

The Wrong Move (Matzav.com)
By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

A while back I signed up for the Yeshiva World e-mail list. It is a popular list that sends a variety of news that affects the yeshiva community. Though they most often send important news of disaster and triumph, product recalls, strife in Israel, breaking political stories as well as emergency Tehillim alerts in the face of illness and accidents, they sometimes send news of the absurd; I guess those alerts are meant to amuse us during stressful times. On Tuesday, Yeshiva World sent me a breaking story: "Weiner to ESPN & MLB: Don't Move Yankees Game to Yom Kippur." I surely hope that that news item was sent out as news of the absurd, but perhaps, Mr. Weiner requested it to be sent as a news flash of either great political import or perhaps as a Tehillim emergency.

Who knows? It was indeed important enough for the Congressman to get involved, maybe there are even die-hards reciting Tehillim. What a terrible decree! The formerly Erev Yom Kippur Yankee game is being switched to the Holy Day itself! Imagine! The strains of the National Anthem will be playing concurrently with the haunting refrain of Kol Nidrei. Write letters to the White House! Open your Tehillim.

But have no fear. Congressman Anthony Weiner is hard at work stopping this disaster — a catastrophe that may ruin the Holy Day for Jews all over the globe. Indeed, he wrote a letter to the Commissioner and to the president of ESPN.

Weiner's letter decries the move expressing with great consternation that the switch from an afternoon game on the eve of the holiday to a game played on the night of Kol Nidrei (and I quote) "now runs into direct conflict with the religious requirement for players, such as Kevin Youkilis of the Red Sox, team personnel and fans to be home by sundown."

Poor Mr. Youkilis. He might have some difficult choices to make. Imagine the pain of his dear gentile actress wife having to light the candles and go to shul alone. Or perhaps imagine a Boston worst case scenario - Mr. Youkilis decides to don his tallis instead of a uniform and sway in a pew instead of swing in a batter's box.

Ah! The memories. It was back in 1965 and a player named Koufax had the very same conflict. He did not have the forces of the US Congress on his side. Instead, he switched his uniform for a prayer shawl and in addition to his place in Cooperstown, he earned a special place in the heart of every Jewish kid (and Rabbi) of that era and beyond. (The Dodgers did lose that Yom Kippur day, 8-2, and afterward, Dodgers manager, Walter Alston, chided the hapless Koufax stand-in, Don Drysdale, "Why weren't you born Jewish?")

And the poor Yankee fans. What about them? They just may lose the thousand plus dollars that they laid out to cheer wildly just a few hours before they were to enter their sanctuaries on the holiest day of the year. Mr. Weiner, I was surprised that you did not mention in your letter about the great loss to the kosher vendors who were planning to make a "seudah hamafsekkes special" right after the seventh inning stretch. Now, they will have nothing. I mean, even the Yankee faithful who decidedly will camp out before the game and walk home afterwards so as not to desecrate the holy day, would not buy a kosher frank on Yom Kippur Eve.

I will admit (of course, like many theologians, I can blame it on the kids) I have had occasion to listen to sports-talk radio. I will not name the station as I don't mean to endorse the program or my occasional listening lapses, but a few years back the unlikely orbits of the baseball and Jewish solar systems collided once again and an important game was scheduled on Yom Kippur. A caller was incensed and spewed his venom at one of the radio hosts, Suzyn Waldman, who by her proud admission is Jewish. Ms. Waldman responded with equal intensity. I will paraphrase her response:

"Mister, let me explain you something. You are Jewish. And so am I. When a person is committed to his heritage or anything of true importance for that matter, he or she has to make choices. Yom Kippur is your holiest

day of the year. Baseball is a game. You have to decide. What is more important to you, your Judaism or your games? I am making a choice. I am a broadcaster this is my livelihood. And I am not going to go the game. I am going to the synagogue. I think you ought to think hard about what is really important and make the right choice."

Congressman Weiner, I like you. You have done some great stuff for our nation, our community and even for the children of our yeshiva. But Mr. Weiner, you are a Congressman. You represent the people of this State and this country in making decisions that will make a difference in their lives and perhaps the future of the world. Your time is valuable and expending your power on frivolous requests is demeaning.

So I would like to make a suggestion. Instead using the power and clout of a US Congressman in appealing to a Commissioner Selig & ESPN's Mr. Bodenheimer to leave the Yankees alone and not force them to move a silly game, expend your energies on more important things. Worry about more consequential moves.

Write a letter to, or better yet, make a call and implore our president not to force hundreds of families to move. And I am not referring to moving a baseball game. I am referring to making them move from their homes and uprooting their lives in Israel.

It may not be as important to you as moving a baseball game, but it may get you enshrined in the Jewish Hall of Fame and cherished by every Jewish kid forever.

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Jerusalem Post :: Friday, September 4, 2009
THE FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL :: Rabbi Berel Wein

The school year opens here in Israel this week and will commence in the United States next week. For the first time in years there are no teacher or student strikes that haunt the opening of schools here in Israel though there is plenty of grumbling about local issues in individual schools. There seems to be a general consensus that the Jewish schools the world over are not appreciated by the student body or their parents.

Just as an anecdotal aside without any empiric proof to this matter, I rarely if ever hear complimentary things being said by parents about the education that their children are receiving. Instead they complain about being trapped in a system that has only stark choices, little flexibility for the individual student and that frustrates them more than satisfying them.

This is certainly the case here in Israel; it is less true in the United States where Jewish schools come in wider varieties and the system is far less politicized than it is in Israel. The problems facing the schools are well known. Overcrowding in the classroom, loose discipline which leads to violence, burned out teachers, and great financial pressures all lead to a sense of helplessness when attempting to improve our educational system. Strong ideological views influence the education being presented to the student. Also, all school systems now have to deal with special needs children in growing numbers and varieties. And in our world of instant communication and technological wonders it is increasingly difficult to wean children from their play stations and cellular phones even for a few hours a day. So the negative side of the ledger is clear for all to see and ponder upon.

Yet there are many positive signs to the growth of Jewish education the world over. Those children who attend a Jewish school in America are far more likely not to intermarry, and to support Israel and have a proud attitude towards their faith and people. And attendance at Jewish schools has been constantly rising in the past decades.

High tuitions have served as a brake on even greater enrollments in Jewish schools and the effects of the current severe economic downturn on attendance at Jewish schools in the United States has yet to be measured.

In Israel the numbers of children receiving a Jewishly traditional education have also increased. The Minister of Education promises to install a program of Jewish education even in the secular school system. Such a program, if properly developed and taught, will help minimize the religious-secular divide that exists in Israel.

The problem of religion in secular Jewry is no longer antagonism toward Jewish tradition and Torah knowledge as much as it is complete ignorance of that knowledge, tradition and its value system. Judaism can agree with the famous slogan of one of America's premier merchandiser that "an educated consumer is our best customer." The primacy of Jewish education remains the key to Jewish life and its survival and growth.

The charedi schools system is also bound to change, albeit without ever admitting that it is doing so. An elitist education served up to the masses leads to many children at risk and defections from the religious world. Not giving children the basic tools to earn their living later in life, especially in a competitive and highly skilled work place atmosphere is a disservice to those students.

Much is made of the opinions of great rabbis of Eastern Europe and Old City Jerusalem of the 1800's regarding the place of some secular studies in the context of Jewish education. I have often wondered what the opinion of those great men would be in twenty-first century society today.

Torah and halachic norms are unchanging but Jewish societies and conditions of life have changed considerably over the last three hundred years. Children are entitled to be educated according to the realities of our present world and not according to imagined circumstances of different centuries and locales.

There is a famous Hebrew statement: 'what wisdom fails to achieve, the passage of time will achieve.' The Jewish world, now as ever, requires full-time Torah scholars. But not everyone is cut out to be that full-time Torah scholar and thus changes in education will have to be made in order to produce a society that is able to function and be influential in today's world.

The first day of school is a challenge not only to the students, teachers and administrators of our schools but to the society as well. How well we meet that challenge determines our future.

