

**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 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his untimely death.**

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**Devrei Torah are now Available for Download (normally by noon on Fridays) from [www.PotomacTorah.org](http://www.PotomacTorah.org). Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah. New: a limited number of copies of the first attachment will now be available at Beth Sholom on the Shabbas table!**

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**Dedicated in loving memory of Sidney Glashofer, Yisrael ben Yaakov, husband of Miriam Glashofer and father of Paul Glashofer. Heartfelt condolences to Paul, his wife Sara, and family.**

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Each parsha in Sefer Devarim has a special theme or focus. In Eikev, the focus is on the land of Israel, especially in connection with Avraham Avinu. God repeatedly tests Avraham until after the Akeidah, He promises Avraham many descendants and the land of Israel – “eikev” (because) Avraham did not withhold even his most treasured possession, his beloved son Yitzhak. Rabbi David Fohrman’s colleagues at alephbeta.org explain Moshe’s warning. The “eikev” connection requires that Jews keep God’s mitzvot, undertake periodic tests from God, and remember that the land and its benefits are a gift to Jews only as long as we realize the source and express appreciation to God for His blessings. “Eikev,” with its connection to Avraham Avinu, also requires that we Jews emulate Avraham in his most outstanding personal quality – chesed – kindness to fellow humans and animals. We read the reminder of chesed constantly throughout Tanach – a reminder of an important reason why God chose Avraham to be His ancestor for a nation to set an example of proper behavior for all humans.

God promised us the land to the gates of our enemies – up to the borders of their land. Moshe reminds us that our enemies will always surround us, but that God will protect us as long as we follow His mitzvot and remember that God’s help is what enables us to prevail over those who hate us. Eikev shows us at least two ways to show our gratitude to Hashem: reciting Birkat HaMazon to thank Him for enabling us to obtain food from the land, and mezuzah, keeping the message of rewards and punishments (the second paragraph of the Shema) on our doors and gates.

“Eikev” goes back to God’s words to Avraham after the Akeidah – because (eikev) Avraham withheld nothing from God, not only his son – God promised great gifts to his descendants. Moshe reminds B’Nai Yisrael, however, that God will continue to test us, as He continued to test Avraham, to ensure that we always remember that our blessings come from Hashem, not exclusively from our own efforts. History demonstrates the truth of this teaching. No people except the Jews have ever been able to make Israel productive in more than 2500 years. Only with God’s help to we Jews has Israel become a land of milk and honey.

Should we Jews neglect the mitzvot and forget that our blessings come from God, our enemies, who always surround us, will expel us from the land. Moshe’s warning lives on in modern times. Indeed, 92 years ago, the week of Parashat Eikev, Arabs attacked and murdered nearly all the Jews of Hebron. Saadia Greenberg, who compiles and distributes Likutei Torah each week, has shared a letter that his father, Meyer Greenberg, z”l, wrote after extensive research, recording the history of that episode of anti-Semitic violence. (I have attached a typed copy of this letter by E-mail.) Greatly increased numbers of violent attacks against Jews throughout the world show that Moshe’s warning about our enemies applies as much today as ever. While most of the world watches the Olympic games in Japan, the Japanese hosts arranged a memorial honoring the Israeli athletes murdered at the 1972 Olympic games – finally, 49 years after the

killings. At a time when so many countries participate in hate crimes against Jews, Japan is one of the few countries that fight the evil of hate and violence.

My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, was in elementary school during World War II, and he became an adult during the 1950s, when many colleges and graduate schools had quotas on Jewish students. Rabbi Cahan observed anti-Semitism first hand much more than I did, growing up a decade later. Hatred toward Jews and Israel (two aspects of the same disease) has become much more accepted in America and Europe in recent years compared to other periods during the past half century. Moshe warned us that hatred of Jews would always surround us but that God will protect the Jews as long as we do our part. Military historians say that they cannot explain Israel's victories over the Arabs through any coherent or valid military science. Moshe gave us the answer, probably nowhere as clearly as in Eikev. God protects us Jews as long as we do our part. The difference between now and Moshe's time is that God now operates behind the scenes, "Hester Panim," with his face hidden (out of sight of humans). The survival of the Jews, a tiny people, for 3500 years and counting, has only been possible with God's constant protection – and we must do our part to keep this protection. Could there be any better reason to observe God's mitzvot and remind ourselves constantly that our blessings come from Hashem?

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah & Alan

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**Much of the inspiration for my weekly Dvar Torah message comes from the insights of Rabbi David Fohrman and his team of scholars at [www.alephbeta.org](http://www.alephbeta.org). Please join me in supporting this wonderful organization, which has increased its scholarly work during the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.**

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**Please daven for a Refuah Shlema for Mordechai ben Chaya, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, David Leib ben Sheina Reizel, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, Dovid Meir ben Chaya Tzippa; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Ramesh bat Heshmat, and Regina bat Allegra, who need our prayers.** I have removed a number of names that have been on the list for a long time. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

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Hannah & Alan

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### **Drasha: Parshas Eikev: Perpetual Care**

By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky © 1998

[Please remember Mordechai ben Chaya ( Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky) for a Mishebarach!]

Some things get special attention. The land of Israel Yisrael is one of them. The Torah tells us this week, that Eretz Israel is a land "that Hashem constantly watches, from the beginning of the year till the end of the year" (Deuteronomy 11:12). It is an amazing verse, one that declares the eyes of a very Personal G-d to be supervising even a seemingly inanimate object, His most beloved piece of real estate with constant concern. And though the commentaries discuss the special significance of this particular surveillance as opposed to every thing in the world that is under Hashem's ever-present surveillance. But if everything is always under guard, what makes Israel so special?

**In the early 1980s my grandfather Rav Yaakov Kamenetzky, of blessed memory, suffered an angina attack, and his doctor strongly recommended that he undergo an angiogram, a difficult and sometimes dangerous procedure for a man that age. At the time my younger brother, Reb Zvi, was a student at the Ponovez Yeshiva in B'nai**

Beraq. In addition to his own prayers on behalf of our grandfather, he immediately decided to approach his Rosh Yeshiva HaGaon Rabbi Eliezer Menachem Shach with a request to pray for Reb Yaakov's welfare.

In Jewish tradition, when you pray for the welfare of an individual, you identify the intended party by mentioning him or her together with his or her mother's name. Thus Moshe our teacher's name would be Moshe ben Yocheved (Moshe the son of Yocheved).

My brother knew he had to present Rav Shach with his grandfather's name, Yaakov, and the name of Reb Yaakov's mother. That was no easy feat, my brother Zvi had no clue of her name. Moreover, at the time of the angina attack, Reb Yaakov was over 90 years old, and in excellent health. Zvi could not recall a time where he had mentioned our grandfather's name in the Mi Sheba'irach for the sick. He simply was embarrassed to approach Rav Shach without Reb Yaakov's mother's name, so he went on a search expedition through B'nei Beraq attempting to contact people who would know the name of Reb Yaakov's mother.

Visiting at the homes of second-cousins and other relatives, my brother inquired. No one knew. Finally, a nephew of Rav Yaakov who lived in B'nei Beraq told my brother that Rav Yaakov's mother was named Etka.

Armed with the information and an update on my grandfather's condition, he approached the home of Rav Shach.

The elderly sage invited my brother into his sparsely furnished dining room and asked him to take a seat. The elderly Rosh Yeshiva sat by a wooden table that stood directly under a large bulb illuminating the tomes that lay opened in front of him. The Rosh Yeshiva looked up from the Talmudic passage he was contemplating and smiled toward my brother. He knew my brother and his lineage and asked him how he was feeling. Then he inquired about his grandfather, Reb Yaakov.

My brother turned white. "That is exactly why I came," he stammered. Immediately Rav Shach's face filled with consternation. My brother continued, "you see, my grandfather was not feeling well and must undergo a procedure. I came to inform the..."

Rav Shach jumped up from his chair and exclaimed: "we must say a special prayer for Reb Yaakov ben Etka (Yaakov the son of Etka)!"

My brother stood opened-mouthed and could not contain himself. "Rebbe," he began meekly. "The last 12 hours I have been trying to find out my grandmother's name in order to present it to the Rosh Yeshiva. Now I see that the Rosh Yeshiva knows the name of my great-grandmother. How is that?

Rav Shach explained. "Years ago your grandfather visited Eretz Yisrael. After meeting him I asked him for his mother's name. I could not imagine a Jewish world without a healthy Reb Yaakov, and there is not a single day that goes by that I do not say a special prayer for his welfare!"

Hashem teaches us a lesson in this parsha. Sometimes we think that the Land of Israel is on auto-pilot. The Torah tells us that it is not. His eyes are on it 365 days a year 24 hours a day. And though we all care for and love Eretz Yisrael, perhaps we too, must mimic that attitude. Because we should not be able to imagine a world without a stable and healthy Israel. And we must have it, like Hashem, in our hearts and minds constantly. Not only when during crisis when the storm clouds are brewing, but even from "the beginning of the year through the end." Even when the sun is shining down on it.

Good Shabbos!

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### Eikev: Birkat HaMazon and the Oral Torah

by Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2018

Sefat Emet teaches that those who were to enter the Land of Israel would be the beginning of the Oral Torah – the taking of the Divine word and interpreting it and applying it to the lived reality of their lives. This process begins already in Sefer Devarim, where they stand on the cusp of entering the land, and where Moshe retells, interprets and applies the stories

and the mitzvot of the past. In Sefat Emet's words: "Mishneh Torah is the passageway connecting the Written and Oral Torah."

This dynamic of interpretation and application can be seen in a mitzvah that appears in this week's parasha: *birkat ha'mazon*, the mitzvah to make a blessing after one has eaten bread. This is a mitzvah which has not existed until now. In the Wilderness, there was little need to recognize that one's sustenance came from God – the otherworldly manna that fell every day was reminder enough. But once they entered the land, and had to toil to plant and harvest grain, to grind it into flour and to make it into bread, it was quite possible that they will lose sight of God's invisible hand in their success. The Torah explicitly warns against this, immediately after it gives the mitzvah for *birkat ha'mazon*: "Guard yourself lest you forget the Lord your God... and you will say in your hearts, 'It is my strength, and the power of my hands, that has made me all this wealth.'" (8:11-17). These new circumstances required a new ritual, one that would heighten our awareness of, and appreciation for, God's presence in our daily toil and material success.

The Rabbis, as we know, instituted more blessings – blessings before we eat our food, blessings over natural phenomenon like thunder, lightening or a rainbow; blessings when we hear good tidings or bad tidings; and blessings to appreciate the daily wonders of creation. For being part of the Oral Torah means not just interpreting and applying, but also legislating. By taking their cue from the Torah, the Rabbis expanded the single blessing of the Torah into many blessings, making God that much more of the lived reality in our lives.

This expansion happens with the mitzvah of *birkat ha'mazon* as well. A close reading of the verse reveals that the mitzvah is not so much to bless God over the sustenance that God has given us, but to bless God for giving us the land: "For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land... A land of wheat and barely, and vine and figs and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey... And you will eat and be sated, and you shall bless the Lord your God for the good land that He has given you." (8:7-10). This is about the gift of the land, not the gift of the food!

Now there is a special blessing over the land in *birkat ha'mazon*. But it is the second, and not defining, blessing. It is the first blessing, "Blessed are you God, Who sustains all creatures." that defines it. It is not *birkat ha'aretz*, a blessing on the land, but *birkat ha'mazon*, a blessing on our food.

By reading the verses more narrowly, to apply only to the gift of the food and not to the gift of the land which it represents and should evoke, the Rabbis applied its scope much more broadly. Had the halakhic meaning of the verse been limited to its literal meaning, there would only be a Biblical mitzvah to make a brakha after eating when one was living in the Land of Israel, or at most when one was eating produce that came from Israel. The interpretation of the Oral Torah, however, is that this Biblical mitzvah applies to wherever we are. It is an interpretation that acknowledges certain realities, that Jews will not always be living just in the land of Israel, and reads the verse through that lens.

We see the Oral Torah's expansion of the scope of this blessing also when it comes to the minimum amount that one must eat before he or she should recite *birkat ha'mazon*. The Gemara (Berakhot 20b) makes the point of the role and power of rabbinic interpretation, in imagining a discussion between God and the ministering angels, who asked God why God shows favor to the Jewish People:

He replied to them: Shall I not show special regard for Israel? For I wrote in the Torah, "And you shall eat and be sated and bless the Lord thy God," and they are particular [to say the Grace] even if the quantity is but the size of an olive or an egg.

The human-Divine partnership that is the Oral Torah is one where we must take responsibility in expanding the scope of Torah and its values. If we do, we are living up to what this relationship expects of us, then we are doing right by God and hence God – according to this Midrash – reciprocates with doing right by us. And perhaps this "showing regard" happens naturally; for if we are striving to find God more in our lives, then God will indeed be more found and more present.

There is another aspect of *birkat ha'mazon* that also exemplifies this dynamic, and that is the question of what defines something to be bread. Although the verse mentions 7 types of produce, not only wheat and barely, but also wine, figs, pomegranates, olive oil, and date honey, the Rabbis determined that the full *birkat ha'mazon*, constituting of 3, and later 4, blessings, was only required after one ate bread.

The Rabbis focused on bread because it is mentioned explicitly in the verse before birkat ha'mazon, "A land that you will not eat bread in privation... And you will eat and be sated..." (8:9-10). And bread is the staple of life, and for much of human history it was the foundation of every meal. So our most weighty brakha is reserved for our eating of bread.

But what about those who cannot eat bread? The mishnah (Menachot 70a) lists five species of grain. Only bread made from these species is considered bread, according to halakhah. But what about people with Celiac disease who are gluten-intolerant? Does this mean that they cannot make hamotzi on Shabbat, that they can never say birkat ha'mazon, that they cannot fulfill the mitzvah of matzah on Pesach?

Let's first see what grains we are talking about. The mishnah lists five: wheat, barley, kusmin, shibolet shual, and shifon. These last three are generally translated as spelt, oats, and rye. Now that's good, because rye does not have gluten, so it provides the perfect solution – just make your bread or matzah out of rye flour! And according to halakha there is even a way you can make it out of a rye flour-rice flour mix.

Rye's inclusion on this list comes from Rashi. Rashi translates shifon as sigala, which refers most likely to secale cereale, or rye. There's just one problem. Rye was unknown in the Land of Israel! And if rye does not have gluten, then it does not ferment, and if it cannot ferment, then how can it be one of the 5 species of grain? It seems that from an academic perspective, shifon cannot be rye. Indeed, Dr Yehudah Felix, author of "Flora and Fauna in the Talmud," concludes that shifon is not rye, but a type of barely.

Is our gluten-intolerant person in trouble? When science and halakhah collide, which do we follow? The traditional identification, or the one that scholars have concluded is the original and accurate identification?

A wonderful story illustrating this tension, exactly on our topic:

Professor Felix relates that on the basis of his identification, Rav Shlomo Zalman Aurbach, ztz"l, used to make the brakha of shehakol on his morning breakfast of oatmeal. He did this for two years until Rav Shalom Elyashiv yelled at him with the critique that one cannot change what has been the Jewish custom for hundreds of years, going back to the time of the Rishonim, just because of one scholar's findings].

So our gluten-intolerant person is safe. Phew.

This is the power of the Oral Law. It defines our halakhic reality based on how the Rabbis have and continue to interpret and apply the law, how precedent and the works and codes that we have codified define the parameters and limits of interpretation, and how people committed to the halakhah have lived it as a reality.

The Oral tradition is not overridden by the literal meaning of a verse and it is not overridden by certain scientific findings. New information can and is integrated and can often lead to reassessment, but ultimately it will be defined by the Rabbis, guided by tradition and text, operating in the proper parameters, living up to their responsibility to partner with God in interpreting and applying the Torah, in making it a lived reality in our lives.

Shabbat shalom!

<https://library.yctorah.org/2018/08/birkat-hamazon-and-the-oral-torah/>

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### **Parshas Eikev -- Planting with Flowers**

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine © 2014 Teach 613

Little things count. That is the message of the blessings described in this week's Torah portion. The blessing that G-d will "love you, bless you, multiply you, and save you from illness," is granted to you, "If you will observe the nuances of the mitzvos."

Traditional commentaries explain the observance of "the nuances of the mitzvos" is in addition to the basic requirements. "If you will pay attention to detail," the Torah is telling us, then G-d will pay attention to the details of our needs.

There is however a different, illuminating perspective which those starting out in observance might find helpful.

Sometimes addressing all aspects of a mitzvah may be overwhelming. Even if one person may be ready for a mitzvah, but their spouse, children, or roommate, might not be ready to appreciate or to accommodate. The Talmud describes the emotion of being overwhelmed by a goal with regard to Torah study. And the Talmud offers simple advice.

The Talmud states:

*The Talmud doesn't explain how learning two laws a day will enable a person to learn it all. Mathematically it may not make sense. But experience shows that the strategy does work. If a person chooses "a point of least resistance" and succeeds with it, they have opened themselves up to additional opportunities of optimism and success. All we have to do is start with some little thing.*

Consider a person who studied about Shabbos, and really wants to bring its warmth and meaning into their home. It doesn't take much to decide to recite Kiddush and experience a Shabbos meal by oneself. But how does one attempt to share the beauty of Shabbos with family members, if they choose to be unmotivated?

One solution is to pay attention to little things: like flowers.

Although buying flowers for Shabbos is not a requirement according to tradition and Halacha, it is definitely a powerful "little thing" that opens the door to attitude change and future success. Flowers send a message that Shabbos is special. Such "little things" can be most pleasant gestures, and they open the door to countless blessings.

The simple message of the Torah is that if in addition to basic observance you will pay attention to detail, then you will merit great blessings. But perhaps the Torah is also saying, "Even if you are not observing everything- Pay attention to 'little things'". Because little things change the direction of life. With time the fruit of your flowers will blossom.

With best wishes for a wonderful Shabbos.

<http://www.teach613.org/parshas-eikev-planting-with-flowers/>

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## Righteousness Is Not Enough: Thoughts for Parashat Ekev

by Rabbi Marc D. Angel \*

In this week's Torah portion, we are reminded that God does justice on behalf of the orphan and the widow; He loves the stranger and provides food and clothing (Devarim 10:18). The implication is that we, too, should emulate these compassionate qualities of the Almighty, caring for those who need our assistance and protection.

The theme of God's mercy is echoed in Psalm 146. In listing His attributes, the Psalm states that God "provides justice for the oppressed; He gives food to the hungry; He frees those who are bound; He gives sight to the blind; He raises those who are bowed." But then, surprisingly, the Psalmist adds the phrase "God loves the righteous," and then goes on to state that "God watches over strangers and upholds the orphan and widow." The pattern of the above phrases is to describe a person who has a deficiency (e.g. is oppressed, hungry, bound, blind, bowed, in the weak social position of stranger, orphan or widow)—and then to indicate that God resolves the deficiency and restores the person to fullness.

The only exception to this pattern is the phrase that "God loves the righteous". What is that phrase doing in the midst of these descriptions? (Logically, it should be connected to a later phrase that God "thwarts the way of the wicked." Yet, it is not so placed in our Psalm.)

I would suggest that the phrase should be interpreted in the same pattern as the other phrases in which it is included. Just as in the other phrases, it refers to a human deficiency which the Almighty comes to heal. What is the deficiency of the righteous? The lack of love! Since the righteous lacks love, God fills this deficiency by showering love upon the righteous.

This can be understood in two ways. A righteous person—since she/he has high principles—is not always a beloved person. People don't necessarily like others who are righteous, seeing them rather as being self-righteous. Or they don't like righteous people who seem to stand in criticism of the lifestyles and opinions of others. Since a righteous person might feel lonely and unloved, he/she should take comfort in the fact that the Almighty will love him/her. That Divine love makes up for the deficiency of human love that he/she experiences.

I would suggest a second interpretation—not that the righteous are deprived of the love of others, but that the righteous lack the ability to love others! A righteous person follows the rules carefully, and does that which is right. In being committed to these rules, he/she might become disdainful of others who aren't quite as meticulous. The righteous person becomes characterized by love of the rules, not by love of fellow human beings. Indeed, those people who do not conform to his/her standards of righteousness become objects of scorn or disgust.

The Talmud relates a strange passage about a father who prays on behalf of his ailing son. If the father says that he will give charity if God will heal the son, the father is considered to be totally righteous. Yet, this prayer seems to be less than ideal. Why should the father be considered to be righteous by making a bargain with God? Rabbi Hayyim Yosef David Azulai, one of the great sages of the 18th century, commented on this Talmudic passage. He stated: the father is considered righteous—but not pious! He is righteous in that he strikes a bargain and meets its terms exactly. He has not deviated from the rules. Yet, he is not pious—his attitude reflects a low level of religiosity. It lacks true love of God.

A righteous person might not even realize that righteousness is insufficient to make one a good person, a religious person. A righteous person can be cold, calculating, unsympathetic to others—and still be following the rules meticulously. Such a person is lacking in piety—in love of God and love of fellow human beings. Such a person is devoted to the rules, but is not devoted to living by ideals that deepen and transcend the rules. The righteous person lacks love.

Thus, the Psalm lists the deficiency of the righteous as a deficiency of love—a deficiency in his/her ability to live with a loving attitude toward God and human beings. So God must intercede and teach the righteous person to love.

When the Bible describes God's love and compassion and His concern for the weak and downtrodden, it is presenting a model for emulation. Just as He is kind, so we are to be kind; just as He is merciful, so are we to be merciful. The essence of religion is not merely doing that which is right—but doing that which is imbued with compassion and love.

Our goal is not merely to be righteous—but to be pious. To be pious entails the qualities of empathy, compassion—and sincere love.

\* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/righteousness-not-enough-thoughts-parashat-ekev> 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](http://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.

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## My life in Rhodes during World War II

By Dr. Elliot Turiel \*

Rhodes is a Greek Island in the Aegean Sea that was occupied by Italy from 1912 until 1943. Those years of occupation included many of the years of World War II and the reign of Benito Mussolini. I was born in Rhodes on September 23, 1938. My family on my father's (Daniel Turiel) side had lived in Rhodes for many years as part of the Jewish Sephardic community there. My mother (Mathilde Nahum Turiel) was from the Sephardic community in Izmir, Turkey, where she grew up. She moved to Rhodes when she married, but she maintained her Turkish citizenship. We lived in the Jewish section located in the old city of Rhodes, which is surrounded by medieval walls.

During my early childhood years Rhodes was occupied by Italy, with a substantial number of soldiers stationed there. As a young child, I was not very aware of the military presence or the existence of a broader war in much of the rest of the world. I recall that I had a regular childhood with my parents and older brother, as well as with friends. I have memories of a bicycle kept in our home that I often rode in the streets.

However, I was also aware and made afraid by the regular bombings of the island by the British, usually from ships off the shore of Rhodes. Typically, the air raid sirens would sound, and we would then go to the ground floor of our house that provided some protection and wait for the bombings to end. I do vividly remember an incident that actually saved me from having surgery. Because of an intense stomachache our family doctor came to examine me. He concluded that I had appendicitis and told us to go to the hospital to have my appendix removed. Just then, the air raid sirens sounded, and we had to go directly to the shelter. By the time the air raid was finished, my stomach pain was gone. The doctor concluded that I did not have appendicitis, and to this day I still have my appendix.

Events in Rhodes began to change dramatically in January of 1943 when German soldiers and the Gestapo came to Rhodes. By September of 1943, they had displaced the Italians from the island after a brief battle. The number and ferocity of the bombings increased at that time. I recall an attack, coming with no warning, when a bomb hit the house across our house while we were having lunch on the first day of Passover. The bombing caused a great deal of damage to property and life. I recall walking through the streets in the rubble looking for a cousin who had disappeared. His body was never found. Eventually, it was presumed that he had died and been buried deep in the streets.

Because of the intensity of the bombings, my parents decided we would move to a farmhouse a few kilometers from the city. We were away from bombings in the few months we lived there. It all ended abruptly one day in July of 1944. On that day, my mother had taken my brother and me shopping at a store near the farm. We returned to learn that German authorities had taken my father away. We did not know why or where he was taken. We went back to town right away to learn that all the Jewish men had been placed into a government building for reasons or fates unknown. The German authorities rapidly announced that all the women and children were required to report to the same building on July 19th. It was also announced that if families did not report, their husbands would be killed.

My mother prepared for the three of us to report on that day. As we were on the way, Mr. Selahattin Ulkumen, the young Turkish Counsel on Rhodes, made his presence. He told my mother, as well as other women also holding Turkish citizenship, to return to their homes while he would confront the German authorities.

Apparently, he argued with the Germans that all Turkish citizens, as well as their spouses, were under his protection. He insisted that all the Turkish citizens must be allowed to be free and that their husbands too had to be released from detention. The Germans reluctantly agreed to his demands – probably because they wanted Turkey to remain neutral in the war. Mr. Ulkumen presented the Germans a list of persons under his protection that included a number of names of people who were not actually Turkish; the Germans disallowed those names. My father was then released.

A total of 42 people, including my family, were saved by the heroic actions of Mr. Ulkumen. The rest of the Jewish people (over 1700) were moved on July 23rd to the port in Rhodes, placed on ships for mainland Greece, and then taken by train to the Auschwitz concentration camp. Many suffered greatly on the way in the boats or trains, and some died. Only a small number survived Auschwitz.

After the deportation of the other Jewish people, we remained in Rhodes with the intention to leave for Marmaris as soon as possible since we did not feel safe there. In the Fall of 1944, we attempted to go to Marmaris on a large rowboat. Soon after leaving Rhodes, there was a leak in the boat and we had to return to Rhodes. We were not able to finally leave until January of 1945 when, with some of the other survivors, we took a large motorized boat to Marmaris in winter weather with rough seas and we experienced a good deal of sea sickness.

We did arrive safely in Marmaris, where we all slept on cots in a large room. Although it was not very comfortable, we were very glad to finally be in the welcoming confines of Turkish land. Soon after my mother, brother and I, as Turkish citizens, went to Izmir to join my mother's family. It took two months for my father to obtain the necessary documents to be able to join us in Izmir. We lived in Izmir in happy circumstances until July of 1946 when we took a ship to New York City where we were admitted as immigrants because my father's brothers had established residency earlier during World War II. My brother and I had our names "Americanized" – his from Boaz to Bernard and mine from Eliachim to Elliot.

My father went into business with his brothers. My brother and I went through the public schools in New York, and then went to University. My brother went to Law School and had a long and successful career as a lawyer. I obtained a Ph.D. in psychology and have taught at universities since 1966. I have been a professor at the University of California, Berkeley since 1980.

B'nai B'rith in New York and Yad Vashem in Jerusalem have deservedly recognized Mr. Ulkumen's actions that directly saved those 42 lives. My mother was able to attend both ceremonies and became reconnected with Mr. Ulkumen. I did not have an opportunity to meet him, but I did on more than one occasion meet his son, Mehmet, who for many years was the Chief of Protocol for the United Nations. Turkey is a country I feel I know well, having visited many times since 1962.

