

Potomac Torah Study Center
Vol. 11 #50, September 20-21, 2024; 17-18 Elul 5784; Ki Tavo

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

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

Almost immediately after I sent my last posting, we learned of the brutal murder of Hersch Polin Goldberg, cousin of very close friends of ours, and several other of our "hostages" (prisoners) that Hamas has been torturing for nearly a year. Baruch Dayan HaEmet. May the names of our victims of terror and hatred, added to the countless Jewish victims of anti-Semitism over the past 3500 years, inspire all of us to dedicate ourselves to more mitzvot. May the IDF operation in Lebanon also bring safety to northern Israel with minimal adverse consequences.

One of the first requirements for our ancestors upon entering the land of Israel is to bring a portion of the first fruits of the seven special crops associated with Israel, put them in a basket, and bring them to a Kohen at the place that God designates (the Mishkan and later the Temple) (26:1-10). When bringing this offering, the farmer recites a short statement of Jewish history, starting with the well known verse about a wandering Aramean, descent into Egypt, and becoming a nation there. The statement continues with our crying out to Hashem, who then redeemed us and gave us this land. Thanking Hashem for His blessings is always a requirement for our people.

Rabbi David Fohrman and his scholars at alephbeta.org observe that when Yaakov left Canaan to go to his uncle's home to find a wife, as he left the country, he vowed that if God protected him and brought him back to his family in peace, he would tithe (give a tenth of whatever he had) to Hashem (Bereshis 28:20-22). Yaakov never returned to his family home in Canaan with his family complete and in peace, so he never redeemed this pledge. Moshe reminds the people and tells them that now that they are united and entering the promised land, it is time for them to redeem Yaakov's pledge. Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander reminds us that unity among Jews is a fundamental goal and responsibility – a requirement for Israel to stay strong and defeat our enemies. Moshe's words are as important today as they were more than 3000 years ago.

As Moshe's narration to B'Nai Yisrael comes closer to a conclusion, he reminds the people again that they have a choice, to follow Hashem's mitzvot and live in the land that He promised to our ancestors, or to disobey and face awful consequences. Before entering and taking over the land, Moshe insists that the people accept a new covenant with God. Moshe splits the people into two segments, one on Mt. Gerizim and the other on Mt. Ebal. Moshe has the tribe of Levi recite twelve forbidden activities that will lead to awful curses, and all the people must recite "Amen" to each of them (27:15-26). As the scholars at alephbeta.org and Rabbi Haim Ovadia observe, the common element in these curses is that they represent sneaky, secretive, destructive sins, some against God but many more against other people.

While this statement of curses is frightening, the real terror comes in 28:15-68, the tochacha with an incredible, detailed listing of horrible consequences of not following Hashem's laws and commandments. Rabbi Ysoscher Katz explains why this tochacha is far more frightening than the one in Sefer Vayikra. The tochacha in Ki Tavo is more than twice as long, the punishments have an element of rage and vindictiveness absent from the earlier tochacha, and this tochacha lacks the uplifting forgiveness that ends the earlier statement of curses. Anyone reading this section will quickly understand why Ki Tavo must be the worst Torah portion that any Bar Mitzvah child could have for what should be a day of celebration.

We reach Ki Tavo only a few weeks before October 7, the anniversary of the cruel attack on our people by the evil of Hamas. The explosion of anti-Semitism all over the world in the past nearly twelve months makes it seem that Israel is isolated in a world of enemies. Rabbi Yakov Nagen reminds us that Israel does, however, have many friends in the world. For example, the Islamic Fatwa Council in Iraq has forbidden any support for Hamas. The United Arab Emirates strongly supports Israel. The Avraham Accords remain solid. When Iran sent thousands of missiles toward Israel a few months into the war, Jordan participated in destroying missiles before they could reach Israel. Egypt stayed silent. Only a small number of Arab countries sided with Iran. Rabbi Nagen reinforces Rabbi Brander's words by stating again that Israel's success comes largely because of unity in Israel. While the world remains dangerous for Jews, there is hope among the darkness.

My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, lived through World War II and served as a chaplain for the U.S. Navy for many years. He saw much evil and anti-Semitism during his life – although the experiences of the past year must have been worse than anything since the Nazi period (when he was a child). Ki Tavo brings a message that he would have endorsed – we Jews must work together, especially in Israel and with respect to what we can do for fellow Jews throughout the world. May our children and grandchildren keep to these goals throughout their lives.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah and Alan

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. Please join me in supporting this wonderful organization, which has increased its scholarly work during and since the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Moshe Aaron ben Leah Beilah (badly wounded in battle in Gaza but slowly recovering), Ariah Ben Sarah, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Yoram Ben Shoshana, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Miriam Bat Leah, Chai Frumel bat Leah, Rena bat Ilsa, Riva Golda bat Leah, Sarah Feige bat Chaya, Sharon bat Sarah, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, and all our fellow Jews in danger in and near Israel. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom

Hannah & Alan

Parshat Ki Tavo: From Wandering to Unified – the Timeless Message of Bikkurim

By Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander * © 5784 (2024)
President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone

Dedicated in memory of Israel's murdered and fallen, the refuah shlayma of the wounded, the return of those being held hostage in Gaza, and the safety of our brave IDF soldiers.

As we get closer to October 7th, the eternal wisdom of the Torah on unity and national resilience resonates with renewed urgency and offers timely guidance for navigating our present challenges.

This timeless wisdom on the importance of unity is beautifully encapsulated in the Bikkurim ceremony, a practice from the era of the Beit Hamikdash. As the rainy winter gave way to the summer harvest, Jewish farmers would celebrate the year's bounty by offering Bikkurim, their first fruits of the *shiv'at haminim* [the seven species](#) to Hashem.

In a festive atmosphere, they would carry their produce (either fresh or dried fruit) to Yerushalayim and ceremonially present them to the Kohanim. At this sacred, joyous moment, the farmer would recite a prayer, one of the few tefillot formally written into the Torah, recalling the history of the Jewish people, tracing back to our earliest ancestors:

Arami Oved Avi, and he went down to Egypt and sojourned there in a small group, and he became there a great, multitudinous, populous nation... [Devarim 26:5](#)

The meaning of the opening phrase, "*Arami Oved Avi*," is ambiguous, lending itself to diverging directions of interpretations.

Some of the traditional commentators consider '*oved*' a verb, such that the phrase means: '*an Aramean wished to destroy my forefather.*' In this interpretation, first appearing in Sifrei Devarim #301 (and adopted by Rashi and the Maharal in his commentary on the Haggadah, the "*Aramean*" refers to Lavan's attempts to stymie the development of the Jewish people already at its inception.

The episode is recalled by Jewish farmers living centuries later in order to celebrate the immortality of the Jewish people. Despite the attempts of all those who have tried to destroy us, from Lavan to Pharaoh and all those who would follow, we give thanks to Hashem for our people's providential continuity, ensured by the stability of living in our own land and being sustained by its bounty.

Yet there is an alternative interpretation, suggested by Ibn Ezra *ad loc.* (and others, that "*oved*" is an adjective meaning wandering or nomadic, thus rendering the opening phrase as "*My forefather]Yaakov[was a wandering Aramean.*"

According to this reading, the backdrop of the farmer's recounting of the servitude in Egypt is not the desire to destroy the Jewish people, but Yaakov's experience of wandering. The instability of Yaakov's home, riddled with family strife among his children, becomes the direct cause for the descent to Egypt, paving the way for the Jewish people's subjugation under Pharaoh's rule.

Going with the Ibn Ezra's reading of the phrase, as the farmer recites these words over the Bikkurim basket, what comes to mind are not external enemies, but rather our own internal familial conflicts. Distrust, breakdowns in communication, resentment towards our fellow Jews – these are the sins which led not only to our original exile to Egypt, but also to the destruction of the second Beit Hamikdash and the exile that followed, which perpetuates today through our continued exile experience.

Recalling these familial conflicts during Bikkurim, which celebrates both the personal and national celebration of the bounty of the land, reminds us of the essential role of unity. It is for this reason that the Mishna [Bikkurim 3:3](#) describes

the leadership and citizens of Jerusalem warmly greeting the Bikkurim pilgrims as an essential part of the mitzvah itself. Hashem has brought us from being “*wandering Arameans*” to become a nation living in the promised land of Israel in order for us to live in harmony, a challenge we still face today.

Especially as we approach the anniversary of October 7, marking a year since the massacre of nearly 1,200 in southern Israel, and the capture of the hostages, the alarming infighting and disunity is disturbing. Our inability to bridge gaps, to see the best in others, and to make space for those with whom we fervently disagree is a threat to our morale and to our national security. We must not forget that unity is one of our foundational goals and responsibilities. We must continually strive towards it! It is the only way we will truly have bounty and blessings in our promised land.
Shabbat Shalom.

* Ohr Torah Stone is a modern Orthodox group of 32 institutions and programs. Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin is the Founding Director, and Rabbi Dr. Brander is President and Rosh HaYeshiva. For more information or to support Ohr Torah Stone, contact ohrtorahstone@otsyny.org or 212-935-8672. Donations to 49 West 45th Street #701, New York, NY 10036.

“A Tragedy We Can Prevent: The Case for Halakhic Pre-Nups”

By Rabbi Dr. Katriel)Kenneth(Brander * © 5784 (2024)
President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone

[ed.: Because of my travels, I did not post Devrei Torah last week for Ki Teitzei. I am reprinting Rabbi Brander’s Dvar Torah for last Shabbat for those who missed reading it.]

Not all marriages can be saved – nor should they be.

While the Torah celebrates the joining of a couple in marriage and all that it represents; the Torah also commands the protection of couples from unloving, unhappy or abusive relationships.

The formal procedure to end a marriage is based on a verse in our parsha, Ki Tetze:

The husband writes and presents a writ of divorce – a get – to his wife...)Deuteronomy 24:1(

The word “גט” – gimmel+tet – are never found together in Tanach, highlighting the fact that sometimes severance is best – when it is no longer in the best interest of the couple to remain together.

3,000 years ago, the idea of a formal get was a novel approach; the first concept in human history to ensure that a divorced woman would remain economically protected and not simply discarded.

But today this tool, created to protect, has been corrupted and turned into a weapon. Thousands of Jewish women around the world have become “**agunot**” – chained to marriages by recalcitrant husbands who hold them hostage by withholding their rightful get.

Sometimes the price he asks for the get is custody of the children, huge sums of money or giving up on joint property. Other times, his motive is punishment, and no amount of concession will change his mind.

This ugly phenomenon of get-refusal creates misery for the aguna and devastates the family.

Get-refusal is nothing less than a chilul Hashem, a desecration of God’s name, and it is inconceivable that such pain be inflicted under the guise of halakha.

You and I can change this.

We can and must insist that every couple get married with a halakhic prenuptial agreement – a document first conceived in the 17th century halakhic work, Nachlas Shiva. *Nachalat shiva Shtarot* 9

A contemporary version, established by the Beit Din of America and Rav Mordechai Willig, with the strong support of Rav Herschel Schacter and the approval of poskim such as Rav Ovadia Yosef and Rav Zalman Nechemia Goldberg, zt”l, and libadel may’chayyim l’chayyim, Rav Asher Weiss and others, has been in use for more than 25 years, during which time tens of thousands of North American couples have signed it without one single case of aguna!

Here in Israel, similar documents have been created, but much work needs to be done to increase awareness of the issue in Israeli society.

By using the links that appear on the screen, you can download the halakhic prenup from the Beit Din of America; an Israeli version of it from Ohr Torah Stone’s Yad La’isha: Monica Dennis Goldberg Legal Aid Center and Hotline for agunot; or a slightly different Israeli version promoted by the Tzohar rabbinical organization.

What better way can a couple demonstrate how much they care for one another, how much they truly love one another, than to promise to never hurt one another?

Just as it is a mitzvah to end an unhappy marriage, let us recommit to ensuring that this sad process includes this important and common-sense step in protecting our daughters, granddaughters and all Jewish women from avoidable agony and suffering.

We have the ability to end this chilul Hashem. Let’s do our part.

Shabbat Shalom

OTS’s “Yad La’isha: Monica Dennis Goldberg Legal Aid Center” is engaged in a public awareness campaign alerting young couples and their parents to the importance of signing a halakhic prenuptial agreement to prevent potential get-abuse. Visit the campaign website)in Hebrew(: www.haheskem.co.il

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Ki Tavo: Get the Merchandise

By Rabbi Label Lam * (2007)

“You will become an object of horror, an example, and an abject lesson among all the nations to which HASHEM will lead you.” (Devarim 28:37)

Let us pause to marvel at the miraculous properties of this prophetic statement. In order to evaluate the power of such a prediction we must first ascertain if it is clearly stated. Is it vague like a fortune cookie? “You will meet a stranger!” Secondly, we must check to see if it is improbable if not downright irrational. Calling for snow sometime in the winter is no big trick. Forecasting attitudes over thousands of years is. Thirdly we need to determine if it came to be. That’s the easiest.

Firstly, the verse could not be more open. It explicitly informs us that we, the Jewish People will be the poster child for hatred and disgust everywhere we go. Secondly, how easy would it be with only future-spec to predict that we would universally despised, even by cultures that we enriched. Who could have reasoned that Germany would turn upon us so viciously after declaring universal tolerance? As for the third point, one would have to have been asleep for two thousand years and still leaning on the snooze button to not recognize the epidemic proportion, and danger of anti-Semitism alive in the world today. The Protestants and Catholics have been fiercely fighting on the British Isles since “the reformation” and

there is no word to describe the hatred they have for each other. The Sunnis and the Shiites are still brutally attacking one another and there is no word to describe that animosity. However, we would be greatly challenged to find a dictionary in the world, in whatever language that does not contain that word, anti-Semitism.

Professor Michael Curtis of Rutgers University writes,

"Everybody has a people they hate; a group you do not like, that are threatening you. But the uniqueness of anti-Semitism lies in the fact that no other people in the world have been charged simultaneously with alienation from society and with cosmopolitanism; with being capitalist exploiters and also revolutionary communists; with having a materialist mentality or being a people of the book. We are accused of being both militant aggressors and cowardly pacifists; adherents to a superstitious religion and agents of modernism. We uphold a rigid law and are also morally decadent. We have a chosen people mentality and an inferior human nature; we are both- arrogant and timid; individualistic and communally adherent; we are guilty of both the crucifixion of Jesus to the Christians and to others we are held to account for inventing Christianity. Everything and its opposite becomes an excuse for anti-Semitism."

In 1923 Lloyd George penned the following: "Of all the extreme fanaticisms that plays-havoc in man's nature, there is none as irrational as anti- Semitism. The Jews cannot vindicate themselves in the eyes of these fanatics. If the Jews are rich they are the victims of ridicule. If they take sides in a war, it is because they wish to gain advantage from the spilling of non-Jewish blood. If they espouse peace, it is because they are scared and anxious by nature or traitors to their country. If the Jew dwells in a foreign land he is persecuted and expelled. If he wishes to return to his own land, he is prevented from doing so."

What's the point of observing these facts? What profit is there in this painful exercise?

An older study partner told me a story he had heard from a grandparent that came here from the "old country." There was a man who bought a goat to get milk. The goat failed to deliver milk. Then a plague came that killed all the goats and his goat died. He cried aloud, "When it comes to giving milk, she's not a goat! When a goat-disease shows up, suddenly she's a goat."

I knew of a Russian fellow whose heart was turned back to Judaism, because even in communist Russia where everyone was equal, he had "Jew" on his papers. He was blocked from many opportunities as a result. He reasoned that if, for being a Jew, he's paying such a mighty price he might as well get the merchandise.

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5767-kisavo/>

**Ki Tavo – The Rosh Yeshiva Responds:
Saying V'Ten Tal U'Matar for a Visitor to Israel from Chutz La'aretz **
by Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah ***

*Hashem will open for you His good treasure the heaven to give rain for your land in its season,
and to bless all the work of your hand; (Devarim 28:12).*

QUESTION – Riverdale, NY

For people traveling to Israel during a time when those in Israel are already saying *v'ten tal u'matar livracha* ("give dew and rain," a wintertime insertion in the Amidah), but we in chutz la'aretz (the diaspora) are not yet saying it, does one keep one's diaspora practice in Israel or adopt the Israel practice for the few days that one is there?

ANSWER

The Mishnah Berurah (MB 117:5) says to keep practices of the place from which you originate, and not say it.

However, for my part, I cannot see being in Israel, where and when they actually need rain and are praying for it, and not identify with the people around you — Jews who are connected to land and its produce — and rather identify with generic chutz la'aretz people, to whom you are not really connected, and whose need for rain is anyway not reflected by the times we do or don't say v'ten tal u'matar. In other words — in Israel the need is real, these are our people, and v'ten tal u'matar is actually synced to when rain is needed. In chutz la'aretz — not so much. It all just follows formal rules. This is the position of the Chida (Birkei Yosef OH 117:5), Rabbi Betzalel Stern (Betzel HaChochma 1:62), and Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (Halichot Shlomo, Tefillah 9:22).

Based on this reasoning, I would say v'ten tal u'matar if I were in Israel during this time.

* Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, Bronx, NY.

** This question is taken from a WhatsApp group in which Rabbi Linzer responds to halakhic questions from rabbis and community members.

<https://library.yct Torah.org/2024/09/ryrkitavo/>

Not Listening to God's Words Directly: Costs and Severe Consequences

By Rabbi Ysoscher Katz *

Shock, horror, and deep sadness: That is the primary reaction most of us will likely have when studying this week's Torah portion or hearing it read in shul.

There is a lot that happens in this week's Torah reading, but a big chunk of it is taken up by what is traditionally referred to as the tochacha, Moshe's recounting of the severe punishments God promises to inflict on the Jewish nation if they do not adhere properly to God's laws and commandments.

It is harsh and relentless.

The tochacha section is 51(!) verses long. And in them we are threatened with every form of death, tragedy, and calamity; terrible things that will happen to ourselves, our possessions, and our families. Impressionistically, these verses read like the words of someone who is filled with rage, spewing round after round in a spiral of curses. They unfold as follows: First we are told that something terrible will happen to us. A few verses later, we are told, "never mind" — what was just mentioned is too tame, and it will actually be much worse than that. And then, even much worse than THAT. — And so on and so forth for several rounds.

This, however, is not the only time a set of harsh verses such as these appears in the Torah. It happens once before in Parashat Bechukotai, the last parasha in Sefer Vayikra. There, too, are we told about the brutal consequences of refusing to submit subserviently to God's will.

It is important to note though: While, generally speaking, the two tochachot — in Bechukotai and in this week's parasha — are similar, they are not exactly comparable. Their essence is the same but the particulars differ significantly in the following three ways.

- The tochacha in Bechukotai is much shorter than the one in this week's parasha. (Significantly so. Bechukotai's tochacha is only 24 verses long, while the one in this week's parasha goes on for more than double.)
- A close comparison shows that Bechukotai's is much milder than ours. The punishments mentioned this week have an element of rage and vindictiveness that one does not sense in the earlier version.

- Finally, and most importantly, the tochacha in Bechukotai ends with an uplifting coda, while in this week's there is none of that.

Almost counterintuitively, in Bechukotai, at the end of the litany of punishments, God concludes with the following comforting words:

"Then will I remember My covenant with Jacob; I will remember also My covenant with Isaac, and also My covenant with Abraham; and I will remember the land ... Yet, even then, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them or spurn them so as to destroy them, annulling My covenant with them: for I Hashem am their God."

This week's version lacks that reassuring conclusion. It ends abruptly: Fifty one verses of bone-chilling threats and ... that is it. When done, the Torah moves on to other matters. Just like that.

Taken together these differences combine to illustrate how this week's Deuteronomical tochacha is a much harsher articulation of those very admonitions in Vayikra.

These differences are not just happenstance. They are there for a reason and carry a powerful and complex lesson, informed by an extremely important distinction between our current book, Sefer Devarim, and the other four books of the Bible.

While we believe that all five books are dvar HaShem, the word of God, there is a difference between Devarim and the other four books.

The first four books are God speaking in God's own voice: God spoke and Moses recorded the words God dictated. However, in Devarim God speaks in Moses' voice. It is still God speaking, but here God dictates verbatim to Moses exactly how to describe his own experience of the preceding forty years: how Moses experienced the events, and how he perceived that which God spoke.

In Bechukotai we therefore encounter the tochacha the way it was actually said, while in this week's Torah portion we are reading about the way Moses heard it.

And that explains the above-mentioned differences.

As we know, quite often, when two entities are in a conversation, there is potential for a significant gap between what the speaker intended and what the listener perceived.

Perhaps that is what we are seeing here. There is a discrepancy between what God actually said and the way it was received by Moshe. What Moses heard was far harsher than what God actually said.

There is, however, something unique here.

Normally when that happens the speaker will try to correct the listener's misunderstandings. In our case, the Speaker accepts them and moreover offers God's imprimatur on Moshe's perception of what was said. In Devarim, God dictates the tochacha in words that belong to Moshe, knowing that what Moshe heard was far harsher than what God had said originally.

This suggests a rather fascinating insight.

Of course we are dependent on prophets and intermediaries to convey God's messages to us, but the dual versions of the tochacha preserved in the Torah make us aware that something happens to God's utterances when filtered through a human's personal perception. They possibly could end up coming across imprecisely, the particulars exaggerated or deflated.

Consequently, whenever possible, we should strive as best we can to encounter the divine word directly, unadulterated by intermediaries, messengers, or perhaps even translators(!). Hearing from a middleman will inevitably cloud the message, to one degree or another.

* Rabbi of the Prospect Heights Shul in Brooklyn, New York; teaching faculty, Ma'ayanot Yeshiva High School for Girls and SAR High School.