Shabat shalom.

Weekly Parsha :: KI TAVO :: Rabbi Berel Wein

The word "ki" in Hebrew has a number of meanings. The meaning most often used is "if." However it also means "when" as expressed here in the first word of this week's parsha. But Hebrew is a many layered and many faceted language. Sparse in vocabulary – English has almost ten times as many words as does Hebrew – it is nevertheless very rich in meaning and nuance.

So that the Hebrew word when used in a certain sense still retains certain aspects of its alternate meanings that apply to other forms and grammatical structures. So even though the word "ki" that appears here in our parsha clearly means "when" it nevertheless retains within it a shade of meaning that can be understood as meaning "if."

The Torah means to imply to us that living in the Land of Israel is no sure thing for the Jewish people. In case the nuance of the word "ki" was not sufficient to drive that message home to us, the parsha is distinguished by its long and bitterly detailed "tochacha" which shows us the truly tenuous hold we have on this land.

The Land of Israel is acquired through pain and sacrifice, the rabbis taught us. It is a difficult land to acquire and it is a difficult land to hang on to. The rabbis taught us that Torah knowledge is as difficult to acquire as vessels of gold and is as easy to lose as fragile crystal. The same general idea can be applied to the Land of Israel as far as the Jewish people is concerned.

The parsha makes it clear that the relationship between the people and the Land of Israel is based upon mitzvot. The first section of the parsha deals with the commandments regarding bikurim – the offerings of the first fruits of the season - and the commandments regarding the tithing of produce and the redemption of it in coins to be brought to and spent in Jerusalem.

All of the laws regarding the Land of Israel and its produce are meant to remind us of the uniqueness of that land and its inherent holiness. If the Jews somehow treat the Land of Israel as just another country or location on face of this earth then their stay in the land will remain questionable and impermanent.

Just as the Jews are not allowed by God to see themselves as just plain folks like everyone else so too does He not allow us to see the Land of Israel as a place on the map just like anywhere else. Zionism learned the hard way that Uganda is not the Promised Land for Jews.

The difficulty in treating the Land of Israel as a unique location lies in the practical tasks of everyday national, governmental and social life. How to try and live a supposedly normal life in a country and location that the Torah defines for us as being abnormal and unique represents the great challenge that faces the Jewish people in today's world. Hopefully we will meet that challenge more successfully than did our earlier ancestors.

Shabat shalom.

Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Ki Tavo For the week ending 5 September 2009 / 15 Elul 5769

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com

Overview

When Bnei Yisrael dwell in the Land of Israel, its first fruits are to be taken to the Temple and given to the kohen in a ceremony expressing recognition that it is G-d who guides the history of the Jewish People throughout all ages. This passage forms one of the central parts of the Haggadah that we read at the Passover Seder. On the last day of Pesach of the fourth and seventh years of the seven-year shemitta cycle, a person must recite a disclosure stating that he has indeed distributed the tithes to the appropriate people in the prescribed manner. With this mitzvah Moshe concludes the commandments that G-d has told him to give to the Jewish People. Moshe exhorts them to walk in G-d's ways, because they are set aside as a treasured people to G-d. When Bnei Yisrael cross the Jordan River they are to make a new commitment to the Torah. Huge stones are to be erected and the Torah is to be written on them in the world's seventy primary languages, after which they are to be covered over with a thin layer of plaster. Half the tribes will stand on Mount Gerizim, and half on Mount Eval, and the levi'im will stand in a valley between the two mountains. There the levi'im will recite 12 commandments and all the people will answer "amen" to the blessings and the curses. Moshe then details the blessings that will be bestowed upon Bnei Yisrael. These blessings are both physical and spiritual. However if the Jewish People do not keep the Torah, Moshe details a chilling picture of destruction, resulting in exile and wandering among the nations.

Insights

A Vanished World

"You will go mad from the sight of your eyes that you will see." (28:34)

"The world is falling to pieces, and Adams and Weston are taking pictures of rocks!" — Henri Cartier-Bresson during World War II

Right now, as you are reading this, a million different things are happening in the world. Millions of lives are beginning and millions ending. A vast cacophony called life in all its rawness and gentleness is being played out on this ball turning silently in space. It all seems so chaotic. Great evil is going unpunished. And great goodness is going unrewarded. Where is G-d? Has He thrown up His hands in despair and gone off for a ride with the top down?

The basic credo of Judaism is that G-d is One. Not just that there is one G-d, but that His Oneness precludes the existence of anything apart from Him. This is what I mean when I proclaim in the Shema, Judaism's central declaration of faith: "Hear, O Israel, the L-rd our G-d, the L-rd is One." One. Alone. Nothing else.

Let me ask you a question. If G-d is One, why is this world so full of conflict, so full of contradictions to His Oneness? In other words, if He is One how can evil exist?

A few months ago I was scanning through a magazine and my eye came to rest on one of the photo icons of our age — Ansel Adams' immortal "Moonrise over Hernandez." A beautiful full moon skirting a low bank of

cloud, rising majestically from the horizon. The evening sky dark and brooding. My eye traveled down to the caption and I started to read:

“Because of my unfortunate disregard for the dates of my negatives, I have caused considerable dismay among photographic historians, students, and museums — to say nothing of the trouble it has caused me. ‘Moonrise’ is a prime example of my anti-date complex. It has been listed as 1940, 1941, 1942, and even 1944. At the suggestion of Beaumont Newhall, Dr. David Elmore of the High Altitude Observatory at Boulder, Colorado, put a computer to work on the problem. Using data from a visit to the site, analysis of the moon’s position in the photograph, and lunar azimuth tables, he determined that the exposure was made at approximately 4:05 p.m. on October 31, 1941. That is now the official date.”

October 31, 1941. Here was the doyen of American photography making art in all the beauty of a warm New Mexico evening, while, on the other side of the world, this same moon was witnessing the torment of a generation.

I wonder what was happening in Europe when Ansel Adams was making that photograph. October 31, 1941. My curiosity piqued, I fed the date into an electronic search engine. The answer made the hair on the back of my neck rise.

On January 20, 1942, at an idyllic lakeside house in Wannsee near Berlin, there was an intramural meeting attended by Heydrich, Eichmann, and other Nazi leaders. This is how the report begins:

“Protocol of the Wannsee Conference, January 20, 1942

Reich Secret Document 30 Copies

Protocol of Conference

“The following took part in the conference on the final solution (Endlösung) of the Jewish question held on January 20, 1942, in Berlin, Am Grossen Wannsee No. 56–58.”

There it was in black and white. “The final solution.” I was reading the death warrant of the Jewish people.

On page 4 of the Wannsee Protocol, the following statement is made:

“...since the Machtbernahme[rise to power of the Nazi Party], January 30, 1933, until the accounting day, October 31, 1941, a total of about 537,000 Jews had been brought to emigration...”

October 31, 1941. The day of accounting. While Ansel Adams was busy photographing a moonrise in New Mexico, the sun was setting on an entire generation. The Germans had drawn a red line under the emigration of Jews from the Reich. There was to be no more emigration. The final phase had been reached. The death sentence of European Jewry had been sealed.

And where was G-d?

Judaism teaches that G-d created the world to reveal His perfection.

Given that G-d can do anything He wants, it's logical that nothing should emerge from this wish except that which is perfect and complete in every way. Nothing in this world should exhibit any sign of lacking or deficiency. There should be no room for evil. What possible purpose could there be in His creations exhibiting seeming deficiency?

G-d's perfection has many facets, such as His kindness, His wisdom and His justice. G-d could have chosen to reveal His perfection through any of these aspects. He chose, however, to reveal His perfection in one way only — by revealing His Oneness. And His Oneness is uniquely different from any other aspect of His perfection because, amazing as it may seem, we can understand it.