\* To read more about the experiences of Jews in Greece during World War II, see *The Illusion of Safety* by Dr. Michael Matsas. The Beth Sholom library has a copy of this important book in the synagogue library.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/article/my-life-rhodes-during-world-war-ii>

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### Parshas Eikev

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer \* ©2020

As Moshe continues his farewell speech to his beloved nation, he stresses the depth of Hashem's love for us. He tells us that all Hashem asks of us is to revere Him and love Him, walk in His ways, serve Him and keep His mitzvos for our own good, that we should benefit and receive the reward He wishes to bestow upon us. (Devarim 10:12-13, Rash"i ibid., Ramba'n ibid.)

Rash"i (ibid.) noting the context within which Moshe mentions this, tells us that this message is not only of the depth of Hashem's love, but also of the depth of Hashem's commitment to us. Moshe had just finished exhorting the nation for the sin of the Golden Calf. He explained how Hashem wanted to destroy them and how he had pleaded to Hashem on their behalf for forty days and nights. Moshe then continues and says "And now, Israel, what does Hashem, your G-d, ask of you but to revere Hashem, your G-d, etc." Moshe was saying to the nation "And now" after all that you have done, Hashem still has great compassion and love for you. After all that you have sinned before Him, what does Hashem ask of you? Just to revere Him and serve Him. Despite all the damage we have done, all Hashem asks is that we return to our relationship with Him.

This Rash"i, while certainly inspiring, is rather difficult to understand. How can we possibly say that after committing grave sins we don't need to do anything more than serve Hashem appropriately as if nothing had happened? After the sin of the Golden Calf, worshiping an idol less than a month and half after receiving the Ten Commandments directly from G-d, can we really just go back as if nothing has happened? Surely, there must be more that we need to do to repair our relationship than simply to say we're sorry and move on.

Upon reflection, though, this Rash"i is teaching us a profound insight into our relationship with Hashem and our observance of Torah and mitzvos. Moshe delineates here five specific elements in our service of Hashem. He says we must revere Him, walk in His ways, love Him, serve Him and keep His mitzvos. Serving Hashem and keeping His mitzvos are the last two elements that Moshe listed. There are three other elements which come first. We must revere Hashem, walk in His ways and love Him.

The Mesillas Yesharim, in his introduction, explains what each of these elements are. Reverence of G-d means to recognize His Majesty and stand before Him with the awe with which one approaches a king. To walk in His ways means to recognize His goodness and to emulate His ways and to develop our character to live a noble life that reflects G-d's greatness. Loving G-d means to recognize G-d as our Creator who believes in us and loves us as a parent, and to love Him and care to make Him proud as we do with our parents.

Moshe then is telling us here that what Hashem asks of us is not just what we do, but more so Hashem is asking us how we do what we do. We must first recognize Hashem as the One possessing the Ultimate Goodness, Who lovingly created us. Then, from within this context, we are enjoined to serve Him and keep His mitzvos. Our responsibility is not simply to daven, keep Shabbos, eat kosher and be careful of how we treat others. Rather, our responsibility is to stand in awe of the great privilege bestowed upon us to speak directly to our Creator and to be allowed to praise Him and to ask

for our needs. Our responsibility is to recognize that our loving Creator joyously remembers the first Shabbos when the world He made for us was complete and has invited us to join in that celebration. Our responsibility is to recognize that we are His subjects living in His world, and may only eat the items which He allows us. Our responsibility is to recognize that other people are Hashem's precious children and must be treated with the ultimate dignity and respect.

It is our attitude towards Torah and mitzvos which restores and maintains our relationship with Hashem. It is not what we do that matters, as much as how we do.

\* Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD.

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## The Ramifications of Ice Cream

By Rabbi Moshe Rube \*

Isn't it strange that an ice cream brand has sent the Jewish world aflame for Israel? Throughout the past week people have been posting pictures of them throwing out their Ben and Jerry's stash and reiterating their support for Israel, its right to defend itself, protect its borders and fight an enemy that pays families to kill themselves so that Jews can be killed. This enemy has rejected and broken multiple peace agreements throughout the decades. This enemy has consistently shown and said explicitly that coming to peace is not its primary objective; rather, the primary goal is eliminating the Jewish state along with all those who would support it.

I don't know what your reaction has been to this whole fiasco or how you think about the relationship between Israel and its neighbors. My point here is not to go into a historical deep dive into the nuances of Israeli history along with the history of terrorism, mistaken foreign policies, or boycotts against the only democracy in the Middle East.

What I want to know is what this has to do with ice cream.

Ice cream is wonderful -- an indulgence like no other that has soothed broken hearts and offered its generous rewards to those seeking its pleasures. Ben and Jerry's specifically has been beloved for its endless variety of ice cream flavors, including "Peanuts and Popcorn" "Netflix and Chilled." But just because you're an expert at one thing does not mean you have any knowledge on another. So why do they feel they can wade into the thorny world of Middle East policy? And why are we getting upset? An organization of ice cream makers should have zero standing when it comes to foreign policy or our feelings about it.

Because that's not the way humans work. Our parsha this week starts off with God telling us to listen to the "Ekev" of his commandments. "Ekev" means heel, so Rashi brings down the rabbinic teaching that Hashem is telling us to pay attention to the tiniest of deeds, even the ones that we crush with our heels -- i.e., the things that seem insignificant. Because even tiny details are much more significant than our frontal lobes would have us believe.

Dan Ariely, an Israeli psychologist, writes in his book on human behavior, *Predictably Irrational*, that many factors that influence our feelings and behavior do not come from our rational mind. Rather, they come from various other factors, many that seem like the "Ekev" of human behavior. For instance, if we have a pleasurable experience while we're doing something we hate, we can actually develop better feelings toward the activity we don't like. Ariely used this insight to his advantage by watching his favorite movies while taking medicine that was painful to administer. And it worked. He was able to stick to his regimen and regain his health.

I just came back from attending the first haircut of my nephew. At this celebration, called the "upsherin," the haircut recipient licks honey off the letters of the Aleph Bet. Because Jews and Jewish tradition know that if we want the child to enjoy Hebrew and Torah, we should create this pleasurable synapse connection in the brain.

Obviously we should be very careful to use this knowledge in the most wise and moral way possible by creating pleasurable connections to life-affirming and beautiful things. In contrast, Hamas creates pleasurable connections to evil deeds like teaching children that becoming a terrorist is holy.

And indeed this is what we should be worried about when it comes to Ben and Jerry's. Perhaps you as an individual can eat Ben and Jerry's and enjoy the ice cream while specifically stating that you find their stance on Israel to be untenable

and wrong. But I don't know if we can rely on all of the people who they feed, to be so nuanced. Now when people eat their ice cream, they may subconsciously associate the pleasurable taste sensations with their stances on Israel. I'm not saying that people will change their opinions based on their ice cream choices -- only that how we make decisions and how people feel things are much more complicated than we'd like to believe. (Ask anyone who works in advertising, trained experts in leading the masses to feel pleasure towards their products. Hint: It's never done strictly through logical arguments but through wonderful songs and dances about products such as Coca-Cola.)

Even if ice cream's connection to Israel seems to be an "Ekev" matter, maybe the Ben and Jerry's policy makers know how small details affect people and how ice cream can play a part in influencing opinions, no matter how wrong.

So perhaps it's a good thing that so many are getting upset and publicly boycotting and throwing out their Ben and Jerry's. Perhaps this reaction will counteract whatever negative (admittedly irrational) societal effects that may come about from this Ben and Jerry's policy. It's definitely a good thing that Israeli ice cream companies are moving in to fill the market where Ben and Jerry's have moved out, so no Jew has to feel that he's given anything up by living wherever he does.

Allow me to help fill the void. Here's a pareve ice cream recipe that you can enjoy at any meal. I've served it many times to stellar reviews.

Put 4 bananas, a cup of berries(any kind), 2 tablespoons of any nut butter, and a half teaspoon of vanilla extract into a food processor. Pour it out into a container and freeze.

And just to be clear, just in case any B&J executive is reading this email, I have nothing against you or your ice cream, which is very good. I don't hope that your company suffers but only that you come around and only do what you do best without wading into things over which you have no standing. But until that happens, I'll be enjoying some of my homemade ice cream or some Haagen-Dazs.

\* Rabbi, Knesseth Israel Congregation, Birmingham, AL.

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## Rav Kook Torah Eikev: Two Loves for Eretz Yisrael

### The Blessings of Torah Scholars

The Talmud (Berachot 50a) gives a litmus test to determine if an individual is truly a Torah scholar: listen to how he recites berachot (blessings). Clearly, when berachot are recited sincerely, they reflect a proper outlook on life and help instill important traits such as gratitude to God. What is less obvious is that even the detailed laws for blessings reflect fundamental concepts of the Torah. For this reason, Torah scholars are punctilious in their blessings.

### Loving the Land of Israel

The following story gives one example of such an exacting approach towards blessings. It also contains an important lesson about love for the Land of Israel.

*"Rabbi Hisda and Rabbi Hamenuna were seated at a meal, and were served dates and pomegranates. Rabbi Hamenuna made the blessing over the dates. Rabbi Hisda told him, 'Do you not agree that those fruit mentioned earlier in the verse take precedence when reciting the blessing?' Rabbi Hamenuna responded, 'Dates are mentioned second after the word "land", while pomegranates are only mentioned fifth.' Rabbi Hisda exclaimed, 'If only we had legs of iron to always follow you and learn from you!'" (Berachot 41b)*

The two scholars referred to the verse that praises the Land of Israel for seven grains and fruits:

*"It is a land of wheat, barley, grapes, figs and pomegranates; a land of oil-olives and honey-*

*dates.” (Deut. 8:8)*

Rabbi Hisda felt that the blessing should reflect the order of the produce mentioned in the verse. Thus, pomegranates should come first. Rabbi Hamenuna explained that while the order in the verse is indeed important, there is an even more important factor: how close is the fruit to the word “land” in the verse? Pomegranates are the fifth produce mentioned after the first time “land” appears in the verse; dates, however, are the second fruit mentioned after “land” appears a second time in the verse. In other words, the position of dates in the verse indicates a greater closeness to the Land of Israel; therefore, this fruit deserves to come first.

The thought and care that Rabbi Hamenuna gave to his blessing demonstrates the importance he placed on loving Eretz Yisrael. This great love stems from recognizing the unique qualities of the Land -- qualities that enable the Jewish people and all of humanity to attain spiritual goals. One who is closer to the Land of Israel, and demonstrates a greater connection to it, comes first for blessing. Such an individual is closer to the perfection that is attained through this special land.

## **Two Types of Love**

Yet, we may ask: why is the word “land” mentioned twice in the verse? Why does the verse divide up the produce of Eretz Yisrael into two categories?

There are in fact two types of love for the Land of Israel. One's appreciation for the Land is a function of his spiritual level and awareness. Some value Eretz Yisrael because of its unique spiritual qualities. They long “to take pleasure in her stones and love her dust” (Psalms 102:15) in order to fulfill the mitzvot that are connected to the Land. They recognize the blessings that Eretz Yisrael provides for the spiritual elevation of the Jewish people and the entire world.

Then there are those who appreciate the land for its material benefits. They recognize its value as a homeland for the Jewish people, and work towards settling and rebuilding the land. This form of devotion to the Land of Israel, even though it does not take into account its special spiritual qualities, is nonetheless a good and positive trait.

The verse mentions the word “land” twice, each time followed by a list of produce. This corresponds to the two forms of devotion to the Land of Israel. The first list of produce represents those who love the Land for its elevated, spiritual properties. This group consists of five fruits and grains, corresponding to the Five Books of Moses. This devotion to Eretz Yisrael stems from the world of Torah, from an awareness of the spiritual goals of the Jewish people and the entire world.

The second list contains oil-olive, symbolizing knowledge, and the honey-date, representing material contentment. These fruits represent those who appreciate the Land as a place where the Jewish people can be successful in the material spheres of life, whether academic, cultural, or economic.

Rabbi Hamenuna taught us an important lesson: how great is the love for the Land of Israel, even when this love is limited to its physical benefits. When they are connected to the community, all material matters become spiritual ones; the elevated goals will automatically be realized through the bonds of God's people to His Land.

## **The Pomegranate and the Date**

Why does the date take precedence before the pomegranate? Even though the pomegranate belongs to the first group, it is the last fruit in the list. The pomegranate represents those who are aware of the holy qualities of Eretz Yisrael, yet in practice remain distant from the Land. These individuals unfortunately take few practical measures to express their love for the Land.

The date, on the other hand, is near the top of the second group. It represents those who only recognize the material benefits of the Land of Israel. Through their efforts, however, they are much closer to the Land, taking practical steps in settling and rebuilding it. Such a person, Rabbi Hamenuna taught, should be strengthened and presented first for a blessing. Devotion to the Land, when promoted in practical, concrete efforts, is a wonderful thing. Thus we find the Talmud (Sanhedrin 102b) states that Omri merited to be king in reward for establishing a city in the Land of Israel, even though his intentions were certainly pragmatic.

## **Legs of Iron**

Now we can understand Rabbi Hisda's fervent response, "If only we had legs of iron to always follow you and learn from you!" Rav Hisda understood the inner message of Rabbi Hamenuna's teaching. One needs "legs of iron" — courage and fortitude like iron — in order to be able to receive this remarkable message, and appreciate the importance of the material strength of Israel.

Similarly, on the national level, we need "legs of iron," powerful means to build up the physical aspects of the nation. Then we will have the spiritual strength to create a courageous national spirit. "And we will learn from you" — we will follow your path of Torah, and merit inheriting the Land through love and wholeness and inner strength.

(Gold from the Land of Israel, pp. 304-306. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. II, pp. 186-187; Olat Re'iyah vol. I, pp. 374-377.)

[http://www.ravkooktorah.org/EKEV\\_64.htm](http://www.ravkooktorah.org/EKEV_64.htm)

## Why Civilisations Fail (Eikev 5777)

By Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l, Former Chief Rabbi of the U.K.\*

What is the real challenge of maintaining a free society? In parshat Eikev, Moses springs his great surprise. Here are his words:

*Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God... Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery... You may say to yourself, "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me."... If you ever forget the Lord your God... I testify against you today that you will surely be destroyed.*  
(Deut. 8:11-19)

What Moses was saying to the new generation was this: You thought that the forty years of wandering in the wilderness were the real challenge, and that once you conquer and settle the land, your problems will be over. The truth is that it is then that the real challenge will begin. It will be precisely when all your physical needs are met — when you have land and sovereignty and rich harvests and safe homes — that your spiritual trial will commence.

The real challenge is not poverty but affluence, not insecurity but security, not slavery but freedom. Moses, for the first time in history, was hinting at a law of history. Many centuries later it was articulated by the great 14th century Islamic thinker, Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406), by the Italian political philosopher Giambattista Vico (1668-1744), and most recently by the Harvard historian Niall Ferguson. Moses was giving an account of the decline and fall of civilisations.

Ibn Khaldun argued similarly, that when a civilisation becomes great, its elites get used to luxury and comfort, and the people as a whole lose what he called their *asabiyah*, their social solidarity. The people then become prey to a conquering enemy, less civilised than they are but more cohesive and driven.

Vico described a similar cycle:

*"People first sense what is necessary, then consider what is useful, next attend to comfort, later delight in pleasures, soon grow dissolute in luxury, and finally go mad squandering their estates."*

Bertrand Russell put it powerfully in the introduction to his History of Western Philosophy. Russell thought that the two great peaks of civilisation were reached in ancient Greece and Renaissance Italy. But he was honest enough to see that the very features that made them great contained the seeds of their own demise:

*What had happened in the great age of Greece happened again in Renaissance Italy: traditional moral restraints disappeared, because they were seen to be associated with superstition; the liberation from fetters made individuals energetic and creative, producing a rare fluorescence of genius; but the anarchy and treachery which inevitably resulted from the decay of morals made*

*Italians collectively impotent, and they fell, like the Greeks, under the domination of nations less civilised than themselves but not so destitute of social cohesion.*

Niall Ferguson, in his book *Civilisation: the West and the Rest* (2011) argued that the West rose to dominance because of what he calls its six “killer applications”: competition, science, democracy, medicine, consumerism and the Protestant work ethic. Today however it is losing belief in itself and is in danger of being overtaken by others.

All of this was said for the first time by Moses, and it forms a central argument of the book of Devarim. If you assume – he tells the next generation – that you yourselves won the land and the freedom you enjoy, you will grow complacent and self-satisfied. That is the beginning of the end of any civilisation. In an earlier chapter Moses uses the graphic word *venoshantem*, “you will grow old” (Deut. 4:25), meaning that you will no longer have the moral and mental energy to make the sacrifices necessary for the defence of freedom.

Inequalities will grow. The rich will become self-indulgent. The poor will feel excluded. There will be social divisions, resentments and injustices. Society will no longer cohere. People will not feel bound to one another by a bond of collective responsibility. Individualism will prevail. Trust will decline. Social capital will wane.

This has happened, sooner or later, to all civilisations, however great. To the Israelites – a small people surrounded by large empires – it would be disastrous. As Moses makes clear towards the end of the book, in the long account of the curses that would overcome the people if they lost their spiritual bearings, Israel would find itself defeated and devastated.

Only against this background can we understand the momentous project the book of Devarim is proposing: the creation of a society capable of defeating the normal laws of the growth-and-decline of civilisations. This is an astonishing idea.

How is it to be done? By each person bearing and sharing responsibility for the society as a whole. By each knowing the history of his or her people. By each individual studying and understanding the laws that govern all. By teaching their children so that they too become literate and articulate in their identity.

Rule 1: Never forget where you came from.

Next, you sustain freedom by establishing courts, the rule of law and the implementation of justice. By caring for the poor. By ensuring that everyone has the basic requirements of dignity. By including the lonely in the people’s celebrations. By remembering the covenant daily, weekly, annually in ritual, and renewing it at a national assembly every seven years. By making sure there are always prophets to remind the people of their destiny and expose the corruptions of power.

Rule 2: Never drift from your foundational principles and ideals.

Above all it is achieved by recognising a power greater than ourselves. This is Moses’ most insistent point. Societies start growing old when they lose faith in the transcendent. They then lose faith in an objective moral order and end by losing faith in themselves.

Rule 3: A society is as strong as its faith.

Only faith in God can lead us to honour the needs of others as well as ourselves. Only faith in God can motivate us to act for the benefit of a future we will not live to see. Only faith in God can stop us from wrongdoing when we believe that no other human will ever find out. Only faith in God can give us the humility that alone has the power to defeat the arrogance of success and the self-belief that leads, as Paul Kennedy argued in *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (1987), to military overstretch and national defeat.

Towards the end of his book *Civilisation*, Niall Ferguson quotes a member of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, part of a team tasked with the challenge of discovering why it was that Europe, having lagged behind China until the 17th century, overtook it, rising to prominence and dominance.

At first, he said, we thought it was your guns. You had better weapons than we did. Then we delved deeper and thought it was your political system. Then we searched deeper still, and concluded that it was your economic system. But for the past 20 years we have realised that it was in fact your religion. It was the (Judeo-Christian) foundation of social and cultural life in Europe that made possible the emergence first of capitalism, then of democratic politics.

Only faith can save a society from decline and fall. That was one of Moses' greatest insights, and it has never ceased to be true.

\* 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, I have selected an earlier Dvar. See

<https://rabbisacks.org/civilisations-fail-eikev-5777>

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## **Heavenly Hunger: Parshas Eikev**

By Chaya Mushka and Nechama Krimmer

*"Man does not live on bread alone, but by the utterance of G d's mouth does man live" (Devarim 8:3).*

This is a verse from this week's Torah portion, Parshas Eikev, spoken regarding the Maan, the heavenly bread that Hashem provided the Jewish people during their sojourn in the desert. The people complained of hunger although they received more than enough bread to physically satiate every member of the congregation. What were the Jewish people actually hungry for?

One interpretation of our Sages is that the hunger of the Jewish people was metaphoric in nature, that our spiritual intake, or "heavenly bread," doesn't satisfy but rather feeds the flame of the G dly soul, leaving us yearning for greater spiritual awareness.

This Thursday, Chof Av, was the 77th yahrtzeit of the father of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Levi Yitzchok Schneersohn, z"l. The yahrzeit of Reb Levik, as he was known, generally falls out during this parsha. Reb Levik, Chief Rabbi of Yekaterinovsk, was a prime example of how a taste of Torah leads to a hunger for G dliness.

From a young age, Reb Levik was identified as a prodigy. His thirst for gaining a deeper and more esoteric understanding of the Torah grew exponentially throughout the course of his life.

During his teenage years, he began writing down the insights he had while learning, and he continued on to become a renowned scholar in both Halacha and Chassidus.

Later in life, Reb Levik was arrested, imprisoned, and tortured under Stalin's regime for opposing the party's attempts to stamp out Jewish education and observance. Eventually he was exiled to a remote village in Kazakhstan. His wife, the Rebbetzin Chana, accompanied him into the perils of exile where life was nearly unbearable and food was scarce.

When she saw a chance to slip away unnoticed, the Rebbetzin would hurry to a field near their settlement and gather berries to make ink for her husband to continue writing down his Torah insights on the weathered margins of the few books he was able to smuggle into exile.

Through her devotion, Reb Levik was able to pen his observations on the Zohar, the Tanya, and on Halachic issues, which were later codified and published in a collection of works entitled "Likutei Levi Yitzchok."

As we approach the holy month of Elul, may we all gain inspiration from Reb Levik's "heavenly bread," his scholarship, brilliance, and hunger for learning.

[https://www.chabaddayton.com/templates/articlecco\\_cdo/aid/5200435/jewish/Eikev.htm](https://www.chabaddayton.com/templates/articlecco_cdo/aid/5200435/jewish/Eikev.htm)

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## Can You Bribe G d?

By Yossi Ives \*

### Contradictory Verses

At first blush, the answer seems to be a resounding no! Indeed, we read in the portion of Eikev: “For the L rd, your G d ... will show no favor, nor will He take a bribe.”<sup>1</sup>

What does the verse even mean? How would one “bribe” the Creator anyway? G d is an infinite being who, by definition, lacks for nothing. Moreover, is it not blindingly obvious that the only truly Perfect Being would not stoop to lowly bribery? Does this really need to be said?

And if, indeed, G d would never accept a bribe, how do we make sense of the verse, “He will take a bribe from a wicked man’s bosom,”<sup>2</sup> which becomes even more troublesome when we read the Midrashic commentary:

*What is the bribe that the Holy One Blessed Is He takes from the wicked in this life? Repentance and good deeds. The Holy One Blessed Is He said to Israel: “My children, return while the gates of repentance remain open, because I accept bribes in your earthly life. By contrast, once I sit in judgement when you reach the next life, I do not accept bribes...”*

So, yes bribes or no bribes?

### Repentance Is Bribery, in a Good Way

Of course, we could answer – as do several commentators<sup>3</sup> – that accepting repentance for a sin is not really a bribe.

It is true, as Maimonides explains,<sup>4</sup> that no number of good deeds will wipe away a bad one. If a person commits both bad and good deeds, they don’t cancel each other out. Rather, reward will accrue for the good deed, and punishment for the bad ones.

That is true for regular good deeds. Repentance, though, is not just a good deed. By regretting and apologizing for one’s misdeeds, they are cleansed and washed away.

If G d were to use the person’s mitzvot in order to overlook his or her aveirot (sins), that would indeed be a form of bribery. But accepting repentance is very different, because through teshuva the aveirot cease to exist – the bad deeds are undone, not merely compensated for by good deeds.

According to this logic, then, G d does not take bribes in the form of good deeds, and the reason He accepts repentance is because it isn’t, in fact, a bribe.

If this was supposed to clear things up, it has not. If repentance is not considered a bribe, why does the Midrash call it so? In which way is accepting repentance “taking bribes from a wicked man”? And if repentance is a form of bribery, how can we reconcile that with the verse that G d “takes no bribes”? It seems we are right back to where we started!

### Getting to the Heart of Bribery

The Rebbe offers a truly stunning insight to resolve this conundrum. What, exactly, is a bribe? If one steals money and then repays it in full, he has not “bribed” the victim, but repaired the breach he caused. Bribery, then, is when the criminal pays a relatively small sum to relevant parties in order to be let off the hook for a much larger amount that he must rightfully surrender.

There is something very special and unique about repentance, that even a modest effort on our part has a far greater impact than it should have by right. The power of teshuva is such, the Rebbe explains, that it can secure forgiveness and erasure of our sins even if merely a token repentance is done.

Repentance is called a “bribe” because we can earn more credit from it than we genuinely deserve. G d revealed to us that he is “susceptible” to repentance, and that he finds it quite “irresistible.” Such is G d’s proclivity towards repentance

that even a less-than-total repentance has the capability to wash away our sins before His eyes.

It would be reasonable to expect that in order for forgiveness to be granted, the repentance should be as enthusiastic and as fulsome as the sin itself. If people are not entirely sincere in their renunciation of the wrongdoing, or are not completely committed to never repeating those acts, why should they be granted full atonement?

G-d is very much aware of the reality that we say we are sorry, but then go on to repeat the misdeed. We say we regret committing the sin, but how truly sorry are we? If it cannot be said that we are truly a changed person, why should our expression of remorse be taken seriously? Are words alone not cheap?

Yet the mystery of teshuva is that even imperfect repentance is considered repentance – and the sin is treated as if it never happened. As long as the person fulfilled the requirements of teshuva under Jewish law – an admission of guilt, a decision to desist from the sin, and a request for forgiveness – Divine clemency is total.

It is in this sense that repentance is considered a “bribe”: A little bit of repentance gets you a lot of atonement. Imperfect repentance can still get you perfect forgiveness.

But how is this fair? Shouldn’t the atonement be commensurate with the penitence?

Indeed, it would appear that many times repentance is not fully sincere, given how often we return to the very wrongdoing we foreswore. But that is how it seems from a human perspective. To our minds, how can the person truly mean their regret if they repeat the offense the next day?

However, the Almighty Who sees into the depths of our character knows that when we express our remorse it comes from the soul. Despite whatever may happen later, at that moment of regret we truly meant it.

This secret of teshuva reveals a mystery of the soul: for all our missteps and bungling errors, we are at heart pure and holy. Regardless of our mistakes and reversals, our truest self wants to do the right thing. It is when we sin that we are “faking it,” impersonating a sinner for some foolish reason. When we achieve moments of clarity and choose the good path, it is then that we are being true to our real self.

Adapted from *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 34, Parshat Eikev II.

#### **FOOTNOTES:**

1. Deuteronomy 10:17.
2. Proverbs 17:23. The simple meaning is that a corrupt person is willing to accept a bribe from a criminal to pervert the course of justice. Here the Midrash homiletically interprets this as referring to Great Judge of All Things as willing to accept a bribe from the wicked.
3. Midrash Shmuel, Tzeida Ladarech, Derech Chaim – to Avot end of chapter 4.
4. Commentary to the Mishna, Tractate Avot end of chapter 4.

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[https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article\\_cdo/aid/5193395/jewish/Can-You-Bribe-Gd.htm](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/5193395/jewish/Can-You-Bribe-Gd.htm)

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#### **Eikev: Imitating G-d**

by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky \*

*“Moses tells the Jewish people to safeguard the commandments, perform them properly, and “walk in all G-d’s ways” Deuteronomy 11:22*

The sages of the Talmud explain that the phrase "walk in all his ways" means that we are intended to imitate G-d's goodness. "Just as He is merciful, so should you be merciful; just as He performs acts of loving-kindness, so should you perform acts of loving-kindness."