<https://library.yct Torah.org/2024/09/kitavo5784/>

Godliness and Fraudliness: Thoughts for Parashat Ki Tavo

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The leader of prayers with a beautiful voice impacted on worshippers because he was able to pray sincerely, to transcend the beauty of his own voice. His chanting inspired the congregation because it lifted them spiritually, it brought them to a

higher dimension beyond the egotism of a good voice. His voice presented the words of prayer; but his prayer emerged not from his voice but from his soul.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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<https://www.jewishideas.org/node/3277>

Israel's Many Friends By Rabbi Dr. Yakov Nagen *

"Together we will be victorious." This slogan, which emerged in Israel in the wake of October 7, printed on signs all over the country, tacked on to the end of ordinary TV advertisements, and stated constantly by government officials, is less ubiquitous today as the war drags on and internal disagreements deepen. But we must still embrace this slogan. It encapsulates a profound truth: our success lies not only in military strength but in the unity of Israeli society. In the face of relentless enemies seeking our destruction, our most potent weapon is cohesion. Victory demands that we build bridges, not barricades, beyond our immediate circles, even beyond the Jewish people.

This war transcends Israel's physical borders, extending into the global arena. That means that we absolutely cannot afford to isolate ourselves, to be *"a people dwelling alone,"* as the wicked prophet Balaam characterized the children of Israel in the Bible. Our path forward must include partnerships with other peoples. The ancient vision of the prophets, one of human fraternity including Jews and other nations, is more relevant than ever. In this era of heightened hatred and division, we are called to forge alliances, not withdraw into the dangerous assumption that the world is uniformly against us. Isolation only strengthens our enemies, who seek to broaden their own coalitions while we retreat.

Identifying our enemies, and also finding allies, is essential. Despite the global level of pervasive evil and rising hostility towards Israel, we must resist the dangerous narrative that *"everyone is against us."* This, after all, is the story Hamas wishes to promote, a portrayal of themselves as leaders of a global religious war of Islam against Judaism.

Countless meetings with non-Jewish allies confirm that this dangerous narrative, one that is fed by Iran's axis of evil through its support of Hamas and by certain parts of the global neo-Marxist left, is simply not true. As the alliance between parts of the global left with these terrorist groups seems more and more shocking and paradoxical, we must remember the

unlikely partnership once formed between Hitler and Stalin. What binds these forces together, then as now, is a shared devotion to totalitarianism and a desire to uproot basic fundamental religious and human values, even while claiming to champion those the very values they trample upon.

This was poignantly illustrated during a deeply emotional gathering in Jerusalem shortly after the war began. A group of African Christian religious leaders had come to express their solidarity with Israel. As Rachel Goldberg-Polin shared the heart-wrenching story of her son Hersh, who had been kidnapped on Oct. 7, the room fell silent. When she finished, I recited verses from Jeremiah, describing Rachel weeping for her children and holding on to the hope for their return, a hope that did not materialize for Hersh who was brutally murdered by Hamas last month. The leaders, moved to tears, promised to continue to stand with Israel. They offered a powerful insight: *"We ask ourselves why there is so much antisemitism from such disparate quarters. At its core, we believe this hatred is directed at God, and the Jewish people, as God's representatives, bear the brunt of it."*

A Muslim fatwa against Hamas

The notion of an inherent conflict between Islam and Judaism is far from reality as many Muslims will attest. For instance, the Islamic Fatwa Council in Iraq issued a religious ruling well before October 7th, explicitly forbidding any support for Hamas, comparing them to ISIS, and condemning them and their crimes as a desecration of Islam. After the horrific attacks on October 7th, this council and many other Islamic groups have denounced Hamas.

Another indisputable fact stands out: the Abraham Accords, the 2020 agreements opening Israeli diplomatic relations with the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan, have endured through nearly a year of the war. When asked about the impact of the war on these historic agreements, Dr. Ali Rashid Al Nuaimi, chairman of the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee of the United Arab Emirates, was unequivocal: *"We want everyone to acknowledge and accept that Israel is there to exist and that the roots of Jews and Christians are not in New York or Paris but here in our region. They are part of our history and they should be part of our future."*

The Abraham Accords and the war with Hamas represent two opposing poles in Israel's relationship with the Muslim world. This contrast calls to mind Israeli peace activist Rabbi Menachem Froman's insight that if religion is part of the problem in the conflict, it must also be part of the solution. Religious identity, though often a source of friction, can also foster connection and brotherhood. Indeed, respect and coexistence have always existed alongside criticism and violence in Islam's relationship with Judaism.

The Quran refers to Jews as *"the People of the Book"* and contains verses praising Israel as a blessed nation. Yet, just as the Bible criticizes some actions of the Israelites, such as their worship of the golden calf, the Quran also includes criticism of Jews. A key question in Islamic-Jewish relations is how scriptures are interpreted. For example, the Quran describes the Jewish people's return to the land of Israel:

We said thereafter unto the Children of Israel, 'Dwell in the land. And when the promise of the Hereafter comes to pass, We shall bring you as a mixed assembly.' (17:104)

The simple meaning of this verse is a promise of ingathering in the end of days. Yet, Hamas distorts this teaching, claiming it to be a prophecy of Israel's destruction.

Religious discourse can either amplify such distortions or promote the true meaning of these texts. It is our responsibility to advocate for the latter. Just as in the second half of the 20th century, there were profound positive developments in relations between Christianity and Judaism, a parallel and complementary process must now develop between Islam and Judaism. This is the mission I've taken up, working to build Jewish-Muslim religious fraternity across the Middle East and beyond.

For Jews, engaging with broader humanity is not only a social and political imperative, it is a spiritual one. I see this as part of my duty to serve God and work towards the vision of redemption. The Jewish people should not be passive

bystanders in this prophetic vision. We must act to bring it to fruition. Central to this mission is a call for global fraternity and shared service of nations to God.

In the local and global arenas, together we will be victorious, for the sake of the Jewish people and for the sake of humanity.

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<https://www.jewishideas.org/node/3278>

Parshas Ki Savo – Know Yourself

By Rabbi Mordechai Rhine *

The farmer of the Torah is a truly blessed man. In addition to the crops that he is most grateful for, he is a person of clarity. When he comes to the Beis HaMikdash with his Bikurim (first fruits) each year, he declares his thanks by expressing his narrative of history. He recalls those who tried to destroy us, and he recalls our humble origins as slaves in Mitzrayim. By recalling those who tried to destroy us he has the clarity to know that there is evil in the world. By recalling our humble origins, he has a better chance of avoiding haughtiness; there is a greater likelihood that when he encounters those who are in need, he will be sensitive to their plight and use his wealth to help them.

One of the areas that the farmer of the Torah has clarity in is regarding what other people say. As part of his statement of thanksgiving, he declares, *"The Mitzriyim made us bad."* The Oznayim LaTorah wonders, *"Wouldn't it be more appropriate to say that the Mitzrim did bad to us?"* He explains that what the farmer was saying is that in order to do bad to us, the Mitzriyim first had a great propaganda campaign to make us bad. Otherwise, they could never have done this strange thing of enslaving us. *"The Mitzriyim made us bad,"* is an expression of the farmer's clarity that whatever propaganda the Mitzriyim said about us in order to justify their evil, is just propaganda and has no relevance to reality and our worthiness.

This style of *"They made us bad,"* was used most noticeably by the Nazis. They scapegoated all the problems on the Jews, blaming them for both capitalism and communism, as well as all the other ills that Germany was suffering from at the time. Then they degenerated to use of derogatory pictures and terms like *"vermin."* Once all that was in place and they had made the Jews *"bad,"* they were able to proceed with their evil.

There is a story of a nine-year-old boy who was with his grandfather in a ghetto during a Nazi roundup. He and his grandfather watched the atrocities of the Nazis as they shot and beat people as they rounded them up onto the trains. With youthful clarity the boy said to his grandfather, *"They are Esav (evil) and we are Yakov (good). I am glad that we are Yakov."*

In our time we once again witness this style of evil people first using propaganda to justify their actions. They hold court cases and violent rallies, which play on the niceness of western man who begins to think, *"If they are so vocal there must be something to their complaints."* Even the most noble of our friends falls into the propaganda trap by saying, *"Oh, yes, Israel has a right to defend itself,"* as if self defense is a novel concept which needs to be explained. The enemy killed and has declared its intense intent to kill more. The clarity of the farmer is refreshing. *"They made us bad."* It is a war between good and evil which has morphed into a propaganda war.

One of our greatest tasks in life is to have personal clarity. That means that regardless of what other people say, and however the winds, moods, values, and hormones of today blow, we can have personal clarity. This applies even in our personal lives, even when we work with people who are kind, and have no personal agenda.

Rabbi Zelig Pliskin recounts in *Gateway to Happiness* a story of a wonderful person who was praised publicly and blushed. His Rebbe noticed that he blushed and said, *"You have not reached your potential of personal awareness. When*

you do, it will not matter personally what they say about you, good or bad. Either you have the qualities, or you don't. It makes no difference what they say."

To reach that place of personal clarity we do need to have mentors and trusted friends. When they assess and advise us, we take good heed. But the statements of those who are not qualified to pass judgment will not steer us off course with their foolishness. We know our worthiness; we strive for kindness, righteousness, and internal greatness.

With best wishes for a wonderful Shabbos!

* Rabbi Mordechai Rhine is a certified mediator and coach with Rabbinic experience of more than 20 years. Based in Maryland, he provides services internationally via Zoom. He is the Director of TEACH613: Building Torah Communities, One family at a Time, and the founder of CARE Mediation, focused on Marriage/ Shalom Bayis and personal coaching. To reach Rabbi Rhine, his websites are www.care-mediation.com and www.teach613.org; his email is RMRhine@gmail.com. **For information or to join any Torah613 classes, contact Rabbi Rhine.**

Ki Savo: Finding Joy in The Day of Judgement

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer © 2021 *

As Moshe nears the end of his final speech to the Jewish people, he instructs them in three different obligations for the day when they will cross the Jordan River and enter the promised land. One is to erect large stones which have the entire Torah written upon them. The second is to construct an altar, bring sacrifices and rejoice before Hashem. The third is to enter another covenant with G-d over Torah and mitzvot, through the acceptance of blessings and curses at the mountains of Eival and Grizim.)Devarim Chapter 27(

The second command, to rejoice before G-d, is readily understood. The Jewish people had spent two hundred and ten years in Egypt, and eighty of those years were under conditions of intense and bitter slavery and oppression. We were miraculously redeemed and told we would be brought to G-d's chosen land and establish our own country. After forty years of wandering in the desert, when the day finally came to enter the promised land, there was a great miracle -- the Jordan River stood straight up, allowing us to cross on dry land. One can only imagine the joy felt by our ancestors as they crossed into the promised land. The day was finally here. The final stage of our redemption from Egyptian bondage was beginning.

Surprisingly, the Sforno)Devarim 27:9(teaches that this was not the joy which required us to celebrate before G-d. It was the third obligation of entering into a covenant with G-d which we were to be celebrating. Why would the focus of our celebration be entering into a covenant, when we had already entered into a covenant with G-d forty years earlier? How could that event overshadow the joy of the moment as we finally entered the promised land guided again by miracles?

Perhaps this Sforno is teaching us a deeper meaning of these three mitzvot. It was specifically as we entered the promised land that we were to renew our covenant with G-d, because our redemption from slavery, all of the miracles in the desert and our success in the promised land, were all a reflection of our covenant with G-d. G-d redeemed us because He chose us to be His nation, and it is only as His nation that we succeed. All three of the obligations which Moshe instructed us are reminding us of this. We erected huge stones with all of Torah upon them as soon as we entered, rejoiced to have a covenant with G-d, and renewed that covenant. This joy of renewing our covenant with G-d was exactly the joy we felt as we entered the promised land guided by miracles. It was the joy of truly living as G-d's nation in G-d's chosen land.

With this understanding, one could ask why Moshe needed to instruct us to rejoice? Wouldn't the joy have been only natural? What greater joy could there be then entering into fulfillment of a pact with Master of the World, to be His nation and live in His chosen land?

Perhaps Moshe was instructing us to stop and reflect on the joy in order that we should recognize the full import of what was happening. We were now beginning the final stage in a committed relationship with G-d Himself. After redeeming us, He cared for us for decades in the desert and was miraculously bringing us into His chosen land. We were renewing not only our commitment to G-d, but also G-d's commitment to us.

This message can help us to better understand the joy of Rosh Hashana. It is a Day of Judgement, when each of us is individually judged for who we are and for who we want to be. Yet, we are commanded to rejoice on this day. For we are commanded to recognize that Hashem is committed to our success. Just as we accepted the obligation to be G-d's nation, so too has G-d accepted to care for us. We are judged because we have to do our part. If we still have to do our part, then our covenant with G-d still stands. With this in mind, we enter Rosh Hashana knowing that G-d is eternally committed to caring for us and to ensuring our success. May we merit this year to recognize Hashem's commitment to us and truly experience the joy of Rosh Hashana.

* Savannah Kollel; Congregation B'nai Brith Jacob, Savannah, GA. Until recently, Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD. Rabbi Singer will become Rosh Kollel next year.

Ki Tavo by Rabbi Herzl Hefter *

]Rabbi Hefter did not send in a Dvar Torah for Ki Tavo. Watch this space for his future Devrei Torah[

* Founder and dean of the Har'el Beit Midrash in Jerusalem. Rabbi Hefter is a graduate of Yeshiva University and was ordained at Yeshivat Har Etzion. For more of his writings, see www.har-el.org. To support the Beit Midrash, as we do, send donations to America Friends of Beit Midrash Har'el, 66 Cherry Lane, Teaneck, NJ 07666.

Parashat Ki Tavo: Exposing Hypocrisy By Rabbi Haim Ovadia *

A dreadful list of curses is part of a momentous event the Israelites were commanded to stage upon entering the land of Canaan. ** The nation is to be divided into two groups of six tribes each, one standing on the slopes of Mount Eval, and the other on Mount Gerizim. The Levites will then face the nation and will read a list of twelve admonitions, clearly corresponding to the number of tribes. Each admonition, to which the whole nation must respond with Amen, starts with the word ארור – A curse shall rest upon him who...

We would expect the list of actions which sanction such punishment to be somewhat similar to the Ten Commandments, but they are not. We would expect them to be all transgressions which carry the death penalty, or of monetary character, but the list is a mixed bag of severe crimes such as idolatry, murder, promiscuity, and distortion of justice, alongside what we would consider minor transgressions such as disrespect to one's parents, trespassing, and deception. The obvious question is whether there is a common thread connecting all these transgressions, and if so, what is it? We would also like to know what is the purpose of this awe-inspiring event and which specific fear was the list meant to strike in the hearts of the listeners. I believe that the answer can be found in the word בסתר – in hiding – which appears in the opening and closing verses of the list.

This word also explains the purpose of that historic assembly. Human societies rely on either trust or fear. A totalitarian regime can stay in control only by measure of the fear it can instill in the hearts of its subjects, and as history has shown, one cannot completely subdue the human spirit. The rebellion of independent thinkers or believers against a regime is not

always with positive results, as we have learned from the experience of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, and from the failed attempt of secular Egyptian leaders to oppress Muslim clerics, but there were many others with positive results, such as the nonviolent protests of Gandhi and the Civil Rights movement.

Contrary to a fear-based society, where everyone is a potential enemy or spy, a trust-based society functions with an air of reciprocity and support. But there are no perfect societies, and there will always be those who take advantage of the system, the free-loaders and the deceivers, like those shameless scoundrels who falsely reported their spouse's death after 9/11. The Torah offers a balance between fear and trust. Trust is achieved through the extensive social system of the Torah and its insistence on mutual help and loving kindness, while fear is substituted by reverence of the omniscient God, and fortified by curses and not by clear punitive measures.

Standing on the two mountains, the two groups face each other as well as the Levites in the center. On one hand, they are all in the same space, yet on the other, there is a potential sharp divide between them. The event serves as symbolic reminder that, lacking reciprocity and trust, the nation will find itself fragmented. The Levites declare, one by one, a list of transgressions united by their covert nature, admonishing people against deceiving others by pretending to be who they are not. Verse 14 is not about idolatry, but rather about hypocrisy; cursed is one who pretends to believe in God and practice Judaism, while in hiding practices paganism. The next verse does not use the term כבוד – respect, but rather מקלה – he who makes light. This is the person who pretends to respect his parents, but in his heart makes light of them. He might convey that air of disrespect to his children, thus breaking a chain of tradition and causing greater damage than if he would openly express his opinion and have an informed debate.

Trespassing? It refers to one who slowly moves his fence, inch by inch, into his neighbor's territory. His actions cannot be tracked, and he upsets the trust among neighbors. Misleading a blind person is both a prohibition and a metaphor to giving advice to a non-expert. The expert often feigns innocence and claims he was genuinely trying to help. Distorting justice for the weaker layers of society is also done covertly, sometimes even in the name of justice, while those affected have no one to speak for them. The sexual transgressions mentioned here are not the full list of Leviticus, because this list singles out people who lead a double life, not occasional sinners.

Verse 24 speaks of one who secretly initiates a move which will cause damage to another person, including badmouthing that person. No one can trace the action back to him, while he pretends to care and mourn for his suffering "friend." It is followed by the admonition against bribes. It is surprising that the Torah mentions only one who takes a bribe in exchange for falsely sentencing someone to death, and in light of what was said here, we have to understand it differently: taking a bribe is done in secrecy, but it eventually will lead to disastrous, visible results. Not every bribe will lead to death, but the cumulative corruption of the judicial system, prompted by internal hidden hypocrisy, would inevitably cause death and destruction.

The list concludes with a call on people to establish the words of the Torah. This means that we have to internalize the values of the Torah and make them an integral element of our life, avoiding hypocrisy and corruption at all costs, and championing honesty and transparency.

** The members of Levi provide an initial list)27:15-26(to which the people must say Amen. The much more graphic and extensive list of curses is in the tochecha)ch. 28(.

Shabbat Shalom.

* Torah VeAhava. Until recently, Rabbi, Beth Sholom Sephardic Minyan)Potomac, MD(. Faculty member, AJRCA non-denominational rabbinical school(. **Many of Rabbi Ovadia's Devrei Torah are now available on Sefaria:** <https://www.sefaria.org/profile/haim-ovadia?tab=sheets> . The Sefaria articles usually include Hebrew text, which I must delete because of issues changing software formats.

Devrei Torah from Rabbi Ovadia this year come from an unpublished draft of his forthcoming book on Tanach, which Rabbi Ovadia has generously shared with our readers. Rabbi Ovadia reserves all copyright protections for this material.

Ki Tavo: Creating Our Role in Jewish History

By Rabbi Moshe Rube *

I am the second born child of my parents just missing the privilege of being a firstborn, known as the “bechor” in Hebrew. The bechor has certain privileges, like a double inheritance portion in strict Biblical law, and is redeemed by the parents in a special ceremony at the ripe old age of 30 days. However the concept of “bechor” also includes fruit.

Our Torah portion this week details the “bechor” fruits, or the first fruits of the season, called the “bichurim.” The farmer brings the first fruits to Jerusalem and recites a four sentence prayer of Jewish history expressing his gratitude for all that God has done to bring him and his family to Israel and allow him to plant trees. He then gives the basket of fruit to the priests, and the fruit metamorphosises into a symbol of Jewish history and a culmination of all which has happened before.

Contemplating the fruits of our labour can fill us with a sense of wonder that we are part of something bigger. Some grand plan which we play a part in. So much has happened in our lives to bring us to this moment. This spirit of contemplation becomes especially important as we inch closer to Rosh Hashanah. It behoves us to consider questions during the New Year such as what has happened over this past year? How have events led us to this moment? Is it time to change course? What type of fruits do we want to produce this year?

We all have bichurim of a sort that we want to give to the world. Rosh Hashanah is a perfect time to contemplate our place in the wider story of Jewish history and the world.

* Senior Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation, Remuera)Auckland(, New Zealand. Formerly Rabbi, Congregation Kneseth Israel)Birmingham, AL(.

Rav Kook Torah Ki Tavo: A Different Kind of Viduy

Viduy Ma'aser

There is an unusual mitzvah performed twice every seven years. It is called Viduy Ma'aser — literally, “*Tithing Confession*.” But this is not a confession in the usual sense. The individual ascends to Jerusalem and publicly declares that he has fulfilled all his obligations regarding terumot and ma'aserot — the tithes of agricultural produce that are distributed to kohanim, Levites, and the poor.

We do not find a viduy of this nature for any other mitzvah, where we formally announce that we have discharged our obligation. What is the purpose of this unusual declaration? And why is it performed so infrequently?

Appreciating Our Achievements

If we seek to continually improve ourselves, we need to be aware of the full extent of our moral and spiritual responsibilities, whether this involves helping others, refining our character traits, or performing acts of holiness. Even when we are dedicated to pursuing the path of goodness, we will still be far from completely fulfilling our obligations. This

is the attitude of the truly righteous. They see themselves as lacking in good deeds and thoughtfulness. This critical self-image prevents them from becoming pretentious and arrogant, and graces them with a sincere modesty.

However, we must be careful not to be overly self-critical. We should not let this attitude deny us a sense of joy and satisfaction in our accomplishments. For this reason, the Torah teaches that we should rejoice in our good deeds. In the proper measure, this contentment bolsters our resolve to serve God, to perform mitzvot and acts of kindness. It is proper to feel a measure of satisfaction and well-being, and not always regard our actions as flawed and inadequate when we have acted correctly.

In short: we need set times for regular viduy, to admit our mistakes and faults, so that we may refine our character traits and improve our actions. But we also need set times for a positive viduy, to express our awareness that we have discharged our obligations and attained some of our spiritual goals.

This positive declaration, however, should be less frequent than our periodic soul-searching. We must avoid the sense of self-satisfaction that can lead to smugness and complacency. Thus Viduy Ma'aser is performed only twice in seven years.

Balanced Self-Image

Why did the Torah establish this positive viduy specifically with regard to terumot and ma'aserot? The beauty of tithing is that it encompasses all aspects of the Torah's obligations. It contains both positive and negative commands: the obligation to distribute ma'aserot, as well as the prohibition not to eat untithed produce. It involves our responsibilities toward others)gifts to the Levites and the poor(as well as responsibilities toward God)the special holiness of terumah(. And it reflects both obligations of the individual)the farmer's obligation to tithe(and society as a whole)our support of the kohanim and their spiritual service for the nation(.

