace so as to be able to meditate at length on any of the prayers themselves – their meaning, music, rhythm and structure. Prayer is essentially a kind of counterpoint between speaking and listening. But communal prayer often involves more speaking than listening. The lockdown meant that we could listen more to the poetry and passion of the prayers themselves. And prayer is about listening, not just speaking.

In one of his essays in Beit Yaakov, Rabbi Yaakov Leiner, son of the Ishbitzer Rebbe (Rabbi Mordechai Leiner), makes a fascinating comment on a phrase in this week's parsha, hasket u-shema Yisrael, "Be silent and listen, Israel. You have now become the people of the Lord your God (Deut. 27:9). There is, he says, a fundamental difference between seeing and listening as to what they communicate. Seeing tells us about the surfaces, the externalities, of things. Listening tells us about internalities, depths (omek kol davar).^[2]

His comments are echoed by one of the great 20th Century scholars of technologies of communication, Walter J Ong, who spoke about "the unique relationship of sound to interiority when sound is compared to the rest of the senses." He adds, "This relationship is important because of the interiority of human consciousness and of human communication itself."^[3] In other words, it is through sound, especially through speaking and listening, that we are present to one another as subjects rather than objects. By listening, we encounter the depth-dimension of reality.

When we listen, we are personally engaged far beyond the way we participate when we simply watch. Ong regards this as one of the special features of the Hebrew Bible. God creates the universe through words. He reveals Himself to His people in words. He makes a covenant with them in words. The last and culminating book of the Torah is Devarim, "words." Ong notes that the Hebrew for "word," davar, also means an event, a happening, something that generates momentum in history. If the greatest thing God does is speak, then the greatest thing we can do is listen.

There is also a difference, as I pointed out in my translation and commentary on the Siddur, between hearing and listening, often concealed by the fact that the Hebrew verb Shema means both. But they are very different. Hearing is passive, listening is active. Hearing needs no special concentration, but listening does. It involves attention, focus, and openness to the other. One of the greatest gifts we can be given is to meet someone who really listens to us. Sadly, it happens all too rarely. We are often so focused on what we are going to say next, that we don't really listen in depth to what the other person is saying.

And so it is with prayer. Someone once defined prayer as listening to God listening to us.

There are some profound stories about listening in the Torah and Tanach. Take for instance the fraught episode in which Jacob takes his father's blessing, intended for Esau. The story eliminates sight as a dimension: Isaac is old and cannot see. Yet he has persistent doubts as to whether the son in front of him is indeed Esau. He goes through the various senses. He tastes the food his son has brought. He smells his clothes. He touches his hands. He concludes: "The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau" (Gen. 27:22). How much anguish might have been spared had he followed the evidence of his hearing rather than his taste, smell and touch.

The names of Jacob's first three sons were all cries for attention on the part of their mother Leah. She called the first, Reuben, saying, "It is because the Lord has seen my misery. Surely my husband will love me now." The second she called Simon, saying, "Because the Lord heard that I am not loved, He gave me this one too." She called the third Levi, saying, "Now at last my husband will become attached to me, because I have borne him three sons." Was Jacob listening to her cries? We don't know. But the plain sense of the text is that he was not. And we know from Jacob's deathbed blessings that his relationship with these three sons was fractured.

Then there is the strange choice of Moses as the man selected to be the voice of God's word to Israel for all time. Moses kept reminding God that he was not a man of words, he could not speak, he had "uncircumcised lips." The Torah is surely telling us several things, but might one of them have been that, finding it hard to speak, Moses had learned to listen? Certainly Moses heard God better than anyone in history.

Then there was the drama on Mount Horeb where Elijah went after his spectacular victory over the prophets of Baal, having called down fire from heaven at Mount Carmel. God showed him a powerful wind, an earthquake, and a fire, but God was in none of these things. Instead He was in the *kol demamah dahah*, the "still, small voice" that I have argued means "a sound you can only hear if you are listening."

There are the stunningly beautiful lines of Psalm 19, that we say on Shabbat mornings that tell us that "the heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands," despite the fact that "There is no speech, there are no words." Creation sings a song to its Creator, which we might hear if we listen attentively enough. I was reminded of this throughout the pandemic, when there was little noise from traffic and none from aeroplanes overhead, and we could hear the birdsong and other sounds of nature more vividly than ever I remember.

Listening is a primary theme of Moses' speeches in Devarim. The root *sh-m-a* appears no fewer than 92 times in the book, an astonishing number. That is what I hope we gained from this distressing time of isolation: the ability to slow down our prayers and listen to them, letting their poetry penetrate more deeply than at other times.

Rabbi Yaakov Leiner, whose reflections on listening started us on this journey, said about the tragic month of Av that it is a time when it is hard to see the presence of God. We lost two Temples. It seemed to the nations of the world as if God had abandoned His people. But precisely when it is hard to see the Divine presence, we can focus on listening.^[4] I believe that listening is one of the greatest arts. It opens us to God, our fellow humans, and the beauties of nature. For me one of the gifts of this strange, difficult time has been the ability

to slow down the prayers so that I am able to listen to them speaking to me. Praying is as much about listening as speaking. And faith itself is the ability to hear the music beneath the noise.

Shabbat Shalom

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Weekly Parsha KI TAVO **Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog**

I have in earlier years written about the strange requirement that the Torah imposes upon the Jewish farmer in the land of Israel when he brings his first crop of the year to Jerusalem as an offering in the Temple. However, I want to reiterate and expand on the matter once again in this short article because I believe it to be of vital and relevant importance to us in our times.

The Jewish farmer, in a review of Jewish history, recounts as to how he arrived at bringing this offering to the temple. He relates the story of our forefathers, of Abraham and Jacob and of their struggles to survive in a very hostile environment. He explains how the great and essential idea of monotheism, morality, charity, and godliness in human society was propagated. The one bringing the offering then recounts the fact that we have never had an easy road on which to travel. Our forefathers were enslaved in Egypt for centuries and sank to low levels of physical and spiritual standards. Yet, the Lord redeemed us and took us out from the house of bondage through miraculous events under the leadership of Moshe.

We were granted the Torah and we were entrusted with the mission to be a holy nation and a kingdom of priests. We wandered in the desert for 40 years, sustained only by the will of heaven, and finally arrived in the land of Israel, a land promised to us through our forefathers by the God of Israel. And now, as a fulfillment of this drama of Jewish history, the farmer can bring these first crops of the year to Jerusalem, as an offering in the temple.

There is an innate desire within all human beings to know about their past. At one time or another, all of us experience the feeling of *déjà vu*, about events and places that we know we have never been to before or have never experienced in this lifetime. It is this sense of history, of the past that imposes itself upon us. Unfortunately, most Jews in our time are completely unaware of their past. They have no idea as to their ancestry, traditions and the events that have led them to where they are and who they are today. In that ignorance lies the main cause for the alienation and disaffection of so many Jews as to their faith and future.

They are overwhelmed by the present and fearful of the future simply because they are ignorant of their past. This engenders a feeling of panic and uncertainty that gnaws at the very vitals of their existence. This is especially true here in Israel, now almost 75 years after its creation and founding, the state is still taken for granted and has lost some of its luster. It is no longer treasured as it once was and should be. To sanctify the mundane – to make even the produce of this country into a holy offering – knowledge and appreciation of the

past is necessary. This is an important lesson that this week's reading imparts to us.

Shabbat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

We find ourselves towards the end of the month of Elul, standing before the great days of judgment, forgiveness, and renewed commitment. A few weeks ago, I happened to visit my physician on a relatively minor matter. As he handed me a prescription for a lotion that I should apply and a pill that I should take, he inquired as to whether I had ever been vaccinated for pneumonia. When I told him that I had not, he said he felt that it would be important for me to do so. He dutifully typed out a prescription and admonished me to be certain to fill it and take the vaccine. I hesitated a few days before following his instruction, because I usually do not like to have diseases injected into my body. However, since he was so strongly recommending it to me, I did go to the pharmacy where a nurse expertly stuck me in the arm and injected the vaccine. The whole purpose of all of this was to grant me some sort of immunity from pneumonia. Now, when a person is being injected with a very sharp needle, it is always wise to concentrate on a different matter entirely, so that he or she will hardly feel the prick of the needle being inserted and removed. Thus, as I was being hopefully granted immunity from pneumonia, I thought a bit about spiritual immunity as well.

I think that an essential part of the idea of repentance over particular sins, acts of commission or omission, is that true regret and return to strict observance of Torah law and godly values provides us with a certain immunization against repeating such sins and errors.

Maimonides writes that when a person truly repents and commits himself not to repeat bad behavior, then, so to speak, the Lord himself will testify that that person is cleansed from that sin, and will not revert to perform that violation again.

I never really thought about repentance and return from this viewpoint, but I now think that this is a valid perspective of the power of repentance and return. Teshuva is, so to speak, an immunization injection to our souls and spirits. Just as when we experience a physical injection, with its pain and discomfort so, too, true penitence and return comes with painful moments and emotional discomfort. It is difficult to admit our wrongs and our sins. We are full of excuses and rationalizations. But only when we face reality and the truth of our actions, can we really improve ourselves and be able, somehow, to right past wrongs and move on, feeling cleansed and more confident spiritually.

The Talmud, in recounting for us the joy of elderly people celebrating the holiday of Sukkot in the Temple in Jerusalem, states that many of these people would say: "How fortunate are we that our later years have brought us repentance and return to the God of our fathers." Having, so to speak, absorbed the injection of accepting the very disease of sin into our bodies, regretting it wholeheartedly, and pledging not to repeat that type of mistake again, we become immune from the ravages of the diseases of sin that so destroys our blessed nature and our godly soul.

Using the story from Oscar Wilde's "The Picture of Dorian Gray" where Gray throughout his entire lifetime of indulgence and debauchery, only wanted to be seen as a healthy and vibrant

individual, and was willing to 'sell his soul,' so to speak, to do so. But upon his demise, after the sinful life that he led, the ghastly and ghostly caricature of Gray is revealed. This is an excellent metaphor for the situation of sin and spiritual disease within us. On the outside, everything may look normal, even healthy, and attractive. But at the day of judgment and the moment of truth, a person is always revealed in all his ugliness. We can acquire immunization from this scenario through the gift of return and repentance which the Lord has granted us. We are in that season of the year now but we must be willing to fill the prescription, to acquire the vaccine and have it injected into us in order for the power of immunization to take hold and protect us in the future.

Shabbat shalom

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Insights Parshas Ki Savo Elul 5780

Yeshiva Beis Moshe Chaim/Talmudic University

Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan

This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of our parents Noach Yaakov ben Chaim and Dvora Esther bas Moshe.

"May their Neshamas have an Aliyah!"

Connectivity

When you come to the land that Hashem your Lord is giving you as a heritage, occupying and settling it. You shall take the first of every fruit of the ground produced by the land that Hashem your Lord is giving you, and you shall place it in a basket and go to the place Hashem will choose as the place associated with His name (26:1-2). This week's parsha opens with the obligation of the mitzvah of bikkurim. To perform the mitzvah of bikkurim, a farmer in Eretz Yisroel would go out to his field, find his first budding fruits, and tie reeds around them, thus designating them as "first fruits" (this applied only to fruits of the seven species of the land of Israel: wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives, and dates). He would then create a beautiful "fruit basket" (the wealthy would bring baskets of gold or silver) and with some pomp and ceremony march off to the Beis Hamikdosh to present it to the Kohen. He then gave it to the Kohen while expressing his appreciation for all that Hashem had done for him as well as Bnei Yisroel.

Rashi (ad loc) explains that the end of the verse - "occupying and settling it" -teaches us that Bnei Yisroel were not obligated in the mitzvah of bikkurim until they conquered the land and apportioned it. In other words, this mitzvah didn't begin until fourteen years after Bnei Yisroel entered the land of Israel.

In light of this, we must strive to explain a difficult Sifri: **כִּי תִבּוֹא אֶל־הָאָרֶץ עַשֵּׂה מְצֻוּהָאָמֹרָה בְּעַנִּין שְׁבָשְׁרָה תִּכְנֹם לְאָרֶץ** - do this mitzvah in order that you should merit entering the land. How can entering the land of Israel possibly be predicated on fulfillment of this mitzvah when the

obligation to do the mitzvah didn't take effect until fourteen years after entering the land? This question was first raised two hundred and fifty years ago by the well-known Rav Dovid Pardo in his commentary on the Sifri. In fact, he finds it so perplexing that he writes that there must be a mistake in the text and he amends it. Obviously, this approach is difficult to accept.

The key to this Sifri lies in the understanding of the word "חיכנָה". Generally, we translate this word as "to enter," but we see from Chazal that this is not a proper translation. There is a fascinating Gemara (Shabbos 32a) relating to the terminology we use for shuls (בית כנסת): "R' Yishmael Ben Eleazar says that ignorant individuals die prematurely for two sins; for calling the 'Holy Ark' a chest and for calling a shul ('beis knesses') 'a gathering place' ('beis am')." Rashi further explains that referring to a shul as a place where people gather is denigrating.

Maharsha (ad loc) finds this very difficult and points out that the word in Hebrew - "beis knesses" - also means a gathering place. So why were the ignorant punished for calling it beis am, which seems to merely be another translation?

Maimonides (Yad Hilchos Teffilah 11:1) makes a fascinating statement: "Any place that has ten Jews is required to build a house for them to enter in and pray at all the required times. This place is called a beis haknesses." What does Rambam mean by the words "for them to enter - בֵּית כְּנָסֶס"? Rambam could have easily left those words out and the meaning of the sentence would have been exactly the same. What is the point of writing "for them to enter"?

Maimonides is teaching us what a shul is all about. The words don't merely mean to enter, they mean to connect. We shouldn't view a shul as a place we gather (a 'beis am'), rather we must view a shul as a place we connect to each other. That is what the obligation of building a shul is all about. We don't build a shul to just have a place to daven, we build it as a place to connect as a people. We find many instances in Chazal of this concept (Hachnosas Orchim - Machnisei Shabbos, etc.). Ignorant people don't understand this, they think a shul is merely a place Jews go to gather and pray, but they are missing the very essence of what a shul is supposed to be.

That's what the Sifri in this parsha is saying. It isn't referring to the initial entering of Eretz Yisroel. Rather, the mitzvah of bikkurim, whenever it is done, will cause a person to be merited to be connected to the land of Israel.

Mind Your Mind

Hashem will strike you with madness and with blindness and confounding of the heart (28:28).

The latter half of this week's parsha informs us, in very explicit detail, of all the calamitous consequences that will befall us for not properly following in the path of Torah and mitzvos. Concerning this verse, the Ibn Ezra (ad loc) writes that they refer to illnesses of the mind. From this Ibn Ezra we see something remarkable regarding illnesses of the mind.

A number of years ago a man who was in a desperate state came to see the Rosh HaYeshiva. He was highly educated and held a Master's in Engineering from an Ivy League school, where he had graduated with honors. Previously, he had headed a large construction firm with many employees and his firm had offices occupying over a 100,000 square feet of space. Then came the financial crash, his business fell apart, and he was forced to close it down. Moreover, he had personally guaranteed the business leases, so he was sued for

payment, which led to his personal financial ruin. Things deteriorated to the point that he and his wife were forced to move into their son's home.

