

## Weekly Internet Parsha Sheet

### Ekev 5766

#### **JEWS DYING :: Rabbi Berel Wein**

**Jerusalem Post :: Aug 10 2006**

Apparently we are now once again back in the historical norm of Jews being killed every day simply because they are Jews. Israeli Arabs are also being killed by the rockets of their co-religionists but they also deserve to be killed because they are living in a Jewish state. Jews in Seattle were shot at and one was killed because she somehow was also Jewish. Tens of thousands of idiotic Europeans march carrying pictures of Nasralla and extolling the rights of the Moslem terrorists to keep on killing Jews. The head of Iran promises a new Holocaust and is actively preparing for it.

For Jews who thought that the Holocaust had finally brought the world to its senses and that “never again” was a certainty and not just a slogan, our current world is a rude and most unpleasant awakening. From Mel Gibson to Ken Livingstone to almost the entire Moslem world, our planet reeks of open and aggressive anti-Semitism. And there does not seem that there is much that we can do about it.

In the past, when Jews lived in the Diaspora, subject to official persecution by the Church and governments, Jews adopted a two-fold attitude towards their torment. One part of Jewish attitude was almost fatalistic. The non-Jewish world hates the Jews. It is an irrational, unjustified, inexplicable hatred and there is not much that the Jews can do except to attempt to survive and be successful in spite of that hatred. Heaven has its reasons for so treating the Jews but the Jews tenaciously will never reject Heaven because of this.

This attitude is reflected in the kinnot – the prayers of lamentation that were recently recited on Tisha B'av. This attitude, which was always part of the makeup of the mindset of religious Jewry, persists and even thrives in the Jewish world today. The major difference in our time being, and it is really a major difference, that Jews possess a state and armed might to fight back against those who wish to destroy us. But basically, deep down in the Jewish heart, there is recognition that no matter what, the basic inimical attitude towards Jews will always persist.

It is an axiom of life that “Esau hates Jacob.” Jews should therefore not constantly look inward with feelings of guilt as though the fault for this hatred against them lies with them. There are not sufficient resources or abilities present in the world to disprove all of the wild conspiracy theories about Jews that abound. And that is just a sad fact of Jewish life, one that we have lived with for millennia.

The other concurrent attitude that has always existed within the Jewish people is the demand that the Torah placed upon us to be a special people, a “treasure amongst the nations, a kingdom of priests, a holy people.” We are bidden to be “a light unto the nations,” a force for goodness and morality.

We are charged with the task of advancing civilization, providing moral hope for others, influencing somehow the general world for good. And we are supposed to be doing all of this while Jews are dying daily simply because they are Jews. But this has been our role in all of human history. We have always been the canary in the coal mine, the litmus paper test that defines good and evil in our world.

That the people who are always most threatened with extinction should somehow at the same time be the driving force for the advancement of humanity in thought, technology, commerce, faith and the arts is a mind boggling paradox. And yet that is the way it is and it has been for many millennia. Apparently, even when Jews are dying simply because they are Jews, the holy burden of being a special people has not departed from our shoulders.

In the midst of our painful and most necessary struggle to defeat our enemies by force of arms and by killing them before they are able to destroy us, we are yet reminded that the given enmity of the world towards us in no way mitigates our God given task of being that special people in

the world that bears God's mission of goodness and righteousness as part of its national charter.

We all look forward to the time when Jews will stop dying needlessly because of blind hatred and when we also will no longer be required to do any killing. However, tragically, that time has not yet arrived.

Therefore, the twin attitudes of acceptance of the reality of the hatred mounted against us and fighting for our survival, coupled with our never ending service to the cause of humankind and our hopes and plans for a better future for all, should continue to guide and inform us. Jewish history validates these ideas and therefore we should not despair even though Jews are dying every day.

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#### **Weekly :: Parsha EKEV :: Rabbi Berel Wein**

I have always been fascinated by the wooden ark that Moshe mentions in this weeks' parsha as being the place where he deposited the tablets of stone upon which the aseret hadvarim – the Ten Commandments were inscribed. The commentators to the Bible differ in their understanding of this wooden ark. Some present it as being the ark that went out to war to lead the Israelites in battle against their enemies. Others see the wooden ark as being the inner middle ark of the three “boxes” that composed the Holy Ark that resided in the Holy of Holies. The outside “box” was gold, the inside “box” was gold and the middle “box” that separated between them was made of wood. It was this wooden “box” that Moshe used as a temporary storage place for the great tablets of Sinai.

In any event, no matter which opinion we will follow in this discussion, it is obvious that this wooden ark had great significance and importance in Jewish life. It led the Jewish army into battle and victory and/or it bound together the two “boxes” of gold that housed the tablets of stone in the Holy of Holies. So what is so special about a wooden box? I appreciate the value and grandeur that the golden “boxes” must have brought to the Temple and the tablets of stone that they contained. After all, the Torah and the Temple represent the royalty of Judaism and royalty requires gold to enhance it. But why the wooden ark? What does that represent and teach us?

I think that the wooden ark represents the power of Torah in Jewish life. The Torah is compared to the tree of life – eitz chayim. Wood is a symbol of life not of an inert metal. Trees are one of the great natural wonders of God's world. Without their presence, life as we know it on this planet could not exist. The Torah itself compares human life to trees – ki haadam eitz hasedah – humans are as the trees of the field. The Torah cannot be housed only in gold. It is the symbol of life and therefore must be nurtured and protected by living things.

Even in war, with all of its technology and weapons, it is the living human being's bravery, courage and ability that ultimately decide the fray. Therefore, Moshe's choice of a wooden ark to house the tablets of stone is a most appropriate one. For in our time, when we are deprived of the Temple and of the golden Holy Ark, the Torah resides within the living organism of the Jewish people and of individual Jews. We are, so to speak, Moshe's wooden ark.

It is our living vitality that creates the commitment to Torah that ensures its continuity and eternity. The Torah does not reside within golden museums. Rather, it resides within the living Jew who cherishes its teachings and values and practices its ritual lifestyle. How important and necessary therefore is this lesson of Moshe's wooden ark. It speaks to the heart of Jewish life and practice. Shabat Shalom.

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**TORAH WEEKLY—Parshat Ekev**

**For the week ending 12 August 2006 / 18 Av 5766**

from Ohr Somayach | [www.ohr.edu](http://www.ohr.edu)

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

## OVERVIEW

If Bnei Yisrael carefully observe even those “minor” mitzvot that are usually “trampled” underfoot, Moshe promises them that they will be the most blessed of the nations of earth. Moshe tells Bnei Yisrael that they will conquer Eretz Canaan little by little, so that the land will not be overrun by wild animals in the hiatus before Bnei Yisrael are able to organize and settle the whole land. After again warning Bnei Yisrael to burn all carved idols of Canaanite gods, Moshe stresses that the Torah is indivisible and not open to partial observance. Moshe describes the Land of Israel as a land of wheat, barley, grapes, figs, and pomegranates, a land of oil-yielding olives and date-honey. Moshe cautions Bnei Yisrael not to become haughty and think that their success in Eretz Yisrael is a result of their own powers or vigor; rather, it was Hashem who gave them wealth and success. Nor did Hashem drive out the Canaanites because of Bnei Yisrael’s righteousness, but rather because of the sins of the Canaanites, for the road from Sinai had been a catalogue of large and small sins and rebellions against Hashem and Moshe. Moshe details the events after Hashem spoke the 10 Commandments at Sinai, culminating in his bringing down the second set of Tablets on Yom Kippur. Aharon’s passing is recorded as is the elevation of the Levi’im to Hashem’s ministers. Moshe points out that the 70 souls who went down to Egypt have now become like the stars of the heaven in abundance. After specifying the great virtues of the Land of Israel, Moshe speaks the second paragraph of the Shema, conceptualizing the blessings that accompany keeping mitzvot and the curse that results from non-observance.

## INSIGHTS

### Being There Now

**“Beware for yourselves, lest your heart be seduced and you turn astray and serve gods of others and prostrate yourself to them.” (11:16)**

In our day and age, idol worship seems rather quaint.

The overwhelming desire to bow down to a large dolly severely taxes our imagination; yet King Menashe told Rav Ashi in a dream, that had Rav Ashi lived in his days he would have hiked up his cloak and scuttled off to find an idol to bow down to, so powerful was the attraction of idol worship.

It’s hard for us to conceive of the attraction of idolatry because in the time of the Second Holy Temple, the Sages nullified the desire for it, but think of our own era’s obsession with pursuit of physical pleasure, and you’ll get an idea of what the drive to worship idols must have been like: Imagine giant car ads featuring some idol draped around the hottest set of wheels, or the TV awash with ads featuring large stone statues beguiling us to use a certain brand of toothpaste!

In a more subtle way, however, idol worship has far from vanished from our world.

The essence of idolatry is the belief that I can buy the future; that the sun, the rains and the other forces of nature can be bought off with a quick sacrifice or two. In other words, “We have the technology.” With one small step for a man, we can control the world, the stars and beyond. The future is ours! This is the philosophy of the West. Lip service may be paid to the idea of a G-d, but He is lucky if He gets more than a Sunday morning visit. The real worship of the West is technology and its unlimited promise of control.

The Arabs, on the other hand, have a strong, some might say fanatic, belief in a G-d, but are obsessed with immortality. The Talmud tells us, “Ten portions of immortality descended to the world - Arabia took nine of them”. Islam must be the only theistic religion whose concept of an afterlife is rampant immortality.