But inasmuch as G-d's goodness is infinite, how can we be expected to imitate Him?

The answer is that it is for this very reason that G-d created us in His image. As such, we indeed possess G-d's infinite potential to do good.

\* From *Daily Wisdom #1*

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## Eikev – Torah Thoughts From SEED

In the beginning of this week's Parsha the Torah discusses importance of guarding the *Mitzvos Kalos* – lighter mitzvos. The Daas Zekanim tells us that this is because of the importance of these *Mitzvos Kalos* that Hashem didn't tell us the reward for any of the mitzvos. If we knew the reward for each mitzva, we might decide to only do the mitzvos that we get a lot of reward for. The Daas Zekanim gives a parable of a king who wants to plant his garden with a variety of trees. When he hires workers to plant the trees, he doesn't tell them about the reward for each tree. In this way the workers will plant the full variety of trees the king wants, and not only plant the trees which have a lot of reward. To me there is a glaring question on the Daas Zekanim. Its understandable in the parable that someone can feel complacent with the reward given by a king. If he is already getting so much reward for the more rewardable trees, then he doesn't need any more reward. Therefore, he wouldn't bother planting the whole garden. However, in the case of mitzvos we know that the whole purpose of Hashem giving us the mitzvos is to benefit us and to give us the greatest reward that could possibly exist. If so, it must be worthwhile to do even the *Mitzvos Kalos* – lighter mitzvos. Why would we get complacent with doing some of the mitzvos if we know there is more reward to be had that we could enjoy? It sounds like even though logically it might not make sense to be complacent, deep down on an emotional level we still feel complacent with the reward for the mitzvos. It's hard for us to relate to reward that has unending and everlasting enjoyment that we can't get enough of. It is important to realize that we can fall prey to this complacency, and that we have to do our best to drill in the truth that there is always more to accomplish.

*Mordechai May*

The verse in this week's parsha says, "Beware for yourselves, lest your heart be seduced, and you turn astray and serve other gods and prostrate yourselves to them." Rash"i explains that "turning astray" refers to straying from Torah, and that the Torah is telling us that if one separates himself from Torah, he will eventually start serving idols. Rash"i is obviously not saying that upon abandoning Torah one will immediately start serving idols. Nonetheless, it automatically puts him on a detrimental path, and unless he works against it, it will eventually lead him to idol worship. This astounding idea gives a new perspective on our inner workings. Every one of us has a natural inclination to rebel against G-d, and the only thing we can do to keep it in check is to live by the Torah. We are like someone who has a big animal chained to his arm, constantly pulling him in the wrong direction. Without a tremendously powerful force in the other direction, our "inner animal" will inevitably pull us the other way, a path that leads to such lowly things as idol worship. This idea sheds light on the importance of our connection to Torah. This connection plays out practically, in our everyday life, keeping us from going off the proper path. May we merit to strengthen our connection to Torah and with that be able to constantly fight off our evil inclination.

*Aryeh Singer*

In this weeks Parsha, Moshe says to B'nei Yisroel that all Hashem asks from us is to revere Him, go in His ways, and to love and serve Him with all your heart and soul. Rash"i says that our Rabbis learn from the fact that Hashem is asking B'nei Yisroel to revere Him, that everything is in Hashem's control except our reverence of Hashem. This means that Hashem has everything in each of our lives mapped out and planned for us even before we are created. However, the most important factor, the free choice over our thoughts and actions, Hashem entrusted to us to use it correctly to serve Him. The Master of the universe and the Creator of everything doesn't take any control over what we do and how we do it. If we fully understand this, we can begin to realize how important our actions are and how much can come from them. May we merit to always use our actions to do the right thing and to sanctify Hashem's name.

*Doniel Feldman*

This week's parsha, chapter 10, verse 12, discusses Moshe's advice to the generation. "And now, Israel, what does Hashem, your G-d, ask from you, only to revere Hashem, your G-d..." the Kli Yakar quotes a Gemarah in Brachos that is bothered by a basic question. Is revering Hashem as easy as Moshe makes it sounds? The Gemarah answers that, yes, for Moshe it was something small. The commentaries ask on the Gemarah's answer that even if it's easy for Moshe, does that mean its easy for the rest of the generation too? They answer that since the generation learnt from Moshe how to cultivate this trait of revering Hashem and to be receptive to it everywhere, it was a small request to ask of them. This seems puzzling because this generation was also shown blatant miracles that didn't follow the natural laws of nature. For example, they got the manna daily, lived in the Cloud of Glory in the desert, and witnessed the battles of Sichon and Og. They were also receptive to using inspiration to develop their reverence of Hashem. However, the commentaries are telling us that without Moshe teaching them tactics for how to better develop reverence of Hashem, this level of reverence of Hashem would be something great to ask of them. Why wouldn't they be on the highest levels of reverence of Hashem even without Moshe? Weren't all these blatant daily miracles enough? It seems, what brings a person to a greater understanding of reverence of Hashem is not the open daily miracles that happened in the desert. Rather, it is the teachings of Moshe on how to develop reverence of Hashem. The best way to learn to develop true reverence of Hashem is to learn strategies on how to be receptive to see Hashem's hand everywhere, and not simply to find opportunities to be inspired. May we all merit to learn to recognize and appreciate Hashem's hand in our everyday lives, and to learn to use this awareness to develop true reverence of Hashem and to strengthen ourselves in the observance of His mitvos.

*Shua Katz*

## Good Shabbos

# Likutei Divrei Torah

Gleanings of Divrei Torah  
on Parashat Hashavuah  
via the Internet

Volume 27, Issue 41

## Covenant and Conversation Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

### To Lead is to Listen

"If only you would listen to these laws..." (Deut. 7:12). These words with which our parsha begins contain a verb that is a fundamental motif of the book of Devarim. The verb is sh-m-a. It occurred in last week's parsha in the most famous line of the whole of Judaism, Shema Yisrael. It occurs later in this week's parsha in the second paragraph of the Shema, "It shall be if you surely listen [shamoa tishme'u]" (Deut. 11:13). In fact, this verb appears no less than 92 times in Devarim as a whole.

We often miss the significance of this word because of what I call the fallacy of translatability: the assumption that one language is fully translatable into another. We hear a word translated from one language to another and assume that it means the same in both. But often it doesn't. Languages are only partially translatable into one another.<sup>[1]</sup> The key terms of one civilisation are often not fully reproducible in another. The Greek word megalopsychos, for example, Aristotle's "great-souled man" who is great and knows he is, and carries himself with aristocratic pride, is untranslatable into a moral system like Judaism in which humility is a virtue. The English word "tact" has no precise equivalent in Hebrew. And so on.

This is particularly so in the case of the Hebrew verb sh-m-a. Listen, for example, to the various ways the opening words of this week's parsha have been translated into English:

If you hearken to these precepts...  
If you completely obey these laws...  
If you pay attention to these laws...  
If you heed these ordinances...  
Because ye hear these judgments...

There is no single English word that means to hear, to listen, to heed, to pay attention to, and to obey. Sh-m-a also means "to understand," as in the story of the tower of Babel, when God says, "Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand [yishme'u] each other" (Gen. 11:7).

By Rene and Rami Isser  
in loving memory of Rene's mother,  
Devorah bat Chaim Eliyahu, a"h,  
on the occasion of the her 11th Yahrtzeit,  
(24th of Av)

By Bryna & Paul Epstein of Rehovot, Israel, Dvora & Nathan Liebster, and Saadia & Lily Greenberg  
in loving memory of Saadia, Bryna, & Dvora's great grandparents, Aharon Reuven and Breine Bernzweig, on the 92nd anniversary of their miraculous deliverance, b'Chasdei Hashem, during the Hebron massacre on Shabbat Parashat Eikev, 18 Menachem Av 5689 (August 24, 1929).  
The text of the letter of Aharon Reuven Bernzweig describing their experiences and deliverance may be read at: [www.hebron1929.info](http://www.hebron1929.info).

## Shabbat Parashat Ekev

5781 B'H

As I have argued elsewhere, one of the most striking facts about the Torah is that, although it contains 613 commands, it does not contain a word that means "to obey." When such a word was needed in modern Hebrew, the verb le-tzayet was borrowed from Aramaic. The verb used by the Torah in place of "to obey" is sh-m-a. This is of the highest possible significance. It means that blind obedience is not a virtue in Judaism. God wants us to understand the laws He has commanded us. He wants us to reflect on why this law, not that. He wants us to listen, to reflect, to seek to understand, to internalise and to respond. He wants us to become a listening people.

Ancient Greece was a visual culture, a culture of art, architecture, theatre and spectacle. For the Greeks generally, and Plato specifically, knowing was a form of seeing. Judaism, as Freud pointed out in Moses and Monotheism, [2] is a non-visual culture. We worship a God who cannot be seen; and making sacred images, icons, is absolutely forbidden. In Judaism we do not see God; we hear God. Knowing is a form of listening. Ironically, Freud himself, deeply ambivalent though he was about Judaism, invented the listening cure in psychoanalysis: listening as therapy.<sup>[3]</sup>

It follows that in Judaism listening is a deeply spiritual act. To listen to God is to be open to God. That is what Moses is saying throughout Devarim: "If only you would listen." So it is with leadership – indeed with all forms of interpersonal relationship. Often the greatest gift we can give someone is to listen to them.

Viktor Frankl, who survived Auschwitz and went on to create a new form of psychotherapy based on "man's search for meaning," once told the story of a patient of his who phoned him in the middle of the night to tell him, calmly, that she was about to commit suicide. He kept her on the phone for two hours, giving her every conceivable reason to live. Eventually she said that she had changed her mind and would not end her life. When he next saw the woman he asked her which of his many reasons had persuaded her to change her mind. "None," she replied. "Why then did you decide not to commit suicide?" She replied that the fact that someone was prepared to listen to her for two hours in the middle of the night convinced her that life was worth living after all.<sup>[4]</sup>

As Chief Rabbi I was involved in resolving a number of highly intractable agunah cases, situations in which a husband was unwilling to give his wife a get so that she could remarry. We resolved all these cases not by legal devices but by the simple act of listening: deep listening, in which we were able to convince both sides that we had heard their pain and their sense of injustice. This took many hours of total concentration and a principled absence of judgment and direction. Eventually our listening absorbed the acrimony and the two sides were able to resolve their differences together. Listening is intensely therapeutic.

Before I became Chief Rabbi, I was head of our rabbinical training seminary, Jews' College. There in the 1980s we ran one of the most advanced practical rabbincics programmes ever devised. It included a three-year programme in counselling. The professionals we recruited to run the course told us that they had one precondition. We had to agree to take all the participants away to an enclosed location for two days. Only those who were willing to do this would be admitted to the course. We did not know in advance what the counsellors were planning to do, but we soon discovered. They planned to teach us the method pioneered by Carl Rogers known as 'non-directive' or 'person-centred' therapy. This involves active listening and reflective questioning, but no guidance on the part of the therapist.

As the nature of the method became clear, the Rabbis began to object. It seemed to oppose everything they stood for. To be a Rabbi is to teach, to direct, to tell people what to do. The tension between the counsellors and the Rabbis grew almost to the point of crisis, so much so that we had to stop the course for an hour while we sought some way of reconciling what the counsellors were doing with what the Torah seemed to be saying. That is when we began to reflect, for the first time as a group, on the spiritual dimension of listening, of Shema Yisrael.

The deep truth behind person-centred therapy is that listening is the key virtue of the religious life. That is what Moses was saying throughout Devarim. If we want God to listen to us, we have to be prepared to listen to Him.

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And if we learn to listen to Him, then we eventually learn to listen to our fellow humans: the silent cry of the lonely, the poor, the weak, the vulnerable, the people in existential pain.

When God appeared to King Solomon in a dream and asked him what he would like to be given, Solomon replied: *lev shome'a*, literally “a listening heart” to judge the people (1 Kings 3:9). The choice of words is significant. Solomon’s wisdom lay, at least in part, in his ability to listen, to hear the emotion behind the words, to sense what was being left unsaid as well as what was said. It is common to find leaders who speak, very rare to find leaders who listen. But listening often makes the difference.

Listening matters in a moral environment as insistent on human dignity as Judaism. The very act of listening is a form of respect. To illustrate this, I would like to share a story with you. The royal family in Britain is known always to arrive on time and depart on time. I will never forget the occasion – her aides told me that they had never witnessed it before – when the Queen stayed for two hours longer than her scheduled departure time. The day was 27 January 2005, the occasion, the sixtieth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. The Queen had invited survivors to a reception at St James’ Palace. Each had a story to tell, and the Queen took the time to listen to every one of them. One after another came up to me and said, “Sixty years ago I did not know whether tomorrow I would be alive, and here I am talking to the Queen.” That act of listening was one of the most royal acts of graciousness I have ever witnessed. Listening is a profound affirmation of the humanity of the other.

In the encounter at the Burning Bush, when God summoned Moses to be a leader, Moses replied, “I am not a man of words, not yesterday, not the day before, not from the first time You spoke to Your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue” (Ex. 4:10). Why would God choose a man who found it difficult to speak to lead the Jewish people? Perhaps because one who cannot speak learns how to listen.

A leader is one who knows how to listen: to the unspoken cry of others and to the still, small voice of God.

[1] Robert Frost said: “Poetry is what gets lost in translation.” Cervantes compared translation to the other side of a tapestry. At best we see a rough outline of the pattern we know exists on the other side, but it lacks definition and is full of loose threads.

[2] Vintage, 1955

[3] Anna O. (Bertha Pappenheim) famously described Freudian psychoanalysis as “the talking cure,” but it is in fact a listening cure. Only through the active listening of the analyst can there be the therapeutic or cathartic talking of the patient.

[4] Anna Redsand, Viktor Frankl: *A Life Worth Living*, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2006, 113-14.

### Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

“Remember the entire path along which the Lord your God led you these forty years in the desert, He sent hardships to test you.” (Deut. 8:2)

“The land which you are about to inherit is not like Egypt.” (Deut. 11:10)

Our Biblical portion of Ekev devotes much praise to the glories of the Land of Israel; its majestic topography, its luscious produce, and its freely-flowing milk and honey. And in order to conceptually explain the truly unique quality of our land promised us by God, the Biblical text – in chapters eight and eleven of the Book of Deuteronomy – contrasts the Land of Israel with the desert experience of manna on the one hand and the geographical and geological gifts of Egypt on the other, with Israel coming out far ahead. In this commentary – heavily inspired by Rav Elhanan Samet’s “Studies of the Weekly Portions” – I shall attempt to understand what it is that makes the Land of Israel so special.

The Israelite wanderers are hardly enamored with the manna they receive in the desert. Again and again they complain about the lack of meat and fish (Numbers 11:1-7), about the scarcity of water and fruits, crying out in despair, “Why did you bring God’s congregation into this desert? So that we and our livestock should die? Why did you take us out of Egypt and bring us to this terrible place? [The desert] is an area where there are no plants, no figs, no grapes, no pomegranates, no water to drink” (11:4,5). And even in our portion of Ekev, God describes the desert years as years of “hardships to test you,” of “chastisement and training” (Deut. 8:3,5). The moral message of the inexhaustible manna was merely to teach the people that the ultimate source of food is God, “so that you may observe His commandments and fear Him” (8:3,6).

Indeed, the desert’s difficulties are contrasted with future life in the Land of Israel, the Torah narrative praising the Promised Land’s blessings. In three packed verses (8:7-9) the land (*eretz*) – in contrast to the desert – is referred to seven times, a chiastic structure reveling in the seven special species of fruit for which Israel is esteemed (wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olive oil and date-honey), a “good land with flowing streams and underground springs, gushing out in valley and mountain, whose stones are iron and from whose mountains you will quarry copper.”

The wondrous descriptions depict a wide range of foods and natural resources produced by the earth – from bread and olive oil to copper mines – all of which require serious human ingenuity, input and energy to create a partnership with God to properly develop the gifts inherent in the land. After all, to properly irrigate the fields, rainwater must be collected and gathered through the underground springs; the making of bread requires eleven

### Likutei Divrei Torah

agricultural steps; oil must be carefully extracted from the olive trees by means of olive presses; and the copper must be painstakingly quarried from the depths of the mountains. It is precisely this partnership between God and humanity that is critically necessary to develop – and ultimately perfect – the world which we have been given.

It shouldn’t surprise us that Egypt, representing the very antithesis of the desert (“the gift of the Nile,” in the words of Herodotus) is where agriculture had initially developed – a development which made the land of the Pharaohs the most commanding power of the ancient world. And so, chapter eleven of the Book of Deuteronomy, in our portion of Ekev, provides a dazzling parallel (verses 8-12) to the passage we discussed earlier (8:7-9), similarly emphasizing the “defining and leading” word *eretz*, land.

Interestingly enough, in our passage where “*eretz*” is mentioned seven times, the land of Israel is the focus of all but one, the fourth time, when it refers to Egypt. On one level the contrast is between land and desert, but the Torah’s intention is to provide a contrast between Egypt and Israel, the latter introduced as the “land flowing with milk and honey” (11:9). The Biblical text continues: “Because the land you are about to inherit is not like Egypt, the place you left, where you could plant your seed and irrigate it with your feet, just like a vegetable garden” (11:10). Since the fertility of Egyptian land and the cultivation of its crops does not depend on rainfall but is effectively irrigated by the Nile’s natural overflow and from the omnipresent moisture of the great river, Egyptians did not need to turn to the heavens for rain.

However, while Egyptian land may be easily cultivated, it remains a dry, desert valley, unlike Israel, a land flowing with milk and honey: milk derived from livestock grazing on fields of natural growing grass and honey from bees that thrive in areas blessed by a natural abundance of flora. It may be difficult to live only on milk and honey – but it is possible. And more importantly: “The land you are crossing to occupy is a land of mountains and valleys, which can be irrigated only by rain. It is therefore a land constantly under the Lord your God’s scrutiny; the eyes of the Lord your God are on it at all times, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year” (Deut. 11:11,12).

Ancient Egypt had very little to offer in the God-human partnership. The rich, fertile soil of the ‘gift of the Nile’ makes the agricultural process a relatively simple one, its dependency on rain removed. Israel, abundant in its natural supply of resources, nevertheless must rely heavily both on plentiful rainfall as well as human input for a successful agricultural crop. And since Israel must rely on God – the obvious source for rain – the Israelites must be worthy of God’s grace by dint of their ethical

and moral conduct, their fealty to God's laws. Hence our Biblical portion concludes with a call to sensitive fulfillment of God's laws as the key to our successful harvesting of the land's produce. Perhaps this is really why Israel is called the land 'flowing with milk and honey: only milk and honey can be garnered without destroying any form of life whatsoever – human, animal or plant.

## Dvar Torah

### Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

#### A change in the order provides a major lesson for all time!

A change in the order presents us with a crucially important lesson for life.

Last Shabbat, Parshat Va'etchanan, we read the first paragraph of the Shema which is so very well known to us. In it we have the important mitzvah of וְשַׁנְתָּה לְבָנֶךָ וּדְבָרָה בְּם – וְשַׁנְתָּה לְבָנֶךָ וּדְבָרָה בְּמָ – we must teach Torah to our children. A bit later in the same paragraph, we're given the Mitzvah of Tefillin – תְּפִילִין. Now in the second paragraph of Shema which we will be reading in Parshat Eikev this coming Shabbat, we have, yet again, the mitzvah of tefillin – תְּפִילִין וְקַרְבָּן and that is followed by וְלֹמַדְתָּם אֶת בְּנֵיכֶם לְדִבָּר בְּמָ – First Tefillin and then Talmud Torah.

So my question is this: Why is it that in the first paragraph, the teaching of Torah precedes the mitzvah of Tefillin, whereas in the second paragraph, first, we have the mitzvah of Tefillin followed by the mitzvah to teach Torah.

Now we know of course that the first paragraph of the Shema is in the singular. It therefore, addresses each and every one of us in our own individual capacities. The second paragraph is in the plural, indicating that we fulfil the mitzvot of Hashem as an integral part of Am Yisrael as a collective, with a responsibility to all of Am Yisrael.

Allow me therefore to suggest the following: When a child is born, the parents immediately have the mitzvah of וְשַׁנְתָּה לְבָנֶךָ – to teach Torah to their child. To instil within the heart and the mind of that child an appreciation of Torah values and eventually as suggested by the first paragraph, the child will grow up. As girls reach the age of 12 and boys reach the age of 13 when they put on Tefillin, they become members of the adult community of Am Yisrael and they embrace fresh responsibilities. But that's not the end of the story.

The second paragraph of the Shema picks it up from there. First of all, Tefillin and after that, yet again, Talmud Torah. Indicating that as an adult, the study of Torah must always continue.

In this spirit, we say in our davening every evening, כי הַמְּחִינָה וְאַרְךְ יָמָנוּ וּבָהָם נָהָג יְמִינָה וְלִילִית – that the words of Torah are our lives and they are the length of our days – they are there to inspire and to guide us throughout our

lives.

Let no one therefore think, God forbid, that there comes a time in one's life when one 'graduates' from Torah study, or from a commitment to keep the law of Hashem. Quite the contrary: Talmud Torah needs to be a part of our lives both as children and thereafter, throughout our entire existence. And thanks to Torah, we have the keys to a meaningful life filled with joy and happiness always.

## OTS Dvar Torah

### Moments Before Entering the Land: You Haven't Come Here Alone

#### Avi Ganz

Moshe Rabbeinu wanted the Jewish people to understand that God would look after them even when they were at war, during the conquest of the land, and during times of concern, but they needed to pray a great deal, and keep their hopes up, as they had done in the desert.

Parashat Eikev documents the last time Moshe Rabbeinu addressed the Jewish people before passing. As the leader of the generation, Moshe was taking his leave of a new nation that had undergone complex and difficult processes. It was at that point, as they prepared to enter a new and intimidating place, that Moshe reminds them of their past: "Just look at how Hashem looked after you, providing whatever you needed. He did miracles for you, revealed and everlasting miracles, to help you overcome these hardships with peace of mind." But why did He do this? After all, the Israelites were a developing nation. Like a small child leaving his home for the first time, they should be encouraged to be independent. Wouldn't they feel like they were being abandoned if Moshe were to focus too much on the past?

Moshe also reminds them that they were entering the land without manna, the clouds of glory, and Miriam's well. Why? Moshe Rabbeinu wanted the Jewish people to peer into the future in light of their reflection on the past. "Look to the past, and you'll discover that you had everything you needed, because the universe had a Father, a Caretaker, who took care of the things you needed and performed great miracles". Moshe wanted the people to understand that this same Caretaker, their heavenly Father, would also look after them when they were engaged in battle and conquest, and when they were sowing and plowing their fields, beset with worry over what the future had in store for them. Earning a livelihood requires investment and action, but to the same extent, it also requires prayer and hope – the same prayers and hope that kept the people going when they were in the desert.

In Parashat Beshalach, we learned about the manna that Hashem sent to the people: "The omer is a tenth of an ephah." The "tenth of an ephah" is a commonly used unit of

## Likutei Divrei Torah

measurement in the Torah, but we only encounter this unit of measurement twice in connection to the omer. The first time it appears is when we learn about the manna (each individual was allowed to collect a quantity of manna equaling a tenth of an ephah – the omer). The second time, in Parashat Emor, is in the context of the omer barley flour offering, at the beginning of the harvest season, brought starting on the second day of Passover.

Barley flour is completely tasteless, and is usually used as animal feed. In the case of the omer, this is the first flour produced from the new crop, which was brought as an offering after careful sifting (it was sifted 13 times!). Thus, we take the most carefully sifted flour of the simplest species of grain, which is inedible to humans, and infuse it with a similar meaning to the one the manna had, which was a completely spiritual food. The Israelites' material pursuits, once they entered the land, are part and parcel of their spiritual pursuits, just as the omer offering of barley had the potential of being just like the manna, which was a spiritual omer. Though it needed to be sifted and refined, it had enormous potential.

Moshe parted from the Jewish people with a powerful message: "Look back," he said. "You haven't come here alone, and you won't remain here alone. Don't stop working on your spirituality. This is a new land, and life will not be easy, but you will be able to scale mountains, both physically and spiritually."

## Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

### Rabbi Yakov Haber

#### The Fruits of Eretz Yisrael: Outer and Inner Dimensions

Parashas Eikev, perhaps more than any other single parasha in Chumash Devarim extolls the spiritual and physical blessings of the Holy Land. "A land flowing with milk and honey" (11:10), "a land in which you will not eat bread sparingly, nothing will be lacking in it, whose stones are iron and from its mountains you will hew copper" (8:9), "a land upon which Hashem's eyes rest from the beginning of the year until the end of the year" (11:12). Here, we would like to focus on one of the most famous aspects of Eretz Yisrael, its acclaimed fruits, specifically the "seven species".

ארץ חיטה וشعורה וגפן ותנהנה ורימון, ארץ זית שמן ובדש - A land of wheat and barley and vine and fig and pomegranate, a land of oil-producing olives and honey" (8:8). Why are specifically these species enumerated in praise of the land? Why does the word "eretz" appear twice at specific locations dividing the list of seven into two groups of five and two respectively?