Thus, tithing encompasses all of the foundations of our ethical responsibilities. Viduy Ma'aser teaches us that we should not judge ourselves too harshly, but strive for a balanced self-image, with the ability to derive satisfaction from our accomplishments. It allows us to see ourselves more clearly, and it gives us the strength to overcome negative traits and habits. While we are disappointed in our failings, we also take pride in our triumphs.

Despite the importance of this declaration, the Torah sought to impress a measure of modesty. Unlike the loud declaration of Bikkurim)first-fruits(, Viduy Ma'aser is recited quietly)Sotah 32b(. Furthermore, we demonstrate our reticence at praising ourselves by delaying the viduy until the very last moment – the end of the last day of the Passover holiday.

)Adapted from *Ein Eyah* vol. II, p. 405.(

https://www.ravkooktorah.org/KI_TAVO_67.htm

Ki Tavo: A Nation of Storytellers (5774, 5779, 5781)

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

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

Gardner's argument is that what makes a leader is the ability to tell a particular kind of story – one that explains ourselves to ourselves and gives power and resonance to a collective vision. So Churchill told the story of Britain's indomitable courage in the fight for freedom. Gandhi spoke about the dignity of India and non-violent protest. Margaret Thatcher talked

about the importance of the individual against an ever-encroaching State. Martin Luther King Jr. told of how a great nation is colour-blind. Stories give the group a shared identity and sense of purpose.

Philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre has also emphasised the importance of narrative to the moral life. “*Man,*” he writes, “*is in his actions and practice, as well as in his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal.*”^[2] It is through narratives that we begin to learn who we are and how we are called on to behave. “*Deprive children of stories and you leave them unscripted, anxious stutterers in their actions as in their words.*”^[3] To know who we are is, in large part, to understand the story or stories of which we are a part.

The great questions – “*Who are we?*” “*Why are we here?*” “*What is our task?*” – are best answered by telling a story. As Barbara Hardy put it: “*We dream in narrative, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticise, construct, gossip, learn, hate and love by narrative.*”^[4] This is fundamental to understanding why Torah is the kind of book it is: not a theological treatise or a metaphysical system but a series of interlinked stories extended over time, from Abraham and Sarah’s journey from Mesopotamia to Moses’ and the Israelites’ wanderings in the desert. Judaism is less about truth as system than about truth as story. And we are part of that story. That is what it is to be a Jew.

A large part of what Moses is doing in the book of Devarim is retelling that story to the next generation, reminding them of what God had done for their parents and of some of the mistakes their parents had made. Moses, as well as being the great liberator, is the supreme storyteller. Yet what he does in parshat Ki Tavo extends way beyond this.

He tells the people that when they enter, conquer and settle the land, they must bring the first ripened fruits to the central Sanctuary, the Temple, as a way of giving thanks to God. A Mishnah in Bikkurim^[5] describes the joyous scene as people converged on Jerusalem from across the country, bringing their first-fruits to the accompaniment of music and celebration. Merely bringing the fruits, though, was not enough. Each person had to make a declaration. That declaration became one of the best known passages in the Torah because, though it was originally said on Shavuot, the festival of first-fruits, in post-biblical times it became a central element of the Haggadah on Seder night:

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

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

This is a remarkable development. Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi tells us that “*only in Israel and nowhere else is the injunction to remember felt as a religious imperative to an entire people.*”^[6] Time and again throughout Devarim comes the command to remember: “*Remember that you were a slave in Egypt.*”)Deut. 5:15; 15:15; 16:12; 24:18; 24:22(;
“*Remember what Amalek did to you.*”)Deut. 25:17(“*Remember what God did to Miriam.*”)Deut. 24:9(“*Remember the days of old; consider the generations long past. Ask your father and he will tell you, your elders, and they will explain to you.*”)Deut. 32:7(

The vidui bikkurim, though, is more than this. It is, compressed into the shortest possible space, the entire history of the nation in summary form. In a few short sentences we have here “*the patriarchal origins in Mesopotamia, the emergence of the Hebrew nation in the midst of history rather than in mythic prehistory, slavery in Egypt and liberation therefrom, the climactic acquisition of the land of Israel, and throughout – the acknowledgement of God as lord of history.*”^[7]

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

There is a fundamental difference between history and memory. History is “*his story*,”¹⁸ an account of events that happened sometime else to someone else. Memory is “*my story*.” It is the past internalised and made part of my identity. That is what the Mishnah in Pesachim means when it says, “*Each person must see themselves as if they)personally(escaped Egypt.*”)Mishnah Pesachim 10:5(

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

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

You can still see the power of this idea today. As I once wrote,¹⁹ if you visit the Presidential memorials in Washington, you will see that each carries an inscription taken from their words: Jefferson’s ‘*We hold these truths to be self-evident . . .*’, Roosevelt’s ‘*The only thing we have to fear, is fear itself*,’ Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address and his second Inaugural, ‘*With malice toward none; with charity for all . . .*’ Each memorial tells a story.

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

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

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

England does not have the same kind of national narrative because it is based not on covenant but on hierarchy and tradition. England, writes Roger Scruton, “*was not a nation or a creed or a language or a state but a home. Things at home don’t need an explanation. They are there because they are there.*”¹⁰ England, historically, was a class-based society in which there were ruling elites who governed on behalf of the nation as a whole. America, founded by Puritans who saw themselves as a new Israel bound by covenant, was not a society of rulers and ruled, but rather one of collective responsibility. Hence the phrase, central to American politics but never used in English politics: “*We, the people*.”¹¹

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

FOOTNOTES:

- [1] Howard Gardner in collaboration with Emma Laskin, *Leading Minds: An Anatomy of Leadership*, New York, Basic Books, 2011.
- [2] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, University of Notre Dame Press, 1981.
- [3] Ibid.
- [4] Barbara Hardy, "An Approach Through Narrative," *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 2)Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1968(, 5.
- [5] *Mishnah Bikkurim* 3:3.
- [6] Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory*, Schocken, 1989, 9.
- [7] *Ibid.*, 12.
- [8] This is a simple reminder, not an etymology. Historia is a Greek word meaning inquiry. The same word comes to mean, in Latin, a narrative of past events.
- [9] Jonathan Sacks, *The Home We Build Together: Recreating Society*)London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2009(.
- [10] Roger Scruton, *England, an Elegy*, Continuum, 2006, 16.
- [11] See "We, the People", the *Covenant & Conversation* essay on Behar-Bechukotai, for further discussion on the power of this phrase.

AROUND THE SHABBAT TABLE

- Why do you think stories can be so effective in teaching and passing on identity to future generations?
- Why is this an important part of the role of a teacher and leader?
- Who do you know in your life who is a great storyteller? What kind of things have you learned from their stories?

<https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/ki-tavo/a-nation-of-storytellers/>

Ki Tavo: Attitude of Gratitude

By Yehoshua B. Gordon, z"l * © Chabad 2024

Harvesting Appreciation

The Torah portion of Ki Tavo opens with the beautiful mitzvah of bikkurim, the commandment for all farmers to bring the first fruits of their crops to the Holy Temple. This mitzvah applies only to produce grown in the Land of Israel and only to the seven species for which the Holy Land is praised: wheat, barley, dates, figs, grapes, pomegranates, and olives. Each year, when the first fruits of these species appeared, the farmer would verbally designate them as bikkurim and tie a marker around them for later identification. These fruits were then placed in a basket and brought to the Temple in Jerusalem.)Until the Temple was built, the bikkurim were brought to the Tabernacle(.

When the farmers arrived in Jerusalem, a variety of baskets could be seen: The simple farmers used plain, modest baskets, while the more prosperous brought their fruits in elegant silver baskets. Once in the Temple, the farmer would present the first fruits to a Kohen — one of the priests. Together, they would perform a ceremony in which both the farmer and the Kohen held the basket and waved it in six directions. Then the farmer offered a thanksgiving prayer to G d.

At its core, the mitzvah of bikkurim is all about gratitude, thanking G d for bringing us to the Holy Land, the Land promised to our forefathers.

In the bikkurim ceremony, it is as if the Jew says to G d, *“I know I often turn to You for help, but first and foremost, I want to thank you.”* In this annual declaration, we acknowledge that we are home, safe and secure in our Land, though it wasn’t always this way. We reminisce: Laban the Aramean tried to destroy our forefather Jacob, and he was forced to go down to Egypt with his small family.¹ Despite arriving at Laban’s house alone and with nothing more than his walking stick, Jacob’s family blossomed in Egypt and developed into a *“great, mighty, and numerous nation.”*² And now, standing in the Holy Temple with our first fruits, we say: thank you!

The idea of showing appreciation isn’t exclusive to bikkurim. Hakarat hatov — showing appreciation for the good that has been done for us — is a cornerstone of Jewish values.

In fact, it’s how we begin each day. The very first thing a Jew does in the morning — even before getting out of bed — is recite Modeh Ani, a prayer of thanksgiving:

“Modeh ani — I offer thanks to You, living and eternal King, for You have mercifully restored my soul within me; Your faithfulness is great.”

In essence, we’re thanking G d for the gift of waking up.

My father, Rabbi Sholom B. Gordon, of blessed memory, was very meticulous about reading the obituaries each morning. He used to say, *“I wake up, look in the paper, and scan the obituaries. If I’m not there, I’m having a good day!”*

Be Happy

After harvesting your produce and sharing it with the less fortunate, G d says, *“Then, you shall rejoice with all the good that the L-rd, your G d, has granted you and your household — you, the Levite, and the stranger who is among you.”*³

Be happy. G d was good to you, and you, in turn, were good to others. You were joyful, and you brought joy to others. Everyone should be happy, and everyone should celebrate.

This is also why the optimal time to bring bikkurim is between Shavuot and Sukkot — the harvest season — when the farmer was making money and his joy was at its peak.⁴

Tithe, and Be Blessed

In addition to the bikkurim offering, Jewish farmers were required to separate several different tithes from their produce over a three-year cycle. These were distributed to the Priests, the Levites, and the poor. One of these — the second tithe — was to be enjoyed by its owners in Jerusalem. My father, of blessed memory, used to say that in Chassidic terms, the second tithe experience is like going to Jerusalem and having a farbrengen — you take wine and good food, gather your friends and family, sit down, say lechaim, and talk about spirituality.

At the end of each three-year cycle, upon arriving in Jerusalem for Passover, each farmer would declare that he had fulfilled all his tithing duties and then beseech G d to bless His people and the Land:

*"Look down from Your holy dwelling, from the heavens, and bless Your people Israel and the ground which You have given to us, as You swore to our forefathers: a land flowing with milk and honey."*⁵

The Hebrew word used for "look down" is hashkifah. There are several Hebrew words for "to look," but hashkifah typically denotes a look of severity or judgment.

So why does the farmer's declaration include the harsh hashkifah when asking for blessings?

We say to G d, *"We have given tzedakah, we have fulfilled our charity obligations meticulously, we followed every rule. Therefore, please bless us in the merit of charity, transforming even the negative into good."*

Sometimes, the opposite of blessings come our way. This parshah contains the admonitions — a section of harsh rebuke that includes a lengthy description of all the curses and suffering that will befall the Jewish People when we neglect the mitzvot.

Giving charity to the poor and, more broadly, fulfilling all of our tithing obligations, triggers G d's attribute of mercy rather than His attribute of justice. He prefers to bless rather than punish and always looks for ways to do so. In the merit of our charity, we ask: G d, please look down — hashkifah — and bless the Land You have given us. Bless it to continue flowing with milk and honey, bless the economy, and bless every Jew.

Serving G d with Joy

When reading the words of the Rebuke, we must pay special attention to one particular part:

*"All these curses will befall you ... because you did not serve the L-rd, your G d, with happiness and with gladness of heart, when you had an abundance of everything."*⁶

You had everything, and you served G d, but when you did so, you were miserable.

Of course, we all face challenges in our lives, but we also experience so much goodness. We need to view the proverbial glass as half full rather than half empty and serve G d with joy and gladness of heart, and not, G d forbid, the opposite.

On a lighter note, this fellow once said, *"They told me, 'Cheer up; things could be worse.' So I cheered up, and sure enough, things got worse!"*

Hidden Blessings

The Rebbe shares a beautiful story in Hayom Yom⁷ about Rabbi DovBer, the second Chabad Rebbe, also known as the Mittlerer Rebbe. One year, his father, Rabbi Shneur Zalman, founder of Chabad, known as the Alter Rebbe, who was the designated Torah reader in his synagogue in Lyozna, was out of town during the reading of the portion of Ki Tavo, so a substitute reader took his place.

Rabbi DovBer, still a young boy of 10 or 11 at the time, heard the section of the curses and became ill. In fact, he was so sick that a few weeks later, when Yom Kippur came around, he didn't have the strength to fast as he normally would.

The chassidim asked the young DovBer, *"You hear this portion every year and are fine. Why did you suddenly become sick from hearing it?"*

Rabbi DovBer explained: *"When my father reads, there are no curses. I hear only blessings!"*

These verses, which appear as curses on the surface, have a deeper meaning; on that level, they are blessings. When the Alter Rebbe read them, his son would hear those blessings.

From our human perspective, they appear to be curses, but from G d's perspective, which we cannot see, even curses can be blessings.]emphasis added[

On its surface, however, the Rebuke predicts difficult times and events that will befall the Jewish people, which, unfortunately, we have seen fulfilled many times. In recent times, we witnessed the horrors of the Holocaust and the atrocities of Islamic terrorism, may G d avenge all of the innocent Jewish blood that has been spilled throughout the ages.

The Big Picture

Describing the era of Moshiach, the Prophet Isaiah promises, *"The L-rd G d shall wipe the tears off every face ..."*⁸

The Hebrew word for tears is *dimah*, which more broadly can denote crying, sadness, or tragedy. Rabbi Isaac Luria, the 16th century Kabbalist known as the Arizal, noted that the numeric value of the word *dimah* is the same as the word *moed*, which means *"festival"* and more broadly can denote joy, happiness, or celebration.

According to this teaching, every sad thing is really a happy thing. But it sure doesn't feel that way! If sadness is really happiness, why does it feel so sad?

Let's take a look at the numeric values. The word *dimah* equals 119, and *moed* equals 120. So why do we say that they have equal value? The answer lies in the gematria rule of *"im hakolel,"* which means that the word itself adds a value of 1. Using this method, the gematria of *dimah* plus the value of the word itself equals *moed*.

That sounds intriguing. But what is really happening here? Are tears truly transformed into festivals simply because of a special method of gematria?

The Rebbe explains that in life, we must recognize that whatever we're going through is just one tiny part of nearly 6,000 years of creation. There's the situation we find ourselves in, and then there's the big picture. *Im hakolel* represents the big picture.⁹

Tears)*dimah*(equals 119, but when you consider the big picture, you reach 120, *moed* — a festival. When you view your experience from G d's perspective, as part of the Master Plan, even curses can be seen as blessings.

Ignoring the big picture is like watching one minute of a 2-hour film and saying, *"I don't get it."* How could you? There's almost two hours of scenes you haven't seen!

What we see in life is one tiny part of the film. Thousands of years preceding it and many years will follow. We see one small frame, and yet we want to understand everything.

Remember *im hakolel*, says the Rebbe. To us, something may look like a tragedy, but to G d, it's a celebration. And that requires the highest level of faith and the deepest trust in Him.

The End of The Story

After the people heard the curses in the Rebuke, they became frightened and doubted their ability to survive such suffering. Moses, ever the loving shepherd, reassured them:

*"Yet until this day, the L-rd has not given you a heart to know, eyes to see, and ears to hear."*¹⁰
*As Rashi explains*¹¹, *only now do you have the ability to recognize G d's kindness over all these years, and to therefore cleave to Him.*

Moses continued, *"I led you through the desert for forty years ... No one can fathom neither the depths of his teacher's mind nor the wisdom of his studies before forty years ..."*

*"From now on [since today marks forty years for the people of Israel],"*¹² said Moses, *you will begin to appreciate and understand everything I have taught you. Sometimes, you need to see the entire story, the entire picture, to understand what's going on. You are now at the end of the story.*

Forty years have passed since the Jewish People received the Torah, and they can now finally appreciate the greatness of G d, the greatness of the Torah, and the greatness of Moses and his teachings. After forty years, you should be able to see the big picture. You should be able to see the circumstances in your life im hakolel.

The Rebbe referenced this idea in 1990-91 when Chassidim celebrated forty years of his leadership. *"It has been forty years since the passing of the Previous Rebbe,"* the Rebbe said affectionately. *"We are entering a new era. We can now fully appreciate his teachings and see the big picture that he was trying to show us — the vision of the arrival of Moshiach."*¹³

The Rebbe encouraged us to look around and see the great miracles taking place — the fall of the Berlin Wall, the end of the Soviet Union and the fall of Communism, and the swift resolution of the Gulf War — these are Messianic events, proclaimed the Rebbe! The world has already begun to change, and the transformation can be seen.

Having passed the three-quarter mark of the sixth millennium, the year 5750)corresponding to 1990(, we have now transitioned to the Messianic era. *"The time of your redemption has arrived,"* declared the Rebbe.

We have seen the curses in the Rebuke too many times in our history. It's time we see the blessings. May G d avenge the blood of all those murdered in the Holocaust, and more recently by Islamic terrorists, and may He grant us tremendous blessings, including the ultimate blessing — the arrival of our righteous Moshiach who will usher in the Ultimate Redemption and an end to all suffering and tragedy. May it happen speedily in our days. Amen.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Deuteronomy 26:5.
2. Deuteronomy 26:5.
3. Deuteronomy 26:11.
4. Although the bikkurim could be brought at any point from Shavuot through Chanukah, the farmer could only make the prescribed declaration during the harvest season, between Shavuot and Sukkot.
5. Deuteronomy 26:15.
6. Deuteronomy 28:45-47.
7. Hayom Yom entry for 17 Elul.
8. Isaiah 25:8.
9. Talk of 20 Av, 5742)1982.(
10. Deuteronomy 29:3.

11. Commentary to Deuteronomy 29:3.

12. Commentary to Deuteronomy 29:4.

13. Talk of the eve of 10 Shevat, 5750)1990(.

* Rabbi Yehoshua Gordon directed Chabad of the Valley in Tarzana, CA until his passing in 2016. Adapted by Rabbi Mottel Friedman from classes and sermons that Rabbi Gordon presented in Encino, CA and broadcast on Chabad.org. "Life Lessons from the Parshah" is a project of the Rabbi Joshua B. Gordon Living Legacy Fund, benefiting the 32 centers of Chabad of the Valley, published by Chabad of the Valley and Chabad.org.

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/6579275/jewish/Attitude-of-Gratitude.htm

Ki Tavo: Bolstering the Family

by Rabbi Moshe Wisniefsky *

[Note: This Shabbos, "Chai Elul," the 18th of Elul, marks the birth of the "two great luminaries," Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov and Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, founders, respectively, of the general Chasidic movement and of the Chabad movement.]

Fzamily Bonds

Cursed be he who degrades his father or mother!" And all the people will answer, "Amen!")Deut. 27:16(

The family is the foundation of society. A family is not a group of individuals who just happen to be living under the same roof or are bound together by some nebulous social conventions.

Rather, the genetic ties that bind the family entwine them with a deep spiritual and emotional bond. Thus, although spouses, parents, and children should of course be taught)and continuously educate themselves(how to relate to each other and to care for each other in better ways, their essential mutual bond and love enables them to intuitively sense each other's needs and devotedly fulfill them far better than any substitute.

— from *Daily Wisdom 3*

May G-d grant resounding victory and peace in the Holy Land.

Gut Shabbos,

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
Kehot Publication Society

* A Chasidic insight by the Rebbe on parshat Ma'sei, selected from our *Daily Wisdom*, by Rabbi Moshe Wisniefsky.

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Volume 30, Issue 49

Shabbat Parashat KiTavo

5784 B"H

Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

We Are What We Remember

One reason religion has survived in the modern world despite four centuries of secularisation is that it answers the three questions every reflective human being will ask at some time in his or her life: Who am I? Why am I here? How then shall I live?

These cannot be answered by the four great institutions of the modern West: science, technology, the market economy and the liberal democratic state. Science tells us how but not why. Technology gives us power but cannot tell us how to use that power. The market gives us choices but does not tell us which choices to make. The liberal democratic state as a matter of principle holds back from endorsing any particular way of life. The result is that contemporary culture sets before us an almost infinite range of possibilities, but does not tell us who we are, why we are here, and how we should live.

Yet these are fundamental questions. Moses' first question to God in their first encounter at the burning bush was "Who am I?" The plain sense of the verse is that it was a rhetorical question: Who am I to undertake the extraordinary task of leading an entire people to freedom? But beneath the plain sense was a genuine question of identity. Moses had been brought up by an Egyptian princess, the daughter of Pharaoh. When he rescued Jethro's daughters from the local Midianite shepherds, they went back and told their father, "An Egyptian man delivered us." Moses looked and spoke like an Egyptian.

He then married Zipporah, one of Jethro's daughters, and spent decades as a Midianite shepherd. The chronology is not entirely clear but since he was a relatively young man when he went to Midian and was eighty years old when he started leading the Israelites, he spent most of his adult life with his Midianite father-in-law, tending his sheep. So when he asked God, "Who am I?" beneath the surface there was a real question. Am I an Egyptian, a Midianite, or a Jew?

By upbringing he was an Egyptian, by experience he was a Midianite. Yet what proved decisive was his ancestry. He was a descendant of Abraham, the child of Amram and Yocheved. When he asked God his second question, "Who are you?" God first told him, "I will be what I will be." But then he gave him a second answer: Say to the Israelites, 'The Lord, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you. This is My name forever, the name you shall call Me from generation to generation.

