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Thu, Jun 30, 2011 at 5:33 PM

Rabbi Yaakov Neuburger

Kehila vs. Eida

The imposing if not foreboding building is not new to me. I have seen it many times. It houses a synagogue and an impressive array of communal services, worlds separating us philosophically and practically, unfortunately. Yet on my most recent visit to that area of town, I was struck by the bold modern Israeli script that had been added to its outer facade, carrying its new Hebrew name and preceded by the traditional double kuf acronym, signifying "kehilo kedosha - holy community". What went on in my mind at that moment mirrors one of the themes of the mei meriva narrative, the account of that one moment, according to some, where Moshe and Aharon spoke disparagingly to the Jewish people and according to others, severely underestimated their core and their destiny.

Dramatizing what lies between the lines of the written word, the Medrash (Yalkut Shimoni) records that Moshe and Aharon's utter disappointment began early in the episode. Whereas we read of the enormous national loss of the prophetess Miriam, the Yalkut reminds us of the personal mourning of her great brothers. Miryam was the older sister who worried over Moshe to no end, and tried to protect him long before he was born and long after he became the forever unparalleled national teacher. Picture the thirsty and rancorous crowd approaching Moshe and Aharon sitting shiva. Aharon is convinced that they are comforters all coming to pay homage, and the discerning Moshe, evaluating the tempo and the disarray of the group, understands that this is an implacable and bitter lot.

At that moment, Moshe was far more disillusioned by his people's self centeredness than by any lack of faith that they ever expressed. Throughout any lapse of belief or trust, Moshe defended his people, but this lack of decency, of courtesy, of *ofmenstchlikeit*, frustrated Moshe beyond repair. Where were the words of tribute for Miriam, the moments of pause, the inquiry to learn life lessons from her years, the gratitude to her profound vision at their depth of despair and the recollection of her well kept cymbals? Where was the concern for the wellbeing of Moshe and Aharon who unconditionally stood by them all, the soothing words and the memories that give meaning to mortal life?

This disappointment, suggests Rav Elyashiv *shlit"a* drawing on the Abarbanel, brought Moshe Rabeinu to censure the people he loved, respected and always defended even against condemnation from on High.

Yet Hashem holds Moshe responsible for losing the moment, for not teaching, for allowing his frustration to blind his otherwise profoundly penetrating understanding of our national and individual goodness and promise.

Throughout the parsha, observes the saintly Rav Yaakov Moshe Charlop *zt"l*, Hashem portrays for us various prisms and perspectives that could change the outcome of similar situations. Rav Charlop draws our attention to a recurring verbal interplay throughout the account, referencing our people in two distinct fashions. At the beginning of the parsha (20:1,2) we are called an "eidah". However, we act as a "kehila" (20: 2, 4) and we see ourselves as such. Hahsem says (20:8) to Moshe to gather (*hakhel*) the eida and Moshe (20:10) responds and gathers (*hakhel*) the "kehila". Clearly there is instruction here.

Rav Charlop explains that "kehila" when standing alone, refers to a gathering of people; perhaps collected, perhaps selected, perhaps serving each other, perhaps offering a service to others. Not so an "eida." They have a mission. They must bear "eidus." Their ideas, speech and actions must at all times strive to bear profound testimony about Hashem and His sovereignty. How did the Jewish people falter and lose their compassion for the leaders they deeply loved and their belief after all that they had experienced? Their lapse may have been momentary, perhaps fleeting but nevertheless it stemmed from the core. They saw themselves, perhaps only briefly, as a "kehila" as a group brought together by shared circumstances rather than by a common challenge. Hashem stresses to Moshe that practically he may have to gather them as one puts together disparate parts of a complex puzzle, but he must remember at all times and through every interaction that they are no less than a weighty "eida."

Thus how does one prevent dissatisfaction from grabbing one's better judgment and expressing that which we may live to regret? Rav Charlop opines that if we are ever aware that what may seem to be a simple and unimpressive collection holds at its root an "eida kedosha", that every instant with an "eida" provides a moment to shape and bring impact far beyond our reach, we will have learned much from the mei meriva.

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From **Rabbi Yissocher Frand** ryfrand@torah.org

Wed, Jun 29, 2011 at 5:05 PM

subject **Rabbi Frand on Parshas Chukas**

These *divrei Torah* were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion: Tape #18, Rending Garments on Seeing Yerushalayim. Good Shabbos!

Departure of Israel's Peace-maker Triggers Cannanite Attack

This week's parsha contains the death of Aharon *haKohen*. The *pasuk* [verse] states that the Cannanite King had been afraid to start up with

Bnai Yisroel until this point. However, now he heard something (Vayishma haCannani...) that caused him to wage war with Israel.

