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date: Sep 3, 2020, 7:35 AM
subject: Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky - Teshuva, Love, and Joy
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Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky
Teshuva, Love, and Joy

Joy is an integral part of our avodas Hashem. The absence of such joy is clearly indicative of a deficiency of our appreciation for the great gift of Torah which Hashem has bestowed upon us. In this week's parsha the performance of mitzvos without this enthusiasm is strongly critiqued. After a long, harsh description of the terrible tragedies that will befall the Jewish people, the Torah concludes that these will occur because we are not serving Hashem with joy and goodness of our hearts. There are times during the year when it is relatively easy to be in a state of joy. Particularly during the Shalosh Regalim, when there is actually a mitzvah to rejoice, our avodas Hashem naturally takes on the spirit of joy. However, as we approach the Yomim Noraim it becomes more difficult to instill the proper level of joy into our avodas Hashem.

The Rambam highlights this by explaining that the very reason we don't recite Hallel on Rosh Hashana is because they are not days of abundant joy. The poskim note that the Rambam did not say there is no mitzvah to rejoice on these days. Rather, because of the appropriate fear and trepidation that accompany the Days of Judgment, the joy that would normally be present on yom tov is mitigated. Nevertheless, a degree of rejoicing is not only appropriate on the Yomim Noraim, according to many including the Rambam it is actually a fulfillment of simchas yom tov. What is the essence of this simcha that does accompany the otherwise awesome Days of Awe?

Chazal elaborate in Maseches Yoma about the two paths of teshuva. The lower level is teshuva that results from fear. Teshuva achieved out of love, however, is a significantly higher form of teshuva. On Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur it is almost impossible not to be stirred to perform teshuva out of fear. Simply contemplating the ramifications of the Days of Judgment will instill the feelings of awe and trepidation necessary for this level of teshuva. We are expected, however, to reach a higher level. A sincere desire to come closer to Hashem as we contemplate His endless kindness for us will be a catalyst for teshuva out of love. Culminating on Yom Kippur when Hashem extends His mercy and compassion to us, we complete our teshuva that began out of fear and return to Hashem with love.

It is this higher level of teshuva that is a source of great joy. Perhaps that is why the Torah warns us in this week's parsha about avodas Hashem that is lacking joy. Such an avodas Hashem may enable teshuva out of fear, but the height of avodas Hashem will never be reached. May we merit during the upcoming days to begin the teshuva process and reach its culmination by returning to Hashem out of love and an abundance of joy.

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Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Ki Savo
Dedicated to the speedy recovery of Mordechai ben Chaya
A Tale of Two Speeches—One Out Loud and One in Silence

In the beginning of Parshas Ki Savo, there are two mitzvos that involve making a speech. One of them is Mikra Bikurim, the formal declaration a person makes upon bringing the first fruits of his crop to the Beis HaMikdash. In addition to the mitzvah of bringing the first fruits, in most situations there is a second mitzvah of reading the pesukim found in our parsha beginning with the words: "Then you shall call out and say (v'anisa v'amarta) before Hashem your G-d…" [Devorim 26:5-11]

What follows is a brief synopsis of the history of the Jewish people. We had to go down to Egypt. The Ribono shel Olam took us out of Egypt. He brought us to this place, a land flowing with milk and honey. And now, behold, I have brought the first fruit of the ground that You have given me, O Hashem. In short, we extol the praises of all the things the Almighty did for us, and we acknowledge our privilege of now being able to bring the first fruits of our wonderful land as a gift offering to the Kohen.

In connection with this Mikra Bikurim declaration, the Torah writes: "V'Anisa v'Amarta." Rashi writes that this specific idiom indicates that the declaration is to be made "b'kol Ram" – in a loud voice. The Biblical passages read on this occasion are not to be said as one says the Shmoneh Esrei – silently. They are to be said out loud.

There is a second declaration associated with agricultural mitzvos that are performed in the Land of Israel. That declaration is contained in the pesukim found in the section of Vidui Ma'aser [Devorim 26:13-15]. At the end of each of the three-year mini-cycles that take

place during the first six years of the seven year Shmitah cycle, the Jewish farmer makes a declaration testifying to his observance of the laws of separating and properly distributing Teruma and Ma'aser to the Kohanim, the Leviim, and the poor during the past three-year cycle. "I have eliminated the holy things from the house, and I have also given it to the Levite, to the convert, to the orphan, and to the widow, according to the entire commandment that You commanded me; I have not transgressed any of Your commandments, and I have not forgotten. I have not eaten of it in my intense mourning; I have not consumed it in a state of impurity, and I have not given of it to a dead person; I have listened to the voice of Hashem my G-d; I have acted according to everything You have commanded me.".

However, the Torah does not specify that Vidui Ma'aser must be said in a loud voice. Why is it that Mikra Bikurim must be said "b'kol Ram" and Vidui Ma'aser is apparently said silently?

The answer is obvious. The declaration of Mikra Bikurim extols the praises of the Almighty. The Jewish farmer is not praising or patting himself on the shoulder for his diligent observance of the laws. He recounts what the Ribono shel Olam did for him. At such a time it is appropriate that everyone should hear what is being said: Kol Rom. Vidui Ma'aser, on the other hand, is what I have done. I have done everything the Almighty has told me to do. When I am saying what I did right, it is not appropriate to give a klop in the Beis Medrash and say "I came to minyan every day for the last seventeen years…." We do not do that. We do not publicly pat ourselves on the back.

This is the simple answer to our question. However, I saw a very interesting insight from Rav Shlomo Kluger, which applies this dichotomy of silent recitations versus out-loud recitation to another area of Jewish practice.

The halacha is that Shmoneh Esrei should be said silently. There is one exception to this rule. It says in Shulchan Aruch that on Yomim Noraim, a person can say the Amidah louder than he recites it the whole year. This does not mean that every congregant should pretend to be the chazzan and sing the whole nussach of Rosh HaShannah and Yom Kippur while reciting his private Amidah. However, a person is allowed to say it louder than normal. Why is that?

The commentaries to the Shulchan Aruch give a couple of reasons: First, on the Yomim Noraim everyone davens out of a Machzor. During the year, people sometimes daven by heart (especially in the times of the Shulchan Aruch, not everybody had a Siddur). When Reuven is davening by heart and Shimon suddenly says something out loud, it can cause Reuven to become derailed and lose his mental place in davening. When everyone is reading out of a Machzor on Rosh HaShannah and Yom Kippur, it is much less likely for a person to get mixed up in his own Amidah recitation as a result of someone else davening out loud.

However, says Rav Shlomo Kluger, there may be another reason as well: Just like we say that Mikra Bikurim is said out loud because we speak there about the praises of the Ribono shel Olam, this too can explain the Shulchan Aruch's distinction between Yomim Noraim davening and the normal daily davening. The hallmark of the Yomim Noraim Amida is "Meloch al kol ha'Olam kulo bichvodecha..." It is all about the Kingship of the Ribono shel Olam. We acknowledge the Sovereignty of the Almighty. It is about Him, it is not about me.

The whole year the overriding themes of Shmoneh Esrei are "Almighty I need sustenance, I need cures, I need this, I need that." It is all about "me". When it is all about "you", you do that quietly. But Yomim Noraim, we are asking the Almighty to become King of the world. It is all about Him. That is the equivalent of Mikra Bikurim where we apply the principle of "V'Anisa v'Amarta" and we proclaim it aloud, rather than in silence.

Cursed Be the Faker

Later, the parsha mentions a very unique ceremony that occurred only once in the history of Klal Yisrael. When they came into Eretz Yisrael there were two adjacent mountains—Mt. Gerizim and Mt. Eval. Six Tribes stood on one mountain and six Tribes stood on the second mountain. A series of Blessings and Curses were recited, to which everyone needed to respond Amen.

The Torah mentions which tribes were to be positioned on each mountain, and then it proceeds to list the eleven "Curses" (Arurim) which were to be part of this recitation. These are eleven sins for which a person who transgressed them should be cursed. It was like a national Kabbalas Shevuah (acceptance of a binding oath) not to be in violation of these eleven transgressions.

The specific sins for which it was proclaimed "Accursed be he who…" include the following:

Makes a graven image and places it in secret.
Degrades his father or mother.
Moves back the boundary of his fellow.
Causes a blind person to go astray on the road.
Perverts a judgment of a convert, orphan, or widow.
Lies with the wife of his father.
Lies with any animal.
Lies with his sister.
Lies with his mother-in-law.
Strikes his fellow in secret.
Takes a bribe to kill an innocent person.

Let me ask something: Are these eleven things the worst sins in the Torah? It does not say "Cursed be one who desecrates the Shabbos." It does not say "Cursed be one who eats chametz on Pesach." Some of the things mentioned do not involve the serious Kares penalty, nor even the less serious penalty of makkos (lashes). If we had to pick a list of "the worst eleven," maybe we would have listed some of the eleven items, such as those involving Avodah Zarah or Arayos. But most of them do not seem to be "all that bad" that they should be worthy of this unique curse. So why were these eleven singled out?