Here too there is a double sense. On the surface God was telling Moses what to tell the Israelites when they asked, "Who sent you to us?" But at a deeper level the Torah is telling us about the nature of identity. The answer to the question, "Who am I?" is not simply a matter of where I was born, where I spent my childhood or my adult life or of which country I am a citizen. Nor is it answered in terms of what I do for a living, or what are my interests and passions. These things are about where I am and what I am but not who I am.

God's answer – I am the God of your fathers – suggests some fundamental propositions. First, identity runs through genealogy. It is a matter of who my parents were, who their parents were and so on. This is not always true. There are adopted children. There are children who make a conscious break from their parents. But for most of us, identity lies in uncovering the story of our ancestors, which, in the case of Jews, given the unparalleled dislocations of Jewish life, is almost always a tale of journeys, courage, suffering or escapes from suffering, and sheer endurance.

Second, the genealogy itself tells a story. Immediately after telling Moses to tell the people he had been sent by the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, God continued:

Go, assemble the elders of Israel and say to them, 'The Lord, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—appeared to me and said: I have watched over you and have seen what has been done to you in Egypt. And I have promised to bring you up out of your misery in Egypt into the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites—a land flowing with milk and honey. Ex. 3:16-17

It was not simply that God was the God of their ancestors. He was also the God who made certain promises: that He would bring them from slavery to freedom, from exile to the Promised Land. The Israelites were part of a narrative extended over time. They were part of an unfinished story, and God was about to write the next chapter.

What is more, when God told Moses that He was the God of the Israelites' ancestors, He added, "This is My eternal name, this is how I am to be recalled [zichri] from generation to generation." God was here saying that He is beyond time – "This is My eternal name" – but when it comes to human understanding, He lives within time, "from generation to generation." The way He does this is through the handing on of memory: "This is how I am to be recalled." Identity is not just a matter of who my parents were. It is also a matter of what they remembered and handed on to me. Personal identity is shaped by individual memory. Group identity is formed by collective memory.[1]

All of this is by way of prelude to a remarkable law in today's parsha. It tells us that first-fruits were to be taken to "the place God chooses," i.e. Jerusalem. They were to be handed to the priest, and each was to make the following declaration: "My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down into Egypt with a few people and lived there and became a great, powerful and populous nation. The Egyptians mistreated us and made us suffer, subjecting us to harsh labour. Then we cried out to the Lord, the God of our ancestors, and the Lord heard our voice and saw our suffering, our harsh labour and our distress. The Lord then brought us out of Egypt with a strong hand and an outstretched arm, with great fearsomeness and with signs and wonders. He brought us to this place and gave us this land flowing with milk and honey. I am now bringing the first-fruits of

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the soil that You, Lord, have given me.”
Deut. 26:5-10

We know this passage because, at least since Second Temple times it has been a central part of the Haggadah, the story we tell at the Seder table. But note that it was originally to be said on bringing first-fruits, which was not on Pesach. Usually it was done on Shavuot.

What makes this law remarkable is this: We would expect, when celebrating the soil and its produce, to speak of the God of nature. But this text is not about nature. It is about history. It is about a distant ancestor, a “wandering Aramean”, It is the story of our ancestors. It is a narrative explaining why I am here, and why the people to whom I belong is what it is and where it is. There was nothing remotely like this in the ancient world, and there is nothing quite like it today. As Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi said in his classic book *Zachor*, [2] Jews were the first people to see God in history, the first to see an overarching meaning in history, and the first to make memory a religious duty.

That is why Jewish identity has proven to be the most tenacious the world has ever known: the only identity ever sustained by a minority dispersed throughout the world for two thousand years, one that eventually led Jews back to the land and state of Israel, turning Hebrew, the language of the Bible, into a living speech again after a lapse of many centuries in which it was used only for poetry and prayer. We are what we remember, and the first-fruits declaration was a way of ensuring that Jews would never forget.

In the past few years, a spate of books has appeared in the United States asking whether the American story is still being told, still being taught to children, still framing a story that speaks to all its citizens, reminding successive generations of the battles that had to be fought for there to be a “new birth of freedom”, and the virtues needed for liberty to be sustained. [3] The sense of crisis in each of these works is palpable, and though the authors come from very different positions in the political spectrum, their thesis is roughly the same: If you forget the story, you will lose your identity. There is such a thing as a national equivalent of Alzheimer’s. Who we are depends on what we remember, and in the case of the contemporary West, a failure of collective memory poses a real and present danger to the future of liberty.

Jews have told the story of who we are for longer and more devotedly than any other people on the face of the earth. That is what makes Jewish identity so rich and resonant. In an age in which computer and smartphone memories have grown so fast, from kilobytes

to megabytes to gigabytes, while human memories have become so foreshortened, there is an important Jewish message to humanity as a whole. You can’t delegate memory to machines. You have to renew it regularly and teach it to the next generation. Winston Churchill said: “The longer you can look back, the further you can see forward.” [4] Or to put it slightly differently: Those who tell the story of their past have already begun to build their children’s future.

[1] The classic works on group memory and identity are Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, University of Chicago Press, 1992, and Jacques le Goff, *History and Memory*, Columbia University Press, 1992.

[2] Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zachor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory*. University of Washington Press, 1982. See also Lionel Kochan, *The Jew and His History*, London, Macmillan, 1977.

[3] Among the most important of these are Charles Murray, *Coming Apart*, Crown, 2013; Robert Putnam, *Our Kids*, Simon and Shuster, 2015; Os Guinness, *A Free People’s Suicide*, IVP, 2012; Eric Metaxas, *If You Can Keep It*, Viking, 2016; and Yuval Levin, *The Fractured Republic*, Basic Books, 2016.

[4] Chris Wrigley, Winston Churchill: a biographical companion, Santa Barbara, 2002, xxiv.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin **The Pilgrim Festival of the First Fruits**

“When you come to the land which the Lord your God gives to you as an inheritance and you inherit it.... You shall take from the first of all the fruits of the earth which you shall bring from your land.... And you shall respond and you shall say before the Lord your God: ‘My father was a wandering Aramean.’” (Deuteronomy 26:1–2, 5)

The Mishna in Bikkurim magnificently describes the drama of the bringing of these first fruits, the massive march to Jerusalem of farmers from all over Israel with the choicest fruit and grain of their labors in their hands, the decorated marketplaces of our Holy City crowned by the magnificent fruits, and the speech-song of each individual farmer as he stood in front of the Temple altar with the offering he handed to the priest. What an impressive demonstration of fealty to the Master of the Universe, who is hereby recognized as the Provider of all produce and the Sustainer of all sustenance.

However, the drama of the first fruits seems to be emphasizing a far different truth than that of God, the Ultimate Benefactor. The speech-song which accompanies the first fruits – an element which is unique to this particular commandment, and is not even a factor in the giving of tithes but which is a necessary condition with regard to the first fruits – makes no reference to the Lord of the rains and the winds and the sun and the nutrient-filled soil which produced these luscious fruits and sustaining grains of the seven species. The

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clear emphasis is the arrival of the Israelites to the Land of Israel – after having been enslaved and afflicted by the Egyptians, and after the Almighty heard their prayers and took them from Egypt to Israel with great miracles and wonders.

This quintessential early history of Israel goes one step further. It is recited by the individual in the first person: “My father was a wandering Aramean.... The Egyptians... afflicted us.... And He [God] gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey” (Deut. 26:4–11).

The text makes the individual feel that the Land of Israel is his personal land. It is chiefly because of the brevity and total individual identification with Israel’s historical past that these verses are co-opted by the author of the Haggada for the Passover Seder. And if the drama of the Passover meal is tailor-made to express the truth that “in every generation, it is incumbent upon every individual to see himself as if he came out of Egypt,” so is the drama of the first fruits tailor-made to express a parallel truth that “in every generation it is incumbent upon every individual to see himself as if he arrived in Israel.” Indeed, just as the Passover Seder is “speech plus food,” so is the Bikkurim “speech plus fruits”; and just as the Passover Haggada comes from the verse “And you shall tell your child, (vehigadeta),” so does the speech-song of the first fruits open with the words, “I told (higadeti) this day to the Lord your God that I came to the land that the Lord swore to your fathers to give to us” (26:3).

From this perspective I can understand why the first fruits are only to be brought from the seven species which are unique and bring praise to the Land of Israel (Deut. 8), and why only an individual who owns a portion of the Land of Israel and on whose portion the fruits actually grew is obligated to perform the command of the first fruits (Mishna, Bikkurim 1:1–3). This is totally unlike the tithes, for example, which must be given by biblical command only from wine, grain, and oil (universal staples), and by rabbinical command on all fruits and vegetables; the first fruits are not so much about God’s agricultural bounty as they are about God’s gift of the Land of Israel to the nation of Israel. Indeed, in the eleven verses of the first fruits speech-song, the noun “land (eret),” appears no fewer than five times, and the verb “gift (matan)” (by God), no fewer than seven times.

To further cement the inextricable relationship between the first fruits and the Land of Israel, Rabbi Elchanan Samet (in his masterful biblical commentary) cites a comment by Rabbi Menachem Ziemba (Chiddushim, siman 50) in the name of the Holy Ari, that the commandment to bring the first fruits is a

repair, a tikkun, for the Sin of the Scouts. Perhaps that is why the Mishna links the command of the first fruits specifically to the fig, grape, and pomegranate ("If an individual goes into his field and sees a fig, a grape-cluster and/or a pomegranate which has/have ripened, he must tie them with a cord and state that these are to be first fruits" – Bikkurim 3:1), precisely the three fruits which the scouts took back with them (Num. 13:23). And the Bible relates to the scouts on their reconnaissance mission with the very same language that God commands the Israelite concerning the first fruits: Moses tells the scouts, "And you shall take from the fruits of the land" (13:20), "We came to the land...and it is even flowing with milk and honey, and this is its fruit" (13:27), and – in remarkably parallel fashion – God commands the Israelites, "And you shall take from the first of all the fruits of the land" (Deut. 26:2), "Because I have come to the land" (26:3), "And He gave to us this land flowing with milk and honey" (26:9). In effect, God is saying that we must bring precisely those first fruits from that very special land which the scouts rejected, or at least lacked the faith to conquer and settle. Fulfilling the command of the first fruits is in effect a gesture of "repentance" for the Sin of the Scouts.

Rabbi Elchanan Samet goes still one step further. The Mishna teaches that the first fruits are to be brought from Shavuot until Sukkot, each area in Israel in accordance with the ripening of their respective seven species (Bikkurim 1:10). (Shavuot marks the first ripening of wheat-bread, and so it concludes Passover, when the barley ripened. Bread, the staff of life, is the basic "first fruit." Throughout the summer the individual farmers and householders would come with the other special and indigenous fruits.) And we are only commanded to do so when there is a Holy Temple, requiring from us additional offerings as well as song and overnight sleep in Jerusalem (Mishna, Bikkurim 2:4).

Each one of the Pilgrim Festivals does have an aspect of its celebrations that touches on the remembrance of our entry into the Land of Israel: Passover, with its fifth expression of redemption (Ex. 6:8) and its fifth cup, Sukkot with its mention of the four species (Lev. 23:39), and Shavuot, which is actually called the Festival of the First Fruits because of the newly ripened wheat and offering of two challa loaves. But it is the bringing of the other first fruits all summer and its concomitant speech-song which exclusively resonates with this experience. Wheat is a universal grain, whereas the other first fruits are unique to the Land of Israel and so emphasize the truest reason for the sanctity of this land: its provision of nutrition and sustenance

specifically for the children of Israel (see Deuteronomy, Ekev, commentary 6).

In effect, therefore, the first fruits are a fourth Pilgrim Festival, the Pilgrim Festival which celebrates our entry into the Land of Israel. It was just this accomplishment which was lacking in Passover, Shavuot, and Sukkot – and what better way to celebrate the entry into the land than by bringing its unique fruits and reliving our entry after the Exodus!

Rabbi Dr. Norman J. Lamm's Derashot Ledorot

One Nation, All Alone, Under God

In the portion of this week's reading which describes the blessings that will come upon Israel, we read *וְרָאוּ כָּל עַמֵּי הָאָרֶץ כִּי שֵׁם ה' נִקְרָא עֲלֶיךָ* and *וְיִירָאוּ*: read one verse that is outstanding by its magnificence And all the nations of the world will see that the name of the Lord is called upon you, and "they will be afraid of you."

What does Moses mean when he says that "the name of the Lord will be called upon you?" The Talmud (Ber. 6a) quotes an answer by one of the greatest of all sages, Rabbi Eliezer Hagadol (the Great). In a pithy comment of but three words, he says: *אלו תפילין שבראש*, the "name of the Lord" that is "called upon us" refers to the Tefillin that we wear upon the head.

How remarkable! Is that all it takes to frighten away the anti-Semite bent upon a pogrom? Is the Tefillin worn upon the head really sufficient to neutralize the venom of the anti-Jewish enemy, his plentiful arms and allies?

If we turn to the Talmudic passage from which this quotation is taken, and study it in context, we discover what I believe is the real meaning of the statement of Rabbi Eliezer the Great. The Agadah often speaks of the Tefillin that are worn not only by man, but by God. The Talmud asks: we know that in the Tefillin of man is written the profession of unity, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one." But what is written in the Tefillin that, so to speak, God himself wears? They answer that the Tefillin of God bear the message: "Who is like unto Thy people Israel, one nation upon the earth." And the Rabbis explain: The Lord said to Israel, "You made of Me a unity in the world." Our espousal of God's oneness is reciprocated by God's affirming our uniqueness in the world.

Now, reading our original passage in context, we see that "the name of the Lord" refers not to man's but to God's Tefillin *של ראש*! Hence, what the Sages really meant to say is this: What will *אחת בעולם* win respect and inspire awe in others is the Jewish ability to stand alone, to be a to risk loneliness, to

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remain secure through friendliness, to hold its own if necessary against the entire world. When Jews have sufficient faith in "the name of the Lord" to act on the basis of the confidence that we will remain *בני אחד בארץ*, one nation upon the earth, then will survive and we will flourish.

This is true for us as individuals. If we are embarrassed by our Jewishness and fearful of being outsiders and aliens in a non-Jewish culture, if we will yield easily to the majority's pressures upon us to conform, then we will deserve no *יִרְאָה* or respect for us, because we will have dishonored ourselves. Those pseudo-WASPs, those Jews who would have preferred to be re-born non-Jewish, who do not acknowledge their ethnic origins or religious traditions, are in truth not authentically human. The self-deniers have, as it were, ripped the Tefillin off the head of God and left themselves both headless and heartless.

What Rabbi Eliezer is telling us is that we must have the courage of our convictions and ignore the pressure of numbers. If you think you are right, if you are convinced that what you are doing is correct and moral, then do not be worried by the fact that most people are against you, that you may look silly, that people will gaze at you as though you came from another world. If you are right, proceed to do what is right in your eyes and do not be worried that you offend majority opinion.

Indeed, Rabbi Eliezer the Great himself beautifully exemplified this principle. He was born to a very wealthy father who, like most wealthy fathers, preferred that his son become a well-to-do businessman. But when Eliezer was 22 years old he decided that he would rather become a scholar and so, at a relatively advanced age, he made his way to Yavneh and enrolled in the Academy of Rabbi Yohanan b. Zakkai. His father was furious at him for abandoning the family business and going into something as impractical as Talmudic scholarship. He made up his mind, after some time, that he would himself travel to Yavneh and there publicly disinherit his son.

When he came to Yavneh, the great teacher Rabbi Yohanan b. Zakkai noticed him and called out to Eliezer, saying: *"עמוד ודרוש"*, Rise up and deliver the lecture. Eliezer was truly frightened, because he regarded himself as only a beginner, disqualified and unprepared for such a task. But the teacher insisted, and Eliezer delivered himself a brilliant and scintillating Talmudic lecture.

So impressive were his words that the audience gasped, and the teacher kissed the student upon the forehead. When Eliezer's father Hyrkanos saw this, he arose and declared that although he had come to

disinherit Eliezer, he now wished to announce that he is so overwhelmed that he is going to leave all his money and estate to his son.

All through his life, R. Eliezer continued to demonstrate this single-minded stubbornness of following what is right no matter who is in the opposition. At one crucial point of his life, when he was already a world-famous teacher and had distinguished students – counting among them no less a figure than Rabbi Akiva – R. Eliezer clashed with his colleagues on a point of law. They declared a certain oven as טמא, ritually unclean, and he pronounced it טהור, ritually clean. When the matter was taken to a vote and the opposition won, R. Eliezer refused to go along. The matter led to confrontation, and as a result of R. Eliezer's persistence and his refusal to accede to majority rule, he was placed in excommunication – and remained in this ban for many years, until his death. He was beloved by his colleagues and students, revered universally, and yet in order for the Halakhah to survive they felt it necessary to take this extreme action against him. But he refused to be budged. The principle he found in the divine שבראש was something he implemented in his own life.

If this is true for us as individuals, it is certainly true for Israel as a people today. We must be prepared for what is coming upon us. We must recognize that the State of Israel is in for some difficult times in the diplomatic and political world, and possibly even militarily. Israel is more and more facing isolation. It has earned the enmity of the Soviet Union. It is isolated from the Third World who in their recent assembly repeated the ritualistic condemnation of and hatred for Israel. The UN continues treating Israel like a pariah, and the Civil Airlines Organization, which always procrastinates and dawdles when hijackings are carried out against Israeli aircraft, springs into action and tries to prevent hijacking, without any loss of life or property. Arab oil is now being used perhaps for the first time, in a deliberate attempt to isolate Israel diplomatically. The Energy Crisis in the US is exaggerated in order to fall in line with this pressure. Russian-American detente promises no great help for Israel. A weakened Presidency leaves Israel in a most difficult position. And, if we are honest with ourselves, we will admit that pleased as we are at having the first Jewish Secretary of State in American history, we are also worried lest he will bend over backwards in an attempt to prove that he is not prejudiced in favor of Israel.

So we must be prepared to remain alone, friendless, isolated.

At times of crisis it has been our experience for this past quarter century, that Israelis

usually rally, whereas Diaspora Jews usually cave in. To the dismay of most Israelis, we Jews of the Diaspora panic rather quickly.

So, Israel must certainly continue to seek friends where it can, and we American Jews must use our political influence and clout discretely and wisely. But we must not panic. We must remember that our normal condition is עם לבדד ישכון, often alone and different in the world. It is during these times of loneliness – when we are חטיבה אחת בעולם, one nation upon the earth, as the statement in God's Tefillin declares – that we will draw that admiration and respect of others who will appreciate our strength and courage during these periods of solitude, who will recognize “that the name of the Lord is called upon,” and then we shall prevail.

I do not mean to say that American Jews must offer blind support for every Israeli policy, whether foreign or certainly internal. But if the decision of the Israelis should be to go it alone, let us not try to move them on the basis of our own inner panic. At such times we must give them strength, and not infect them with our weakness.

It is at times of this sort that we must be aware of the principle enunciated in the Divine Tefillin. We have been, we are, and will probably always will remain בני אחד בארץ.

This is our burden and glory, as the Name of the Lord is called upon us. We shall remain one nation, all alone, under God.

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

A Religion Becomes a Religion When Passed on to the Next Generation

Among the curses of the tochacha, the pasuk says “All these curses will chase after you and will come upon you and pursue you and overtake you, until you are destroyed, because you will not have listened to the voice of Hashem your G-d, to observe His commandments and His decrees that He commanded you. They will be in you and your children as a sign and a wonder forever.” (Devorim 28:45-46)

The Maharal Diskin points out that if we were to take these pesukim at face value, it would be the worst of curses. This is not like the transient curses that the Jews experienced through the generations. Usually, there is an end to each era of persecution that we encounter. There was an end to the Spanish Inquisition. There was an end to the persecutions of Tac’h v’Ta”t (“5408-5409”). There was even an end to the Holocaust. But here the pasuk seems to say that these curses will be with us and our children in perpetuity. Is this pasuk foretelling the doom of Klal Yisrael, its utter destruction? That cannot be.

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The Maharal Diskin explains that we need to read the aforementioned pasuk differently. There are two parts to the pasuk. One is “All these curses will come upon you and catch up with you until you are destroyed.” At that point, there is an esnachta in the trop – in effect, marking the end of the sentence. Then the pasuk explains why the Jewish people receive this punishment: “For you will not have listened to the voice of Hashem your G-d, to observe His commandments and His decrees that He commanded you (in a way so that) they will be in you and your children as a sign and a wonder forever.”

In other words, pasuk 46 is referring to the second part of pasuk 45! The criticism of Klal Yisrael and the reason they are being cursed is that they did not keep the commandments in a way that inspired and made an impression on their children and future generations, so that the future generations would want to likewise keep these signs and wonders forever.

The Tolner Rebbe added to this Maharal Diskin: The reason their mitzvah performance did NOT make an impression on their children is explained in pasuk 47: “Because you did not serve Hashem, your G-d, with gladness and with goodness of heart, out of an abundance of everything.” The Jews were chastised for the fact that their fulfillment of mitzvos, as unfortunately is too often the case, was just going through the motions and performing the mitzvos by rote. Our children did not see an excitement and passion in our mitzvah performance. If a person wants his children to follow on the straight trodden path of Torah observance, he needs to motivate them to do so. The only way to do that is for parents to perform the mitzvos with enthusiasm and a sense of simcha (joy). Then, and only then, will their children see and appreciate the fact that this is something meaningful.

As much as we sometimes think that our children are not paying attention, they are paying attention. They see how we daven or how we learn or how we perform the mitzvos of Succos or Pesach, and it makes a difference. If it is just about great meals, then what is religion to them? What does Yiddishkeit mean to the next generation? Without simcha, performance of mitzvos may just seem like a burden to our children.

That is what these pesukim are saying: You are going to experience these curses because you have not kept the mitzvos properly. And what is the meaning of “you have not kept the mitzvos properly?” You have not kept them in a way that they would remain with you and your offspring forever! What does it mean “you have not kept them in a way that they would remain with your offspring?” “You did

not serve Hashem your G-d with simcha (i.e. – joy, passion, enthusiasm).”