Several commentaries indicate that these fruits provide basic, important nourishment (see Ibn Ezra and Abravanel quoting the Greek physician Galen).<sup>[1]</sup> Seforim adds that the two groups of five and two preceded by the word

"eretz" are divided into the nutritive fruits and the ma'adanei melech, the royal delicacies of olive oil and date-honey. R' Eliyahu of Vilna in Aderes Eliyahu similarly notes the division into two groups and, on a pshat level, states that the first lists mazon, food; the second comprises items which are a hybrid of both food and drink.[2]

The Gemara (Berachos 41b) concludes that the fruits are listed in order of importance with an emphasis being placed on the proximity of each fruit to the word eretz. This leads to the following list in order of importance: wheat, olives, barley, dates, grapes, figs and pomegranates. Sheim MiShmuel (Haggada shel Pesach) directs us to two Talmudic passages indicating the interrelationship between wheat-product (Berachos 40a) and olive oil (Menachos 85b) consumption and the acquisition of wisdom. Since Eretz Yisrael is known as a land most conducive to the acquisition of wisdom (Bereishis Rabba 16:4), whose very air induces wisdom - **אִירָא דְאַרְץ יִשְׂרָאֵל מְחַכֵּם** (Bava Basra 158b), the agricultural products most directly connected to wisdom are considered the most important. [3]

Bach (Orach Chaim 208) and Chasam Sofer[4] remarkably write that consumption of the fruits of Eretz Yisrael induce sanctity into those eating them. Based on this concept, Bach justifies the view that in the bracha me'ein shalosh we recite "הַלְאָכֵל מִפְרַח וְנִשְׁבַּע מִתּוֹבָה" - and may we eat of its fruits and be satiated from its goodness". Several Rishonim (see Tur 208) struck out this phrase as it appears to focus on the importance of the physical side of land, something that Chazal seem to diminish by assuming that clearly Moshe Rabbeinu did not pray to enter the Promised Land **לִרְשָׁבֹע מִתּוֹבָה** (Sota 14a)! How can we then pray to Hashem for precisely that! Bach explains that even the fruits themselves of the Holy Land generate sanctity and are worthy of praying that we merit to partake of them. (Although Bach does not address the question from Moshe Rabbeinu, presumably Chazal understood that Moshe was praying for directly spiritual activities - the mitzvos dependent on the land.) Bach's actual words are extremely revealing both as to the benefits of partaking of the even the physical bounty of the land, but also the great danger in defiling its sanctity:

The sanctity of the land which emanates from the sanctity of the upper (supernal) Land also permeates its fruits which are nourished from the sanctity of the Divine Presence which dwells in the midst of the land. Therefore He adjures (Bamidbar 35:34) "Do not contaminate the land in which you dwell which I dwell in, for I am Hashem Who dwells among the Children of Israel." He states that if you do contaminate the land, impurity will also be drawn into its fruits which nourish from it when the Divine presence has been removed from the land... What follows then is I will

remove my Presence from bnei Yisrael whom until now have been "heichal Hashem"... for the Divine presence was literally dwelling among them... Therefore it is understandable that we say **וְנִשְׁבַּע מִתּוֹבָה וְנִאֵל מִפְרַח** for by consuming its fruits we are nourished by the sanctity of the Shechina and from Its purity and we are satiated from Its goodness.[5]

R' Yaakov Zvi Mecklenburg in his HaKesav v'HaKabbala opines that the division of the seven species of fruits into two groups splits them into fruits in their original form and products which are pressed from the original fruits (olive oil and date honey). Conceptually, perhaps one of the messages in this division is that Hashem is conveying to us two aspects of His Providence over His people in the land, one without (or minimal) human involvement and one with a significant amount of human endeavor. Hashem grants both salvation and success, the former without human effort, the latter with.[6] To be sure, some agricultural labor must be invested into growing fruits as well, but the product is consumed as is. With olive oil and date honey, the final product itself only emerges after human involvement. This then is directly parallel to verses immediately following ours. "Lest you eat and be satiated ... and your heart will grow arrogant, and you will forget Hashem, your G-d... and you will state in your heart 'My might and the strength my hand have amassed for me this great wealth.' And you shall remember that it is Hashem, your G-d, who has granted you the strength to amass wealth..." (8:12,14,17-18). In partaking of Divine blessing anywhere in the world, even of the sanctified fruits of the Holy Land, even if produced with much human effort, one must always recall that ultimately all of this great bounty is meant to bring us closer to the Almighty by being recipients of His kindness and not chas v'shalom to cause distance.

A final thought on the division of the fruits into two groups: I heard from Rav Mendel Farber shlit'a, a longtime Rebbe at Yeshiva Darchei Noam where I have been privileged to teach for the last thirteen years, that the difference between the two sub-lists of fruits is that the first represents the apparent, the external fruit itself, the second denotes the inner dimension, the extract inside. This helps explain why the spies only took grapes, figs and pomegranates as samples of the fruits of the land (Bamidbar 13:23) and not olives and dates. The Torah's description of olives and dates in our parasha as olive oil and date-honey represents their inner essence. Thus, the spies only looked at the outer surface of the Holy Land they entered, and therefore returned with a negative report. Had they looked beneath the surface, they would have fallen in love with the land and returned with a positive, even excitedly gushing report of its physical and spiritual beauty. Moshe Rabbeinu knowing this truth, asks Hashem "Let me pass over and see the land" (Devarim 3:25). Kli Yakar explains that the physical part of his request

## Likutei Divrei Torah

was denied - he was not permitted entry. But the spiritual aspect of his request - to see the land - was granted. Indeed, Moshe's looking at the land allowed him to see its inner quality, a land infused with the Divine presence and partake, even if from a distance, of its supernal pleasure.

May Hashem grant us the ability to always partake of the sanctified, physical bounty of the Holy Land, to avail ourselves of all of the land's spiritual and physical blessings and to create the opportunities to do so. When the world situation does not allow us to enjoy those blessings, may we increase our longing for the Coveted Land's abundant gifts. More importantly, may we always appreciate the "Land upon which Hashem's eyes rest" constantly.

[1] Much has been written about the health benefits of olives, grapes, dates, pomegranates and figs, but many other fruits also have significant health benefits. The particular nutritive advantage - if there is one according to current nutritional knowledge - of these fruits over others, intuitively true and taken for granted by at least some of the commentaries, remains a fascinating topic of research.

[2] See there that on a deeper level the five and two division is directly parallel to the hatavas hamenorah, the cleaning out of the menorah in the midkash, which was divided into cleaning five receptacles of oil and then the remaining two later. Also see there where the Gaon analyzes each fruit in the list kabbalistically.

[3] See Maharsha (Horayos 13b) and Pardes Yosef (Eikev 8:8) who explain based on this concept why olive oil and date honey are mentioned rather than olives and dates.

[4] See Seifer Eretz Yisrael b'Mishnas HaChasam Sofeir (2:52 ff.).

[5] Fascinatingly, the Bach's words concerning the fruits of Eretz Yisrael are directly parallel to Ramban's understanding of the man in the desert (see his comments to Shemos 16:6). This directly follows from the thesis that the midbar experience supernaturally gave a foretaste of what would be happening in Eretz Yisrael in a more hidden way. This can be generalized to Torah study, parnassa, and Providence in general. See Mann and Parnassa and The Mishkan, Har Sinai, Torah and Eretz Yisrael for further elaborations on these themes.

[6] Also see Sukkos: Two Types of Divine Providence.

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### Torah.Org Dvar Torah by Rabbi Label Lam

#### Laughing All the Way to the Bank

...and you will say to yourself, "My strength and the might of my hand that has accumulated this wealth for me." But you must remember the Lord your God, for it is He that gives you strength to make wealth, in order to establish His covenant which He swore to your forefathers, as it is this day. (Devarim 8:18)

There is a very grave danger, and perhaps the greatest danger that is highlighted and emphasized, and hammered time and time again. What is that gravest of all dangers? Forgetting about HASHEM! We are all at risk and at all times regardless of the external condition in which we find ourselves.

The Ramchal gives this description of the human condition; "Thus, we see that man is truly placed in the midst of a raging battlefield. For all matters of this world, whether for the good or for the bad, are trials for a man; Poverty from one side or wealth from the other. This is as Shlomo said: "Lest I be satiated, and deny You, and say, Who is G-d? or lest I be poor, and steal..." (Prov.30:9). Tranquility on the one hand and suffering on the other... until the battle is being waged against him from the front and from behind!"

What looks like the worst situation may actually be the best and the best the worst. It matter more what we do with each of the ever changing circumstances of life. There was a book written about tennis called, "The Inner Game". This is what matters most. Does my inner response to whatever the surroundings bring me closer or farther away from HASHEM?! That is the question!

There's an odd expression that goes like this, "Nothing fails like success!" I think that maybe now we cannot understand it from this angle. Wealth may even be a bigger test than poverty, although we have been crying out for generations now, "TEST ME!" Looking at the landscape of many materially successful Jewish people in the last few decades, we would have to wonder if wealth brought enough of them and their families closer to HASHEM. No one can know! Everyone can ponder!

The Sefer Orchas Tzadikim outlines three reasons why a person might be treated to wealth in this world and then he provides a sign, a way of telling which of these reasons most likely applies. Someone might become rich as 1) a punishment 2) a test or 3) a blessing.

What might indicate that it is a punishment? The person's suffering and perhaps even his ultimate demise is because of all that money. He falls out of harmony with his children or his wife or his friends.

He takes on new habits of indulgence that eventually are the cause of death. How often do we hear about people who were stricken

with "sudden wealth syndrome" for having won the lottery or getting a giant signing bonus and not only does the money not solve their problems, it amplifies them by millions.

A husband and wife janitorial team, married and working together for 40 years win the lottery and what happens? Two years and two wives later he falls of his yacht with a high alcohol and drug content in veins in what the police are calling, based upon insufficient evidence, an accident.

What would show that it is a test? He cannot spend on himself or anybody else either. He is paralyzed with fear of losing the sum. He obsesses on his investments and lives a miserly existence.

He cannot give charity and neither can he gives himself permission to splurge on himself. The money holds him more than he holds the money.

How does one know if wealth is given as a blessing? He is busy using his wealth to accomplish more and more good for himself and others. He hires an assistant to watch his affairs so he can spend more time learning.

He actively seeks out Tzedaka and Mitzvah opportunities in which he can happily invest without expecting returns in this world. With this attitude he rejoices as someone who is truly laughing all the way to the bank!

### **Yeshivat Har Etzion: Virtual Bet Midrash** "From Where in the Torah do we Derive the Prohibition of Arrogance?

**By Rav Elchanan Samet**

#### **I. The Two Dreams of R. Moshe of Coucy -**

At the end of the fifth millennium, R. Moshe ben Yaakov of Coucy (France) wandered among the cities of Spain and Provence and preached to the Jewish communities there. R. Moshe, one of the most important Tosafists of his generation, rebuked his audiences for their lax observance of certain *mitzvot* and guided them toward adopting good traits and distancing themselves from their wayward ones. His preaching made a deep impression on those who heard him and saved many of them from sin.<sup>1</sup>

## **Likutei Divrei Torah**

Another result of R. Moshe of Coucy's extended journey was that upon his return to France he began to compile his *Sefer Mitzvot Gadol* (the *Semag*), considered one of the most important halakhic texts written in the Middle Ages.<sup>2</sup> This is what he writes in the introduction to his work concerning the circumstances that brought him to write it:<sup>3</sup>

And it came to pass, when I was brought by Heaven to wander among the lands to reprove the exiles of Israel, that I set my mind on orally arranging the *mitzvot*, each *mitzva* on its own... so that I make no mistakes in my rebuke. In several places, I was asked to write the foundations of the *mitzva* based on proofs and to make of this a book. I feared doing so, to publicize a work of Torah, for "surely I am brutish, unlike a man, and have not the understanding of a man" (*Mishlei* 30:2). At the beginning of the sixth millennium,<sup>4</sup> the matter came to me in a vision in a dream: "Arise, compile a work of Torah in two parts!" I contemplated the vision, and there were two parts – to write a book of the positive commandments in the first part and a book of the negative commandments in the second part.<sup>5</sup>

Therefore, I Moshe ben Yaakov, set my mind to write the two books...

R. Moshe concludes the introduction to his book with an account of another dream: Also with regard to the negative commandments, a vision in a dream came to me, saying: "You forgot the principle: 'Beware lest you forget the Lord your God' (*Devarim* 8:11)." For it had not been my intention to include this in the count of the prohibitions. Rabbeinu Moshe [ben Maimon, the Rambam] similarly did not mention it in his count.

I contemplated the matter in the morning, and, lo, it is a great foundation in the fear of God, and I included it among the great principles in its place.<sup>6</sup>

This second vision is a mystery that requires a resolution, and the author alludes to this resolution when he writes: "I included it among the great principles in its place." Let us proceed in the wake of R. Moshe's allusion, and see how the author resolved the mystery of his dream.

**II. Beware lest you forget the Lord" –**  
**Should this be counted among the 613 Torah Commandments? -** In the first orations

\* While writing this study, we made use of Yehuda Galinsky's article, "Pen Tishkach et Hashem Eloekha – Le-Pitaron Chalomo shel Rabbeinu Moshe Mi-Coucy," in a periodical published by Yeshivat Shaalvim, *Sifra Ve-Saifa* 44-45 (Summer 5753).

<sup>1</sup> R. Moshe left for Spain in 1236 and his journey lasted several years. The *mitzvot* that have a prominent place in his sermons are Torah study, *tefillin*, *mezusa* and *tzitzit*, the prohibition of marrying a non-Jewish woman, honest business practices, and the prohibition of deceiving a non-Jew.

<sup>2</sup> This book has been preserved in many manuscripts and was published in many editions. Prominent *Rishonim* and *Acharonim* wrote commentaries on it, and various arbitrators among the *Rishonim* relied on it in their rulings. R. Yehoshua Boaz included it together with the Rambam's *Mishneh Torah*, the *Tur*, and the *Shulchan Arukh* among the halakhic works that he references in his work, *Ein Mishpat* on the Talmud.

<sup>3</sup> All the citations from the *Semag* are from the *Sefer Mitzvot Gadol Ha-Shalem* edition, vol. I, published by Machon Yerushalayim and Machon Shlomo Auman, 5753.

<sup>4</sup> In the year 5000 (1240-1241). By then, R. Moshe had already returned to France. In that same year, he participated in the great debate with the apostate Donin, which was conducted in Paris at the court of the French king, Louis IX, along with three other Jewish authorities, headed by R. Yechiel of Paris.

<sup>5</sup> In practice, R. Moshe put the book of negative commandments before the book of positive commandments (in the spirit of "Turn away from evil and do good"), the opposite of the order in the Rambam's *Sefer Ha-Mitzvot*.

<sup>6</sup> The inclusion of the story about the two dreams brings R. Moshe to conclude his introduction with the following emotion-filled words: The Lord God knows that as far as I know I am not lying about the visions. And the Lord God knows that I mentioned them in this book only to strengthen Israel in Torah and rebuke, and that the purpose of the Lord might prosper by his hand.

concerning the *mitzvot* in the book of *Devarim*, we encounter two similar verses. In *Parashat Va'etchanan* it is stated:

6:10-11: And it shall be, when the Lord your God shall bring you into the land which He swore to your fathers...

great and goodly cities, which you did not build, and houses full of all good things, which you did not fill, and cisterns hewn out, which you did not hew, vineyards and olive-trees, which you did not plant, and you shall eat and be satisfied,

12: then **beware lest you forget the Lord**, who brought you forth out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

13: You shall fear the Lord your God; and Him shall you serve, and by His name shall you swear.

14: You shall not go after other gods, of the gods of the peoples that are round about you; 15: for a jealous God, even the Lord your God, is in the midst of you; lest the anger of the Lord your God be kindled against you, and He destroy you from off the face of the earth.

And in *Parashat Ekev* it is stated:

8:7: For the Lord your God brings you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths, springing forth in valleys and hills;

8: a land of wheat and barley, and vines and fig-trees and pomegranates; a land of olive-trees and honey;

9: a land wherein you shall eat bread without scarceness, you shall not lack anything in it; a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you may dig brass.

10: And you shall eat and be satisfied, and bless the Lord your God for the good land which He has given you.

11: **Beware lest you forget the Lord your God**, in not keeping His commandments, and His ordinances, and His statutes, which I command you this day;

12: lest when you have eaten and are satisfied, and have built goodly houses, and dwelt therein;

13: and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and your gold is multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied; 14: then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the Lord your God, who brought you forth out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage;

15: who led you through the great and dreadful wilderness...

16: who fed you in the wilderness with manna, which your fathers knew not...

17: and you say in your heart: My power and the might of my hand has gotten me this wealth.

18: But you shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He that gives you power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day.<sup>7</sup>

The two similar verses that we marked in bold in the citations above – "beware lest you

forget the Lord" – are formulated as clear commands, as negative precepts. As R. Avin taught in the name of R. Ila'i (*Eiruvin* 96 and parallel passages): "Wherever it says 'beware,' 'lest,' or 'do not,' this indicates a negative commandment."

## OU Torah

### Birkas Hamazon

#### Rabbi Immanuel Bernstein

אֲכַלְתָּ וְשָׁבַעַת וּבְרָכַת אַתְּ הַאֲלֹקֶךְ עַל הָאָרֶץ הַתָּבָא  
אֲכַלְתָּ וְשָׁבַעַת

You will eat and you will be satisfied and you will bless Hashem, your God, for the good land that He has given you.[1]

Introduction - Our verse is the source for the mitzvah of Birkas Hamazon, the blessing recited after eating bread. This is the only blessing explicitly obligated by the Torah.[2] [All the other blessings we recite were instituted by the Anshei Knesses Hagedolah (Men of the Great Assembly) in the beginning of the Second Commonwealth soon after returning from the Babylonian exile.] It is noteworthy that the Torah mandates that a blessing be recited after one has eaten bread, and not before. Recognition of Hashem as the Source of our sustenance is of critical importance, yet never more so than after the person has eaten and been sated. It is characteristic of this stage that it can induce a person to a state that is accompanied by an over-inflated sense of complacency and self-importance, allowing his awareness of Hashem to become jaded and slip away. To this end, the Torah says "Remember Hashem – even after you have eaten and become satisfied!"[3]

The Make-up of Birkas Hamazon - Birkas Hamazon comprises four blessings, the first three of which are from the Torah, with the fourth – Hatov ve'Hameitiv – being added by the Sages at a later stage. The basis of the three Torah blessings is expounded by the Gemara[4] from the words in our verse as follows:

וּבְרָכַת הַזֶּן – זֹה בְּרָכַת הַזֶּן  
עַל הָאָרֶץ – זֹה הַרְכַּת הָאָרֶץ  
הַתָּבָא – זֹה בְּרָכַת בְּוֹנָה יְרוּשָׁלָם

"And you shall bless Hashem" – this is the [opening] blessing of "Hazan" (He Who sustains).

"For the land" – this is the blessing over the land.

"The good [land]" – this is the blessing over Jerusalem.

This exposition, however, needs to be considered in light of another comment which the Gemara makes on that very same page just a few lines further up regarding the origins of these blessings:

תְּנוּ רַבְנָנוּ, מֹשֶׁה תִּקְנֹן לִיְשָׁרָאֵל בְּרָכַת הַזֶּן בְּשָׁעָה שִׁירָה  
לְהַמְּמָן. יְהוָשָׁע תִּקְנֹן לְהַמְּמָן בְּרָכַת הָאָרֶץ בְּשָׁעָה שְׁנָכְנוּסָה  
לְאָרֶץ. דָוד וְשָׁלְמָה תִּקְנֹן בְּוֹנָה יְרוּשָׁלָם.

The Rabbis taught:

Moshe instituted the blessing of "hazan" at the time the manna fell for the [Jewish

## Likutei Divrei Torah

people].

Yehoshua instituted the blessing over the land when they entered the land.

David and Shlomo instituted the blessing of Yerushalayim and the Beis Hamikdash.

How can the Gemara state that these blessings were instituted by Moshe and Yehoshua etc. if their recitation is, in fact, a Torah obligation?

The Rashba[5] explains that, on a Torah level, there is no set text for the blessing. A person could simply say, "Thank you, Hashem for the food, the land of Israel and Jerusalem" and with this fulfill his obligation. The specific formulae for these blessings, with which we are familiar and through which we fulfill the mitzvah, were instituted by the various prophets as outlined by the Gemara.

It is fascinating to consider in this light, that the text of the first blessing of Birkas Hamazon – which we all recite after meals – is a "Moshe Rabbeinu original"!

Was There an Obligation of Birkas Hamazon over the Manna in the Wilderness?

The above comment of the Gemara raises a most interesting question. As we know, the mitzvah of reciting Birkas Hamazon only applies after eating a bread meal from one of the five species of grain. During the years we were in the wilderness, we were sustained by the manna, which does not come from the five species! Why, then, did Moshe compose the formula for a blessing that did not apply to the food that they ate?

R' Yosef Engel[6] suggests that this tradition is aligned with the view that the manna assumed, not only the taste of whatever the person wanted it to taste like, but also its physical form.[7] This means that if a person wanted their manna to taste like bread, it actually became bread and hence, was subject to the mitzvah of Birkas Hamazon.

However, it is possible to understand this Gemara in a different way. Let us preface by raising another question: As we mentioned, the Gemara states that Moshe composed the blessing of "hazan" at the time the manna began to fall for the Jewish people. The Torah informs us that the manna began to fall on the fifteenth of Iyar – a month after leaving Egypt. [8] This was three weeks prior to the Torah being given. This means that not only did the mitzvah of Birkas Hamazon not apply to the manna, it did not even exist as a mitzvah at that time!

In light of this, the Tzlach[9] explains that when the Gemara states that Moshe instituted the blessing of "hazan" over the manna, this was not as a fulfillment of the Torah obligation of Birkas Hamazon. Rather, it was simply an expression of gratitude to Hashem for providing them with sustenance in the wilderness. Later on, when reciting Birkas Hamazon after eating bread was received as a mitzvah, the Sages incorporated Moshe's original "manna blessing" as the formula for

<sup>7</sup> The similarity between these two passages is not simply in the verse that appears in both, but is rather much broader. We noted the relationship between them in our study for *Parashat Va'etchanan*, first series, "Ha-Shefa Ha-Chomri Le-Sugav U-Le-Sakanotav." The present study is connected to the conclusions reached in that study.

the first of the three blessings of Birkas Hamazon – the blessing over sustenance.[10]

Indeed, this may a simple answer to the question of why Birkas Hamazon is not mentioned until Chumash Devarim, even though its fulfillment is not exclusive to the land of Israel. Rather, the people simply did not have the basis for being obligated in this mitzvah until they entered the land and partook of actual bread.

A Verse from Tehillim in a Blessing of Moshe? - Awareness of the blessing of “Hazan” as a composition of Moshe Rabbeinu led to a most interesting discussion among the early commentators. There is a version of the blessing which includes the following words just before its conclusion:

כאמור, פותח את ידך ומשביע לכל חי רצון

As it says, “You open Your hands and satisfy the desire of every living being.”

One of the Rishonim, the Kol Bo,[11] maintained that this section should be omitted, as it is clearly not part of the blessing. After all, the verse “You open Your hands etc.” is from the Book of Tehillim,[12] authored by David Hamelech. As such, a blessing that was composed by Moshe would surely not be quoting from a verse written by someone hundreds of years before they were born!

A fascinating response to this argument comes from the Mabit in his sefer Beis Elokim.[13] The Gemara informs us that while David Hamelech compiled and redacted Tehillim, as well authoring most of its chapters, there were in fact ten individuals whose words form part of the sefer.[14] Some of these are mentioned in the verses by name, such as the sons of Korach – as well as Moshe Rabbeinu.[15] In light of this, we will appreciate that one cannot reject the idea that a verse was composed by Moshe Rabbeinu based on the fact that it is in Sefer Tehillim – for that sefer draws on and incorporates Moshe Rabbeinu’s words! According to this, it turns out that the entire situation regarding this verse is actually reversed: When it comes to the verse “You open Your hands etc.” Moshe was not “pre-quoting” from David. Rather, it was Moshe who originally said these words, which were then quoted by David in Tehillim!

Indeed, the Mabit points out that there is another sentence in the first blessing of Birkas Hamazon which is also a verse in Tehillim, and which somehow went entirely unnoticed in this discussion. Toward the beginning of the blessing it says: הַוָּנוּ לְחַמֵּם לְכָל בָּשָׂר כִּי לְעוֹלָם

חַמֵּם

He gives food to all flesh, for His Kindness is forever.

If one consults chapter 136 of sefer Tehillim, one will find the above words, “נוּנוּ לְחַמֵּם – He gives food etc.” verbatim![16] The explanation here is exactly the same: words originally said by Moshe were subsequently included by David Hamelech in Sefer Tehillim.[17] The Mabit does concede, however, that the introductory word “כאמור – as it says,” is certainly a later addition. As the original author of these words, Moshe would not be quoting them (“as it says”) from a verse that was

actually quoting him! Rather, after these words were recorded in Sefer Tehillim, the word “כאמור” was added to the blessing of “hazan”.

Birkas Hamazon and the Land of Israel -

Moving back to our verse, which is the source of the mitzvah of birkas hamazon, let us ask a deceptively simple question: What are we blessing Hashem for? The simple reading of the verse implies that when we eat bread, we are to bless Hashem for the land that He has given us. Yet this is a little puzzling. Why should we not bless him also – if not primarily – for the bread itself? Indeed, in light of the fact that birkas hamazon is an obligation that is not restricted to the land of Israel, why is the land mentioned in the blessing at all?

The Ramban[18] explains that we are to read the verse as if there is a letter vav denoting “and” before the words “for the land,” so that the verse reads “you shall bless Hashem [for the food], and for the good land that He has given you.” Thus, we first mention the sustenance that we have just now received, and then we extend the blessing to mention the land that Hashem has given us our homeland, and whose goodness we will ultimately enjoy.

Others explain that the blessing over food indeed focusses primarily on the land of Israel. This is based on a statement of the Zohar Hakadosh[19] that the Land of Israel is the conduit into which Divine sustenance flows and through which the entire world is sustained – even when the Jewish people are in exile. Therefore, after having enjoyed Hashem’s sustenance, wherever we are, we bless Him for having given us the land of Israel from which that sustenance issued forth.[20]

Birkas Hamazon and the Beis Hamikdash - This idea leads us to consider the third of the blessing in Birkas Hamazon – the blessing over Jerusalem and the Beis Hamikdash. It is interesting to observe that, roughly half way through this blessing, we turn to Hashem and say:

אֶל קָרְבָּנוּ אֲבָנֵינוּ רָעָנוּ וּבְנָנוּ וּלְכָלָנוּ  
Our God, our Father! Provide for us, nourish us, sustain us, support us.

Given that the subject of this blessing is the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the Temple, how is it relevant or appropriate to depart from that theme midway through to ask for sustenance and support?

In truth, however, while we are asking this question, we might well take a step back and ask the reverse question: What is a blessing over the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the Temple doing in Birkas Hamazon, a blessing we make after eating bread? Of course, we understand how there is room for this blessing in our prayers which encompass all of our wishes and aspirations, but what does it have to do with the meal that we just ate?

The Gemara[21] tells us that “the mizbeyach (altar) nourishes.” The meaning of these words is that in the merit of the offerings brought upon the mizbeyach in the Beis Hamikdash, the world is nourished. The offerings come from different types of food, and bringing them as offerings to the Beis Hamikdash brings about blessing and bounty in our food.

## Likutei Divrei Torah

[22] Indeed, in this vein the Gemara further states:[23] “From the day the Temple was destroyed... dew has not fallen with a blessing, and the taste of fruits has been removed.”

It thus emerges that while the land of Israel is the conduit for Divine blessing on a basic level, the Beis Hamikdash is a conduit for that blessing on an optimal level. Thus, as we thank Hashem for the meal which we just had, and the land through which that blessing flowed, we are mindful of the fact that the conduit for maximal blessing is not with us. We therefore ask Hashem to sustain us in its absence, and we look forward to the reinstating of the Temple when we will enjoy the full measure of Divine blessing in our physical sustenance as in all spheres.[24] May we merit to witness and experience this soon!

[1] Devarim 8:10.

[2] The only other blessing that is referred to in the Talmud as a Torah obligation is birkas haTorah – the blessing before learning Torah, see Berachos 21a and Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 47, with comments of Mishnah Berurah ibid. sec. 1.

[3] Meshech Chochmah Devarim loc. cit.

[4] Berachos 48b.

[5] Berachos ibid.

[6] Gilyonei Hashas Berachos ibid.

[7] See Yoma 75a.

[8] Shemos 16:1.

[9] Berachos 20a.

[10] This idea has potential halachic implications. The Chayei Adam (51:17) rules regarding bread that is grown on a surface detached from the ground, that even though one would not recite hamotzi beforehand – since it did not grow directly from the ground – nevertheless, one would recite Birkas Hamazon afterwards. Among his sources for the idea that these two blessings are not mutually dependent, he cites the case of the Manna, which clearly did not have the blessing of “hamotzi” recited beforehand – as it came down from the heavens – yet required Birkas Hamazon afterwards, as mentioned our Gemara (Nishmas Adam 152:1). According to the Tzlach, however, who says that the blessing of “hazan” was not instituted at that time in fulfillment of Birkas Hamazon, but simply as an expression of gratitude for the manna, there is no proof from there regarding this question (R’ Meir Dan Plotzki, Chemedas Yisrael, vol 2 sec. 14.)