The Sefer Darash Mordechai suggests a common denominator to all eleven items. These sins are all done behind closed doors in which a person can act hypocritically (Echad b'fnim, v'echad b'Chutz). A person can act as the biggest Tzadik out in public, and behind closed doors he can treat his parents with utter disrespect.

"Cursed be he who encroaches on the boundary of his fellow man." A person can promote himself as one of the most honest businessmen there are, and yet in the stealth of night he will move the boundary demarcation a couple of inches, and no one will know the difference.

"Cursed is he who leads the blind man astray on the road." The commentaries dispute what this applies to, but according to Rambam this refers to giving bad advice. You tell a person "Listen, you invest in this deal and you will make a fortune!" when you are purposely giving him bad advice, for your own advantage. All of these things, a person can in fact externally promote himself as a most upstanding citizen, but in secret – behind closed doors – (v'sam ba'seiser) it is quite a different story.

Chazal say that in the times of Yoshiyahu haMelech, the king thought he succeeded in cleaning out all the Avodah Zarah that existed in Eretz Yisrael. The King had guards going to people's houses searching for idols. The wicked people hid their idols on the back of their doors, so that when the doors were open the idols would be hidden. As soon as the guards closed the doors behind them, the idols reappeared. That is an instance of "and emplace it in secret" (V'sam ba'seiser) [Devorim 27:15].

So, what is this unique ceremony all about? It is about being fakers. That is why these are Arur (cursed behavior). A person needs to be "Tocho k'Baro"—the same on the inside as on the outside. A person must be who he is everywhere—in the privacy of his home and in the public arena. All these people here are acting behind closed doors, secretively. Such behavior is intolerable. The Ribono shel Olam cannot suffer such hypocrisy.

One of the themes of the Yomim Noraim is "V'Taher Leebeinu l'Avdecha b'Emes" (Purify our hearts to serve you in truth). We must be honest. We must act with integrity. What you see is what you get. What is apparent to people must be what you really are. When you are "one way with your mouth and one way with your heart" or "one way outside and one way inside" then you are a faker. This is what the Torah condemns as deserving theArur curse. That is why these eleven things—although perhaps not the most egregious of Aveiros—nevertheless have this element of fakery which the Torah singles out for explicit condemnation.

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subject: Covenant and Conversation

Be Silent and Listen (Ki Tavo 5780)

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

During our first Coronavirus lockdown, there was one question I was asked more than any other: What about prayer? Just when we needed it the most, we found ourselves unable to participate in tefillah be-tsibbur, public communal prayer. Our most sacred prayers, devarim she-bi-kedushah, are communal. They require a minyan. There was an argument between Rambam and Ramban as to whether, originally and essentially, the command of prayer was directed to individuals or to the community as a whole. But there was no disagreement between them as to the importance and value of praying as part of a community. That is supremely how we, as Jews, come before God, not primarily as "I" but as "We." How then were we to find spiritual strength without this communal dimension?

My answer was, this is indeed a terrible privation. There is no point in minimising the loss. As Yehuda ha-Levi said in the Kuzari, individual prayer is like protecting yourself by building a wall around your house. Collective prayer is like joining with others to maintain the wall around the city. The wall around the city protects everyone, not just me.[1] Besides which, when I pray for myself, I may pray selfishly, asking for something that may directly benefit me but might also be harmful for others. If I sell ice-cream, I want the sun to shine, but if I sell umbrellas, I want the rain to fall. Praying together, we seek, not private good but the common good.

Communal prayer is not just an expression of community. It is also a builder of community. Hence the psychological cost of the pandemic lockdown. We are social, not solitary beings. We long, most of us, for company. And even the marvels of Zoom, Skype, YouTube, Facebook Live, WhatsApp and Facetime cannot compensate for the loss of the real thing: face-to-face encounter.

But there was one gain to our praying in isolation. Tefillah be-tsibbur involves going at the speed of the congregation. It is hard to slow the pace so as to be able to meditate at length on any of the prayers themselves – their meaning, music, rhythm and structure. Prayer is essentially a kind of counterpoint between speaking and listening. But communal prayer often involves more speaking than listening. The lockdown meant that we could listen more to the poetry and passion of the prayers themselves. And prayer is about listening, not just speaking.

In one of his essays in Beit Yaakov, Rabbi Yaakov Leiner, son of the Ishbitzer Rebbe (Rabbi Mordechai Leiner), makes a fascinating comment on a phrase in this week's parsha, hasket u-shema Yisrael, "Be silent and listen, Israel. You have now become the people of the Lord your God (Deut. 27:9). There is, he says, a fundamental difference between seeing and listening as to what they communicate. Seeing tells us about the surfaces, the externalities, of things. Listening tells us about internalities, depths (omek kol davar).[2]

His comments are echoed by one of the great 20th Century scholars of technologies of communication, Walter J Ong, who spoke about "the unique relationship of sound to interiority when sound is compared to the rest of the senses." He adds, "This relationship is important because of the interiority of human consciousness and of human communication itself."[3] In other words, it is through sound, especially through speaking and listening, that we are present to one another as subjects rather than objects. By listening, we encounter the depth-dimension of reality.

When we listen, we are personally engaged far beyond the way we participate when we simply watch. Ong regards this as one of the special features of the Hebrew Bible. God creates the universe through words. He reveals Himself to His people in words. He makes a covenant with them in words. The last and culminating book of the Torah is Devarim, "words." Ong notes that the Hebrew for "word," davar, also means an event, a happening, something that generates momentum in history. If the greatest thing God does is speak, then the greatest thing we can do is listen.

There is also a difference, as I pointed out in my translation and commentary on the Siddur, between hearing and listening, often concealed by the fact that the Hebrew verb Shema means both. But they are very different. Hearing is passive, listening is active. Hearing needs no special concentration, but listening does. It involves attention, focus, and openness to the other. One of the greatest gifts we can be given is to meet someone who really listens to us. Sadly, it happens all too rarely. We are often so focused on what we are going to say next, that we don't really listen in depth to what the other person is saying.

And so it is with prayer. Someone once defined prayer as listening to God listening to us.

There are some profound stories about listening in the Torah and Tanach. Take for instance the fraught episode in which Jacob takes his father's blessing, intended for Esau. The story eliminates sight as a dimension: Isaac is old and cannot see. Yet he has persistent doubts as to whether the son in front of him is indeed Esau. He goes through the various senses. He tastes the food his son has brought. He smells his clothes. He touches his hands. He concludes: "The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau" (Gen. 27:22). How much anguish might have been spared had he followed the evidence of his hearing rather than his taste, smell and touch.

The names of Jacob's first three sons were all cries for attention on the part of their mother Leah. She called the first, Reuben, saying, "It is because the Lord has seen my misery. Surely my husband will love me now." The second she called Simon, saying, "Because the Lord heard that I am not loved, He gave me this one too." She called the third Levi, saying, "Now at last my husband will become attached to me, because I have borne him three sons." Was Jacob listening to her cries? We don't know. But the plain sense of the text is that he was not. And we know from Jacob's deathbed blessings that his relationship with these three sons was fractured.

Then there is the strange choice of Moses as the man selected to be the voice of God's word to Israel for all time. Moses kept reminding God that he was not a man of words, he could not speak, he had "uncircumcised lips." The Torah is surely telling us several things, but might one of them have been that, finding it hard to speak, Moses had learned to listen? Certainly Moses heard God better than anyone in history.

Then there was the drama on Mount Horeb where Elijah went after his spectacular victory over the prophets of Baal, having called down fire from heaven at Mount Carmel. God showed him a powerful wind, an earthquake, and a fire, but God was in none of these things. Instead He was in the kol demamah dakah, the "still, small voice" that I have argued means "a sound you can only hear if you are listening."

There are the stunningly beautiful lines of Psalm 19, that we say on Shabbat mornings that tell us that "the heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands," despite the fact that "There is no speech, there are no words." Creation sings a song to its Creator, which we might hear if we listen attentively enough. I was reminded of this throughout the pandemic, when there was little noise from traffic and none from aeroplanes overhead, and we could hear the birdsong and other sounds of nature more vividly than ever I remember.

Listening is a primary theme of Moses' speeches in Devarim. The root sh-m-a appears no fewer than 92 times in the book, an astonishing number. That is what I hope we gained from this distressing time of isolation: the ability to slow down our prayers and listen to them, letting their poetry penetrate more deeply than at other times.

Rabbi Yaakov Leiner, whose reflections on listening started us on this journey, said about the tragic month of Av that it is a time when it is hard to see the presence of God. We lost two Temples. It seemed to the nations of the world as if God had abandoned His people. But precisely when it is hard to see the Divine presence, we can focus on listening.[4] I believe that listening is one of the greatest arts. It opens us to God, our fellow humans, and the beauties of nature. For me one of the gifts of this strange, difficult time has been the ability to slow down the prayers so that I am able to listen to them speaking to me. Praying is as much about listening as speaking. And faith itself is the ability to hear the music beneath the noise.