He was despondent and asked the Rosh HaYeshiva for some guidance. The Rosh HaYeshiva tried to console him and offer some advice for moving forward: "Why don't you go back to school and learn another profession?" The man responded that it was an impossibility as he had recently been diagnosed with ADHD and would not be able to focus on his studies. Here was a man who had an advanced degree from a prestigious school, where he had graduated with honors, and all of the sudden he was learning disabled?

When a person suffers trauma in their life one of the oft overlooked consequences is what this trauma does to the mind. According to both the NIH and a Harvard medical school study, about 5% of the population suffers from ADHD. Yet there are many districts in the country where the diagnoses and prescribe rate for ADHD are more than triple the accepted rate. In one NIH study, children who lived within thirty kilometers of Chernobyl and had subsequently been relocated to Ukraine for ten years were testing positively for ADHD at a rate of almost 20%.

Ever wonder why so many illnesses are being treated today at rates that were unheard of decades ago? Of course, part of the answer is that there is better testing today, but another significant percentage is due to the fact that today so many more children are products of broken or unstable homes where their parents themselves are emotional wrecks. Today, many children are being raised by proxy with video games and social media platforms acting as their guide to the realities of life. There is very little emotional validation in their lives. Is it any wonder they are having issues coping?

The toll that the physical and financial failures will have on Bnei Yisroel's emotional state are no small portion of the terrible consequences of the punishments that Hashem doles out for not following in His ways. However, much of this reaction is within our power to control. This is part of the lesson that is being taught: We need to take control and responsibility for our reactions.

Have you ever had someone come to you and apologize for saying something unkind or inappropriate? Often it goes something like this: "I am sorry I yelled at you for something so silly, please forgive me, it's just who I am." What they are really telling you is, "that's who I want to be." In other words, instead of working on themselves they expect you to just tolerate their boorish behavior. One of the lessons of the tochacha is that we must constantly work to improve who we are and take responsibility for our own emotional state.

Did You Know...

Next motzei Shabbos Ashkenazim begin to rise earlier than usual to go to shul to say selichos. Sephardim, on the other hand, already began reciting selichos at the beginning of the month of Elul. This is not, as is commonly believed, to atone for the sin of eating rice on Pesach. Rather, there are spiritual reasons for the different commencement times.

Rambam (Yad Hilchos Teshuvah 3:4) explains that the Aseres Yemei Teshuva (the Ten Days of Repentance) are crucial to awakening man from his spiritual slumber, and that everyone should engage in a thorough examination of his/her life and deeds; "It is for this reason that all of the Jewish people increase their charitable giving and good deeds and perform extra mitzvos between Rosh

Hashanah and Yom Kippur. In addition, everyone has the custom to wake up during the night (i.e. while it is still dark) and go to shul to recite pleadings and supplications."

So why do Ashkenazim begin before Rosh Hashanah and Sephardim begin on Rosh Chodesh Elul?

For Ashkenazim this is based on two criteria: the 25th of Elul and motzei Shabbos. We find in the Gemara (Rosh Hashanah 8a) the opinion of R' Eliezer that Adam and Chava were created on Rosh Hashanah. This makes the creation of the world the 25th of Elul. According to the Ran (Rosh Hashanah 16a), the Jews of Barcelona and the surrounding areas began reciting selichos on this day - the birthday of the world.

In addition, there is a custom to fast during the Aseres Yemei Teshuva, and to fast for ten days. But there are four days that one is not permitted to fast; the two days of Rosh Hashanah, Shabbos, and Erev Yom Kippur. Thus, those who fast do so prior to Rosh Hashanah. Therefore, the rabbis instituted that when Rosh Hashanah begins on a Monday or Tuesday then selichos begin the prior week on motzei Shabbos.

Sephardim begin on Rosh Chodesh Elul because that is when Moshe ascended Mount Sinai for the second time (returning with the second set of luchos on Yom Kippur). Obviously, these days were filled with much trepidation because during Moshe's first absence Bnei Yisroel sinned with the Golden Calf, Moshe shattered the original luchos, and Hashem was on the verge of destroying the entire nation. Thus, the second time, Bnei Yisroel undoubtedly spent the forty days in a vastly different manner. To memorialize this special time, Sephardim begin saying selichos at the onset of Elul.

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Parshat Ki Tavo

Expressing Thanks

"You will come to whoever is the kohen in those days and you will say to him..." (26:3)

A blisteringly hot Wednesday.

Suddenly there's a power outage. A visit from the electrician reveals the worst: "It's the compressor in your A/C. You need a new one. Trouble is, the manufacturer can only get it here next Tuesday."

"But what are we going to do on Shabbat?"

"Does your Shabbat table fit in the fridge? Listen, I think I can get you a new compressor before Shabbat. I'll do my best."

"You're a tzaddik!"

And sure enough, by Thursday lunchtime the new compressor is in place and the house returns to its regular cool temperature.

On Friday afternoon the electrician's phone rings. He notes the caller ID — it's the people with the new compressor.

"Trouble," he thinks to himself as he answers the phone.

"We just wanted to call you and thank you so much for fixing our air conditioner. You've really made our Shabbat. Thank you so much! Shabbat Shalom!"

Gratitude should never remain implicit. It should be expressed. In this week's portion, the Torah instructs us to give bikkurim — the first fruits — to the kohen. However, it's not enough just to give them.

"You will come to whoever is the kohen in those days and you shall say to him...." Rashi comments on the phrase "and you shall say to him" — "because you are not an ingrate." In other words, what prevents a person from being an ingrate is the verbalization of his gratitude. Anything less is considered lacking.

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Parshas Ki Tavo: To Each His Language

Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

There was a time when the literary treasures of the Jewish people were accessible only to those with a reading knowledge of Hebrew. This is no longer the case. I know of no major Jewish religious work which has not been translated into English in recent years and, in most instances, into many other languages as well. The past several decades have witnessed the publication of multiple editions of the Bible and the Talmud, commentaries ancient and modern, liturgical works, historical tomes, biographies, and even cookbooks with recipes of our ancestors.

I must confess that when this phenomenon of translation began, I was not all that happy. I am a bit of a purist and have long clung to the belief that sacred Hebrew books should be read in the original. I was willing to make exceptions for those religious classics which were originally written in languages other than Hebrew, such as those works of Maimonides, Saadia Gaon, and Bahya ibn Paquda, which were originally written in Arabic and translated into Hebrew and eventually English as well. But for me, the Bible and classical commentaries were to be read only in the language in which they were written.

I was guided in my opposition to translation by the classic Italian motto, "traduttore traditore", "the translator is a traitor." No translation is exactly accurate, and ideas expressed in one language inevitably lose some of their meaning when rendered into another language. Every translation compromises beauty and forfeits subtlety and nuance.

Ironically, in recent years, I myself have become a translator. My first professional effort was with the elegies that are recited on the solemn day of Tisha b'Av, when Jews recall the seemingly endless chain of catastrophes that have marked Jewish history. Translating these poignantly tragic poems was a difficult challenge. But I undertook the task in the belief that an English translation was better than no translation, and that I was doing a public service by bringing these poems to the public, albeit in a far from perfect form.

Since then, and to this day, I have been involved in the process of translating classical Jewish works, and have come to terms with the fact that translations, although far from perfect, bring Torah study to multitudes of individuals who would otherwise be deprived from so much of our tradition.

These reflections bring us to this week's Torah portion, Parshat Ki Tavo (Deuteronomy 26:1-29:8). The relevant verses read, "As soon as you have crossed the Jordan into the land that the Lord your God is giving you, you shall set up large stones. Coat them with plaster and inscribe upon them all the words of this Teaching...On those stones you shall inscribe every word of this Teaching most distinctly" (Deuteronomy 27:2-3, and 8).

What does this phrase, *ba'er heitev*, translated as "most distinctly," mean? The Babylonian Talmud Tractate Sotah 32b suggests that the inscription of the "Teaching," that is, the Torah, should be done in seventy languages, in every language known to mankind. How fascinating! Moses himself, speaking on behalf of the Almighty, instructs the people to engage in that "traitorous" task of translation. He seems unconcerned with the difficulties of rendering the word of God from sacred Hebrew into the languages of all mankind.

Why? Why was it necessary to translate the Torah into languages which were incomprehensible to the people of Israel? Our Sages offer two very different answers to this question.

The Jerusalem Talmud takes a universalistic approach and suggests that these translations were to bring the teachings of the Torah to the entire world.

The Zohar, the basic text of the Kabbalah, notes that the members of the Jewish High Court, the Sanhedrin, knew all seventy languages. But the Zohar does not take this literally. Instead, the Zohar understands the seventy languages to be a metaphor for the seventy facets of Torah, the seventy different avenues of interpretation with which the sacred text is endowed. The members of the Sanhedrin were thus not linguists, according to the Zohar, but experts in probing the depths of the Torah's meaning. Perhaps, the seventy languages inscribed on the stones in the River Jordan were also not the languages for the peoples of the world, but were seventy codes enabling so many different approaches to the Torah's interpretation. Permit me to offer a somewhat different approach. I prefer to understand the word "language" more broadly. The word need not be restricted to its literal meaning, referring to French, Spanish, Swahili, and Portuguese. Rather, "language" can refer to a cognitive modality, or to a learning style. Thus, some of us prefer the language of humor, while others prefer the language of logic and reason. We speak of angry language, soothing language, and the language of love. Music is a language, play is a language, and there is even the language of war.

Every teacher worth his salt knows that he must use different "languages" for different students. This does not mean that he speaks to some students in English and to others in Yiddish. No. This means that some students will respond to clear and logical explanations. Others will require anecdotes and stories. Still others will require humor, or perhaps visual illustrations of the subject matter being taught. This is the lesson which every successful teacher learns sooner or later: no two individuals learn in the same way. Woe to the teacher who delivers his or her prepared lecture once, and expects all thirty pupils to learn the material. The successful teacher discerns the

learning styles of each pupil and develops strategies and modalities that facilitate the learning of every member of the class.

Perhaps this is what the Talmud in Tractate Sotah is really teaching. Inscribed on those stones in the River Jordan were seventy different teaching strategies, seventy pedagogical tools, which would enable every recipient of the Torah to learn its messages in his or her own idiosyncratic way. Some would learn best by reciting the words by rote until they were memorized. Others would learn by breaking the text down into small phrases and reflecting on them, and still others would learn by using visual imagery to "see" the meaning of the text. Indeed, the phrase "seventy facets of Torah" could be the Zohar's way of referring to seventy different learning styles, encouraging teachers to identify a "stone in the River Jordan" to match every pupil, even those who on the surface appear unteachable.

If I am at all correct in this interpretation of "the seventy languages" I am asserting that our Sages were very aware of a basic lesson in education. That lesson is that there is a need for individualized curricula so that diverse populations can all learn well.

This lesson is reflected throughout Talmudic literature. Here is one example:

"Observe the excellent advice given to us by the Tanna Rabbi Yehoshua ben Perachya: 'Make for yourself a teacher, and acquire for yourself a friend...' If you do this you will find that your teacher will teach you mikrah, mishnah, midrash, halachot, ve'aggadot. Whatever is not conveyed in mikrah (Scripture) will be conveyed in mishnah; whatever is not conveyed in midrash will be conveyed in the halachot; whatever is not conveyed in the halachot will become clear in the study of the aggadot. Thus, the student will sit in place and fill himself with all that is good and blessed." (Avot DeRabbi Nathan, 8:1)

In this passage our Sages are advocating a richly variegated curriculum. They know that not every student will be fully informed by the study of one subject. The student who fails to gain from the study of mikrah, will gain instead from a very different type of text, mishnah, the early rabbinic codification of the Oral Law. And similarly for midrash, rabbinic lore; halachot, rules and regulations, and aggadot, legends and stories.

There are many erudite quotations that I could cite to summarize the point of my brief essay. But I prefer to conclude with a remark I hear from my teenage grandchildren: Different strokes for different folks. Arguably, this is an apt motto for getting along with people in all situations. But it is especially apt for teachers. And as I have repeatedly stated in this column, we are all teachers!

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Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

Dvar Torah: Ki Tavo

Why are stones so important in our tradition?

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 "וְקַתְבָּתָה עַל-דְּאַבְנִים אֶת-קְלִזְבָּנִי הַתּוֹגָה כִּאֵת" 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 “**אָבִן שְׁرָאֵל** – he is the stone of Israel”. What did Yaakov mean? Targum Onkelus, the Aramaic translation, explains that the word ‘**אָבִן**’ is a composite term. It is made up of two words, ‘**אָבָּ**’ and ‘**בִּן**’ meaning father and son – together making ‘**אָבִן**’. So Yaakov was saying of Yosef that he was the **אָבִן שְׁרָאֵל** – 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 **אָבִן** – 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. 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. “**אָבִן מָצָא שְׁבָנוּם הַבּוֹנִים הַוְתָּה לְרֹאשׁ פֶּתַח**” – 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: “**אָבִן מָצָא הַבּוֹנִים הַוְתָּה לְרֹאשׁ פֶּתַח**” – even where those who are building the future of our world reject the notion of ‘**אָבִן**’, 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 – “**אָמֵן יִשְׂרָאֵל הַזָּהָר**” – 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.

Shabbat Shalom

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Ki Tavo: Expanding Land

Ben-Tzion Spitz

Still round the corner there may wait, a new road or a secret gate. - J. R. R. Tolkien

The Torah reading of Ki Tavo presents us with both blessings and curses. There are horrific, frightening curses that God says will be the result of abandoning Him. Conversely, there are wondrous blessings if we are steadfast in our loyalty to God.

The Meshech Chochma expands on one sliver of the blessings in Deuteronomy 28:8, which reads as follows:

“The Lord will ordain blessings for you upon your barns and upon all your undertakings: He will bless you in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.”

The Meshech Chochma explains that just as God can and does provide a blessing for the miraculous expansion of the produce being stored in the barns, so too, God allows for the miraculous expansion of the Land of Israel.

In a number of places in the Torah, we see hints to the phenomena of the unusual and unexpected contraction or expansion of dimensions, of space and time. We have the examples of the incredibly shortened journeys of both Jacob and Abraham’s servant. We have examples of the unusual dimensional effects within the Tabernacle and the Temple. It’s as if there is some Einsteinian time and space dilation occurring. I’ve theorized elsewhere that there is a connection between extreme holiness and relativistic effects (think of approaching God as approaching the speed of light and then miraculous time and space dilation seems much less surprising). The Meshech Chochma states that there is indeed a supernatural effect at work in this blessing. That somehow, space expands. It’s similar to what the Talmud tells us about the pilgrims to Jerusalem, that none of them ever said “the space is too small for me.”

In the times of the Temple, there was a miraculous expansion of the city of Jerusalem, which enabled as many pilgrims as came to find adequate accommodations. So too, there is a blessing upon the entire land of Israel, that it will expand; that somehow the existing land will grow and be able to accommodate as many people as needed.

May all those who want to come to Israel, find the right space. Dedication - To Saudi Arabian airspace. Thanks for letting us through.

Shabbat Shalom

Ben-Tzion Spitz is a former Chief Rabbi of Uruguay. He is the author of three books of Biblical Fiction and over 600 articles and stories dealing with biblical themes.

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Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz

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Parashat Ki Tavo: A successful society’s foundations

Prohibitions that ‘merit’ being cursed are all acts that damage relationships between people.