For the mind of man to fathom G-d's kindness, His wisdom, or His justice is impossible. For example, when we talk of the wisest person in existence, we mean that no one is wiser; however, theoretically more wisdom could exist of which that person was unaware. G-d's wisdom is greater not just in magnitude but in kind: G-d's wisdom is not just the greatest wisdom that exists, but it is impossible for any wisdom to exist of which He is ignorant. Our concept of wisdom is relative, and G-d's wisdom is absolute. Thus, we cannot fathom His perfection through His wisdom, nor His kindness, nor His justice, nor any other attribute that He possesses.

With one exception.

G-d's Oneness is different. It is unique among the other aspects of His perfection because we can understand it. When we say that G-d is not two, we have defined exactly His Oneness — that there is no existence, no other power, nothing, except for Him. That we can understand. The negative

defines precisely the positive. It's like all the information of a print being carried in the film. Even if viewing the "print" is beyond human capacity, the negative defines exactly the positive. Only G-d's Oneness can be revealed through its negative counterpart. For to understand, say, His wisdom by its opposite — saying that He is not foolish — is obviously absurd.

Since G-d's will was to reveal His perfection, it follows that the perceiver of that perfection, man, must be able to grasp that revelation. Finite man must be able to comprehend something infinite. Since G-d chose to reveal His perfection through His Oneness, and we can only perceive that Oneness through its opposite, there must exist in this world the opposite of His Oneness — namely evil.

Through the existence of evil man can grasp G-d's Oneness.

But this is no mere spectator sport. G-d gave the Jewish People the task of eradicating evil from the world — or more precisely revealing His Unity — by performing a set of spiritual tasks known as the mitzvot. Every mitzvah (commandment) has the power to reveal a little more of G-d's Oneness in the world. It's like a dirty window through which the light cannot penetrate. The light itself is in no way diminished by the dirty window. It's just that the light cannot penetrate the dirt. G-d's Oneness is not diminished in any way by the existence of evil. It is just obscured. Every mitzvah cleans away a little of the dirt from the window, until the light shines undimmed.

One day G-d will show us His utter dominion over all that exists, and our perception of this Oneness in its most complete form will come from having been the agents through which G-d's Oneness was revealed.

•Source: Based on the Da'at Tevunot of the Ramchal

Drasha Parshas Ki Savo

by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

First Impressions

This week's parsha begins by telling us what will occur when the Jews finally conquer and settle the Land of Canaan. "It will be when you enter the Land that Hashem, your G-d, gives you as an inheritance, and you possess it, and dwell in it" (Deuteronomy 26:13). It relates the mitzvah of Bikurim: "You shall take of the first of every fruit of the ground that you bring in from your Land that Hashem, your G-d, gives you, and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place that Hashem, your G-d, will choose, to make His Name rest there (Deuteronomy 26:2). The bikurim are then presented to the kohen. "You shall come to whomever will be the Kohen in those days, and you shall say to him, "I declare today to Hashem, your G-d, that I have come to the Land that Hashem swore to our forefathers to give us" (Deuteronomy 26:3).

What kind of introductory remark is that? Of course, we come to the land! If we had not arrived, we would not be here! Why then do we tell the kohen that "I declare today that I have arrived"?

As a student in the Ponovez Yeshiva, I would spend some summer days in the resort town of Netanya. One day, I spotted what, to an American seemed like an anomaly: a small Yemenite man, long curly peyos dangling from his darkly tanned olive-skinned face, bouncing up and down as he, dressed in a policeman's uniform, was directing traffic. I had never seen an orthodox policeman, let alone one who had dangling side curls. My propensity to talk to fellow Jews and my inherent fascination with curiosities, spurred me to engage him in conversation.

As we talked, he told me about lineage. I mentioned that my name was Kamenetzky, and he froze in disbelief.

"Are you, by any chance, related to the famous Rabbi Kamenetzky of America who recently visited Israel?"

"Do you mean Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky?" I inquired. When he nodded, in excited corroboration, I added, "he is my grandfather." It was as if I had sent a charge of electricity through his body!

He beamed at me. "Do you know that your grandfather, Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky attended my son's bris, right here in Netanya!"

I did a double take and thought, "Yeah Right! Sure. My 89-year-old grandfather came to Netanya for a Yemenite police officer's son's bris."

The man registered my apparent skepticism, and proceeded with the following story. At the time, Kiryat Zanz, the community built by the Klausenberg Rebbe, in Netanya, had recently expanded its medical center. The administrators wanted Rabbi Kamenetzky to see the beautiful facility first hand. The revered sage's endorsement would surely boost their fundraising efforts. They picked Rav Yaakov up from his accommodations in Jerusalem, and drove him to Netanya. Entering the city limits, Rav Yaakov asked, "Are we going to the hospital?"

When the administrators and the driver, affirmed that destination, Rav Yaakov said, "No, we are going to the Rav. When one comes to a town, his first stop is to see the Rav. After we greet the Rav, we will see the hospital."

They went to the home of Rabbi Lau, (Israel's current Chief Rabbi) Rav of Netanya, but he was not there.

At that point in the story, the policeman became excited. "Do you know where Rabbi Lau was?" he beamed.

He did not wait for an answer. "Rabbi Lau was at my son's bris! And a few minutes later, your grandfather arrived as well!"

Imagine. It took the Jews fourteen years to settle and conquer the Land of Canaan. Until they settled, there was no mitzvah to bring bikurim, (first fruits). During all those years, no one had formally presented themselves to the Kohen. They may have gone to Jerusalem for the holidays, or for other occasions, but never was there a formal presentation to the kohen.

Thus, when the simple farmer finally presents himself to the kohen, he uses the words, "I declare, today, to Hashem that I have come." Perhaps the Torah is subtly sending a simple message: "Kohen, now that I greet you, I declare that I have arrived." Because until you have greeted the kohen, you may have battled. You may have conquered. You may have sown, and you may have reaped. But you have not arrived.

Good Shabbos!

This week's Drasha is dedicated in memory of Bertha Fisch & Tobias Stein by Mr. and Mrs. Lionel Fisch Braina bas Reb Aryeh Laib of blessed memory - 23 Elul Reb Tuivia ben Reb Chaim of blessed memory 25 Elul.

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Rabbi Mordechai Willig
The TorahWeb Foundation
Serving Hashem With Joy

I

"You shall rejoice with all the goodness that Hashem, your G-d, has given to you and your household" (Devarim 26:1). We do not recite the recitation over the bikurim except at a time of joy, from Shavuot until Sukkos (Rashi).

The last pasuk of the recitation includes the word hineh, which means with joy (Sifrei, 26:10). Without joy, the mitzvah is incomplete (Malbim).

"The joy that a person experiences by the performance of mitzvos and the love of Hashem Who commanded them is a great service. One who refrains from this joy is worthy of punishment, as it is said, 'Because you did not serve Hashem your G-d, with joy and with goodness of heart' (Devarim 28:47)" (Rambam, Lulav 8:15).

The horrible curses (28:46) are attributed to a failure to serve Hashem with joy. This is surprising, especially since a different, more understandable, reason is given earlier – "If you will not listen to the voice of Hashem, your G-d, to keep and perform all of His commandments and decrees" (28:15).

Apparently, the joy of mitzvos is a critical and indispensable ingredient in serving Hashem. If one performs mitzvos out of habit, he is not really listening to the voice of Hashem, but rather engaging in rote ritual.

Even service of the heart, which cannot be entirely thoughtless, is worthy of punishment if incomplete. Loving Hashem which does not lead to joy is, by definition, insufficient. "Their fear of Me is like rote learning of human commands" (Yeshaya 29:13). This, too, reflects a heart distant from Hashem and is punishable (14).

II

The pasuk (28:47) concludes, "merov kol", out of an abundance of everything, while you still had all that is good (Rashi). Even though you were blessed by Hashem with prosperity, which should lead to joy, as the parsha of bikurim notes, you failed to serve Hashem with joy. Alternatively, because you were blessed with prosperity, you failed to serve Hashem with joy. Wealth leads to haughtiness and forgetting Hashem (Devarim 8:13, 14).

Remarkably, Rambam (ibid.) contrasts service of Hashem with arrogant self-centeredness. Rejoicing humbly before Hashem, as David Hamelech did, is true greatness and honor. One who is blessed with an abundance of everything – wealth, power, etc. – and continues to serve Hashem with joy and humility, is the exemplar who is worthy of blessing and not curse.