Shabbat Shalom

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Weekly Parsha KI TAVO

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

I have in earlier years written about the strange requirement that the Torah imposes upon the Jewish farmer in the land of Israel when he brings his first crop of the year to Jerusalem as an offering in the Temple. However, I want to reiterate and expand on the matter once again in this short article because I believe it to be of vital and relevant importance to us in our times.

The Jewish farmer, in a review of Jewish history, recounts as to how he arrived at bringing this offering to the temple. He relates the story of our forefathers, of Abraham and Jacob and of their struggles to survive in a very hostile environment. He explains how the great and essential idea of monotheism, morality, charity, and godliness in human society was propagated. The one bringing the offering then recounts the fact that we have never had an easy road on which to travel. Our forefathers were enslaved in Egypt for centuries and sank to low levels of physical and spiritual standards. Yet, the Lord redeemed us and took us out from the house of bondage through miraculous events under the leadership of Moshe.

We were granted the Torah and we were entrusted with the mission to be a holy nation and a kingdom of priests. We wandered in the desert for 40 years, sustained only by the will of heaven, and finally arrived in the land of Israel, a land promised to us through our forefathers by the God of Israel. And now, as a fulfillment of this drama of Jewish history, the farmer can bring these first crops of the year to Jerusalem, as an offering in the temple.

There is an innate desire within all human beings to know about their past. At one time or another, all of us experience the feeling of déjà vu, about events and places that we know we have never been to before or have never experienced in this lifetime. It is this sense of history, of the past that imposes itself upon us. Unfortunately, most Jews in our time are completely unaware of their past. They have no idea as to their ancestry, traditions and the events that have led them to where they are and who they are today. In that ignorance lies the main cause for the alienation and disaffection of so many Jews as to their faith and future.

They are overwhelmed by the present and fearful of the future simply because they are ignorant of their past. This engenders a feeling of panic and uncertainty that gnaws at the very vitals of their existence. This is especially true here in Israel, now almost 75 years after its creation and founding, the state is still taken for granted and has lost some of its luster. It is no longer treasured as it once was and should be. To sanctify the mundane – to make even the produce of this country into a holy offering – knowledge and appreciation of the

past is necessary. This is an important lesson that this week's reading imparts to us.
Shabbat shalom
Rabbi Berel Wein

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog
We find ourselves towards the end of the month of Elul, standing before the great days of judgment, forgiveness, and renewed commitment. A few weeks ago, I happened to visit my physician on a relatively minor matter. As he handed me a prescription for a lotion that I should apply and a pill that I should take, he inquired as to whether I had ever been vaccinated for pneumonia. When I told him that I had not, he said he felt that it would be important for me to do so. He dutifully typed out a prescription and admonished me to be certain to fill it and take the vaccine. I hesitated a few days before following his instruction, because I usually do not like to have diseases injected into my body. However, since he was so strongly recommending it to me, I did go to the pharmacy where a nurse expertly stuck me in the arm and injected the vaccine. The whole purpose of all of this was to grant me some sort of immunity from pneumonia. Now, when a person is being injected with a very sharp needle, it is always wise to concentrate on a different matter entirely, so that he or she will hardly feel the prick of the needle being inserted and removed. Thus, as I was being hopefully granted immunity from pneumonia, I thought a bit about spiritual immunity as well
I think that an essential part of the idea of repentance over particular sins, acts of commission or omission, is that true regret and return to strict observance of Torah law and godly values provides us with a certain immunization against repeating such sins and errors. Maimonides writes that when a person truly repents and commits himself not to repeat bad behavior, then, so to speak, the Lord himself will testify that that person is cleansed from that sin, and will not revert to perform that violation again.
I never really thought about repentance and return from this viewpoint, but I now think that this is a valid perspective of the power of repentance and return. Teshuva is, so to speak. an immunization injection to our souls and spirits. Just as when we experience a physical injection, with its pain and discomfort so, too, true penitence and return comes with painful moments and emotional discomfort. It is difficult to admit our wrongs and our sins. We are full of excuses and rationalizations. But only when we face reality and the truth of our actions, can we really improve ourselves and be able, somehow, to right past wrongs and move on, feeling cleansed and more confident spiritually.
The Talmud, in recounting for us the joy of elderly people celebrating the holiday of Sukkot in the Temple in Jerusalem, states that many of these people would say: "How fortunate are we that our later years have brought us repentance and return to the God of our fathers." Having, so to speak, absorbed the injection of accepting the very disease of sin into our bodies, regretting it wholeheartedly, and pledging not to repeat that type of mistake again, we become immune from the ravages of the diseases of sin that so destroys our blessed nature and our godly soul.
Using the story from Oscar Wilde's "The Picture of Dorian Gray" where Gray throughout his entire lifetime of indulgence and debauchery, only wanted to be seen as a healthy and vibrant individual, and was willing to 'sell his soul,' so to speak, to do so. But upon his demise, after the sinful life that he led, the ghastly and ghostly caricature of Gray is revealed. This is an excellent metaphor for the situation of sin and spiritual disease within us. On the outside, everything may look normal, even healthy, and attractive. But at the day of judgment and the moment of truth, a person is always revealed in all his ugliness. We can acquire immunization from this scenario through the gift of return and repentance which the Lord has granted us. We are in that season of the year now but we must be willing to fill the prescription, to acquire the vaccine and have it injected into us in order for the power of immunization to take hold and protect us in the future.
Shabbat shalom
Berel Wein

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Insights Parshas Ki Savo Elul 5780
Yeshiva Beis Moshe Chaim/Talmudic University
Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan

This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of our parents Noach Yaakov ben Chaim and Dvora Esther bas Moshe.
"May their Neshamas have an Aliya!"
Connectivity
When you come to the land that Hashem your Lord is giving you as a heritage, occupying and settling it. You shall take the first of every fruit of the ground produced by the land that Hashem your Lord is giving you, and you shall place it in a basket and go to the place Hashem will choose as the place associated with His name (26:1-2).
This week's parsha opens with the obligation of the mitzvah of bikkurim. To perform the mitzvah of bikkurim, a farmer in Eretz Yisroel would go out to his field, find his first budding fruits, and tie reeds around them, thus designating them as "first fruits" (this applied only to fruits of the seven species of the land of Israel: wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives, and dates). He would then create a beautiful "fruit basket" (the wealthy would bring baskets of gold or silver) and with some pomp and ceremony march off to the Beis Hamikdosh to present it to the Kohen. He then gave it to the Kohen while expressing his appreciation for all that Hashem had done for him as well as Bnei Yisroel.
Rashi (ad loc) explains that the end of the verse - "occupying and settling it" -teaches us that Bnei Yisroel were not obligated in the mitzvah of bikkurim until they conquered the land and apportioned it. In other words, this mitzvah didn't begin until fourteen years after Bnei Yisroel entered the land of Israel.
In light of this, we must strive to explain a difficult Sifri: כי תבוא אל הארץ. עשה מצוהאמורה בענין שבשכרה תיכנס לארץ- do this mitzvah in order that you should merit entering the land. How can entering the land of Israel possibly be predicated on fulfillment of this mitzvah when the

obligation to do the mitzvah didn't take effect until fourteen years after entering the land? This question was first raised two hundred and fifty years ago by the well-known Rav Dovid Pardo in his commentary on the Sifri. In fact, he finds it so perplexing that he writes that there must be a mistake in the text and he amends it. Obviously, this approach is difficult to accept.

The key to this Sifri lies in the understanding of the word "תיכנס". Generally, we translate this word as "to enter," but we see from Chazal that this is not a proper translation. There is a fascinating Gemara (Shabbos 32a) relating to the terminology we use for shuls (בית כנסת): "R' Yishmael Ben Eleazar says that ignorant individuals die prematurely for two sins; for calling the 'Holy Ark' a chest and for calling a shul ('beis knesses') 'a gathering place' ('beis am')." Rashi further explains that referring to a shul as a place where people gather is denigrating.

Maharsha (ad loc) finds this very difficult and points out that the word in Hebrew - "beis knesses" - also means a gathering place. So why were the ignorant punished for calling it beis am, which seems to merely be another translation?

Maimonides (Yad Hilchos Teffilah 11:1) makes a fascinating statement: "Any place that has ten Jews is required to build a house for them to enter in and pray at all the required times. This place is called a beis haknesses." What does Rambam mean by the words "for them to enter - שיכנסו בו"? Rambam could have easily left those words out and the meaning of the sentence would have been exactly the same. What is the point of writing "for them to enter"?

Maimonides is teaching us what a shul is all about. The words don't merely mean to enter, they mean to connect. We shouldn't view a shul as a place we gather (a 'beis am'), rather we must view a shul as a place we connect to each other. That is what the obligation of building a shul is all about. We don't build a shul to just have a place to daven, we build it as a place to connect as a people. We find many instances in Chazal of this concept (Hachnosas Orchim - Machnisei Shabbos, etc.). Ignorant people don't understand this, they think a shul is merely a place Jews go to gather and pray, but they are missing the very essence of what a shul is supposed to be.