In his interpretation of Nevuchadnezzar’s dream, the prophet Daniel envisioned a huge statue. Its head was of gold; its torso and arms were of silver; its stomach and thighs were of copper; its legs of iron; and its feet - one of iron and one of earthenware. (Daniel 2:31)

The Arizal says that this statue was an embodiment of the world-historical exiles through which the Jewish People would suffer and endure: The crown of the statue represents Egypt, the root of all exile; the head of gold

symbolizes the exile of Babylon; the arms of silver stand for the exile of Persia, and the stomach of copper is Greece. The legs of iron, which correspond to the exile of Rome, divide into feet, one of iron and the other of earthenware: Meaning that in the very last stages of history, in which we now find ourselves, the two dominant powers would be the descendents of the Roman Empire, i.e. the nations of the West, and the Empire of Arabia. Like two feet, the two last Empires of exile must work in tandem to be effective. A person with only one hand can still use it to good advantage, someone with one foot, however, is virtually incapacitated. The feet must work together if they are to be of use.

In the third paragraph of the Shema, the Torah warns us, “Do not stray after your hearts and after your eyes,” (Bamidbar 15:39). “After your hearts” refers to idol worship; “after your eyes” refers to immortality. Rabbi Mendel Mishkelov said, in the name of his teacher the Vilna Gaon, that idol worship and immortality always go hand in hand - or better - “foot with foot”, for, as we mentioned, Rome and its current cultural heirs - the nations of the West - epitomize idol worship, and the empire of Arabia - immortality.

But why should idolatry and immortality be connected, and why do the feet represent them?

The feet want to take us somewhere else; they want to be anywhere but here. They want the future now.

This is the symptom of the age: To be there - while I’m still here.

Hidden beneath an apparent similarity to eating and other physical desires, the deeper attraction of immortality is a distortion of the ultimate pleasure of basking in the radiance of the Divine Presence - a pleasure reserved for the World to Come. It cannot be experienced here and now. If there is a distant glimmer of that radiance in this world, it exists in the Shabbat experience, and Shabbat is the time of family closeness.

When G-d told Avraham to forsake his environment of idol worship, He said, “Go for yourself!” The sentence could equally well be translated “Go to yourself!” The Hebrew word for “Go” is exactly the same as the word for “to yourself.” In other words, our journey in this world is to ourselves, to connect to our essence, to our soul, which is a part of G-d, not to try to buy the future and have it now.

This is the common denominator of idol worship and immortality - the desire to consume the future now. The feet, the agents of locomotion want to run, to be there now. Their correct task, however, is to lead us to our higher selves, for only that will bring us to perfection at its appropriate time and place.

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## Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

### PARSHAS EIKEV

**This shall be the reward when you hearken to these ordinances. (7:12)**

The word eikav can also be translated as heel, which the Midrash explains alludes to those mitzvot which man might view as insignificant. Thus, eikav refers to those commandments that one figuratively tends to “step on with his heels.” The Torah, therefore, assures the people that if they observe all mitzvot, even those “eikav” mitzvot, the neglected mitzvot, they can be secure in the knowledge that Hashem will reward them. Horav Sholom Y. Elyashiv, Shlita, adds that there are also aveiros, sins, that one “treads upon with his heels,” referring to those transgressions that one frequently overlooks or, even worse, justifies. This is why the Tanna in Pirkei Avos 2:1, declares, “Be just as careful in performing a mitzvah kalah, light, less stringent mitzvah or a mitzvah which you think is not that important, as you are in doing a mitzvah that is important, for you never know which mitzvah will earn you a greater reward.”

Chazal teach us that when Yonah HaNavi ran to Tarshish, he was sitting on the boat, calm and collected during a major storm at sea. The boat was bouncing around in the raging waters like a toy. All of the sailors began to pray to their respective gods. Each person entreated his pagan god. Yonah sat there with total equanimity. He even went to sleep. If we analyze the situation, he was probably correct in his assumption that the storm was not occurring because of him. There were members of every nation in the world - an entire United Nations. Certainly, enough immoral, murderous, thieving miscreants were on board to speculate safely that Yonah was not

the focus of the storm. Here was a man who was a kadosh v'tahor, holy and pure. What could he have done wrong? He refused to go to Nineveh for the purpose of rebuking the people out of a deep, abiding love for Klal Yisrael. How would it look if Nineveh had listened to him immediately, while Klal Yisrael ignored his prophecies on a regular basis? This would incur the Middas HaDin, Attribute of Strict Justice, against the Jewish People. Yonah acted l'shem Shomayim, for the sake of Heaven, by refusing to go to Nineveh. Thus, he could be certain that the storm could not be attributed to him.

So they threw lots and, lo and behold, they fell on Yonah. He announced, "It is not because of you. It is because of me. My sin is causing this storm - not yours." Rav Elyashiv explains that one does not know the value of mitzvos - the reward for the positive commandments and, likewise, the punishment for the prohibited commandments.

We never think to blame ourselves. It is always someone else who is to blame for the "storms." If we look around, there is such filth, such sin, such immorality. Certainly, the raging storms are because of these "others." The venerable sage of our generation posits that the storm might be because we have a moral obligation to convey a prophecy, to rebuke, to reproach, to reach out with care and love - but certainly not to ignore and be complacent, accepting the indiscretions of our alienated brethren. Yonah HaNavi validated his refusal to communicate a prophecy, thereby stifling a mitzvah. He felt he was acting justly and properly. Hashem says to be careful of every mitzvah. He determines their intrinsic value and reward; we do not.

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

The hardships that Klal Yisrael underwent in the wilderness were an integral part of their development. As a father chastises his son, thereby preparing him for the future, so, too, does Hashem bring upon us various degrees of suffering that will temper our faith and fortify our conviction. Everyone experiences some sort of affliction. It comes in all sizes and shapes - each Divinely suited for the individual. How we respond determines how we benefit from this experience. Much has been written concerning yissurim, pain/affliction/troubles, the need for it, the benefit that is derived, and the proper attitude one must maintain in accepting Hashem's decree. I take the opportunity to share some of these insights with the readers.

Yissurim bring about yeshuah, salvation. This salvation also comes in many shapes and forms, and, thus, has different connotations to various people, depending upon their circumstances and mindset. The following analogy cited by Horav Leib Pinter, Shlita, sheds light on this issue. A wise king who, unfortunately, had not been blessed with an heir to his throne sought to find an appropriate succession to his monarchy. He decided to make a test that would involve all of the young boys of his constituency. He handed out a packet of seeds to each boy and instructed him to plant his individual seeds in a flower pot. The one whose flowers bloomed the fullest would become his successor.

Each boy left with his seeds and planted and nurtured them. Everyone succeeded in producing an impressive array of foliage. There was one boy who, regardless of how hard he tried, just could not get his seeds to produce anything substantial. He changed the dirt, added various fertilizers, watered and nurtured the seeds - to no avail. Nothing grew. Despondent, he arrived together with the other boys at the palace to display their projects and to find out who would win the coveted prize.

Each boy came before the king and presented his blooming flowerpot. The king took a quick look and said, "Next!" Nothing seemed to impress the king. Hundreds, thousands, filed by the king and - nothing - the king was simply not impressed. When the king saw the young boy whose flowerpot was empty, standing by the side, he called him over and asked, "Why are you not displaying your flowers?"

"I have no flowers," the boy replied. "I did everything possible to generate some growth from the seeds, but nothing seemed to work." The boy began to cry, "I even prayed that the flowers should bloom, but I was not answered. The flowers were not destined to grow."

Suddenly, the king declared, "You will be my son. You will inherit my throne." Understandably, all of those assembled were in a state of shock. Why would the king select the one boy whose flowers did not grow?

The king turned to the people to explain his choice, "All of the seeds that I handed out had been ripe, and ripe seeds cannot possibly produce anything. Therefore, all those boys who presented me with flowers cheated. They exchanged the seeds I had given them for other seeds. The one boy who maintained his veracity - who was not willing to lie just to win - was this boy, whose seeds did not grow. He has the seeds of truth! He will follow me as king! The individual for whom integrity guides his life and truth is the foundation of his every endeavor, he is fit to reign over the country."

The same idea applies with regard to yeshuah, salvation. We pray to Hashem. We entreat Him with all forms of supplication. It seems that He does not respond. Yet, we continue to pray, to believe, to hope. We continue with the conviction that salvation can only come from Hashem. As we persist in our devotion to Hashem, never ceasing to implore His positive response, our faith becomes tempered and resolute. With every tear, our commitment is nurtured; with every sigh, our fidelity and trust become stronger and unequivocal. Ultimately, our tears and prayers will bring about salvation. It may not necessarily be the one for which we have been waiting, but it will be salvation nonetheless.

We have to know where to look, and we have to continue believing. Rav Pinter presents an inspiring thought. After Klal Yisrael passed through the Red Sea, they traveled for three days in the wilderness without water. They were thirsty. Finally, they saw a source of water in the distance. Understandably, they ran and "attacked" the water. Their joy was short-lived, for they soon discovered that the water was bitter. Can one imagine their emotions at that time? To have sustained so much suffering; to have been finally liberated, only to have their road to freedom blocked by the Red Sea. To have the Red Sea miraculously split before their very eyes; to see their Egyptian pursuers perish in the sea; to trudge three days without water, famished and broken, only to discover that the water which they had sought was bitter! When would it end?

They turned to Moshe Rabbeinu and asked, "Why? Why does Hashem not give us water? Were we taken out of Egypt only to die of thirst in the wilderness?" Hashem responded by showing Moshe a tree which was to be thrown into the water - and the water became sweet.

Klal Yisrael was to derive a lesson from this experience. When life throws you a curve, when the water that you are drinking suddenly turns bitter, know that nearby there is growing a tree that can sweeten the water. The question is where is this tree? How will we know which one is the tree that will save us? This is where tefillah, prayer, makes its entrance. Cry to Hashem. Ask Him to show you where the tree is located.