Just as serving Hashem without joy can lead to punishment, so can excessive joy, even when cloaked as a mitzvah. "When one eats, drinks, and rejoices on a holiday, he should not be drawn into excess wine, levity, and frivolity, and say that more of them is a greater mitzvah of simcha. Intoxication, excessive levity and frivolity are not simcha, but madness and folly. We are not commanded to engage in madness and folly, but rather in simcha that contains the service of the Creator, as it says, 'Because you did not serve Hashem with joy.' Service of Hashem is with joy. It is impossible to serve Him with levity, frivolity, or intoxication" (Rambam, Yom Tov 6:20).

Unfortunately, we are influenced by a society that engages in these negative activities. We must always, but especially during holidays, avoid them, and experience a true simcha shel mitzvah.

III

The phrase "merov kol" can be interpreted in yet another way. "Rov" means majority. "Merov kol" can mean a majority of everything. Some individuals who have been blessed with a majority of everything focus on the minority that, in their perception, is missing. This focus precludes serving Hashem with joy.

In reality, no person has "everything." Life is filled with challenges, which are viewed as problems or shortcomings. The wrong attitude can prevent one from serving Hashem with joy, and even lead to being angry, or upset, with one's fate.

One must accept that what he has, and what he lacks, come from Hashem Who knows what is best for every person. "You shall rejoice with all the goodness that Hashem, your G-d, has given to you" (Devarim 26:11). Hashem is your personal G-d Who has chosen what goodness to give to you, in particular.

This idea is immutable, and was true even when Am Yisrael lived in dire poverty and suffered persecution. How much more so today, when we live in wealth and freedom. Unfortunately, at a time when we have a significant majority of everything, some are focused on the perceived missing minority. This can border on a lack of faith in Divine Providence, and prevent serving Hashem with joy.

The curses are read before Rosh Hashanah, expressing a prayer that the year and its curses should end (Megilah 31b). If we serve Hashem with joy, we will merit a new year filled with Hashem's blessings.

Rabbi Yissocher Frand on Parshas Ki Savo
Showing Spiritual Maturity After 40 Years

The parshios in Sefer Devarim represent the last days of the life of Moshe Rabbeinu. Moshe makes a very interesting statement at the end of Ki Savo: "But Hashem did not give you a heart to know, or eyes to see or ears to hear until this day." [Devarim 29:3]

The Talmud [Avodah Zarah 5b] derives from this pasuk [verse] the lesson that a disciple does not fully appreciate and integrate the teachings of his master until after 40 years. A certain maturity comes with age.

Many of us can think back to the teachers and Rabbis who we had in our youth. Maybe they did things in those years, which at the time, in did not seem to make any sense. As we have gotten older, often, we may say to ourselves, "I now understand what he was doing." This is an example of "A person does not fully understand his Rebbi until 40 years after the fact."

This is what happened in our parsha as well. The Jewish people were in the wilderness for forty years. Despite being unbelievable giants, that generation was a troublesome group of individuals. They questioned Moshe and the Almighty almost from the word "Go". It was not yet 7 days past the exodus when they felt they were all doomed at the Red Sea. We wonder how people who witnessed all the miracles of the plagues in Egypt can now panic that the Almighty would let them down one week later? This went on and on throughout all the incidents in the desert: We are going to starve; we are going to die of thirst, etc, etc.

Now, finally, after 40 years, after most of that generation had passed on, Moshe Rabbeinu finally makes the statement about the newly emergent generation: "Hashem did not give you a heart to know, or eyes to see or ears to hear UNTIL THIS DAY." With this idea in mind we can perhaps explain a very peculiar pasuk.

Moshe give a very brief synopsis of the highlights of their sojourn in the desert: "...your garment did not wear out from on you, and your shoe did not wear out from on your foot. Bread you did not eat and wine or intoxicant you did not drink, so that you would know that I am Hashem, your G-d. Then you arrived at this place, and Sichon, king of Cheshbon and Og, king of Bashan, went out toward us to battle, and we smote them. We took their land and gave it as an inheritance to the Reuvenite, the Gadite, and to half the tribe of the Manassite." [Devorim 29: 3-5].

If we were writing the highlights of this wondrous period of Jewish history, what would we include? Moshe Rabbeinu makes some very logical choices. He accounts for the fact that G-d miraculously fed and clothed the Jewish people during those 40 years. G-d miraculously protected them, defeating Sichon and Og when they came out to attack the Jewish people. We were successful in conquering their territories, thereby getting our first foot-hold in a land that we could call our own.

But then he mentions the detail of distributing the portion of land formerly belonging to Sichon and Og to the Tribes of Gad, Reuvain, and half of Menashe. This detail would not, most likely, make our list of highlights of the 40 years in the wilderness. The story takes up a small section of Parshas Massai, but we would not normally associate the event with the major highlights of the era. Moshe is certainly not giving a diary of every single event that occurred during those 40 years – just the highlights! And yet he felt compelled to mention the fact that the conquered land of Sichon and Og were divided up to Gad, Reuvain, and Menashe. Why is that in here?

The Shemen HaTov suggests an interesting answer. Moshe came to the nation towards the end of 40 years and told them that two tribes wanted to take their portions from the land that has already been conquered. "The rest of us will travel on to Eretz Yisrael and do battle with the 30 kings and the 7 nations. After we conquer them, the rest of the Tribes will get their portions of land."

Many people might have reacted as follows to such a proposal: "Wait a minute! We are not giving away anything yet! Let us first see what happens. What if we do not defeat the 30 kings and the 7 nations and we are not successful in conquering the land? That would leave us no other choice than to split the territories on the East Bank of the Jordan among all 12 tribes. Not so quick, Moshe Rabbeinu!"

However, the dramatic fact was that after 40 years, they finally "Got it". Now they were at a spiritual level such that when they were told that with G-d's Help they would defeat the 30 kings and the 7 nations and conquer their land, it was money in the bank! They believed it to the extent that they were ready to give away the already conquered land on the East Bank, knowing full well that the other land was "already theirs".

This was the difference between now and forty years earlier. Had Moshe Rabbeinu tried that with the previous generation and told them "give away this land now, you will get yours later" he would have been told "wait a minute!" They did not believe they were going to get their bread or their water. They certainly did not believe they would defeat mighty armies in battle!

It is to commemorate this development that Moshe comments: "But Hashem did not give you a heart to know, or eyes to see or ears to hear until this day." Finally, after 40 years, you have true faith in the Almighty! Moshe proves this fact by citing their willingness to give up the already

conquered Trans-Jordan to two and a half tribes, fully confident that they would soon be conquering the other part of Eretz Yisrael and getting their own share on the West Bank of the Jordan.

This is not just a historical footnote regarding some obscure incident in the wilderness. This marks a turning point in the spiritual maturity of the Jewish people. They now "spoke with their wallets", clearly demonstrating their Emunah [belief] in the promises of the Almighty.

Transcribed by David Twersky Seattle, WA; Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman, Baltimore, MD

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Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum
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PARSHAS KI SAVO

And you shall say to him, "I declare today to Hashem, your G-d."
(26:3)

Rashi comments, she'eincha kafui tovah. The farmer presents his first fruits to the Kohen, making a declaration of gratitude to demonstrate that he is not an ingrate. He has been blessed, and now he gives thanks. Horav Moshe Shapiro, zl, explains the concept of hakoras hatov, appreciation and gratitude, in light of the Bikurim offering. By nature, man does not want to be grateful, since it indicates that he is beholden to someone. No one wants to be obliged, to owe, because it diminishes his uniqueness, his individuality. By becoming subservient to another person his status is reduced and weakened. He is no longer the self-sufficient person that he once had been. The joy that accompanies his Bikurim presentation catalyzes the realization that he is not an ingrate. The Torah reviews the notion that we are the recipients of Hashem's benevolence a number of times. We incorporate this reality into our minds, constantly reaffirming that, without Hashem, we are nothing and we have nothing. Everything that we possess is a gift from Him. This is how we are makir tov to Him - by realizing that everything comes from Him. One does not have to "pay back" in order to be grateful. The mere realization that what one has is the result of the benevolence of another is in itself hakoras hatov. One acknowledges that he has received from another.