That's what the Sifri in this parsha is saying. It isn't referring to the initial entering of Eretz Yisroel. Rather, the mitzvah of bikkurim, whenever it is done, will cause a person to be merited to be connected to the land of Israel.

Mind Your Mind

Hashem will strike you with madness and with blindness and confounding of the heart (28:28).

The latter half of this week's parsha informs us, in very explicit detail, of all the calamitous consequences that will befall us for not properly following in the path of Torah and mitzvos. Concerning this verse, the Ibn Ezra (ad loc) writes that they refer to illnesses of the mind. From this Ibn Ezra we see something remarkable regarding illnesses of the mind.

A number of years ago a man who was in a desperate state came to see the Rosh HaYeshiva. He was highly educated and held a Master's in Engineering from an Ivy League school, where he had graduated with honors. Previously, he had headed a large construction firm with many employees and his firm had offices occupying over a 100,000 square feet of space. Then came the financial crash, his business fell apart, and he was forced to close it down. Moreover, he had personally guaranteed the business leases, so he was sued for payment, which led to his personal financial ruin. Things deteriorated to the point that he and his wife were forced to move into their son's home.

He was despondent and asked the Rosh HaYeshiva for some guidance. The Rosh HaYeshiva tried to console him and offer some advice for moving forward: "Why don't you go back to school and learn another profession?" The man responded that it was an impossibility as he had recently been diagnosed with ADHD and would not be able to focus on his studies. Here was a man who had an advanced degree from a prestigious school, where he had graduated with honors, and all of the sudden he was learning disabled?

When a person suffers trauma in their life one of the oft overlooked consequences is what this trauma does to the mind. According to both the NIH and a Harvard medical school study, about 5% of the population suffers from ADHD. Yet there are many districts in the country where the diagnoses and prescribe rate for ADHD are more than triple the accepted rate. In one NIH study, children who lived within thirty kilometers of Chernobyl and had subsequently been relocated to Ukraine for ten years were testing positively for ADHD at a rate of almost 20%.

Ever wonder why so many illnesses are being treated today at rates that were unheard of decades ago? Of course, part of the answer is that there is better testing today, but another significant percentage is due to the fact that today so many more children are products of broken or unstable homes where their parents themselves are emotional wrecks. Today, many children are being raised by proxy with video games and social media platforms acting as their guide to the realities of life. There is very little emotional validation in their lives. Is it any wonder they are having issues coping?

The toll that the physical and financial failures will have on Bnei Yisroel's emotional state are no small portion of the terrible consequences of the punishments that Hashem doles out for not following in His ways. However, much of this reaction is within our power to control. This is part of the lesson that is being taught: We need to take control and responsibility for our reactions.

Have you ever had someone come to you and apologize for saying something unkind or inappropriate? Often it goes something like this: "I am sorry I yelled at you for something so silly, please forgive me, it's just who I am." What they are really telling you is, "that's who I want to be." In other words, instead of working on themselves they expect you to just tolerate their boorish behavior. One of the lessons of the tochacha is that we must constantly work to improve who we are and take responsibility for our own emotional state.

Did You Know...

Next motzei Shabbos Ashkenazim begin to rise earlier than usual to go to shul to say selichos. Sephardim, on the other hand, already began reciting selichos at the beginning of the month of Elul. This is not, as is commonly believed, to atone for the sin of eating rice on Pesach. Rather, there are spiritual reasons for the different commencement times.

Rambam (Yad Hilchos Teshuvah 3:4) explains that the Aseres Yemei Teshuva (the Ten Days of Repentance) are crucial to awakening man from his spiritual slumber, and that everyone should engage in a thorough examination of his/her life and deeds; "It is for this reason that all of the Jewish people increase their charitable giving and good deeds and perform extra mitzvos between Rosh

Hashanah and Yom Kippur. In addition, everyone has the custom to wake up during the night (i.e. while it is still dark) and go to shul to recite pleadings and supplications."
So why do Ashkenazim begin before Rosh Hashanah and Sephardim begin on Rosh Chodesh Elul?
For Ashkenazim this is based on two criteria: the 25th of Elul and motzei Shabbos. We find in the Gemara (Rosh Hashanah 8a) the opinion of R' Eliezer that Adam and Chava were created on Rosh Hashanah. This makes the creation of the world the 25th of Elul. According to the Ran (Rosh Hashanah 16a), the Jews of Barcelona and the surrounding areas began reciting selichos on this day - the birthday of the world.
In addition, there is a custom to fast during the Aseres Yemei Teshuva, and to fast for ten days. But there are four days that one is not permitted to fast; the two days of Rosh Hashanah, Shabbos, and Erev Yom Kippur. Thus, those who fast do so prior to Rosh Hashanah. Therefore, the rabbis instituted that when Rosh Hashanah begins on a Monday or Tuesday then selichos begin the prior week on motzei Shabbos.
Sephardim begin on Rosh Chodesh Elul because that is when Moshe ascended Mount Sinai for the second time (returning with the second set of luchos on Yom Kippur). Obviously, these days were filled with much trepidation because during Moshe's first absence Bnei Yisroel sinned with the Golden Calf, Moshe shattered the original luchos, and Hashem was on the verge of destroying the entire nation. Thus, the second time, Bnei Yisroel undoubtedly spent the forty days in a vastly different manner. To memorialize this special time, Sephardim begin saying selichos at the onset of Elul.
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Parshat Ki Tavo
Expressing Thanks
"You will come to whoever is the kohen in those days and you will say to him…" (26:3)
A blisteringly hot Wednesday.
Suddenly there's a power outage. A visit from the electrician reveals the worst: "It's the compressor in your A/C. You need a new one. Trouble is, the manufacturer can only get it here next Tuesday."
"But what are we going to do on Shabbat?"
"Does your Shabbat table fit in the fridge? Listen, I think I can get you a new compressor before Shabbat. I'll do my best."
"You're a tzaddik!"
And sure enough, by Thursday lunchtime the new compressor is in place and the house returns to its regular cool temperature.
On Friday afternoon the electrician's phone rings. He notes the caller ID — it's the people with the new compressor.
"Trouble," he thinks to himself as he answers the phone.
"We just wanted to call you and thank you so much for fixing our air conditioner. You've really made our Shabbat. Thank you so much! Shabbat Shalom!"
Gratitude should never remain implicit. It should be expressed.
In this week's portion, the Torah instructs us to give bikkurim — the first fruits — to the kohen. However, it's not enough just to give them.
"You will come to whoever is the kohen in those days and you shall say to him.…" Rashi comments on the phrase "and you shall say to him" — "because you are not an ingrate." In other words, what prevents a person from being an ingrate is the verbalization of his gratitude. Anything less is considered lacking.

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Parshas Ki Tavo: To Each His Language
Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb
There was a time when the literary treasures of the Jewish people were accessible only to those with a reading knowledge of Hebrew. This is no longer the case. I know of no major Jewish religious work which has not been translated into English in recent years and, in most instances, into many other languages as well. The past several decades have witnessed the publication of multiple editions of the Bible and the Talmud, commentaries ancient and modern, liturgical works, historical tomes, biographies, and even cookbooks with recipes of our ancestors.
I must confess that when this phenomenon of translation began, I was not all that happy. I am a bit of a purist and have long clung to the belief that sacred Hebrew books should be read in the original. I was willing to make exceptions for those religious classics which were originally written in languages other than Hebrew, such as those works of Maimonides, Saadia Gaon, and Bahya ibn Paquda, which were originally written in Arabic and translated into Hebrew and eventually English as well. But for me, the Bible and classical commentaries were to be read only in the language in which they were written.
I was guided in my opposition to translation by the classic Italian motto, "traduttore traditore", "the translator is a traitor." No translation is exactly accurate, and ideas expressed in one language inevitably lose some of their meaning when rendered into another language. Every translation compromises beauty and forfeits subtlety and nuance.
Ironically, in recent years, I myself have become a translator. My first professional effort was with the elegies that are recited on the solemn day of Tisha b'Av, when Jews recall the seemingly endless chain of catastrophes that have marked Jewish history. Translating these poignantly tragic poems was a difficult challenge. But I undertook the task in the belief that an English translation was better than no translation, and that I was doing a public service by bringing these poems to the public, albeit in a far from perfect form.

Since then, and to this day, I have been involved in the process of translating classical Jewish works, and have come to terms with the fact that translations, although far from perfect, bring Torah study to multitudes of individuals who would otherwise be deprived from so much of our tradition.

These reflections bring us to this week's Torah portion, Parshat Ki Tavo(Deuteronomy 26:1-29:8). The relevant verses read, "As soon as you have crossed the Jordan into the land that the Lord your God is giving you, you shall set up large stones. Coat them with plaster and inscribe upon them all the words of this Teaching...On those stones you shall inscribe every word of this Teaching most distinctly" (Deuteronomy 27:2-3, and 8).

