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III

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INTERNET PARSHA SHEET
ON **EIKEV** - 5768

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From TorahWeb <torahweb@torahweb.org> to
weeklydt@torahweb2.org Aug 20, 2008 at 5:43 PM subject
**Rabbi Mordechai Willig –
Cleaving to Chachamim**

I

“To walk in all His ways and to cleave to Him” (Devarim 11:22).

Is it possible to cleave to Hashem? Is He not a consuming fire (4:24)? Rather, cleave to the students of Torah and to the chachamim, and Hashem will consider it on your behalf as if you cleaved to Him (Rashi).

Is it possible for a person to walk behind the Shechina (13:5)? Is He not a consuming fire? Rather, follow his attributes of chessed, clothe the naked, visit the sick, consol the mourners (Sotah 14a).

Just as He is merciful, so should you be merciful (Shabbos 133b).

The progression of the passuk, as understood by Chazal, implies that character refinement, such as loving-kindness and mercy, must precede, and should result in, cleaving to talmidei chachamim. Why is this so?

II

The gemara in Pesachim (49b) recounts that R' Akiva said, “When I was an am ha'aretz, I said ‘Who would give me a talmid chacham and I would bite him like a donkey’”. In other words, R' Akiva would be so angry at the talmid chacham as to want to harm him, and, as a result, would grit his teeth (Maharsha). Yet, when R' Akiva was a shepherd, Rachel saw that he was modest and lofty (ma'ali), and offered to marry him if he would go to a rav to study Torah (Kesuhbos 62b). How could one who was lofty wish to bite a talmid chacham?

R' Akiva did not hate talmidei chachamim. Rather, because he thought that they acted arrogantly and hatefully towards the unlearned amei ha'aretz he wished to bite them. But, to compound the original question, we know that R' Akiva was also a shomer mitzvos (Tosafos). So, how are we to understand the above?

Tosafos implicitly criticizes the Torah scholars of R' Akiva's time for improperly conveying the impression, even to a person as astute as the young Akiva, that they hated amei ha'aretz. Such an impression typically results in the unlearned, even those who are modest and refined individuals, harboring a hatred that they perceive is reciprocal.

One should learn Torah and serve Torah scholars. His dealings with briyos should be pleasant. What do briyos say about him? Fortunate are his father and teacher who taught him Torah. Woe unto briyos who do not learn Torah. This person who learned Torah, see how pleasant are his ways, how refined are his deeds (Yoma 86a).

A Torah scholar should make Hashem's name beloved to all briyos. As a result, Jews will come closer to Torah observance, and non-Jews will develop a greater respect for Torah and its scholars. In this way, Hashem's name will be sanctified, and the Jewish people earn the title “Yisroel, in whom I (i.e. Hashem) take glory” (Yeshayahu 49:3).

The Mishna in Avos (4:1) states, “Who is honored? He who honors others (briyos), as it is said, ‘For those who honor Me I will honor’ (Shmuel I 2:30)”. The proof text the mishna cites refers to honoring Hashem, not humans, so how does it prove that we must honor other people? The answer lies in the word “briyos”. We must love briyos simply because they are creations of Hashem (Tosafos Yom Tov, Avos 1:12). Similarly, we honor humans because they all are created in Hashem's image (Breishis 9:6) and are, therefore, beloved (Avos 3:18).

IV

Notwithstanding the divine image in all humans, we are required to clearly differentiate between right and wrong, and distance ourselves from that which is wrong. A difficult balance is required of us in our dealings with, and attitude towards, non-observant Jews. They, like us, are described as children of Hashem (Devarim 4:1), worthy of additional love (Avos 3:18), even if they do not conduct themselves as proper sons (R' Meir, Kiddushin 36a). Yet, we must establish separation to insure that we remain observant even as we yearn to bring the non-observant closer to Torah. In a similar vein, most excruciatingly difficult is the balance required by talmidei chachamim in their dealings with, and attitude towards, unlearned observant Jews. If manifest love is not exhibited by Torah scholars towards observant amei ha'aretz, there is a risk of actions being misinterpreted. This in turn can lead to a schism within the observant community.

The Tosafos cited earlier does not say that a talmid chacham should not be aware of the cosmic spiritual importance of learning Torah, an awareness which perforce gives one a measure of pride when one is heavily engaged in Talmud Torah. However, Tosafos does demand that a talmid chacham not allow pride to convey a message of condescension towards the unlearned. In every circumstance a Torah scholar must strive to make his love for the unlearned manifestly clear. Otherwise, he bears some responsibility for the Akivas of his time, i.e. modest and refined people who think that chachamim reject or disdain them and, in turn, respond in kind.

V

The animosity generated by the lack of manifest love is a double catastrophe. Firstly, it prevents the masses from cleaving to chachamim and their students.

One who does not cling to chachamim, does not establish love for them in his heart, does not attempt to help them when he is able, violates this mitzvah. His punishment is great, because they are the endurance of Torah, and a strong foundation for the salvation of the souls. For one who associates with them will not quickly sin (Sefer Hachinuch 434)

Aside from the spiritual impoverishment and the greater possibility of sin consigned to those who do not fulfill this mitzvah, the second disaster is the disharmony that can develop within the observant community. This can lead to the type of baseless hatred which led to the churban.

We can now understand how character refinement, i.e., walking in the ways of Hashem, should result in cleaving to talmidei chachamim. When R' Akiva was exposed to true Torah scholars, his modesty and refinement of character, i.e. his walking in Hashem's ways, enabled him to penetrate the smokescreen of misunderstanding of his earlier stage of life and to adhere to talmidei chachamim. This progression from not only walking in Hashem's ways, but to cleaving to Torah scholars, lead, in R' Akiva's case,

to his becoming the greatest chacham of his day. Copyright © 2008 by The TorahWeb Foundation. All rights reserved.