Rav Shapiro adds that, in addition to the fact that gratitude is a good and positive attribute, it also brings one closer to Hashem. When one recognizes the kindness of Hashem, he becomes closer to Him. Developing a close relationship with the Almighty is the raison d'être of man. This is our purpose in life. A lack of hakoras hatov ultimately distances us from Hashem.

In addition, hakoras hatov saves one from falling into the clutches of sin. Rabbeinu Yonah writes that one who sins should be remorseful and filled with pain over the fact that he has rebelled against Hashem. Had he only taken into account that he is a creation of yeish mei'ayin, ex nihilo, something from nothing, he would have realized that Hashem fashioned man with the greatest sense of kindness and altruism. Yet, puny man has the gall to disregard all of this good and rebel against his Creator. Clearly, if a person is imbued with a sense of hakoras hatov, it greatly diminishes whatever desire he has to sin. How can one pay back Hashem for all His kindness to us by sinning against Him?

Rav Shapiro cites the Gaon zl, m'Vilna, who interprets the pasuk, Hodu l'Hashem kiru bishmo, "Give thanks to Hashem, declare His Name" (Tehillim 105:1), to mean that one should invoke Hashem's Name on everything. Not only should one not deny the source of everything, but he should make a serious effort to refer to everything in such a manner that it is evident that it comes to him from Hashem. This idea must become ingrained in a person to the point that hakoras hatov to Hashem becomes second nature. Furthermore, one should view hakoras hatov as a debt of gratitude, in which the obligation weighs heavily upon the recipient, a debt which does not allow him to rest until he has in some way acknowledged the favor which he has received.

Stories abound about our Torah giants who demonstrate the feelings of gratitude and their expression to those from whom they benefitted. One story, which I feel is poignant and underscores the sense of hakoras hatov one must demonstrate, concerns the Michtav M'Eliyahu, Horav Eliyahu

Eliezer Dessler, zl. It was winter of 1948, and Rav Dessler arrived in New York for a reunion with his son, Horav Nochum Zev, Shlita, whom he had not seen in nine years. When he had last seen his son, he was a teenager going off to study in yeshivah. Now, he was a young father and the accomplished head of what was to become a major Torah center.

We can imagine that many questions coursed through the mind of this Torah sage. Nine years, a World War, a Holocaust, new beginnings in a strange land, marriage, fatherhood, a nascent school. Yet, one of the first questions Rav Dessler asked his son was: Who had helped him during the many years that he had been alone in America? His son mentioned Horav Shraga Feivel Mendlowitz, the Menahel of Mesivta Torah Vodaath, and Horav Shlomo Heiman, its Rosh Yeshivah. He also mentioned Horav Eliezer Silver, Rav of Cincinnati and head of Agudath Israel and Agudas Harabbonim. Rav Silver had been a close disciple of Horav Chaim Ozer Grodzenski, legendary leader of European Jewry. When he heard that a grand-nephew of Rav Chaim Ozer was in America, he extended himself greatly to the young man.

When the elder Rav Dessler heard this, he said, "We must go thank him." His son immediately took out his address book and gave his father Rav Silver's phone number in Cincinnati. Rav Dessler demurred, saying that nothing less than a face to face expression of hakoras hatov would suffice. He insisted that his son accompany him to Cincinnati to pay their respects to Rav Silver. This was a long trip, but Rav Dessler was adamant: hakoras hatov meant that much to him.

The Desslers arrived in Cincinnati at 5:00 A.M. and waited on Rav Silver's porch until the venerable rav came out on his way to davening. The younger Rav Dessler introduced his father, and the three proceeded to shul. After davening, they returned with Rav Silver for breakfast.

"Nu, Rav Dessler, what brings you to Cincinnati?" Rav Silver asked. Rav Dessler replied that he had come for no reason other than to pay gratitude to the individual who had extended himself to his son. Rav Silver listened, gave a smile and asked again, "Why are you really here?" Once again, Rav Dessler replied in all sincerity, "I have come to pay a debt of hakoras hatov." A few minutes later, Rav Silver asked, "Rav Dessler, please tell me what I can do for you." Rav Dessler repeated his previous response that he had come for nothing else but to express his personal gratitude to the individual who had gone out of his way to befriend his son. Rav Silver finally gave up and quietly said, "This must be mussar."

Yes, as the result of the ethical character development Rav Dessler had absorbed in Kelm - and later as a mussar personality himself - he imparted this sense of refinement to others. He understood that when one receives he must return the favor. Regrettably, some of us are aware that we owe, but instead of returning the favor, we seek ways to diminish the favor. We must remember that he who does not demonstrate hakoras hatov to his fellow man will ultimately extend his selfishness to Hashem.

Gaze down from Your holy abode, from the heavens, and bless Your People Yisrael. (26:15)

Viddui Maasros, the confession of tithes, occurs no later than on the last day of Pesach during the fourth and seventh years of the Shemittah cycle. The viddui consists of the farmer's declaration that he has fulfilled all that has been asked of him with regard to his obligations concerning the Levi, the poor, and Maaser Sheni, Second Maaser, which must be consumed in Yerushalayim. He says, "I have acted according to everything You commanded me" (26:14). Rashi comments, based on the Mishnah in Meseches Maaser Sheni 5:12, Samachti v'simachti bo, "I have been happy and have made others happy with it."

Horav Avrohom Pam, zl, derives an important lesson concerning the way a Jew should give tzedakah, charity. Just as one must give Maaser with joy, knowing that in some way he is easing the plight of someone in need, so, too, should he give tzedakah b'simchah, with joy. Giving should not hurt. It should not be a hurdle one must traverse. It should be a privilege, a joy, carried out with a sense of humility.

We often forget that our material success is not something for which we worked and which we actually earned. It is a gift from the Almighty, a gift that He gives us for a purpose - to be shared with others. As such, one should be excited that he has the ability to carry out Hashem's command. Tzedakah should not be given begrudgingly. It should be viewed as a

z'chus, merit and privilege, offered only to him. This, says the Rosh Yeshivah, is what Rashi means when he says, "I was happy to make others happy."

Not everyone is blessed with the proper attitude. Regardless of their tax brackets, some individuals happen to be "givers," while others find it difficult to part with their "hard-earned" money. Hashem addressed this problem in Devarim 15:10 when the Torah says, "Let not your heart feel bad when you give him (the poor man) for in return for this matter, Hashem your G-d, will bless you in all your deeds and in your every undertaking." The commentators explain that the primary reward one receives for giving tzedakah is not as much for the giving as it is for his attitude upon giving it. If it is accompanied with joy, then Hashem will bless him in kind. If he carries it out begrudgingly, as if, "I just have to do it," or for fear of embarrassment, the reward is still there, but it is drastically reduced.

As a postscript, es chatai ani mazkir hayom, I am writing this on the plane returning from my first trip to Eretz Yisrael. Yes, there are still some people who have not been there. For anyone who has been there, it is obvious that it is a country in which there is no dearth of tzeddaks and no shortage of those who are in need. One cannot go anywhere without being "approached" in any number of ways - all legitimate - all sincere - all worthy, but, at a certain point, it gets to you. The geshmak and excitement of giving to real aniyim slowly dissipates as one is inundated from all sides. At the end of the day, he gives everyone anyway, but his attitude has regrettably changed. No more simchah, no more joy, no more privilege. He begins to begrudge, to give for all of the wrong reasons. Thinking back as I write this, I realize - I was going to give anyway. Why should I not receive the proper schar, reward, for the mitzvah?