One of the most spectacular events in Jewish history is described in this week’s Torah portion, Ki Tavo: the event on Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal, at which Moses commanded the nation to hold a ceremony of blessings and curses, with half the nation standing on Gerizim, and the other on the opposite mountain, Ebal, and the kohanim (priests) and Levites standing in the center between the mountains, announcing the list of blessings and curses.

Before we deal with the content of the ceremony, let us focus first on the venue. These two mountains, Gerizim and Ebal, surround the city of Shechem – the city that Abraham reached on his journey to Canaan, where he established an altar to God; the city where Jacob planted roots when he purchased a field across from it and where the

tomb of Joseph is located. This place, at the center of the Land of Israel, is where the scene took place.

What occurred at this event of blessings and curses? Who was blessed and who was cursed? A not particularly long list of acts merited mention at this event, including acts of incest for which the perpetrators were cursed, as well as anyone who objects to, and rebels against, Judaism. Along with these serious offenses, several other acts were mentioned at this event, undoubtedly negative ones, and we will focus on them to see what these negative acts entailed that warranted them being included in the list of cursed behavior. “Cursed be he who moves back his neighbor’s landmark.... Cursed be he who misguides a blind person on the way.... Cursed be he who perverts the judgment of the stranger, the orphan or the widow.... Cursed be he who strikes his fellow in secret” (Deuteronomy 27:17-24).

When we look at this list of prohibitions that “merit” being cursed, we understand that these are all acts that lead to the destruction of society and damage relationships between people.

Let’s imagine two neighbors with a light fence between their fields. The ability each has to conduct a serene life with hope for success rests on the trust he has in his neighbor not attempting to trespass and steal land from him. If that trust is lost, the person is distracted from concern about his and his family’s success, and instead ends up focused on his neighbor trying to take possession of his land. A person’s trust in a fair trial is similar. In countries where the citizens’ faith in the justice system and its enforcement is eroded, these citizens lose their existential security. The Torah does not suffice with a demand for fair trial, but emphasizes the weaker segments of society – the stranger, the orphan and the widow, those who do not have supportive families – as also eligible for a fair trial.

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Two additional examples of acts that erode society’s existential security are misguiding a blind person and secretly striking another person.

The first situation describes one in which someone meets a blind person and, rather than assisting him as one would expect anyone to do, he chooses to mislead him. Such a situation is appalling in that it erodes the minimal trust that exists between people. Any one of us would expect that in a state of distress, we would have someone who would assist us. Someone who does the opposite and actually causes harm does not do so only to the blind person, but harms society as a whole.

The same is true for someone who strikes another in secret.

According to the great commentator Rashi, this refers to someone who speaks badly of another. In such a situation, which unfortunately is quite common, the victim doesn’t get the chance to defend himself. Only after the damage was done does he find out that he was harmed by the inconsiderate tarnishing of his name by someone who spread rumors about him.

Nowadays, there is a phenomenon in social media called “shaming.” Under the guise of anonymity, we see people humiliated and demeaned. This wonderful tool that allows everyone to express opinions can become a lethal weapon that tramples the dignity of others.

At this event of blessings and curses that took place immediately after the Jewish nation entered the Land of Israel, emphasis is placed on strong personal-social foundations, those that, when adopted,

allow us to live in a better and more moral society that rests on mutual trust, concern for others and unconditional love.

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subject: Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

Shema Yisrael Torah Network

Peninim on the Torah - Parshas Ki Savo

פִּישְׁתָּה כִּי תְּבֹא תְּשִׁיבָה

שְׁמָמָה בְּכָל הַטּוֹב

You shall be glad with all the goodness. (26:11)

Parashas Ki Savo begins with the *mitzvah* of *Bikurim*, the first fruits, in which the Jewish farmer is enjoined to bring his first fruits to Yerushalayim as a sign of his gratitude to Hashem. He makes a declaration of gratitude, whereby he details Hashem’s loving intervention throughout history, thus demonstrating the realization that everything that he has is only as a result of Hashem’s beneficence. *Hakoras hatov*, expressing one’s gratitude, is a requisite for an individual to be considered a decent human being. One who is an ingrate to others will eventually act likewise to Hashem. We are accustomed to viewing the ingrate as arrogant, considering himself better than those who reach out to benefit him. Expressing gratitude for favors received is below his dignity. Another negative perspective of the ingrate is his insatiable hunger, his implacable desire which is hardly ever appeased. Thus, whatever someone does for him is insufficient, because he wants more. He never has enough, so why should he be grateful? He is a self-centered person, who sees everything in life as being all about himself/me. He does not care about anyone other than himself. Gratitude is the farthest thing from his mind, because everyone owes him. These characterizations of the ingrate have one common denomination: the ingrate has feelings; he is not emotionless. If someone were to act unkindly to him, he would take revenge. He would not tolerate a disservice, maltreatment, or disparagement.

Another aspect of ingratitude is that the reaction of an ingrate goes beyond the pale of “normative” ingratitude: the Amalek syndrome. In the end of *Parashas Ki Seitzei* (Devarim 25:17), the Torah exhorts us to remember the evil attack of Amalek against us during our nascent as a nation. Shortly after our liberation from Egypt, Amalek attacked us for absolutely no reason other than his venomous hatred against G-d’s representatives in this world. Our only offense was our religion. As the designated chosen people, we became Amalek’s sworn enemies.

The *Midrash Tanchuma* (*Ki Seitzei* 6) offers a rare perspective on the aberrant behavior of this loathsome nation, and, by extension, all those who have descended from the original miscreants, or, who act in a manner similar to them. The *Midrash* cites *Sefer Tehillim* 32:9, *Al tiheyu k’sus k’fered ein havin*, “Be not like a horse, like a mule, uncomprehending.” Hashem said to *Klal Yisrael*, “Do not be like the horse that lacks comprehension. If a man (his master) goes to bring it food, to place upon it ornaments, it swallows the food, bends its neck and kicks outward. Likewise acts the mule. (These two animals are clueless concerning the generosity of their benefactor. To them, the aid and services they receive mean nothing.) You (*Klal Yisrael*), do not be like them (horse/mule, or in their characterization of Amalek).

You should pay attention and be vigilant in appreciating the favor that you receive and express gratitude for it.” The *Midrash* continues that we should neither despise the *Edomi*, because he is our brother; nor the Egyptian, because we were “guests” (ill-treated, but still guests) in their land.

Horav Henach Leibowitz, zl, derives from this *Tanchuma* a novel perspective concerning the *kafui tov*, ingrate. It is possible that this person not only eschews expressing gratitude, but also neither reacts to evil, nor exacts retribution against someone who has hurt him. While the latter may be to his credit, the reason for this attitude is not. This person responds neither to the good nor the bad because he is apathetic, impervious to expressing emotion, regardless whether it concerns good or bad. He simply does not care; he is indifferent to what happens around him, totally disengaged from reality.

It is possible for a person not to acknowledge the most basic and most simple occurrences for what they are. The *Rosh Yeshivah* posits that the Torah exhorts us to remember what Amalek did to us – not because the Torah is suggesting that Amalek did not seek to do us harm. We have no question that his intentions were evil and that he was bent on destroying us. So, what is the problem? Why do we require a reminder to inculcate our psyche that Amalek’s name must be blotted out? People who do not think do not comprehend. They can go through life ignoring all the signs that point to someone and scream, “He is evil! He wants to destroy you!” If a person refuses or is unable (for various reasons) to think cogently, he will ignore the clear and the obvious, and might even embrace Amalek! We have seen more than one instance in which well-meaning (but nonsensical and naïve) people have embraced the most reprehensible individuals – people who sought to do us harm. Why? They did not think. The *Tanchuma* teaches us that one who does not think is like a horse or a mule: clueless, insensitive and dimwitted.

**וְשָׁמַחַת בְּכָל הַטּוֹב אֲשֶׁר נָתַן לְךָ דָ' אֱלֹקִיךְ וְלִבְיתְּךָ וְהַלְוִי וְהַגֶּר אֲשֶׁר בְּקָרְבֶּךָ
And you shall be glad with all the goodness that Hashem, your G-d, has given you and your household – you and the *Levi* and the *ger* who is in your midst. (26:11)**

A farmer toils, labors in the field, at times under grueling conditions. *Baruch Hashem*, he is successful and his field produces a bumper crop. Obviously, at this point, the farmer will be overwhelmed with joy. Why does the Torah enjoin him to rejoice? One would expect this to be a given. *Horav Mordechai Gifter, zl*, observes that human nature is such that man is never happy with what he has. *Mi she’yeish lo manah rotzeh masaim*, “One who has one hundred – wants two hundred.” He is never satisfied. Whatever success he has achieved he always feels that he could have done better; he could have made/acquired/succeeded more. While this might be a good thing with regard to Torah-study and erudition, concerning materialism, it can drive a person to a voracious desire to amass more and more, thus transforming him into an unhappy person. Rather than sit back and rejoice over what he has achieved, he is miserable concerning what he does not have. His problem arises from the misguided notion that whatever he has accomplished in life is the result of his own doing. One who lives life knowing that everything he has and all that he has achieved is only due to Hashem, understands that he will not receive that which Hashem does not deem to be appropriate for him (at that time). By enjoining us to rejoice, the Torah is intimating to us: Be satisfied with what Hashem has given you. Do not permit your

desire for more – your “wants” – to supplant your “needs”, impeding your ability to rejoice with what Hashem has given to you.

The Torah exhorts us to rejoice by sharing our goodness with others – our family – and with those less fortunate than we are. True *simchah*, posits the *Rosh Yeshivah*, is attained only when one shares his *simchah* with the destitute and the dejected. If we wish our *simchah* to reach its apex, its fullest potential, then we should see to it that we share our *simchah* with those in need.

Perhaps I might suggest another form of sharing, one that surprisingly (mostly due to petty reasons) some of us have great difficulty in accepting: sharing other people’s joy or – as psychologists refer to it – manifesting positive empathy. This concept applies not only to parents sharing their child’s success, but also rejoicing for, and with, the child. (It is not only about the parent’s *nachas* and boasting rights). This concept also includes sharing a student’s success, or a spouse’s achievement, but, most of all, the success and happiness of other people – friend or acquaintance. The idea that one can be happy for others means that one cares about others, that life is not only about oneself. True satisfaction is derived when one shares other people’s joy, because then he shows that other people are also significant; their joy is my joy. When one acknowledges this, he realizes that unless he shares another person’s joy, he is limiting his own sense of satisfaction. Thus, true satisfaction is achieved when one shows positive empathy and shares in another person’s joy.

גַם כָל חָלֵי וּכְלֵי מִכְחָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא כְתּוּב בְּסְפַר הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת יָעַלְמֵם ד' עַלְמֵם
Even any illness and any blow that is not written in this Book of the Torah, Hashem will bring upon you. (28:61)

Chazal say that the *choli* and the *makah*, illness and blow, are references to the tragic passing of *tzaddikim*, righteous persons. (Veritably, this *Midrash*, which is quoted by a number of commentators, has yet to be found.) The *Yaaros Devash* quotes it (*Chelek 1, Drush 4*). *Horav Yeshayah Pik, zl*, writes that he had searched for this *Midrash* and was unsuccessful in locating its source. Indeed, he observed anecdotally that this is the meaning of a blow that is not written in the Torah. He is unable to locate this *Midrash*. Apparently, in *Shut Tiferes Tzvi Yoreh Deah 38*, the author cites the *Zohar HaKadosh* (*Chelek bais daf 10b*). *Horav B. Ransburg* explains that every one of the *Chamishah Chumshei Torah*, Five Books of the Torah, mentions the deaths of *tzaddikim*: *Bereishis*, the *Avos* and *Imahos*, Patriarchs and Matriarchs; *Shemos* commences with the passing of *Yosef* and the Tribes; *Vayikra* relates the tragic death of *Nadav* and *Avihu*; *Bamidbar* details the passing of *Aharon HaKohen* and *Miriam HaNeviah*; *Sefer Devarim* does not mention the death of any *tzaddik*. (Although *Moshe Rabbeinu*’s death is mentioned after *Parashas Ki Savo*, when he admonished the nation with the rebuke, he was obviously still alive.) Furthermore, the deaths and burials of every one of the preceding *tzaddikim* were noted in the Torah. No one witnessed either *Moshe*’s death or his burial. The atonement of a *tzaddik*’s passing is derived through the medium of contemplation, ruminating over his life and achievements. This is best achieved when one can stand at the *tzaddik*’s grave, and, with a relaxed mind, deliberate about his life. This is impossible with regard to *Moshe Rabbeinu*’s life. Thus, *Sefer Devarim* is the place in which the blow of *missas tzaddikim* is not explicit. To recap: Veritably, all Five Books mention a *tzaddik*’s

passing. However, *Devarim* mentions it later – after Moshe's Admonition. Thus, it really does not count.)

When the *Satmar Rav*, zl, visited Yerushalayim in 1932, he *davened* in one of the *shuls*. When the *shliach tzibbur, chazzan*, who was reading the service concluded *chazoras ha'shatz*, the repetition of *Shemoneh Esrai*, the *gabbai*, sexton, banged on the lectern. The *Rav* inquired for the reason behind this *makah*, banging. The *gabbai* explained that the *shul's* custom is not to recite *Tachanun*, supplication-confessional service, and instead recite *Kaddish* if that day coincides with the *yahrzeit*, anniversary of the passing, of a *tzaddik*. Thus, since that day they were commemorating the loss of a *tzaddik*, he banged as a form of announcement. The *Rav* mused that now he understood the meaning of the *pasuk*, “and a blow which is not written in the Torah,” a reason *Tachanun* is not recited when a *bris* is being celebrated or if a newly-married *chassan*, during the first week following the wedding, attends the service. Such a *makah*, “blow/banging,” is written in the Torah/*Shulchan Aruch*. The commemoration of a *tzaddik*'s passing, however, is one that is not recorded in *Shulchan Aruch*. Therefore, *Tachanun* should be recited (unless a *Meseches of Talmud* is concluded and a *siyum*, ceremony, is celebrated).

In *Chut Ha'meshulash* by *Horav Shlomo Sofer*, zl, *Rav* of Beregszasz, Czechoslovakia, the author distinguishes between *choli*, illness, and *makah*, blow. A *makah* is obvious, noticeable to the naked eye. One bangs himself in such a way that results in a wound that can hardly be concealed. *Choli*, illness, is different. It can be covered up, camouflaged, thus kept secret. One does not become immediately aware of an illness. It might take weeks and even months before the effects of the illness are noticed and revealed.

A similar phenomenon occurs with the passing of a *tzaddik*. When a *tzaddik* takes leave of his mortal surroundings, his passing leaves an immediate void, a vacuum that is painful. The *tzaddik* illuminates a community; he is their inspiration, their lodestar, their source of hope. With his passing, the *makah*, blow, is felt throughout. When time passes and life goes on, however, we become further aware and understand the depth of the loss of the *tzaddik*. When life continues and people begin to move on, we recognize and finally acknowledge the irreplaceable loss that we sustained. This is *choli* – illness, revealed, laid bare for all to see and truly sense the loss.