Rabbi Asher Brander - Eikev Reflections: Have a Beautiful Shabbos"
Parshas Eikev - 20 Av 5767 To sponsor or dedicate an edition of
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Eikev: Satisfaction, Jewish Style

It seems innocuous enough, but in our time-starved world, its sheer length strikes fear in the hearts and minds of men, sufficiently so to have spurned a quasi religious phobia and an industry of avoidance. How sad it is!

I refer to the fear of bentsching (grace after meals or birkas hamazon), that alongside fleishig phobia (the fear of eating meat, lest G-d forbid one miss out on that geshmake Haagen-Daaz or Klein's), figures prominently in the real lives of Orthodox Jews who can't find the time or zitsfleisch (patience) to bentsch properly. Thus mezonos rolls, rice cakes and Ezekiel bread have emerged as possible alternatives. Both the former (are mezonos rolls really mezonos?) and latter (what's the bracha on Ezekiel bread) have developed serious halachic discussions that transcend this forum. (I find it fitting/ironic that as I write these words, (Friday Morning 4:26 am) the smell of delicious Angel's bakery bread wafts into our Jerusalem apartment. It is a shtickl fun olam haba - a piece of other worldliness).

The source of the incredibly beautiful mitzvah of bentsching can be found in Eikev (8:10).

You will eat and be satisfied, and you will bless Hashem, your G-d, for the good land He has given you.

One may have already noticed that the Biblical obligation of birkas hamazon starts when one is satisfied[1] - a mere k'zayis (olive size measure ~1.1 oz.) of bread just won't do. To adduce support to this idea, a famous, beautiful piece of Talmud is often cited[2]:

R. Avira taught: The ministering angels said before God: Master of the Universe, it is written in Your law, "(I am God) that does not favor nor accepts bribes"[3], do You not show favor to Israel, as it is written, "The Lord shall show his favor towards you?"[4]" He replied: And shall I not raise up My countenance towards Israel, for in my Torah I wrote: And you shall eat, be satisfied and bless the Lord, your God, and they are particular [to bentsch] if the quantity is but an olive

A two tiered obligation emerges. Rabbinically, we are obliged after a k'zayis of bread whilst the Torah obligation only commences after one achieves satisfaction. The Talmud then extols the Rabbinic level that invites special Divine grace as a worthy investment with residual benefits

Much about this Talmudic piece baffles. Rav Yechiel Yaakov Weinberg (1878-1966) asks two basic questions:

1. If the obligation to bentsch requires satisfaction and one is not satisfied with a k'zayis, why is the Rabbinic obligation not equivalent to a blessings made in vain?

2. How has the gemara solved its initial problem of God's favoritism? At the end of the piece, G-d is still favoring His Jews ?

Rav Weinberg's brilliant insight flows first from a personal nostalgic reflection - one worth our consideration:

Before his move to Germany and then Switzerland, Rav Weinberg lived in Lithuania. He described the dire poverty of many in his "city". I suspect he meant the small town of Pilvishki. Often dire poverty created Shabbos Jews - Jews who were basically hungry all week so that their Shabbos could be celebrated with (not a lot, but) a bit more.

"And these Jews", said Rav Weinberg, "what would happen to them when they would come to the shul and find guests who needed a meal? Many were the first to jump at the opportunity." Of course, when they came home with their guests, their meager morsels had to be stretched out to accommodate the guests.

But make no mistake, exclaimed Rav Weinberg, even as they ate less, perhaps only a k'zayis of bread, oh was there satisfaction; a sense of

contentment that flowed from giving another Jew the ta'am (taste) of Shabbos. In other words, their love of kindness more than made up for their lack. This said Rav Weinberg is what the gemara is teaching. With only partially filled stomachs, they found great joy in k'zayis and were indeed able to bentsch from a place of great satisfaction.

Such an attitude unleashes a Divine quid pro quo: My dear children, by attaining satisfaction from your noble acts of undeserved kindness, I too must respond by showering you with undeserved kindness as well.

As a bar mitzvah, my son recently received what I like to call a "me-pod" (actually 3 of them), a symbol worthy of its generation. Now, even one who is walking on the street, has the societal license to completely ignore all other pedestrians. A few years back, in an anecdotal survey of slogans for popular products, I came across "Because you deserve it", "Do something for yourself", "I am the King", "Obey your thirst", and "Double your pleasure".

Unquestionably, transmitting the hallmark Jewish legacy of loving kindness within such an environment carries a whole set of challenges.

Let us rise to the occasion!

Good Shabbos from Jerusalem.

Asher Brander

[1] This is the assumption of the overwhelming majority of halachic authorities. Cf. Ra'avad however, Mishneh Torah, Brachos, 5:15

[2] Berachos, 20b

[3] Devarim, 10:17

[4] Bamidbar, 6:26 We love all feedback To subscribe to Reflections, email listserv@kehillanews.org with the phrase "join reflections" in the subject line. To unsubscribe to Reflections, email listserv@kehillanews.org with the phrase "leave reflections" in the subject line. To sponsor or dedicate an edition of REFLECTIONS (which went out to over 2,000 households last week), please email rabbi@kehilla.org

from **Rabbi Aryeh Striks** <striks@vths.org> reply-to striks@vths.org to internetparshasheet@gmail.com date Thu, Aug 21, 2008 at 1:08 PM subject Mussar HaTorah - Parashas Eikev

Mussar HaTorah Torah Insights into Human Nature – Dedicated in memory of **Rabbi A. Henach Leibowitz zt"l**

"And you shall love the stranger [lit. convert]..." (Devarim 10:19)