With this idea, we can better understand the following pesukim at the end of the parsha: “Moshe called all of Israel and said to them, ‘You have seen everything that Hashem did before your eyes in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his slaves and to all his land – the great trials that your eyes beheld; those great signs and wonders. But Hashem did not give you a heart to know or eyes to see or ears to hear, until this day...’” (Devarim 29:1-3)

This is the last day or days of Moshe Rabbeinu’s life. He has been with them for forty years. He has been with them through Galus Mitzraim (the Egyptian exile) and Yitziyas Mitzraim (the Egyptian Exodus) and the forty years in the desert. Moshe was now approaching his own exit from the world. He told the people: “But Hashem did not give you a heart to know or eyes to see or ears to hear, until this day.” After all this time, you still did not get it until today. Finally, I see you got it!

Rashi asks “How did Moshe know that finally they now ‘got it?’” Rashi answers that this was the day (the last day of his life) when Moshe Rabbeinu wrote a Sefer Torah for the Tribe of Levi and gave it to the members of that shevet (Devarim 31:9). All of Israel then came before Moshe and said to him “We too stood at Sinai and received the Torah and it was given to us.” They protested the fact that Moshe only gave a copy of the Sefer Torah to Bnei Levi, as if that shevet was to monopolize the possession of Torah. The other shevatim expressed the fear that at some future date, the Leviim would claim that only they were given the Torah. They expressed their strong objection on this matter.

Rashi says that Moshe was overjoyed when he heard their reaction. Moshe thought this was a beautiful and appropriate sentiment and remarked “This day you have become a nation.” (Devarim 27:9) Now I see that you finally ‘got it’ and this day you have become a people.

Even on the simple level, Rashi’s words here are very powerful. The people complained here that they have not been given a spiritual gift that others were given and they are upset about that. “We want the Torah!” That is well and true, however, Rav Yeruchem Olshin quotes a vort from Rav Nosson Meir Wachtfogel, z”l (1910-1998; Mashgiach of the Lakewood Yeshiva) explaining that it is more than just that.

Rav Nosson Meir Wachtfogel comments “You will say to us tomorrow (machar) ‘It was not given to you.’” That word – machar – is a “code word”. It evokes other places in

Chumash where the Torah uses the word ‘machar. ‘Namely, “when your son will ask you tomorrow (machar)...” (Shemos 13:14; Devorim 6:20). When Rashi uses the word “machar” here, he is referring to the children. This Rashi is saying, “Listen, we know we also received the Torah. If you only want to give the Sefer Torah to Bnei Levi, that is well and fine for us now. But ‘tomorrow’ (machar) implying: ‘our children – ‘that is going to be a problem. Shevet Levi will possess something to give over to their children; but we won’t possess anything to give over to our children.”

The rest of the shevatim were not at all concerned that Bnei Levi would deny the fact that the other Jews received the Torah as well. But they were worried about their children. They were afraid that their children would see that only Bnei Levi had Moshe Rabbeinu’s Torah. The children would ask, “Hey, does that mean that only Bnei Levi received the Torah?” Their complaint to Moshe was “You have not given us something to give over to our children!” They knew that if they didn’t have something to give over to their children, the religion would die. That is what they were worried about. That is why every shevet wanted their own Sefer Torah, something to pass on to the next generation to give the religion continuity from father to son to grandson, etc.

When Moshe Rabbeinu saw that they were worried about “What will be with our children?” he rejoiced: Now I see that this day you have become a nation! Today you showed me that you want Torah and Mitzvos, not only for yourselves, but also for generations to come.

Rav Yeruchem Olshin relates to this idea a very interesting comment by the Mefarsh (in place of “Rashi” there) in Tractate Nedarim (81a). Yirmiyahu the prophet tells the nation that the churban is coming. He predicts that the land will be lost and the people will ask “Why was the land lost? What was the aveira that caused the churban?” The Gemara says that HaKadosh Baruch Hu Himself responded: It was because they abandoned the Torah. Rav Yehudah says in the name of Rav that this means she’lo barchu b’Torah techila (they did not make the preliminary blessing before learning Torah). In other words, as most commentaries interpret, they may have learned Torah but they did not give it the proper respect and treat it as fulfillment of a spiritual charge.

However, the Mefarsh on Maseches Nedarim gives an alternate interpretation: Hashem’s charge and criticism against that generation was that they neglected to say the preparatory blessing before learning Torah, which includes the words “and may we and our children and

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the children of your nation Israel all be among those who know Your Name and learn Your Torah lishmah.” According to the Mefarsh, they learned Torah and they recited the Birkas haTorah. But they did not invoke the prayer on behalf of their children and the other children of Israel.

They learned Torah, they enjoyed Torah, and they found it intellectually stimulating. But they had no desire to give it over to their children. Because of that, the Land would be lost.

This is exactly what happened over here with the Bnei Levi and the other shevatim. Klal Yisrael said, “Fine, we can live without our own copy of the Sefer Torah. But the problem is that you (Shevet Levi) have something to give over to your children and we do not.” A religion becomes a religion when the older generation is able to give it over to their children. And that is what the aforementioned ‘curse’ is about: You didn’t keep the mitzvos in a fashion that would inspire your children to integrate those mitzvos into their own lives and the lives of their children. You did perform the mitzvos, but you performed them in a way that was devoid of passion and excitement.

Dvar Torah: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

How do some people justify antisemitism? In Parshat Ki Tavo, we are told how in ancient times farmers would come to the Temple. They would bring their bikkurim, their first fruits, and there they would recite a passage recalling key moments of Jewish history. In this passage the farmer would say (Devarim 26:6),

“Vayareiu otanu haMitzrim vayaanunu.” – “And the Egyptians were bad to us and they oppressed us.”

In his book Kol Omer Kra, Rabbi Yosef Chaim Karo asks a great question. He says that the words ‘vayareiu otanu haMitzrim’ cannot mean that the Egyptians were bad to us. In that case, the Torah would have said, ‘Vayareiu lanu haMitzrim.’ ‘Vayareiu otanu’ on the other hand means that the Egyptians caused us to appear to be bad.

At our Pesach Seder we read these verses and immediately afterwards we bring a verse from the book of Shemos through which we recall how Pharaoh justified the oppression of the Hebrews in his time. He said (Shemos 1:10)

“Hava nitchachma lo” – “They are clever. We need to be cleverer than them.”

“...vehaya ki tikreina milchama,” – “It will come to pass if our enemies launch a war against us,”

“...venosaf gam hu al soneinu v’nilcham banu...” – The Hebrews won’t be on our side! They don’t see themselves as being an integral part of our nation; they will “join the forces of the enemy and be against us!”

Pharaoh made this claim without any factual basis whatsoever, and the Egyptians swallowed it. Their mindsets were changed and as a result, they considered the Hebrews to be the ‘them’ as opposed to the ‘us’, and it was within their comfort zone to persecute us.

Time and again through history we have seen how aggressors have blamed the victims, with the suggestion the Jews are the cause of Antisemitism but, *baruch Hashem*, there is one thing that we have on our side.

The farmer in the temple would conclude his comments by saying, “*Vanitzak el Hashem Elokeinu*,” – “We cried to the Lord our God” “*Vayishma Hashem et koleinu*,” – “And Hashem heard our voices.” In the same way as Hashem saved the Jews from the Egyptians in those days, so may He always guarantee that ‘*am Yisrael chai*’ – despite all forms of hatred and persecution the Jewish people will live and will thrive throughout all future times.

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

Know Yourself

Rabbi Avinoam and Hadas Czitrin

Czitrin In our parsha, the mitzvot of first fruits are described. We are told that when we settle in the Promised Land and are privileged to grow and harvest fruit, we are obligated to take the first fruits, place them in a basket, and bring them to Jerusalem.

The Baal Shem Tov (1698-1760), founder of the Hasidic movement, explains: when a new desire or good intention awakens within us; when a new fruit of hope and aspiration is born, it is forbidden to allow it to remain only in our thoughts. Rather, we must take it, place it in the basket of reality and carefully examine it. We need to provide it with practical tools to bring it into the world of action.

This is our work, as we approach the New Year in the month of Elul: to know how to take hold of our beautiful dreams, to examine them in every detail, and to plan step by step how to make them come true.

The crux of the Selihot prayer, which we recite before Rosh Hashana, is the “*Yag Middot*” – the “thirteen attributes” of divine mercy. As we beg to Hashem for forgiveness in preparation for Rosh Hashanah, we appeal to these attributes, which reflect God’s kindness and compassion, and His willingness to forgive us for our wrongdoing.

One of these attributes is “*Notzer Chesed La’alafim*” – literally, “keeps kindness for thousands.” This phrase has been explained to refer to the Talmud’s comment (Shabbat 32a) that when a person is judged, even if 999 angels prosecute against him, and a single angel advocates on his behalf, he is saved from a harsh sentence because of that one angel. The Gemara then cites Rabbi Elazar Ben Rabbi Yossi as adding that even if 999/1000th of that one angel is inclined to prosecute against the individual being judged, and just one-thousandth of that angel seeks to defend him, the person is saved. It emerges, then, that even if a person has only one-thousandth of one one-thousandth to his credit, he can earn a favorable judgment.

It has been suggested that this is the meaning of “*Notzer Chesed La’alafim*” – God is so merciful that He extends kindness and grace to “*Alafim*” – those who have only one-thousandth of one thousand angels advocating on his behalf.

As much as we are required to examine ourselves and repent during this period of the High Holidays, identifying our faults and flaws and working to correct them, we also need to give ourselves some credit. There can hardly be a person who does not have at least “one-thousandth of one one-thousandth” of goodness on his record. We all have much to put right, but we all also have much to be proud of. And God, in His infinite compassion, is prepared to focus His attention on that “one-thousandth of one one-thousandth” and judge us favorably.

The question then becomes, how do we sign up for the “*Alafim Program*”? How do we access this extraordinary resource, and earn a favorable judgment based on the merits and goodness which we have to our credit?

The answer is found in the Gemara’s comment later in *Masechet Shabbat* (127), that whoever judges his fellow favorably is himself judged favorably. If we give other people the benefit of the doubt and judge their actions in a favorable light, then God will, in turn, judge us in a favorable light.

This is the key to the “*Alafim Program*.” We need to focus our attention on the “one-thousandth of one one-thousandth” of goodness found in other people. Rather than following our natural tendency to judge people harshly and highlight their negative qualities, we must do the opposite – focus our attention on all that is good about the people around us and the second thing is that if we have a good thought to put it into practice.

If we make these efforts, then God will, in turn, direct His attention, as it were, to the

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considerable amount of goodness which we have to our credit. Inscribe and seal us for a happy, healthy, and prosperous New Year.

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Michael Rosensweig Mitzvat Bikurim: Priority, Perspective, and Humility as Components in a Spiritually Focused Halachic Life

“*Ve-hayah ki tavo el ha’aretz asher Hashem Elokecha noten lecha nachalah, viyerishtah ve-yashavta bah. Ve-lakachta mi-reishit kol peri ha’adamah asher tavi mei-artzecha...*” *Parshat Ki Tavo* introduces the mitzvah of bikurim, designating, sanctifying, and dedicating the yearly first fruits of the seven minim as *kodshei mizbeach*. The Torah’s language conveys that bikurim constitutes the central manifestation of our bond with Eretz Yisrael. Indeed, bikurim is prominently enumerated, alongside *korban omer* and *korban shetai ha-lechem*, which play a prominent role defining Chag ha-Matzot and Chag ha-Shavuot and bridging between them, as embodying the sanctity of the Land of Israel, in the ten gradations of sanctity enumerated in the mishnah in the first chapter of *massechet Keilim*. Why is bikurim rather than *terumah* or other land-linked mitzvot spotlighted in these contexts? In his commentary on *Keilim*, the Vilna Gaon (and others), was sufficiently troubled by this question that he posited that bikurim’s inclusion was a scribal error and recommended it should be banished from the text. Yet, there is no evidence of manuscripts in which Bikurim is absent; Rambam (*Hilchot Beit ha-Bechirah* 7:12), Rash (on *Keilim*) and others acknowledge and codify bikurim’s presence in this seminal source. What is so singular about bikurim that distinguishes it even from *terumah* (though it has the legal status of *terumah* in some respects) and qualifies it to embody the sanctity of Eretz Yisrael?

Bikurim is singular in many other respects, as well. We shall identify just a few distinguishing features. The Torah (in *Parshat Ki Tisa* and *Pinchas*) characterizes Chag ha-Shavuot as Chag ha-Bikurim. While some interpret this as a reference to the *korban shetai ha-lechem*, others render it as an allusion to the ideal timing of mitzvah bikurim. Some *mefarshim* adopt both interpretations. [See Rashi, Chizkuni, Ha’amek Davar and other discussions of this issue on these verses. I hope to elaborate the significance of this debate elsewhere.] In any case, it is striking that the Torah would invoke the ideal timing for an independent mitzvah as a way of identifying a major holiday. Evidently, the association is conceptually and substantively consequential, as well.

Unique among mitzvot, bikurim is comprised of two components: *hava’at bikurim* and *mikra*

bikurim. [Ramban, in his commentary to Rambam's Sefer ha-Mitzvot, argues that birkat ha-Torah constitutes an independent mitzvah in the count of 613, comparing it to mikra bikurim (and sippur yetziat Mitzrayim)!]. The demand to recite a text that chronicles the ancient history of Klal Yisrael - "arami oved avi..." in conjunction with the actual bringing of bikurim, requires clarification.

In fact, the parshah of mikra bikurim, as is well known (Pesachim 116a), serves as the primary vehicle to explicate sippur yetziat Mitzrayim as part of maggid on the seder night. Like sippur yetziat Mitzrayim, this recitation exemplifies the principle of hakkarat ha-tov - and acutely promotes the principle of hashgahah-Divine providence, acknowledging our total reliance upon, debt to, and dedication to Hashem. Why are these themes affixed specifically to bikurim?

Perhaps the solution lies in two related factors that differentiate terumah and bikurim. While the mitzvah of hafrashat terumah applies to any sampling of obligated produce and serves (also, or primarily) to neutralize the prevailing prohibition of tevel, the imperative of bikurim targets the first (see also Bereshit Rabbah on the word "bereishit") and best produce (reishit, see Menachot 84a - R.Y. and Resh Lakish) and is exclusively focused on sanctifying and dedicating these eagerly anticipated "firsts" to avodat Hashem. The fact that bikurim is a chovat gavra, a personal charge to initiate this spiritual opportunity unencumbered by the need to redeem or negate an existing status or flaw that inheres in the produce, underscores the unadulterated aspirational motif. Tosafot (Bava Basra 81a, second answer) suggests that the fact that the bikurim imperative applies only to the land of Israel is disconnected from the broader principle of mitzvot ha-teluyot ba-aretz that is related to redeeming the status of the produce, and is based instead on an independent source in these verses in Ki Tavo (Bava Basra 81a): "asher tavi mei-artzecha - hahu lemeutei chutz la-aretz."

Rambam (Moreh Nevuchim III, 39; see, also, Sefer ha-Chinuch, no. 91, 606) explains that sanctifying the bikurim to Divine ends, given the eager anticipation of the first and best of the seven minim, the fruit of arduous labor in our own homeland, and in light of the proclivity of successful and prosperous owners to engage in triumphalist and self-aggrandizing reflection - "kochi ve-otzem yadi asah li et ha-chayil ha-zeh" (Devarim 8:17) - reveals profound humility and faith that stems from an unequivocal acknowledgement of Divine providence. Moreover, Rambam elected to present and organize the laws of matnot kehunah in a manner that especially spotlights bikurim, in a section entitled, "hilchot bikurim

im shear matnot kehunah she-begevulin". Radvaz (Bikurim 1:1) queries why bikurim precedes chalah in this presentation, contrary to the order of the mishnahyot in Seder Zeraim. Evidently, Rambam ascribed enormous broader significance to this quintessential mitzvah of Eretz Yisrael. The entire ceremonial march of hava'at bikurim and the accompanying prayers and songs of Divine praise (summarized in Rambam Hilchot Bikurim 4:16-17) confirm the importance of this mitzvah and highlight its special ideological character.

We may now appreciate why the recitation of mikra bikurim, also an integral part of sippur yetziat Mitzrayim, is so crucial. It both explicates, exemplifies, and provides added perspective on the urgency of spiritual priorities, on the appropriate role of material prosperity, and reinforces faith and reliance on Divine providence. The holiday of Shavuot, which celebrates mattan torah, the foundation of our spiritual world and its singular values, is intimately linked with the mitzvah of bikurim that highlights these motifs indispensable to the Torah's vision. The fact that elevated physical existence dedicated to Hashem is a particular feature of this chag further supports the association. Thus, the Talmud (Pesachim 68b) rules that there must be a "lachem" component to Shavuot observance, as it is "yom she-nitnah bo Torah".

The Midrash Tanchuma (beginning of Ki Tavo) reports that when it was revealed to Moshe that the Mikdash would be destroyed and that the mitzvah of bikurim would be suspended, he legislated thrice-a-day prayers! It is curious that the stark enormity of the churban wouldn't simply eclipse any and all specific ramifications, yet the anticipated absence of bikurim triggered its own lament. Moreover, the legislation of tefillah throughout the day to mitigate the spiritual impact of a terminated bikurim needs to be understood. However, Bikur bikurim is no ordinary or narrow mitzvah; it underscores crucial values and principles that impact the entire system of avodat Hashem. Furthermore, it is the quintessential manifestation of the spiritual potential of physical life in Eretz Yisrael, as noted. Hence, its foreseen absence, even in the context of the churban, needs to be independently and forthrightly redressed. The institution of thrice daily prayer, which highlights man's pervasive dependence on Hashem, his acknowledgement of Divine providence, and which articulates his hakkarat ha-tov effectively embodies many of the bikurim themes. The self-evaluation and self-awareness implied by the term "tefillah", the components of prayer - shevach, bakashah, and hodaah, and the very process of formulating and humbly articulating one's needs, reinforce

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the principles encapsulated by bikurim and, thus, mitigate the unfortunate bikurim lacuna.

We anticipate a future in which we may again merit a fully functioning beit ha-mikdash and in which we may experience the singular mitzvah of bikurim in all of its ramifications. [See, also Meshech Chochmah, Devarim 26:11. He notes that the Divine name is invoked thirteen times in the parshah of bikurim, a parallel to the thirteen qualities of mercy that are so vital to the process of repentance! He also suggests that it may not be coincidental that the mitzvah of bikurim itself is formulated in the aftermath of the parshah that registers the selihot process (Shemot chapter 34) that incorporates the thirteen attributes. The notion that bikurim, an expression of faith, humility, and unconstrained dedication to Hashem is intimately linked to the process of repentance is compelling, indeed.]

Torah.Org Dvar Torah by Rabbi Label Lam

Makes Everything Worthwhile

And it will be, when you come into the land which HASHEM, your G-d, gives you for an inheritance, and you possess it and settle in it, that you shall take (M'Reishis) of the fruit of the ground, which you will bring from your land, which HASHEM, your G-d, is giving you. And you shall put [them] into a basket and go to the place which HASHEM, your G-d, will choose to have His Name dwell there. (Devarim 26:1-2)

(M'Reishis) of the first fruit: A man goes down into his field and sees a fig that has ripened. He winds a reed around it for a sign and declares: "This is the first fruit (בכורים)." – Rashi

This first fruit is called by an important name, "Reishis". That superior designation is calling out for greater recognition. Why is it applied here? It's a simple farmer meeting the first fruits. Where does this appellation, "Reishis" come from?

The opening words of the Torah are too often misread and misunderstood, "In the beginning G-d created the heavens and the earth." That statement would imply that the Torah is communicating cosmology, as a science textbook, and is interested in satisfying our curiosity about the order of creation. The Torah, Rashi relates, is rather a teaching book with a more important lessons to be learned.

The first letter "Beis" taken as a prefix, meaning "for" or "for the sake of" when attached to the word "Reishis" means that the world was created for the sake of something called, "Reishis". Using the rest of Torah as a self-referential dictionary of sorts, Rashi

qualifies and crowns two items with the title, "Reishis"-Primary. It is for their sake all is created. We are being told not "how" but rather "why" the world was created. Those two essential ingredients that Rashi identifies are the Torah and Israel who are crowned with the title Reishis. It is for both of them that the whole world was created! I know this all sounds terribly self-serving but let's understand why it's so.

If I were to attempt to solicit from you a large donation to build a school building, you would certainly be justified in asking a few questions. "Why do we need this school anyway?"

I will have to give some real answers. What if I tell you, "We have a wonderfully unique curriculum." Then you might follow up and ask, "Who would attend this school? From where do you get your faculty?" Good questions!

Imagine, now, the whole world is this school. Why is it here? What is it in this life that justifies the existence of all the world's forests, marketplaces, buildings, people and parking lots? Why a world?! Why do we need all this? What purpose does it serve? How does it justify its existence? The Holy Torah is saying it, right in the beginning. Not me! Why and to whom should we apologize?

The curriculum is the Torah. The students and the faculty are Israel. Together they produce something so valuable that the Talmud tells us that the whole world was created for "this" alone. What is this "this"? Something else is also called "Reishis". (REISHIS CHOCHMA) "The primary wisdom is fear of HASHEM!" This whole educational process is meant to inspire its students with a sense of awe and ecstasy in relationship to their Creator.

Bikurim, these first fruits, are also a Reishis for which the world was created. It is quietly an act of great courage and superior devotion. Once the fruit is ripening on the tree, there is a tendency for the farmer to declare, "Look what my hands have accomplished!" For a person to overcome the natural egoistic instinct and deliver his first fruit – his Reishis to HASHEM, shows that he has not become intoxicated with his own doing. He still feels he owes everything to HASHEM, his FIRST THANKS!

When a student, even years later, writes a letter to a teacher or principal and tells them what a difference the education they provided for him made to them and how they are applying the many lessons to their daily life, believe me, that teacher or administrator does not disregard that little note.