[11] Cited by Beis Yosef, Orach Chaim 187.

[12] 145:16.

[13] Shaar Hayesodos chap. 61. The Mabit (R’ Moshe ben Yosef mi’Trani) was a fellow member of R’ Yosef Karo’s beis din in Tzfat. His sefer Beis Elokim is a treatise on fundamentals in Jewish thought.

[14] Bava Basra 14b.

[15] Tehillim chap. 90, “תְּפִילָה לְמֹשֶׁה – a prayer of Moshe.”

[16] Verse 25.

[17] Perhaps the Kol Bo’s position is that although Sefer Tehillim undoubtedly contains chapters and verses from Moshe Rabbeinu, nevertheless, a chapter that begins with the words “תְּהִלָּה יְהֹוָה – a psalm of praise by David,” as is the case with chapter 145, is assumed to be entirely from David Hamelech.

[18] Devarim loc. cit.

[19] Parashas Terumah 157a.

[20] Shaarei Aharon, Devarim ibid..

[21] Kesuvos 10b.

[22] Rashi ibid. s.v. maizin.

[23] Sotah 48a.

[24] HaSeder he’Aruch.



BS"D

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### **Home Weekly Parsha EKEV 5781**

#### **Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog**

In this week's portion, the Torah seemingly indicates that there is a simple formula for Jewish life and success while living in the land of Israel. If we follow the commandments of God and observe the laws of the Torah, the Jewish people will be showered with physical blessings of health, longevity, and prosperity. And if the Jewish people, for whatever reasons, chooses to deviate from the service of God, then physical calamities will befall them. A literal reading of the Torah portion would certainly bring the reader or student to this conclusion. And yet, this understanding, i.e., observance of the commandments as the determining factor in achieving blessings and success in life in this world, flies in the face of the famous victim of the rabbis of the Talmud, that states that a reward for observing the commandments does not really exist in this world.

If that is the case, then what are we to make of the obviously literal lesson that this week's Torah portion seemingly teaches us? If reward and punishment are not to be based upon the performance of the commandments, then what does the Torah really mean to teach us? These issues and

questions have been raised by the scholars and commentators for many centuries. As one can well imagine, there are several different approaches to this question. All of them are worthy of mention, but in this short essay, I will restrict myself to one of the central ideas advanced regarding this problem.

The promises advanced by the Torah for the observance of the commandments is not meant as a reward, so much as it is intended to be a natural consequence of good behavior and enduring faith. True reward and permanent blessings are rare events in human existence. Many times, a person rejoices when having, what he or she believes, to be a stroke of good luck. Unfortunately, just as often in life, it turns out that the good luck was not so good after all. And the same thing is true in reverse. Many times, we are discouraged by events that occurred to us, only to later see, in the fullness of time, that we should be grateful for that experience. Heaven uses a different measure of goodness and reward than the one that we use in this world.

We all pray for length of life and longevity of years. However, we have learned that our father Abraham, who was apparently scheduled to live for 180 years, passed away five years prematurely. The Talmud saw this as a blessing, so that he would not be alive when his grandson Esau began his sinful rampage of murder and rape. Standards of reward and punishment that are exhibited by heavenly judgment are beyond human comprehension and understanding. And the rewards of heaven are eternal, while all the good or benefit in this world is always temporary. Therefore, it is indeed possible to say that reward and punishment are truly not present in this world.

Shabbat shalom Rabbi Berel Wein

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from: Rabbi Sacks <[info@rabbisacks.org](mailto:info@rabbisacks.org)>

subject: Covenant and Conversation

**To Lead is to Listen (Eikev 5781)**

**Rabbi Jonathan Sacks**

"If only you would listen to these laws..." (Deut. 7:12). These words with which our parsha begins contain a verb that is a fundamental motif of the book of Devarim. The verb is sh-m-a. It occurred in last week's parsha in the most famous line of the whole of Judaism, Shema Yisrael. It occurs later in this week's parsha in the second paragraph of the Shema, "It shall be if you surely listen [shamoa tishme'u]" (Deut. 11:13). In fact, this verb appears no less than 92 times in Devarim as a whole.

We often miss the significance of this word because of what I call the fallacy of translatability: the assumption that one language is fully translatable into another. We hear a word translated from one language to another and assume that it means the same in both. But often it doesn't. Languages are only partially translatable into one another.[1] The key terms of one civilisation are often not fully reproducible in another. The Greek word megalopsychos, for example, Aristotle's "great-souled man" who is great and knows he is, and carries himself with aristocratic pride, is untranslatable into a moral system like Judaism in which humility is a virtue. The English word "tact" has no precise equivalent in Hebrew. And so on.

This is particularly so in the case of the Hebrew verb sh-m-a. Listen, for example, to the various ways the opening words of this week's parsha have been translated into English:

If you hearken to these precepts...

If you completely obey these laws...

If you pay attention to these laws...

If you heed these ordinances...

Because ye hear these judgments...

There is no single English word that means to hear, to listen, to heed, to pay attention to, and to obey. Sh-m-a also means "to understand," as in the story of the tower of Babel, when God says, "Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand [yishme'u] each other" (Gen. 11:7).

As I have argued elsewhere, one of the most striking facts about the Torah is that, although it contains 613 commands, it does not contain a word that

means “to obey.” When such a word was needed in modern Hebrew, the verb le-tzayet was borrowed from Aramaic. The verb used by the Torah in place of “to obey” is sh-m-a. This is of the highest possible significance. It means that blind obedience is not a virtue in Judaism. God wants us to understand the laws He has commanded us. He wants us to reflect on why this law, not that. He wants us to listen, to reflect, to seek to understand, to internalise and to respond. He wants us to become a listening people.

Ancient Greece was a visual culture, a culture of art, architecture, theatre and spectacle. For the Greeks generally, and Plato specifically, knowing was a form of seeing. Judaism, as Freud pointed out in Moses and Monotheism,[2] is a non-visual culture. We worship a God who cannot be seen; and making sacred images, icons, is absolutely forbidden. In Judaism we do not see God; we hear God. Knowing is a form of listening. Ironically, Freud himself, deeply ambivalent though he was about Judaism, invented the listening cure in psychoanalysis: listening as therapy.[3]

It follows that in Judaism listening is a deeply spiritual act. To listen to God is to be open to God. That is what Moses is saying throughout Devarim: “If only you would listen.” So it is with leadership – indeed with all forms of interpersonal relationship. Often the greatest gift we can give someone is to listen to them.

Viktor Frankl, who survived Auschwitz and went on to create a new form of psychotherapy based on “man’s search for meaning,” once told the story of a patient of his who phoned him in the middle of the night to tell him, calmly, that she was about to commit suicide. He kept her on the phone for two hours, giving her every conceivable reason to live. Eventually she said that she had changed her mind and would not end her life. When he next saw the woman he asked her which of his many reasons had persuaded her to change her mind. “None,” she replied. “Why then did you decide not to commit suicide?” She replied that the fact that someone was prepared to listen to her for two hours in the middle of the night convinced her that life was worth living after all.[4]

As Chief Rabbi I was involved in resolving a number of highly intractable agunah cases, situations in which a husband was unwilling to give his wife a get so that she could remarry. We resolved all these cases not by legal devices but by the simple act of listening: deep listening, in which we were able to convince both sides that we had heard their pain and their sense of injustice. This took many hours of total concentration and a principled absence of judgment and direction. Eventually our listening absorbed the acrimony and the two sides were able to resolve their differences together. Listening is intensely therapeutic.

Before I became Chief Rabbi, I was head of our rabbinical training seminary, Jews’ College. There in the 1980s we ran one of the most advanced practical rabbinics programmes ever devised. It included a three-year programme in counselling. The professionals we recruited to run the course told us that they had one precondition. We had to agree to take all the participants away to an enclosed location for two days. Only those who were willing to do this would be admitted to the course. We did not know in advance what the counsellors were planning to do, but we soon discovered. They planned to teach us the method pioneered by Carl Rogers known as ‘non-directive’ or ‘person-centred’ therapy. This involves active listening and reflective questioning, but no guidance on the part of the therapist.

As the nature of the method became clear, the Rabbis began to object. It seemed to oppose everything they stood for. To be a Rabbi is to teach, to direct, to tell people what to do. The tension between the counsellors and the Rabbis grew almost to the point of crisis, so much so that we had to stop the course for an hour while we sought some way of reconciling what the counsellors were doing with what the Torah seemed to be saying. That is when we began to reflect, for the first time as a group, on the spiritual dimension of listening, of Shema Yisrael.

The deep truth behind person-centred therapy is that listening is the key virtue of the religious life. That is what Moses was saying throughout Devarim. If we want God to listen to us, we have to be prepared to listen to Him. And if we learn to listen to Him, then we eventually learn to listen to

our fellow humans: the silent cry of the lonely, the poor, the weak, the vulnerable, the people in existential pain.

When God appeared to King Solomon in a dream and asked him what he would like to be given, Solomon replied: lev shome’ā, literally “a listening heart” to judge the people (1 Kings 3:9). The choice of words is significant. Solomon’s wisdom lay, at least in part, in his ability to listen, to hear the emotion behind the words, to sense what was being left unsaid as well as what was said. It is common to find leaders who speak, very rare to find leaders who listen. But listening often makes the difference.

Listening matters in a moral environment as insistent on human dignity as Judaism. The very act of listening is a form of respect. To illustrate this, I would like to share a story with you. The royal family in Britain is known always to arrive on time and depart on time. I will never forget the occasion – her aides told me that they had never witnessed it before – when the Queen stayed for two hours longer than her scheduled departure time. The day was 27 January 2005, the occasion, the sixtieth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. The Queen had invited survivors to a reception at St James’ Palace. Each had a story to tell, and the Queen took the time to listen to every one of them. One after another came up to me and said, “Sixty years ago I did not know whether tomorrow I would be alive, and here I am talking to the Queen.” That act of listening was one of the most royal acts of graciousness I have ever witnessed. Listening is a profound affirmation of the humanity of the other.

In the encounter at the Burning Bush, when God summoned Moses to be a leader, Moses replied, “I am not a man of words, not yesterday, not the day before, not from the first time You spoke to Your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue” (Ex. 4:10). Why would God choose a man who found it difficult to speak to lead the Jewish people? Perhaps because one who cannot speak learns how to listen.

A leader is one who knows how to listen: to the unspoken cry of others and to the still, small voice of God.

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fw from hamelaket@gmail.com  
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### **Eikev: Balancing Torah and Work**

#### **Rav Kook Toah**

##### **Constant Torah Study?**

What is the ideal? Should we strive to dedicate ourselves totally to Torah study? Or should we divide our time between Torah study and an occupation?

The Sages debated this issue on the basis of an apparent contradiction between two verses. On the one hand, we are exhorted to study Torah constantly:

“This book of Torah shall not depart from your mouth; you shall meditate in them day and night” (Joshua 1:8).

Yet, the Torah also says, “You shall gather your grains, your wine and your oil” (Deut. 11:14) - implying that we should occupy ourselves with working the land and a livelihood. Which is correct?

Rabbi Ishmael explained that the verse exhorting constant Torah study cannot be taken literally. The second verse teaches us that one should combine the study of Torah with a worldly occupation. Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, however, disagreed:

“Can it be that a person will plow and plant and harvest and mill and winnow, each labor in its season? What will become of Torah? Rather, when Israel fulfills God’s will, their work will be performed by others ... And when Israel does not fulfill God’s will, they must perform their own labor.” (Berachot 35b)

##### **The Nature of the Human Soul**

According to Rashi, both scholars agreed that the ideal is full-time Torah study. Rabbi Ishmael, however, took a pragmatic stand that it is better to have a livelihood and not be dependent on charity.

But Rav Kook explained that the disagreement is not a matter of practicality versus an ideal state. Rather, they disagreed about the nature of the human soul and its spiritual capabilities.

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai held that the human soul is meant to be continually occupied with intellectual and spiritual pursuits. If necessary, we may be forced to deal with mundane matters, but such activity is, in fact, beneath our true potential. The human soul is so elevated that it can only be satisfied with total dedication to study and contemplation.

Thus, the command that "This book of Torah shall not depart from your mouth" should be understood literally. It applies to the complete human being who has not become soiled by sin. Some people may feel a weakness in spirit due to excessive study, but this frailty is only due to flaws in character. As the Jewish people perfect themselves, their work will be performed by others, and their sole desire will be to dedicate themselves to knowing God and His ways.

Rabbi Ishmael, on the other hand, felt that human nature is a composite of both theoretical and practical inclinations. According to his view, to occupy oneself with worldly matters in the proper measure is not just a concession to the current state of the world; rather, it meets an innate need of our inner makeup. Rabbi Ishmael came to this conclusion through his observation that most people are not satisfied to spend their days only in study and spiritual pursuits.

#### Who Was Right?

The Talmud records that many followed the advice of Rabbi Ishmael, and it worked well for them. Those who followed Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, on the other hand, were not successful.

There may be a select few who feel they are destined for greatness and are happy to delve constantly in wisdom and Torah. However, the Torah was not given to angels; its teachings must be suitable for the majority of people. While it is difficult to determine the true capacity of the human soul, we can ascertain from empirical evidence that what works for most people is indicative of humanity's true inner nature. Many followed Rabbi Ishmael's counsel and found satisfaction in both their Torah study and their material accomplishments, while those following Rabbi Shimon's opinion felt less successful, due to an internal resistance to constant Torah study. This indicates that Rabbi Ishmael's assessment of human nature is accurate for the vast majority of people. Rabbi Shimon's outlook is only valid for the select few who are blessed with rare spiritual gifts.

#### The Right Balance

Having ascertained that for most people it is preferable to combine Torah study with an occupation, we still need to determine the proper balance between Torah and work. How should we divide our time and effort between them?

The Talmud (Berachot 35b) made the following observation:

"See what a difference there is between the earlier and the later generations. Earlier generations made the study of Torah their main concern and their livelihood secondary to it, and both prospered in their hands. Later generations made their livelihood their main concern and their Torah study secondary, and neither prospered in their hands."

Even in worldly matters, one's sense of contentment and happiness is influenced by his spiritual state. A person who has acquired virtuous character traits, a strong faith and an awe of heaven is protected against many of the aspects of life that can lead one astray and that make life's burdens so difficult. Such a person is content with his portion in life. For this reason, the earlier generations who made Torah study and ethical pursuits their principal concern, were successful in both their spiritual and material endeavors.

However, one who has not properly developed his ethical nature, since he concentrated all of his energy on his livelihood, will never be content with what he has acquired. His flawed character traits will lead him to chase after ill-advised cravings. Even if he succeeds in amassing great wealth, he will not be satisfied and will never feel true peace of mind.

Quality, not Quantity

Rav Kook concluded with a very significant comment. The amount of time devoted to a particular activity is not the sole factor in determining that this is our main pursuit in life. What truly matters is our mindset. That which we consider to be the central focus of our life, even if we are unable to devote most of our time to it, constitutes our principal activity. (Gold from the Land of Israel (now available in paperback), pp. 310-313. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. II pp. 173-175.)

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#### How much must I Bensch?

By Rabbi Yirmiyahu Kaganoff

Question:

I mistakenly recited al hamichyah, when I was required to bensch. Am I now required to bensch?

#### Introduction

Prior to answering our opening question, we need to review many of the basic laws of brachos after eating, and their sources, which will help us understand the topic at hand. Parshas Eikev opens by teaching that when we observe all of Hashem's mitzvos, we will be rewarded with a beautiful land. Shortly afterwards, the Torah continues: Ki Hashem Elokecha me'viacha el eretz tovah... eretz chitah u'se'orah vegefen u'se'einah verimon eretz zeis shemen u'devash. Eretz asher lo bemiskeinus tochal bah lechem, lo sechzar kol bah. "For Hashem, your G-d, is bringing you to a good land... a land of wheat and barley, grape vines, figs and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey. A land where you will eat bread without poverty; you will be missing nothing" (Devorim 8:7-9).

#### Bensching in the Torah

The Torah then continues: Ve'achalta ve'savata uveirachta es Hashem Elokecha al ha'aretz hatovah asher nosan loch, "And when you eat and are satisfied, you shall bless Hashem, your G-d, for the good land that He gave you." This wording implies that we are required to bensch min haTorah only when a person has eaten enough to be fully satisfied, and this is the halachic opinion of most, but not all, rishonim. This law has halachic ramifications for someone who is uncertain whether he has a requirement to recite bensching. This uncertainty might be due to the fact that he does not remember if he bensched, or he was delayed and does not know if he has missed the time in which he can still bensch. When his doubt involves a possible Torah requirement, the rule is safeik de'oraysa lechumra, and he should recite bensching. However, if his question is regarding a rabbinic requirement, then the rule is safeik brachos lehakeil, and he does not recite the bracha acharonah. According to most rishonim, someone who ate a full meal and now is uncertain whether he is required to bensch should do so. If he ate less than a full meal, he does not bensch in case of doubt.

The requirement to recite a bracha acharonah after eating a snack is only midrabbanan. Therefore, if someone has a doubt whether he is required to recite this bracha, he does not, because of the rule of safeik brachos lehakeil.

#### Three aspects

The wording of the posuk that we should bless Hashem al ha'aretz hatovah asher nosan loch, "for the good land that He gave you," implies that, in addition to thanking Hashem for providing us with sustenance, our bensching must include a reference to Hashem granting us Eretz Yisroel. Furthermore, the Gemara (Brachos 48b) derives that bensching must include reference to Yerushalayim and the Beis Hamikdash. These three aspects are represented in the first three brachos that we recite in our bensching. The first bracha is thanks for the fact that Hashem provides us, and the entire world, with food and sustenance. The second bracha praises Him for having given us Eretz Yisroel; and the third bracha is for the special gift of Yerushalayim and the Beis Hamikdash. Since, unfortunately, the Beis Hamikdash is now destroyed, the third bracha emphasizes our plea that Hashem have mercy on the land and rebuild it.

The Gemara explains that Moshe established the first bracha of bensching when the man first fell in the desert, Yehoshua established the second bracha

of bensching when the Jews entered Eretz Yisroel, and Dovid Hamelech and Shalom Hamelech established the third bracha of bensching – Dovid establishing the reference to Yisroel and Yerushalayim, and Shalom adding the reference to the Beis Hamikdash (Brachos 48b).

#### Borei Nefashos

As we are all aware, other than the full bensching, there are two forms of bracha acharonah that we recite after we eat. One is a short bracha that begins with the words borei nefashos, which we recite after eating foods not mentioned in the above pesukim, including, but not exclusively, items upon which we recite the brachos of shehakol and ha'adamah. According to all opinions, this bracha is required only because of a takkanas chachomim, but is not included under the Torah's mitzvah.

#### Bracha mei'ein shalosh

The other bracha, colloquially referred to as al hamichyah, is called in halachic sources bracha mei'ein shalosh, literally, a bracha that abbreviates three. This is because this bracha acharonah includes all three of the themes that are included in the posuk, similar to the full bensching. The difference is that in al hamichyah, each theme does not have its own separate bracha, whereas in the full bensching that we recite after eating bread, each theme does.

There are three types of bracha mei'ein shalosh. We recite most frequently al hamichyah, the version that is said after eating grain products other than bread. This bracha is derived from the fact that the Torah praises Eretz Yisroel as "a land of wheat and barley." Although there are also three other grains upon which we recite al hamichyah, namely spelt, rye and oats, these three are considered halachically as sub-categories of wheat and barley. The second version of bracha mei'ein shalosh, al ha'eitz, is recited after eating olives, dates, grapes, figs, and pomegranates, all of which are also included in these pesukim. The order I chose, which has halachic significance, is not the order of the posuk, but reflects the proximity of each fruit to the word eretz in the posuk.

Although dates are not mentioned explicitly, the honey referred to in the posuk is date honey, not bee honey. (Silan, or date syrup, often used today as a natural, although not dietetic, sweetener, is similar to date honey. Silan is usually produced by cooking dates into syrup, whereas date honey in earlier days was produced simply by crushing dates.)

The third version of the bracha mei'ein shalosh is recited after drinking wine or grape juice, also alluded to in the posuk as the product of grapes. This is the only instance in which we recite bracha mei'ein shalosh after consuming a beverage. It is a reflection of the prominence we give wine, also evidenced by such mitzvos as kiddush and havdalah, and the fact that wine is used for such ceremonies as weddings, sheva brachos, brissin and pidyon haben. These three versions are not mutually exclusive. Someone who ate grain products and fruit includes both texts in his bracha, as does someone who ate grain products and wine. Someone who ate all three "special" foods recites a bracha that includes all three references.

We should note that, since the Torah mentions all these varieties of food, there are rishonim who contend that the requirement to recite a bracha after consuming them is min haTorah. There are many halachic ramifications that result from this issue; however, that sub-topic requires its own article.

#### Fourth bracha

Our full bensching also has a fourth bracha, which is usually referred to as Hatov vehameitiv, which was added to the bensching by Chazal after the destruction that took place in Beitar, two generations after the churban (Brachos 48b). We will leave discussing the details of that topic for a different time, but I want to point out that this explains why this theme is not mentioned in the bracha of al hamichyah. When Chazal added this bracha, they added it only to the full bensching and not to the abbreviated version that is al hamichyah.

#### Harachaman

Common custom is to add a long list of general requests (Avudraham, Seder Birchas Hamazon) followed by a recital of several pesukim, after the fourth bracha of bensching. The origin for this practice is a passage of Gemara

(Brachos 46a) that quotes a text that a guest should recite to bless his host. There, the Gemara quotes a basic bracha and then notes that others added to it. Based on this background, the Rambam (Hilchos Brachos 2:7) teaches that a guest can freely add to this blessing, and this has generated various additional texts to this bracha.

In his monumental work, Even Ha'azel, Rav Isser Zalman Meltzer notes that, according to the Rambam, the prayer of the guest for the host is an addendum to the fourth bracha of bensching. It would appear that, in the Rambam's opinion, a person should not answer "amen" when a guest recites the words leolam al yechasreinu, since he has not yet completed his bracha until he blesses the host. This approach is not accepted, practically. The opinion of other halachic authorities (Avudraham, Seder Birchas Hamazon) as well as prevailing custom is to recite the blessing for the host a bit later in the bensching, after other prayers beginning with word Harachaman have already been expressed.

With time, many other requests were added to the bensching. Some individuals follow the practice of the Gra and recite these prayers only on weekdays, but not on Shabbos and Yom Tov when we generally do not make personal prayer requests, although the accepted halachic practice is to recite these prayers and blessings on Shabbos, also.

#### Three brachos or one?

We noted above that the Torah requires the mention of three topics in our bensching, (1) thanks for sustenance, (2) thanks for the Land of Israel, and (3) a prayer for Yerushalayim and the Beis Hamikdash. However, it is disputed whether the Torah requires that each of these three themes have its own bracha, and that bensching min haTorah must contain at least three different brachos, or whether the Torah requirement is fulfilled by reciting one bracha that emphasizes the three different themes, and reciting three different brachos is only a rabbinic requirement.

There are several differences in practical halacha that result from this dispute. One obvious difference is that, although one is certainly required to recite all the brachos of bensching, according to one approach, this requirement is only miderabbanan, whereas, according to the other approach, reciting three brachos is required min haTorah. We will soon see other halachic differences that result from this dispute.

This question, whether bensching min haTorah must contain at least three different brachos, or whether the Torah requirement is fulfilled by reciting one bracha, is the subject of a dispute between Tosafos and the Rambam. The opinion of Tosafos is stated in his comments germane to the following topic, to which I provide an introduction:

There is a general Talmudic assumption that a worker who is hired for a day is required to work a full day, and that taking time to check his personal email or to make a phone call violates his contractual obligation to his employer. (In today's world, when it is assumed that a worker may take an occasional coffee break, presumably one may take time off that is assumed to be included in one's work schedule. However, doing anything else at the time that a person is obligated to work for someone is certainly forbidden.) In this context, the Gemara (Brachos 16a) quotes the following beraisa: "Hired workers are required to read the Shema and to pray. When they eat bread, they are not required to recite a bracha before eating, but after eating they are required to recite two brachos. Which two brachos do they recite? The first bracha of bensching is recited in its usual fashion. The second bracha begins the way it usually begins, but includes the third bracha." In other words, the Gemara assumes that the worker's responsibility to his employer is more important than his requirement to recite the full bensching! Tosafos, there, notes: "Although reciting both the second and third bracha is required min haTorah, the Sages have the ability to uproot a Torah requirement for the benefit of these workers, who are occupied with performing the work of their employer." In order to explain how a worker is permitted to omit a bracha of the bensching, Tosafos utilizes a halachic principle called yeish koach be'yad chachomim la'akor davar min haTorah, that the Sages have the ability to "uproot" a law of the Torah, when deemed

necessary. It is clear that Tosafos assumes that the requirement to recite three brachos is *min haTorah*.

In his monumental anthology, in which he gathers all the earlier halachic opinions, the Beis Yosef (Orach Chayim 191) indeed quotes Tosafos' approach, but then disagrees, contending that there is no need to apply the principle of *yeish koach be'yad chachomim la'akor davar min haTorah* in this case. To quote the Beis Yosef: "It appears to me that there is no need for this answer, since there is no requirement *min haTorah* to recite several brachos to fulfill the mitzvah of *birchas hamazon*. This can be demonstrated from the words of the Rambam in his *Sefer Hamitzvos*, in which he writes: 'The nineteenth mitzvah is that we are commanded to bless Him after eating.' The Rambam makes no mention that there is a Torah requirement to recite several brachos. Notwithstanding that the Gemara derives the requirement of three brachos from verses, these derivations are only *asmachta* (which means that the requirement to do so is only rabbinic)." In other words, although one is required *min haTorah* to mention all three themes, there is no Torah requirement that each theme have its own bracha. That requirement is only rabbinic. Since Chazal were the source of the requirement to recite three brachos for bensching, they had the ability to dispense with the requirement to recite all three brachos in the case of the hired worker. Thus, in the Beis Yosef's opinion, whether three brachos are required *min haTorah* is a dispute between Tosafos and the Rambam, and the halacha follows the Rambam's approach, that the requirement to recite three brachos is only *miderabbanan*. Those who disagree with the Rambam and contend that all three brachos are required *min haTorah* will be forced to find a way of explaining why the workers are exempt from reciting a full bensching, and will probably have to follow Tosafos' difficult approach to resolve the conundrum.

It is significant that the Bach, in his commentary on the same chapter of *Tur Orach Chayim*, agrees that the Rambam rules that the requirement to recite three brachos for bensching is not *min haTorah*, but contends that his opinion is the minority. The Bach concludes that Tosafos' approach is the primary one. In other words, both the Beis Yosef and the Bach recognize that there is a dispute among the rishonim whether we are required *min haTorah* to recite three brachos for bensching; they dispute regarding which of these approaches is considered the normative halacha.

Al hamichyah

Here is another practical difference that results from this dispute: According to the Beis Yosef, someone who recited *al hamichyah* when he was required to recite the full bensching has fulfilled his requirement *min haTorah*, although he has not fulfilled his requirement *miderabbanan*. A ramification of this will be that if he recited *al hamichyah* and he has a *safeik* whether he is required to recite the entire bensching, he will neither be required nor permitted to recite the full bensching. Since he has fulfilled his Torah requirement and what remains is an unresolved question regarding a rabbinic requirement, the rule of *safeik brachos lehakeil* applies.