Reuven, a visitor from another city, comes to town, and you invite him to your home for a meal. You serve him with a polite smile and tend to his needs. Have you fulfilled your obligation, as described in the broader meaning of the above pasuk? Let us read the commentary of the great sage Rabbeinu Bechaya (introduction to Parashas T'zave), where he illustrates the need to help a stranger who comes to your neighborhood from his hometown. He says that the stranger is like a bird that has left his nest and is now separated from his comfortable origin and far from his spiritual foundation. Rabbeinu Bechaya tells us that we must use Shlomo HaMelech's guidance in how to treat this new arrival: "Oil and incense may make the heart glad, but genuine advice from the soul is sweetness for a friend" (Mishlei 27:9). "Oil and incense" refer to the food and smoke of cooking preparation, while the "advice from the soul" refers to the social greeting that we extend. We must not only feed our guest, but we must make him happy with a kind expression and warm words. Rabbeinu Bechaya continues to tell us that this warm reception must come from a source of love ("from the soul") for the newcomer and not as mere flattery to him.

It is understood that we must greet a new face with a smile and a pleasant greeting. But why do we have to love him? What difference does our internal emotional state make to the visitor – he hears the same words and sees the same smile either way! Furthermore, how can it even be expected of us to feel this love – we have only just met him? Doesn't it take many

days, perhaps even years and much interaction to develop feelings of love for our friends? Finally, why does Rabbeinu Bechaya indicate that if our greeting does not come from the depths of our hearts than it is flattery and obsequiousness? Why can't it be chesed done without love, but sincere chesed nonetheless?

It is apparent from Rabbeinu Bechaya that we can indeed – in mere seconds – develop intense and genuine feelings of love for a fellow Jew. As a matter of fact, it is our responsibility to cultivate these emotions for every Jew who is new to our neighborhood. All we need to do is to vicariously feel the stranger's feelings of loneliness and deprivation. Visualize his situation as being like that bird, far away from his nest, with no place to turn for help; imagine yourself in that very same situation. If we condition ourselves to truly feel our friend's pain, we will be able to immediately turn that empathy into love. This crucial difference can be sensed by the visitor - if we fall short of this mandate, our greeting will seem like flattery: false and dishonest. A welcome that is purely external is an incomplete and, to a certain extent, empty and insincere gesture. Obviously, a meal that is offered with a less sincere greeting is better than no meal at all, but we must strive to reach the Torah's standards for every Jew.

This is the greatness within us. We have the capacity to tune into the needs and pain of our fellow Jew and instantly love him. He, in turn, possesses the delicate sensitivity to detect whether I truly love him or not. In these summer months, as people move to new communities, or travel during their vacation period, we have an opportunity to use this powerful tool of ahavas Yisrael. May this instantaneous, unconditional love, be the ahavas chinam that helps rebuild Yerushalayim and the Beis HaMikdash.

<http://www.artscroll.com/Chapters/tabh-001.html>

Parashas Eikev from Table Talk **Shabbos and Yom Tov Divrei Torah**
By **Rabbi Raphael Pelcovitz** Parashas Eikev

Avinu Malkeinu — Our Father, Our King

Moshe urged the people to appreciate the fact that although the Almighty afflicted them in the wilderness, the purpose was to test them and refine them. He stated: "You should know in your heart that just as a father chastises his son, so Hashem, your G-d, chastises you" (8:5)

One of the great chassidic teachers was the Maggid of Mezritch. He explains this verse in a most profound and telling manner through a beautiful parable. Picture a young child beginning to walk. As he takes his first halting steps, his father stands in front of him, holding out his hands and smiling encouragement. As the child reaches out to him, the father steps back, and as he does so, the child, of course, strives to come closer, and thus he learns to walk. The Maggid explains that often Hashem seems to be distancing Himself from us, and we become dismayed, upset and angry, as does the child. But, similar to the child, we push ourselves to come closer, and even though G-d seems to move away from us as we reach out to Him, it is not because He is rejecting us, but rather because He is encouraging us to continue to reach out and to walk on our own. This is why the pasuk uses the expression, "as a father chastises his son, so Hashem chastises you." It is important for the Jewish people to ever appreciate that even when G-d seemingly distances Himself from us, He is instructing us and urging us to use our own strengths to come closer to Him.

<http://www.chief Rabbi.org/>

Covenant & Conversation

Thoughts on the Weekly Parsha from

Sir Jonathan Sacks

Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Commonwealth

[From 2 years ago - 5766]

<http://www.chief Rabbi.org/tt-index.html>

Eikev

A sequence of verses in this week's sedra gave rise to a beautiful Talmudic passage – one that has found a place in the siddur. It is among the readings we say after the Evening Service on Saturday night as Shabbat comes to an end. Here is the text on which it is based:

For the Lord your G-d is G-d of gods and Lord of lords, the great, mighty and awe-inspiring G-d, who shows no favoritism and accepts no bribe. He upholds the cause of the orphan and widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing. (Deut. 10: 17-18) The juxtaposition of the two verses – the first about G-d's supremacy, the second about His care for the low and lonely – could not be more striking. The Power of powers cares for the powerless. The infinitely great shows concern for the small. The Being at the heart of being listens to those at the margins: the orphan, the widow, the stranger, the poor, the outcast, the neglected. On this idea, the third century teacher Rabbi Yochanan built the following homily (Babylonian Talmud, Megillah 31a):

Rabbi Yochanan said, Wherever you find the greatness of the Holy One, blessed be He, there you find His humility. This is written in the Torah, repeated in the Prophets, and stated a third time in the Writings. It is written in the Torah: "For the Lord your G-d is G-d of gods and Lord of lords, the great, mighty and awe-inspiring G-d, who shows no favoritism and accepts no bribe." Immediately afterwards it is written, "He upholds the cause of the orphan and widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing." It is repeated in the Prophets, as it says: "So says the High and Exalted One, who lives for ever and whose name is Holy: I live in a high and holy place, but also with the contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite." It is stated a third time in the Writings: "Sing to G-d, make music for His name, extol Him who rides the clouds – G-d is His name – and exult before Him." Immediately afterwards it is written: "Father of the fatherless and judge of widows, is G-d in His holy habitation."