Let me add that, at times, the road to salvation and the actual key, the tree of salvation, is very bitter. The Mechilta says that the tree which sweetened the water was nes b'soch nes, a miracle within a miracle. The tree was bitter like the water, yet it made the water sweet. Hashem has His ways for carrying out the Divine Plan, but the tree is always there. We have to seek it out.

Oftentimes, we get carried away and overreact prematurely to a tzarah, troubling situation. Horav Shlomo Margolis, Shlita, relates that he once heard the following thought from Horav David Bliacher, zl, one of the foremost students of the Alter, zl, m'Novordhok. When Klal Yisrael neared the Red Sea, they began to cry out in fear. Hashem said to Moshe, "Why do you cry out to Me? Speak to Bnei Yisrael and let them journey forth" (Shemos 14:15). Why was Hashem upset with Moshe? Klal Yisrael was in a grave situation: the Egyptians were pursuing them from one side, and the Red Sea was on the other. What else should they have done? Why should they not have cried? Moshe, their leader, was justified in turning to Hashem for assistance. What else should he have done?

Rav David explained that there were still a few steps before they reached the shore of the Red Sea. The situation was not yet hopeless. There was still time. Hashem's critique was: Why are you crying now? There is still time. The lesson is clear. A person must go on. He must tread forth, regardless of the situation, because salvation can come in the next few steps - just as it did for our ancestors at the shores of the Red Sea. One must be patient and trust in the Almighty. The miracle of Chanukah

teaches us that when we least expect it, when everything seems so bleak, when everything around us seems to have crumbled - there is still hope. We must persevere by maintaining the belief that as long as we can go on, the opportunity for salvation is still open to us. May Hashem grant us the ability to see through the clouds of ambiguity that veil His salvation.

**Now, O Yisrael, what does Hashem, your G-d, ask of you? Only to fear Hashem, your G-d. (10:12)**

A rav, who was not a chassid of any particular Rebbe, arrived at the Seudas Rosh Chodesh, festive meal in honor of Rosh Chodesh, of Horav Yissachar Dov, zl, m'Radushitz. He sat down at the Rebbe's table to observe the proceedings. After a few moments, the Rebbe asked him, "Why is it that misnagdim, those who are not necessarily pro-chassidus, do not celebrate with a meal in honor of Rosh Chodesh? After all, it is clearly stated in the Shulchan Aruch that one should participate in a Seudas Rosh Chodesh?"

When the Rebbe saw that no response was forthcoming, he continued, "Let me explain the reason. There is a difference between one who is a chassid and one who is not a chassid. If one who is not a chassid performs a mitzvah, he places it "on account" in his "bag" of mitzvos for safekeeping. If he transgresses a negative commandment, he is upset, and he places it in his 'bag' of sins. One who is a chassid however, has a totally different approach concerning his avodas Hashem, service to the Almighty. He is always concerned, lest he has not carried out his service to Hashem on the optimum level. He is always afraid that he might sin. Furthermore, even when he performs a mitzvah, he does not place it in his 'bag' of mitzvos, because he fears that he has not applied himself properly at the time of its performance, and perhaps it is not worthy of being included as a mitzvah.

"Chazal teach us that during the time of the Bais Hamikdash, the Mizbayach, Altar, served as atonement for man's sins. Now that we no longer have these Batei Mikdash, this atonement is achieved through man's table. In other words, when a person prepares and eats a meal with the proper intentions and devotions, it will effect atonement for him. The korban of Rosh Chodesh would be mechaper, atone, for a sin committed unknowingly. For instance, if one were to eat kodoshim, sacrificial flesh, while he was tamei, ritually contaminated; if he were unaware of his state of tumah throughout his entire meal, the korban Rosh Chodesh would serve as atonement.

"This type of sin, in which one does not know throughout the entire performance of an activity whether it has been carried out properly, is something to which chassidim are acutely sensitive. They are never sure if the mitzvah that they have performed was carried out to the optimum requirements. They are always troubled, lest they missed something or have not had the perfect kavanah, intention. Thus, they participate in the Seudas Rosh Chodesh. This traditional meal serves as a penance to atone for their 'mitzvos.' This is their way of seeing to it that their mitzvos achieve the proper standing." This is the meaning of yiraas Shomayim: Maintaining a constant concern that we are not serving Hashem properly. This attitude is the precursor to - and foundation of all - mitzvah performance, for if one succeeds in maintaining such a standard in his avodas Hashem, then he will see to it not to fail in any mitzvah. The key to all mitzvos is fear of Hashem and the attitude this fear engenders. This will generate a feeling and desire to follow in Hashem's ways and perform His mitzvos to the fullest extent.

This, explains the Sfas Emes, is the underlying meaning of the pasuk. First, the pasuk begins by saying that Hashem asks only one thing of us: yiraah, fear. It then goes on to exhort us to follow in His ways, to love Him and serve Him with all our heart and soul. Is it one thing or many? Apparently, all Hashem asks is for us to fear Him. It is just that through a sense of fear that is based on integrity, one merits the other attributes as well.

The Ohr HaChaim Hakadosh explains that this is the meaning of the word v'atah, (and) now. The Torah is telling us that for "now" all Hashem asks is yiraah, but after one has acquired the attribute of fear of Hashem, he will merit to go further and higher in his service of the Almighty.

**Beware for yourselves, lest your heart be seduced and you turn astray and serve gods of others. (11:16)**

Rashi explains v'sartem, and you turn astray, to be a reference to one's departure from Torah study. This will result in his capitulation to idol

worship. One who leaves the Torah turns to idols. It seems a bit of an extreme statement. The yetzer hora, evil inclination, has been very successful in its function of leading man to sin. It has followed a tried and proven method of slowly and patiently leading man to sin, until one day, it is able to convince him of the clincher - idol worship. That is certainly, however, not the first step. Why, with regard to Torah study, does one turn to idol worship almost immediately? What happened to the "process"?

The Chafetz Chaim, zl, explains this with a powerful analogy. Two nations are at war with each other. Even when one seems to have triumphed, his success is not assured until he has taken away his enemies' weapons. As long as his enemy has access to his munitions, he can rebuild his army and return to battle. However, if the victor relieves the vanquished of his weapons, he has no means of returning to the battlefield. Without weapons one cannot fight. Under such circumstances, victory is complete.

A parallel exists in our constant battle with the yetzer hora. While the evil inclination sways and causes us to sin, the insubordination is not equivocal. We have not yet severed our relationship with Hashem. Through teshuvah, repentance, one can return and be accepted. The door is still open. The yetzer hora's success is short-lived. If, however, the yetzer hora has succeeded in convincing an individual to renege Torah study, to leave the halls of the bais hamedrash, it has then succeeded in taking from him his weapons. Without Torah, one no longer has the munitions for carrying out a successful battle against the yetzer hora. Thus, if one leaves Torah, his next stop is idol worship, because he has nothing with which to repel the powerful effect of the yetzer hora.

Horav Elchanan Wasserman, zl, adds that we can now understand why the sin of bitul Torah, wasting time from Torah study, is so grave. Indeed, concerning any other sin, even morality, murder and idol worship, Hashem will patiently tolerate the infraction. The opportunity for repentance is still there. The yetzer hora can still be bested. Once the yetzer hora has convinced him to close his Gemora, to leave the bais hamedrash, the individual no longer has the means for battling the yetzer hora. If one does not learn, he does not really know what is wrong and from what he needs to stay away. The yetzer hora has won.

**Va'ani Tefillah**

**Baruch meracheim al ha'aretz, Baruch meracheim al ha'brios**

Blessed is He that has mercy upon the earth. Blessed is He that has mercy on the creatures (man).

We continue the blessing with our acknowledgment of Hashem's tender mercy, which He lavishes upon the world, in general, and each and every one of His creatures, in particular. As Horav Avigdor Miller, zl, explains, Hashem's sole interest in the universe is because of the earth. As Creator and Owner of the world, He takes an interest in every aspect of the world. Everything that He does is ultimately for the welfare of the earth and its inhabitants. Man possesses free-will and is, thus, able to do as he pleases, giving him the opportunity and ability to rebel against his Creator. Yet, Hashem is all-merciful and spares him, allowing him to continue with the lifestyle of his choice.

The connection between these two blessings has a deeper connotation. It teaches that Hashem's mercy on the earth is solely because of His mercy on man. All of the earth's phenomena are intended for the benefit of man. As Rav Miller so meaningfully states, an owner of a building may, at times, neglect his tenants for the welfare of his property, but whatever Hashem does for the earth is specifically for no other purpose than the benefit of man. Man is not a mere detail in creation - he is the end purpose, the raison d'etre of creation. Everything has been created solely for him and is managed for his benefit.

Arthur & Sora Pollak and Family in loving memory of our mother & grandmother Mrs. Goldie Jundef

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**Rav Kook List - Tarpot (1929): Jewish Pride**

**The 1929 Arab Riots**

On the eleventh of Av, 5689 (Aug. 17, 1929), bloody riots erupted in Eretz Yisrael. Hundreds of Jews were murdered or injured by Arab mobs during these uprisings. Worse hit was the Jewish community of Hebron.

When the riots subsided, rumors spread throughout the Yishuv that the British authorities actually cooperated with the rioters. Accusations pointed specifically to Harry Charles Luke - the son of assimilated, Hungarian Jews (his father immigrated to England where he converted to Christianity). At the time, Mr. Luke served as Secretary General of the British Mandatory Government, and rumor had it that he encouraged the Arabs to murder and pillage the Jews.

### **I Order You!**

During the rioting, Rav Kook called Mr. Luke on the telephone and demanded that he take stiff action against the Arab marauders.

'What can be done?' asked Luke.

'Shoot the murders!' replied Rav Kook.

'I have not received any such orders,' retorted the British official.

"\*I\* order you!" said the Rav. "I demand this in the name of human dignity."