The Talmud in tractate Rosh Hashannah explains that he heard that Aharon haKohen had died. Aharon's death caused the Clouds of Glory to depart. The Cannanite King took this as a signal that he had permission to wage war against Bnai Yisroel. What was it about the loss of Aharon that now made the Jewish people vulnerable to attack from their enemies?

The Ateres Mordechai quotes the teaching of the Sages: Aharon haKohen was a Rodef Shalom [pursuer of peace], who preserved peace in Klal Yisroel. Once Aharon was gone, machlokes [arguments] and fights began. Therefore, Bnai Yisroel became vulnerable to attack from outside.

The Ateres Mordechai further connects this idea with the pasuk in parshas Lech-Lecha: "There was a quarrel between the shepherds of Avram and the shepherds of Lot. And the Cannani was then in the land."

What is the significance of the "Cannani was then in the land?" The Ateres Mordechai notes that this is the same idea that we find here in our parsha: As long as there was peace between the shepherds of Avram and Lot, their unity was a guarantee of protection from external enemies; but as soon as quarrels broke out, there was a cause for worry about the Cannani being in the land.

When there are quarrels among the Jewish people, they become vulnerable to attack from external enemies.

Aharon's Death Triggers Even Greater Emotions Than Moshe's Death

Aharon loved and pursued peace. Chazal consider this a very important concept. The Yalkut Shimoni says that when it came time for Aharon to die, G-d, kaviyachol [so to speak], did not have it within Him to go to Aharon and tell him directly that his time was up. G-d asked Moshe Rabbeynu for a favor, to tell Aharon to go up to his place of death.

Rav Bergman, in his sefer, Shaare Orah, points out that there is no such teaching regarding the time for Moshe Rabbeynu to die. There is not any indication that G-d was, kaviyachol, embarrassed to tell Moshe Rabbeynu that the time had come for him to leave this world. In what way was Aharon superior?

Rav Bergman suggests it was Aharon's attribute of being the pursuer of peace among the Jewish nation that gave him this special status.

Aharon's Method of Making Ba'lei Teshuva: Smiles not Stones

The Avos D'Rav Nasson echoes this same theme. When Aharon dies, the pasuk says that the entire House of Israel (implying men and women) mourned. However, when Moshe dies, the pasuk states that the Children of Israel (implying the men only) mourned.

The relationship between Klal Yisroel and Moshe Rabbenu was not the same as between Klal Yisroel and Aharon. Moshe had to give mussar, had to set the people straight, and had to issue uncompromising judgments.

Aharon, however, never criticized. He was a peacemaker who was beloved by everyone. Aharon would greet wicked people with a smile. He did not spit or throw stones. He said "Good Morning." The response of the wicked, often was, "How can I continue to sin, it will distress Aharon?" The Medrash declares that in this way "he caused many people to repent from doing evil." He caused them to repent, not through anger or disgust, but with Shalom. That is how he was so successful.

Mr. Harry Wolpert, a long time supporter of Torah causes in Baltimore, had been a student of Rabbi Baruch Ber Lebovitz, the Kaminetzer Rosh Yeshiva. When Mr. Wolpert came to Baltimore in the early 1900s, he repeatedly faced the nisayon [test; challenge] of Chillul Shabbos [Shabbos Desecration]. Today, we do not need to face the common nisayon of those years -- "If you don't come in on Saturday, don't bother coming Monday."

Mr. Wolpert related that he faced this temptation many times when he needed to support his wife and children. What stopped him from succumbing to the temptation? It was the image of his Rebbe, Reb

Baruch Ber. Reb Baruch Ber was known as a Rebbe who loved his students. Reb Baruch Ber cherished each student. This love, shown to a student, was what stopped Mr. Wolpert from becoming a Mechalel Shabbos [violator of the Shabbos].

This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic portions for this parsha from the Commuter Chavrusah Series are: Tapes or a complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit <http://www.yadyechiel.org/> for further information. Transcribed by David Twersky Seattle, WA; Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman, Baltimore, MD RavFrand, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Yissocher Frand and Torah.org. Join the Jewish Learning Revolution! Torah.org: The Judaism Site brings this and a host of other classes to you every week. Visit <http://torah.org> or email learn@torah.org to get your own free copy of this mailing. Need to change or stop your subscription? Please visit our subscription center, <http://torah.org/subscribe/> -- see the links on that page. Permission is granted to redistribute, but please give proper attribution and copyright to the author and Torah.org. Both the author and Torah.org reserve certain rights. Email copyrights@torah.org for full information.