However, according to the Bach, someone who recited *al hamichyah* when he was required to recite the full bensching may be missing a Torah requirement to recite three brachos. This could mean that the rule of *safeik de'oraysa lechumra* applies, and he is required to repeat the bensching.

Uncertain identity

This analysis may explain exactly such a dispute between the Beis Yosef and the Bach that appears in a different context (*Orach Chayim 168*). The question concerns a food about which there is an unresolved question whether it is considered regular bread, requiring full bensching, or whether its bracha is *mezanos*, after which one should recite *al hamichyah*. The Beis Yosef appears to hold that one may eat the food and recite *al hamichyah* afterwards, whereas the Bach does not permit this approach, insisting that such a food should be eaten only as part of a regular bread meal in which *hamotzi* and full bensching were recited for the regular bread. Apparently, the Beis Yosef considers *al hamichyah* to be a type of bensching, whereas the Bach rejects this approach, which implies that they are consistently following the positions that each advocated in chapter 191.

Before we close, let us return to our opening question, which we can now resolve:

"I mistakenly recited *al hamichyah*, when I was required to *bensch*. Am I now required to *bensch*?"

The answer is that in this instance, one is required to *bensch* to fulfill the recitation of the three brachos that Chazal instituted. However, if there is a *safeik* whether there is a requirement to *bensch*, then, according to the Beis Yosef, since one has already fulfilled his Torah obligation by reciting *al hamichyah*, there is neither a requirement, nor should one *bensch*.

Conclusion:

According to the Gemara (*Bava Kamma 30a*), someone who desires to become exemplary in his spiritual behavior should toil in understanding the laws of brachos. By investing energy in understanding the details of how we praise Hashem, we realize the importance of each aspect of that praise, and how we must recognize that everything we have is a gift from Him.

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**Rabbi Yochanan Zweig**

**Weekly Insights**

This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of an individual who was instrumental to the development of the Yeshiva's campus: Mr. Sami Rohr of blessed memory.

"May his Neshama have an Aliya!"

It's the Little Things that Count

Therefore it shall come to pass, if you fulfill these laws, and keep, and do them, then Hashem your God shall keep with you the covenant and the kindness which he swore to your fathers (7:12).

74

This week's parsha begins with outlining the basis of our relationship with Hashem; if we keep the mitzvos Hashem will keep the covenant and kindnesses promised to our forefathers. Rashi (ad loc), surprisingly, says that the mitzvos that are being referred to here are those that we trample underfoot – in other words, this refers to mitzvos that we feel are insignificant.

Mizrachi (ad loc) wonders why Rashi is limiting the fulfillment in the verse to those types of mitzvos. In fact, it seems contrary to the simple reading of the verse! What compelled Rashi to explain the possuk in this manner?

Imagine for a moment, that you received a call from your neighbor at two in the morning begging you to come over because his wife had unexpectedly gone into labor and they need someone to come over right away to stay in the house with the other young children. Undoubtedly, you, like most people, would respond in the affirmative and immediately make your way over there. Now imagine receiving a call at two in the morning from this very same neighbor, but instead he asks you to go to Walgreens to pick up a jar of pickles and then go to 7-Eleven to get some ice cream for his wife who suddenly has an intense craving for pickles and ice cream. In this scenario you would hardly be as accommodating. You might just begin to wonder whether or not your friend has lost his mind, and you would surely question the long term viability of this friendship.

Yet, for some inexplicable reason, a wife has no qualms about asking her husband to get out of bed at two in the morning and pick up items that would satisfy her cravings. Why? The answer, of course, lies in the nature of the relationship. When you are closely connected to someone you might ask things of them that seem insignificant because they know if the situation were reversed you would do the same for them.

This applies to our relationship with Hashem as well, and particularly in how we fulfill the mitzvos. Obviously it is crucially important to fast on *Yom Kippur*, but does that really comment on the strength of the bond as it relates to fulfilling all that Hashem desires of us? Not really. In fact, there are many

marginally connected Jews who fast on Yom Kippur, but otherwise do very little else that Hashem asks of us throughout the year.

Observing, in particular, the mitzvos that one would tend to see as trivial is the real indicator of the strength of our bond with Hashem. That is why it is the observance of these mitzvos that guarantees that Hashem will fulfill the covenant that he promised our forefathers.

#### Living for Martyrdom?

And it will come to be, if you diligently listen to my commandments which I command you this day, to love Hashem your God... (11:13)

Rashi (ad loc), quoting the Sifri, explains that the rewards bestowed upon one who follows all of the mitzvos come as a result of loving Hashem. In other words, one is not supposed to do the mitzvos in order to receive reward, but rather to fulfill the mitzvos out of love for Hashem. Rashi continues, “One should not say ‘I will study Torah in order to become rich; I will study in order to be called a Rav; I will study in order to receive reward...’ but rather all that one does should be done out of love.” Rashi is clearly articulating that we do the mitzvos because we have a relationship with Hashem, not because of the reward.

This is akin to what Chazal teach in Pirkei Avos (1:3), “Antignos of Socho used to say: ‘Do not be as servants who serve the Master to receive reward. Rather, be as servants who serve the Master not to receive reward.’”

The trouble is that Rashi ends his comment on this verse with a very perplexing statement, “and in the end the honor will surely come.”

Therefore, even though one isn’t supposed to focus on the reward for doing the mitzvos, one shouldn’t worry as the reward will surely follow. Rashi is seemingly undoing the lesson that he just taught! It’s almost as if we are supposed to do all the mitzvos “altruistically” – wink, wink – knowing all the while that, ultimately, we really are receiving a reward.

If we aren’t supposed to do the mitzvos in order to receive the reward, then what’s the point of making assurances that in the end you will receive it? Aren’t we supposed to grow to the level where you aren’t doing the mitzvos for the reward?

The answer lies in understanding why people commit acts of martyrdom and self-sacrifice. Why, to a lesser extent, do so many people practice hero worship, create fan clubs, and walk around dressed as comic book and movie characters? The answer is that they are seeking recognition. There is a gnawing emptiness in their lives that they seek to fill, and being recognized in such a way gives meaning to their lives. True, this meaning is pretty shallow, but it creates a fleeting moment of relevancy for the person.

In an extreme example, one may actually commit self-destructive acts to fill this void. In fact, the more seemingly altruistic and self-sacrificial the act is, the more recognition they receive. Paradoxically, it seems that it is the survival instinct that drives this bizarre behavior. Thus, how does someone become immortal and live forever in the hearts and minds of others? By sacrificing themselves for the cause.

Judaism abhors this behavior (a clear reason why Christianity was a nonstarter alternative). Our whole understanding of why the world was created is based on the bestowal of good on mankind. The highest level of good is an immortal relationship with the Almighty. Therefore, everything that we do is out of love for Hashem, not out of compulsion to achieve recognition for ourselves. The word korban is commonly translated as sacrifice, but this is not really an accurate translation. The word korban comes from the root word “karov – to be close.” Meaning, the highest level of service to Hashem was a way to achieve a closer relationship.

How do we know that we are in a relationship with Hashem and that it isn’t merely a Master ordering His slaves to be obedient? How do we know that Hashem doesn’t want us to act in a self-sacrificing way? Because, as Rashi points out, the motivation for the mitzvos must be our love for Hashem. Still, you might ask, but who’s to say that this is a two-way relationship, perhaps it is like idol worship which is entirely one-way?

Because Hashem assures us that the reward is going to come in the end. Just like in a healthy marriage we (hopefully) don’t act in a quid pro quo way,

that is, we don’t expect the wife to make dinner for her husband because he did the shopping and now she feels obligated. We all want our spouses to do things for us out of love, not obligation. That is why Rashi finishes with “in the end the reward will come.” Knowing that Hashem is interested in rewarding us tells us that we are in a loving relationship and not in an altruistic self-sacrificial one.

#### Did You Know...

In this week’s parsha, it says that Hashem will send (according to Rashi) a flying insect known as “tzirah” to attack our enemies, so that even those who are hiding will be destroyed. Rashi (ad loc) explains that the venom that these insects discharge can cause impotency and blindness.

1. Some authorities identify the tzirah here with the hornet, *Vespa Orientalis* (see Living Torah by Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan).
  2. It was a species known to multiply in times of war.
  3. It was a honey-producing insect (Makhshirim 6:4).
  4. In Talmudic times, it was also known to be dangerous (Shabbos 80b; Taanis 14a).
  5. According to others, tzirah denotes a kind of plague (Saadia; Ibn Janach; Radak; Sherashim).
  6. It’s possibly related to leprosy (Ibn Ezra).
  7. The Gemara (Shabbos 80) relates an incident whereby one of these wasps stung a certain Galilean and he died from it.
- Additionally, the type of hornet thought to be the tzirah—the *Vespa Orientalis*—is very interesting:
1. Their stings are very painful to humans and their stingers can be used multiple times. Because of this, a person can die from just one hornet, if stung multiple times.
  2. They can transmit some serious diseases, which can also affect fruits and plants.
  3. They have specialized antennas that enable them to harvest solar energy and store it in their heads, which helps them work during the day so that they could burrow and build their nests (underground).

[www.peninim.org](http://www.peninim.org) Rabbi A. Leib Sheinbaum

וַיַּדְעַת עַמּוּ לְבָבָךְ כִּי כָשֵׁר יִסְרָאֵל בְּנֵי דָ' אֱלֹקֶיךְ מִסְרָאֵל

You should know in your heart that just as a father will chastise his son, so Hashem, your G-d, chastises you. (8:5)

We have undergone much hardship throughout our tumultuous history. These were not isolated occurrences during which we were subject to the whims and fancies, disdain and loathing, all products of a cruel, envious world who blamed every one of life’s incongruities on the Jews. Whatever happened to us did not “just happen.” It was all Heavenly-designated by a loving Father, Who, at times, was either meting out fatherly discipline or providing us with “opportunities” to secure our spiritual future. Everything was the result of the profound love that a father has for his son.

The Kedushas Levi (m’Berditchev) explains why the month of Av is the month during which we minimize simchah, joyful expression. He quotes the pasuk in Shemos 17:8, *Va’yavo Amalek va’yilachem b’Yisrael*; “Amalek came and battled Yisrael.” Previously (Perek 7), the people tested Hashem, saying, *Ha’yesh Hashem b’kirbeinu?* “Is Hashem among us?” The Midrash explains the juxtaposition of the people’s questioning Hashem’s Presence among them upon Amalek’s arriving to battle them, comparing it to one who is sitting upon his father’s shoulders, so that he is carried in this manner. While they are moving, he meets his friend and asks him, “Have you seen my father?” His father interjects, “You are riding on my shoulders, yet you ask, ‘Where is my father?’ I will show you. I will put you down on the ground and see how you react when your enemy attacks you.” Likewise, Hashem protected Klal Yisrael ever since they departed from Egypt. The Pillar of Clouds and Pillar of Fire sheltered them from their enemies. Yet, they had the unmitigated audacity to question, “Is Hashem in our midst?” We derive from here (says the Berditchever) that, in some instances, the Father causes adversarial diversions as a way of imbuing us with fear, in

order that we should realize that we have a Heavenly Father who has not, and will not ever, forsake us. Thus, the month during which both our Batei Mikdash were taken from us is called Av, Father, so that we always remember that whatever tragedies occurred during this month, it was all about reminding us that it is the work of our Father, Who cares deeply about each and every one of us.

Horav Yissachar Shlomo Teichtal, zl, applies the words of the Berditchever to explain our opening pasuk, “As a father cherishes his son,” as Hashem’s message to us: “I am doing this to remind you that I am always here and I love you. This is not discipline. This is love.”

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Dedicated to the speedy recovery of Mordechai ben Chaya  
Parshas Eikev What's in a Blessing?  
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Sponsored by

1) Faith Ginsburg, on the yahrzeits of her uncle Benjamin Lavin (Binyamin Beinish ben Raphael a”h, on 10 Av) and her father-in-law Maurice Ginsburg (Yisroel Moshe ben Yosef a”h, on 20 Av)

2)

Robert & Hannah Klein in memory of h r father  
Shlomo ben Zvi Koplowitz a”h (28 Av)

In this week’s Parshah, we are taught the Mitzvah of Birkat Ha’mazon / “Bentching” after eating. R’ Moshe Yechiel Epstein z”l (1889-1971; Ozharover Rebbe in New York and Tel Aviv) writes: A blessing, in general, and Birkat Ha’mazon, in particular, involves both accepting the yoke of Heaven as well as praying for G-d’s continued beneficence. He explains: Because reciting a blessing involves accepting the yoke of Heaven, our Sages (Tosefta, end of Berachot) describe reciting blessings as “performing Mitzvot.” Indeed, the word “Mitzvah” means “something we are commanded to do.” When one does something he is commanded to do, he, in effect, accepts upon himself the yoke of the one who commanded him to do that thing—in this case, Hashem.

He continues: When Pharaoh commanded Bnei Yisrael to leave Egypt, he said (Shmot 12:32), “You shall bless me.” The Aramaic translation Onkelos renders this: “You shall pray for me.” Rashi z”l, as well, explains: “Pharaoh was a firstborn, and he wanted Moshe to pray that he not die in the plague.” Thus, we find that the term “Berachah” can mean “to pray.”

We read (Shmot 23:25), “You shall worship Hashem, your Elokim, and He will bless your bread and your water . . .” The Gemara (Berachot 48b) states: Do not read, “He will bless,” but rather, “You shall bless.” At first glace, the Gemara’s comment seems directly contrary to the P’shat of the verse. However, writes the Ozharover Rebbe, if we understand that our own recitation of blessings leads Hashem to continue providing for us, then there is no contradiction. (Be’er Moshe p268)

“He afflicted you and let you hunger, then He fed you the Mahn that you did not know, nor did your forefathers know, in order to make you know that not by bread alone does man live, rather by everything that emanates from the mouth of Hashem does man live.” (8:3)

We read that when King Chizkiyah was deathly ill, he prayed (Yeshayah 38:3), “Please, Hashem, remember now that I have always walked before You faithfully and wholeheartedly, and I have done what is good in Your eyes.” The Gemara (Berachot 10b) explains: What did he mean by, “I have done what is good in Your eyes”? It refers to his hiding the “Book of Cures.” Rashi z”l explains that Chizkiyah hid the Book of Cures so that people would pray for mercy instead of relying on the ready cures that were at their disposal. [Until here from the Gemara and Rashi]

R’ Yerachmiel Shulman z”l Hy”d (Menahel Ruchani of the Bet Yosef Novardok Yeshiva in Pinsk, Poland; killed in the Holocaust) writes: The way

of the world is to memorialize great innovators and inventors, not those who turn the state of knowledge back in time by concealing what is already known. Why then is Chizkiyah’s action praiseworthy? R’ Shulman explains: Though all forms of wisdom are beneficial to the world—especially medicine, which brings “light” to the world—when knowledge reduces man’s Bitachon / trust in Hashem, it is bad. The moon is a source of light, but when it gets in front of the sun and causes an eclipse, it brings darkness to the world. So, too, wisdom that eclipses the “sun” of Bitachon is a source of darkness. R’ Shulman continues: There are those who ask rhetorically, “In that case, let us hide the world’s bread, for the ready supply of bread causes man to not place his trust in Hashem!” In fact, answers R’ Shulman, when Hashem thought that hiding the world’s bread would be beneficial to us, He did so. Thus the Gemara (Yoma 76a) teaches: “Why did the Mahn fall every day, instead of once a year, enough for the whole year? So that Bnei Yisrael would turn their hearts toward Heaven.” (Peninei Ha’chochmah 1:34)

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“You will eat and you will be satisfied, and you shall bless Hashem, your Elokim, for the good Land that He gave you.” (8:10)

R’ Yitzchak Arieli z”l (1896-1974; Mashgiach of Yeshivat Merkaz Harav; author of Enayim La’mishpat) writes: Many wonder why, in the second blessing of Birkat Ha’mazon, we mention the gift of the Land before we mention the Exodus, seemingly out of chronological order. The answer is that the Land was promised to us before we were enslaved in Egypt, as it is Hashem’s practice to “create the cure before the plague.” Indeed, the fact that He promised us the Land was our guarantee that the redemption would indeed come. (Haggadah Shel Pesach Shirat Ha’geulah p.79)

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“Now, Yisrael, what does Hashem, your Elokim, ask of you? Only to fear Hashem . . .” (10:12)

Our Sages ask: Is fearing Hashem so easy that the Torah can say, “What does Hashem ask of you? Only to fear Him!”?

R’ Chaim of Volozhin z”l (Belarus; 1749-1821) answers: In any event, we fear many things, usually unpleasant things. Apparently, fearing is easy for us. If we could train ourselves to direct our tendency to fear toward fearing something good—Hashem—we would be saved from all our other fears. (Ruach Chaim 4:22)

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“Hashem, your G-d, shall you fear, Him shall you serve, to Him shall you cling . . .” (10:20)

The Gemara (Bava Kamma 41b) teaches: Rabbi Akiva explained that this verse instructs us to cling to Torah scholars.

R’ Yaakov Moshe Charlap z”l (Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Merkaz Harav; died 1952) observes: Rabbi Akiva doesn’t mean that clinging to a Torah scholar is the next best thing to clinging to Hashem. A true Torah scholar nullifies himself completely before G-d; his ultimate goal is to feel as if he has no existence independent of G-d. Thus, when one clings to a Torah scholar, he is actually clinging to G-d Himself.

In addition, R’ Charlap writes, Rabbi Akiva is teaching another lesson. The only way to cling to Hashem is by clinging to a Torah scholar. This is demonstrated by the fact that as soon as Bnei Yisrael loosened their connection to Moshe (thinking that he was not returning from Har Sinai) they immediately fell to the level of making the Golden Calf. (Mei Marom V p.272)

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“In order to prolong your days and the days of your children upon the Land that Hashem has sworn to your forefathers to give them, like the days of the heaven over the earth.” (11:21)

The Gemara (Sanhedrin 90b) cites this verse as one of the allusions in the Torah to Techiyat Ha’meitim / resurrection of the dead. The Gemara explains: It is not written, “The Land that Hashem has sworn to your forefathers to give you,” but rather, “To give them.” This indicates that the Patriarchs will one day receive Eretz Yisrael, which necessarily indicates that there will be Techiyat Ha’meitim.

R' Yehuda Gruenwald z"l (1845-1920; rabbi of Szatmar, Hungary) writes: In light of this, we may interpret the end of the verse ("like the days of the heaven over the earth") as follows: Just as a person receives reward in "heaven"—i.e., in the World of the Souls—after his death, so he will receive reward on "earth" after his death, i.e., when his body and soul are reunited at the time of *Techiyat Ha'meitim*. (*Shevet Mi'Yehuda*)

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#### Tefilah

This year, we will iy"H devote this space to discussing various aspects of our prayers. This week, we continue discussing the thirteen types of prayer identified by the *Midrash Rabbah* and *Midrash Yalkut Shimoni*.

R' Shimshon Dovid Pincus z"l (rabbi of Ofakim, Israel; died 2001) writes: "Kri'ah" means "calling" to Hashem out of recognition that Hashem hears the one who calls Him, calling with a clear understanding that it is Hashem's practice to listen to people's prayers and that He has the ability to grant a person's request. This is analogous to calling to a friend when we know that he is close and can hear us. It is man's nature to cry out when he is in trouble even if he does not know that anyone can hear him, but that is called "Ne'akah," not "Kri'ah." Kri'ah means calling to someone specific because the caller knows that that someone can hear him, calling out to establish a connection for the purpose of making a request or delivering a specific piece of information.

R' Pincus continues: This is the foundation of prayer and all service of Hashem—simply grasping that Hashem's presence is real, no less real than all the inanimate objects, plants, animals, and people that surround us all the time. Hashem is a real, "living" Being, plain and simple, to Whom we can speak and call, and Who hears us in the most literal sense of the word. This is what our Sages mean when they say, "If only your reverence of Heaven would be equal to your fear of man." The more that a person lives with the recognition of this reality, the clearer his prayers will be, the more genuine his Divine service will be, and the more he will merit G-d's assistance in all his affairs. (*She'arim B'tefilah* p.75)

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## The Hebron Massacre of 1929: A Recently Revealed Letter of a Survivor

by Meyer Greenberg

The massacre of the Jews of Hebron in 1929 put an end to the ancient Jewish community at the burial site of the patriarchs. The riots which erupted throughout the country were an organized Arab attack against the entire Zionist enterprise with the aim of preventing the eventual establishment of a Jewish state. They were the most violent eruption until that time in the conflict that has been termed "one long war between Arabs and Jews comparable to the Hundred Years War in medieval Europe."<sup>[1]</sup>

Unlike other parts of the country, where Jews resisted with force, the Hebron community reflected the mind set of the pre modern Jew, conditioned by almost 2,000 years of Jewish powerlessness. The reaction of the local leadership to the impending attack was to turn to the authorities -- the British appointed governor and the Arab notables -- for protection, which, when it arrived, was much too late.

The events in Hebron and my grandparents' miraculous rescue are vividly described in a letter written by my grandfather nine days later to my mother, Blanche Greenberg.

In 1907, the peak year of Jewish immigration into the United States, my maternal grandfather, Aharon Reuven Bernzweig, his wife Breine Zuch Bernzweig, and their six children left Stanislaw, Galicia (then Austrian Poland), and settled in New York City. Twenty years later, in 1927, after their children were grown and they had accumulated a modest capital, they were in a position to fulfill the dream of many traditional Jews to spend their retirement years in Eretz Hakodesh, the Holy Land.

Late in the spring of 1929, my grandparents travelled to the United States in order to attend my brother's bar mitzvah. Upon their return they decided to escape the heat of a Tel Aviv summer by vacationing in Hebron. Five days later the riots broke out.

Zeide Bernzweig's health was affected by the Hebron ordeal, and he died of a heart attack in 1936. Baba Breine continued to live at 16 Bialik Street in Tel Aviv until her death in 1945. That is where I would visit and spend Shabbat in 1937 38, when I studied at Hebrew University.

Aharon and Breine Bernzweig were buried on the Mount of Olives. In the summer of 1967, after the reunification of Jerusalem, my wife and I found and restored their desecrated graves.

While members of the family knew that Zeide had written a letter about Hebron, we were not familiar with the actual text. I found the original in my parents' papers after their death. The Yiddish is closely written on ten pages and is difficult to read. I am therefore greatly indebted to Helen G. Meyrowitz, who deciphered the text and prepared the initial translation, which I have revised and edited.

While preparing the letter for publication, I found clarifying and corroborating information in the testimonies of other eyewitnesses, preserved in the Central Zionist Archives in Jerusalem. From the survivor documents I was able to identify others who were in the group of 33 who shared the same hiding place, as well as the names of the Arabs who saved their lives.

### MEGILLAT HEBRON

With the help of God, Monday, Torah portion Shoftim V'shotrim, 5689 [September 2, 1929], Tel Aviv, may it be built up and firmly established, speedily in our days, Amen.

My dear children, may you live and be well.

Even before I begin writing, my hand is already shaking, my head swims, and every limb is trembling. I am unable to get control of myself, because the cries are still ringing in my ears. It is one week today since we came back from the bitter tragedy. Each day I want to write to you, but when I sit down to write, all my limbs start to quiver and tears pour from my eyes, so I have to stop. Today for the first time I was able to pull myself together, with all my strength, with superhuman effort. I got up at dawn and sat down to write. I hadn't started yet, but even before I could begin, my pen was already soaked with tears. Although it seems that I am writing this letter with ink, you should know that it is not ink, but

tears.

Now, let me get to the point. I don't really know where to start and where to finish, because my blood is still churning inside me. But I will begin my Megillah of Hebron. Children, as you already know from my earlier letter, Mama, may she live and be well, had been feeling very weak, ever since we came back from our trip to America. Moving to a new apartment and all the hard work involved added to it. The apartment wasn't finished and there was endless aggravation because the work was not being done to her liking. On top of everything else, she couldn't bear the terribly hot weather. It was awful; the perspiring was beyond human endurance. She lay in bed all day because she was too weak to walk about. I kept begging Mama, may she live and be well, with tears in my eyes, that we needed a change of climate. It was impossible to convince her because she didn't want to abandon the house and leave it hefker. Finally she realized that she had no choice and she agreed. She did not want to go by herself, only with me. So we left home and went to the country to Hebron.[2]

We arrived on Sunday, August 18th. There we went to a guest house, where we got a very nice room and came to an agreement on the charges. We paid for one month in advance, since we planned to stay for several months, until after all the holidays, when it would be cooler.[3]

From the very beginning, things did not go well. Although the air was very good and the weather cool, and Mama, may she be well, did not perspire any more, she caught a severe cold and had to stay in bed. In addition, there were swarms of biting mosquitoes. We had no choice but to hope that things would get better. Unfortunately, things don't always turn out the way we would like, and no one knows what the future holds.

Ever since we arrived in Hebron, we had heard talk of disturbances in Jerusalem, that Arabs and Jews were fighting. We didn't have any specific details, but there were rumors in the air, so we were not in a happy state of mind. But what could we do about it?

On Friday, the 23rd, we heard that things had gotten worse in Jerusalem. Everyone became very uneasy and walked about without a head. We had forebodings that something terrible was about to happen but what, exactly, we did not know. I was fearful and kept questioning the local people, who had lived there for generations. They assured me that in Hebron there could never be a pogrom, because as many times as there had been trouble elsewhere in Eretz Israel, Hebron had remained quiet. The local population had always lived very peacefully with the Arabs.

But my heart told me that the situation was serious. Hebron alone, without the surrounding villages, has a population of 24,000. Including the villages, there are 60,000 people. Of what significance is the Jewish community there, a mere 100 families?[4] What could we do to protect ourselves? We could only comfort ourselves with the hope that God, blessed be He, would have mercy, and the troubles would run their course quietly.

Friday afternoon the situation worsened. We heard that on the street Arabs had already beaten several Jews with clubs. Next we heard that all the Jewish stores had closed. The atmosphere was explosive. Everybody was afraid to go out into the street, and we locked ourselves in our rooms. Things looked really bad. What should we do? "No one could go out, and no one could come in "[Joshua 6.1]; everybody was fearful. By now the local Jews too were saying that the situation was serious.

Suddenly, just one hour before candle lighting, pandemonium broke loose. Window panes were smashed on all sides. In our building, they broke every window and began throwing large stones inside. We hid ourselves. They were breaking windows in all the Jewish homes. Now we were in deathly fear. As we were blessing the Shabbes candles, we heard that in the Yeshiva one young man had been killed. It was bitter, the beginning of a slaughter.

In the meantime, mounted policemen arrived, and all became still outside. We thought that our salvation had come. All through the night the police patrolled the streets. But it seemed that they were having problems. You can understand that I walked the floor all the night terribly worried, with my heart in my mouth. On Shabbes morning, we saw that the situation was getting worse. Cars kept racing back and forth through the streets. They were filled with Arabs armed with long iron bars, long knives, and axes. The Arabs kept screaming that they were going to Jerusalem to slaughter all the Jews. Soon many Jews gathered in our house. We held a meeting and talked over the situation, but couldn't think of anything we could do to protect ourselves, since none of us had any weapons. Many of the people remained in our house, because by then it was too dangerous to try to go home.