What does this phrase, ba'er heitev, translated as "most distinctly," mean? The Babylonian Talmud Tractate Sotah 32b suggests that the inscription of the "Teaching," that is, the Torah, should be done in seventy languages, in every language known to mankind. How fascinating! Moses himself, speaking on behalf of the Almighty, instructs the people to engage in that "traitorous" task of translation. He seems unconcerned with the difficulties of rendering the word of God from sacred Hebrew into the languages of all mankind.

Why? Why was it necessary to translate the Torah into languages which were incomprehensible to the people of Israel? Our Sages offer two very different answers to this question.

The Jerusalem Talmud takes a universalistic approach and suggests that these translations were to bring the teachings of the Torah to the entire world.

The Zohar, the basic text of the Kabbalah, notes that the members of the Jewish High Court, the Sanhedrin, knew all seventy languages. But the Zohar does not take this literally. Instead, the Zohar understands the seventy languages to be a metaphor for the seventy facets of Torah, the seventy different avenues of interpretation with which the sacred text is endowed. The members of the Sanhedrin were thus not linguists, according to the Zohar, but experts in probing the depths of the Torah's meaning. Perhaps, the seventy languages inscribed on the stones in the River Jordan were also not the languages for the peoples of the world, but were seventy codes enabling so many different approaches to the Torah's interpretation.

Permit me to offer a somewhat different approach. I prefer to understand the word "language" more broadly. The word need not be restricted to its literal meaning, referring to French, Spanish, Swahili, and Portuguese. Rather, "language" can refer to a cognitive modality, or to a learning style. Thus, some of us prefer the language of humor, while others prefer the language of logic and reason. We speak of angry language, soothing language, and the language of love. Music is a language, play is a language, and there is even the language of war.

Every teacher worth his salt knows that he must use different "languages" for different students. This does not mean that he speaks to some students in English and to others in Yiddish. No. This means that some students will respond to clear and logical explanations. Others will require anecdotes and stories. Still others will require humor, or perhaps visual illustrations of the subject matter being taught. This is the lesson which every successful teacher learns sooner or later: no two individuals learn in the same way. Woe to the teacher who delivers his or her prepared lecture once, and expects all thirty pupils to learn the material. The successful teacher discerns the learning styles of each pupil and develops strategies and modalities that facilitate the learning of every member of the class.

Perhaps this is what the Talmud in Tractate Sotah is really teaching. Inscribed on those stones in the River Jordan were seventy different teaching strategies, seventy pedagogical tools, which would enable every recipient of the Torah to learn its messages in his or her own idiosyncratic way. Some would learn best by reciting the words by rote until they were memorized. Others would learn by breaking the text down into small phrases and reflecting on them, and still others would learn by using visual imagery to "see" the meaning of the text. Indeed, the phrase "seventy facets of Torah" could be the Zohar's way of referring to seventy different learning styles, encouraging teachers to identify a "stone in the River Jordan" to match every pupil, even those who on the surface appear unteachable.

If I am at all correct in this interpretation of "the seventy languages" I am asserting that our Sages were very aware of a basic lesson in education. That lesson is that there is a need for individualized curricula so that diverse populations can all learn well.

This lesson is reflected throughout Talmudic literature. Here is one example:

"Observe the excellent advice given to us by the Tanna Rabbi Yehoshua ben Perachya: 'Make for yourself a teacher, and acquire for yourself a friend...' If you do this you will find that your teacher will teach you mikrah, mishnah, midrash, halachot, ve'aggadot. Whatever is not conveyed in mikrah (Scripture) will be conveyed in mishnah; whatever is not conveyed in midrash will be conveyed in the halachot; whatever is not conveyed in the halachot will become clear in the study of the aggadot. Thus, the student will sit in place and fill himself with all that is good and blessed." (Avot DeRabbi Nathan, 8:1)

In this passage our Sages are advocating a richly variegated curriculum. They know that not every student will be fully informed by the study of one subject. The student who fails to gain from the study of mikrah, will gain instead from a very different type of text, mishnah, the early rabbinic codification of the Oral Law. And similarly for midrash, rabbinic lore; halachot, rules and regulations, andaggadot, legends and stories.

There are many erudite quotations that I could cite to summarize the point of my brief essay. But I prefer to conclude with a remark I hear from my teenage grandchildren: Different strokes for different folks. Arguably, this is an apt motto for getting along with people in all situations. But it is especially apt for teachers. And as I have repeatedly stated in this column, we are all teachers!

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Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

Dvar Torah: Ki Tavo

Why are stones so important in our tradition?

In Chumash, we find numerous examples of the significance of stones. One is in Parshat Ki Tavo. The Israelites were just about to enter into the land of Cana'an, Hashem commanded us to take stones "וְכָתַבְתָּ עַל־הָאֲבָנִים אֵת־כָּל־דִּבְרֵי הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת" Hashem asked us to engrave

within the slabs of the stones all the words of the Torah. Why particularly stones? In Parshat Vayechi, Yaakov, who was about to pass away summoned his children. Of his son Yosef, he said " אבן ישראל– he is the stone of Israel". What did Yaakov mean? Targum Onkelus, the Aramaic translation, explains that the word 'אבן' is a composite term. It is made up of two words, 'אב' and 'בן' meaning father and son – together making 'אבן'. So Yaakov was saying of Yosef that he was the אבן ישראל– he sustained the family of Israel in Egypt. Parents and children alike – everybody together.

Emerging from this peirush of Onkelus we have a very profound message. In the same way as an אבן– a stone is indestructible in the face of natural elements, so too the Jewish people will never be destroyed for as long as parents convey the lessons of our tradition through to their children who, in turn, will pass it on to the generations to come. This is what we are being reminded of when Hashem tells us to engrave words of Torah on stone – it implies that we have a responsibility to keep Torah alive through the successful education we give to our children. And now we can understand the significance of the matzevah – a monument of stone to the deceased – because the stone inspires us to remember that everything that those who passed away lived for, can be kept alive if we convey their traditions successfully from parents to children and onto the generations to come.

We now have added insight into an important verse in Tehillim, which we recite in Hallel. " אֶבֶן מָאֲסוּ הַבּוֹנִים הָיְתָה לְרֹאשׁ פִּנָּה– the stone that the builders have rejected has become a cornerstone" We're referring here, of course, to the tragic manner in which our enemies have so often sought to reject the Jewish people. But nonetheless, we have continued to give a contribution of immense value to societies right around the globe.

Perhaps there is an added meaning: "אֶבֶן מָאֲסוּ הַבּוֹנִים" – even where those who are building the future of our world reject the notion of 'אבן', if they reject the possibility that an ancient tradition can be just as fresh and just as relevant today as it always was because it has been passed down from generation to generation and from parents to children – "הָיְתָה לְרֹאשׁ פִּנָּה" – Am Yisrael will still triumph. We have prevailed and today, thanks to our values, thanks to our morals and our ethics we are the cornerstone of our civilisation.

Shabbat Shalom

Rabbi Mirvis is the Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom. He was formerly Chief Rabbi of Ireland.

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Ki Tavo: Expanding Land

Ben-Tzion Spitz

Still round the corner there may wait, a new road or a secret gate. - J. R. R. Tolkien

The Torah reading of Ki Tavo presents us with both blessings and curses. There are horrific, frightening curses that God says will be the result of abandoning Him. Conversely, there are wondrous blessings if we are steadfast in our loyalty to God.

The Meshech Chochma expands on one sliver of the blessings in Deuteronomy 28:8, which reads as follows:

"The Lord will ordain blessings for you upon your barns and upon all your undertakings: He will bless you in the land that the Lord your God is giving you."

The Meshech Chochma explains that just as God can and does provide a blessing for the miraculous expansion of the produce being stored in the barns, so too, God allows for the miraculous expansion of the Land of Israel.

In a number of places in the Torah, we see hints to the phenomena of the unusual and unexpected contraction or expansion of dimensions, of space and time. We have the examples of the incredibly shortened journeys of both Jacob and Abraham's servant. We have examples of the unusual dimensional effects within the Tabernacle and the Temple. It's as if there is some Einsteinian time and space dilation occurring. I've theorized elsewhere that there is a connection between extreme holiness and relativistic effects (think of approaching God as approaching the speed of light and then miraculous time and space dilation seems much less surprising).

The Meshech Chochma states that there is indeed a supernatural effect at work in this blessing. That somehow, space expands. It's similar to what the Talmud tells us about the pilgrims to Jerusalem, that none of them ever said "the space is too small for me."

In the times of the Temple, there was a miraculous expansion of the city of Jerusalem, which enabled as many pilgrims as came to find adequate accommodations. So too, there is a blessing upon the entire land of Israel, that it will expand; that somehow the existing land will grow and be able to accommodate as many people as needed.

May all those who want to come to Israel, find the right space.

Dedication - To Saudi Arabian airspace. Thanks for letting us through.

Shabbat Shalom

Ben-Tzion Spitz is a former Chief Rabbi of Uruguay. He is the author of three books of Biblical Fiction and over 600 articles and stories dealing with biblical themes.