The *p'shat*, explanation, of *makah* and *choli* appropriately apply to the passing of a *tzaddik*. It is only after some time has elapsed that we truly begin to grasp the irreparable loss, the immeasurable toll of losing such a *tzaddik*. If this is the case, why does *choli*, illness, precede *makah*, blow? The blow is immediate, while the illness is only felt later on. The sequence in the *pasuk* should have been reversed. After ruminating over this question, I came to the realization that, indeed, the sequence is as it should be. The *pasuk* (I suggest) is addressing long-range effect. While long-term loss of the *tzaddik* might be mollified somewhat when a successor ascends to fill the void, no one can actually replace and serve as a substitute for the *tzaddik* who inspired so many. The natural course of life is that no one lives forever, and we hope that when we are summoned “home,” our life has served as a blessing for others. Generations pass, and *tzaddikim* move on to a better world, take their rightful place in *Olam Habba*, the World-to-Come. What we never get over is the shock of the blow, the suddenness of the loss, the overwhelming grief that we

are unable to shake. The blow lives with us. It is something that we can never forget. Thus, *choli* precedes *makah*.

נשארתם במתן מעת

You will be left few in number. (28:62)

The *Klausenberger Rebbe*, zl, made his home first in New York following the tragedies that he endured in the European Holocaust. Not to sit idle, he understood that his purpose in life at that time was to give comfort to the survivors and build for the future. He set himself to establish institutions of Torah and *chesed*. Institutions are not built on dreams. He knew that soliciting funds was a vital part of his mission. To this end, he was prepared to travel to other American cities in search of supporters to help him realize his dreams.

During one of his fund-raising trips, he was traveling by train, sitting in the corner of the car, reciting *Tehillim*. The train stopped at a station to allow travelers to disembark and others to alight the train. A middle-aged gentleman, clearly unobservant, entered the car in which the *Rebbe* was traveling and sat down across from the *Rebbe*. He noticed the *Rebbe* reciting *Tehillim* and could not refrain himself from speaking out.

“You are still wasting your time reciting *Tehillim*? I came from a city of righteous men like you. Despite having been raised in an observant home, I was spiritually quite distant from them. Yet, they all perished and I survived! All of the observant, G-d-fearing, good Jews died, while I lived. Can you explain that? That is when I decided that this was not for me.”

The *Rebbe* listened to the man and suddenly broke out in bitter weeping. The man was visibly upset, “Why are you weeping?” The *Rebbe* looked at the man and amidst his copious tears, said, “I, too, was the last of my family and my community. We had the finest and the greatest individuals whose entire lives revolved around serving the Almighty; yet, they all were murdered and I survived. Should I not weep?”

When this newly-assimilated Jew took note of the *Rebbe's* reaction, his extraordinary humility, he, too, began to weep, to the point that he buried his head in the *Rebbe's* loving embrace – as both continued to mourn the many who were no longer able to weep. This experience altered what had become the man's downward spiral and brought him back to his pre-World War II level of observance.

The man was inspired by the *Rebbe's* humility. I think the *Rebbe* was intimating another message to this man. So many righteous Jews perished, and only a handful survived. Does this mean that the survivors were more worthy? Absolutely not! Hashem has His reasons. One thing is for certain: if Hashem allowed one to live when so many had died, then He obviously expects something of the survivors. “We have a mission!” the *Rebbe* was telling the man. “Otherwise, why should we live, when so many others – more worthy than we – died? He expects us to carry on, to rebuild, to inspire, not to weep and mourn. He certainly does not expect us to renege our *Yiddishkeit*!”

After the tragic passing of Nadav and Avihu, Aharon *HaKohen's* two older sons, Moshe *Rabbeinu* informed Aharon, Elazar and Isamar, Aharon's two other sons, that they were to eat the *Korban Minchah*. Although an *onen*, mourner prior to the burial of the deceased, was not permitted to partake of *Kodoshim*, sacrificial offerings, Hashem had said that this day was to be different. The wording of the *pasuk* is ambiguous: “Moshe spoke to Aharon and to

Elazar and Isamar, *banav ha'nosarim*, his remaining sons" (Vayikra 10:12). What is the meaning of "his remaining sons"? Is it not obvious that if Aharon had four sons, of which two died, the other two were "his remaining sons"? Is there a purpose in underscoring their sequential position, as *nosarim*, remaining?

I believe it is *Horav Matisyahu Solomon, Shlita*, who explains this as Moshe's way of saying: "You are the survivors. Therefore, your responsibility is greater. Your mission is no longer about 'you'; it is also about 'them' – your brothers – who were unable to complete their mission." Survivors have a dual mandate – their own and that of those who did not survive. *Klal Yisrael* is a nation of survivors.

B'chol dor va'dor omdin aleinu l'chalocheinu, "In every generation there arise those who would annihilate us." Some survive – others do not. The survivors must remember that they must carry two sets of responsibilities. This is critical, because if you do not care about your personal responsibility to the *klal*, community, at least care about those who did not make it.

I think this might be homiletically expressed via the words *Va'yaamod bein ha'meisim u'bein ha'chaim*, "And he (Aharon HaKohen) stood between the dead and the living" (Bamidbar 17:13). Following the plague that killed some of Korach's supporters, while the rest became ill, it was Aharon whose incense prevented those who were ill, but still alive, from allowing the illness to take its course and kill them. He stood between those who were gone and those who were ill – but not gone. Perhaps we might say that Aharon was teaching us that even when we stand with the living, we may not forget about those who did not survive. They paid the ultimate price; they made the ultimate sacrifice.

When one is absorbed with his own good fortune, his health, he often loses sight of those who did not fare as well, who did not come home. I write this *Erev Shavuos*, two and a half months into the insidious plague that has wrought havoc on so many lives. The tragic stories that we all carry with us are numerous. The images of individuals who have suffered, families torn apart, are still before our eyes. Some worry about the inconveniences they have endured, their physical, emotional, economical and spiritual difficulties.

Nonetheless, they are still talking. They are alive to complain and reminisce. There are sadly many who no longer have this opportunity. Children complain about inconvenience. Other children are too sad to complain, because they no longer have anyone to whom to complain. This is my take on standing *bein ha'meisim u'bein ha'chaim*. Never lose sight of those who have less, who are less fortunate, who did not make it.

The following story is a classic. I made an attempt to locate its source, but was not successful. I will have to relate it from memory. A young couple were blessed with a son and, on the eve of his *bris*, they disagreed concerning the name they wanted to give their son. The husband wanted to name his son after his grandfather who had been a distinguished Torah scholar. His wife refused – not because she had issues with the grandfather -- but because she was uncomfortable giving her son that name. They were a G-d-fearing couple, so they decided to seek the sage advice from a *gadol*, Torah giant – (I believe it was *Horav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, zl*).

They presented their case. The *Rav* listened, then asked the mother to divulge what it was about the name that made her uncomfortable. She replied that in the apartment building in which they presently lived, there was a woman who had lost a son by the very same name.

She understood that his name did not cause the other child to leave this world prematurely. The mother explained that she did not want her son to have this name because she was certain that one day her little boy would run around, and she would have to call him loudly through the building. She feared that the other mother would hear the name of her lost child being called throughout the complex, and it would renew her pain and sadness. She did not want to give her son a name that might cause pain to an already afflicted mother. The *Rav* agreed. *Va'yaamod bein ha'meisim u'bein ha'chaim*.

Va'ani Tefillah

–והmerciful כ"י לא תמו חסידיך – ***V'Ha'Meracheim ki lo samu Chasadecha.***

The Merciful One. Because Your kindness is never exhausted.

Certainly, if we were to ask ten people for their definition of mercy, we would receive ten varied responses. Mercy is a relative term (or so we think), thus, each person selects a definition to which he can best relate. This *tefillah* teaches us otherwise. Hashem is called the Merciful One – because His kindness is never exhausted. There is no end to the Almighty's benevolence. It is not contingent on worthiness. Whether we deserve His kindness or not, we can count on Him to respond to us affirmatively, because His kindness never ends. This is the meaning of mercy: no strings attached. As *Horav Shimon Schwab, zl*, observes, imagine asking someone to lend us money a number of times: five, ten, fifteen times; at some point, the answer will be, "Enough! How many times can you come back to me for money? I have lent you money numerous times. Find someone else!" With Hashem, there is no end. We can – and we do – come back, constantly pleading for favors, begging for mercy, and we can look forward to a positive response. Time and again, every day of our lives, throughout the many challenges that we confront, we can always turn to Him and He will say, "Yes." This is the meaning of mercy.

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Shabbat Shalom: Ki Tavo (Deuteronomy 26:1-29:8)

Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Efrat, Israel – "Cursed be the individual who does not carry aloft the words of this Torah." (Deuteronomy 27:26)

Although I have been blessed with many magnificent students over my five decades of teaching, I shall never forget the piercing words penned by one of my most treasured students, who suddenly and inexplicably turned away from a Torah way of life. For a time he refused to answer any of my heartfelt entreaties for a dialogue – before eventually leaving a poem at my home. In part, it read: Beloved teacher, both of us are often blind; you do not always see how much you taught me and I do not always see how much I learned from you. You think I took the Tablets of Testimony and threw them insolently at your feet. That's not at all what happened. The commandments merely became too heavy in my hands, and they fell to the ground.

As a Torah educator, I still feel the searing pain of losing students such as this one, in whom I had seen so much potential. It led me to difficult questions of myself: Where had I gone wrong as an educator? To what extent was I responsible for his decision? These questions bring to mind a verse from this week's Torah portion, Parshat Ki Tavo, which announces blessings for those who observe specific Biblical commands, and curses for those who reject them. The final denunciation, however, "Cursed be the individual who does not hold aloft the words of this Torah" (Deuteronomy 27:26), is difficult to define. To what is this verse referring?

The Talmud Yerushalmi (Sota 7:4) pointedly asks, in rhetorical fashion, "Is there then a Torah that falls down?" Indeed, the answer is, yes, there is, and Rabbi Shimon Ben Halafta specifies the responsible party for this tragedy: the spiritual leaders of the Jewish community!

While spiritual leaders can be measured to a certain extent by whether those in their care are completely observant of the Torah's teachings, their true mettle is tested by how they respond when their students fall short. Moses demonstrates how a teacher should react in such a situation. Upon witnessing the Jews serving the Golden Calf, he realizes that he has not succeeded in holding aloft the Torah, given that a mere forty days after temporarily ascending Mount Sinai, his people had departed from its ways so quickly. Thus, he casts the Tablets of the Covenant to the ground, smashing them. At that moment, God saw the profound responsibility that Moses took upon himself for the broken tablets, and, according to the Yerushalmi (ibid.) placed within Moses' heart the words of King Josiah: "It is upon me to hold aloft [the words of the Torah]". Hence the Almighty commands Moses to sculpt two tablets just like the earlier two which had been broken (Ex. 34:1).

Fascinatingly enough, this verse is the very source for the Oral Law, specifically unique to the Second Tablets (Midrash Shemot Rabba, ad loc.), and which consists of the input of the Sages in every generation to ensure that the Torah continues to be held aloft.

The Torah "falls" when the Jewish People do not uphold its laws and values. Once the Oral Law – the application of the Torah in every generation – was placed in the hands of the rabbis and teachers, it becomes these leaders' obligation to make certain that it is a Torah of love and a nourishing source of life.

Indeed, it is the responsibility of the spiritual leaders of every generation to see to it that the Torah becomes, in the eyes of the Jewish People, neither so light – of such little significance that it can be easily discarded – nor so heavy and onerous that it can hardly be borne. Those who teach God's Torah must help every Jew feel and understand the loving embrace of Torah, the profound wisdom of Torah, the timeliness and timelessness of Torah.

Shabbat Shalom!

Physical and Spiritual Survival: Thoughts for Parashat Ki Tavo

Angel for Shabbat, Parashat Ki Tavo
by Rabbi Marc D. Angel

In his essay "Fate and Destiny," Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik delineates two aspects of Jewish peoplehood: the camp and the congregation. "The camp is created as a result of the desire for self-defense and is nurtured by a sense of fear; the congregation is created as a result of the longing for the realization of an exalted ethical idea and is nurtured by the sentiment of love. Fate reigns in unbounded fashion in the camp; destiny reigns in the congregation...."

The camp is concerned with our physical survival. We join together to fight against our enemies. We mobilize our resources to defend ourselves from attack. The camp is our means of maintaining our existence in a hostile world.

The congregation is concerned with our spiritual survival. Yes, we need the camp to protect us from danger; but we also need to know the purpose and meaning of our community. Why are we fighting? What are our goals? Survival in and of itself is not enough; we need to survive in order to fulfill our role as a congregation. Rabbi Soloveitchik notes: "The congregation is a group of individuals possessing a common past, a common future, common goals and desires, a common aspiration for a world which is wholly good and beautiful and a common unique and unified destiny."

This week's Torah portion includes the passages to be recited by farmers when they brought their first fruits to the Temple. This recitation reviews Israelite history: our ancestor was a wandering Aramean; we were slaves in Egypt; we overcame many obstacles and much suffering. The text reminds us of our history as a camp. We were endangered; we were afraid; we were victims of a negative fate.

But then the recitation continues by expressing gratitude to the Almighty for bringing us to the land of milk and honey. It puts life in context of the Divine promises to Israel, and the many blessings enjoyed by the people of Israel. The Torah then makes it clear that we are a congregation with a destiny, not merely a camp forced to defend itself. "This day the Lord your God commands you to do these statutes and ordinances; you shall therefore observe and do them with all your heart and with all your soul. You have avouched the Lord this day to be your God and that you would walk in His ways, and keep His statutes, and His commandments, and His ordinances, and hearken unto His voice." (Devarim 26: 17-18)

Throughout our history, the people of Israel has had to view itself and act as a camp. This continues in our own time. The State of Israel and the Jewish People are constantly under physical and political attack. Our survival is threatened by tyrants and pundits, by extremists and bigots, by missiles and potential nuclear attack.

First and foremost, we need to strengthen ourselves as a camp, as a strong and determined people dedicated to defending ourselves from vicious enemies. Not one of us is safe unless we ensure the safety and security of all our camp.

Yet, throughout our history, the people of Israel has understood its nature as a holy congregation. We have stood tall and strong in promoting the great vision of the Torah; the messianic idea that teaches peace for all people; the dedication to God and kindness to our fellow human beings. We

have known "why" we survive; we have been a people with a revolutionary and powerful devotion to righteousness, compassion, respect for all human beings.

Just as we need to devote tremendous energy and strength to maintaining our camp, so we need to devote tremendous energy and strength to maintaining ourselves as a congregation. Our physical survival is a primary responsibility; our spiritual flowering is equally vital.

Some Jews are "Jewish" only (or mainly) in response to anti-Semitism or anti-Israel attacks. They are "camp" Jews. Some Jews are "Jewish" only (or mainly) in their fulfillment of the rituals of our religious tradition. They are "congregation" Jews. In fact, though, we each need to play our role in both domains. We need to fortify our camp and activate our congregation.

Some years ago, Israeli families were forcibly evacuated from Gush Katif as a peace gesture on the part of the Sharon government. One of the families, whose son was murdered by Palestinian terrorists, was reluctant to leave their home. The Israeli military insisted that the evacuation had to take place by orders of the Israeli government. The family left its home, but the father asked to return to his house to retrieve two items. The army officer gave him permission to do so.

The man returned with two items: an Israeli flag from above the front door; and the Mezuzah which had been on the doorpost of the front door.