It is this passage that found its way into the (Ashkenazi) service at the end of Shabbat. Its presence there is to remind that that, as the day of rest ends and we return to our weekday concerns, we should not be so caught up in our own interests that we forget others less favourably situated. To care only for ourselves and those immediately dependant on us is not "the way of G-d".

One of the more unusual aspects of being a Chief Rabbi is that one comes to know people one otherwise might not. These were three moments that made a deep impression on me.

From time to time Elaine and I give dinner parties for people within, and also outside, the Jewish community. Usually, at the end, the guests thank the hosts. Only once, though, did a guest not only thank us but also asked to be allowed to go into the kitchen to thank those who had made and served the meal. It was a fine act of sensitivity. No less interesting was who it was who did so. It was John Major, a British Prime Minister. Greatness is humility.

The oldest synagogue in Britain is Bevis Marks, in the heart of the City of London. Built in 1701, it was the first purpose-built synagogue in London, created by the Spanish and Portuguese Jews who were the first to return to England (or practice their Judaism in public: some had been marranos) after Oliver Cromwell gave permission in 1656 for Jews to return after their expulsion by Edward I in 1290.

Modelled on the Great Synagogue in Amsterdam, it has stayed almost unchanged ever since. Only the addition of electric lights has marked the passing of time – and even so, on special occasions, services are candle-lit as they were in those early days.

For the tercentenary service in 2001, Prince Charles came to the synagogue. There he met members of the community as well as leaders of Anglo-Jewry. What was impressive is that he spent as much time talking to the young men and women who were doing security duty as he did to the great and good of British Jewry. For security reasons, people volunteer to stand guard at communal events – part of the work of one of our finest

organizations, the Community Security Trust. Often, people walk past them, hardly noticing their presence. But Prince Charles did notice them, and made them feel as important as anyone else on that glittering occasion. Greatness is humility.

Sarah Levene (not her real name) died tragically young. She and her husband had been blessed by G-d with great success. They were wealthy; but they did not spend their money on themselves. They gave tzedakah on a massive scale – within and beyond the Jewish community, in Britain, Israel and elsewhere. They were among the greatest philanthropists of our time.

When she died, among those who felt most bereaved were the waiters and waitresses of a well-known hotel in Israel where they often stayed. It transpired that she had come to know all of them – where they came from, what their family situation was, the difficulties they were going through, the problems they faced. She remembered not only their names but also the names of their spouses and children. Whenever any of them needed help, she made sure it came, quietly, unobtrusively. It was a habit she had wherever she went.

After her death I discovered how she and her husband came to be married. He was older than she was, a friend of her parents. She had some weeks free in the summer before the start of the academic year, and Mr Levene (not his real name) gave her a holiday job. One evening after work they were about to join her parents for a meal. In the street they passed a beggar. Mr Levene, punctilious about the mitzvah of tzedakah, reached into his pocket and gave the man a coin. As they were walking on, Sarah asked him to lend her some money – a fairly large sum, which she promised she would repay at the end of the week when he paid her wages.

He did so. She then ran back to the beggar and gave him the money. “Why did you do that?” he asked, “I had already given him some money”. “What you gave him”, she said, “was enough to help him for today but not enough to make a difference to his life.”

At the end of the week, Mr Levene gave her her wages. She handed him back most of the money, to repay him for the sum he had lent her. “I will accept the money,” he told her, “because I do not want to rob you of your mitzvah.” But – as he himself told me after her death, “It was then that I decided to ask her to marry me – because her heart was bigger than mine.”

Throughout their marriage they spent as much time and energy on giving their money to charitable causes as they did on earning it. They were responsible for many of the most outstanding educational, medical and environmental projects of our time. I have had the privilege of knowing other philanthropists – but none who knew the names of the children of the waiters at the hotel where they stayed; none who cared more for those others hardly noticed or who gave help more quietly, more effectively, more humanly. Greatness is humility.

This idea – counter-intuitive, unexpected, life-changing – is one of the great contributions of the Torah to Western civilization and it is set out in the words of our sedra, when Moses told the people about the “G-d of gods and Lord of lords, the great, mighty and awe-inspiring G-d” whose greatness lay not just in the fact that He was Creator of the universe and shaper of history, but that “He upholds the cause of the orphan and widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing.” Those who do this are the true men and women of G-d.

rom Shema Yisrael Torah Network <shemalist@shemayisrael.com> to Peninim <peninim@shemayisrael.com> date Wed, Aug 20, 2008 at 5:18 PM subject

Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum - Parshas Eikev mailing list peninim_shemayisrael.com.shemayisrael.com Filter messages from this mailing list mailed-by shemayisrael.com hide details Aug 20

PARSHAS EIKEV Just as a father will chastise his son, so Hashem, your G-d, chastises you. (8:5) The whole idea of yissurim, troubles, is spelled out in the above pasuk: Yissurim symbolize a loving Father's chastisement. Considered in that light, they are no longer troubles; they are an act of love - tough love, perhaps, but love nonetheless. Yissurim are axioms of those actions that come from Hashem which defy human rationale. I think, however, that the mere thought that one is cognizant

that his troubles are Heaven-sent render them that much more palatable, easier to accept. We also forget that yissurim not only expiate our sins, but they also generate s'char, reward, for us. The Ramban notes that Shevet Levi, comprised of 22,000 souls, was the smallest in number of all the tribes. He explains that this was due to the fact that Shevet Levi was not enslaved in Egypt, as were the other tribes. The other tribes suffered thus, they were rewarded with fertile childbearing, while the tribe of Levi did not enjoy this blessing. We see from here, explains the Ramban, that blessing is often commensurate with the ordeal one sustains.