These shall stand to bless the people on Har Gerizim... Accursed is he who lies with the wife of his father. (27:12, 20)

The tribes were divided, with half standing on Har Gerizim and the other half on Har Eival. The Leviim commenced with blessing, to the resounding Amen of those standing on Har Gerizim. This was followed with the curses which were articulated as they faced Har Eival. Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl, suggests two noteworthy points concerning the blessings and curses which are worthy of introspection. First, it seems quite conspicuous that within the litany of curses, right in the middle of the series referring to social transgressions, the Torah interrupts with a number of sins concerning sexual aberrations. It would be logical to anticipate that the curses upon "one who takes a bribe" would follow after the curse concerning "one who perverts justice of an orphaned stranger." Why is mention made of moral transgression at this point? It should have been inserted later.

Rav Hirsch explains that these sexual deviations are interpolated into the series of social infractions by design. The intention is to demonstrate that both of these sins are equally serious. One should not justify his moral perversity by asserting that moving one's boundary, misleading the blind, and perverting the justice of an orphaned stranger or a widow, certainly constitute sinful behavior. They hurt society and undermine the peaceful goals of a community. Sexual indiscretion between two consenting adults has a limited harm factor. At most, it subverts the happiness of a few individuals who are hurt by the fallout of his misbehavior. It certainly does not wreak havoc on the public welfare of a community.

On the other hand, sexual offenses should indeed weigh heavily on the conscience of moral people. Other types of transgressions - such as moving one's boundary, relaying evil gossip, and other such misdeeds - are not as serious. They are certainly not aberrations. Perhaps one might come to validate such miscreant behavior. The fact that the Torah intermingled both types of behavior effectively refutes both of these notions. A sin is a sin, and no form of justification can change this reality.

Second, we note that while the Torah elects to mention only the curses, they were, in fact, preceded by blessings upon those who did not commit the activities detailed in the text as reason for curse. For the most part, the sins that are included in the curses are active violations of Hashem's law. Thus, the promises of blessing apply even to those who do nothing but abstain from committing a violation of Jewish law. Imagine, one who does not think of his parents in a disrespectful way is blessed; one who does not cherish idolatrous thoughts - even in private - is blessed; one who commits

no unjust act against his neighbors is blessed; one who does not allow himself to commit acts of moral perversity, even in private, is blessed.

Herein, claims, Rav Hirsch, lies a message of incredible reassurance and encouragement: our chances of receiving blessing are much greater than our chances of being cursed. We are cursed only for the actual commission of an evil act. We are blessed simply for abstaining from those acts which warrant a curse.

There is one exception, however. In the final pasuk, the last curse, "Cursed is he who does not uphold the words of this Torah," (ibid. 27:26) the Torah admonishes the individual who fails to act in a positive, affirmative manner to maintain the Torah, to labor with all his might to see to it that others also observe the Torah, who fails to reach out to the unaffiliated and encourage them to observe. In this case, blessing involves positive action. Mere abstaining does not cut it. The reason is basic, because the question is whether one is - or is not - willing and ready to acknowledge that the Torah is binding for all Jews, and to act on his willingness in order to see to it that the opportunity is availed to everyone. Under these circumstances, failure to act is sin which warrants a curse. Hashem's blessing will be catalyzed through the active involvement of everyone, making certain that the Torah will be recognized and observed by all Jews.

Because you did not serve Hashem, your G-d, amid gladness and goodness of heart, when everything was abundant. (28:47)

We read a tragic and bitter Tochachah, Rebuke, in our parshah. One shakes with fear simply from reading the curses that are in store for those who do not follow Hashem's command. Yet, when we take into consideration the behavior - or lack thereof - which warrants such punishment, we begin to tremble, since it appears to be very simple. The Torah tells us that the curses of the Tochachah are the consequences for serving Hashem with a lack of joy. We literally shake with the knowledge that such a simple "sin" warrants such serious consequences. Should a lack of joy warrant such punishment? It is not as if the person reneged the mitzvot; he observed each and every mitzvah, but he did not carry them out with joy! Is that so bad?

Simply, we might say that there is more to simchah, joy, than we realize. Perhaps the idea that one can be happy doing so many mundane, entirely secular activities, yet view mitzvah observance as a negative, is in itself a terrible condemnation. A lack of joy demonstrates a dreadful attitude towards serving Hashem - one that undermines our relationship with Him - one that regrettably defines how we view Judaism.

The Shem MiShmuel considers a lack of joy in mitzvah performance, but no such complacency when carrying out secular, mundane activities, as the actual sin of "a lack of joy." It is not what is missing in our observance, as much as for what we have exchanged it. This is how he explains the Navi Yirmiyahu's lament of, chatu b'kiflayim, "they have sinned doubly," in regard to Klal Yisrael's behavior precursing the destruction of the Bais HaMikdash. We took the joy that should have been inherent in mitzvah observance and applied it to everything but mitzvah observance.

It is because of this "double sin" that laku b'kiflayim, we were doubly punished. He explains that all of the joy that we should have manifested serving the Almighty was overturned and transferred to our enemies who celebrated our defeat and destruction. Because we did not have joy - they had it instead. The sin was transference of joy concerning that which is holy to that which is mundane. The consequential punishment is that not only did we lose out on our national happiness; it was instead added to the success enjoyed by our enemies.

Thus, when we eventually repair the breach in our relationship with Hashem by repenting out of love, to the point that we employ every opportunity to serve Him as a source of excitement and joy, then we receive a double nechamah, consolation, as the joy which has - due to our default - left us is appropriated back to us. It will be guarded within our realm so that the love that we have expressed to Hashem will never again be misdirected elsewhere.

Let us now advance ourselves to the present and ask the question: Have we changed? Do we celebrate Shabbos and Yom Tov in an appropriate manner? If the answer is yes, then let us compare this celebration to the manner in which we "observe" secular occurrences which generate anticipation and joy. Do we anticipate our festivals with the same amount

of intensity that we expend on sports events? Do our Biblical festivals have the same aura of solemnity and excitement associated with them as some of the contemporary observances that, for some, have achieved festival status? Is Tisha B'Av still our national day of mourning, or has it been replaced with a more contemporary day of remembering national tragedy? Is Pesach still our Festival of Freedom, or have we shifted our focus concerning miraculous salvation and freedom to something more germane, something closer to our times? In other words, have we exchanged our allegiances and misplaced our priorities? When we think about it, the lack of simchah in mitzvah performance can be quite a demanding indictment.

Hashem will return you to Egypt in ships, on the road of which I said to you, "You shall never again see it." (28:68)

Being required to go back as a slave to the place from whence one was liberated is truly a curse, but why particularly Egypt? There were other places to where we had been to which we could have been returned. Ramban explains that it is degrading and ruinous for a slave to be returned to his original master. Nothing is more depressing than to have achieved a position of freedom, to have acquired dignity and respect, and then to lose it - and be relegated to return to one's old haunts as the miserable lackey he once had been. It is even worse than to have never left the misery. To have won and then lost liberty is much worse than not to have won it at all.

Horav Chaim Zaitchik, zl, relates that, during the Yamim Noraim, High Holy Days, the Alter, zl, m'Novardok, Horav Yoizel Horowitz, would fire up the hearts of his listeners with an impassioned plea exhorting them about returning to the sins of the past. A person that has for awhile succeeded in extricating himself from the muck that clouded his past behavior, only to return to his original nature, to his earlier sinful routine, is shameful and heartbreaking. When the person realizes how far he has fallen, he often becomes so sullen and depressed, that he encounters greater difficulty in pulling himself back up.

One who was on the rise and "messed up" is in a much worse predicament than the one who had never achieved much in a spiritual sense. It hurts so much more, once he sees where he has been, how high he has gone, and what his spiritual level could have been. The realization of what could have been is compelling, and, for some, overwhelming, to the point that they refuse to even attempt to return. The humiliation, the disgrace is powerful and, for some, debilitating.