### **The Handshake**

Sometime later, the heads of the British government in Palestine held a formal reception for the most prominent Jewish figures in the Land. Mr. Luke cordially held out his hand to Rav Kook, but the Rav refused to shake it, saying sternly, "I will not shake a hand stained with Jewish blood!"

Afterwards, Luke said to the Rav: 'You Jews! Go and defend yourselves, but do not attack others.' The Rav replied:

"Do not preach to us, you who violate the commandment of 'You shall not murder'! (Our rule is,) if someone rises to kill you, kill him first."

The Rav's bold stance made a profound impression upon the entire Jewish world, as Avigdor HaMe'iri (a writer of the time) testified:

"If not for one unique, extraordinary man, who stood guard over our national and human pride, we would now be rending our garments over the loss of our honor as well."

News of the Rav's bold response spread swiftly throughout the Yishuv, creating an uproar wherever it reached. Most people praised his valor, but some criticized it, mainly out of fear that Mr. Luke would take revenge on the Jewish settlements, which were largely at his mercy. Whenever the Rav appeared in public, two opposing groups immediately formed, arguing boisterously for and against the Rav.

### **The "Brit"**

Around that time, Rav Kook was invited to a "brit milah" (circumcision). Before the ceremony began, a heated debate broke out over the Rav's defiant response to the high-ranking officer, who represented the gentile lords of the Land. When the Rav realized what was happening, he signaled to his attendant, R. Meir David Schotland, a clever and learned man, to restore order to the crowd.

R. Meir David rose at once and said emphatically:

'Gentlemen! Very soon, we will usher the newborn baby into the room and bring him into the covenant ("brit") of Avraham Avinu. At that time, we will all stand up and welcome him with the traditional greeting of "Baruch HaBa" ('Blessed is he who arrives').

'I have two questions concerning this practice. First, why don't we greet a bar-mitzvah boy or a bridegroom in the same fashion? They at least would understand the meaning of our blessing, while the uncircumcised child surely does not. Second, why don't we bid farewell to the child after the circumcision by saying, "Baruch HaYotzei" ('Blessed is he who leaves')?'

Silence hovered over the crowd, as R. Meir David continued his words:

'The answer to these questions is quite simple. Sadly and shamefully, we Jews admire every uncircumcised Gentile we meet, taking every opportunity to show him my respect, whether it is necessary or not. Therefore, when the yet uncircumcised child enters the room, we honor him by standing up and proclaiming "Baruch HaBa". However, after he is circumcised and becomes part of the Jewish people, we no longer show him any special respect - no "Baruch HaBa" and no "Baruch HaYotzei".'

It was clear towards whom R. Meir's words were directed. Rav Kook had dauntlessly stood up to a distinguished Gentile, publicly condemning representatives of the Mandatory Government for cooperating with the Arab rioters, and there were actually people who criticized him for this!

[from 'An Angel Among Men' by R. Simcha Raz, translated by R. Moshe Lichtman, pp. 191-194]

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### **The Weekly Halacha Overview,**

**by Rabbi Josh Flug YUTorah**

### **The Mitzvah of Birkat HaMazon**

The Torah (Devarim 8:10) states that one should bless the Almighty after one eats. This is known as the mitzvah of Birkat HaMazon (Grace After Meals). This article will explore the biblical and rabbinic obligations of Birkat HaMazon.

The Biblical Commandment of Birkat HaMazon

According to the opinion of Chachamim, one only recites Birkat HaMazon upon eating bread (see Mishna, Berachot 44a and Rashi ad loc.). The Mishna, Berachot 45a, records a dispute regarding the amount of bread one must eat in order to recite zimun (the joint Birkat HaMazon performed when three people eat together). One opinion is that the minimum amount is a k'zayit (the size of an olive). The other opinion is that the minimum amount is a k'beitzah (the size of an egg). The Gemara, Berachot 49b, explains that the dispute is contingent on the interpretation of the verse "v'achalta v'savata" (and you shall eat and be satisfied), that is mentioned in conjunction with the mitzvah of Birkat HaMazon. The opinion that maintains that the minimum amount is a k'zayit interprets "and you shall eat" as referring to eating a k'zayit (k'zayit is the standard size for any mitzvah or transgression that involves eating something); "and be satisfied" refers to the requirement to drink in addition to eating. [See also, Ramban, Berachot 49b, who interprets this opinion to mean that one is obligated to recite Birkat HaMazon if he eats bread or drinks wine.] The opinion that maintains that the minimum requirement is a k'beitzah interprets "and you shall eat" as referring to eating a k'zayit; "and be satisfied" teaches that it is not enough to eat a k'zayit but a k'beitzah.

The implication of the Gemara is that there is a biblical obligation to recite Birkat HaMazon either by eating a k'zayit and drinking something or by eating a k'beitzah (depending on which opinion one follows). However, there is a passage in the Gemara, Berachot 20b, which records a conversation between the Almighty and the Angels in which the Almighty praises the Jewish People for going above and beyond the call of duty. "I wrote in the Torah 'and you shall eat and be satisfied and bless the Lord for the land that he has given you' and they are meticulous (to recite Birkat HaMazon) on a k'zayit and a k'beitzah." The implication of this passage is that the biblical obligation to recite Birkat HaMazon only applies if one is actually satisfied and recitation of Birkat HaMazon upon eating k'zayit and k'beitzah is considered volunteerism (based on a rabbinic enactment).

The Rishonim have two basic approaches to resolve the apparent discrepancy. Tosafot, Berachot 49b, s.v. Rabbi Meir, cite Rabbeinu Yitzchak who suggests that the biblical commandment to recite Birkat HaMazon only applies if one is fully satisfied from his meal. The amounts of k'zayit and k'beitzah are not of a biblical nature, but rather of a rabbinic nature. The prooftexts brought to support the amounts of k'zayit and k'beitzah are not bona fide proofs, but rather hints in the text (asmachta). Rashba, Berachot 48a, s.v. Ha, on the other hand, is of the opinion that the two passages in the Gemara reflect conflicting opinions among the Amoraim as to whether the biblical amount for Birkat HaMazon is k'zayit/k'beitzah or whether it is full satisfaction. Rashba rules that the normative opinion is the opinion that k'zayit (and a drink) is the biblical amount for Birkat HaMazon.

Mishna Berurah 184:22, rules in accordance with the opinion of Tosafot that one is only obligated to recite Birkat HaMazon on a biblical level if he ate enough to be fully satisfied. Nevertheless, the opinion of Rashba is not totally rejected. Rama, Orach Chaim 197:4 (based on Mordechai, Berachot no. 177), rules that when one is choosing who should lead the zimun, it is preferable to choose someone who drank something at the meal. The reason for this ruling is that according to the opinion of Rashba, there is no biblical obligation of Birkat HaMazon unless someone ate a k'zayit and drank something. In choosing a leader for the zimun, someone who is biblically obligated takes precedence over someone whose obligation is rabbinic. Mishna Berurah 197:28, notes that if someone ate to full satisfaction but didn't drink and another did not eat to satisfaction but drank, the one who ate to satisfaction would take precedence because

the opinion of Tosafot is the primary opinion and the opinion of Rashba (and Mordechai) is an added stringency.

The Significance of a Biblical Obligation

The distinction between the biblical obligation of Birkat HaMazon and the rabbinic obligation has certain practical ramifications. First, Rambam, Hilchot Berachot 2:14, rules that if one ate and is unsure whether he recited Birkat HaMazon, he should repeat Birkat HaMazon. Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 184:4, codifies the opinion of Rambam and explains that the reason why one must repeat Birkat HaMazon is because Birkat HaMazon is a biblical commandment (and regarding biblical commandments one must be stringent in cases of doubt). Mishna Berurah 184:15, adds that this ruling only applies if one was fully satisfied from his meal. If he was not fully satisfied, he is not biblically obligated and he should not repeat Birkat HaMazon.

Second, Mishna Berurah, Biur Halacha 184:6, rules that if one eats bread and then eats other non-bread foods and becomes satisfied, he is biblically obligated to recite Birkat HaMazon. He then presents a novel extension of this ruling. If someone eats (at least) a k'zayit of bread and is not satisfied, he is obligated to recite Birkat HaMazon on a rabbinic level. Suppose he then eats non-bread items after reciting Birkat HaMazon and becomes fully satisfied. Mishna Berurah suggests that since his satisfaction is due to a combination of the bread that he ate and the other foods and the Birkat HaMazon that he previously recited was insignificant on a biblical level, he must repeat Birkat HaMazon.

Chazon Ish, Orach Chaim 34:4, disagrees with Mishna Berurah's suggestion. He claims that although the Birkat HaMazon recited prior to satisfaction has no significance on a biblical level, it does have significance on a practical level. According to Chazon Ish the rabbinic Birkat HaMazon serves to disconnect the bread portion of the meal from the non-bread portion of the meal such that it is considered as two different meals on a biblical level. Non-bread items are only included if they are eaten in the same meal as the bread.

The Role of "V'Achalta"

Normally, eating to full satisfaction will include eating a k'zayit of bread. Nevertheless, if non-food items are included in the calculation, it is possible to construct a case where one eats a small amount of food and then becomes fully satisfied from non-bread foods. Determining whether one is obligated to recite Birkat HaMazon in this case would depend on how one interprets the verse "v'achalta v'savata." If the obligation of Birkat HaMazon is both v'achalta and v'savata, then unless one eats a k'zayit (v'achalta) and one is fully satisfied (v'savata) there is no biblical obligation of Birkat HaMazon. However, one can suggest that the primary obligation to recite Birkat HaMazon is full satisfaction, and the reason why the Torah uses the term v'achalta is because that is the normal way to reach full satisfaction. As such, one would recite Birkat HaMazon if one eats less than a k'zayit of bread and reaches full satisfaction by eating non-bread foods. Pri Megadim, Eshel Avraham 210:1, suggests that in such a situation one should recite Birkat HaMazon.