Now let me tell you about the massacre. Right after eight o'clock in the morning we heard screams. Arabs had begun breaking into Jewish homes. The screams pierced the heart of the heavens. We didn't know what to do. Our house

had two floors. We were downstairs and a doctor lived on the second floor.[5] We figured that we would be safe in the doctor's apartment, but how could we get up there? The stairs were on the outside of the building, but it wasn't safe to go out. So we chopped through the ceiling and that way we climbed up to the doctor's house. Well, after being there only a little while, we realized that we were still in danger because by that time the Arabs had almost reached our house. They were going from door to door, slaughtering everyone who was inside. The screams and the moans were terrible. People were crying Help! Help! But what could we do? There were thirty three of us. Soon, soon, all of us would be lost.[6]

Just then, God, blessed be He, in His great mercy, sent us an Arab who lived in back of our house. He insisted that we come down from the doctor's apartment and enter his house through the back door. He took us to his cellar, a large room without windows to the outside. We all went in, while he, together with several Arab women, stood outside near the door.[7] As we lay there on the floor, we heard the screams as Arabs were slaughtering Jews. It was unbearable. As for us, we felt that the danger was so great that we had no chance of coming out alive. Each one of us said his vidui [his confession in anticipation of death]. At any moment we could be slaughtered, for double edged swords were already at out throats. We had not even the slightest hope of remaining alive. We just begged that it should already be done and over.

Five times the Arabs stormed our house with axes, and all the while those wild murderers kept screaming at the Arabs who were standing guard to hand over the Jews. They, in turn, shouted back that they had not hidden any Jews and knew nothing. They begged the attackers not to destroy their homes.

We heard everything. In addition, the little children in our group kept crying. We were in deadly fear that the murderers outside would hear them.[8]

As for me, I was already 99 percent in the next world. All the time that we were in the Arab's house, I lay there on the floor in terrible pain [from a heart attack].[9] It just happened that there were two doctors in the house. They sat near me and they saved my life.[10]

Well, I cannot continue describing the destruction any longer. It took several hours to us it seemed like years until all became quiet outside. We still lay there, waiting for the Angel of Death to finish with us as quickly as possible.

But God heard our prayers. Suddenly, the door opened, and the police walked in. They had been told that we were hidden there. They demanded that we go along with them, and they would take us to a safe place. We were afraid to go, because we thought they themselves might slaughter us. Eventually, they succeeded in convincing us that they had our good in mind. Since we couldn't walk there, they brought automobiles and took us, under police guard, to the police station, which was in a safe location.[11]

When we reached the police station, there was acted out a real life dance of the devils, for the police had brought together those who were still alive, the surviving remnant. During the earlier confusion, naturally, no one could have known what was happening to anyone else, but there in the police station, everyone first discovered whom he had lost. As people told each other about their misfortunes and how many casualties they had suffered, there burst out a terrible cry, everyone shrieking and crying at the same time. It was unbearable. Blessed God, give us strength! It was beyond human endurance. Three women went out of their minds right there.

In short, we were in the police station three days and three nights. We couldn't eat and we couldn't sleep. We lay on the ground in filth, just listening to the crying and the groaning.[12] Finally, God, blessed be He, had mercy on us and [on Monday night] the police again transferred us to Jerusalem. There we stayed in the Nathan Straus Health Center for two days and two nights, and on Wednesday we came back to Tel Aviv.[13]

I am writing you only about our troubles. I don't have the strength to write about the additional troubles of the whole Jewish community. That you will surely read in the American newspapers. It is very tragic, but everything is from God.

Now I will tell you the total number of people who were slaughtered in Hebron. As of today, there are 63 holy martyrs. While we were still there, 58 were buried in a common grave, 51 males and 7 females; up to today, there are 5 more martyrs from among the wounded. Of the wounded, 49 are in serious condition, and 17 slightly wounded. Who knows how many more fatalities there will be? The Yeshiva suffered 23 killed and 17 wounded. Eight of the dead and 14 of the wounded from the Yeshiva are American boys. Gevald! Twenty three living Torah scrolls were burned! May the heavens open and avenge us.

All the houses of study with their Torah scrolls and holy books were burned; everything in them was destroyed. All the homes were plundered; not even a straw was left!

We ourselves were left practically naked and barefoot. Since we had planned to stay there a few months, we had taken along all our clothes. Mama, may she live and be well, was left with only the one dress she was wearing and I, too, had only what I was wearing. They even took my talis and tefilin. Before Shabbes, I gave the money that I had brought along to the innkeeper for safekeeping. The Arabs took that money too, quite a large amount.

To make matters worse, the situation in the entire country is very bad, and no one is paying his debts. I have notes for several thousand dollars. Last week, notes for \$750 came due, but no one paid. Who knows what will happen in the future? God forbid that we shouldn't be ruined altogether.[14] We're trying to keep our heads above water while we keep hearing that here things are bad and there things are bad. May God, blessed be He, have mercy and help all the Jews, including us, that we should at least be well and be able to bear up under these trials. We Jews have had enough troubles!

I have no patience to write about family matters because my hand is still trembling.

Just one thing, my dear children, may you live and be well, I ask of you that you put away this letter for the generations. Each year, at an agreed upon day, you should all meet and give thanks and praise to God, blessed be He, who saved your parents from this great catastrophe, and each one of you should make a generous contribution to charity. The miracle took place on Shabbes, Torah portion Ekev, the 18th day of the month of Av, 5689 [August 24, 1929], in Hebron.

Your father, who wishes you the best, writing to you through tears.

Aharon [Aharon Reuven Bernzweig]  
[(Wife) Breine Zuch Bernzweig]

## APPENDIX 1: STATISTICAL SUMMARY

Total number of Jewish residents in Hebron: 750 800

Jews present in Hebron at the time (including visitors): 550 estimated

Residents not present: 250 300

Yeshiva students and staff away between terms

People visiting or working elsewhere

Killed in the riots: 67

Yeshiva students and staff: 24

Buried in mass grave: 59

Wounded and survived: 53

Survived and uninjured: (assembled in police station after the riots): 430

Saved by Arabs: 280 300

Saved in other ways: (hiding, homes not reached, lay among bodies of dead and wounded): 130 estimated

Arabs who saved Jews: 25 estimated

Arabs who participated in attacks and plunder: thousands

## APPENDIX 2

Hadassah's Dr. Kitayin Testifies:

"At about 11:00 A.M. on Friday, while I was at work [in the Health Clinic], the nurse, Shoshana Bat Haim, was told by one of the frequenters of the dispensary, Rashad Sa'ad, 18 years old and a government official, that preparations were being made to kill Jews in Hebron. The nurse called me and reported the matter. I answered, 'Tell him that these days one doesn't ordinarily murder people.'

At the same time an Arab guide named Bakri came into the dispensary. When the nurse requested two piasters for the medicine, he replied that he would put out her eyes that day. The nurse called me and told me what the Arab had said, and I chased him out of the building. After a few minutes another guide came in and begged me to forgive the man. I forgave him and he came in for the medicine."

After 10:00 on Saturday morning, when the slaughter had ceased, Dr. Kitayin was sought out and taken to the Police Station to tend the wounded. Together with them were others who were not wounded but "whose faces and clothes were full of blood. They told me that they had lain near the dead and had been saved by being thought dead." Shortly afterward the wounded and the corpses were moved to the government Health Office. (Kitayin Statement, op. cit., Annex 72.)

There Dr. Kitayin worked without stop for 36 hours until Sunday evening, when ambulances arrived from Hadassah to transport the wounded to Jerusalem. Assisting Kitayin were the local Jewish medical staff, Dr. Elkanah and the Hadassah nurse. Toward evening on Saturday they were joined by a surgeon, Dr. John MacQueen, the Government Medical Officer from Jerusalem, his assistant and two nurses. Together they operated upon and treated about 20 of the 60 wounded. (Letter from Dr. Kitayin to the Palestine Zionist Executive dated September 25, 1929, in C.Z.A., S25/4601, and Oded Avissar, p. 418.)

### Notes:

[1] For the significance of the riots see Naomi W. Cohen, *The Year after the Riots: American Responses to the Palestine Crisis of 1929-30*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988; and Aaron S. Klieman, ed. *The Rise of Israel -- The Turn toward Violence 1920-1929*, New York and London: Garland Publishers, 1987, p. 12.

[2] In those days Hebron in the south and Safed in the north were favorite summer vacation sites for the traditional Jewish community. Hebron, 3,000 feet above sea level, is 19 miles south of Jerusalem.

[3] The guest house was called Eshel Avraham, the Tamarisk Tree of Abraham, a classical Jewish symbol of hospitality. It was operated by Haim Shneerson and was one of five or more small family run lodgings for visitors. Students at the Hebron Yeshiva were housed with private families. See Statement of Yehuda Leib Shneerson, son of Haim Shneerson, Central Zionist Archives (hereinafter C.Z.A.), 1929 Riots, Notes on Hebron, File S25/4601, Annex 16. Eshel Avraham was the first hotel in Hebron and was located in one of five buildings constructed by the two grandfathers of Yehuda Leib Shneerson during the period of Turkish rule over Palestine. Hard times forced them to sell the buildings to Arabs. On the main floor there were four rooms and a synagogue. See Yehuda Leib Shneerson, *Hoy Hebron, Hebron!* (Hebrew), Tel Aviv, Yair Publishers, 1980, p.23.

[4] The entire Jewish community of Hebron numbered between 750 and 800. Included in these figures are about 200 students and staff of Yeshivat Hebron Kenesset Israel. In 1924, Rabbi Moses Mordecai Epstein had transplanted 150 students and faculty en masse from Slobodka in Lithuania to Hebron. Rabbi Epstein was notable also for his interest in the building up of Palestine. While at the Volozhin Yeshiva in the 1880s he encouraged the Hovevei Zion group organized

by the students, and he himself was a member of the Hovevei Zion delegation which purchased the land for the settlement of Hadera in 1891.

A population figure of 20,000 Moslems and 800 Jews in the town of Hebron is given in the memorandum of the Palestine Zionist Executive, prepared by Mordecai Eliash and dated October 14, 1929, for the government Commission of Enquiry into the 1929 Riots, C.Z.A., S25/4601. The census of 1931, however, lists 17,531 Moslems in the urban area and 50,100 in the rural portion of the Hebron sub district.

[5] In his disposition after the riots he identified himself as Dr. Zwi Kitayin, Hadassah physician at Hebron. C.Z.A., S25/4601, Annex 72. Later he changed the spelling of his name to Kitain.

The Hadassah Clinic was housed in a building erected in 1909 by a Bagdadi Jew, Joseph Avraham Shalom, and the Sasson family for the Hesed Le'Avraham Hospital. Subsequently the structure was taken over by the Hadassah organization and called Beit Hadassah.

The clinic in Hebron is listed in the November 1919 report of the American Zionist Medical Unit (A.Z.M.U.), set up in 1918 by Hadassah and the American Zionist Organization. The A.Z.M.U. maintained hospitals in Jerusalem, Jaffa, Safed and Tiberias, as well as clinics in many towns and settlements. In 1921 the name was changed to Hadassah Medical Organization (H.M.O.). C.Z.A., Hadassah 1920 22, S30/2513.

Dr. Kitayin, in his statement, described the atmosphere of threats and danger on the eve of the riots and his work in caring for the wounded in the days that followed. See Appendix 2.

[6] Only five minutes before the mob reached the guest house, the Arab landlord "knocked and said to us: "Come out of here at once and go to my house. There you'll be safer." Statements of Shneerson and Kitayin, op. cit., Annexes 16 and 72.

The number of people who took refuge with him is verified by Dr. Kitayin. op. cit., S25/4601.

The known members of the group are the family of Haim Shneerson and his son Yehuda Leib, Dr. Zwi Kitayin, his wife Rivka and their two children, Gavriel and Elisheva, Dr. Leib Levit and Aharon Reuven and Breine Bernzweig. About half of the 33 were children.

[7] The name of the Arab was Haj Eissa El Kourdieh, who is included prominently in the three lists of Arabs identified shortly after the massacre as those who saved the lives of Jews. He lived in the same courtyard as the guest house and was its landlord. One of the women was his wife, Imm Mahmoud.

The most reliable of the lists, dated January 20, 1930, was attested to by the rabbis of the Ashkenazi and Sephardi communities, Yaakov Yosef Slonim and Meir Franco. It includes 19 rescuers and 270 rescued. Since the list underestimates the number in my grandfather's group by nine, we would estimate the total number of Jews saved by Arabs as 280 to 300. The number of Arab rescuers should also be increased by at least four or six to compensate for the omission of women from the list.

The other lists are unsigned and undated. The shorter of the two, naming 17 Arabs but omitting numbers for Jews, is entitled "Arabs of Hebron who behaved well towards Jews." This is apparently an earlier compilation that is referred to in a letter from Mordecai Eliash to the chairman of the Palestine Zionist Executive, Colonel Frederick H. Kisch, dated November 13, 1929, which states, "I attach a list of Arabs of Hebron who behaved well towards Jews."

The third list, which credits 32 Arabs with saving over 444 Jews, appears exaggerated. Only 430 Jews were alive and whole when assembled to the police station, and that number included a substantial number whose homes were not reached by the attackers, others who hid and were not discovered, and those who were overlooked as they lay among the bodies of the dead and wounded. See C.Z.A., The Riots in Palestine, August 1929, Arabs Who Assisted Jews, S25/3409 and List of Jews Protected by Moslems in Hebron, S25/4472.

[8] Other survivors add details: During the attacks two Arab women sat in front of the door and ground on millstones, whose shrill whine, together with the women's screams, helped to drown out the sounds of the crying children inside. Earlier, Imm Mahmoud handed her 10 year old son to the group as a hostage, to reassure them that she would not give them up. The mother coached the boy. When she would call out to him, "Are there any Jews inside with you?" he was to answer, "No, there are no Jews here. They all ran away."

The people inside heard one of the attackers shout out, "Today is a day that is holy to Mohammed. Anyone who does not kill Jews is a sinner." Dr. Kitayin and Shneerson, op. cit., Annexes 72 and 16. Oral interview wth Mrs. Rivka Kitain Mellor and her daughter, Mrs. Elisheva Greidinger, on August 24, 1989.

Edward Robbin, who went to Hebron three weeks later "with a convoy of refugees returning to their homes to bring the remnants of their possessions to Jerusalem," describes meeting a woman whom we recognize as Imm Mahmoud. "Opposite the Slonim house in front of what had been a hotel, a crowd of Jews had gathered about an Arab woman. To each one that approached they repeated the story of how she had saved twenty three [sic] people by bringing them into her house. People looked at the thin worn face of the Arab woman with awe." The Menorah Journal, XVII, 3 (December 1929), p.304.

[9] I remember hearing at the time that he suffered a heart attack.

[10] The second doctor was Dr. Leib Levit, the government veterinary surgeon in Hebron. Statement of Dr. Levit, C.Z.A., S25/4601, Annex 32.

[11] Eyewitness accounts report that police with rifles controlled the streets on Friday night. On Saturday morning, however, they were sent out armed only with clubs and quickly lost control of the mobs. Only when the police commander R.O. Cafferata himself was attacked did he order the police to be rearmed with rifles. They returned, fired shots into the air and the rioting immediately stopped. Op. cit., S25/4601, Statements of Rabbi Feivel Epstein of the Hebron Yeshiva, Annex 28; Yehoshua Hason, Annex 40; Rabbi Yaakov Yosef Slonim, Annex 6; Kitayin, Annex 72, and Shneerson, Annex 16.

[12] The rescued sat and slept on the floor, soaked with the blood of the wounded who had lain there earlier. For two days the British did not supply them with food. Only on Monday were they able to purchase half burned pitta and grapes. The police made no effort to clean the room until they heard that people were coming from Jerusalem to evacuate the women and children. Oded Avissar, ed., Sefer Hebron (Hebrew), (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1970), p. 419.

The police station was in the Romano House, a spacious building with dozens of rooms that was constructed by a Jew from Istanbul in the 1860's. During World War I the Turkish authorities confiscated the building. When the British took over the country they used the structure as a police station, courthouse and prison.

[13] [On Sunday night] "Crowds gathered at the [Hadassah] Hospital [on Straus Street] and waited for the wounded to be brought from Hebron. The [British] authorities ordered that they be transported in the dead of night when the streets would be empty. The next night the women and children refugees [and the elderly] were transported in buses. They brought them to the new Straus [Health Center] building....(This then would be the opening of the new building)....

As the buses stopped, a muffled hysterical crying, shouting, screaming. Half crazed women leaped from the autos, clutching their children tightly and moaning....

One little old woman had jumped out of the auto and started to run about silently among the crowd searching and whispering, "My children, have you seen my children?" Robbin, op. cit., p. 299.

[14] My grandfather had invested his capital in mortgages and construction loans, especially in Bnai Brak, which was being developed in those years.

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By Bryna & Paul Epstein of Rehovot, Israel, Dvora & Nathan Liebster, and Saadia & Lily Greenberg  
in loving memory of Saadia, Bryna, & Dvora's great grandparents, Aharon Reuven and Breine Bernzweig, on the 91st anniversary of their miraculous deliverance, b'Chasdei Hashem, during the Hebron massacre on Shabbat Parashat Eikev, 18 Menachem Av 5689 (August 24, 1929).

## Parshas Eikev: Mosheh's Shiur, Part II

By Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

### I. MOSHEH'S "SHIUR" CONTINUES...

As noted in the last two shiurim, Sefer D'varim is made up of three sections:

Chapters 1-11: Historical Recitation and Exhortation

Chapters 12-26: Laws

Chapters 27-33: Covenant and Blessing

In last week's shiur, we discussed the three lessons (and one significant interruption) which comprise the bulk of Parashat Va'et'hanan and form the first half of the "exhortative" component of Mosheh Rabbenu's speech. In that presentation, I argued that those three lessons are an integrated and "spiralizing" educational experience, culminating in a description of the ideal relationship with God. As we will soon discover, the "shiur" (instruction) which commences near the beginning of Parashat Va'et'hanan (D'varim 4:1) does not conclude with the climactic statement "Sh'ma Yisra'el" which "headlines" the final lesson; indeed, the shiur continues until the end of Parashat Ekev (11:21).

In order to understand the rest of Mosheh's "shiur", we will build on last week's presentation. First, a brief recap is in order.

### II. A BRIEF RECAP

In last week's discussion, I suggested that each new component of Mosheh's "shiur" is marked by the introductory phrase "Sh'ma Yisra'el" (or "Yisra'el Sh'ma").

This phrase, found (in inverted form) at 4:1, introduces the first lesson: The nature of God and His incorporeality.

The same phrase, at 5:1, introduces the repetition of the Decalogue and, significantly, the story behind Mosheh's assuming the role of lawgiver. These two lessons are intertwined and somewhat interdependent, as each utilizes the national experience at Sinai as the foundation for the lesson.

"Sh'ma Yisra'el" appears a final time (in Va'et'hanan), at 6:4, in introducing our ideal relationship with God – "You shall love Hashem your God...".

In analyzing these three lessons, we noted the strange interruption (4:41-49) of the narrative of Mosheh's designation of the three (not-yet-functional) cities of refuge on the East Bank. I suggested that the basic lesson of the "Arei Miklat" – that intent plays a critical role in the performance of Mitzvot – was a valuable insight into the "inner workings" of the Torah. Mosheh, as the consummate teacher, interrupted his lesson to demonstrate a law which exemplifies the value of intent and attitude as vehicles for moral perfection. Last week's discussion gave the impression that the "famous" "Sh'ma Yisra'el" (6:4) was the beginning of the final lesson in Mosheh's "shiur". As we will see further on, there are some more lessons that make up this "shiur" - and they take us nearly to the end of Parashat Ekev.

### III. THE STRUCTURE OF OUR PARASHA

Parashat Ekev is made up of four distinct sections:

- 1) 7:12-8:20 – the "Ekev" section (another interruption between lessons)
- 2) 9:1-10:11 – the fourth lesson
- 3) 10:12-11:12 – the fifth lesson
- 4) 11:13-21 is a summary of the lessons (this section, along with the "epilogue" of our Parashah, 11:22-25 will not be addressed in this discussion.)

Although we will devote some space to the fourth and fifth lessons – including an explanation of how these divisions are evidenced in the text – the focus of this presentation will be on the "Ekev" interruption which begins our Parashah.

### EVIDENCE FOR THE DIVISIONS

The division charted above could certainly be challenged – it does not break down by chapters or by Parashiot (paragraphs) – what evidence is there for the existence of this structure?

The easiest component to identify is the fourth lesson. Just as the first three lessons (in Parashat Va'Et'hanan) began with "Sh'ma Yisra'el" (or "Yisra'el Sh'ma"), so does the fourth lesson: "Sh'ma Yisra'el..."

The fifth (and final) lesson in this series is also relatively easy to identify. Recall that the first lesson, beginning in D'varim 4:1, was introduced with the phrase "V'Atah Yisra'el Sh'ma..." – "And now, Yisra'el, pay heed..." The introductory phrase, "V'atah Yisra'el", is only found in two places in the Torah – at the beginning of Chapter 4 in D'varim and at D'varim 10:12. Although the word "Sh'ma" is missing (an omission which will be explained anon), this phrase which is otherwise a hapax legomenon [unmatched phrase in the T'nakh] seems to be a clear indicator of a new lesson being introduced.

### IV. LESSONS FOUR AND FIVE

Before demonstrating the rest of the "structure", a word about these two lessons. It isn't merely the introductory phrases which indicate the beginning of a new lesson and, therefore, a separate component in the Parashah. The content and context of each section is independent in such a way as to be a clearly marked-off unit. Let's examine them together:

The unit beginning with 9:1 is a rather long speech (40 verses, several of which are extraordinary long) which is Mosheh's retelling of the sin of the Golden Calf and its aftermath. Although it includes two tangential verses (10:8-9) about the separation and sanctification of the Levi'im (marked off by the introductory "Ba'it Hahee", compare 10:8 with 10:1), this is a part and parcel of the Golden Calf episode as it is the loyalty of the Levi'im which earned them their holy status (see Sh'mot 32:26).

Why is this unit here; i.e. what is Mosheh's purpose in relating this heinous crime within the context of this "shiur"?

In last week's shiur, I suggested that the entire purpose of Mosheh's shiur was to act as "shadchan" (matchmaker) between the B'nei Yisra'el and HaKadosh Barukh Hu. This is, quintessentially, the job of a Rabbi – to bring his students closer to God. As such, Mosheh began with a lesson about the nature of the Divine, using the Sinai experience to point out what their parents saw and what they did not see (physical images etc.). The second lesson justified Mosheh's role as lawgiver. The third lesson describes the ideal relationship between the people and God (loving God etc.). Consider what's "missing" from the formula: If I am interested in entering into a relationship with someone, be it a business partnership, an educational endeavor or what have you, I need to know several things. I must know as much as possible about the potential partner (lesson #1); I'll need to know the medium of the relationship (lesson #2 – Torah [given via Mosheh] is the medium of our relationship with God) and the ideal of that relationship (lesson #3). There is, of course, one more piece to the puzzle: Who am I? For me to successfully relate to another, I need to know something about my own nature, tendencies, strengths and weaknesses etc.; this knowledge is as critical (if not more so) than my knowledge about the potential partner. Similarly, the people had been informed about God – but needed to be reminded about how they had previously behaved in their relationship with God. Therefore, Mosheh must incorporate the story of the Golden Calf into his "shiur" which is aimed at bringing the B'nei Yisra'el into a full and complete relationship with God.

The final lesson is also a clear and independent unit. Although the opening formula lacks the familiar keyword "Sh'ma", there is good reason for that omission. Unlike the first four lessons, in which Mosheh is instructing them with information which is indispensable for the success of their national mission, the final lesson turns that instruction on its head and puts the B'nei Yisra'el in the "driver's seat". Now, instead of Mosheh telling them what they must do, he is inviting them to move beyond that which is demanded and commanded: "And now, Yisra'el, what does Hashem your God ask of you, but to fear Hashem your God, to walk in all His ways, and to love Him, and to serve Hashem your God with all your heart and with all your soul, To keep the commandments of Hashem, and His statutes, which I command you this day for your good?... Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiffnecked... You shall fear Hashem your God; Him shall you serve, and to Him shall you hold fast, and swear by His Name." (D'varim 10:12-20)

Until now, the B'nei Yisra'el were given prescriptions and proscriptions – commands and limitations. Although there had been allusions to a greater picture, that had never been laid out in such idealistic detail, nor presented as a challenge in place of a command. This fifth lesson is, indeed, a culmination of the "shiur", as it goes beyond the ideal relationship outlined in the third lesson ("Sh'ma...V'Ahavta..."). More than the command to internalize our love for God completely ("...with all of your heart..."), this final lesson invites us to rise above our base natures ("...circumcise the foreskin of your heart...") in terminology that is otherwise reserved for eschatological visions (e.g. D'varim 30:6; Yechezqe'el 36:26).

Although this final lesson includes the three verses about the Land (11:10-12), we will examine these from another perspective at the end of this presentation.

## V. THE "EKEV" INTERRUPTION

As noted above, the first part of our Parashah (7:12-8:20) is something of an interruption – and its identity as an independent and complete section is quite easy to see.

As we have discussed in earlier shiurim, the Torah utilizes all sorts of allusions, complicated structures and literary techniques to impart its messages. It is fundamental to the methodology of our classical interpretive tradition that uncommon words, especially when appearing in significant locations within a given text, have been deliberately placed there by the Author in order to catch our attention. This methodology is particularly helpful when that uncommon word shows up in a seemingly unrelated context – it is often the case that the Torah is creating an association between the two cases in order to create an "information interface" between the two. In Halakhic exegesis, this methodology is known as "Gezerah Shavah"; however, our Rabbis did not limit its use to that discipline (see e.g. Beresheet Rabbah 44:14; Sh'mot Rabbah 9:7).

The second word (and key word) of our Parashah is an extremely rare one in the Torah. The word Ekev, commonly translated as "on account of" or "since", appears in only five locations in the Humash. Not only does our Parashah begin with an uncommon word – but one of the other four occurrences of that word comes at 8:20 – "...Ekev lo Tish'm'un..." Taking into account the common style of "bookending" which the Torah employs (see our discussion on Parashiot Matot-Mas'ei) and the use of this all-too-rare word at both bookends, it is fairly clear that 7:12-8:20 have the potential of being an independent and self-contained unit.

As mentioned, this "structural analysis" only leaves us with a potentially unified section; we have yet to prove that the content and theme fit that bill.

## VI. ANALYZING THE "EKEV" SECTION

Note that the Ekev section is broken up into three "open" paragraphs ("parashiot p'tuhot" – you can see this if you follow with a Tanakh, such as Koren, which breaks up paragraphs where there are "parashah" breaks):

7:12-26 – "v'Haya Ekev Tish'm'un..."

8:1-18 – "Kol haMitzvah..."

8:19-20 – "v'Haya Im Shakhoah Tishkah..."