The Israeli flag: a reminder of our need to be a camp, a powerful State that can defend itself from its enemies. The Mezuzah: a reminder of our need to be a congregation, a spiritually vibrant, compassionate and idealistic Torah community.

May the camp of Israel forever be strong in defending our nation. May the congregation of Israel forever be a beacon of light, illuminating ourselves and others with the ideas and ideals of a compassionate, righteous and meaningful Torah.

Please see Rabbi M. Angel's blog on "marketing Rosh Hashana"

<https://www.jewishideas.org/blog/marketing-rosh-hashana-blog-rabbi-marc-...>

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Parshas Ki Savo: Declaration and Confession: The Convert and the Land

By Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom © 2014

I. MIKRA BIKKURIM

The first section in this week's Parashah involves two Mitzvot - the bringing of Bikkurim (first fruits) and the "Mikra Bikkurim" (Bikkurim declaration) which sometimes accompanies the gift of those fruit:

When you have come into the land that Hashem your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess, and you possess it, and settle in it, you shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you harvest from the land that Hashem your God is giving you, and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place that Hashem your God will choose as a dwelling for His name. You shall go to the priest who is in office at that time, and say to him,

"Today I declare to Hashem your God that I have come into the land that Hashem swore to our ancestors to give us."

When the priest takes the basket from your hand and sets it down before the altar of Hashem your God, you shall make this response before Hashem your God:

"A wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number, and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous. When the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, by imposing hard labor on us, we cried to Hashem, the God of our ancestors; Hashem heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. Hashem brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with a terrifying display of power, and with signs and wonders; and He brought us into this place and gave us this land, *Eretz Zavat Halav u'D'vash* (a land flowing with milk and honey). So now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground that You, Hashem, have given me."

You shall set it down before Hashem your God and bow down before Hashem your God. Then you, together with the Levites and the aliens who reside among you, shall celebrate with all the bounty that Hashem your God has given to you and to your house. (D'varim 26:1-11)

There are two independent Mitzvot which seem to be mutually interdependent:

A) "you shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground, ... and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place" - i.e. the Mitzvah of *Hava'at Bikkurim* (bringing the Bikkurim to the Beit haMikdash)

B) "You shall go to the priest who is in office at that time, and say to him, 'Today I declare...to give us.'... you shall make this response before Hashem your God: 'A wandering Aramean...So now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground that You, Hashem, have given me.' " - i.e. the Mitzvah of *Mikra Bikkurim* (reciting the Bikkurim declaration)

Even though the presentation of the text implies a concomitant obligation, the Oral tradition maintains that it is possible to be obligated to bring Bikkurim, yet not be obligated (or even allowed) to recite Mikra Bikkurim. (The opposite option is, of course, out of the question - it is unthinkable that someone would make the declaration without having brought Bikkurim). The details of those obligated to "bring and recite," those who "bring but do not recite" and "those who do not bring at all" are delineated in the first chapter of Massechet Bikkurim.

The long and short of "those who bring but do not recite" is that any Jew who owns land in Eretz Yisra'el who has grown fruit (of the seven species) that was exclusively grown on his own land - obtained legally - is obligated to bring Bikkurim to the Beit haMikdash. Yet, if that person cannot honestly make the declaration - i.e. if any of the phrases or words of the declaration do not ring true for the declarant - he cannot recite the Mikra Bikkurim. In the third section, we will analyze an example of this "split" obligation.

II. VIDUI MA'AS'ROT

The second section of this week's Parashah, immediately following parashat Bikkurim, is commonly known as Vidui Ma'as'rot - "the confession of the tithes."

[A word of introduction: Produce grown in the Land is liable for certain Halakhic taxation. In order:

- a) T'rumah (approx. 1/50) must be separated - that belongs to the Kohen and must be given to a member of that family.
- b) Ma'aser (lit. "a tenth" - 1/10 of what's left after T'rumah is taken) is then separated and designated as a gift for the Levi.
- b') T'rumat Ma'aser (1/10 of the Ma'aser) is taken by the Levi and given to the Kohen.
- c) Ma'aser Sheni (lit. "second tenth" - 1/10 of what's left after T'rumah and Ma'aser are taken). This is taken to Yerushalayim and is used for celebration with family and friends. In case it cannot be taken there, its "holy status" is transferred to coins of that value (plus 1/5) and those coins are taken to Yerushalayim, where they are spent on food and drink with which to celebrate.
- c') Ma'aser 'Ani (lit. "poor-man's tenth" - 1/10th of what's left after T'rumah and Ma'aser are taken). This is given to the poor wherever they are.

Note that c) and c') seem to overlap. Keep in mind that the Land works on a seven-year cycle known as the "Sh'mittah cycle." For years 1,2,4 and 5 of the cycle, Ma'aser Sheni is taken. For years 3 and 6, Ma'aser 'Ani is taken in its stead.

The Torah obligates us, in this Parashah, to "clean out our house" on Erev Pesach of the third year and to make sure that all tithes we owe are paid up, after which we make a declaration/confession relating to those tithes.]

The Torah tells us: When you have finished paying all the tithe of your produce in the third year (which is the year of the tithe), giving it to the Levites, the aliens, the orphans, and the widows, so that they may eat their fill within your towns, then you shall say before Hashem your God:

"I have removed the sacred portion from the house, and I have given it to the Levites, the resident aliens, the orphans, and the widows, in accordance with Your entire commandment that You commanded me; I have neither transgressed nor forgotten any of Your commandments: I have not eaten of it while in mourning; I have not removed any of it while I was unclean; and I have not offered any of it to the dead. I have obeyed Hashem my God, doing just as You commanded me. Look down from Your holy habitation, from heaven, and bless Your people Israel and the ground that You have given us, as You swore to our ancestors *Eretz Zavat Halav uD'vash*. (D'varim 26:12-15)

Note that here, just like in Parashat Bikkurim, there is a Mitzvah to give the fruit to its appropriate recipient (the poor, the Levi etc.) and a separate Mitzvah to make a declaration regarding that fruit.

III. QUESTIONS OF STYLE AND LOCATION

I would like to pose two questions about these selections - followed by a third.

1) Why is Mikra Bikkurim exclusively praise and thanks - with no mention of Halakhic restrictions and obligations - whereas the exact opposite is the tone of Vidui Ma'as'rot?

2) As we have noted several times in our earlier shiurim in Sefer D'varim, the Sefer is divided into three sections:

- a) Historic Recounting (Chapters 1-11)
- b) Law Compendium (Chapters 12-26)
- c) Re-Covenanting (Chapters 27-33).

Why were these two selections placed at the very end of the Law Compendium?

THE THIRD QUESTION

As noted above, there are some people who are in the class of "bringing Bikkurim but not making the declaration" (*M'vi'in v'lo Korin*) - and, as noted, this would be because the wording of the declaration does not apply in their case.

An example of this set is the convert, as the Mishnah states: There are some who bring [Bikkurim] and recite [Mikra Bikkurim], some who bring and do not recite and some who do not bring at all... These bring but do not recite. The convert, because he cannot say: "the land which Hashem swore to our fathers to give to us." (Bikkurim 1:1,4).

As the Mishnah understands, the words which actually form the preface to Mikra Bikkurim, "Today I declare to Hashem your God that I have come into the land that Hashem swore to our ancestors to give us.", exclude the convert due to genealogical considerations. The patriarchs to whom God promised the Land are not, technically speaking, his ancestors; for that reason, although he may own land in Eretz Yisra'el and be obligated to bring Bikkurim, he cannot honestly state the declaration.

This Mishnah is followed by a Halakhah in the same spirit, to wit: When a convert prays, he says: "our God and God of the fathers of Israel" and, if he is leading the service, he says: "our God and God of your fathers" (instead of the familiar "God of our fathers").

The Talmud Yerushalmi, in a rare "intrusion," overrules the author of that Mishnah, as follows:

"It was taught in the name of R. Yehuda: The convert himself brings and recites. What is his reason? '...for the father of a multitude of nations have I made you' (said to Avraham in explaining his name change - B'resheet 17:5) [meaning:] Until now, you were the father of Aram, from now on, you are the father of all nations (for an explanation, see the quote from Rambam's Mishneh Torah below). R. Yehoshua ben Levi said: The Halakha follows R. Yehuda." (JT Bikkurim 1:4)

This is indeed how Rambam rules. Here is the relevant ruling from the Mishneh Torah: "The convert brings and recites, since it was said to Avraham: '...the father of a multitude of nations have I made you,' Avraham is the father of the entire world that comes under the wings of the Shekhinah. And Avraham was the first to receive [God's] oath that his children will inherit the Land." (MT Bikkurim 4:3)

So far, so good. Although the wording of the verse seems to exclude the convert, the retroactive inclusion of the convert in the family of Avraham serves to allow him to refer to the Patriarchs as "our fathers", both in prayer and in the Mikra Bikkurim.

The problem begins when we examine the parallel Halakhah regarding Vidui Ma'as'rot. Here is the statement of the Mishnah:

"...as You swore to our ancestors - a land flowing with milk and honey.' Based on this source, the Rabbis said: Yisra'el...recite the confession, but not converts...because they do not have a portion in the Land." (Ma'aser Sheni 5:14)

Until this point, we would not be surprised, considering the ruling of the Mishnah in Bikkurim. Our surprise begins, however, when we look at the relevant Halakhah in Rambam's code:

"Yisra'el and mamzerim recite the confession, but not converts or freed slaves, because they do not have a portion in the Land, as the verse says: '...and the Land which You gave to us...' " (MT Ma'aser Sheni v'Neta' R'vai 11:17)

Our third question is, therefore:

3) Why is the convert included in Mikra Bikkurim - but excluded from Vidui Ma'as'rot?

(R. Moshe Soloveitchik zt"l addressed this question in an article included in "Kovetz Hiddushei Torah" compiled by his son, Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik zt"l. This shiur uses his question as a starting point but takes a different approach - grounded in P'shuto Shel Mikra - to solve the problem. The interested reader is strongly encouraged to read R. Moshe's resolution.)

IV. *ERETZ ZAVAT HALAV UD'VASH*

Before addressing these questions, I would like to point out an anomaly in the last line of Vidui Ma'as'rot:
"Look down from Your holy habitation, from heaven, and bless Your people Israel and the ground that You have given us, as You swore to our ancestors *Eretz Zavat Halav uD'vash*."

We generally assume, in any reference to God's promise to our ancestors (especially as regards the gift/inheritance of the Land) that those ancestors to whom the text refers as our Patriarchs, Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov. That assumption does not hold up very well in this particular instance - if we check through all of the promises, oaths and covenants in B'resheet, nowhere is the Land described as "flowing with milk and honey". The first reference to the Land with that well-known adjective is in Sh'mot 3:17, when God charges Moshe Rabbeinu with his mission to the elders of Yisra'el. What, then, are we to make of this phrasing in Vidui Ma'as'rot?

Ramban, in his commentary to D'varim 26:15, addresses this question and suggests two answers:

"Now, do not find it difficult here that in the oaths made to the patriarchs, "A Land flowing with milk and honey" is not mentioned.

(1) Since at that time the Land was a Land flowing with milk and honey, [it would have been redundant to describe it explicitly. Therefore it was as if] He swore to them about a Land flowing with milk and honey.

(2) Or it may be that "unto our fathers" [here does not mean the patriarchs] but those who came forth from Egypt, for it was to them that it was said: "unto a Land flowing with milk and honey"...

Ramban, in his second answer, provides the starting point for us to answer our third question.

V. TWO DIMENSIONS OF KEDUSHAH

The Ramban, in the commentary quoted above, alludes to the notion that besides the covenant with the Patriarchs (B'rit Avot), there was a later promise, given to the generation of the Exodus (and, by extension, to the generation that entered the Land - see our shiur at <http://www.torah.org/advanced/mikra/5757/dv/dt.57.5.01.html> where we discussed the connection and association between the two) - known as "B'rit Yotz'ei Mitzrayim". The Land was not only promised to Avraham and to his seed - for which purpose Avraham himself walked the length and breadth of the Land as a form of acquisition (see B'resheet 13:17 and BT Bava Batra 100a in the name of R. Eliezer). The Land was also promised to the generation of the Exodus - a promise that was first pronounced at the onset of Mosheh's mission.

This "doubled promise", however, seems a bit superfluous; if we were already given the Land by virtue of the promise to the Patriarchs, what need is there for a further, second promise?

The answer to this lies in an understanding of the basic dialectic which underscores several areas of Halakhah relating to "Kedushah".

For example, the firstborn of the flock and herd is sanctified (Sh'mot 13:2) - yet, there is a Mitzvah to declare the holiness of a B'khor (D'varim 15:19). R. Yehudah haNassi teaches that even though the B'khor is "sanctified from the womb" (i.e. from its birth), nevertheless, it is a Mitzvah to sanctify it (BT N'darim 13a). Why is there a Mitzvah to sanctify something which is already holy?

Similarly, even though Shabbat is already holy from sunset, there is a Mitzvah to declare its sanctity via Kiddush (and to declare the end of its sanctity via Havdalah, even though Shabbat is already over; see MT Shabbat 29:1 for an interesting insight into the relationship between Havdalah and Kiddush). Again, why is there a Mitzvah to declare Shabbat to be holy?

It seems that the Torah is interested in having us participate in the process of Kedushah, such that instead of playing the role of passive recipients, beneficiaries and observers of that which is holy - we can claim a stake and feel a sense of active participation in that process.

This perspective intensifies when we examine the topic of the sanctity of Eretz Yisra'el - and our claim to the Land.

Although the Land was promised to our forefathers - and certainly had a "special quality" to it from that point on (if not earlier), it was not yet Halakhically considered "Eretz Yisra'el". That only took place - vis-a-vis the various obligations which obtain only in the Land - when the B'nei Yisra'el, under the leadership of Yehoshua and organized into camps, tribes and ancestral homes, came into the Land (when some obligations "kicked in") - and conquered it (the rest of those obligations came into force).

Unlike the sanctity of the B'khor or Shabbat, where the level of sanctity is not enhanced via the individual's declaration (but that declaration does allow the individual to participate in the process of sanctification after a fashion), the sanctity of Eretz Yisra'el was dependent on two independent factors. First, there had to be a Divine promise, a gift from God, of the Land. Secondly, those heirs who stood to conquer and settle that Land had to fulfill an act of sanctification - via conquest.

[Note that although the same principle applies to the sanctity of Yerushalayim - that the place of the Mikdash became sanctified through human action - the nature of that sanctification was significantly distinct from the sanctification of the Land. That is the reason that when the Land was conquered by the Assyrians and later by the Babylonians, the sanctity became nullified - but the sanctity of Yerushalayim remained. Rambam's explanation is for this distinction will serve us well:

"Why do I maintain that regarding the [sanctity of the] Mikdash and Yerushalayim 'The first sanctification was valid for the future', yet regarding the sanctity of the rest of the Land of Yisra'el...it was not sanctified for the future? Because the sanctity of the Mikdash and of Yerushalayim is on account of the Shekhinah - and the Shekhinah is never nullified...however, the obligation of the Land with regards to Sh'mittah and tithes is only on account of the National Conquest; once the Land was taken from their hand, the Conquest was rendered null and void." (MT Beit haB'hirah 6:16)]

To recap: In several areas of Halakhah, we have discovered that there are two dimensions of Kedushah: Passive Kedushah (it is sanctified before we approach it) and Active Kedushah (our role in sanctification). Although the Land was promised to our forefathers, the generation of the Exodus (through their children), faced with a fait accompli, nevertheless played an active role in sanctifying the Land and completing the process of that gift.