The role of the term "v'achlata" is also relevant to a question raised by R. Akiva Eger, Hagahot R. Akiva Eger, Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 286:2. R. Eger discusses a case of a minor who eats to full satisfaction, recites Birkat HaMazon and then becomes a bar mitzvah while he is still satisfied. R. Eger wonders whether he should repeat Birkat HaMazon being that the Birkat HaMazon recited while he was a minor was insignificant on a Torah level. He notes that the question is contingent on the role of the eating process in the obligation of Birkat HaMazon. If eating is significant (i.e. v'achalta is a necessary component in obligating someone to recite Birkat HaMazon), eating as minor would not re-obligate him in Birkat HaMazon as an adult. If, however, the primary obligation to recite Birkat HaMazon is full satisfaction, he would be required to repeat Birkat HaMazon as he is currently satisfied and the previous Birkat HaMazon was insignificant on a Torah level. R. Eger writes that he is unsure how to rule on the matter.

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**YatedUSA Halacha Discussion**  
**by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt**

**Question: Is it permitted to borrow another person's tallis or tefillin without first asking him for permission?**

Discussion: We generally assume that most people — even minors<sup>1</sup> — will be pleased to have others perform a mitzvah with their possessions if it costs them nothing,<sup>2</sup> especially since they, too, receive some credit for the mitzvah being performed by the borrower.<sup>3</sup> Thus it is permitted, in many cases, for one to occasionally<sup>4</sup> borrow another person's tallis, tefillin<sup>5</sup> or lulav and esrog<sup>6</sup> in order to fulfill the mitzvah. There are, however, some notable exceptions to this policy:

- We only assume that an owner will be pleased if a mitzvah is performed with his property; if the borrower suspects or knows otherwise, it may not be used without permission. Similarly, if the owner is present, we do not rely on the assumption that he will not object; he should be asked for permission directly.
- If the item is kept in a private locker, if it is brand new or if there are special circumstances for which reason the owner would not want it to be used, e.g., the borrower is ill, unkempt or unclean, it is forbidden to borrow it without permission.<sup>7</sup>
- The tallis or tefillin may not be removed from the premises (even if they will be returned), and they must be folded and put back exactly as they were found.<sup>8</sup>

**Question: Is it permitted to borrow another person's sefer without first asking him for permission?**

Discussion: Shulchan Aruch rules that the previously mentioned assumption — that an owner is pleased to have others perform a mitzvah with his property — does not apply to sefarim. This is because, unlike other ritual objects, sefarim tend to tear and could easily get damaged during learning. Mishnah Berurah<sup>9</sup> rules in accordance with this view and prohibits borrowing any sefer, even for occasional use, without asking permission.

But several poskim suggest that nowadays, when sefarim are plentiful and inexpensive, we can assume that most owners will not object to others learning Torah from their sefarim, especially if the sefer is used only occasionally.<sup>10</sup> In addition, some poskim maintain that leaving a sefer in a shul or a yeshiva is an indication that the owner wants his sefer to be used by others to learn Torah.<sup>11</sup>

**Question: May the contents of baggage that was lost by an airline and delivered by a non-Jew to the passenger's home after the beginning of Shabbos (or Yom Tov) be used on Shabbos (or Yom Tov)?**

Discussion: If the contents are not Shabbos necessities, then it is prohibited to use them, since one is forbidden to benefit from a Shabbos Labor done on his behalf by a non-Jew.<sup>12</sup> In this case, the Shabbos Labor of Carrying was transgressed expressly for the recipient; the contents, therefore, may not be used.<sup>13</sup>

But in a situation of pressing need — if one's Shabbos clothing or food, etc. are in the suitcase — it is permitted to use the contents of the suitcase. This is so because many poskim maintain that our streets and thoroughfares are not considered a reshus ha-rabim min ha-Torah, only a karmelis,<sup>14</sup> and therefore the Biblical Shabbos Labor of Carrying was not violated.<sup>15</sup> The rule is that when a Rabbinical prohibition is transgressed by a non-Jew on behalf of a Jew (shevus d'shevus), it is permitted to benefit from the non-Jew's action for the sake of a mitzvah or for a pressing Shabbos need.<sup>16</sup>

**Question: If the suitcase that was delivered by the airline was outside the techum Shabbos at the time that Shabbos began, is it still permitted to use the contents when they are needed for Shabbos?**

Discussion: If the suitcase was outside of the techum Shabbos<sup>17</sup> at the time Shabbos began, then the halachah is more complicated. Shulchan Aruch clearly prohibits one (and his family members) from benefiting from an item that was brought for him from outside the techum Shabbos.<sup>18</sup> Still, when the suitcase contains indispensable Shabbos necessities, the contents may be used,<sup>19</sup> but only inside the home to which the suitcase was delivered, or anywhere within the limits of the city or community eiruv. If there is no valid eiruv, then the contents may be used only inside the home to which the suitcase was delivered.<sup>20</sup>

**Question: Does the halachah object to conducting a weekly Shabbos miyan in a multi-purpose room which is used during the week for**

activities in which a Jew may not engage, e.g., eating non-kosher food, playing cards, etc.?

Discussion: In response to a similar query, Harav M. Feinstein ruled that it is halachically forbidden to establish a minyan in a party room which is used for parties where mixed dancing (by Jews) takes place. He explained that the purpose of praying with a minyan is to create an *eis ratzon* (a time of favor), to give the tefillah a greater chance of being heard and accepted by Hashem. But if the minyan prays in a place where abominable deeds are performed, in a place which is “despised” by Hashem, then the Shechinah will not be with them even if an entire minyan is present. Harav Feinstein ruled that it is better to daven at home alone than to daven in a “despicable” place with a minyan, since such a tefillah will not be accepted at all.

Question: **On Shabbos or Yom Tov, is it permitted to use suntan lotion in order to prevent sunburn?**

Discussion: Suntan lotion which is in cream, ointment or thick, slow-pouring oil form, is forbidden to be used on Shabbos, as it may be a violation of the Shabbos Labor of Smoothing.<sup>21</sup> It is permitted, however, to use suntan protection which is in a liquid spray form, since Smoothing does not apply to runny, non-viscous liquids such as liquid spray.

Although there is a Rabbinic injunction against taking medicine on Shabbos, suntan protection is not considered medication, since its purpose is not to heal but to protect. It is similar to using insect repellent on Shabbos, which is permitted since its function is also not to heal but to protect.<sup>22</sup>

Taking medication for ordinary sunburn, however, even if it is in spray or liquid form, could be a violation of the Rabbinic injunction against taking medicine on Shabbos. In the atypical case where the sunburn is so severe that one feels “weak all over” or bad enough to require bed rest because of it, liquid or spray medication is permitted.<sup>23</sup> If there is a chance that infection will set in, all medications and ointments are permitted to be used.<sup>24</sup>

Note: Our discussion regarding suntan protection pertains to those who might get sunburned while fulfilling a Shabbos mitzvah, e.g., those who need to walk a long distance to shul on Shabbos. But to deliberately sit in the sun in order to get a suntan is not in keeping with the spirit of Shabbos, and indeed, is forbidden on halachic grounds by some contemporary poskim.<sup>25</sup>

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Question: **Should a sheliach tzibbur pause between berachos when reciting chazaras ha-shatz?**

Discussion: A sheliach tzibbur must pause between the berachos of Shemoneh Esreh for at least as long as it takes the majority of the congregation to answer Amen to that berachah.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, some people who serve as sheliach tzibbur are not aware of this requirement and rush into the next berachah immediately upon finishing the previous one, without giving the congregation any chance to answer Amen.

This is not a mere advisory; it is only permitted to answer Amen to a berachah of chazaras ha-shatz if the sheliach tzibbur did not yet begin the next one. Once the sheliach tzibbur has begun the next berachah, one is no longer permitted to answer Amen to the previous one.<sup>2</sup>

The same halachah applies to kaddish. A sheliach tzibbur or a chiyuv who is reciting kaddish must wait for the majority of the congregation to finish answering Amen, yehei Shmei raba before continuing on with Yisbarach veyishtabach.<sup>3</sup>

Question: At what age must a child — with or without his parents’ help — have his hands washed properly upon rising in the morning (negel vasser)?

Discussion: There are a number of opinions among the poskim on this subject:

- Some hold that the obligation begins when the child reaches the age of chinuch,<sup>4</sup> which — depending on the child — is approximately five to six years old.<sup>5</sup>
- Others write that once the child is old enough to touch food, his hands should be washed,<sup>6</sup> since a ruach ra’ah (a spirit of impurity) adheres to

objects that are touched by hands that have not been ritually washed upon awakening.<sup>7</sup>

• Harav Y. Kamenetsky is quoted as ruling that once a child is old enough to recite a verse from the Torah or to answer Amen to a berachah, the parents should make sure that his hands are washed properly.<sup>8</sup>

• Some poskim recommend that an infant’s hands — even a newborn’s — should be washed.<sup>9</sup>

Question: If a testator (a person who made a will) drew up a legal will which makes provisions that run counter to Torah law (e.g., the oldest son is not given a “double portion” of the inheritance), and the will is probated in court, will beis din overturn the will if its validity is contested by the heirs?