He cherishes it. He may frame it and put it on the wall. He likely waited a long time to get such a message. The expressions of appreciation are certainly farther and fewer between compared numerically to the sheer volume of angry complaints and outrageous requests. Yet, this miniature gesture makes everything worthwhile.

Mizrachi Dvar Torah

Rav Doron Perez

There is Nothing More Whole than a Broken Heart

We are in the midst of the month of Elul, an entire month that we prepare for Rosh Hashanah, and reestablish our relationship and connection with Hashem.

What is the vehicle to reestablish that connection? It is the blowing of the shofar – the mitzvah of the day on Rosh Hashanah and the custom we do every day the entire month of Elul – embraced by all: Ashkenazi, Sephardi, and Yemenite. It is based on the ancient custom mentioned in Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer which states that this time of the year is such a powerful, historic time of reconstitution and reconciliation. Moshe Rabbeinu went up on Rosh Chodesh Elul, having broken the tablets and after the terrible sin of the golden calf, davened for the Jewish people and aimed to reestablish our relationship with G-d. From Rosh Chodesh Elul until Yom Kippur is when we received the second set of tablets, when our relationship was reestablished. So, this entire time period is the time of reestablishing relationships, therefore we blow the shofar every day to inspire us to reconnect.

Why is the shofar the vehicle for preparing to reestablish our relationships? In the Torah, Rosh Hashanah is called "yom teruah," a day of blowing of the shofar, and all the commentators agree that the 'teruah' is the broken sound. Why is the idea of the blowing of the shofar about a broken sound?

Brokenness, incompleteness, vulnerability, is the essence of relationships. If you feel no vulnerability in a relationship, if you feel you need them for nothing, if you feel you are complete – then what do you need another person for? Do we need G-d if we don't need G-d for anything? The key in relationships, as famously said by Brené Brown, is a sense of vulnerability. That is the key of Rosh Hashanah, and the month of Elul. In competitions, vulnerability is a weakness. But it is the opposite in realms of connectedness – you have to have vulnerability. You have to feel that you need them: not co-dependence, but interdependence.

Famously the Kotzker Rebbe said: "there is nothing more complete than an incomplete heart."

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May we all come with a sense of incompleteness and vulnerability in all our relationships, especially with G-d, because ultimately the most complete part of any relationship is a broken, incomplete heart.



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When G-d Wants You to Compliment Yourself Before I Confess My Sins, I Must Confess My Greatness

By: Rabbi YY Jacobson
Do I Have to Tell Him?

An old German man was feeling guilty about something he had done, so he decided to go to Confession.

He said, "Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. I feel terrible because during World War II, I hid a Jew in my attic."

The priest said, "But that's not a sin! I wouldn't feel bad about that if I were you."

"But I made him agree to pay me 50 Marks for every week he stayed."

The priest said, "Well, I admit that it wasn't the noblest thing to do, charging the man to save his life, but you did save his life, after all, and that is a good thing. Don't worry about it too much; G-d forgives."

The man said, "Oh thank you, Father, that eases my mind. I have only one more question to ask you: Do I have to tell him the war is over?"

Make a Confession!

I want to achieve an ambitious goal with this essay: I want to bring back confession to Judaism. People attribute confession to Catholicism; they think it is the job of the priests. I believe it is time to bring it back to our people. I am going to ask of each of my readers that during the following day you should make at least one confession.

Now before you dismiss my plea, allow me to explain myself.

Tithing Cycle

This week's Torah portion, Ki Savo, discusses an interesting law known as "Vidui Maaser," "the Tithing Confession."

In the Holy Land, tithes must be taken from one's crops, according to a set three-year cycle. During each of the three years, a portion of the produce (around 2 percent) is given to the Kohanim, the priests, who had no income of their own (due to their Temple service). This is known as terumah. Another portion of the produce (around 10 percent) was given to the Levites,

who also had no income of their own, as they also served in the Temple and served as teachers. This was known as maasar reshon, the first tithing. There were other tithes that differed from year to year. Here is a quick glance: Year 1—in addition to terumah and maser reshon, you separate a portion of the crop, known as maaser sheni. This is taken by the owner to Jerusalem and eaten there. It gave Jews an opportunity to spend time in the Holy City, contribute to its economy, and learn from its masters.

Year 2 – same as year one.

Year 3—in addition to terumah and maser reshon, a portion of the crop was separated and given to the poor, known as maaser ani (this was in addition to many other contributions made to the poor from each farm.)

Year 4 – same as years 1-2.

Year 5 – same as years 1-2, 4.

Year 6 – same as year 3.

Year 7 – This was a sabbatical year, shemita, in which no plowing or planting was permitted, and no tithes were given. That year the field was open to everybody to enjoy.

Now, on the day before Passover of year four and year seven, every owner must make sure that he has delivered all the tithes of the past three years to their proper destination—to the Priests, the Levites, and the poor. Then, on the last day of Passover of the 4th and 7th years, the farmer recites a special declaration found in this week's portion.

Let us review the text in the Torah:

כִּי תִכְלֶה לַעֲשֹׂר אֶת-כָּל-מַעֲשֶׂר תְּבוּאָתְךָ, בַּשָּׁנָה הַשְּׁלִישִׁית—שְׁנַת הַמַּעֲשֵׂר: וְנָתַתָּה לְלוֹי, לְגֵר לִיתוֹם וְלֵאלְמָנָה, וְאָכְלוּ בִשְׁעָרֶיךָ, וְשָׂבְעוּ. וְאָמַרְתָּ לִפְנֵי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּעֶרְתִּי הַקֹּדֶשׁ מִן-הַבֵּית, וְגַם נִתְּנִיו לְלוֹי וְלֵגֵר לִיתוֹם וְלֵאלְמָנָה, כְּכָל-מִצְוַתְךָ, אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתָנִי: לֹא-עֲבַרְתִּי מִמִּצְוֹתֶיךָ, וְלֹא שָׁכַחְתִּי. לֹא-אֲכַלְתִּי בְּאֵני מִמֶּנּוּ, וְלֹא-בְעֶרְתִּי מִמֶּנּוּ בְּטֶמְאָה, וְלֹא-נָתַתִּי מִמֶּנּוּ, לְמֵת; שְׂמַעְתִּי, בְּקוֹל ה' אֱלֹהֵי--עֲשִׂיתִי, כְּכָל אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתָנִי. הַשְׁקִיפָה מִמַּעַן קֹדֶשְׁךָ מִן-הַשָּׁמַיִם, וּבְרַךְ אֶת-עַמְּךָ אֶת-יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְאֵת הָאָדָמָה, אֲשֶׁר נָתַתָּה לָנוּ--כְּאֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְתָּ לְאַבְרָהָם, אֲרָץ זָבֶת חֶלֶב וְרֵבֶשׁ. [1]

"You shall say before G-d your Lord: I have removed all the sacred portions from my house. I have given the appropriate portions to the Levite, to the convert, to the orphan and to the widow, following all the commandments You prescribed to us. I have not violated your commandments, and have not forgotten anything... I have listened to the voice of the Lord my G-d; I have done everything You commanded me..."

Basically, G-d wants us to verbally declare that we have done everything right. We distributed all the produce we were required to. We tell G-d bluntly that we perfectly implemented all of His commandments on this matter.

This is, no doubt, an interesting mitzvah. G-d wants us to compliment ourselves. He wants us to declare emphatically: G-d! I did it, and I did it well!

But why? He knows we did it. We know we did it. What is the point of making this official verbal declaration?

We have no other precedent for this in Judaism—to literally compliment ourselves before the Almighty!

This Is a Confession?

What is stranger is that this recitation has a name in all of Talmudic literature: Vidui Maaser, "the Tithing Confession." Yet virtually, this recitation is the furthest thing from a confession. A "vidui," a confession, in its classic sense, means that we admit our guilt and ask for forgiveness. We have in Judaism a number of confessional prayers (most of them will be recited on Yom Kippur, the day of confession and atonement), and they all share the same message: Ashamnu, bagadnu, gazalnu, debarnu dofi... "We are guilty; we have dealt treacherously; we have stolen; we spoke falsely, etc." We confess for the sins and errors that we committed in one form or another, we express remorse and we resolve to change in the future.

Yet in this case, we encounter a "confession" of a diametrically opposite nature. Imagine you approach your wife and say: My dear, I want to make a confession to you. Your wife's ears perk up to hear what you did this time. You continue:

"I want to confess to you today, that I am a wonderful, accomplished, flawless, magnificent, incredible, sensitive, kind, caring, handsome, and passionate husband and father. I have fulfilled all of my duties; I have been

loyal to you with every fiber of my being; I have dutifully always fulfilled all my responsibilities; I forgot nothing, I did not transgress; I have been faithful and dutiful, committed and moral. Alas, I am the perfect man."

Well, call this guy any name you'd like, but for G-d's sake, it is not a confession!...

Yet, astoundingly, this is exactly what we do with the "tithing confession."

Listen to the words: "You shall say before G-d your Lord: I have removed all the sacred portions from my house. I have given the appropriate portions to the Levite, to the convert, to the orphan, and to the widow, following all the commandments You prescribed to us. I have not violated your commandments, and have not forgotten anything... I have listened to the voice of the Lord my G-d; I have done everything You commanded me." [2] And Judaism calls this a confession, a "vidui"! [3]

Perhaps if more Jews would know that this is "confession," we would not leave this art to the Catholics; the synagogue would have long lines every day of Jews coming to confess, telling us that they are absolutely perfect, impeccable, flawless, and faultless.

A Catholic boy and a Jewish boy were talking and the Catholic boy said, "My priest knows more than your rabbi." The Jewish boy said, "Of course he does, you tell him everything."

Poor Christians! They think confession is sharing all the negative stuff. Nonsense! Confession is saying how perfect you are. "I have fulfilled all of your commandments."

I'm Awesome

Yet it is in this very mitzvah of "tithing confession" that we encounter an incredible truth: It is important for people to verbalize, from time to time, how good they are, how beautiful they are, how powerful they are. Not in a generic, meaningless, and foolish way, and certainly not in a haughty way, but rather in a very specific, directed, and focused manner. There is always one area, one aspect of your life in which you are a success story. And you need to be able to see it and verbalize it. In this above law, the Jew specifies that as far as tithing is concerned, he has done a magnificent job.

And this is called "confession." Do you know why? See how the Sages, 1800 years before the development of many psychological schools of healing and therapy, taught us this potent truth: Only when I believe that I am good, I'm capable of regretting my mistakes. If I believe that I am just a dirty old rat, I can't really regret my wrongdoings, because I see them as inevitable. When I appreciate my potential for greatness, I can hold myself accountable for my errors.

Genuine confession requires not only acknowledging and confronting a mistake; it also requires a belief that you are essentially good, that you are capable of being good, and that in some areas you are exceptionally good. If my garment is raddled with stains, and you pour some orange juice on it, it won't bother me. I may not even notice it. But if I am wearing a fresh, clean, and beautiful suit and you spill the chocolate mousse with vanilla on it, I will take note. If I consider my soul dirty and filthy, I can't even take note of my inappropriate and immoral behaviors, of my hurtful words, of my toxic thoughts; they fit right in with my distorted self. Only when I appreciate my innate dignity, majesty, and purity, can I begin to notice and feel bad about all that which tarnishes and eclipses such a beautiful life.

Have you ever heard a couple argue in the following manner? She: Darling, you are making a mistake again.

He: Of course! I am always wrong; you are always right. I am the dumb, stupid, bad, husband, who is always dead wrong. You are the perfect wife. You are never ever wrong.

Well, we all know that no woman is pleased with this acknowledgment. Because it is meaningless and cynical. Whenever anybody says, "I am always wrong," it means "I am never wrong; you are just impossible to please." Whenever anybody says, "you are always right," it means "you are never right."

Sincere confession means that I am sometimes right. But now I am wrong. I am not always wrong; it is now that I am wrong.

There is a verse in the Song of Songs: "I am dark and beautiful." [4] These are the two interconnected sides necessary for all personal growth: I am dark,

I may have succumbed to darkness, but I am inherently beautiful. Hence, 1) I regret what I did. I know that it did not befit me; I am so much better. I want to fix it, because this behavior compromises my inherent beauty. [5] 2) I acknowledge that I had the power not to do it; it was not inevitable. I was capable of choosing otherwise and I regret my wrongdoing. 3) I know that I possess the power to fix it for the future. I am not a victim. [6]

To truly confess a mistake or a sin requires that I can sometimes tell G-d: I am good! I am great! I have done exactly what You wanted. I have not transgressed. And because I am capable of doing things correctly I can sincerely regret my actions when I fail to do so. The tithing declaration is called confession because it enables and gives meaning to all other confessions of repentance.

My Boy, You're Great

This truth is vital for education—in the home and in the classroom.

Your child comes home with a report card; in some subjects, he or she did great, in others—he performed poorly. We instinctively tend to focus on the negative, on what is missing, and try to fix it.

There is a more effective approach. Focus on your child's success and strengths. When you receive the report card and see what he is lacking in, don't say: "My dear angel, I see that you need help with this subject. How can I help you? What is bothering you? You are such a good boy, why are you failing in this area?"

Instead say this: "My dear, I see you are excelling in your reading skills, in science and math. I see you got an A-plus for cleanliness and organization. I see you scored really high on your skill for co-operation with friends and sportsmanship. It is obvious that when you put your mind to something, you are immensely successful at it. Now how can we apply these lessons to other areas of your education?"

Your child might be lacking in a certain behavior at home. Point out to him all the things he is doing right at home. "I notice how well-mannered you are when you eat; I noticed earlier how considerate you were when your brother asked you for the juice; I noticed how sensitive you were to your baby sister. This shows how much kindness you have in your heart."

What did you accomplish? You made your child feel like a success story.

You accentuated what is right with him or her, not what is wrong with them.

And you did it not in a patronizing way (you are such an angel; you are a tzaddik; you are the best kid in the world—all this is a lie. Your child is not an angel, he is not a tzaddik, and he is not the best child in the world. And your child knows it is untrue!), but in a specific, genuine and real way.

You showed him what is great about his life. How good and special and capable he or she is. Now, he has a standard for himself that will 1) allow him to appreciate why his past behavior was unbefitting and inspire him to do better. 2) You will make him believe that he is truly capable of doing better. [7]

Singing My Sins?

Here is a story:

The Baal Shem Tov once visited a town in which the people complained that their cantor behaved strangely. It seems that on Yom Kippur, he would chant the Al Chet, confession of sins, in a merry melody, rather than in a more appropriately somber tune. When questioned by the Baal Shem Tov, the cantor explained:

"Rebbe, a king has many servants who serve him. Some of them prepare the royal meals, others serve the food, while others place the royal crown on the king's head, and yet others are in charge of running the affairs of the country, etc. Each of them rejoices in his work and the privilege he has to serve and to be so close to the king.

"Now the palace also has a janitor, charged with the duty of removing the rubbish and filth from the palace. The janitor looks and deals with filth all day. He approaches it, gathers it, and removes it. Do you think that he should be depressed because he is looking at dirt all day? No! He is happy because he is also serving the king. He is removing the dirt from the king's palace, ensuring that the palace is beautiful! It is not the dirt he is focused on, it is on the King's palace and its beauty that he is occupied with."

"When a Jew sins, he amasses some dirt on his soul. When he is confessing his sins, it is not the sins, the guilt, the darkness, and the negativity, that he is focused on; it is the holiness and beauty of his soul that he is focused on. He is removing the layers of dirt that are eclipsing the soul; he is allowing his inner light to shine in its full glory. Is that not a reason to sing and rejoice?" The Baal Shem Tov was deeply moved by this response because it captures one of his essential ideas. While other approaches in Jewish ethics focused often on the negativity of sin and its dire consequences in this world and even more in the next world, the Baal Shem Tov and the teachings of Chassidus focus primarily on the infinite holiness of every soul and heart. "Just as when you look at the earth you can never estimate how many treasures are hidden beneath its crust, so when you look at a Jew you can never estimate how many treasures lie beneath his or her crust," the Baal Shem Tov once said.

This was one of the most important ideas of the Baal Shem Tov (1698-1760)—whose birthday we celebrate on the 18th of Elul: (18 Elul is the birthday of the two luminaries—the Baal Shem Tov, founder of the Chasidic movement, and Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, the Alter Rebbe, founder of Chabad (1745-1812). It is also the yartzeit of the great Jewish thinker, the Maharal of Prague (in 1609), a great-great-great-grandfather of the Alter Rebbe.)

When you encounter a fellow Jew—and that includes yourself—who may have many a blemish, and committed many a sin and mistake, don't tell him how bad he is; tell him how good he is and how good he can be; how much G-d loves him and needs him, and then he automatically he will want to remove the clouds blacking his inner sunlight.

It is interesting, that till today in most Jewish communities the confession is done with a melody: "Ashamanu, Bagadnu..." "Veal kulam Eloka Selechosh..." Our confession of sins is inspired by our tithe confession.

An Exercise

So I return to my original plea: I want each of you to make a confession today. Tell someone—your rabbi, your friend, your spouse—something very positive about yourself. One positive thing about your soul and your life. Something you are proud of. Not in an arrogant way, but as a "confession." Because when you realize how good and capable you are, you might ask yourself the question, why am I not living up to my potential? [8]

[1] Deuteronomy 26:12-15 [2] Deuteronomy 26:13-14

[3] The Sforno (the Italian Rabbi, physician, and philosopher Rabbi Ovadya Sforno, 1470-1550) in his commentary on this verse explains, that the ceremony is called "vidui" because there is an implicit tragedy that hovers over the entire ritual. We testify to the fact that "I have removed the sacred portions from my house." Why is this entire house cleaning necessary? Who should really be receiving these portions? Before the Jews made the Golden Calf, the Divine service was the duty of the firstborn in each family. As a result of the sin of the Golden Calf, the privilege went to the tribe of Levi. If we would have not sinned, then, the tithe could remain in our own home, given to the oldest of the family. Now, however, our homes cannot accept the holiness. We have to remove it from our home. This fits well with what the Sforno writes elsewhere, that if not for the Golden Calf, there would be no Holy Temple; for every home would be a Temple, an abode for the Divine presence. Now, there is a need for a spiritual epicenter in lieu of our homes. For this, we confess.

The Sforno uses this concept to explain why the word used here in the subsequent prayer is "Hashkifa" [look down] which denotes a negative gaze (as in Genesis 19:28 and Exodus 14:24). Why are we invoking this term in our prayer? It is because we are confessing the sin of the Golden Calf.

[4] Song of Songs 1:5. Cf. Likkutei Torah Shir Hashirim on this verse. [5] For an elaboration of this point, see Sichas 18 Elul 5712 (1952). [6] For an elaboration of these last two points, see Likkutei Sichos vol. 30 Miketz. [7] Rabbi Dr. Abraham Twersky in his book of Chassidic tales relates a story about his grandfather, the Alter Rebbe, "The Rusty Penny," which expresses this same idea. [8] The idea about "vidui maaser" is based on a sermon presented by Rabbi Josef B. Soloveitchik ("Bris Avos," published in his

book "Chamash Derashos.") The second half of the sermon on an address I heard from the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Shabbos Parshas Acharei 5748 (1988).

<https://www.jewishpress.com/>

Remembering Not To Forget

By **Rabbi Reuven Taragin** - 17 Elul 5784 – September 19, 2024

Parshat Ki Tavo – Hakarat HaTov

The parsha begins by explaining how one who brings bikkurim (first fruits) to the Mikdash declares his appreciation of Hashem's gift of the Land of Israel (26:3). By doing so, he shows that he is "not an ingrate" (Rashi). The farmer may have been living on the land for hundreds of years and his family may have lived in Eretz Yisrael for many generations, but he still needs to thank Hashem for gifting him the land.

The parsha ends with Moshe Rabbeinu's introduction to the second covenant with Hashem. He explains that a new covenant is necessary because, in the past, the Jews did not yet fully appreciate Hashem (29:3).

Though Hashem had liberated them from Egypt and saved them at the sea, it took forty years of His constant provision for them to fully appreciate Him. This level of appreciation is a condition for the covenant and a meaningful relationship with Hashem (Rashi).

Do We Remember?

We know that Hashem returns life to us each morning, provides us with all we need, and protects us throughout each day, but we do not always show this appreciation properly?

Though we proclaim (in the Modim tefillah) that "we will thank you and sing your praises for our lives are in your hands, our souls in your care, your miracles every day, and your wonders and benevolence that are with us at every moment – evening, morning and afternoon," we are not often actively conscious, reflective, and appreciative of Hashem's care for us.

Parshat Ki Tavo relates to this phenomenon as well. At the end of the three-year ma'aser (tithe) cycle, we proclaim that "we have not violated any of the mitzvot and not forgotten" (26:14). Some of our mistakes reflect mistaken conscious decisions; others stem from forgetfulness or lack of consciousness. Or, as we admit in the Al Cheits, sometimes we sin "bli da'at – without thinking."

We believe that Hashem provides for us, but it is often not part of our active consciousness. We do not even need to forget because we are not reflective enough to remember.

Maximizing Miraculous Moments

This is why taking advantage of the moments when Hashem reminds us of His presence and assistance is so important. These special moments help us appreciate Hashem's more subtle and hidden role in our daily lives (Ramban, Shemot 13:16).

We experienced such a moment earlier this week. Miraculously, thousands of beepers (and later walkie-talkies) exploded simultaneously and killed and wounded thousands of the terrorists who have been attacking us for decades. Though the explosions were the result of much human effort and ingenuity, we know that they would not have taken place without Hashem's assistance. What is the proper reaction to this event? Many responded by posting or liking funny memes about the situation. A little laughter in these difficult times is certainly healthy.

The more important response is appreciating and thanking Hashem for His assistance. ...

Remembering to thank Hashem is so critical at this challenging time. We have experienced much suffering over the past year, which has caused many to feel distant from Hashem and wonder if Hashem is still with us. Moments like Tuesday give us the answer and (our proper response to them gives us) the strength to deal with more difficult days.