"For six travails He will save you, and in the seventh no harm will reach you." In this pasuk, Sefer Iyov (5:19) expresses the concept that Hashem limits suffering. The numbers six and seven are symbolic. The Ramban explains that the number seven denotes totality, which alludes to the fact that Hashem will not permit us to be overwhelmed by evil. Six refers to limited punishment. Hashem punishes a person, at times even severely, but, if he is worthy, he will not receive a "seven," full measure of punishment.

The Metzudas David adds that Hashem often sends a small amount of suffering to people as an expiation for their sins, so that when a great calamity strikes the world, these people will not have to suffer along with others. An example of this would be someone who, due to illness or car trouble, misses being in a place where tragedy suddenly strikes. Here Iyov is reflecting that he is now receiving retribution for his sins, but this punishment will save him from the "seven," a more serious catastrophe later on.

Horav Moshe Cordovero, zl, writes that Hashem gives us the necessary strength to withstand the troubles which we experience. He substantiates this from the fact that Sarah Imeinu died when the Satan told her that Yitzchak had "almost" died. Had Yitzchak actually died, then Sarah would not have died. Hashem would have strengthened her and granted her the ability overcome the tragedy. Since Yitzchak did not die, her reaction exceeded the decree.

Likewise, we find that Yaakov Avinu "refused" to be comforted concerning his loss of Yosef. Chazal teach us that there is a decree from Heaven that, after awhile, one forgets the deceased. What about Yosef? Why was Yaakov inconsolable? He explains that since Yosef was still alive, Hashem did not grant Yaakov the ability to withstand this trial.

There are those who will say, "We can do without the reward generated by yissurim, as long as we do not have to experience the yissurim. In other words, we do not want the pain or the gain. For some, this actually works, while most of us do not seem to have a choice in the matter. Why? Horav Nochum, zl, m'Horadna, relates the following story as means of an explanation. The Russian President once decided to visit the state prison to see how it was being run. Lo and behold, he was arriving at a time when no one was incarcerated! The jail was empty. In an effort to "alleviate" this problem, the warden approached a poor man and asked him if he would be willing to serve as "prisoner for a day." The poor man had a strong distaste for prisons, and, therefore, he refused to "accept" the offer. One year later, the poor man was regrettably caught in an act of petty theft. The judge was in the process of sending him to prison, when he turned to the warden and said, "I do not want to go. Imagine, just one year ago, I refused to go to the prison. Then, you were willing to pay me. Now, I will certainly not go." The warden listened to him and laughed. "My friend, you do not have much of a choice in the matter. Now, you must go. You have 'earned' your sentence."

Likewise, those who are able to say we will do without the pain are individuals who are expiating the sins of the greater community. They themselves were so holy that they have extra "funds" in their account. Those of us who are receiving our due punishment, however, really do not have much of a choice. We receive what we have unfortunately "earned." There are instances when the troubles one experiences are not simply to pay for his past sins, but rather serve as a buffer for future generations when there will be a situation that a z'chus, merit, is needed. No pain is for naught. Hashem saves it all; He puts it away in an account to be used at a later date. The commentators compare this to the young son of a wealthy man who became ill. While the illness was not of a serious nature, the man, possessing great wealth, sought the finest and most talented physician to treat his son. After all, what else is money for? Surprisingly, however, while this distinguished doctor had been treating the boy for a short while, he became increasingly more ill. The father approached the doctor, "I do not understand. Just a few weeks ago, my son was diagnosed with a minor illness, and now his life is in danger. What has happened?"

"I am sorry to say that your son does have a serious life-threatening illness," the doctor replied. "During my initial checkup, I noticed early signs of a deadly disease that would probably have taken about five years to surface. At that time, it will be almost impossible to cure your son. In addition, I do not know if I will be available then. I, therefore, caused the illness to incubate more quickly, so that your son would become ill now. At this point, the illness is treatable. It might be painful, but your son will survive and live a full life. To have waited would have been to invite certain disaster."

Likewise, the yissurim sustained by individuals may quite possibly serve as a deposit to be placed in a spiritual bank, with one's descendants -- children, grandchildren, or even great-grandchildren - as the beneficiaries. The travails suffered by parents can mitigate some of the harsh decree that is to be issued to later generations, who do not have the necessary merits, to survive its painful consequences.

In conclusion, as the pasuk states, yissurim are a G-d-given manifestation of fatherly love. When one takes this into consideration, it makes the pain that much more bearable. Many stories relate how great men and women came to terms with their suffering. There is one incident that I recently came across that fascinated me. It indicates a woman's pragmatic attitude toward her suffering, and it is an incident from which we can all learn.

There is a woman in Yerushalayim who exemplifies chesed, acts of lovingkindness, at its zenith. In fact, the girls' schools often bring their students to her to take note of her incredible and successful efforts on behalf of Yerushalayim's less fortunate. She has organized campaigns that have sustained thousands. How did it all begin?

Apparently, a while ago, she was seriously ill, almost at death's door. The medical community had given up hope of a recovery from her dread disease. The situation was very bleak. It was close to what should have been the "end." The doctors had just notified her to "put her affairs in order," because they could no longer offer her any hope. She gathered her strength and cried out to Hashem: "Ribono Shel Olam, who will benefit from my lying in the grave? You will derive nothing, because I will not be able to perform mitzvos. I will certainly gain nothing. I promise You that if You permit me to live, I will devote every minute of my time towards sanctifying Your Holy Name by performing acts of lovingkindness. I will dedicate my life, my entire being, towards the fulfillment of this mitzvah. Please Hashem, allow me to live!"