Discussion: Drawing up a legal will whose provisions run counter to the Torah’s laws of inheritance is strictly forbidden by the Torah, and every effort should be made to educate the public regarding the obligation of writing a will in accordance with halachah. But in the event that such a will was drawn up by an attorney and probated in court, either out of the ignorance of the testator or because of his disregard for Torah Law, there is a dispute among the poskim whether or not it can be overturned by beis din. Some hold that if the will is contested in beis din as being contrary to halachah, beis din may declare the will null and void and redistribute the estate according to Torah law.<sup>10</sup> Other poskim, however, hold that a legal will which was probated in court is valid and cannot be contested in beis din.<sup>11</sup>

To better understand the issues involved, let us list some of the basic differences in the laws of inheritance between the Torah law and secular law:

- Children: According to civil law, all children — sons and daughters, adopted or natural — inherit equally.<sup>12</sup> According to halachah, if there are natural sons, daughters and adopted sons do not inherit the estate at all.
- Spouse: According to civil law, upon the death of a spouse, the surviving spouse inherits the estate. According to Torah law, a husband inherits from his wife but a wife does not inherit from her husband; the sons do.
- Maternal relatives: According to civil law, there is no distinction between paternal and maternal relatives. The halachah, however, holds that maternal relatives are not considered relatives regarding the halachos of inheritance.
- Firstborn: Civil law does not differentiate between the first born son and his younger siblings. The halachah does; the firstborn receives a “double portion” [of certain parts] of the estate.

So if, for instance, one draws up a legal will where he divides his estate equally between his sons and daughters and the estate is probated in court, the poskim debate whether or not the sons have the right to contest the will in beis din, as the division is blatantly contrary to halachah. Beis din will then have to rule whether or not they should disregard the deceased’s wishes and redivide the estate according to the halachah.

Since there are conflicting views as to the validity of a non-halachic will, and the final ruling will depend on a host of factors, one is well advised to write a will with rabbinical guidance. Otherwise, he runs the risk of having his will overturned by a future ruling of beis din.

Question: Is there any leeway in Torah law for one to divide his estate in a manner that is at variance with any of the four points enumerated above? For example, if he wanted to disinherit a son, could he do so halachically?

Discussion: There is leeway and he may do so. While in general Chazal were strongly critical of those who do not follow the Torah’s guidelines in matters of inheritance,<sup>13</sup> the halachah recognizes that there are so many factors involved in inheritance laws (financial, societal, emotional, familial) that the situation may demand an alternate course of action.<sup>14</sup> For example, we mentioned earlier that according to the Torah, daughters do not inherit their father’s estate when there are sons. But because this could result in familial strife,<sup>15</sup> in reducing young women to poverty upon the death of their father, or in ruining their chances of marriage for lack of a dowry,<sup>16</sup> Rabbinic leaders searched for halachically permitted methods whereby daughters, too, could inherit at least part of the estate, and indeed, this has become the norm.<sup>17</sup>

There are a number of halachic methods available whereby one may distribute a significant part of his estate according to his wishes, as long as

a certain percentage<sup>18</sup> of it is distributed according to the Torah's laws of inheritance.<sup>19</sup> One should contact a Torah observant lawyer or beis din and have them draw up the required documents. But it is imperative that all changes from the Torah's laws of inheritance be stipulated and finalized prior to the death of the testator. If, for any reason, the testator failed to prepare a halachic will, his estate will be probated by beis din according to Torah law, though it may run counter to his true wishes.

(Footnotes)

1 Mishnah Berurah 124:37.

2 Sha'arei Teshuvah 124:5, quoted by Mishnah Berurah, *ibid*.

3 Mishnah Berurah 124:37.

4 Shulchan Aruch ha-Rav 4:2; Eishel Avraham, O.C. 4; Harav S.Z. Auerbach (Halichos Shelomo 20, Devar Halachah 25).

5 See Mishnah Berurah 343:3 and 640:4 and Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 3.

6 Mishnah Berurah 4:10, based on Peri Megadim 7.

7 See O.C. 4:5. B'diavad, however, it is not forbidden to eat such foods; Mishnah Berurah 14.

8 Emes l'Yaakov, O.C. 4, note 10.

9 See Ben Ish Chai, quoted by Kaf ha-Chayim 4:23, and several poskim quoted in Tzitz Eliezer 7:2-4.

10 See Pischei Choshen, Yerushah 4, note 85, quoting several poskim; Minchas Yitzchak 6:165.

11 See Binyan Tziyon 2:24; Achiezer 3:34; Igros Moshe, E.H. 1:104-105.

12 Laws concerning adopted children vary from state to state.

13 Bava Basra 133b, Shulchan Aruch C.M. 282:1.

14 See Ketzos ha-Shulchan, C.M. 282; Igros Moshe, C.M. 2:49; Minchas Yitzchak 3:135; Shevet ha-Levi 4:216.

15 See Rama, C.M. 257:2

16 See Teshuvos Chasam Sofer, E.H. 1:147.

17 See Rama, E.H. 90:1, 108:3, 113:2; Teshuvos Maharsham 2:224-29.

18 While all poskim agree that a "sizable" percentage of the estate be distributed according to Torah law, there are different opinions as to the exact percentage. In Igros Moshe, C.M. 2:50, Harav M. Feinstein writes (in 1966) that leaving a thousand dollars to each son is considered a sizable amount, while in another responsum (C.M. 2:49) he recommends that a fifth of the estate be probated according to Torah Law. See also Igros Moshe, E.H. 1:110, where he writes that the house where the deceased lived should be probated according to Torah law, while the rest of the estate can be allocated according to his wishes.

19 See Kuntress Mi-Dor l'Dor and Mishpat ha-Tzava'ah, pg. 66.

## YatedUSA

[Toward A Meaningful Shabbos  
by Rabbi Boruch Leff

### Defining Menuchas Shabbos

I am always grateful for the many emails that I have received since this column began. But I am especially grateful to readers who send me a wonderful source which illuminates the topics we discuss here. Aaron Bleeman recently directed my attention to a section in Rav Shimshon Pincus' sefer, Shabbos Malchasa (beg. on page 92), which discusses menucha, the topic which we have spent the last few weeks studying. We thank him kindly. We have spent much space recently attempting to describe what it means and how it feels to genuinely experience rest on Shabbos. The following is the approach of Rav Shimshon Pincus zt"l.

We are used to thinking that menucha means to physically rest from a laborious activity. We work hard, we become exhausted, and so we rest. But it is clear that Chazal didn't look at it that way. In the Shabbos Mincha Shemoneh Esrai, menucha is described as one of love, of graciousness, of truth, of faith, of peace, of security. Clearly, there are different aspects and even levels of menucha. What, then, is menucha? Every single 24-hour period has a frame of time designated for rest called night. As Chazal say (Eruvin 65a), night was created for sleep. If so, how is Shabbos more of a time for menucha than a weeknight?

We need to delve deeply into the profound meaning of menucha. When someone works hard, carrying heavy objects for a few hours, he feels exhausted and drops into his bed. Why? You'll tell me because that is the way Hashem made the world. Such is nature. There is no doubt that is correct. But let's probe further. Why did the Master of the World make the world this way? He could have created us to be able to withstand all kinds of physical labor without getting tired. Why are we only able to work until we physically can't? Why can't we work until we decide not to work? Why is rest forced upon us by our physical limitations?

The answer is that when we engage in physical labor, we focus on our bodies, on our material lives. We become distant from our neshama for that period of time.

Spirituality seems to be far away at that moment. We become exhausted, not really because our strength has given way, but because we have become too far removed from our source of life, the Ribbono Shel Olam. Life is a tug of war between body and soul. Every push toward something physical automatically removes us from the spiritual. Yes, we can and must engage the physical world, incorporating and sanctifying it with spirituality. But generally, the more we expend effort within the corporal, the less we are pulled toward the spiritual.

This is why we become exhausted and collapse after hard physical labor. It is Hashem's reminder to us that enough is enough. We have spent enough time and effort within the material world and the time has come to focus again upon the soul. Amazingly, this is why the Torah describes someone who has sinned (with reference to Esav) with the same word used to depict a person who is physically tired: 'ayef'. We now understand what the Torah means when it says that Hashem rested on the 7th day of Shabbos. G-d doesn't get tired; he isn't physical, so how could He rest? The answer is that Hashem did not rest in the same sense that we usually associate menucha. Rather, for six days G-d was creating and building the physical world. It was as if He was not occupying Himself with the Shomayim, the spiritual realm. After six days, on Shabbos, He 'tired'; He stopped involving Himself with creating material things and 'focused once again' upon the spiritual world. This is what menucha means. It is a return to holiness, a detachment from our infatuation with all things physical. We realign ourselves with the source of life and our existence, ruchniyus and the Ribbono Shel Olam. This is the purpose of Shabbos.

In reality, one would think that every single Shabbos, the entire physical world should cease to exist. This would be the most genuine and true expression of the depth of menucha. But this does not occur, because it is unnecessary. On Shabbos, for the Jew, there is no physicality which pulls us away from spirituality. All is within Hashem's direct domain. This is the meaning of the following perplexing Medrash (Beraishis Rabbah 11:5):

"R' Akiva was asked by heretics, if Hashem honors Shabbos, why does He make the wind blow, make it rain, and allow plants to grow on Shabbos? He answered them that since Hashem possesses the entire world and no one shares the world with Him, it is permitted." (paraphrased)

What does the Medrash mean? How did R' Akiva answer the question? Rav Pincus explains that the question was based upon the premise of what we had discussed. Really, the entire physical realm should shut down on Shabbos in order to establish true menucha. It should not rain, and plants should not grow. R' Akiva answered that the premise is logical except that on Shabbos even the physical world becomes a part of the spiritual plane.

When we enjoy all of the pleasures of Shabbos, we must have this concept in mind. True menucha would necessitate the entire physical world to stop existing. What right, then, do we have to stand at a Shabbos Kiddush or sit around a Shabbos table? We have no right unless we have some aspect of the mitzvah of kavod or oneg Shabbos in mind. This is how we experience a meaningful Shabbos menucha. ]

## Why You Shouldn't Play Ball on Shabbos

by Rabbi Boruch Leff

### Defining Menuchas Shabbos - Part 2

We were discussing Rav Shimshon Pincus' approach to menucha as described in his sefer, Shabbos Malchasa (beg. on page 92). Rav Pincus defined menucha as a return to holiness, a detachment from our infatuation with all things physical. Menucha does not merely mean to physically rest from a laborious activity. Rather, it is a realignment of ourselves with the source of life and our existence, ruchniyus and the Ribbono Shel Olam. This is the purpose of Shabbos menucha.