Continuing Our Tradition

Our thanks to Hashem on Tuesday night followed the tradition of our ancestors who burst into song after experiencing Hashem's salvation at Yam Suf. Their Az Yashir did not focus on the downfall of the Egyptians but, instead, on appreciating Hashem's salvation. We, too, concentrate not on the downfall of Hezbollah or Hamas but on Hashem's assistance to us.

Though the drowning of Hashem's creatures made the angels' song inappropriate (Sanhedrin 39b), our ancestors were expected to sing because they were the ones actually saved. With their song, they reached a high spiritual level. We, too, use their words each morning as the transition from praise of Hashem to commitment to His service.

We accentuate their song on the day they sang it as well – the last day of Pesach. Because of the death of Hashem's creations, we limit ourselves to half-Hallel, but we still say Hallel, sing and celebrate. In fact, though we recite Az Yashir every day, we reinforce our recital on the last day of Pesach by reciting it at sea at night (a minhag some have) and singing it verse by verse in the morning. The drowning of Hashem's creatures does not keep us from expressing our thanks to Him.

Perspective

How many great miracles have we experienced over the past months? Soldiers have shared so many stories of salvation. A unit in a personnel carrier was saved after backing up to transfer tefillin. Another unit was saved by a soldier who saw a terrorist rising from a pier he was facing while davening Mincha. These stories are Hashem's way of reminding us that He is with us.

We have also experienced much larger miracles. The unprecedented defense against hundreds of missiles and drones fired simultaneously by Iran and her proxies in April and the successful neutralization of thousands of Hezbollah missiles in August are just two of the many.

Did we "remember" to thank and praise Hashem then, and did we do so this week? Like the one bringing bikkurim, we need to express appreciation to Hashem for giving us the Land of Israel and sustaining us within it. There are many ways to express thanks. You can dance, you can recite Mizmor L'Todah or Nishmat, you can sing His praise. Which mode you choose is less important than making sure to choose one.

Redemption

Chazal tell us that Chizkiyahu HaMelech was meant to be the Mashiach after Hashem saved him and the city of Yerushalayim from Sancheirev's army if only he had responded with song and praise (Sanhedrin 94a). Had he responded like our ancestors at Yam Suf, he would have been crowned as Mashiach.

Chizkiyahu, like us, was not "out of the woods" yet. All of Judea lay in ruins, but he was still expected to show his appreciation for Hashem's salvation with song. He did not and the Messianic age was delayed for millennia.

Our personal relationship with Hashem and our national redemption hinge on our "remembering" to respond to his salvation with song and praise.

How To Use This Shabbat To Prepare for Rosh Hashana

As we approach Rosh Hashana, the day we all pass before Hashem, we should consider the depth of our relationship with Him. Do we appreciate the role He plays in our lives? Does that help make His existence central to our consciousness?

If the answer to these questions is the same as earlier this week, we have missed a golden opportunity.

Let's make sure not to let Shabbat pass without thanking Hashem for the past week's events. Let's ensure the beeper blasts inspire a better appreciation for everything Hashem does for us and His role in our lives.

We can accomplish this goal by discussing this week's events in shul and at the Shabbat table. We should take the opportunity over Shabbat to talk about the events and our lives with our children and encourage each of them to reflect upon Hashem's place in their lives.

May our efforts this Shabbat inspire us to work on the trait of hakarat hatov for Hashem and others in the weeks leading up to Rosh Hashana.

Let's make sure we continue remembering not to forget.

<https://www.jewishpress.com/judaism/parsha/sivan-rahav-meir/ribo-new-york-and-redemption/2024/09/20/>

Ribo, New York, And Redemption

By **Sivan Rahav-Meir** - 17 Elul 5784 – September 20, 2024 0

It's possible to describe what happened this month in technical terms: The Israeli singer-songwriter Ishay Ribo broke a record when he appeared in

Madison Square Garden in New York. His two performances there, attracting thousands, were sold out.

But it's also possible to describe what happened on a spiritual level: It's the month of Elul in the Diaspora and Jews there are eager for contact with an emissary from the land of Israel. It's a time of drawing closer to G-d, of gaining clarity, of renewed Jewish pride and identification with Israel, a time of joy, of prayer, of unity.

At these huge gatherings there were not only songs but also words of inspiration from Ribo regarding our present challenges: "I believe – and I think everyone else believes in their heart – that everything the nation of Israel is going through now is not in vain. The pain and the tears that have fallen without end will cause redemption to grow and a new world to flourish. When this happens – soon, with G-d's help – we cannot imagine how much good there will be." These words, too, and not only Ribo's famous hit songs, were applauded by thousands of Jews. Amen.

Making The Connection

74 mitzvot!

Last Shabbat we read Parashat Ki Teitze which is the parasha in the Torah that contains the largest number of mitzvot: 74 out of a total of taryag (613) mitzvot.

Let's stop for a moment and think about this, especially now in the month of Elul. The list of mitzvot in this parasha is not a long shopping list of items to "check off" when completed.

The word mitzvah is not only derived from the root word, "tzivui" – commandment, it is also closely related to the Aramaic word, "tzavta" – together, which is connected to the Hebrew word, "tzevet," – staff, a group of people who work together. When a person fulfills a mitzvah, he or she is connecting to G-d and becoming His partner. This connection in itself is the greatest reward and the most incredible source of joy! Through mitzvot, a person is doing the right thing, and in this way, he is making the world right too.

The mitzvot enable us to take the most basic things of all: our bodies, our possessions, our most physical parts, and to sanctify them. For example, we can take our hard-earned money – and give it to tzedakah, to someone in need. We can find a lost item and return it to its owner; we can take tefillin straps and wrap them around our arms; we can knead dough and make the blessing of hafrashat challah (separating challah).

It is through these physical actions that we mere humans are able to bring into our world holy sparks of the eternal Light.

At the end of each year, as we stand on the cusp of the year to come, it is the custom for us to take on a new mitzvah, a practical action, which will bring us more of a "tzavta" – connection to G-d – and thus bring more holiness into our lives.

Translated by Yehoshua Siskin and Janine Muller Sherr.

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subject: Covenant and Conversation

Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks zt"l

Freedom Means Telling the Story Ki Tavo

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

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

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

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

“We hold these truths to be self-evident . . .”

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

Take the statue of Winston Churchill in Parliament Square. Churchill was one of the greatest orators of all time. His wartime speeches and broadcasts are part of British history. But no words of his are inscribed on the monument, and the same applies to almost everyone else publicly memorialised.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A covenant is more than a myth of origin – like the Roman story of Romulus and Remus, or the English story of King Arthur and his ground will yield no produce, and you will soon perish from the good land the Lord is giving you.

Deut. 11:13-17

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

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

One of the most profound truths about the politics of covenant – the message of the first-fruits' declaration in this week's parsha – is: If you want to sustain freedom, never stop telling the story.

knights. Unlike a myth, which merely claims to say what happened, a covenant always contains a specific set of undertakings that bind its citizens in the present and into the future.

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

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

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

Indeed, as the Johnson quotation makes clear, covenant societies see their very fate as tied up with the way they meet or fail to meet those obligations.

“If we keep its terms, we shall flourish” – implying that if we don't, we won't. This is a way of thinking the West owes entirely to the book of Devarim, most famously in the second paragraph of the Shema:

If you faithfully obey the commands I am giving you today . . . then I will send rain on your land in its season . . . I will provide grass in the fields for your cattle, and you will eat and be satisfied.

Be careful, lest you are enticed to turn away and worship other gods and bow down to them. Then the Lord's anger will burn against you, and He will shut up the heavens so that it will not rain and the ground will yield no produce, and you will soon perish from the good land the Lord is giving you. Deut. 11:13-17

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Parsha Parables By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky
Drasha

By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky Parshas Ki Savo

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

What then does Moshe mean when he tells the nation that Hashem "did not give you a heart to comprehend, eyes to see, or ears to hear until this day"? Rav Noach Weinberg, dean of Aish HaTorah Institutions, tells the story of the young man who came to him in search of spiritual meaning.

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

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

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

"Yes sir," came the resounding reply. "None whatsoever!"

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

"Bafoofsticks?" countered the student. What's a Bafoofstick?" "That's not the point," responded the rabbi, "I just want to know how you feel about them."

"About what? "The Bafoofsticks"

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

Moshe explains to the nation that it is possible to be mired in miracles and still not comprehend the greatness that surrounds you. One can experience miraculous revelations but unless he focuses his heart and mind he will continue to lead his life uninspired as before. In fact, even blessings need to be realized. In offering blessing the Torah tells us, "the blessings will be upon you and they will reach you" (Deuteronomy 28:2). If blessings are upon us of course they reach you! Why the redundancy? Once again the Torah teaches us that it is possible to be surrounded by blessing and not realize it. There are people who are surrounded by health, wealth, and great fortune, but their lives are permeated in misery. They have the blessing, but it has not reached them.

We need more than physical or even spiritual blessing. We need more than experiencing miraculous events. It is not enough to see miracles or receive the best of fortune. We must bring them into our lives and into our souls. Then we will be truly blessed. Good Shabbos © 1999 Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Thank You to Mr. Daniel Retter and family for your words of support and encouragement.

Good Shabbos

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

from: **Alan Fisher** <afisherads@yahoo.com>

date: Sep 19, 2024, 8:58 PM

subject: Potomac Torah Study Center: Devrei Torah for Shabbat Ki Tavo 5784

Potomac Torah Study Center

Vol. 11 #50, September 20-21, 2024; 17-18 Elul 5784; Ki Tavo

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

Almost immediately after I sent my last posting, we learned of the brutal murder of Hersh Polin Goldberg, cousin of very close friends of ours, and several other of our "hostages" (prisoners) that Hamas has been torturing for nearly a year. Baruch Dayan HaEmet. May the names of our victims of terror and hatred, added to the countless Jewish victims of anti-Semitism over the past 3500 years, inspire all of us to dedicate ourselves to more mitzvot. May the IDF operation in Lebanon also bring safety to northern Israel with minimal adverse consequences.

One of the first requirements for our ancestors upon entering the land of Israel is to bring a portion of the first fruits of the seven special crops associated with Israel, put them in a basket, and bring them to a Kohen at the place that God designates (the Mishkan and later the Temple) (26:1-10).

When bringing this offering, the farmer recites a short statement of Jewish history, starting with the well known verse about a wandering Aramean, descent into Egypt, and becoming a nation there. The statement continues with our crying out to Hashem, who then redeemed us and gave us this land.

Thanking Hashem for His blessings is always a requirement for our people. Rabbi David Fohrman and his scholars at alephbeta.org observe that when Yaakov left Canaan to go to his uncle's home to find a wife, as he left the country, he vowed that if God protected him and brought him back to his family in peace, he would tithe (give a tenth of whatever he had) to Hashem (Bereshis 28:20-22). Yaakov never returned to his family home in Canaan with his family complete and in peace, so he never redeemed this pledge. Moshe reminds the people and tells them that now that they are united and entering the promised land, it is time for them to redeem Yaakov's pledge. Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander reminds us that unity among Jews is a fundamental goal and responsibility – a requirement for Israel to stay strong and defeat our enemies. Moshe's words are as important today as they were more than 3000 years ago.

As Moshe's narration to B'Nai Yisrael comes closer to a conclusion, he reminds the people again that they have a choice, to follow Hashem's mitzvot and live in the land that He promised to our ancestors, or to disobey and face awful consequences. Before entering and taking over the land, Moshe insists that the people accept a new covenant with God. Moshe splits the people into two segments, one on Mt. Gerizim and the other on Mt. Ebal. Moshe has the tribe of Levi recite twelve forbidden activities that will lead to awful curses, and all the people must recite "Amen" to each of them (27:15-26). As the scholars at alephbeta.org and Rabbi Haim Ovadia observe, the common element in these curses is that they represent sneaky, secretive, destructive sins, some against God but many more against other people.

While this statement of curses is frightening, the real terror comes in 28:15-68, the tochacha with an incredible, detailed listing of horrible consequences of not following Hashem's laws and commandments. Rabbi Ysoscher Katz explains why this tochacha is far more frightening than the one in Sefer Vayikra. The tochacha in Ki Tavo is more than twice as long, the punishments have an element of rage and vindictiveness absent from the earlier tochacha, and this tochacha lacks the uplifting forgiveness that ends the earlier statement of curses. Anyone reading this section will quickly understand why Ki Tavo must be the worst Torah portion that any Bar Mitzvah child could have for what should be a day of celebration.

We reach Ki Tavo only a few weeks before October 7, the anniversary of the cruel attack on our people by the evil of Hamas. The explosion of anti-Semitism all over the world in the past nearly twelve months makes it seem that Israel is isolated in a world of enemies. Rabbi Yakov Nagen reminds us that Israel does, however, have many friends in the world. For example, the Islamic Fatwa Council in Iraq has forbidden any support for Hamas. The United Arab Emirates strongly supports Israel. The Avraham Accords remain solid. When Iran sent thousands of missiles toward Israel a few months into the war, Jordan participated in destroying missiles before they could reach Israel. Egypt stayed silent. Only a small number of Arab countries sided with Iran. Rabbi Nagen reinforces Rabbi Brander's words by stating again that Israel's success comes largely because of unity in Israel. While the world remains dangerous for Jews, there is hope among the darkness.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah and Alan

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. Please join me in supporting this wonderful organization, which has increased its scholarly work during and since the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.

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Rabbi Kaganoff's Sunday night shiur

date: Sep 16, 2024, 9:56 AM

subject: Holding the Torah Upright

There is a halachic source for the mitzvah of hagbahah in this week's parsha. The Ramban, in his commentary on the verse, Cursed be he who does not uphold the words of this Torah (Devarim 27:26), explains that this curse includes someone who, when performing hagbahah, does not raise the sefer Torah in a way that everyone in the shul can see it.

Holding the Torah Upright

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question #1: Enthusiasm

"I was recently in a shul where they took out the sefer Torah, opened it and carried it all around the shul, showing everyone with a yad where the beginning of the keria'ah is. I had never seen this before, and was wondering if this is a common practice. Is it mentioned in halachic sources, or does it simply manifest someone's enthusiasm?"

Question #2: Inversion

Is there any halachic basis for the custom on Simchas Torah of reversing the sefer Torah so that the writing faces away from the magbiah?

Answer:

The mitzvah of hagbahah is to raise the sefer Torah and show it, so that everyone in the shul can see the writing of the sefer Torah. The prevalent, but not exclusive, tradition among Ashkenazim is that this mitzvah is performed after each sefer Torah is read, whereas the exclusive practice among Edot Hamizrah (Jews of Middle Eastern and Sefardic descent) is that this mitzvah is performed prior to reading from the Torah.

Among the Edot Hamizrah, some open the sefer Torah and lift it up immediately upon removing it from the Aron Kodesh, whereas others first bring the sefer Torah to the shulchan and then perform hagbahah, prior to calling up the kohen for the first aliyah (Ben Ish Chai II, Tolados #16). Some even perform hagbahah both before and after the reading (ibid.; Kaf HaChayim 134:17) As a matter of curiosity, it is interesting to mention that some Chassidim and Perushim in Eretz Yisrael observe the practice of the Sefardim and perform hagbahah before the Torah is read.

As we will soon see, both customs -- performing hagbahah before the reading and performing it after the reading -- can be traced back to antiquity.

The earliest description of hagbahah

The earliest extant description of the procedure of hagbahah haTorah is found in Masechta Sofrim, as follows:

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"One must raise the sefer Torah when reciting the words Shema Yisrael... and then raise it again upon reciting Ehad Elokeinu gadol Adoneinu Kadosh Shemo... Immediately, [the person performing the mitzvah] opens the sefer Torah to a width of three columns and lifts the sefer Torah -- showing the writing to all the people standing to his right and his left. Then he moves the sefer Torah in a circular motion before him and behind him -- because it is a mitzvah incumbent on all the men and women to see the text of the sefer Torah, to bow, and to say Vezos HaTorah asher sam Moshe lifnei B'nei Yisrael" (Masechta Sofrim 14:11-14).

What are the sources for the divergent customs?

As noted by the Beis Yosef and the Gra, the Masechta Sofrim describes performing hagbahah before keria'as haTorah. Nevertheless, the venerated practice of the Benei Ashkenaz is to do hagbahah after we read the Torah (see Darkei Moshe 147:4; the

practice is quoted at least as early as the Sefer HaTzur, who lived over eight hundred years ago). This custom is based on the Gemara (Megillah 32a) that states, "After ten people read the Torah, the greatest of them should roll up the Torah," which refers to hagbahah and implies that it is performed after the Torah has been read. Similarly, a different passage of Gemara (Sotah 39b) mentions that the person reading the haftarah should be careful not to begin until the rolling of the Torah is complete. This implies that the hagbahah and subsequent rolling closed of the Torah is performed immediately prior to the haftarah, and not before the Torah is read.

Two places in Shulchan Aruch

This difference in practice resulted in an anomalous situation. Because the Tur was himself personally an Ashkenazi, he included the laws of hagbahah haTorah after the reading of the Torah, in Chapter 147 of Orach Chayim. On the other hand, the Shulchan Aruch, who follows Sefardic practice, mentions hagbahah haTorah before the rules of the reading of the Torah in Chapter 134:2, yet he also discusses them where the Tur placed the halachah in Chapter 147. As a result, the halachos of hagbahah haTorah are located in two different places in Shulchan Aruch, with the laws of keria'as haTorah sandwiched between. Some details of the laws of hagbahah haTorah are discussed in Chapter 134, others in Chapter 147.

Why do Ashkenazim perform hagbahah afterwards?

Logically, it would seem that we should display the text of the sefer Torah prior to reading the Torah, so that people observe the section that is about to be read, as, indeed, the Sefardim do. Why do Ashkenazim delay displaying the words of the Torah until after the reading is concluded?

The authorities present the following basis for what seems to be an anomalous practice:

In earlier generations, there were unlettered people who mistakenly assumed that it was more important to see the words of the Torah during the hagbahah than it was to hear the reading of the Torah. As a result, many of these people would leave shul immediately

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after the hagbahah and miss the reading. Therefore, the practice was introduced to postpone the hagbahah until after the reading was concluded -- which now caused these people to stay in shul and hear the reading of the Torah (Sheyarei Keneses HaGedolah 134:2, quoted by Kaf HaChayim 134:17).

Are there any other ramifications to this dispute?

Indeed, there is another interesting ramification that results from the Ashkenazic practice of delaying the hagbahah until after the reading is concluded. Should one notice a pesul in the sefer Torah that does not require taking out another sefer Torah, but precludes reading from this sefer Torah until it is repaired, one should not recite the words Vezos HaTorah and Toras Hashem temimah when being magbiah the sefer Torah (Kaf HaChayim 134:17, quoting Shu't Adnei Paz #13).

What is the proper way to do hagbahah?

A sefer Torah is written on sections of parchment that are stitched together. The person who is performing hagbahah should make sure that the stitching is in front of him before he lifts the Torah, so that if the sefer Torah tears from the stress of the lifting, the stitching, which is easy to repair, will tear and not, G-d forbid, the parchment itself (Megillah 32a, as explained by the Tur; see esp. Aruch HaShulchan 147:13; cf., however, how Rashi explains the Gemara).

"Reading" the Torah

When the sefer Torah is raised, each person in shul should try to actually read the letters of the sefer Torah. This causes the bright, spiritual light of the Torah to reach him

(Arizal, quoted by Magen Avraham 134:3). Some have the practice of looking for a word in the sefer Torah that begins with the same letter as their name (Ben Ish Chai II, Tolados #16). In most Sefardic communities, someone points to the beginning of the day's reading while the sefer Torah is held aloft for all to see. Some congregations consider this a great honor that is given to the rav or a different scholar (Kaf HaChayim 134:13). This may be the origin of the custom that some people have of pointing at the sefer Torah during hagbahah (cf. Yalkut Me'am Lo'ez, Parshas Ki Savo, 27:26).

In order to make sure that everyone sees the text of the sefer Torah, some Sefardic congregations have the magbiah carry the open sefer Torah around the shul to display its holy words to every attendee (Kaf HaChayim 134:13).

In which direction is the Torah held?

The usual Ashkenazic practice is that the magbiah holds the sefer Torah with its writing facing him. Some congregations have the practice that, on Simchas Torah, the sefer Torah is lifted in the reverse way, so that the writing is away from the magbiah. Most people think this is a "stick" that is part of the Simchas Torah celebration, but this is not halachically accurate.

The Bach (Orach Chayim 147) contends that the original approach was to hold the sefer Torah with the writing visible to the people -- as we do on Simchas Torah. This is because when the magbiah lifts the sefer Torah the way we usually do, his body blocks the view, and for this reason, the Maharam and other great Torah leaders held the Torah with its text away from them when they performed hagbahah. Presumably, the reason this practice was abandoned is because it is much more difficult to do hagbahah this way, and there is concern that someone might, G-d forbid, drop the sefer Torah while doing it. Nevertheless, in places where the custom is to perform hagbahah this way on Simchas Torah, the reason is to show that on this joyous occasion, we want to perform hagbahah in the optimal way.

The more the merrier!

The above-quoted Masechta Sofrim requires that the magbiah open the sefer Torah three columns wide. The authorities dispute whether the magbiah may open the sefer Torah more than three columns. In other words, does Masechta Sofrim mean that one should open the sefer Torah exactly three columns, or does it mean that one should open it at least three columns, so that everyone can see the words of the Torah, but that someone may open it wider, should he choose? The Magen Avraham (134:3) suggests that one

should open it exactly three columns, although he provides no reason why one should not open the sefer Torah more, whereas the Mishnah Berurah says that it depends on the strength of the magbiah -- implying that if he can open it more, it is even better. It is possible that the Magen Avraham was concerned that opening the sefer Torah wider might cause people to show off their prowess and cause the important mitzvah of hagbahah to become a source of inappropriate pride -- the exact opposite of the humility people should feel when performing mitzvos.

Should you roll it while lifting?