The final mini-paragraph serves an obvious purpose. All of the blessings which are promised in the first 33 verses of this section will be reversed if the people do the opposite of the stated condition: "v'Haya Ekev Tish'm'un...". If you obey the Mitzvot, God will grant you security in the Land, success in conquest etc. The final two verses leave us without a "pareve" middle ground – if we forget God and do not listen ("...Ekev LO Tish'm'un...") then we will be destroyed.

What are we to make of the first two paragraphs, these 33 verses of condition and blessing?

In order to understand the impact of the "Ekev message" – and the reason it is divided into two separate parashiot – let's take a careful look at the two sections.

Although both 7:12-26 and 8:1-18 promise us a successful entry into the Land and no lack of material bounty if we obey God and remember His kindnesses, the focus is slightly different in each section.

The first section begins with "v'Hayah Ekev Tish'm'un eit haMishpatim ha'Eleh..." – "If you heed these Mishpatim...". However one chooses to translate the various words for Law – "Eduyot", "Hukkim" etc., "Mishpatim" almost certainly belong to the realm of civil law and social interaction (e.g. Sh'mot 21:1).

Conversely, the second section declares its emphasis right away: "Kol haMitzvah..." Although the word "Mitzvah" is usually considered a generic term for all commandments, in the context of the first third of D'varim it seems to take on a unique meaning: Those actions which reflect and enhance our close relationship with God. (See, e.g. D'varim 6:1, 11:22 – see also 30:11)

In the first section, we are told to remember the Exodus – that is, the very fact of our miraculous exit from Egypt.

In the second section, we are also told to remember the Exodus – but here, again, the emphasis shifts. We are told to remember: "Remember the long way that Hashem your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, in order to humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his Mitzvot. He humbled you by letting you hunger, then by feeding you with manna, with which neither you nor your ancestors were acquainted, in order to make you understand that one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of Hashem. The clothes on your back did not wear out and your feet did not swell these forty years...then do not exalt yourself, forgetting Hashem your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, who led you through the great and terrible wilderness, an arid wasteland with poisonous snakes and scorpions. He made water flow for you from flint rock, and fed you in the wilderness with manna that your ancestors did not know, to humble you and to test you, and in the end to do you good." (8:2-16)

As opposed to the actual liberation that we are told to recall in the first section, it is the fact of God sustaining us throughout the desert for forty years which is the topic of remembrance in the second section.

Finally, note how the Land is described in each paragraph.

In the first section, the emphasis is on the conquerability of the Land:

"Moreover, Hashem your God will send the pestilence against them, until even the survivors and the fugitives are destroyed. Have no dread of them, for Hashem your God, who is present with you, is a great and awesome God. Hashem your God will clear away these nations before you little by little; you will not be able to make a quick end of them, otherwise the wild animals would become too numerous for you. But Hashem your God will give them over to you, and throw them into great panic, until they are destroyed. He will hand their kings over to you and you shall blot out their name from under heaven; no one will be able to stand against you, until you have destroyed them." (7:20-24)

Contradictorily, the second paragraph ignores the military concerns regarding the Land and instead describes its beauty and bounty: "For Hashem your God is bringing you into a good land, a land with flowing streams, with springs and underground waters welling up in valleys and hills, a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, a land where you may eat bread without scarcity, where you will lack nothing, a land whose stones are iron and from whose hills you may mine copper. You shall eat your fill and bless Hashem your God for the good land that he has given you." (8:7-10)

The three salient differences between these sections can be summed up in this chart:

Section – Laws – The Land – Remembrance

7:12-26 – Mishpatim – Conquerable – Exodus

8:1-18 – Mitzvot – Beautiful, Sustaining – 40 years in the desert

## VII. THE AVRAHAM CONNECTION

As mentioned above, the keyword "Ekev" is extremely rare in the Torah. Understanding the implications of its use here will help us make sense of the entire Ekev section.

Besides the two occurrences here and one (which will be discussed below) in Bamidbar, the only two instances of "Ekev" in the Torah are found within the Avraham narratives.

When Avraham demonstrates his complete devotion to God on Mount Moriah, he was given the most complete blessing of his life: The angel of Hashem called to Avraham a second time from heaven, and said, "By Myself I have sworn, says Hashem: Because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will indeed bless you, and I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of their enemies, and by your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves, because ("Ekev") you have obeyed My voice." (B'resheet 22:15-18)

Later on, when Yitzhak considers following in his father's footsteps and descending to Egypt to escape the famine plaguing K'na'an, we are told:

Now there was a famine in the land, besides the former famine that had occurred in the days of Avraham. And Yitzhak went to Gerar, to King Abimelech of the Philistines. Hashem appeared to Yitzhak and said, "Do not go down to Egypt; settle in the land that I shall show you. Reside in this land as an alien, and I will be with you, and will bless you; for to you and to your descendants I will give all these

lands, and I will fulfill the oath that I swore to your father Avraham. I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven, and will give to your offspring all these lands; and all the nations of the earth shall gain blessing for themselves through your offspring, because ("Ekev") Avraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws." (B'resheet 26:1-5). It must certainly be clear to all members of Mosheh Rabbenu's audience that this rare word, opening and closing this section of his "shuir", is intended to create an Avraham-association for us. But what is that association? Given these two selections, we would assume that Avraham's greatness lay chiefly in his total obedience to God and the spiritual heights he achieved. The scene at the Akeda is nothing if not the quintessence of devotional worship.

We are, however, provided another perspective of Avraham's stature which gives us a broader view of his greatness:

Hashem said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, seeing that Abraham shall become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? No, for I have chosen him, that he may charge his children and his household after him to keep the way of Hashem by doing righteousness and justice; so that Hashem may bring about for Abraham what he has promised him." (B'resheet 18:17-19)

As much as Avraham is a devotional worshipper, he is (perhaps even more) a man whose very soul speaks of righteousness, whose being is bound up with the pursuit of justice. Witness his negotiations with God regarding the fate of the evil cities of S'dom (ibid. 18:23-32).

The "Ekev" section in our Parashah is placed here to remind us of the dual nature of Avraham's distinction: Lonely Man of Faith and Civic Man of Justice. (Avraham's reputation is not only based on his success in both of these areas of moral growth – but also his ability to synthesize them into one persona.)

Subsequent to teaching us about our ideal relationship with God (at the end of Parashat Va'et'hanan) and prior to reminding us of our potential for infidelity (9:1-10:11), Mosheh Rabbenu interjects a lesson which is grounded in our awareness of our earliest roots and the spiritual and ethical heights which our first Patriarch scaled.

Before addressing the dual messages of the "Ekev" section, we should briefly examine the one remaining occurrence of "Ekev" in the Torah:

"...nevertheless, as I live, and as all the earth shall be filled with the glory of Hashem, none of the people who have seen My glory and the signs that I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and yet have tested Me these ten times and have not obeyed My voice, shall see the land that I swore to give to their ancestors; none of those who despised Me shall see it. But My servant Kaleb, because ("Ekev") he has a different spirit and has followed Me wholeheartedly, I will bring into the land into which he went, and his descendants shall possess it." (Bamidbar 14:21-24)

As we see throughout the story of the scouts, Kaleb was willing to stand up to their derogation of the Land and publicly face his ten blasphemous colleagues. This is very much in the spirit of Avraham, who is called "Avram ha'Ivri" (B'resheet 14:13). He is given that name specifically within the context of his war against the four kings and our Rabbis explain the meaning as follows: The entire world was one on one side (\*Ever\*) of the river and he was on the other side. (B'resheet Rabbah 42:8 – see also Yehoshua 24:2). In other words, it was Avraham's willingness to stand up against anyone and everyone to defend and promote monotheism and its attendant value system which earned him the title "Ivri".

This is exactly the spirit which moved Kaleb to stand up to the ten detractors of Eretz Yisra'e. The Torah uses the key word "Ekev" in his praise to link him to the valor of Avraham. [Might there be a connection here with Kaleb's visit to Hevron and the Rabbinic tradition that he went to pray at Avraham's tomb?]

### VIII. MISHPATIM AND MITZVOT

We can now revisit our "Ekev" section and explain the two separate paragraphs and their significant differences.

Perhaps the most telling distinction between "Mishpatim" and "Mitzvot" lies in their very nature. Whereas a Mitzvah (in the context of this part of Sefer D'varim) is an act which is part of a life-long process of spiritual development and sensitivity, a Mishpat is purely utilitarian and designed to promote the common weal.

It is abundantly clear why we must not steal, kill etc. and why we must pay workers on time, return lost items and so on. The extent to which a society is governed by these norms correlates closely to its material, social and spiritual well-being.

On the other hand, a person who engages in diligent Torah study, prays with great focus and generally observes those Mitzvot which fall under the rubric of "Ahavat Hashem" (Love of God), finds that the development of that relationship is a slow, arduous process. Each act of devotion is not an end in and of itself; it is rather a building block towards a closer relationship with haKadosh Barukh Hu. In much the same spirit, we can distinguish between the two "remembrances" in this section. The matter of the Exodus itself, although performed with great wonders and portents, was essentially a utilitarian act. God desired to bring the people out of slavery and into their own Land – and that is exactly what He did.

Conversely, the Mahn (which is the object of remembrance in the second paragraph) was not a purely pragmatic "gift". The manner in which the B'nei Yisra'el were sustained throughout their desert sojourn was designed to enhance their awareness of the Ribono Shel Olam on an ongoing basis: "In order to teach you that man does not live on bread alone, but that man may live on anything that Hashem decrees." (D'varim 8:3)

Note that the first paragraph promises us that if we (1) Remember the Exodus and (2) observe the Mishpatim, we will be successful in (3) Conquering the Land. The focus here is purely pragmatic, following the lead of Avraham's "social-justice" agenda. (Keep in mind that it is within the context of war that Avraham earns his title of "Ivri".)

In the second paragraph, we are told that if we (1a) Remember the Mahn and (2a) observe the Mitzvot, we will (3) enjoy a beautiful and sustaining Land. Here, the focus is on the personal development of a relationship, the ongoing process of becoming more aware of God's role in our lives and the beauty and bounty of His Land.

## IX. POSTSCRIPT

After completing his shiur, Mosheh adds three verses which describe the Land in even more glowing terms than those found in the "Ekev" section:

"For the land, which you enter to possess, is not as the land of Egypt, from where you came out, where you sowed your seed, and watered it with your foot, as a garden of vegetables; But the land, which you are going over to possess, is a land of hills and valleys, and drinks water from the rain of the skies; A land which Hashem your God cares for; the eyes of Hashem your God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year." (11:10-12)

Beyond the pragmatic promise of conquest, beyond even the aesthetic beauty and bounty of the Land, we are given an even more powerful insight into the special place which God has reserved for His people. All of these blessings, including the development of an ideal relationship with God as outlined in Mosheh Rabbeinu's "shiur", are only possible in that Land which God always watches, "from the beginning of the year to the end of the year."

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## **PARSHAT EKEV**

Who 'stops' the rain?

According to Parshat Ekev (and what we recite every day in the second 'parshia' of 'kriyat shema'), the answer is God Himself. To better appreciate the Biblical significance of rain ['matar'], this week's shiur discusses the correlation between Divine Providence and the climate of the Land of Israel.

### **INTRODUCTION**

In the beginning of Parshat Ekev, the land of Israel receives what appears to be a very positive assessment:

"For the Lord your God is bringing you into a **good** land... a land of wheat and barley (...the 7 species) ...a land which lacks nothing..." (8:7-9).

Yet, later in the Parsha, the Torah describes the land of Egypt as much better:

"For the land which you are about to conquer is **not like the land of Egypt**, from which you have come, where when you planted your field you watered it with your foot... The Land which you are about to conquer, a land of hills and valleys, receives its water from the rains (**matar**) of the heavens" (11:10-11).

So which land is better, and on what do we base this comparison? To answer this question, we take a closer look at various other instances where the Torah compares the Lands of Israel to the Land of Egypt.

### **THE FIRST 'FAUCET'**

We begin our study with the Torah's 'strange' description of how one would water his field in the land of Egypt:

"For [your] land is **not** like the land of Egypt... where you planted your field and **watered it with your foot**" (see 11:10).

For some reason, Egypt is described as a land that 'you water with your feet'? To appreciate this rather strange depiction, and how it forms the basis of Egypt's comparison to the land of Israel, we must review a few basic facts of world history.

In ancient times, civilizations developed along major rivers, as they provided not only a means of transportation, but also the necessary water for agriculture and consumption.

If was for this reason that Egypt (developing along the Nile) and Mesopotamia (developing along the Tigris and Euphrates) became two of the greatest centers of ancient civilization.

To enhance their agriculture, the Egyptians developed a sophisticated irrigation system by digging ditches from the Nile to their fields. Using this system to water his field, an Egyptian would open his local irrigation ditch by simply kicking away the dirt **'with his foot'**. To 'turn off' the water supply, he would use his foot once again to move the dirt to close the ditch. [Consider this the first 'faucet' system.]

This background explains why the Torah describes Egypt as a land 'watered by your feet' (see 11:10). In contrast, the Torah describes the land of Israel as:

"The land that you are going now to inherit is a land of **hills & valleys**, which drinks from the **rains of Heaven**" (11:11).

In contrast to Egypt, Israel lacks a mighty river such as the Nile to provide it with a consistent supply of water. Instead, the agriculture in the Land of Israel is totally dependent on **rainfall**. Therefore, when it **does** rain, the fields are watered 'automatically'; however, when it does **not** rain, nothing will grow for the crops will dry out.

[It should be noted that even though Israel does have a river, the Jordan - but it is located some 300 meters **below** sea level (in the Jordan Valley), and thus not very helpful to water the fields. In modern times, Israel has basically 'solved' this problem by pumping up the water from the Kinneret into a national water carrier.]

Hence, even though the land of Israel may have a slight advantage over Egypt when it does rain [see Rashi 11:10], from an agricultural perspective the land of Egypt has a clear advantage [see Ramban 11:10]. Furthermore, any responsible family provider would obviously prefer the 'secure' option - to establish his home in Egypt, instead of opting for the 'risky' Israeli alternative.

So why is the Torah going out of its way to tell us that Egypt is better than Israel, especially in the same Parsha where the Torah first tells us how Israel is a 'great' land, missing nothing! (See 8:9!) Furthermore, why would Moshe Rabbeinu mention this point to Bnei Yisrael specifically at this time, as they prepare to enter their land.

To answer these questions, we must re-examine these psukim in their wider context.

### **THREE PARSHIOT RELATING TO THE FEAR OF GOD**

Using a Tanach Koren (or similar Chumash), take a look at the psukim that we have just quoted (i.e. 11:10-12), noting how these three psukim form their own 'parshia'. Note however how this short 'parshia' begins with the word 'ki' - 'for' or 'because' - which obviously connects it thematically to the previous parshia:10:12-11:9. Therefore, we must first consider the theme of this preceding 'parshia' and then see how it relates to our topic.

Let's begin by taking a quick look at the opening psukim of that 'parshia', noting how it introduces its theme very explicitly:

"And now, O Israel, what is it that God demands of you? It is to **fear** ('yir'a') the Lord your God, to walk in his ways and to love Him... Keep, therefore, this entire 'mitzva'... that you should conquer the Land..." (see 10:12-14).

As you continue to read this parshia (thru 11:9), you'll also notice how this topic or the 'fear of God' continues, as it is emphasized over and over again.

Hence, the theme of our short 'parshia' (11:10-12), where the Torah compares the land of Israel to Egypt, must somehow be related to the theme of **Yir'at Hashem** (fearing God). But what does the water source of a country have to do with the fear of God?

To answer this question, we must read the Torah's conclusion of this comparison (in the final pasuk of our 'parshia'):

"It is a land which the Lord your God **looks after** ('doresh otah'), on which Hashem always keeps His eye, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year" (11:12).

This pasuk informs us that God Himself takes direct control over the rain that falls in the Land of Israel! In contrast to Egypt where the water supply from the Nile is basically **constant**, the water supply in Israel is **sporadic**, and hence more clearly a vehicle of God's will. Considering that one's survival in the Land of Israel is dependent on rain, and the rain itself is dependent on God's will, then to survive in the land of Israel, one must depend on God - a dependence which should have a direct affect on one's level of **Yir'at Hashem**!

### **WHO STOPPED THE RAIN?**

In this manner, the Land of Israel is not better than Egypt, rather it is **different** - for its agriculture is more clearly dependent on the abundance of rain. A good rainy season will bring plenty, while a lack of rain will yield drought and famine. Hence, living in a land with this type of 'touchy' rainy season, dependent on God's will, should reinforce one's fear of God.

The next 'parshia' [i.e. ve-haya im shamo'a...] (11:13-21), the second parshia of daily 'kriyat shema' not only supports this theme, it forms its logical conclusion:

"If you obey the commandments... I will grant the rain (matar) for your land in season... then you shall eat and be satisfied..."

Be careful, lest you be lured after other gods... for Hashem

will be angry ... and He will shut up the skies and there will be no rain (matar)... (see 11:13-16).

Thus, according to Sefer Devarim, the matar that falls in the land of Israel acts not only as a 'barometer' of Am Yisrael's faithfulness to God, but also serves as a vehicle of divine retribution. God will use this matar to 'communicate' with His nation. Rainfall, at the proper time, becomes a sign that is pleased with our 'national behavior', while drought (i.e. holding back the matar) becomes a sign of divine anger.

So which land is better? The answer simply depends on what one is looking for in life. An individual striving for a closer relationship with God would obviously prefer the Land of Israel, while an individual wary of such direct dependence on God would obviously opt for the more secure life in Egypt ['chutz la-aretz'].

To support this interpretation, we will now show how the connection between matar and Divine Providence had already emerged as a Biblical theme back in Sefer Breishit.

## BACK TO AVRAHAM AVINU

At the onset of our national history, we find a very similar comparison between the lands of Egypt and Israel.

Recall, that when God first chose Avraham Avinu, commanding him to uproot his family from Mesopotamia and travel to the land of Canaan (see 12:1-3), his nephew Lot was consistently mentioned as Avraham's 'travel partner' (see 12:4-6 & 13:1-2). As Avraham was childless and Lot had lost his father, it would only be logical for Avraham to assume that Lot would become his successor. Nevertheless, after their return from a trip to Egypt, a quarrel broke out between them, which ultimately led to Lot's 'rejection' from Avraham's 'chosen family'.

One could suggest that the Torah's description of these events relates directly to this Biblical theme of matar. To show how, let's begin with the Torah's description of that quarrel:

"And Avraham said to Lot, let there not be a quarrel between us... if you go to the **right** [=south], I'll go to the left [=north] (& vice versa)... (see Breishit 13:8-9).

[Note that Avraham suggested that Lot choose either North or South (13:8-9), not East or West as is often assumed! See Targum Unkelos which translates right & left as 'south' or 'north' (see also Seforno). Throughout Chumash 'yemin' always refers to the south, kedem - east, etc.]

In other words, Avraham Avinu, standing in Bet El (see 13:3), is offering Lot a choice between the mountain ranges of 'Yehuda' (to the south) or the hills of the 'Shomron' (to the north). To our surprise, Lot chooses neither option! Instead, Lot prefers to divorce himself from Avraham Avinu altogether, choosing the Jordan Valley instead. Note, however, the connection between Lot's decision to 'go east' and his most recent experience in Egypt:

"Then Lot lifted up his eyes and saw the whole plain of Jordan, for it was all well watered (by the Jordan River)... just like the Garden of the Lord, **like the land of Egypt...**" (13:10-12).

After his brief visit to Egypt (as described at the end of chapter 12), it seems as though Lot could no longer endure the hard life in the 'hills and valleys' of the Land of Israel. Instead, Lot opts for a more secure lifestyle along the banks of the Jordan River, similar to the secure lifestyle in Egypt by the banks of the Nile River.

[Note especially how the Torah (in the above pasuk) connects between this river valley and the 'Garden of the Lord', i.e. Gan Eden (for it was set along four rivers, see Breishit 2:9-14).]

Lot departs towards Sdom for the 'good life', while Avraham Avinu remains in Bet El, at the heart of the Land of Israel (see 13:14-16, see also previous TSC shiur on Matot / Mas'e).

Rashi, commenting on Breishit 13:11, quotes a Midrash which arrives at a very similar thematic conclusion:

"Va-yisa Lot mi-kedem... [Lot traveled from kedem] - He

traveled **away** from He who began the Creation ('kadmono shel olam'), saying, I can no longer endure being with Avraham nor with his God" ("iy efshi, lo be-Avraham, ve-lo be-Elokav").

As Rashi alludes to, this quarrel between Avraham and Lot stemmed from a conflict between two opposite lifestyles:

- \* A life striving for a dependence (and hence a relationship) with God (=Avraham Avinu);
- \* A life where man prefers to be independent of God (=Lot).

The path chosen by Avraham Avinu leads to 'Bet El' - the house of God, while the path chosen by Lot leads to 'Sdom' - the city of corruption (see 13:12-13).

## BACK TO THE CREATION

This Biblical theme of matar is so fundamental, that it actually begins at the time of Creation! Recall how the Gan Eden narrative (i.e. Breishit 2:4-3:24) opens with a very peculiar statement in regard to matar:

"These are the generations of Heavens and Earth from their Creation... And no shrub of the field had yet grown in the land and no grains had yet sprouted, because Hashem had not yet sent rain (matar) on the land, nor was there **man** to work the field..." (Breishit 2:4-5).

It is rather amazing how this entire account of Creation begins with a statement that nothing could grow without matar or man!

Furthermore, this very statement is rather odd, for it appears to contradict what was stated earlier (in the first account of Creation [= 'perek aleph'] which implies that water was just about everywhere (see 1:2,6,9 etc.).

Finally, this very statement that man is needed for vegetation to grow seems to contradict what we see in nature. As we all know shrubs and trees (and especially weeds) seem to grow very nicely even without man's help. Yet, according to this opening pasuk of the second account of Creation - nothing could grow without this combination of matar and **man**.

Nonetheless, Chumash emphasizes in this opening statement that both man and matar are key factors in the forthcoming story of creation. To appreciate why, we must first very briefly review our conclusions in regard to the comparison between the two accounts in Sefer Breishit.

The first account [perek aleph] focused on God's creation of all 'nature' in seven days. God's Name - 'Elokim' - reflected its key point that all **powers** of nature - that appear to stem from the powers of various gods - are truly the Creation of One God. To remind ourselves of this key point, we are commanded to refrain from all creativity once every seven days. ['olam ha-teva']

In contrast, the second account [perek bet] - focused on the special relationship between man and his Creator, as reflected in its special environment - Gan Eden - created by God for man to work and keep. In that environment, man is responsible to follow God's laws, and His Name ['shem Havaya'] reflects His presence and involvement ['olam ha-hitgalut].

[See TSC shiur on Parshat Breishit.]

Therefore, this opening pasuk - emphasizing the relationship between matar and man - must relate in some manner to the special relationship between man and God.

The Midrash (quoted by Rashi), bothered by this peculiarity, offers a very profound interpretation, explaining this connection:

"Ki lo himtit... And why had it not yet rained? ... because "adam ayin a'avod et ha-adama", for man had not yet been created to work the field, and thus no one had yet recognized the significance of rain. And when man was created and recognized their importance, **he prayed for rain**. Then the rain fell and the trees and the grass grew..." (see Rashi 2:5).

This interpretation reflects the very same theme that emerged in our discussion of matar in Parshat Ekev. According to this Rashi,

God created man towards the purpose that he recognize God and His Creations. From this perspective, matar emerges as a vehicle to facilitate that recognition.

The reason for this may stem from the very meaning of the word matar. Note that matar does not mean only 'rain'. Rather, the 'shoresh' - 'lehamtir' - relates to anything that falls from heaven to earth. Rain is the classic example; but even 'bread' or 'fire', when they fall from heaven, are described by the Bible as matar.

[In regard to bread, see Breishit 19:24 re: the story of Sodom, "Ve-Hashem **himtir** al Sedom gofrit va-eish min ha-shamayim". In relation to fire coming from heaven, see Shmot 16:4 re: the manna: "hineni **mamtir** lachem lechem min ha-shamayim".]

When man contemplates Creation, there may appear to be an unbridgeable gap between 'heaven' and 'earth'. Man must overcome that gap, raising his goals from the 'earthly' to the 'heavenly'. In this context, matar - a physical proof that something in heaven can come down to earth - may symbolize man's potential (and purpose) to bridge that gap in the opposite direction, i.e. from 'earthly' to 'heavenly'.

Hence, Biblical matar emerges as more than just a type of water, but more so as a symbol of a potential connection between the heavens and earth, and hence between God and man.

In the special spiritual environment created by the climate of the Land of Israel, as described in Parshat Ekev, matar serves as a vehicle by which Am Yisrael can perfect their relationship with God. Even though other lands may carry a better potential for prosperity, the Land of Israel becomes an 'ideal' environment for the growth of this spiritual environment,

shabbat shalom,  
menachem

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**FOR FURTHER IYUN:**

A. Relate the famous Midrash Chazal of 'ein mayim ela Torah' [- the true water is really the Torah] to the above shiur.

B. Note how the word matar appears in relation to the Flood in Breishit 7:4-5. Based on the above shiur and our shiur on 'perek aleph & bet' (on Parshat Breishit), attempt to explain why.

C. In the psukim by Lot, the Nile and Jordan rivers are compared to the rivers of Gan Eden.

1. Does this indicate that there may be a positive aspect to the supply of water by a River?
2. Why should a river be appropriate for Gan Eden, while rain is more appropriate for Eretz Yisrael?
3. Relate this to Zecharaya 14:7-9 & Yechezkel 47:1-12!

D. Throughout the time period of the Shoftim, and even during the time period of the First Monarchy, many Israelites worshipped the 'Ba'al' - the Canaanite rain god.

1. Relate the nature of this transgression to the above shiur.
2. Relate this to the mishnayot of Masechet Ta'anit, which requires national fast days should rain not fall in sufficient quantities early in the rainy season.
3. Relate to Kings I 17:1 & 18:21 and context of perek 18!

E. In last week's shiur we noted that the 'mitzva' section of the main speech includes 'mitzvot' given originally during Ma'amat Har Sinai, as well as 'tachachot' added in the 40th year by Moshe Rabbeinu.

1. Show textually why from 8:1 till 10:11 must be an 'addition' of the 40th year, while 6:4-7:26 is most likely 'original'! Prove your answer. Use Shmot 23:20-33 in your proof!
2. 10:12-11:21. Would you say that these parshiot are also 'additions' or originals, or possibly a combination. Support your answer, and relate it to the above shiur!

F. The story of chet ha-egel is repeated in chap 9.

1. In what context is this story now being brought down.

Relate to 9:4-6, and especially to 'ki am ksheh oref ata' (9:6).

Relate also to 9:7

2. What other examples of this behavior are cited in this perek?
3. Based on this observation, explain why the story about chet ha-egel is broken up in the middle by psukim 9:22-23, and later by 10:6-9.
4. What is the primary theme of this short 'tachacha'?

G. Read 9:25-29 carefully. Is this simply a review of Moshe's request that God invoke His 'midot ha-rachamim' after the incident of chet ha-egel, or do you find a theme from 'chet ha-meraglim' as well? Support your answer by comparing Shmot chapter 34:1-9 and Bamidbar 14:11-25.

Based on the context of chapter 9, can you explain why?