Rav Pincus explained why Hashem created us to become exhausted and collapse after hard physical labor. The more we engage in physical labor, the more we focus on our bodies, and on our material lives. We become distant from our neshama for that period of time. Spirituality seems to be far away at that moment. We become exhausted, not really because our strength has given way, but because we have spent enough time and effort within the material world and the time has come to focus again upon the soul. Spending time with the soul is how we should experience our Shabbos.

Continuing along these lines, Rav Pincus asks a fascinating question: The Yerushalmi (Shabbos 15:3) says that, 'Lo nisnu Shabbosos v' Yomim Tovim elah laasok bohen b'divrei Torah'. The function of Shabbos and Yom Tov is in order to immerse ourselves in Torah. If so, how does this unite with menucha, a restful experience? Serious Torah study can physically weaken a person (Sanhedrin 26b). Learning Torah is supposed to be accomplished with ameilus, toil. How can we rest on Shabbos with menucha if we are supposed to be toiling and working at Torah study?

The answer is the same theme that we have been expressing. Menucha means to break the physical focus of our lives, to concentrate more on spirituality. Toiling in Torah is exactly what we must do in order to achieve true menucha. Menucha does not mean rest and relaxation; this is not what Shabbos is all about. There is certainly a proper need, time and place for relaxation within avodas Hashem, which within limits can also take place on Shabbos, but this is not the design of Shabbos. On Shabbos, spiritual growth must be the rallying goal.

This helps us understand a famous Medrash with great profundity. The Medrash Eichah 2:5 and Yerushalmi Taanis 4:5 (brought in Bais Yosef, Orach Chaim 308) say that the ancient Jewish city of Tur Shimon was destroyed because the people would play ball on Shabbos. While we may innately comprehend the fact that playing ball on Shabbos does not fit the spirit of the day, how could it be such a terrible sin as to be the cause of an entire city's destruction? (Though we might have understood the Medrash as meaning that the children played ball, due to the lack of mention of children, the poskim seem to read the Medrash as describing the adults' involvement.) What's more, did Tur Shimon have no other transgressions that may have caused their city to be decimated? If they did not, then they must have been supremely righteous. They must have spent most of Shabbos immersed in Torah and happened to spend a little time of recreation playing some ball as well. They also must have not violated any issurim while playing ball, for otherwise the problem would have been described as chillul Shabbos, not the specific aspect of playing ball. They must have had an eiruv to avoid the problem of carrying, and the ball wasn't muktzah (as the Rema paskins in 308:45), etc.

So, their shemiras Shabbos was in line with the Torah's demands. They were concerned with shemiras Shabbos. What, then, could have propelled them to play ball on Shabbos, which runs counter to the spirit of Shabbos itself?

To answer these questions, we will return to our underlying theme. The people of Tur Shimon played ball on Shabbos because they wanted to avoid transgressing any of the prohibitions of Shabbos. They calculated that this activity would keep them occupied and away from other regular life situations, removing the possibility of Shabbos desecration. In addition, they knew how terrible it is to spend any part of Shabbos talking about meaningless things, devorim betalim, so they played ball. They may have been correct in this calculation; perhaps it did help them stay away from the violations of Shabbos. But true menucha means to divorce oneself from stressing the physical force and strength of life. Playing ball is not just an activity which is unfit for the spirit of Shabbos; it runs counter to everything Shabbos and menucha stand for.

If menucha is defined as resting from the emphasis upon the physical in order to allow the neshama to expand and thrive, playing ball is its antithesis. Athletics stresses the physical talents and energies of its participants, requiring them to display their body strength. In addition, playing ball tires out a person, without any spiritual component. It is the same fatigue one can get while studying Torah, without any of the gains.

Thus, says Rav Pincus, there is no greater novel b'reshus haTorah, degenerating oneself without technically violating the Torah, than playing ball on Shabbos. This is why the Mishnah Berurah (518:9) writes how inappropriate playing ball on Shabbos is.

The Kaf Hachaim (308:259) writes that anyone who has the fear of Hashem in his cognizance should ponder the purpose of Shabbos - how it was given for Torah study. If so, how would it be possible to abandon this holy day and the holy Torah and involve oneself with playing ball, something that can bring impurity to the soul? How much more reward is there for one who learns Torah on Shabbos as compared with learning during the week!

Still, Rav Pincus' strong words are surprising given the fact that although the Mechaber says that playing ball is forbidden, the Rama (308:45) technically permits playing ball on Shabbos, without mentioning any problems. This is a good example of the application of the 'fifth Shulchan Aruch'. A person must be sensitive to what the Torah demands of us, even if it is unstated.

Have a meaningful and ball-free Shabbos.

May this article be a zechus for a refuah shelaima b'karov to Yehudis Sarah bas Esther. Comments or questions may be emailed to: [sbleff@yahoo.com](mailto:sbleff@yahoo.com).

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## TALMUDIGEST—Yoma 65 - 71

For the week ending 12 August 2006 / 18 Av 5766

from Ohr Somayach | [www.ohr.edu](http://www.ohr.edu)

by Rabbi Mendel Weinbach

### HOW A TURNAROUND IS ACHIEVED Yoma 71a

Is it possible for a person whose early years were plagued with poverty to be blessed with prosperity in his later years?

Rabbi Elazar saw the answer to this question in a passage from Mishlei (3:2). After counseling the reader to not neglect Torah and mitzvot, King Shlomo declares that these are the merits that will entitle him to "a length of days and years of life and peace".

"Are there, then, a man's years which are not years of life" asks Rabbi Elazar?

His explanation is that this is a reference to those years when a person's life turns around from bad to good. The example cited by Rashi in his commentary is that of someone poor in his youth becoming prosperous in his later years, a turnaround which gives him the feeling of suddenly coming alive.

This is why we offer the traditional blessing of "long life and long days". The first half refers to the quantity of life and the second half to its quality.

### WHAT THE SAGES SAY

"If not for the awesomeness of G-d how could this one nation of Israel have survived among the seventy nations who tried to destroy it!"

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi - Yoma 69b

"At first they tied a red ribbon at the inside of the entrance to the ulam of the Beit Hamikdash and when it turned white they knew that the scapegoat had reached the wilderness, and that its mission had been accomplished in accordance with what is written (Yeshayahu 1:18):

'Though your sins be like red they will be as white as snow.' "

Rabbi Elazar Hakapar - Yoma 67a

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### "RavFrاند" List - Parshas Eikev

#### Manna From Heaven

#### The One Who feeds you manna in the desert...in order to test you. (Devarim 8:16)

Everyone knows that life is a test. We struggle to make a living, to raise our children, to build up our communities. Nothing comes easy, and our test is to deal with the hardships and frustrations in the best way possible.

But what if our livelihood were served up to us on a silver platter? How wonderful that would be! No more worries about how to pay for the children's tuition or the new roof. What if everything we needed came to us like manna from heaven? Would we consider this a test? Hardly. We would consider it a blessing. The Torah, however, seems to say otherwise.

No sooner had the Jewish people come forth from Egypt that they complained (Shemos 16:3), "If only we had died by the hand of God in the land of Egypt when we were sitting beside the fleshpots, when we ate our fill of bread; now you have brought us out into the desert to let the entire congregation starve to death."

"Behold, I will rain down bread from the heavens on you," Hashem replied (ibid. 16:4). "The people shall go out to collect their daily portion every day, in order to test whether or not they will follow My Torah."

The commentators wonder what kind of test this is. What could be better than having everything you need delivered to your doorstep every day?

This is a test? This is a blessing!

Rashi explains that Hashem was referring to the laws that govern the manna. One could not store away any manna for the next day. One had to collect a double portion on Friday. And so forth. This was the test.

Would the Jewish people observe the laws of the manna scrupulously?

This test is also mentioned in Parshas Eikev, "The One Who feeds you manna in the desert...in order to test you." Sforno explains that the test is to see if the Jews would still follow the Torah when they do not have to worry about their livelihood.

Yes, there is a great test in “bread raining down from heaven.” Affluence without effort is a dangerous thing. It comes with a great amount of leisure time and freedom of action. What do we do with that leisure time and that freedom of action? Do we use our leisure time and freedom of action to taste the forbidden? This is the great test of the manna.

We are all aware of the test of poverty. We are all aware of the trials and tribulations of being poor. However, says Sforno, affluence also comes with great temptations. It puts a tremendous responsibility on a person. This is the test of the manna, and it is the test for many Jews in these affluent times.

The Chovos Halevavos writes in Shaar Habitachon that one of the reasons people, unlike birds and animals, must make a great effort to earn their livelihood is to control the yetzer hara. If we had too much time on our hands, we would be unable to resist the temptations he puts before us.

As it is, we are either too busy or too tired most of the time. And even then it is a struggle to resist temptation.

The Maggid of Mezritch once said that when people face troubles, sickness or mortal danger, Heaven forbid, they all become religious.

They all come to shul. They pray fervently. They say Tehillim with tears streaming down their cheeks. They give charity generously. But when things are going well, when they are going wonderfully, do they give much thought to the Almighty? This is the test of the manna.