Most people who perform the mitzvah of hagbahah roll open the sefer Torah to the requisite width and then lift it, whereas others unroll it while they are lifting it, while the sefer Torah is in the air. Which of these approaches is preferred?

The Shaar Efrayim discusses this issue, and implies that there is no preference between the two approaches, whereas the standard wording of Masechta Sofrim is that one should unroll the sefer Torah first.

Reciting Vezos HaTorah

When the sefer Torah is elevated, everyone should bow and recite the pasuk (Devarim

4:44) Vezos HaTorah asher sam Moshe lifnei Benei Yisrael (Masechta Sofrim 14:14).

Indeed, the Chida cites sources who hold that since Chazal mention saying Vezos

HaTorah, it has the status of a davar shebekedushah and can be said even if one is in the middle of birchos keria; as shema (Kenesses HaGedolah, quoted by Birkei Yosef 134:4).

Subsequently, the Chida wrote a lengthy responsum, in which he concluded that reciting

5 Vezos HaTorah does not have the status of a davar shebekedushah, and therefore should not be said in a place where it interrupts one's davening (Shu"t Chayim She#39;al 1:68).

Vezos HaTorah should be said only while facing the words of the sefer Torah (Ba#39;er Heiteiv 134:6, quoting several earlier sources). If one began reciting Vezos HaTorah while facing the writing of the sefer Torah, one may complete the pasuk after the text of the sefer Torah has been rotated away from one's view (Sha'ar Efrayim).

In many siddurim, after the sentence Vezos HaTorah asher sam Moshe lifnei Benei Yisrael is read, five words are added: Al pi Hashem beyad Moshe (Bamidbar 9:23), as if this is a continuation of the verse of the Torah. Many halachic authorities question this practice, since there is no such passage in the Torah (Aruch HaShulchan 134:3). Others are concerned, because these last five words are not an entire verse. Indeed, many old siddurim do not quote this addition, and many halachic authorities do not recite it.

Who should be honored with hagbahah?

The Gemara (Megillah 32a) states "Ten people who read the Torah, the greatest of them should roll the Torah," which refers to the mitzvah of hagbahah, since the magbiah rolls the Torah both prior to displaying it and when he closes it afterwards. The Baal Hatur quotes two opinions as to whom the "ten people" refers. Does it mean the attendees of

the current minyan, comprised of at least ten men, and that the greatest of this group should have the honor of hagbahah. Or does it mean that we give hagbahah to the greatest of the ten people who were involved in that day's reading of the Torah: the seven who had aliyyos, the maftir, the baal keria, and the person who recited the Targum after each pasuk was read, which was standard procedure at the time of the Gemara.

The halachic authorities rule according to the first approach, that one should honor the greatest person in the shul (Gra; Mishnah Berurah 147:6). They also refer to another practice, which was to auction off the mitzvah of hagbahah to the highest bidder (Tur; Shulchan Aruch). However, where the hagbahah is not auctioned, one should provide the honor to the greatest Torah scholar in attendance (Machatzis HaShekel). The prevalent practice of not necessarily offering hagbahah to the greatest scholar is in order to avoid any machlokes (Shaar Efrayim; Mishnah Berurah). Nevertheless, in a situation where no machlokes will develop, one should certainly accord the mitzvah to the greatest talmid chacham who can perform hagbahah properly.

The importance of performing hagbahah correctly

As we mentioned in the introduction to this article, the Ramban, in his commentary on the verse, Cursed be he who does not uphold the words of this Torah (Devarim 27:26), explains that this curse includes someone who, when performing hagbahah, does not raise the sefer Torah in a way that everyone in the shul can see it. Apparently, there were places that did not perform the mitzvah of hagbahah at all, out of concern that people will be cursed for not performing hagbahah properly (Birkei Yosef, Shiyurei Bracha 134:2; Kaf HaChayim 134:15; Encyclopedia Talmudis, quoting Orchos Chayim).

Although I certainly do not advocate eliminating the mitzvah of hagbahah, a person who knows that he cannot perform the mitzvah correctly should defer the honor. The gabbai is responsible to give hagbahah only to someone who is both knowledgeable and capable of performing the mitzvah properly.

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date: Sep 16, 2024, 5:39 PM

subject: Parsha Insights - Spiritual Ups and Downs

Parsha Insights

By Rabbi Yisroel Ciner

Parshas Ki Savo

Spiritual Ups and Downs

print

This week we read the parsha of Ki Savo--when you will enter the Land of Israel--which begins with the commandment to bring the first fruits to the

Temple in Yerushalayim. This is called the mitzvah of Bikurim. There is a passuk {verse} later on in the parsha, after Bikurim and a number of other commandments, which really hits upon an issue that I think plagues all of us to varying degrees at one point or another.

"Ha'yome ha'zeh Hashem Elokecha m'tzav'cha la'a'sos es ha'chukim v'es ha'mishpatim {On this day Hashem, your G-d, is commanding you to do the laws and judgments} [26:16]."

Why does the passuk say that on this day Hashem is commanding? Hadn't most mitzvos already been given at Sinai?

The Ramban explains that Moshe had now completed his task of teaching Bnei Yisroel all of the commandments. Therefore it was only from that day that Bnei Yisroel were commanded to do all of the laws and judgments.

Rashi, however, takes a different approach. Quoting the Medrash he explains: Every day they must be like new {k'chadashim} in our eyes, as if we had just been commanded.

Unbelievable. Imagine if Hashem would come forth and speak to us, giving us clear instructions as to what actions are in our best interests. Imagine the motivation and determination that we'd have to fulfill those instructions.

According to Rashi, the passuk is exhorting us to feel that way every single day--k'chadashim {like new}.

But how can we maintain that freshness and excitement--that k'chadashim? We know that we human beings have a tremendous capacity to adjust to things.

On the first morning of camp, my wife and I were woken by the sounds of birds walking on our ceiling. They were inside the building and were having quite a time on the drop-ceiling of our room. The ceiling kept sagging under their weight and we were petrified that the birds would drop through the drop-ceiling with all of their droppings in tow! I thought to myself that if this is going to be a daily 'Close Encounter of the Fou/wl Kind' I'm never going to get a proper amount of sleep and I simply won't survive the summer. However, on the second day I found it far less annoying. By the third day, even though they seemed to be having quite a party up there, I simply didn't hear it. I had gotten used to it and it no longer moved me.

If that is the nature of man, how can we be commanded to feel as if the Torah was given today--that its words are k'chadashim? How can we feel freshness in our service to Hashem? We've already 'been there done that'. On whatever level of observance we're at, we've done what we do perhaps thousands of times already. How can we reach the level of k'chadashim? Rav Volbe, in his Alay Shur, deals with the cycle of spiritual ups and downs that we are all subjected to. How at times it feels fresh and exciting and at times we feel like robots, mechanically going through the motions. How we can then begin to question ourselves: Is this really me? Where have the feelings gone? If I'm feeling (or not feeling) this way then maybe this really isn't for me...

He quotes from the Sefer Hayashar that one must realize right from the start that this is part and parcel of spiritual growth. An intrinsic part of this growth process is the ups and downs--the swings between the feelings of intimacy and the feelings of detachment. Having these feelings is as clear an indication as one can have that this is where you belong. This is for you.

It would be like giving up baseball because you once got a strike while at bat. Well I guess baseball just isn't for me... I'm clearly not cut out to be a basketball player because I missed a foul shot... It's part of the process.

But if that is so, doesn't the passuk become even harder to understand? If the ups and downs are inevitable and intrinsic parts of the spiritual growth process, how can I be commanded and expected to feel as if they are new? I've done it so many times already... I'm feeling distant and detached...

The Sefer Hayashar writes further that the factor which will determine if one is feeling intimate in his service to Hashem or detached from Him is chidush {newness}. One can make sure that his service doesn't become rote by constantly searching for new insights and understandings. Finding chidush in oneself and in one's service. The chidush can make everything k'chadashim. Perhaps, that is the explanation of the commandment that we began with. We seem to be commanded to view the Torah as newly given each day. How can

one possibly do that and furthermore, how can we be commanded to do something that seems to be beyond our nature and grasp?
 Perhaps the commandment is in fact a very tangible one. Work at finding and infusing freshness into your fulfillment of the mitzvot. Study. Search. Open your eyes. Open your hearts. You'll thereby minimize the downs and maximize the ups—have short bouts of detachment surrounded by extended spells of intimacy.
 Find chidush and you'll find the mitzvot to be k'chadashim.
 Good Shabbos,
 Yisroel Ciner
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from: **Rabbi Chanan Morrison** <chanan@ravkooktorah.org>
 date: Sep 19, 2024, 3:24 AM
 subject: **Rav Kook on Ki Tavo**: How to Serve God in Joy
 Ki Tavo: How to Serve God in Joy
 "Because you failed to serve the Eternal your God with joy and contentment..." (Deut. 28:47)
 Rav Kook was once asked: How can we awaken feelings of excitement and enthusiasm in our avodat Hashem? How do we cultivate a sense of joy in our service of God, when we observe mitzvot and study Torah?
 The Answer of the Kabbalists
 In his response, Rav Kook wrote:
 It is difficult to properly explain this fundamental aspect of serving God in a letter. However, the primary way to kindle joy and enthusiasm is by dedicating time to rigorous study of the spiritual, non-halakhic areas of the Torah. Do not relegate it to haphazard reading. It is through this study that the soul's inner light begins to shine, and a spirit of joy and vitality infuses those who earnestly seek truth.
 Nonetheless, I will share with you one central principle, though this too cannot be fully grasped without serious study and reflection. This principle can serve as a gateway to deepening your love for God and experiencing the radiant light of the holy Torah.
 Clearly, if someone was granted the chance to benefit the entire world, even the most self-centered individual would eagerly seize the opportunity, devoting his heart and soul to the task.
 Fatigue and weariness arise when we fail to recognize the extent of the good that we bring to the entire world through our Torah study, performance of mitzvot, Divine service, and cultivation of character traits.
 For this reason, God enlightened us with the teachings of the lofty tzaddikim, the masters of Kabbalah. They deepened our understanding of the true significance of our service, clarifying how it uplifts all of creation.
 Nonetheless, we need to bring this abstract idea closer to our intellect. Then our motivation will be strong and our enthusiasm well-grounded.
 Uplifting the Universe
 We attain this profound awareness by contemplating the spiritual unity that binds the entire universe. We need to recognize that each individual soul is connected to the collective soul of all existence. Every created being draws its light and perfection from this collective soul. We have the power to increase the light in our souls through Torah study, mitzvot, prayer, and character refinement. We need to be aware that whenever we enlighten our own souls, we are benefiting not just ourselves, but the entire universe. We are bestowing perfection and life upon all creation.
 Through our efforts, the righteous are strengthened in their holy service. The evil of the wicked is mitigated to some extent, and they experience stirrings of remorse and penitence. Even the animals are ennobled, according to their station. The noble holiness provided by a single soul that truly cares about all

of existence helps refine and purify even those creatures inclined toward destruction. And it certainly adds dazzling light to the lofty splendor of the souls, and throughout the spiritual worlds, in their infinite beauty and sanctity.
 All of this is relevant for every member of the holy nation of Israel. But it resonates with even greater significance for those who are privileged to dwell in the Holy Land.
 (Adapted from Iggerot HaRe'iyah vol. I, letter 301 5670/1910)

fw from allen.klein@gmail.com
 from: Rabbi Efreim Goldberg <reg@brsonline.org>
 September 17, 2024
 Assassination Attempts and Bucket Lists
 By **Rabbi Efreim Goldberg**
 "0 – 2."

That was the defiant tweet former President Trump posted shortly after an assassination attempt on his life earlier this week, the second in less than three months.
 The first time, Trump came within inches of losing his life and while the second time the would-be assassin didn't get off a shot, Trump couldn't help but feel he escaped death yet again. Reflecting on the incident, one of his sons said, "My father is running out of lives."
 The truth is one doesn't need to be a former president, a current candidate, or a target of assassins to be concerned with mortality. Many people experience the mortality alarm in mid-life, triggered by the loss of a parent, a diagnosis, a near-death experience or just general "FOGO," fear of growing old. As we age (and for some even in our youth) when we think about the dangers of this world, the uncertainty of life, the risk of illness, natural disasters, terrorist attacks and more, one can't help but spend their life thinking about their eventual death.
 While confronting mortality and contemplating the fragility of life can be debilitating and anxiety-producing, it can also be enormously motivating and inspiring.
 The Gemara (Berachos 5a) teaches:
 אמר רבי שמעון בן לקיש: לעולם ירגיז אדם יצר הרע, שנאמר: "רגיז ואל תתקטאו" אם נצחו — מוטב, ואם לאו — יצטוק בתורה, שנאמר: "אמרו בלבבכם". אם נצחו — מוטב, ואם לאו — יקרא קריאת שמוע, שנאמר: "על משכבכם". אם נצחו — מוטב, ואם לאו — יזכור לו יום המיתה, שנאמר: "ודמו סלה".
 Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish said: One should always incite his good inclination against his evil inclination... If one succeeds and subdues his evil inclination, excellent, but if he does not succeed in subduing it, he should study Torah...
 If he subdues his evil inclination, excellent; if not, he should recite *Shema*...
 If he subdues his evil inclination, excellent; if not, he should remind himself of the day of death.
 As human beings with an animal soul, we are drawn to the material, physical world around us. We struggle with desires, drives and appetites that relentlessly tempt us. Our rabbis teach when we feel we are in the throes and the grip of our alter ego, our animal impulse and instinct, we should follow a formula. First, try to show discipline, employ your positive inclination. If that isn't successful, engage in Torah study to ground you and calm you. If that doesn't work, say *Shema*, contemplate before Whom we must give an accounting. If we are still tempted, struggling and on the verge of indulging, the last resort is to contemplate the day of death.
 (The Vilna Gaon says that the Rebbe Shimon Ben Lakish's advice is alluded to in the verse *rabos machshavos b'lev ish, v'atzas Hashem hi sakum*. The Gra notes that "*sakum*" is the acronym for *Torah, kerias shema and misa*.)
 Death is a motivating factor. Thinking about our mortality, considering the finality of death, serve to remind us to live and live life to its fullest. Perhaps that is why Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year, is in some ways a dress rehearsal for our deaths. From Kapparos, the death of a chicken to atone for our mistakes, to the wearing of the kittel, the white garment that we will literally be buried in, to the Torah reading of Acharei Mos, "after the death" of the two sons of Aharon, the day is replete with references to death. We

read of the *asara harguei malchus*, the ten holy martyrs murdered by the romans. We recite *Viduy*, the confession that is also said by someone on their deathbed. We abstain from eating, drinking and physical comforts and pleasures as if we are already only a soul devoid of a body. The Talmud says that *Yom Ha'Hakippurim atzmo m'caper, u'misah m'chaperes*, Yom Kippur and death atone for our mistakes.

Yom Kippur, like every encounter with death, urges us into the fullness of living. It should not be the most depressing day of the year, but rather can be our happiest if we use it to inspire our best year, a year in which we cross things off our bucket list. A bucket list is a list of goals and objectives to accomplish before we kick the proverbial bucket and it is too late. There are many books, websites and apps that encourage and promote people to create their own lists of what we want to do before we die.

There are classic lists, adventure lists, food lists, indulgent lists, and everyday lists like make someone smile, dance in the rain. Some want to skydive and others make a handmade quilt. Some want to travel to exotic locations and others taste unusual foods.

Our lists reveal a great deal about us. Confronting mortality means considering the question, what is on your list? What do you want to achieve or experience before it is too late? Does your list include making a million dollars, or making a difference? Does it include finishing a TV series or finishing Shas? Does it include spending time on vacations and trips or spending time with spouses and children?

Once you identify what is on your list, ask yourself, why haven't you done it yet, what is holding you back or what is in your way?

You don't need to be shot at to think about mortality. Considering death should inspire our best life. Write your bucket list and more importantly, start checking things off.

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

By Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom © 2014

I. MIKRA BIKKURIM

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

II. VIDUI MA'AS'ROT

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

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

a) T'rumah (approx. 1/50) must be separated - that belongs to the Kohen and must be given to a member of that family.

b) Ma'aser (lit. "a tenth" - 1/10 of what's left after T'rumah is taken) is then separated and designated as a gift for the Levi.

b') T'rumat Ma'aser (1/10 of the Ma'aser) is taken by the Levi and given to the Kohen.

c) Ma'aser Sheni (lit. "second tenth" - 1/10 of what's left after T'rumah and Ma'aser are taken). This is taken to Yerushalayim and is used for celebration with family and friends. In case it cannot be taken there, it's "holy status" is transferred to coins of that value (plus 1/5) and those coins are taken to Yerushalayim, where they are spent on food and drink with which to celebrate.

c') Ma'aser 'Ani (lit. "poor-man's tenth" - 1/10th of what's left after T'rumah and Ma'aser are taken). This is given to the poor

wherever they are.

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

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

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

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

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

III. QUESTIONS OF STYLE AND LOCATION

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

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

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

a) Historic Recounting (Chapters 1-11)

b) Law Compendium (Chapters 12-26)

c) Re-Covenanting (Chapters 27-33).

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

THE THIRD QUESTION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Our third question is, therefore:

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

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

IV. *ERETZ ZAVAT HALAV UD'VASH*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

V. TWO DIMENSIONS OF KEDUSHAH

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

VI. TWO LEVELS OF INCLUSION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

VIII. POSTSCRIPT

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

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

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

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

PARSHAT KI TAVO

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

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

INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

Now, in Parshat Ki Tavo, we find:

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

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

PART I - THE TWO LAST MITZVOT OF THE MAIN SPEECH

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

1) MIKRA BIKKURIM (26:1-11)

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

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

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

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

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

WHERE THEY 'REALLY' BELONG!

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

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

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

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

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

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

MATCHING BOOKENDS

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

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

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

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

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

1. MIKRA BIKKURIM

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

2. VIDDUI MA'ASER

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PART II / THE FINALE - MOSHE'S CONCLUDING REMARKS

This same theme continues in Moshe Rabbeinu's concluding remarks of the main speech (which follow these two mitzvot): "On this day, God commands you to observe these **chukim** u-mishpatim... God has affirmed this day that you are His '**am segula**' (treasured nation) and He will set you high above all the nations, that you shall be, as He promised, a '**goy kadosh**' (a holy nation)..." (see 26:16-19)

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

BACK TO HAR SINAI

Moshe's concluding remarks also feature a striking parallel to God's original charge to Bnei Yisrael at Har Sinai. Recall that when Bnei Yisrael first arrive at Har Sinai, God summons Moshe to the mountain and proposes a special covenant with Bnei Yisrael: "And now, if **you will listen to my voice and keep my covenant**, then you shall become for Me a '**segula**' amongst all the nations...and you shall be for Me a kingdom of priests and a **goy kadosh**..." (Shmot 19:5-6).

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

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

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

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

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

THE PROPER BALANCE

Moshe's concluding remarks also beautifully tie together the two sections of the main speech. Recall that the **mitzva** section, whose primary topic is ahavat Hashem, opened with the commandment to love God - 'be-chol levavcha u-vechol nafshecha' - with all your heart and soul. Now, at the conclusion of the **chukim** u-mishpatim section, Moshe explains how these two sections relate to one other: "The Lord your God commands you this day to keep these **chukim** u-mishpatim; observe them faithfully - 'be-chol levavcha u-vechol nafshecha' - with all your heart and with all your soul..." (26:16).

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

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

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

You might recall that an almost identical ceremony was conducted some forty years earlier, at Ma'amad Har Sinai, immediately after Moshe taught Bnei Yisrael the laws he was taught after the Ten Commandments: "And Moshe came [down from Har Sinai] and told the people all of God's commandments and the **mishpatim**... Moshe then wrote down all of God's commandments. Then, he woke up early in the morning and built a **mizbeiach** at the foot of the mountain and erected twelve large stones... and they offered **olot** and **shlamim**..." (Shmot 24:3-8).

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

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

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

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

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

TODAY

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

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

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

shabbat shalom,
menachem

FOR FURTHER IYUN

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

E. If the blessings and curses of Har Grizim and Har Eival serve as a reenactment of Ma'amad Har Sinai, then we would perhaps expect the blessings / curses to correspond to the Ten Commandments.

(Hopefully you're not yet fed up with asseret hadibrot parallels from last week's shiur.) While some of them are more obvious than others, it might just work. Let's give it a try:

1) "Cursed be anyone who makes a sculptured or molten image..." A clear parallel to the first two dibrot ('Anochi' and 'lo yihyeh lecha').

2) "Cursed be he who insults his father or mother" - honoring parents.

3) "Cursed be he who moves is fellow countryman's landmark" - stealing (see Rashi here).

4) "Cursed be he who misdirects a blind person on his way" - a bit more tricky. Rashi explains this as referring to intentionally misleading someone with bad advice, which seems to relate to Rashi's interpretation of 'lifnei iver' - see Vayikra 19:14. There, Rashi explains the case as involving one who persuades another to sell property in order to acquire it himself. If so, then this curse may correspond to 'lo tachmod', excessive desire for the property of others.

5) "Cursed be he who subverts the rights of the stranger, the orphan and the widow." Take a careful look at the Torah's presentation of the mitzva of Shabbat in Shmot 23:12, and consider the role played by Yetziat Mitzrayim as a basis for this mitzva (Dvarim 5:15) and Seforno there in Shmot and in Dvarim 5:12. See if this curse could thus correspond to at least one element of the fourth commandment - Shabbat.

6) "Cursed be he who lies with his father's wife... who lies with any animal... who lies with his sister... who lies with his mother-in-law..." - 'lo tin'af'.

7) "Cursed be he who strikes down his fellow countryman in secret" - 'lo tirtzach'.

8) "Cursed be he who accepts a bribe" - 'lo ta'aneh be-re'acha' (dishonesty in the courtroom).

9) "Cursed be he who will not uphold the terms of this Torah..." See Rashi's comment that this curse constitutes an oath to keep the Torah, perhaps corresponding to 'lo tisa'.

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

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