She continued to weep bitterly until she no longer had any more strength. Hashem listened, and she left the hospital cured of her disease. She kept her word and has devoted her life to carrying out acts of chesed, thereby sanctifying the Name of Hashem. She asked - Hashem listened - she acted. Our prayers are never wasted. We may never despair of hope.

Just as a father will chastise his son, so Hashem, your G-d, chastises you. (8:5)

We translate the word, ish, as "a father," but it actually means "a man." The Torah should have used the word, av, father. Why does the Torah alter the wording? Horav Yosef Chaim, zl, the Ben Ish Chai, distinguishes between the love manifest by a biological father and that shown by a man who raises a child as a surrogate. The father certainly loves his child, and the discipline and punishment that he must mete out is rooted in love. However subtle it may be, there is a hidden agenda - one that the father may not even be aware of: He has a personal stake in his son's success, because it is a reflection on him.

The individual, who, out of the goodness of his heart, has raised someone else's son, is certainly proud of his son's achievements, but the failures are not necessarily attributed to him. This is why the Torah changes the text. Hashem chastises us as "a man" chastises his "son." It is purely for the sake of the child. Success and failure are not the result of his biological relationship. It is totally out of objective love for Klal Yisrael - a love that endures and will continue to do so for all time.

Take care of yourself...lest you eat to satiety...and your cattle and sheep grow many...and your heart become haughty, and you forget Hashem Your G-d, Who took you out of the land of Egypt. (8:11, 12, 13, 14)

Chazal consider haughtiness to be a deplorable character trait from which one should distance himself to the extreme. The trait of self-conceit is one of the worst qualities one can possess. As Rabbeinu Yonah writes in Pirkei Avos 4:4, "It is a sin that makes one's heart forget his Creator, as the Torah says, 'Lest you become haughty and forget Hashem your G-d'" (Devarim 8:14.)

"Be very humble-spirited, for the hope of man is but worms" (Pirkei Avos 4:4). The Tanna could not paint a much clearer picture. We have nothing about which to be arrogant, because we all are destined to the same conclusion to our lives. When we keep this in mind, what do we have to be haughty about? In the Talmud Sanhedrin 88b, the statement is perhaps a bit more extreme: "Who is worthy of entering the World to Come? Whoever is humble, with bent knee, who comes and goes with bowed head, who regularly studies Torah and does not make much of himself (over it)."

The above is a powerful statement, but, it seems to contradict another well-known statement of Chazal: "All Yisrael have a share in the World to Come (Sanhedrin 90A)." Clearly, the statement that restricts entrance to the humble is referring to another point. Horav Meir Bergman, Shlita, explains that Chazal are saying: Who, while still in this world, is worthy right now to enter the World to Come? Who is so completely divorced from sin that he stands pure and clean in the midst of a world filled with moral and spiritual pollution, with materialism and physicality, with the mundane, secular and profane, all prevailing over sanctity, purity and morality? The answer is: the individual who is self-effacing, who is unassuming, who thinks little of himself. Because of his infinitesimal self-view, he has risen above his peers and is worthy of entrance through the gates of Gan Eden.

Chazal are meticulous in informing us of the definition of unassuming: he who is with "bent knee, who comes with bowed head, who regularly studies Torah and does not call attention to himself over it." Do a "bent knee" and "bowed head" make such a difference in an individual's character? Is this "position" something physical, or is it meant in a spiritual sense?

Rav Bergman explains that in day-to-day life, one bends his knee or bows his head in order to avoid collision with the ceiling or doorway. It is pure practicality. Likewise, in the spiritual life, one "bends his knee" or "bows his head" to avoid "knocking his head" against the Shechinah. One who has a palpable sense of Hashem's Presence, who has a tactile feeling that Hashem is Master of the world, will "bow mentally" effacing himself before the Almighty. After all, Hashem is everywhere! He feels that by mentally raising himself up, he is shunning, pushing up, against Hashem. Just as when the ceiling of a house is sagging, the tenant understands that for practical purposes, he must maintain a "low profile" and keep his head down, so, too, should every "tenant" in Hashem's world feel His all-present glory hovering all over and bow himself internally as a matter of course.

This constant feeling of Hashem's Presence is the greatest safeguard against sin. In contrast, the individual who is filled with himself, who is so wrapped up in his own glory, has a difficult time finding Hashem in his life. He simply has no room, because life is all about him - not Hashem. His arrogance and the consequence of forgetting about Hashem will surely lead him to sin.

That it is not your children who did not know and who did not see the chastisement of Hashem, your G-d. (11:2)

As Moshe Rabbeinu continues his admonishment of the Jewish People, he stresses their singular responsibility to maintain a strong fidelity to Hashem. They were the ones who saw firsthand Hashem's wonders and miracles. They were sustained through His mercy. While the Torah's commandments are no less obligatory to the future generations, they nonetheless do not have the personal experience of seeing what their parents saw. Their personal involvement was stronger. Hence, their commitment should be likewise. The Torah uses the word mussar, which is here translated as chastisement. The people should take a lesson from the punishment meted out to those who have angered Hashem. Targum Onkeles defines mussar as upana, which means teaching. Hashem inflicts suffering for the constructive purpose of rectifying one's inappropriate behavior.

In any event, mussar is a lesson one should derive by taking note of what happens to him and around him. When one ignores his Heavenly messages, he makes a serious mistake, one that can - and usually does - lead to much more serious sins. A sobering example of this notion can be gleaned from the incident of the meraglim, the spies, all distinguished Jewish leaders, who, upon returning from their reconnaissance of Eretz Yisrael, relayed a negative report about the Land. The Mirer Mashgiach, Horav Yeruchem Levovitz, zl, notes that when we read through the passages describing the episode and we view the entire incident through the spectrum provided and elucidated by Chazal, we see that they committed a number of grievous sins. When they said, "The people of Canaan are stronger than we are, they were actually implying that the pagans were stronger than Hashem. This statement is at least heretical and certainly indicative of other fundamental problems in emunah, belief, in Hashem.