In Hilchos Melachim 10:3, the Rambam writes, "We do not listen to a ben Noach, gentile, who converted and afterwards decides to "partially" renege his conversion to Ger Toshav status (a convert who lives in Eretz Yisrael, does not worship idols, but has not embraced Judaism). He either remains a complete ger, convert, or is put to death for violating the Torah." Why is he so severely punished? He has not transgressed any sin indictable for capital punishment. Rav Zaitchik asserts that his deliberate retreat from his original position of geirus, whereby he had achieved a specific spiritual plateau upon which he is now about to default, is sufficient reason to punish him so drastically. Going back, reneging upon one's earlier standard of commitment, is an unpardonable sin. One who converts and repudiates his conversion is much worse than one who had never initially converted.

This idea applies equally to anyone who has merited elevating himself, achieving a position of distinction. Once he has reached the top, he must maintain and execute all of the obligations and commitments that are intrinsic to his exalted position. He is now judged from a different perspective, an altogether different vantage point, than before.

Va'ani Tefillah

Moneh mispar la'kochavim, l'kulam sheimos yikra.

He who counts the number of all the stars has also given them names.

The enormous number of stars and heavenly bodies, with the vast distance that exists between them, is truly awesome. What is more incredible is that the Creator knows each individual body, its details and exactly where it is located in the constellation. Simply, this is the meaning of Hashem giving a name to each star. What is the uniqueness of giving a name? Is it greater than any of Hashem's other unfathomable abilities? The Sefas Emes explains that giving a name denotes the knowledge and understanding of the subject to its core. In other words, a name defines the essence of the subject. Every creation acknowledges Hashem in accordance with its individual purpose and objective in the scheme of things. The creations of

Hashem are named based upon their depth of perception of Him. Their names define them. This was Adam HaRishon's incredible power. He understood the purpose of every creature, its function and uniqueness. Thus, he was able to give them names. Giving a name implies an unparalleled ability to understand everything there is to know about the subject. When a person understands this, he becomes overwhelmed by Hashem's depth of understanding of each and every creation.

Horav Shimon Schwab, zl, posits that the reference to naming applies to the broken-hearted, those who have survived the galus, exile, at the End of Days. Each one of these survivors has a purpose to fulfill and, as a consequence, becomes very important to Hashem. Each of these survivors is special; each has his own individual name which defines his purpose.

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Endless wanderings, on high

By Benjamin Lau

In a passage near the end of this week's Torah reading, we read of the disasters the Jews will face in the future if they abandon their true national identity: They will feel alienated in their own land, will be exiled and will undergo much suffering. In this part of the portion, living in the Holy Land is exalted, while life in the Diaspora is described as being cursed: "And among these nations shalt thou find no ease, neither shall the sole of thy foot have rest: but the Lord shall give thee there a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind" (Deuteronomy 28:65).

The classical rabbinical authorities saw a blessing hidden in that verse. Indeed, one third-century scholar referred to it in interpreting "she dwelleth among the heathen, she findeth no rest" (Lamentations 1:3), saying: "Rabbi Yuden stated in the name of Rabbi Nehemiah, who in turn cited Rashbal [Rabbi Simeon Ben Lakish]: 'Had she found rest, she would never return [to the Holy Land].' Similarly, we read: 'But the dove found no rest for the sole of her foot' [Genesis 8:9] and: 'And among these nations shalt thou find no ease, neither shall the sole of thy foot have rest'" (Lamentations Rabba).

For centuries, the symbol of the dove or pigeon searching for a home has been an integral element in traditional Jewish sources - whether it is a homing pigeon carrying a greeting or the dove that finds a place to rest after the Flood described in Genesis. In some contexts, for instance in Psalms 56:1, the dove is described as "yonat elem rehokim" - "mute dove" or, literally, "dove of distant terebinths." Although it has much to say, this dove cannot utter a word, and the way it is described here graphically conveys its humiliation: Not only is it mute; it has been distanced from its native land.

In the 11th century, Yehuda Halevi dedicates a rather haunting poem to this silent dove, writing: "A distant dove / A lily of the valley / Will wander through the marketplace ..." The creature he describes is totally lost in this world and resembles an unwanted vessel. Living in exile, it has neither a home nor any goal to which it can aspire: It will wander through the marketplace like the woman in the Song of Songs, searching for her beloved.

More than three centuries ago, Rabbi Israel Najara settled in Gaza, where he wrote many sacred poems that expressed both vitality and immense spiritual strength. In one of them, he also describes the dove's return to Zion.

The dove's silence is sometimes interpreted as a metaphor for the Jewish response to the persecution and anti-Semitic decrees of the centuries preceding the establishment of the State of Israel. A well-known piyyut, by Solomon Ibn Gabirol, recited during the month of Elul, as the High Holy Days approach, uses the image of the mute dove in depicting the binding of Isaac. Tormented and driven nearly to distraction by its ongoing wanderings, this dove - symbolizing the Jewish people - longs to return to its native land, and God collects all its tears.

Furthermore, the protagonist in the Song of Songs, who is a divine symbol, thus expresses his longings for his beloved - the Jewish people described as a dove: "O my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs, let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely" (2:14).

Several centuries would elapse from the time Yehuda Halevi wrote his poem until the dawn of the Jewish people's national renaissance, and the time when the dove would begin to articulate its longing to return to Zion; many years of wandering had, however, already weakened the creature's senses.

Similarly depicting Jews as a dove, modern Hebrew poet Haim Nahman Bialik, in his "Behind the Gate," imagines a dove leading him to the Promised Land. Traveling so great a distance in time and space, he does not know how to open the gate: "Alas! cry the waves / And the fish of the deep waters / How will I enter my gate,

the special land, when my key is broken / And the door locked? No voice is heard, nobody answers / And a dove and a youth still knock at the gate."

Since that poem was published, so many decades ago, we kept knocking on that door. Our knocks were loud and strong, because we were unwilling to wait even one second longer. Thanks to the halutzim, Zionist pioneers, and the founders of the state, we have returned to our home and have begun to work on its reconstruction. It has not been easy to come home after so many years of being alienated from Zion. However, our old/new home is still in the process of being built. The difficulties we encounter from time to time remind us that the dove has not yet found a place where it can rest its weary foot, although it has come home; the State of Israel is no Noah's ark.

Israel is more than just a political refuge for the Jewish people, and sometimes people become tired of the lengthy process of rebuilding our homeland.

One of the most difficult stops made by the dove in its journey here was the Yom Kippur War, which broke out in October 1973. "The Dove's Voice," by songwriter Shimrit Or, reflected the painful mood into which the entire country was then plunged: "High, above the towers / The dove spreads her wings / Gliding freely in the air / With desperate longing in her heart ..." Here, the dove is alienated, hovering above the land, distanced from it. The song ends: "Keep going, keep going, you still have a long way to go."

Parashat Ki Tavo describes the blessings to be enjoyed by the Jewish nation dwelling in its land and eating the fruits of its labors. Each year, before the New Year, we read this Torah portion as our hearts prepare for a time of penitence. We pray that we will hear the song of the dove that has finally come home to rest.

Rav Kook on the Torah Portion Ki Tavo: The Splendor of Tefillin

Tefillin and Mourning

A mourner is obligated in all mitzvot except for one: tefillin. Why is he exempt from wearing tefillin on the first day of mourning?

The Sages explained that tefillin are called pe'er - splendor or beauty. When Ezekiel was instructed not to observe the usual mourning customs after his wife's death, he was told: "bind your splendor (pe'ercha) upon yourself" [Ez. 24:17]. Despite his personal loss, the prophet was commanded to keep wearing his beautiful tefillin.

Similarly, our custom on Tisha B'Av is not to wear tefillin during the morning hours, when our grief over the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash is the most intense (see also Mishneh Torah, Laws of Fasts 5:11). Why is wearing tefillin inappropriate in times of mourning?

Pe'er

The key, Rav Kook explained, lies in the description of tefillin as pe'er. Beauty is meant to make an impression on others. When we perform a mitzvah in a beautiful way (hiddur mitzvah), we intend to engage our emotions and sense of aesthetics. By speaking of the spiritual beauty of tefillin, this indicates that they have the potential to inspire and make an impact on others.