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**Covenant & Conversation - Thoughts on the Weekly Parsha**  
**Sir Jonathan Sacks - Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Commonwealth**

[From 2 years ago]

**Ekev - The Politics of Memory**

IN EKEV MOSES SETS OUT A POLITICAL DOCTRINE OF SUCH WISDOM that it can never become redundant or obsolete. He does it by way of a brilliant contrast between the ideal to which Israel is called, and the danger with which it is faced. This is the ideal:

Observe the commands of the LORD your G-d, walking in his ways and revering him. For the LORD your G-d is bringing you into a good land - a land with streams and pools of water, with springs flowing in the valleys and hills; a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey; a land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing; a land where the rocks are iron and you can dig copper out of the hills. When you have eaten and are satisfied, bless the LORD your G-d for the good land he has given you.

And this is the danger:

Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your G-d, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your G-d, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. . . . You may say to yourself, “My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.” But remember the LORD your G-d, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your forefathers, as it is today.

The two passages follow directly on from one another. They are linked by the phrase “when you eat and are satisfied,” and the contrast between them is a fugue between the verbs “to remember” and “to forget.”

Good things, says Moses to the next generation, will happen to you. The question is how you will respond. Either you will eat and be satisfied and bless G-d, remembering that all things come from Him—or you will eat and be satisfied and forget to whom you owe all this. You will think it comes entirely from your own efforts: “My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.” Although this may seem a small difference, it will, says Moses, make all the difference. On this alone will turn your future as a nation in its own land.

Moses’ argument is both brilliant and unexpected. You may think, he says, that the tough times are behind you. You have wandered for forty years without a home. There were times when you had no water, no food. You

were exposed to the elements. You were attacked by your enemies. You may think this was the test of your strength. It wasn’t. The real challenge is not poverty but affluence; not slavery but freedom; not homelessness but home. Many nations have been lifted to great heights when they faced difficulty and danger. They fought battles and won. They came through crises - droughts, plagues, recessions, defeats - and were toughened by them. When times are hard, people grow. They come together. They bury their differences. There is a sense of community and solidarity, of neighbours and strangers pulling together. Many people who have lived through a war remember it as the most vivid time of their life.

The real test of a nation is not, can it survive a crisis? but, can it survive the lack of a crisis? Can it stay strong during times of ease and plenty, power and prestige? That is the challenge that has defeated every civilization known to history. Let it not, says Moses, defeat you.

Moses’ foresight is little less than stunning. The pages of history are littered with the relics of nations that seemed impregnable in their day, but which eventually declined and fell and lapsed into oblivion - and always for the reason Moses prophetically foresaw. They forget. Memories fade. People lose sight of the values they once fought for - justice, equality, independence, freedom. The nation, its early battles over, becomes strong. Some of its members grow rich. They become lax, self-indulgent, over-sophisticated, decadent. They lose their sense of social solidarity. They no longer feel it their duty to care for the poor, the weak, the marginal, the losers. They begin to feel that such wealth and position as they have is theirs by right. The bonds of fraternity and collective responsibility begin to fray. The less well-off feel an acute sense of injustice. The scene is set either for revolution or conquest. Societies succumb to external pressures when they have long been weakened by internal decay. That was the danger Moses foresaw and about which he warned.

How right he was. More than three thousand years later, his argument was restated in secular terms by two outstanding British philosophers, neither of whom was religious. The first was John Stuart Mill, who wrote:

Whenever and in proportion as the strictness of the restraining discipline was relaxed, the natural tendency of mankind to anarchy reasserted itself; the state became disorganised from within; mutual conflict for selfish ends neutralised the energies which were required to keep up the contest against natural causes of evil; and the nation, after a longer or briefer interval of progressive decline, became either the slave of a despotism or the prey of a foreign invader. (John Stuart Mill, *Essays on Politics and Culture*, edited Gertrude Himmelfarb, 137)

The second was Bertrand Russell:

What had happened in the great age of Greece happened again in Renaissance Italy: traditional moral restraints disappeared, because they were seen to be associated with superstition; the liberation from fetters made individuals energetic and creative, producing a rare fluorescence of genius; but the anarchy and treachery which inevitably resulted from the decay of morals made Italians collectively impotent, and they fell, like the Greeks, under the domination of nations less civilized than themselves but not so destitute of social cohesion. Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy*, introduction)

Most recently, in his fascinating book *Civilization and its Enemies* (2004), Lee Harris restates the theme:

Individual civilizations rise and fall; in each case the fall was not inevitable but due to the decisions - or lack of decision - of the human beings whose ancestors had created the civilization for them, but who had forgotten the secret of how to preserve it for their own children. We are ourselves dangerously near this point . . .

AT THE HEART OF MOSES’ WARNING in this week’s sedra are two fundamental insights. The first is the vital significance of memory for the moral health of a society.

Throughout history there have been many attempts to ground ethics in universal attributes of humanity. Some, like Immanuel Kant, based it on reason. Others based it on duty. Bentham rooted it in consequences (“the greatest happiness for the greatest number”). David Hume attributed it to certain basic emotions: sympathy, empathy, compassion. Adam Smith predicated it of the capacity to stand back from situations and judge them

with detachment (“the impartial spectator”). Each of these has its virtues, but none has proved failsafe.

Judaism took and takes a different view. The guardian of conscience is memory. As Akavya ben Mehalallem said, “Think of three things and you will not fall into sin: where you have come from, where you are going to; and before whom you are accountable.”<sup>3</sup> Because the prophets of ancient Israel were the first to see G-d in history, they understood the importance of handing on their story to future generations. Each time the covenant was renewed by way of a national gathering - in Moses’ last days, at the end of Joshua’s life, during the reign of Josiah and at the time of Ezra and Nehemiah - the ceremony was preceded by a summary review of Jewish history (as I pointed out last week, this continues in the custom of American presidents in their inaugural addresses to review the nation’s past and rededicate it to the future). One of the earliest Jewish acts of memory was the declaration made each year by those who came to the Temple to bring the firstfruits of the harvest:

“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. But the Egyptians mistreated us and made us suffer, putting us to hard labor . . . So the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror and with miraculous signs and wonders. He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey; and now I bring the firstfruits of the soil that you, O Lord, have given me.”

Time and again the verb *zakhor*, “Remember,” resonates through Moses’ speeches in Deuteronomy:

Remember that you were slaves in Egypt . . . therefore the Lord your G-d has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.

Remember how the Lord your G-d led you all the way in the desert these forty years . . .

Remember this and never forget how you provoked the Lord your G-d to anger in the desert . . .

Remember what the Lord your G-d did to Miriam along the way after you came out of Egypt.

Remember what the Amalekites did to you along the way when you came out of Egypt.

Remember the days of old, consider the years of ages past.

As Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi notes in his great essay, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory*, “Only in Israel and nowhere else is the injunction to remember felt as a religious imperative to an entire people.” Civilizations begin to die when they forget. Israel was commanded never to forget.

Moses’ second great concern was that the Israelites should never forget that their fate was not ultimately in human hands. It was G-d who had rescued them from Egypt, G-d who led and protected them in the wilderness, G-d who would be with them in their battles to possess and defend their land, G-d who was the source of their blessings, G-d who was their law-giver and ultimate sovereign. When people attribute their success to themselves, not G-d, disaster becomes possible, even probable.

Two historians have reminded us of this fact. The first was Lord Acton in his *Essays on the History of Liberty*. Reminding us that democracy was born in ancient Athens, he goes on to explain why it was so short-lived:

But the possession of unlimited power, which corrodes the conscience, hardens the heart, and confounds the understanding of monarchs, exercised its demoralising influence on the illustrious democracy of Athens . . . The

philosophy that was then in the ascendant taught them that there is no law superior to that of the State - the lawgiver is above the law. It followed that the sovereign people had a right to do whatever was within its power, and was bound by no rules of right or wrong but its own judgment of expediency . . . in this way the emancipated people of Athens became a tyrant . . .

The second was J. L. Talmon in his *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy*. Contrasting the religious revolutionary movements of the Middle Ages (the Levellers, Ranters, Hussites and others) with the secular terror of the French Revolution, he notes that both were messianic, but there was a fundamental difference between them. The religious revolutionaries shrank “from the use of force to impose their own pattern, in spite of their belief in its divine source and authority, while secular Messianism . . . has developed a fanatical resolve to make its doctrine rule absolutely and everywhere.” Belief in G-d means that there are moral limits to the use of power. Neither the French nor the Russian revolutionaries recognised any such limits. The result was bloodshed on a massive scale.

When we forget G-d we begin to lose our humanity. Attempting to be more than merely human, we become less. The result is idolatry - of the nation, the state, the race, the class, the system, the party or the tyrant. Idolatry never dies. It returns, always in a new guise, and always demanding human sacrifice. The prelude to disaster is the thought: “My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.”

None of this is mere ancient history. The seminal work of our time is Samuel Huntington’s *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. The book has been widely misunderstood. Huntington has been read as arguing that the great threat to the West is Islam. That is not his point at all. It would be fairer to say that it is the opposite: the great threat to the West is the West itself. It is in danger of forgetting its own fundamental values. It currently shows all the signs, he argues, “of a mature civilization on the brink of decay.” He speaks of “moral decline, cultural suicide, and political disunity”:

All civilizations go through similar processes of emergence, rise, and decline . . . The principal responsibility of Western leaders . . . is not to attempt to reshape other civilisations in the image of the West . . . but to preserve, protect, and renew the unique qualities of Western civilization.

That renewal is, he believes, moral and in a certain sense religious. The final chapter of the book is nothing less than a restatement, in contemporary terms, of Moses’ great warning in Ekev: “Be careful that you do not forget . . .”

In an eloquent passage, the American scholar Jacob Neusner once wrote: Civilization hangs suspended, from generation to generation, by the gossamer strand of memory. If only one cohort of mothers and fathers fails to convey to its children what it has learned from its parents, then the great chain of learning and wisdom snaps. If the guardians of human knowledge stumble only one time, in their fall collapses the whole edifice of knowledge and understanding.

The politics of free societies depends on the handing on of memory. That was Moses’ insight, and it speaks to us with undiminished power today.

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