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Jerusalem Post :: Torah Portion

Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz

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Parashat Ki Tavo: A successful society's foundations

Prohibitions that 'merit' being cursed are all acts that damage relationships between people.

One of the most spectacular events in Jewish history is described in this week's Torah portion, Ki Tavo: the event on Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal, at which Moses commanded the nation to hold a ceremony of blessings and curses, with half the nation standing on Gerizim, and the other on the opposite mountain, Ebal, and the kohanim (priests) and Levites standing in the center between the mountains, announcing the list of blessings and curses.

Before we deal with the content of the ceremony, let us focus first on the venue. These two mountains, Gerizim and Ebal, surround the city of Shechem – the city that Abraham reached on his journey to Canaan, where he established an altar to God; the city where Jacob planted roots when he purchased a field across from it and where the

tomb of Joseph is located. This place, at the center of the Land of Israel, is where the scene took place.

What occurred at this event of blessings and curses? Who was blessed and who was cursed? A not particularly long list of acts merited mention at this event, including acts of incest for which the perpetrators were cursed, as well as anyone who objects to, and rebels against, Judaism. Along with these serious offenses, several other acts were mentioned at this event, undoubtedly negative ones, and we will focus on them to see what these negative acts entailed that warranted them being included in the list of cursed behavior.

"Cursed be he who moves back his neighbor's landmark.... Cursed be he who misguides a blind person on the way.... Cursed be he who perverts the judgment of the stranger, the orphan or the widow.... Cursed be he who strikes his fellow in secret" (Deuteronomy 27:17-24).

When we look at this list of prohibitions that "merit" being cursed, we understand that these are all acts that lead to the destruction of society and damage relationships between people.

Let's imagine two neighbors with a light fence between their fields. The ability each has to conduct a serene life with hope for success rests on the trust he has in his neighbor not attempting to trespass and steal land from him. If that trust is lost, the person is distracted from concern about his and his family's success, and instead ends up focused on his neighbor trying to take possession of his land.

A person's trust in a fair trial is similar. In countries where the citizens' faith in the justice system and its enforcement is eroded, these citizens lose their existential security. The Torah does not suffice with a demand for fair trial, but emphasizes the weaker segments of society – the stranger, the orphan and the widow, those who do not have supportive families – as also eligible for a fair trial.

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Two additional examples of acts that erode society's existential security are misguiding a blind person and secretly striking another person.

The first situation describes one in which someone meets a blind person and, rather than assisting him as one would expect anyone to do, he chooses to mislead him. Such a situation is appalling in that it erodes the minimal trust that exists between people. Any one of us would expect that in a state of distress, we would have someone who would assist us. Someone who does the opposite and actually causes harm does not do so only to the blind person, but harms society as a whole.

The same is true for someone who strikes another in secret. According to the great commentator Rashi, this refers to someone who speaks badly of another. In such a situation, which unfortunately is quite common, the victim doesn't get the chance to defend himself. Only after the damage was done does he find out that he was harmed by the inconsiderate tarnishing of his name by someone who spread rumors about him.

Nowadays, there is a phenomenon in social media called "shaming." Under the guise of anonymity, we see people humiliated and demeaned. This wonderful tool that allows everyone to express opinions can become a lethal weapon that tramples the dignity of others.

At this event of blessings and curses that took place immediately after the Jewish nation entered the Land of Israel, emphasis is placed on strong personal-social foundations, those that, when adopted, allow us to live in a better and more moral society that rests on mutual trust, concern for others and unconditional love.

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Peninim on the Torah - Parshas Ki Savo

פרשת כי תבוא תש"פ

ושמחת בכל הטוב

You shall be glad with all the goodness. (26:11)

Parashas Ki Savo begins with the *mitzvah* of *Bikurim*, the first fruits, in which the Jewish farmer is enjoined to bring his first fruits to Yerushalayim as a sign of his gratitude to Hashem. He makes a declaration of gratitude, whereby he details Hashem's loving intervention throughout history, thus demonstrating the realization that everything that he has is only as a result of Hashem's beneficence. *Hakoras hatov*, expressing one's gratitude, is a requisite for an individual to be considered a decent human being. One who is an ingrate to others will eventually act likewise to Hashem. We are accustomed to viewing the ingrate as arrogant, considering himself better than those who reach out to benefit him. Expressing gratitude for favors received is below his dignity. Another negative perspective of the ingrate is his insatiable hunger, his implacable desire which is hardly ever appeased. Thus, whatever someone does for him is insufficient, because he wants more. He never has enough, so why should he be grateful? He is a self-centered person, who sees everything in life as being all about himself/me. He does not care about anyone other than himself. Gratitude is the farthest thing from his mind, because everyone owes him. These characterizations of the ingrate have one common denomination: the ingrate has feelings; he is not emotionless. If someone were to act unkindly to him, he would take revenge. He would not tolerate a disservice, maltreatment, or disparagement.

Another aspect of ingratitude is that the reaction of an ingrate goes beyond the pale of "normative" ingratitude: the Amalek syndrome. In the end of *Parashas Ki Seitzei* (*Devarim* 25:17), the Torah exhorts us to remember the evil attack of Amalek against us during our nascency as a nation. Shortly after our liberation from Egypt, Amalek attacked us for absolutely no reason other than his venomous hatred against G-d's representatives in this world. Our only offense was our religion. As the designated chosen people, we became Amalek's sworn enemies.

The *Midrash Tanchuma* (*Ki Seitzei* 6) offers a rare perspective on the aberrant behavior of this loathsome nation, and, by extension, all those who have descended from the original miscreants, or, who act in a manner similar to them. The *Midrash* cites *Sefer Tehillim* 32:9, *Al tiheyu k'sus k'fered ein havin*, "Be not like a horse, like a mule, uncomprehending." Hashem said to *Klal Yisrael*, "Do not be like the horse that lacks comprehension. If a man (his master) goes to bring it food, to place upon it ornaments, it swallows the food, bends its neck and kicks outward. Likewise acts the mule. (These two animals are clueless concerning the generosity of their benefactor. To them, the aid and services they receive mean nothing.) You (*Klal Yisrael*), do not be like them (horse/mule, or in their characterization of Amalek).

You should pay attention and be vigilant in appreciating the favor that you receive and express gratitude for it." The *Midrash* continues that we should neither despise the *Edomi*, because he is our brother; nor the Egyptian, because we were "guests" (ill-treated, but still guests) in their land.

Horav Henach Leibowitz, zl, derives from this *Tanchuma* a novel perspective concerning the *kafui tov*, ingrate. It is possible that this person not only eschews expressing gratitude, but also neither reacts to evil, nor exacts retribution against someone who has hurt him. While the latter may be to his credit, the reason for this attitude is not. This person responds neither to the good nor the bad because he is apathetic, impervious to expressing emotion, regardless whether it concerns good or bad. He simply does not care; he is indifferent to what happens around him, totally disengaged from reality.

It is possible for a person not to acknowledge the most basic and most simple occurrences for what they are. The *Rosh Yeshivah* posits that the Torah exhorts us to remember what Amalek did to us – not because the Torah is suggesting that Amalek did not seek to do us harm. We have no question that his intentions were evil and that he was bent on destroying us. So, what is the problem? Why do we require a reminder to inculcate our psyche that Amalek's name must be blotted out? People who do not think do not comprehend. They can go through life ignoring all the signs that point to someone and scream, "He is evil! He wants to destroy you!" If a person refuses or is unable (for various reasons) to think cogently, he will ignore the clear and the obvious, and might even embrace Amalek! We have seen more than one instance in which well-meaning (but nonsensical and naïve) people have embraced the most reprehensible individuals – people who sought to do us harm. Why? They did not think. The *Tanchuma* teaches us that one who does not think is like a horse or a mule: clueless, insensitive and dimwitted.

ושמחת בכל הטוב אשר נתן לך ד' אלקיך ולביתך אתה והלוי והגר אשר בקרבך

And you shall be glad with all the goodness that Hashem, your G-d, has given you and your household – you and the *Levi* and the *ger* who is in your midst. (26:11)

A farmer toils, labors in the field, at times under grueling conditions. *Baruch Hashem*, he is successful and his field produces a bumper crop. Obviously, at this point, the farmer will be overwhelmed with joy. Why does the Torah enjoin him to rejoice? One would expect this to be a given. *Horav Mordechai Gifter, zl*, observes that human nature is such that man is never happy with what he has. *Mi she'yeish lo manah rotzeh masaim*, "One who has one hundred – wants two hundred." He is never satisfied. Whatever success he has achieved he always feels that he could have done better; he could have made/acquired/succeeded more. While this might be a good thing with regard to Torah-study and erudition, concerning materialism, it can drive a person to a voracious desire to amass more and more, thus transforming him into an unhappy person. Rather than sit back and rejoice over what he has achieved, he is miserable concerning what he does not have. His problem arises from the misguided notion that whatever he has accomplished in life is the result of his own doing. One who lives life knowing that everything he has and all that he has achieved is only due to Hashem, understands that he will not receive that which Hashem does not deem to be appropriate for him (at that time). By enjoining us to rejoice, the Torah is intimating to us: Be satisfied with what Hashem has given you. Do not permit your desire for more – your "wants" – to supplant your "needs", impeding your ability to rejoice with what Hashem has given to you.