This aspect of tefillin is supported by Rabbi Eliezer's explanation of the verse:

"All the nations of the world will see that God's Name is called upon you and they will be in awe of you." [Deut. 28:10]

In what way will the nations of the world see that "God's Name is called upon you"? Rabbi Eliezer in Berachot 6a explained this in a literal fashion. He taught that the verse refers to the tefillin worn on the head. Tefillin, containing passages from the Torah mentioning God's Name, are a visible sign for others that "God's Name is called upon you." Rabbi Eliezer saw tefillin as a vehicle for influencing and inspiring others - "they will be in awe of you."

A Time to Draw Inwards

How does this explain the Halachah that mourners do not wear tefillin?

To influence others, the soul must be in a state of strength and joy. By utilizing our inner joy, we are able to show others a path of enlightenment.

Bereavement and sorrow have their place; there are times when one needs to mourn. But when the heart is heavy with pain and grief, one cannot reach out to others. It is wrong to influence others while embittered. No good will come from spreading sadness to others.

For this reason, when one is overcome with grief and sorrow, it is not a suitable time to adorn oneself with tefillin and their spiritual splendor. It is a time to draw inwards, not radiate outwards. We should wait until God dispels the darkness and we are able to return to Him with the complete teshuvah of love. Then we will be able to reach out to others and illuminate them with a path of light and joy.

[Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. I 1:157 on Berachot 11a]

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Halachah Discussion
by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt
Situations of Zimun

Question: In order for the obligation of zimun to be in force, how many people have to be eating together?

Discussion: Three men who ate a meal together are Rabbinically¹ required to recite Birkas ha-Mazon together.² One of them recites the zimun and the first blessing of Birkas ha-Mazon aloud, so that the others can hear him clearly. For this reason, when there is a big crowd, a man with a powerful voice should be chosen for the honor.³

If two people sit down to a meal which includes bread, and a third person wants to join them, they should ask him to eat bread along with them so that they can recite zimun. If he refuses to eat bread, then even if he eats a k'zayis' worth (approx. 1 fl. oz.) of any food, zimun is recited.⁴

If the third person did not eat anything but drank a revi'is (approx. 3 fl. oz.) of wine, beer or any natural fruit juice, zimun may be recited.⁵ Many poskim rule that coffee or tea is also sufficient to require zimun.⁶ Some poskim allow even sweetened sodas or lemonade,⁷ while others do not.⁸ If the third person drank water or seltzer only, no zimun is said.⁹

A minimum of seven people can get together for a meal including bread, and join with three other men who did not eat bread in order to recite the name of Hashem — Elokeinu — when reciting zimun, provided that the three men ate or drank something, as stated above.¹⁰

Question: What are the rules of zimun when five men eat together?

Discussion: Five men who eat together must recite Birkas ha-Mazon together. They may not separate before the zimun is recited.¹¹

If one or two need to leave early, they should ask the other three to join them in the zimun. If only one of the other three joins them, the remaining two may not join with the one who joined previously, even if they all eat again together.¹² If, however, there were six¹³ or more men eating together and two of them finished early, the one who joins them for zimun may join the next three when they are finished.¹⁴

Question: May two groups of five people, sitting in a yeshiva dining room at two separate tables, join together for a zimun of ten and recite Elokeinu?

Discussion: Zimun can only be said in one of the following two cases:¹⁵ a) by those who sat together at one table, even though each is eating his own meal; b) by members of one household, even though they are seated at separate tables. Therefore:

If the two groups consider themselves as members of one household — in other words, they would have liked to sit together but could not do so because there was no room for all of them at one table — then they may join together for a zimun of three or ten.¹⁶ The tables should be in close proximity to each other.¹⁷

If, however [as is frequently the case], the groups are split according to classes or cliques, and each group wants to sit separately, then they may not join together for a zimun of three or ten, unless the two groups had the specific intention at the start of the meal to join together.¹⁸

Question: Is a woman obligated in the mitzvah of zimun?

Discussion: If a woman ate a meal together with at least three other men, she is obligated to join¹⁹ in the zimun together with them.²⁰ She may not leave the table until the zimun takes place, and if for some reason she must leave temporarily, the men must wait for her to return to the table in order to proceed with the zimun.²¹

In the event that three or more women ate together with three or more men and the women are not ready to bench together with the men, they are allowed to form their own zimun when they are ready to bench.²² If,

however, they participated in a meal with ten or more men, then they may not bench for themselves and must join the men for zimun.²³

Question: If three or more women join together for a meal, are they obligated in zimun?

Discussion: Three or more women who ate a meal together may recite the zimun for themselves if they wish, but they are under no obligation to do so.²⁴ For undetermined reasons, this optional zimun is not widely practiced today among the Ashkenazim.²⁵

Ten or more women who joined together for a meal may recite the zimun for themselves if they wish, but they are not permitted to recite the word “Elokeinu” during the zimun.²⁶

In all other cases, such as two women and a man, or two men and a woman eating together (or nine men and a woman eating together who would like to recite the zimun with Elokeinu), it is forbidden to recite the zimun.

Footnotes

1 Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 197:16; 199:19, following the view of most Rishonim. See, however, Chazon Ish, O.C. 31:1, who maintains that zimun is min ha-Torah.

2 O.C. 192:1.

3 Mishnah Berurah 193:17. A microphone, preferably, should not be used.

4 O.C. 197:3 and Mishnah Berurah 22.

5 O.C. 197:3 and Mishnah Berurah 20. B'diavad 1.6 fl. oz. is sufficient; Beur Halachah, s.v. sheyeish. See Chazon Ish, O.C. 30:11.

6 Teshuvos v'Hanhagos 1:183; Vezos ha-Berachah, pg. 130.

7 Aruch ha-Shulchan 197:5.

8 Rav Y.Y. Fisher (quoted in Vezos ha-Berachah, pg. 130).

9 Mishnah Berurah 197:12. Shulchan Aruch ha-Rav and Chayei Adam, quoted by Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 9, rule that zimun may be said even over water. See Beur Halachah 204:7, s.v. ha-shoseh.

10 O.C. 197:2.

11 O.C. 193:1.

12 Mishnah Berurah 200:9. Aruch ha-Shulchan 200:5 and Chazon Ish 31:5, however, hold that if they eat together again they can recite zimun.

13 Mishnah Berurah, quoting Magen Avraham, says: seven or eight men, but Levushei Serad and Shoneh Halachos say six or more.

14 Mishnah Berurah 200:9.

15 Mishnah Berurah 193:18.

16 Rav Y.S. Elyashiv (quoted in Vezos ha-Berachah pg. 133). This is the reason why guests at a wedding may join together for a zimun even when there are not ten people at their table. See also Sova Semachos, pg. 111.

17 Beur Halachah 167:11, s.v. ela.

18 Rav S.Z. Auerbach and Rav C.P. Scheinberg (Vezos ha-Berachah, pg. 134.). There are other poskim who hold that yeshiva students can join together at any time, see Minchas Yitzchak 8:8, Minchas Shlomo 2:4-20, and Beis Baruch 48:24. Rav Elyashiv recommends that to avoid any questions and doubts, it is best that the groups clearly intend not to join together, as the Igros Moshe, O.C. 1:56 suggests to a guest who cannot stay late at a wedding.

19 She may not, however, lead the zimun; Beur Halachah 199:7, s.v. veyotzos.

20 O.C. 199:7.

21 Igros Moshe, O.C. 5:9-10.

22 Mishnah Berurah 199:18 and Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 9.

23 Shulchan Aruch ha-Rav 199:6.

24 O.C. 199:7. Even if one or two men ate together with the three or more women, the women are allowed to recite the zimun, and the men are permitted to answer to the woman leading the zimun; Halichos Beisah 12:7, quoting Rav S.Z. Auerbach.

25 Beur Halachah 199:7, s.v. nashim; Aruch ha-Shulchan 199:2. Among the Sefaradim, however, three or more women who join together for a meal recite the zimun for themselves; Vezos ha-Berachah, pg. 132, quoting Rav M. Elyahu. See also Ben Ish Chai, Korach 13.

26 O.C. 199:6.