Rav Yeruchem wonders why after a thorough study of the parshah and a critical evaluation of the behavior of Klal Yisrael, which indicates a serious deficiency in their belief in G-d, all Chazal can "pin" on them is the sin of not taking the appropriate mussar lesson from the earlier incident in which Miriam spoke against Moshe. Such a statement is mind-boggling! Imagine someone steals a car, commits a homicide, and is finally caught with a trunk stuffed with hard drugs. Seems pretty bad! Would it not be ludicrous if he is only prosecuted for speeding through a school zone in the course of fleeing from the police? It might sound comical, but this seems to be the case concerning the spies. The Mashgiach explains that it is essentially the sin of not listening, not acknowledging that there is a problem, which leads to-- and is the catalyst for-- all of the other sins. We go through life hearing messages. If we take note of the message and acknowledge that we are its focus, we have the possibility of changing the negative course of our lives. If, however, we ignore the messages, we are likely to pay dearly.

The incident that occurred concerning Miriam was a defining moment in Jewish history, which should have had a definitive impact on the Jewish People. The nation should have derived the overriding significance of positive speech, as well as the damaging effects of negative, inappropriate speech. If the meraglim would only have taken a critical look at the lesson implied from the episode of Miriam, they would not have sinned, and today we would probably not be celebrating Tishah B'Av as our national day of mourning.

We must wake up and listen to our messages. There are occurrences every day of which we are aware, that take place for a reason. We must search for that reason, but this can occur only if we acknowledge the G-d factor in every incident. If we fail to react to the inferred messages, the next communication might not be quite as subtle.

Zeichar rav tuvecha yabiu The remembrance of Your goodness they shall utter.

All too often, we pay gratitude to the Almighty for His wonderful beneficence which we receive in the present, while simultaneously ignoring His gifts from the past. It is important that we not forget the past favors that we have received, and therefore, must constantly and repeatedly remember everything that Hashem has done for us. Remembering is not sufficient. The good fortune from which we have benefited must be reiterated, articulated and delved into, so that we learn to appreciate every direct and even indirect consequence of that favor. The voicing of our gratitude must be two-fold: to ourselves and to others. Indeed, when one is truly excited about something, he does not keep it to himself. He wants to share it with others, to "shout it from the rooftops." This should be our attitude concerning the gratitude we owe Hashem. Remember, delve into it, focus on every aspect of it, articulate it to oneself and to others. Only then has one truly recognized Hashem's favor.

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Weekly Parsha

Rabbi Berel Wein

EKEV

Friday, August 22, 2008 Printer Friendly

One of the most famous and quoted passages of the Torah appears in this week's parsha – "man does not live by bread alone." This phrase has entered general literature in all of its forms but it certainly has not entered human life in much reality.

Many if not most people still believe that man does live by bread alone and that the life of spirit is nice but it is not really part of this world and our basic existence.

The Torah emphasizes often and especially in this series of parshiyot in which we are currently engaged, the importance of the manna in forming a Jewish people characterized by ultimate faith and spirit. The manna is the food of angels - of heaven itself. It leaves no residue in the human body and adjusts its taste to the wishes of those who consume it. It supplies physical nourishment but it is not bread or any other human food. It is the food of spirit, of hope and longing and of the pursuit of Godliness.

The manna educated Israel that dependence upon G-d is the reality of human existence and that eventually everyone has to eat the food of heaven in order to live a truly meaningful life. Manna cannot be stored for another day. It falls fresh daily except for Shabat, because this day itself envelopes us with the purely spiritual – nothing more is needed.

The manna fell every day and served as a constant reminder that the relationship between the Creator and the created is continual and permanent. Truly, man cannot live by bread alone.

When the Jewish people finally entered the Land of Israel and settled it, the manna stopped falling. Real bread was now necessary for the existence of the nation and of its individual members. This proved to be and continues to be one of the supreme tests of national and individual Jewish life – how does one retain a sense of spirituality while toiling to acquire bread to live on?

Providing time for the study of Torah, performing mitzvot and granting priority to true Jewish values in our lives helps us answer this difficult question. Shabat and the holidays also provide us with an escape from pursuing bread alone and allow us to refocus our attention on our Creator-created relationship.

It is not for naught that the rabbis insisted that our speech and even our thoughts on Shabat and the holidays not deal with the bread of daily toil and struggle. Instead we are to treat the food of Shabat as though it were of heavenly origin.

The secret ingredient in Shabat food according to the Talmud is Shabat itself. To be able to live at least one day of the week on the word of God, so to speak, and not on the bread of man is a truly spiritual experience.

The Jewish story of survival and destiny over millennia is the proof of the words of the Torah – man does not live by bread alone.

Shabat shalom. Rabbi Berel Wein

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Parshas Eikev 5765

Want to talk about disengagement –

After the images we've seen, the raw pain, the hardship –

And the infuriating reports of government callousness to the fate of the people of גוש קטיף – I think it is necessary to address these events, and how we should react to them.

But what I want to say is not obvious, and you'll allow me to get to it in my own way.

If you have apple and fig – make ברכה on fig; one of המינים שבעת ה'פסק

See פרק ה' פסוק ה'

What if you have fig and pomegranate? Fig first – ורמון.

What if you have pomegranate and date – ויתמר תאנה?