This is why the Ramban refers to a second oath regarding the Land - because the generation of the Exodus was charted to complete an active part of the fulfillment of that Divine promise.

VI. TWO LEVELS OF INCLUSION

We can now return to the problem of the convert. Although someone who converts becomes a (retroactive) descendant of Avraham - he is not considered a member of any particular tribe (which would, of course, be impossible). In other words, as much as the call "you shall be a father of multitudes" allows the convert in to the nation as a whole, he cannot be considered a member of a particular grouping within the nation.

That being the case, the convert shares, along with all of the B'nei Yisra'el, a membership in the "seed of Avraham" who are destined to inherit the Land. As such, he can claim a piece of the Land (besides being able to call the Patriarchs "our fathers") in the most general way.

On the other hand, he cannot claim a piece of the Yehoshuan inheritance, divided by lottery and by conquest among the nine and a half inheriting tribes.

When we look at the text of the Mikra Bikkurim, we note that the declarant refers to the Land as "a land flowing of milk and honey" - not in the context of the Divine promise, rather as a real-life description of the good Land. This is not the case with Vidui Ma'as'rot, where the phrase is mentioned in the context of the oath.

Following Ramban, we can make the following distinction: Mikra Bikkurim is a celebration and thanksgiving for the fulfillment of the Divine promise to Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov to give their children the good Land (which, practically speaking, flows with milk and honey). That is why the convert can participate in this declaration - he is as much a part of the inheritance of Avraham as is any member of the B'nei Yisra'el.

On the other hand, the Vidui Ma'as'rot focuses on the oath given to the generation of the Exodus - an oath which includes the description of "flowing with milk and honey". That is why a convert cannot make this declaration - because, no matter how much retroactive imagination we employ, we cannot "plug him in" to a particular camp, tribe and ancestral home that he should be considered part of the conquest and division of the Land under Yehoshua.

This distinction helps us answer the first two questions we asked:

These two sections are the final sections in the Law Compendium because they demonstrate the dialectical relationship we have towards the Land - on the one hand, the Land is already ours, already special and already (in some sense) a sanctified place. On the other hand, the sanctification process is in our hands to complete. Since the entire Sefer D'varim was Mosheh's charge to the generation about to enter the Land, it was imperative that they understand the dual nature of our relationship to that Land - the Avrahamic legacy and the Sinaitic covenant.

This also explains why Mikra Bikkurim is exclusively a matter of praise, whereas Vidui Ma'as'rot focuses on the Halakhic details and restrictions of Ma'as'rot. Mikra Bikkurim, being a thanksgiving and celebration of the fulfillment of the Avrahamic promise, is simply an opportunity for praise. Vidui Ma'as'rot, on the other hand, is focused on the fulfillment of our role in that sanctification, which demands proper action - the subject of that Vidui.

This also explains one further distinction. Mikra Bikkurim takes place in the "place where God chooses to place His Name" (i.e. the Beit haMikdash), whereas Vidui Ma'as'rot takes place at home. Mikra Bikkurim is geared to that aspect of our relationship to the Land in which all of 'Am Yisra'el is "equal" and has no divisions by tribes or families. The only place where this can reasonably take place is in the place where God places His Name - the central locus of worship which belongs to all tribes.

Vidui Ma'as'rot is about our role in the conquest and sanctification of the Land - as specific members of specific tribes and families - and, as such, takes place in our own homes.

VII. VIDUI MA'AS'ROT - WHY THE "CONFESSON"?

Although we have already answered the questions we originally proposed, there are two ideas relating to the texts we analyzed that are worth sharing.

S'foro (in his commentary to D'varim 26), comments on the nature of Vidui Ma'as'rot. He wonders why there is a "confession" (trans. of "Vidui") when apportioning the tithes to all of their proper recipients.

S'foro answers (and this answer works quite well with our analysis) that the "confession" relates to the entire reason for tithes and why they must be taken out of the house. Originally, the first born of each family were to be the "Priests"; this is the meaning of the sanctification of the first born during the Exodus. Had that remained status quo, no one would have had to take any tithes out of their houses; they would have just given them to their own first-born children. Since the behavior of the first-born (of the non-Levi tribes) at the incident of the golden calf caused God to remove their special status and transfer it to the Levites, we now have to remove the tithes from our houses and give them to the proper recipients. This is, according to S'foro, the reason for the confession - it is an extended confession for the sin of the golden calf. (This supports our analysis in that it focuses the Vidui Ma'as'rot on the generation and events of the Exodus).

VIII. POSTSCRIPT

One further and final note: The statement from the Yerushalmi which creates a genealogical fiction and declares all converts to be children of Avraham has its echoes in common practice. When someone converts and comes under the wings of the Shekhinah, he becomes known as "Ben Avraham Avinu" (for purposes of an Aliyah etc.).

We could ask the question - why are "born-Jews" known as "B'nei Yisra'el" or "Beit Ya'akov"; yet "Jews by choice" (converts) are called "B'nei Avraham"?

If we examine Avraham's life (something we are surely going to do in detail in a couple of months), we see that his entire life was made up of isolation, turning his back on family and on everything he knew. Ya'akov, on the other hand, had the fortune of being born into the tradition of father and grandfather, which it was his job to absorb and maintain.

This is a crucial distinction between those of us fortunate enough to be born as B'nei Yisra'el - we are indeed followers of Ya'akov, who must absorb our ancestral tradition. Those who have the unique blessing to voluntarily come under the wings of the Divine Presence and convert are truly children of Avraham. They have turned their back on everything familiar, family, customs, faith and tradition - to embrace the Truth. Someone who has taken this bold step is surely a child of Avraham.

PARSHAT KI TAVO

Saying 'thank-you': Ask any mother - it's not enough to 'think' it - a child has to **say** it. For some reason, a verbal declaration, be it of gratitude or regret, is of paramount importance not only for the listener, but - even more so - for the person who utters it.

In Parshat Ki Tavo, we find two such examples of obligatory declarations, precisely where the main speech of Sefer Devarim reaches its conclusion. In this week's shiur, as we study the concluding section of the 'main speech,' we attempt to explain why.

INTRODUCTION

As usual, we must begin our shiur with a quick review of the three basic components of the main speech in Sefer Devarim:

- * Introduction - the events at Ma'amad Har Sinai (chap. 5)
- * The **mitzva** section - (chapters 6-11)
- * The **chukim** u-mishpatim section - (chapters 12-26)

Our last several shiurim have focused on the mitzvot in the **chukim** u-mishpatim section, which began in Parshat Re'eh with the commandment to establish the National Center at **ha-makom asher yivchar Hashem**, then continued in Parshat Shoftim with mitzvot relating to national leadership and waging war, and concluded with a wide variety of civil laws ('mitzvot bein adam le-chavero') in Parshat Ki Tetzeh.

Now, in Parshat Ki Tavo, we find:

A) two final mitzvot, which conclude the **chukim** & **mishpatim** section;
 B) Moshe Rabbeinu's concluding remarks (26:16-19);
 C) a special ceremony to take place on Har Eival (chapter 27);
 D) the 'Tochacha' - a lengthy rebuke (in chapter 28).

Off this backdrop, we will discuss these topics in three "mini-shiurim" into which our shiur will be divided.

PART I - THE TWO LAST MITZVOT OF THE MAIN SPEECH

Review the opening section of Parshat Ki Tavo (26:1-15), noting how it contains two mitzvot:

1) MIKRA BIKKURIM (26:1-11)

A special declaration made upon the presentation of one's first fruits.

2) VIDDUI MA'ASER (26:12-15)

A special declaration recited once every three years, when 'ma'aser sheni' [the second tithe] is given to the poor (rather than to the 'makom asher yivchar Hashem').

Then, review the next short 'parshia' (26:26-19), noting once again how it forms the concluding remarks of the 'main speech'. [To verify this point, simply review the opening psukim of chapter 27, noting how they are written in third person narrative, and hence form the beginning of a new section.]

Based on this short analysis, it becomes quite clear that these two mitzvot were specially chosen to conclude the **chukim** & **mishpatim** section of the main speech of Sefer Devarim. In our shiur, we will attempt to explain why.

WHERE THEY 'REALLY' BELONG!

Before we discuss what is special about these two mitzvot, we must first take into consideration that both of them should have been recorded earlier in the speech, back in Parshat Re'eh. Let's explain why.

Recall how Parshat Re'eh discussed numerous mitzvot relating to "**ha-makom asher yivchar Hashem**" (note how that phrase

appears over fifteen times in that Parsha and in the beginning of Parshat Shoftim, see 12:5,11,14,18,21,26; 14:23; 15:20; 16:2,6,7,11,15,16; and 17:8). Afterward, that phrase doesn't appear again until the mitzva of bikkurim at the end of the speech (see 26:1-2)!

Furthermore, back in Parshat Re'eh, we already found laws relating to bringing other produce to **ha-makom asher yivchar Hashem** (see 14:22-23). Hence, it certainly would have made more sense to record the laws of **bikkurim** back in Parshat Re'eh. [In fact, if we compare this to the pattern established in Parshat Mishpatim (see Shmot 23:14-19, especially 23:19), then the mitzva of **mikra bikkurim** should have been recorded in Devarim chapter 16 (in Parshat Re'eh), together with (or immediately after) the laws of shalosh regalim (compare Devarim 16:9-12 with Shmot 23:14-19).]

Similarly, the laws of **viddui ma'aser** also should have been recorded in Parshat Re'eh, for the simple reason that all the other laws of the three year cycle of ma'aser sheni are found there (see 14:22-29).

Yet for some reason, Sefer Devarim prefers to uproot these mitzvot from Parshat Re'eh and record them instead as part of the finale of the entire speech.

MATCHING BOOKENDS

One could suggest that the relocation of these mitzvot yields a chiastic structure for the entire chukim u-mishpatim section of the main speech. In other words, the mitzvot of **ha-makom asher yivchar Hashem** serve as 'bookends' for the entire **chukim u-mishpatim** section (chapters 12-26), as it both begins and ends with mitzvot relating to this theme.

[In a previous shiur, we offered a similar explanation for the structure of the earlier **mitzva** section of Moshe's main speech. We suggested that the parshiyot of **shma** and **ve-haya im shamo'a** serve as 'bookends' for this section (i.e. chapters 6-11), thus emphasizing the section's overall theme, 'ahavat Hashem' (see shiur on Parshat Va-etchanan).]

Nonetheless, a more basic question remains: i.e. Why were specifically these two mitzvot - **mikra bikkurim** and **viddui ma'aser** - selected (over all the others) to form this closing 'bookend'?

To answer this question, we must show how both of these mitzvot relate to thanking God for the Land of Israel, and how that concept is an underlying theme in the main speech.

To start, note how both mikra bikkurim and viddui maser contain declarations of gratitude for the fertile land granted to us by God:

1. MIKRA BIKKURIM

"You shall then recite: ...and God brought us to this place and gave us this **land**, a land flowing with milk and honey. Therefore, I now bring my first fruits of the **soil** which You have given me" (26:9-10).

2. VIDDUI MA'ASER

"When you set aside your **ma'aser**...you shall declare before Hashem: I have [fulfilled all my obligations]... Look down from heaven and bless Your people Israel and the **soil** You have given us, a **land** flowing with milk and honey, as **You swore to our fathers**" (26:12-15).

Note as well how both declarations thank God not only for the Land but also recall His covenant with the Avot (which included God's original promise of the Land).

This element emerges explicitly in **viddui ma'aser** (see quote above / 26:15), and is expressed more subtly in **mikra bikkurim**, as that proclamation reflects thanksgiving for God's fulfillment of his covenant at 'brit bein ha-btarim' - when the land was promised to Avraham's offspring (see Breishit 15:18 / also compare Breishit 15:13-16 w/ Devarim 26:5-8!.

[See Further Iyun section for a more complete explanation.]

Recall as well how the primary purpose of the main speech was to teach Bnei Yisrael the various laws which they must keep when they enter the land. For example,:

"And **these** are the **mitzva, chukim** u-mishpatim that God has commanded me to impart to you, to be **observed in the land** that you are about to enter and conquer..." (6:1).

[See also 5:28 and our introductory shiur to Sefer Devarim.]

These observations suggest that Sefer Devarim intentionally 'saved' these two 'declarations' for the conclusion of the main speech - because both of these mitzvot relate to the need for Am Yisrael to recognize why God gave them the land of Israel. Hence, it becomes most appropriate that the final mitzvot of this speech include expressions of gratitude to God for the **land** He has given us.

In this sense, one could understand the mitzva of **mikra bikkurim** in a slightly different light. Instead of viewing this mitzva as a yearly thanksgiving to God for our fruits, it should be viewed instead as a yearly thanksgiving to God for the Land. In other words, we thank God for the Land and bring a sampling of our first fruits as a 'token of our appreciation'! [To verify this, carefully read 26:3-8 once again.]

[This may also explain why we quote **mikra bikkurim** in the **Haggada** on Pesach as part of the mitzva of retelling the story of Yetziat Mitzrayim and thanking God for His fulfillment of brit bein ha-btarim. Whereas the primary purpose of this mitzva is to thank God for fulfilling His covenant, this declaration is appropriate as well for **maggid**, in which we thank God for His fulfillment of brit bein ha-btarim. (See Shmot 13:8 and compare with Devarim 26:3, noting the use of '**ve-higgadeti**' in both contexts!)]

Recalling God's covenant with the Avot serves another purpose, as well. The farmer not only thanks God for fulfilling His promise to our forefathers, but also reminds himself of the reason **why** God gave us the land - to become a great nation to represent Him in the world. [See Breishit 12:1-3 and our shiur on Parshat Lech Lecha.]

As such, these declarations are significant in that they emphasize the reason for keeping **all** the mitzvot of the main speech in Sefer Devarim - that Bnei Yisrael become an 'am kadosh' (a holy nation), a model for all nations to follow. [See Devarim 4:5-8.]

PART II / THE FINALE - MOSHE'S CONCLUDING REMARKS

This same theme continues in Moshe Rabbeinu's concluding remarks of the main speech (which follow these two mitzvot):

"On this day, God commands you to observe these **chukim** u-mishpatim... God has affirmed this day that you are His '**am segula**' (treasured nation) and He will set you high above all the nations, that you shall be, as He promised, a '**goy kadosh**' (a holy nation)..." (see 26:16-19)

Moshe concludes the main speech by reiterating the primary purpose behind keeping these mitzvot: that Am Yisrael becomes an **am kadosh**, a holy nation, worthy of representing God.

BACK TO HAR SINAI

Moshe's concluding remarks also feature a striking parallel to God's original charge to Bnei Yisrael at Har Sinai. Recall that when Bnei Yisrael first arrive at Har Sinai, God summons Moshe to the mountain and proposes a special covenant with Bnei Yisrael:

"And now, if **you will listen to my voice** and **keep my covenant**, then you shall become for Me a '**segula**' amongst all the nations...and you shall be for Me a kingdom of priests and a **goy kadosh**..." (Shmot 19:5-6).

This proposal, which actually forms the prelude to the Ten Commandments, explains the central function of Matan Torah - that Am Yisrael will become a **goy kadosh** to represent God.