The Torah exhorts us to rejoice by sharing our goodness with others – our family – and with those less fortunate than we are. True *simchah*, posits the *Rosh Yeshivah*, is attained only when one shares his *simchah* with the destitute and the dejected. If we wish our *simchah* to reach its apex, its fullest potential, then we should see to it that we share our *simchah* with those in need.

Perhaps I might suggest another form of sharing, one that surprisingly (mostly due to petty reasons) some of us have great difficulty in accepting: sharing other people's joy or – as psychologists refer to it – manifesting positive empathy. This concept applies not only to parents sharing their child's success, but also rejoicing for, and with, the child. (It is not only about the parent's *nachas* and boasting rights). This concept also includes sharing a student's success, or a spouse's achievement, but, most of all, the success and happiness of other people – friend or acquaintance. The idea that one can be happy for others means that one cares about others, that life is not only about oneself. True satisfaction is derived when one shares other people's joy, because then he shows that other people are also significant; their joy is my joy. When one acknowledges this, he realizes that unless he shares another person's joy, he is limiting his own sense of satisfaction. Thus, true satisfaction is achieved when one shows positive empathy and shares in another person's joy.

גם כל חלי וכל מכה אשר לא כתוב בספר התורה הזאת יעלם ד' עליך

Even any illness and any blow that is not written in this Book of the Torah, Hashem will bring upon you. (28:61)

Chazal say that the *choli* and the *makah*, illness and blow, are references to the tragic passing of *tzaddikim*, righteous persons. (Veritably, this *Midrash*, which is quoted by a number of commentators, has yet to be found.) The *Yaaros Devash* quotes it (*Chelek* 1, *Drush* 4). *Horav Yeshayah Pik, zl*, writes that he had searched for this *Midrash* and was unsuccessful in locating its source. Indeed, he observed anecdotally that this is the meaning of a blow that is not written in the Torah. He is unable to locate this *Midrash*. Apparently, in *Shut Tiferes Tzvi Yoreh Deah* 38, the author cites the *Zohar HaKadosh* (*Chelek bais daf* 10b). *Horav* B. Ransburg explains that every one of the *Chamishah Chumshei Torah*, Five Books of the Torah, mentions the deaths of *tzaddikim: Bereishis*, the *Avos* and *Imahos*, Patriarchs and Matriarchs; *Shemos* commences with the passing of Yosef and the Tribes; *Vayikra* relates the tragic death of Nadav and Avihu; *Bamidbar* details the passing of Aharon *HaKohen* and Miriam *HaNeviah*; *Sefer Devarim* does not mention the death of any *tzaddik*. (Although Moshe *Rabbeinu's* death is mentioned after *Parashas Ki Savo*, when he admonished the nation with the rebuke, he was obviously still alive.)

Furthermore, the deaths and burials of every one of the preceding *tzaddikim* were noted in the Torah. No one witnessed either Moshe's death or his burial. The atonement of a *tzaddik's* passing is derived through the medium of contemplation, ruminating over his life and achievements. This is best achieved when one can stand at the *tzaddik's* grave, and, with a relaxed mind, deliberate about his life. This is impossible with regard to Moshe *Rabbeinu's* life. Thus, *Sefer Devarim* is the place in which the blow of *missas tzaddikim* is not explicit. To recap: Veritably, all Five Books mention a *tzaddik's*

passing. However, *Devarim* mentions it later – after Moshe's Admonition. Thus, it really does not count.)

When the *Satmar Rav, zl*, visited Yerushalayim in 1932, he *davened* in one of the *shuls*. When the *shliach tzibbur, chazzan,* who was reading the service concluded *chazoras ha'shatz*, the repetition of *Shemoneh Esrai*, the *gabbai*, sexton, banged on the lectern. The *Rav* inquired for the reason behind this *makah*, banging. The *gabbai* explained that the *shul's* custom is not to recite *Tachanun*, supplication-confessional service, and instead recite *Kaddish* if that day coincides with the *yahrzeit*, anniversary of the passing, of a *tzaddik*. Thus, since that day they were commemorating the loss of a *tzaddik*, he banged as a form of announcement. The *Rav* mused that now he understood the meaning of the *pasuk*, "and a blow which is not written in the Torah," a reason *Tachanun* is not recited when a *bris* is being celebrated or if a newly-married *chassan*, during the first week following the wedding, attends the service. Such a *makah*, "blow/banging," is written in the Torah/*Shulchan Aruch.*, The commemoration of a *tzaddik's* passing, however, is one that is not recorded in *Shulchan Aruch*. Therefore, *Tachanun* should be recited (unless a *Meseches* of *Talmud* is concluded and a *siyum*, ceremony, is celebrated).

In *Chut Ha'meshulash* by *Horav Shlomo Sofer, zl, Rav* of Beregszasz, Czechoslaovakia, the author distinguishes between *choli*, illness, and *makah*, blow. A *makah* is obvious, noticeable to the naked eye. One bangs himself in such a way that results in a wound that can hardly be concealed. *Choli*, illness, is different. It can be covered up, camouflaged, thus kept secret. One does not become immediately aware of an illness. It might take weeks and even months before the effects of the illness are noticed and revealed.

A similar phenomenon occurs with the passing of a *tzaddik*. When a *tzaddik* takes leave of his mortal surroundings, his passing leaves an immediate void, a vacuum that is painful. The *tzaddik* illuminates a community; he is their inspiration, their lodestar, their source of hope. With his passing, the *makah*, blow, is felt throughout. When time passes and life goes on, however, we become further aware and understand the depth of the loss of the *tzaddik*. When life continues and people begin to move on, we recognize and finally acknowledge the irreplaceable loss that we sustained. This is *choli* – illness, revealed, laid bare for all to see and truly sense the loss.

The *p'shat*, explanation, of *makah* and *choli* appropriately apply to the passing of a *tzaddik*. It is only after some time has elapsed that we truly begin to grasp the irreparable loss, the immeasurable toll of losing such a *tzaddik*. If this is the case, why does *choli*, illness, precede *makah*, blow? The blow is immediate, while the illness is only felt later on. The sequence in the *pasuk* should have been reversed. After ruminating over this question, I came to the realization that, indeed, the sequence is as it should be. The *pasuk* (I suggest) is addressing long-range effect. While long-term loss of the *tzaddik* might be mollified somewhat when a successor ascends to fill the void, no one can actually replace and serve as a substitute for the *tzaddik* who inspired so many. The natural course of life is that no one lives forever, and we hope that when we are summoned "home," our life has served as a blessing for others. Generations pass, and *tzaddikim* move on to a better world, take their rightful place in *Olam Habba*, the World-to- Come. What we never get over is the shock of the blow, the suddenness of the loss, the overwhelming grief that we are unable to shake. The blow lives with us. It is something that we can never forget. Thus, *choli* precedes *makah*.

ונשארתם במתי מעט

You will be left few in number. (28:62)

The *Klausenberger Rebbe, zl*, made his home first in New York following the tragedies that he endured in the European Holocaust. Not to sit idle, he understood that his purpose in life at that time was to give comfort to the survivors and build for the future. He set himself to establish institutions of Torah and *chesed*. Institutions are not built on dreams. He knew that soliciting funds was a vital part of his mission. To this end, he was prepared to travel to other American cities in search of supporters to help him realize his dreams.

During one of his fund-raising trips, he was traveling by train, sitting in the corner of the car, reciting *Tehillim*. The train stopped at a station to allow travelers to disembark and others to alight the train. A middle-aged gentleman, clearly unobservant, entered the car in which the *Rebbe* was traveling and sat down across from the *Rebbe*. He noticed the *Rebbe* reciting *Tehillim* and could not refrain himself from speaking out.

"You are still wasting your time reciting *Tehillim*? I came from a city of righteous men like you. Despite having been raised in an observant home, I was spiritually quite distant from them. Yet, they all perished and I survived! All of the observant, G-d-fearing, good Jews died, while I lived. Can you explain that? That is when I decided that this was not for me."

The *Rebbe* listened to the man and suddenly broke out in bitter weeping. The man was visibly upset, "Why are you weeping?" The *Rebbe* looked at the man and amidst his copious tears, said, "I, too, was the last of my family and my community. We had the finest and the greatest individuals whose entire lives revolved around serving the Almighty; yet, they all were murdered and I survived. Should I not weep?"

When this newly-assimilated Jew took note of the *Rebbe's* reaction, his extraordinary humility, he, too, began to weep, to the point that he buried his head in the *Rebbe's* loving embrace – as both continued to mourn the many who were no longer able to weep. This experience altered what had become the man's downward spiral and brought him back to his pre-World War II level of observance.