Gemara (ברכות מ"א):

ליה מר להא דאמר רב יוסף ואיתימא רבי לקמייהו תמרי ורמוני. שקל רב המנונא בריך אתמרי ברישא. אמר ליה רב חסדא: לא סבירא רב חסדא ורב המנונא הווי יתבי בסעודתא, אייתו ונשמעינך ליה: זה שני לארץ, וזה תמישי לארץ. - אמר ליה: מאן יהיב לך נגרי דפרזלא יצחק: כל המוקדם בפסוק זה קודם לברכה? - אמר

Why this strange expression: נגרי דפרזלא?

R' Berel Eisenstein (editor of אנציקלופדיה תלמודית) offered fascinating explanation:

The next תקרי אבניה תענית (ד) כל ת"ח שאינו קשה כברול אינו ת"ח... ארץ אשר אבניה ברזל, אל) Says the Gemara. פסוק: ארץ אשר אבניה ברזל ומהררי תחצוב נחשת בניה אלא בניה.

And likewise in מה ברזל זה אחד מחדד את חברו אף ב' ת"ח מחדידן זה את זה בהלכה, ברכות ז' – מאי דכתיב ברזל כברזל יחד

So we see that this ת"ח that א"י produces. פסוק – ארץ אשר אבניה ברזל

Now, since this פסוק comes after א"י is more important. But now that רב המנונא taught that the salient point is what is closest to א"י – the reiteration of ת"ח teaches that א"י are at least as important – indeed, of paramount importance.

And so חסדא exclaimed – to really be nourished from the land that is ברזל, אבניה ברזל, one needs דפרזלא, feet of iron to follow such ת"ח as you loyally and faithfully and benefit fully from your wisdom.

Back to disengagement –

Truth is, that the debate around disengagement really contained within it two separate debates; and there are two separate סוגיות, two separate issues, that have to be – disengaged – from each other.

The first issue was what is best for the security of Israel. Would the withdrawal from Gaza enhance Israel's negotiating position, free up its military resources, defuse a demographic time bomb; or would it encourage terror, provide a military platform for Hamas, expose Ashkelon, and encourage our enemies by presenting the appearance of defeat.

But it must be said that this debate – for all that it engrossed us, for all that we may have felt passionately about it – or been confused by it – was a debate for the people of Israel to decide. At the end of the day it is not – for the most part – our sons who served in the army protecting the settlements of גוש קטיף, it is not we who have stood the brunt of Palestinian terror. For many years the American Jewish community's policy has been that security issues must be decided by the people of Israel, and that is sound policy, and I think we are making a mistake if we abandon it.

And, in any event, for better or worse, the decision has been made, and it remains now even for those who were opposed to disengagement to hope that they were wrong, and that events will validate the government's decision.

But there is a second issue that was engaged here as well. For all that this was a security debate, it was also a debate about the character of the state of Israel. For us, from afar, it may not have been apparent, but to the people there in Israel it was very clear – it was made very clear – that part of the callousness that much of the governing elite of Israel felt towards the settlers – much of the callousness that characterizes the government's shabby treatment of them now – flows from the animosity that they feel towards people who represent a certain vision of Israel's future; flows from animosity towards the fact that settlers are תורה ומצוות, not merely nominally frum but כעל חמורה, deeply religious Jews, whose vision of the future of the state of Israel is radically different than that of the secular elite.

But while the people of גוש קטיף, feeling the brunt of this animosity perhaps for the first time, feel betrayed and disillusioned, it is important for us to realize that this is just another chapter in an ongoing battle over the character of the state, and of the Jewish people in ארץ ישראל, for a very long time; long before גוש קטיף was even dreamed of, long before even the founding of the state. It goes back to the very beginnings of the Zionist movement, to when Herzl proclaimed that in the future Jewish state the rabbis would be locked into their synagogues and not allowed out; to when Eliezer ben Yehudah proclaimed that we have turned our back on all of Jewish history, and that is our pride and our glory.

It is no secret that the great dream of the founders of secular Zionism was בית ישראל, to make over the whole character of the Jewish people, to divorce the Jewish people from its heritage and its Torah.

The great irony however – and irony, of course, is just another way of saying השגחה – was that they chose as the vehicle of this dream the land of Israel. And what they did not realize is that ארץ ישראל is not only a land of physical bounty. It is, far more importantly, an ארץ אשר אבניה ברזל, a land that produces Torah, and greatness in Torah, a land in which רוחניות flows like milk and honey.

And so אפם ועל המתם – to their confounding and chagrin – the state of Israel has become the catalyst for an explosion of Torah greatness, without precedent, perhaps, since the time of המלך; חזקיהו תשובה; a revival without parallel since the time of הסופר; עזרא הסופר; a growing spiritual thirst that is a clear fulfillment of the ואלא צמא למים כי אם לשמוע את דברי ה' נבואה – הנה ימים באים ושלחתי רעב בארץ לא רעב ללחם

Let us be clear eyed. The people of גוש קטיף are experiencing tremendous pain – and their pain is our pain. To the best of our ability we need to help them, to empathize with them, to be בעול נושא with them. It would be very appropriate on our next mission if we could visit with some of our brave friends from נצרים and גוש קטיף and all the wonderful communities that we had visited.

But there is no room here for disillusionment, because we never had any illusions in the first place. Let us not lose our perspective. The saga of גוש קטיף is only one chapter in an ongoing process, an ongoing struggle for the soul of the state of Israel. But while we have no illusions about the depth of the struggle, we have no doubts about its outcome. Because the state of Israel was founded in a land that is – not only an ארץ אשר אבניה ברזל, a land of great natural beauty and bounty – not only an ארץ זבת חלב ודבש – flowing with milk and honey. It was founded on an ארץ אשר אבניה ברזל, a land that produces Torah as its natural product – so that we are indeed confident that ultimately our vision will prevail, and we will see unfold before our eyes the promise that א' וישבת עד ה' א' and to the עולם של עולם, ארץ ישראל, and to those who have returned from sin – a redeemer will come to Zion, and to those who have returned from sin – בב"א.