At the conclusion of the main speech, in which Moshe Rabbeinu repeats those mitzvot which were **originally given at Har**

Sinai (immediately after the dibrot - see our introductory shiur to Sefer Devarim), this very same theme is repeated:

"And God has affirmed this day that you are, as He promised you [at Har Sinai!], His **am segula** who shall **observe** all of His commandments, and that He will set you, in fame and renown and glory, high above all the nations that He has made; and that you shall be, as He promised [at Har Sinai!], a **goy kadosh**..." (26:18-19).

Moshe's concluding remarks thus appropriately close his presentation of the mitzvot that will facilitate Bnei Yisrael's development into a **am segula** and an **am kadosh**, just as He had originally promised at Har Sinai!

THE PROPER BALANCE

Moshe's concluding remarks also beautifully tie together the two sections of the main speech. Recall that the **mitzva** section, whose primary topic is ahavat Hashem, opened with the commandment to love God - 'be-chol levavcha u-vechol nafshecha' - with all your heart and soul. Now, at the conclusion of the **chukim** u-mishpatim section, Moshe explains how these two sections relate to one other:

"The Lord your God commands you this day to keep these **chukim** u-mishpatim; observe them faithfully - 'be-chol levavcha u-vechol nafshecha' - with all your heart and with all your soul..." (26:16).

In other words, the numerous specific mitzvot recorded in the **chukim** u-mishpatim section must be observed with the proper attitude, as explained in the **mitzva** section. Thus, Moshe's speech has come full circle. The general values of faith and love of God outlined in the **mitzva** section must combine with the practical, day-to-day details and guidelines of the **chukim** u-mishpatim section, to form a mode of behavior capable of producing God's special nation in His special land.

PART III - THE COVENANT AT ARVOT MO'AV AND HAR EIVAL

The thematic and textual parallel to Ma'amad Har Sinai at the conclusion of the main speech continues in the next parshia as well: "Moshe and the elders charged the people, saying: Observe everything that I command you today... for when you cross the Jordan, you must erect large stones and coat them with plaster [in order that] you shall write on them all the words of this Torah [the mitzvot of Sefer Devarim]... erect these stones on Har Eival... And you shall build there a **mizbeach**... (note parallel to Shmot 20:22), and you shall offer upon it **olot** and **shlamim**..." (Devarim 27:1-8).

You might recall that an almost identical ceremony was conducted some forty years earlier, at Ma'amad Har Sinai, immediately after Moshe taught Bnei Yisrael the laws he was taught after the Ten Commandments:

"And Moshe came [down from Har Sinai] and told the people all of God's commandments and the **mishpatim**... Moshe then wrote down all of God's commandments. Then, he woke up early in the morning and built a **mizbeach** at the foot of the mountain and erected twelve large stones... and they offered **olot** and **shlamim**..." (Shmot 24:3-8).

Furthermore, the requirement that a tochacha be read as part of the ceremony on Har Eival (see Devarim 27:11-28:69) parallels the tochacha delivered at Har Sinai (Vayikra 26:3-46, see also 25:1).

Thus, this ceremony on Har Eival, which consists of the writing and teaching of the mitzvot of Sefer Devarim, the construction of a **mizbeach** and offering of **olot** and **shlamim**, parallels the covenantal ceremony at Ma'amad Har Sinai, when Bnei Yisrael proclaimed 'na'aseh ve-nishma' (see Shmot 24:3-11).

The reason behind this parallel is simple. Since this generation (which stands on the brink of entry into the Land to fulfill these mitzvot) was not present at the original ceremony, a **new** ceremony is required for the new generation to reaffirm their commitment to the covenant.

This ceremony will take place on Har Eival, where Bnei Yisrael will 'relive' the experience of Har Sinai by studying the mitzvot of

Sefer Devarim, which will guide them towards the establishment of their new nation.

TODAY

It is not often in our history that a generation is granted the opportunity to fulfill a destiny originally intended for an earlier generation. Aware of the immense potential latent in such an opportunity, Moshe encourages the new generation in the desert to rise to the challenge of establishing an **am kadosh** in the Promised Land, as God had originally planned for their parents.

Although this challenge by Moshe Rabbeinu to Am Yisrael is some three thousand years old, it takes on additional significance today, as our own generation has been granted the opportunity to fulfill this very same destiny, a privilege that had remained but a dream for so many years.

The tragedies of this past week in Yerushalayim and Tzrifin, that cut short the lives of wonderful people who had dedicated their entire lives to the realization of these ideals, certainly cloud those dreams. Yet their memory must serve as our source of inspiration to continue.

shabbat shalom,
menachem

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FOR FURTHER IYUN

A. Carefully compare the declaration in **mikra bikkurim** with God's covenant with Avraham Avinu at brit bein ha-btarim (Breishit 15), the original covenant with Avraham, which includes God's promise of the Land to his offspring.

Pay particular attention to Breishit 15:7-21 and relate these psukim to Devarim 1:7-11, Moshe's opening remarks in his introductory speech. Note the use of the word 'yerusha' and/or shoresh y.r.sh. in both contexts, and specifically 've-rishta' in 26:1!

Also, note the historical process described in Breishit 15:13-16 and how it relates to 26:5-8. Relate this as well to Shmot 6:2-8.

Finally, see the dispute among the mefarshim as to whom the introduction to mikra bikkurim - 'Arami oved avi' refers. See Rashi and the Haggada, as opposed to Ibn Ezra, Chizkuni and Sefero - these are the two most common interpretations. Then look at Rashbam's peirush (which appears as well in the commentary of Rabbenu Yosef Bechor Shor). Explain why Rashbam's explanation fits best into our reading of mikra bikkurim. If 'arami' does refer to Lavan, could we still associate 'arami oved avi' with brit bein ha-btarim? Compare Breishit 15:13 and 31:40-42. See also 'Da'at Mikra' on Breishit 15:13 and the Netziv's peirush ('He'amek Davar') on Dvarim 26:5.

B. Regarding the importance of a verbal declaration, see Rashbam on 26:13 and Sefer Hachinuch on both mikra bikkurim and viddui ma'aser.

C. In terms of the connection between viddui ma'aser and the bet hamikdash: Several Rishonim maintain that viddui ma'aser must take place in the bet hamikdash - see Sefer Hachinuch, Tosfot Sota 33a 'birkat' and Ra'avad Hilchot Ma'aser Sheni 11:4. How would the other Rishonim (Rambam and others) explain the clause 'lifnei Hashem Elokecha' in 26:13?

D. Many people have questioned why the declaration after distributing ma'aser is called viddui ma'aser - the "confession" of ma'aser. The expression viddui usually has to do with confession of wrongdoing. Here, the individual does just the opposite - he declares, "I have done everything You have commanded me." Why, then, do Chazal refer to this declaration as viddui? See Rashi and Metzudat David in Divrei Hayamim II 30:22 who translate the word 'mitvadim' as 'expressing gratitude'. (See the two versions of the Targum there, as well.) Relate this to viddui ma'aser and the above shiur.

D. How many stones are taken from the Yarden in Sefer Yehoshua (4:1-10)? What is done with these stones?

How does this relate to Shmot 24:3-10?

What other parallels exist between Sefer Yehoshua and the generation of Yetziat Mitzrayim?

As you answer this question, pay particular attention to chapters 3 & 5 in Sefer Yehoshua!

See Yehoshua 8:30-35. Is this the fulfillment of the mitzva in Devarim 27:1-11? Why is this mitzva performed only after the battle against Ha-Ai? [Or is it? Three opinions exist as to when this ceremony actually took place. See Sota 36a (quoting the Tosefta) that Bnei Yisrael performed this ceremony immediately upon crossing the Yarden, as opposed to Rabbi Yishmael's view in Yerushalmi Sota 7:3, that this occurred only after the 14 years of 'kibbush ve-chiluk' (conquest and settlement). In 'pshat,' of course, this ceremony occurred after the war with Ha-Ai, and this is the shitta of Abarbanel and the Malbim.]

E. If the blessings and curses of Har Grizim and Har Eival serve as a reenactment of Ma'amad Har Sinai, then we would perhaps expect the blessings / curses to correspond to the Ten Commandments. (Hopefully you're not yet fed up with asseret hadibrot parallels from last week's shiur.) While some of them are more obvious than others, it might just work. Let's give it a try:

- 1) "Cursed be anyone who makes a sculptured or molten image..." A clear parallel to the first two dibrot ('Anochi' and 'lo yihyeh lecha').
- 2) "Cursed be he who insults his father or mother" - honoring parents.
- 3) "Cursed be he who moves is fellow countryman's landmark" - stealing (see Rashi here).
- 4) "Cursed be he who misdirects a blind person on his way" - a bit more tricky. Rashi explains this as referring to intentionally misleading someone with bad advice, which seems to relate to Rashi's interpretation of 'lifnei iver' - see Vayikra 19:14. There, Rashi explains the case as involving one who persuades another to sell property in order to acquire it himself. If so, then this curse may correspond to 'lo tachmod', excessive desire for the property of others.
- 5) "Cursed be he who subverts the rights of the stranger, the orphan and the widow." Take a careful look at the Torah's presentation of the mitzva of Shabbat in Shmot 23:12, and consider the role played by Yetziat Mitzrayim as a basis for this mitzva (Dvarim 5:15) and Sefero there in Shmot and in Dvarim 5:12. See if this curse could thus correspond to at least one element of the fourth commandment - Shabbat.
- 6) "Cursed be he who lies with his father's wife... who lies with any animal... who lies with his sister... who lies with his mother-in-law..." - 'lo tin'af'.
- 7) "Cursed be he who strikes down his fellow countryman in secret" - 'lo tirtzach'.
- 8) "Cursed be he who accepts a bribe" - "lo ta'aneh be-re'acha" (dishonesty in the courtroom).
- 9) "Cursed be he who will not uphold the terms of this Torah..." See Rashi's comment that this curse constitutes an oath to keep the Torah, perhaps corresponding to 'lo tisa'.

F. The ceremony at Har Grizim & Har Eival may have served another purpose, beyond the reenactment of Ma'amad Har Sinai. Note the geographic location of these mountains as described in Parshat Re'eh (Dvarim 11:30) and compare closely with Breishit 12:6. Now see Rashi there in Breishit, as well as the next pasuk (12:7 - note especially the mizbeach!!). Explain why this parallel takes on particular significance according to the view of the Gemara in Sota cited above (in B). [See also Da'at Mikra on Yehoshua, introduction to 8:30-35.] Is this necessarily a different explanation from the one presented in the shiur?

G. A note regarding methodology: Throughout our series on Parshat Ha'shavua, we have seen numerous examples of how a specific parsha can be better understood by studying not only its **content** but also its **location** within the framework of an entire Sefer. Use the above shiur on Parshat Ki Tavo to support this approach.

OH RNET

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Expressing Thanks

"You will come to whoever is the kohen in those days and you will say to him..." (26:3)

A blisteringly hot Wednesday.

Suddenly there's a power outage. A visit from the electrician reveals the worst: "It's the compressor in your A/C. You need a new one. Trouble is, the manufacturer can only get it here next Tuesday."

"But what are we going to do on Shabbat?"

"Does your Shabbat table fit in the fridge? Listen, I think I can get you a new compressor before Shabbat. I'll do my best."

"You're a tzaddik!"

And sure enough, by Thursday lunchtime the new compressor is in place and the house returns to its regular cool temperature.

On Friday afternoon the electrician's phone rings. He notes the caller ID – it's the people with the new compressor.

"Trouble," he thinks to himself as he answers the phone.

"We just wanted to call you and thank you so much for fixing our air conditioner. You've really made our Shabbat. Thank you so much! Shabbat Shalom!"

Gratitude should never remain implicit. It should be expressed.

In this week's portion, the Torah instructs us to give *bikkurim* – the first fruits – to the *kohen*. However, it's not enough just to give them.

"You will come to whoever is the kohen in those days and you shall say to him...." Rashi comments on the phrase *"and you shall say to him"* – *"because you are not an ingrate."* In other words, what prevents a person from being an ingrate is the verbalization of his gratitude. Anything less is considered lacking.

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TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Ki Tavo: Eruvin 23-29

Mushrooms at the Border

In order to walk on Shabbat more than 2,000 amahs beyond the city border (approximately one kilometer), one must do something before Shabbat called *eruv techumim*. This involves placing food for two Shabbat meals at a place 2,000 amahs outside of the city. It is then considered as if he has established his residence there for Shabbat and that he may therefore proceed to walk another 2,000 amahs. This *eruv* procedure, as is the case for other types of *eruvim* – such as *eruvei chatzeirot*, *eruvei mavo'ot* and *eruv taushilin* – is a rabbinical mitzvah and a *beracha* is recited when making the *eruv*.

Not everything, however, qualifies as food for this *eruv*, or for an *eruv* which is made to allow residents of different courtyards to carry objects into the alley into which their courtyards empty. The *mishna* excludes only water or salt from being considered acceptable foods. A simple reading of our *gemara* indicates that truffles and mushrooms are also excluded. The reason for their exclusion even when cooked, say the early commentaries, is that people do not generally rely on them as a staple, nor even as an accompaniment to meals, and only occasionally indulge in them. The

Rambam goes even further by ascribing their exclusion to their negative nutritional impact.

Despite this consensus of so many major commentaries based on the text before us, the text before the Gaon of Vilna has an "etc." added to the quotation from the *mishna*, which radically alters the meaning of the *gemara*. The exclusion of mushrooms, in his text, is limited to the law of *maaser sheni* – the second tithe – which is mentioned in our *mishna* immediately following the law of the *eruv*. The Torah sets down special rules for what one may purchase in Jerusalem with the money from the redemption of *maaser sheni*. These rules preclude mushrooms because they do not grow from the earth but are only fungi. As far as *eruv* is concerned, he concludes, once they have been cooked into an edible state they qualify as food.

This innovative approach of the Gaon of Vilna is elaborated upon in another footnote on our *daf* of *gemara*, that of Rabbi Betzalel of Regensburg, and is mentioned by the *Mishna Berura* (366:23) as well.

• *Eruvin 27a*

We wish all of Ohrnet Magazine's readers and friends a meaningful month of Elul, leading up to the *Yamim Nora'im* in Tishrei.

Q & A

Questions

1. When did the obligation to bring *bikkurim* begin?
2. *Bikkurim* are from which crops?
3. How does one designate *bikkurim*?
4. Who shakes the basket containing the *bikkurim*?
5. What does "*v'anita v'amarta*" mean?
6. Which Arami "tried to destroy my father?"
7. When during the year may *bikkurim* be brought? Until when are the special verses recited?
8. Someone declaring that he separated *terumah* and *ma'aser* says: "And I didn't forget." What didn't he forget?
9. What were the Jewish People to do with the 12 stones on Mount Eval?
10. Six tribes stood on Mount Eval and six on Mount Gerizim. Who and what were in the middle?
11. Who "causes the blind to go astray"?
12. How does one "strike another secretly"?
13. Eleven curses were spoken on Mount Eval. What is the significance of this number?
14. Why are sheep called "*ashterot*"?
15. How is the manner of expressing the curses in Parshat Bechukotai more severe than in this week's parsha?

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary, unless otherwise stated.