The man was inspired by the *Rebbe's* humility. I think the *Rebbe* was intimating another message to this man. So many righteous Jews perished, and only a handful survived. Does this mean that the survivors were more worthy? Absolutely not! Hashem has His reasons. One thing is for certain: if Hashem allowed one to live when so many had died, then He obviously expects something of the survivors. "We have a mission!" the *Rebbe* was telling the man. "Otherwise, why should we live, when so many others – more worthy than we– died? He expects us to carry on, to rebuild, to inspire, not to weep and mourn. He certainly does not expect us to renege our *Yiddishkeit*!"

After the tragic passing of Nadav and Avihu, Aharon *HaKohen's* two older sons, Moshe *Rabbeinu* informed Aharon, Elazar and Isamar, Aharon's two other sons, that they were to eat the *Korban Minchah*. Although an *onen*, mourner prior to the burial of the deceased, was not permitted to partake of *Kodoshim*, sacrificial offerings, Hashem had said that this day was to be different. The wording of the *pasuk* is ambiguous: "Moshe spoke to Aharon and to

Elazar and Isamar, *banav ha'nosarim,* his remaining sons" (*Vayikra* 10:12). What is the meaning of "his remaining sons"? Is it not obvious that if Aharon had four sons, of which two died, the other two were "his remaining sons"? Is there a purpose in underscoring their sequential position, as *nosarim*, remaining?

I believe it is *Horav Matisyahu Solomon, Shlita*, who explains this as Moshe's way of saying: "You are the survivors. Therefore, your responsibility is greater. Your mission is no longer about 'you'; it is also about 'them' – your brothers – who were unable to complete their mission." Survivors have a dual mandate – their own and that of those who did not survive. *Klal Yisrael* is a nation of survivors. *B'chol dor va'dor omdin aleinu l'chaloseinu*, "In every generation there arise those who would annihilate us." Some survive – others do not. The survivors must remember that they must carry two sets of responsibilities. This is critical, because if you do not care about your personal responsibility to the *klal*, community, at least care about those who did not make it.

I think this might be homiletically expressed via the words *Va'yaamod bein ha'meisim u'bein ha'chaim,* "And he (Aharon *HaKohen*) stood between the dead and the living" (*Bamidbar* 17:13). Following the plague that killed some of Korach's supporters, while the rest became ill, it was Aharon whose incense prevented those who were ill, but still alive, from allowing the illness to take its course and kill them. He stood between those who were gone and those who were ill – but not gone. Perhaps we might say that Aharon was teaching us that even when we stand with the living, we may not forget about those who did not survive. They paid the ultimate price; they made the ultimate sacrifice.

When one is absorbed with his own good fortune, his health, he often loses sight of those who did not fare as well, who did not come home. I write this *Erev Shavuos*, two and a half months into the insidious plague that has wrought havoc on so many lives. The tragic stories that we all carry with us are numerous. The images of individuals who have suffered, families torn apart, are still before our eyes. Some worry about the inconveniences they have endured, their physical, emotional, economical and spiritual difficulties. Nonetheless, they are still talking. They are alive to complain and reminisce. There are sadly many who no longer have this opportunity. Children complain about inconvenience. Other children are too sad to complain, because they no longer have anyone to whom to complain. This is my take on standing *bein ha'meisim u'bein ha'chaim*. Never lose sight of those who have less, who are less fortunate, who did not make it.

The following story is a classic. I made an attempt to locate its source, but was not successful. I will have to relate it from memory. A young couple were blessed with a son and, on the eve of his *bris*, they disagreed concerning the name they wanted to give their son. The husband wanted to name his son after his grandfather who had been a distinguished Torah scholar. His wife refused – not because she had issues with the grandfather -- but because she was uncomfortable giving her son that name. They were a G-d-fearing couple, so they decided to seek the sage advice from a *gadol*, Torah giant – (I believe it was *Horav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, zl*).

They presented their case. The *Rav* listened, then asked the mother to divulge what it was about the name that made her uncomfortable. She replied that in the apartment building in which they presently lived, there was a woman who had lost a son by the very same name. She understood that his name did not cause the other child to leave this world prematurely. The mother explained that she did not want her son to have this name because she was certain that one day her little boy would run around, and she would have to call him loudly through the building. She feared that the other mother would hear the name of her lost child being called throughout the complex, and it would renew her pain and sadness. She did not want to give her son a name that might cause pain to an already afflicted mother. The *Rav* agreed. *Va'yaamod bein ha'meisim u'bein ha'chaim.*

Va'ani Tefillah

והמרחם כי לא תמו חסדיך – *V'Ha'Meracheim ki lo samu Chasadecha*.

The Merciful One. Because Your kindness is never exhausted.

Certainly, if we were to ask ten people for their definition of mercy, we would receive ten varied responses. Mercy is a relative term (or so we think), thus, each person selects a definition to which he can best relate. This *tefillah* teaches us otherwise. Hashem is called the Merciful One – because His kindness is never exhausted. There is no end to the Almighty's benevolence. It is not contingent on worthiness. Whether we deserve His kindness or not, we can count on Him to respond to us affirmatively, because His kindness never ends. This is the meaning of mercy: no strings attached. As *Horav Shimon Schwab, zl*, observes, imagine asking someone to lend us money a number of times: five, ten, fifteen times; at some point, the answer will be, "Enough! How many times can you come back to me for money? I have lent you money numerous times. Find someone else!" With Hashem, there is no end. We can – and we do – come back, constantly pleading for favors, begging for mercy, and we can look forward to a positive response. Time and again, every day of our lives, throughout the many challenges that we confront, we can always turn to Him and He will say, "Yes." This is the meaning of mercy.

Sponsored by Ruthie and Sam Salamon in loving memory of Mr. Victor Gelb אביגדור בן משה ז"ל נפטר י"ט אלול תש"ן *Hebrew Academy of Cleveland,* ©*All rights reserved prepared and edited by Rabbi L. Scheinbaum*

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Shabbat Shalom: Ki Tavo (Deuteronomy 26:1-29:8)
Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Efrat, Israel – "Cursed be the individual who does not carry aloft the words of this Torah." (Deuteronomy 27:26)

Although I have been blessed with many magnificent students over my five decades of teaching, I shall never forget the piercing words penned by one of my most treasured students, who suddenly and inexplicably turned away from a Torah way of life. For a time he refused to answer any of my heartfelt entreaties for a dialogue – before eventually leaving a poem at my home. In part, it read: Beloved teacher, both of us are often blind; you do not always see how much you taught me and I do not always see how much I learned from you. You think I took the Tablets of Testimony and threw them insolently at your feet. That's not at all what happened. The commandments merely became too heavy in my hands, and they fell to the ground.

As a Torah educator, I still feel the searing pain of losing students such as this one, in whom I had seen so much potential. It led me to difficult questions of myself: Where had I gone wrong as an educator? To what extent was I responsible for his decision?

These questions bring to mind a verse from this week's Torah portion, Parshat Ki Tavo, which announces blessings for those who observe specific Biblical commands, and curses for those who reject them. The final denunciation, however, "Cursed be the individual who does not hold aloft the words of this Torah" (Deuteronomy 27:26), is difficult to define. To what is this verse referring?

The Talmud Yerushalmi (Sota 7:4) pointedly asks, in rhetorical fashion, "Is there then a Torah that falls down?" Indeed, the answer is, yes, there is, and Rabbi Shimon Ben Halafta specifies the responsible party for this tragedy: the spiritual leaders of the Jewish community!

While spiritual leaders can be measured to a certain extent by whether those in their care are completely observant of the Torah's teachings, their true mettle is tested by how they respond when their students fall short. Moses demonstrates how a teacher should react in such a situation. Upon witnessing the Jews serving the Golden Calf, he realizes that he has not succeeded in holding aloft the Torah, given that a mere forty days after temporarily ascending Mount Sinai, his people had departed from its ways so quickly. Thus, he casts the Tablets of the Covenant to the ground, smashing them.

At that moment, God saw the profound responsibility that Moses took upon himself for the broken tablets, and, according to the Yerushalmi (ibid.) placed within Moses' heart the words of King Josiah: "It is upon me to hold aloft [the words of the Torah]". Hence the Almighty commands Moses to sculpt two tablets just like the earlier two which had been broken (Ex. 34:1).

Fascinatingly enough, this verse is the very source for the Oral Law, specifically unique to the Second Tablets (Midrash Shemot Rabba, ad loc.), and which consists of the input of the Sages in every generation to ensure that the Torah continues to be held aloft.

The Torah "falls" when the Jewish People do not uphold its laws and values. Once the Oral Law – the application of the Torah in every generation – was placed in the hands of the rabbis and teachers, it becomes these leaders' obligation to make certain that it is a Torah of love and a nourishing source of life.

Indeed, it is the responsibility of the spiritual leaders of every generation to see to it that the Torah becomes, in the eyes of the Jewish People, neither so light – of such little significance that it can be easily discarded – nor so heavy and onerous that it can hardly be borne. Those who teach God's Torah must help every Jew feel and understand the loving embrace of Torah, the profound wisdom of Torah, the timeliness and timelessness of Torah.

Shabbat Shalom!