Answers

1. 26:1 - After the Land was conquered and divided.
2. 26:2 - The seven species for which *Eretz Yisrael* is praised.
3. 26:2 - When he sees the first fruit ripen on a tree, he binds a piece of straw around it to mark it as *bikkurim*.
4. 26:4 - The *kohen* places his hands under the hands of the one bringing it, and they wave the basket together.
5. 26:5 - Speak loudly.
6. 26:5 - Lavan.
7. 26:11 - *Bikkurim* are brought from Shavuot until Chanukah. The verses are recited only until Succot.
8. 26:13 - To bless G-d.
9. 27:2 - Build an altar.
10. 27:12 - *Kohanim, levi'im* and the Holy Ark.
11. 27:18 - Any person who intentionally gives bad advice.
12. 27:24 - By slandering him.
13. 27:24 - Each curse corresponds to one of the tribes, except for the tribe of Shimon. Since Moshe didn't intend to bless the tribe of Shimon before his death, he did not want to curse it either.
14. 28:4 - Because they "enrich" (*m'ashirot*) their owners.
15. 28:23 - In Bechukotai the Torah speaks in the plural, whereas in this week's *parsha* the curses are mentioned in the singular.

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

A Basket Case

When the Torah speaks about bringing the first fruits to Jerusalem in baskets, it uses a non-standard word for “basket”: *tene*. The standard Hebrew word for “basket” is *sal* — which appears fifteen times throughout the Bible. By contrast, the word *tene* appears only four times in the entire Bible, all of them in Ki Tavo (Deut. 26:2, 26:4, 28:5, and 28:17). In this essay we will seek to better understand the differences between the words *tene* and *sal*, and how those words relate to another handful of synonyms for “basket.”

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (to Num. 19:20, Ps. 3:3) writes that the word *sal* literally means “to lift,” because a basket’s main purpose is to help a person lift and carry various items. Rabbi Hirsch compares this word to *sulam* (“ladder” up which one climbs), *solelah* (high mound used for circumventing city walls), and *mesilah* (road that goes up a mountain), which all have the two-letter string SAMECH-LAMMED.

Rabbi Hirsch’s explanation fits with Rabbi Aharon Marcus’ (1843-1916) theory to explain the etymology of the word *selā* (“rock”). Rabbi Marcus proposed that in all Hebrew words whose root is comprised of the biliteral string SAMECH-LAMMED, the SAMECH is actually a placeholder for the letter AYIN that follows it. In other words, when a word’s root seems to be SAMECH-LAMMED, it should really be understood as AYIN-LAMMED. The letters AYIN-LAMMED refer to something “on top” (*al/lemalah*) of something else, or something which is “elevated” or “ascends upward” (*oleh/aliyah*). Based on this, Rabbi Marcus suggested that the word *selā* refers to something which “comes up”— i.e. a rock which “comes up” from underground. According to Rabbi Hirsch, the word *sal* also refers to

“elevation,” as it is the vessel used to “lift up” various items and carry them elsewhere.

Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim (1740-1814) offers a different take on the SAMECH-LAMMED root. He explains that this two-letter root refers to things related to repeated actions. For example, the word *mesilah* (“road”) is derived from this root because it is a well-travelled path upon which many have trodden. Similarly, one who constantly twists and twirls one’s hair is said to be *misalsel* (*Rosh Hashanah* 26b) because he repeatedly does the same action. In that spirit, Rabbi Pappenheim explains that *sal* refers specifically to a “bread basket” (see *Gen. 40:16, Lev. 8:2*), because it is an item in constant, daily use. This notwithstanding, Rabbi Pappenheim admits that the term *sal* can refer to any sort of basket in a borrowed sense, even a basket of meat (*Jud. 6:19*) or grapes (*Jer. 6:9*).

That said, Dr. Chaim Tawil points out that the Hebrew word *sal* actually seems to derive from the Akkadian word *sallu*, which also means “basket.”

In all four places that the word *tene* appears in the Bible, the Targum translates it into the Aramaic *sala*, an Aramaicized version of the Hebrew word *sal*. In Talmudic parlance the word *teni* means the same as *tene*. But where does the word *tene* come from?

Unlike *sal*, which he maintains refers to a basket used for “bread,” Rabbi Pappenheim explains that *tene* refers to a basket used specifically for fruits. Such baskets were typically woven with extra space to allow air to waft through, thus ensuring that the fruits will not spoil. Rabbi Pappenheim argues that the letter ALEPH of *tene* is a radical, while its actual root is just TET-NUN. He explains that the word *etun* (*Prov. 7:16*) also derives from this root,

and it refers to clothing woven in such a way that more air is allowed through. Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenburg (1785-1865) adds that the TET-NUN element in the word *shaatnez* refers to “weaving,” as well.

Like Rabbi Pappenheim, Rabbi Aharon Marcus also connects *tene* to *etun*. But he argues that both words are actually of Egyptian origin. Indeed, master etymologist Rabbi Dr. Ernest Klein (1899-1983) confirms *tene*’s status as an Egyptian loanword.

Interestingly, Rabbi David Chaim Chelouche (1920-2016), the late Chief Rabbi of Netanya, connects the word *tene* to *beten* (“stomach”), as a basket has an open “cavity” into which people can put things, just like a stomach has.

There are two more words in Biblical Hebrew for “basket”: *keluv* and *dud*. In one instance, the word *keluv* (Amos 8:1) refers to a basket into which one puts undeveloped figs, while in the other instance, *keluv* (Jer. 5:27) refers to a basket into which one placed birds in order to fatten them up. Based on this second usage, Modern Hebrew redefines *keluv* as a “bird cage” or even “animal cage” in general. The word *dud* sometimes means “basket” (see Jer. 24:1-2), but sometimes means “pot” (I Sam. 2:14, II Chron. 35:13), both of which are fashioned in practically the same shape.

The word *kalkalah* in the sense of “basket” appears multiple times in the Mishnah (see *Peah* 7:3, *Dema* 7:6, *Terumot* 4:6, *Maasrot* 1:5, 4:2, *Shabbos* 20:3, 21:1, *Eruvin* 3:8, *Kiddushin* 2:7, *Keilim* 16:2, 22:9). Rabbi Tanchum HaYerushalmi (a 13th century exegete who lived in the Holy Land) writes that a *kalkalah* is an especially big *sal* that people would typically use to store all sorts of foods. Because its contents generally provide sustenance and nourishment, the word for this type of basket is a cognate of the verb *kalkal* (see, for example, Gen. 47:12) which means “to sustain.” Another word for “basket” in Mishnaic Hebrew

is *kefifah* (sometimes spelled with a KUF and sometimes with a KAF). This term seems to refer specifically to a “wicker basket” (see *Shabbos* 2:2, *Sotah* 2:1, 3:1, *Keilim* 26:1).

In the Talmudic vernacular there are another eight Hebrew/Aramaic words for “basket.” How they differ from one another is not readily apparent or addressed by the commentators, but from context clues we can hone in on their exact meanings:

- *Dikula* (*Chullin* 32b) seems to refer specifically to a basket made from the bast of a *dekel*, the Hebrew word for “palm tree” (see Rashi to *Shabbos* 90b).
- *Gridia* means “vegetable basket” (see Rashi to *Sotah* 10a).
- *Traskal* refers to a wide “basket” that is typically filled with barley and hung around an animal’s neck so that it can eat more easily (see Rashi to *Shabbos* 5a, 53a and *Eruvin* 33b).
- *Tzana* (see Rashi to *Chullin* 57a and *Rashbam* to *Bava Basra* 126b) also means “basket,” and Rabbi Dr. Ernest Klein explains that it refers to a basket made out of thorns (related to the Biblical Hebrew word *tzan*, see Num. 33:55, Prov. 22:5, Amos 4:2).
- *Kelet* refers to a vase-shaped basket that women used to wear on their heads (*Kesubos* 72b, 82b, *Gittin* 77a, *Bava Basra* 85b, and *Bava Meztia* 9b).
- *Sharkafa* seems to be a basket in which one placed birds (see *Chullin* 53b, with Rashi and *Tosafos* there).
- *Tuvila* was apparently a basket used for harvesting dates (see Rashi and *Rabbeinu Gershon* to *Bava Basra* 33b).
- *Tirina* (*Pesachim* 88a) seems to have been a special basket for date fruits.

For questions, comments, or to propose ideas for a future article, please contact the author at rklein@ohr.edu

PARSHA OVERVIEW

When the Jewish People dwell in the Land of Israel, its first fruits are to be taken to the Temple and given to the *kohen*. This is done in a ceremony that expresses recognition that it is G-d who guides the history of the Jewish People throughout all ages. This passage forms one of the central parts of the Pesach Haggadah that we read at the Seder.

On the last day of Pesach of the fourth and seventh years of the seven-year *shemitta* cycle, a person must recite a disclosure stating that he has indeed distributed the tithes to the appropriate people in the prescribed manner. With this mitzvah Moshe concludes the commandments that Hashem has told him to give to the Jewish People. Moshe exhorts them to walk in Hashem's ways because they are set aside as a treasured people to Him.

When the Jewish People cross the Jordan River they are to make a new commitment to the Torah. Huge stones are to be erected and the Torah is to be written on them in the world's seventy primary languages, after which they are to be covered over with a thin layer of plaster. Half the tribes are to stand on Mount Gerizim, and half on Mount Eval, and the *levi'im* will stand in a valley between the two mountains. The *levi'im* will recite twelve commandments, and all the people will answer "amen" to the blessings and the curses. Moshe then details the blessings that will be bestowed upon the Jewish People, blessings that are both physical and spiritual. However, if the Jewish People do not keep the Torah, Moshe details a chilling picture of destruction, resulting in exile and wandering among the nations.

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

BLESSING TWELVE: HOW STRONG ARE YOU?

"Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d, King of the universe, Who girds Israel with strength."

It is now apparent that Hashem has granted us, His nation, a special task. We are commanded to become a "light unto the nations" (see Isaiah 49:6) and it is our mission to represent Hashem in this world. We are His ambassadors and we are supposed to epitomize the potential for Divinity that exists within humankind. We have been given a fulltime job. And it requires focus and inner-strength to be successful.

I had a student who used to compete at state level in power-lifting competitions. He told me that his personal record was just less than 120 kilo (260 lbs.)! In class one day, he explained to us that when he was lifting he had to be completely and absolutely focused on what he was doing. To lose concentration, for even a second, would mean failing to lift at all. Or, even worse, might cause an injury.

He then tried to describe his feeling after succeeding at lifting his heaviest weight. He told us that however difficult it sounds to lift such enormous weights, once he was in the right state of mind it was "relatively simple" to do. It was interesting, although I wasn't sure how connected it was to what we were learning. But then he added a sentence that turned an interesting conversation into a riveting one. He told us that when he utilizes that same inner fortitude and endurance to living his life as a Jew, keeping the commandments becomes easy. "After all," he added, "it is inconceivable that Hashem would expect us to keep the commandments if we weren't physically or emotionally capable of doing so!"

"Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d, King of the universe, Who girds Israel with strength". Strength

for what? The strength to live our lives in a way that reflects the sense of G-dliness and holiness inherent inside each and every one of us. This is not an allusion to physical strength. Rather, the blessing is affirming that we are capable of so much more in the spiritual realms. The secret to getting there is that we have to focus, laser-like, on our inner dimensions. Our blessing is referring to "spiritual adrenalin." When a person becomes infused with adrenalin they can achieve the most incredible things. Even "superhuman" things.

In 1982, in Lawrenceville, Georgia, Tony Cavallo was working on a Chevrolet Impala. He wriggled under the chassis to fix something, and the jacks that were holding up the car gave way. The car immediately collapsed, pinning him underneath. His mother instantaneously jumped into action, lifting the car high enough and long enough for two neighbors to replace the jacks and pull Cavallo out. Please do not

think for one minute that this was the kind of thing Mrs. Cavallo did in her spare time. Panic-stricken, her body had been flooded with adrenalin and she found herself inundated with herculean strength. She was able to do something that she could never have been able to do under normal circumstances.

Our blessing is teaching us that in our spiritual lives we are also capable of accomplishing such heroic feats. Probably not picking up Chevrolet Impalas singlehandedly. But feeling confident that we can push beyond ourselves to serve Hashem, exceeding what we thought was our limit. Because our blessing is letting us know that He has given us hidden reservoirs of inner strength that we can tap into. Strength that will allow us to continue to flourish and thrive. And, by doing so, we are now equipped to break new records in our own personal spiritual power-lifting!

LETTER AND SPIRIT

Insights based on the writings of Rav S.R. Hirsch by Rabbi Yosef Hershman

Curse of Hypocrisy

Moshe instructs the people that when they come to the Land they are to arrange themselves on two opposing mountains, Har Gerizim and Har Eival, for a public proclamation ceremony. In the middle, between the two mountains, stood the elder *kohanim* and *levi'im*, who pronounced those acts which bring about curse and their counterpart acts which bring about blessing. The entire nation would answer "amen," in an affirmation that G-d's rule alone dispenses blessing and curse.

The subjects of the curses include: secret worship of idolatry, slighting one's father or mother, moving the boundary of one's neighbor (so as to increase one's own property), misleading a blind man, infringing the rights of an orphan, stranger or widow, various prohibited incestuous relationships, 'hitting' one's fellow in private (i.e. slander), acceptance of a bribe to convict someone, and, finally, not upholding the words of the Torah to carry them out. This list is followed by a repertoire of blessings that will overwhelm he who conscientiously carries out the mitzvahs.

The content and order of the cursed behaviors are significant. Growth, prosperity and success will be withheld from one who outwardly is pious, but privately denies G-d; one who outwardly shows respect for his parents, but inwardly despises them; one who develops an honest reputation, but infringes on the rights of his neighbor; one who grovels before the high and mighty, but does not help the weak and helpless; the hypocrite who poses as respectable, but in private indulges in sexual licentiousness; one who does not openly hurt his neighbor but kills his happiness and honor in conversations with others; one who enjoys a position of authority and trust but abuses his power by corruption in secret.

These are sins which by their nature are done with some degree of secrecy. Because they are not in full view, they cannot be effectively monitored by society or the justice system. For this reason they are placed under the rule of G-d's dispensation of blessing and curse.

Notice that the list of sins comprises social sins (disrespect for parents, infringement of neighbor's property rights, slander, bribery) interrupted by a list of sexual sins. The juxtaposition is meant to equate the severity of social sins and sexual sins, and to disabuse us of two opposite notions: (1) while social sins should be condemned as a menace to society, sexual sins are less serious as they do not affect the public welfare, and (2) while forbidden incestuous relationships weigh heavily on the Jewish conscience, social sins such as slander are less serious. The intermingled list refutes both of these notions, and establishes the equal severity of both types.

The final curse is unique in that it curses *inaction*. All the other sins that come under the curse are active violations — and, by contrast, the promise of blessing applies to one who does no more than refrain from violating prohibitions. The final pronouncement of the curse declares, *cursed is he who does not uphold the words of this Torah to carry them out*. This applies to one who is personally faithful, but does not do his part to ensure the Law is observed in the wider community. Similarly, blessing will come to one who uses his persuasion and abilities to uphold the Torah. It is only in this instance that indifference brings curse. Blessing will be full only when everyone does his share to uphold the Torah.

- Sources: Commentary, Devarim 27:15-26

*Ohr Somayach announces a new booklet
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