From Shabbat Shalom postmaster@ou.2dialog.com date Thu, Jun 30, 2011

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Rabbi Weinreb's Torah Column, **Parshat Chukat**

Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

What's worse? Death by the plague? By the sword? Starving to death? Or being sentenced to captivity?

What a horrible set of choices, and what a bizarre question to ask!

But our Sages asked precisely this question in response to a prophecy of Jeremiah that he addressed to a sinful people. A frightening prophecy indeed:

"The Lord said to me, 'Even if Moses and Samuel were to intercede with me, I would not be won over to that people. Dismiss them from my presence, and let them go forth! And if they ask you, "To what shall we go forth?" answer them, "Thus said the Lord: Those destined for the plague, to the plague; Those destined for the sword, to the sword; Those destined for famine, to famine; Those destined for captivity, to captivity.'" (Jeremiah 15:2)

There is no question about it. The Jewish historical experience is rife with all four of the above catastrophes. Jeremiah's prophecy came true more than just a few times in our history.

Is it an idle question to ask which of the four is the worst? Are they not all terrible?

But the question is asked in an astounding passage in the Talmud (Bava Batra 8b), in connection with the great mitzvah of redeeming captives. Rabbi Yochanan, one of the greatest teachers in the Talmud, refers to the above passage in Jeremiah and says: "Each subsequent calamity in this verse is harsher than the one preceding it!" For him, the sword is a worse fate than the plague for the body is disfigured. Hunger is worse than death by the sword because of the immense suffering involved in the former.

Captivity, Rabbi Yochanan asserts, is worse than all of the other three, because all of them are included in it. As Rashi explains: "The captive is totally at the mercy of his captor, who may slay him or starve him to death as he chooses."

Our people, who have endured so many forms of calamity, have known captivity firsthand and frequently. Our national consciousness has

always known how painful captivity is, and how much effort we must invest in freeing captives and in appreciating the joys of freedom.

This past Shabbat, June 25, 2011 (Parshat Korach), marked exactly five years since one of our brethren was taken captive by sworn and fanatical enemies of the Jewish people. I refer of course to Gilad Shalit, the young Israeli soldier who is being detained under miserable circumstances by Hamas.

It is important that each of us be constantly aware of his plight, which, we have just learned, is the worst of all plights. My home in Jerusalem is just a short walk from the headquarters of the Israeli Prime Minister; daily, I pass the tent from which information about Gilad is distributed, and from which poignant pleas for his release emanate.

This week, I choose to reflect upon the horrors of captivity in general, and to feel the pain of Gilad and his loved ones. This week, Gilad's suffering is especially relevant because it is in this week's Torah portion, Parshat Chukat, that we read of the very first Jew to become a prisoner of war.

The verse (Number 21:1) tells of the Canaanite King of Arad who "engaged Israel in battle and took some of them captive." Rashi, following the Midrash, hastens to add that only one prisoner was taken, a maidservant. Be that as it may, this is the first record of a Jew being taken into captivity in the heat of battle.

The reaction of the people to the horror of having a captive snatched from their midst is a powerful one: "Then Israel made a vow to the Lord and said, 'If you deliver this people into our hand, we will utterly destroy their cities.'" And they indeed proceed to do so, to the extent that the collective name of all the cities became Hormah, which means "doomed to destruction".

It may not be politically correct these days to call for the utter destruction of the cities of our enemies. The morality of such a response surely needs to be contemplated. But one thing is for certain. The loss of even one soldier has always been taken very, very seriously. Back then, with our maidservant, and now, with Gilad Shalit.

We do not know how Moses or Aaron responded, as it was the people of Israel who asserted that they could not tolerate the taking of a captive from their midst. Furthermore, we can never know what they really learned of the fate of that captive, nor of whether or not she was successfully recovered.

But we do learn that our response to the captivity of one of our fellow Jews must be one of indignant and effective action. Once again, the Torah portion of the week, which ties Korach with Chukat, astoundingly carries a message of relevance for today and for this moment in time.

This Sabbath, as we utter a prayer for the well-being and safe return of Gilad Shalit, let us fully realize that we must do all we can to advocate his release. And let us also fully realize that Gilad represents only the most recent example of a soldier who is tragically suffering that most dire of calamities, captivity.

from izzwick@gmail.com

Parashas Chukas:

We Are What We Wear

By Rabbi Moshe Hubner

Right after the passing of Aharon Hakohen, the Torah tells of how Bnei Yisrael was attacked during their travels through Eretz Canaan. The passuk states, "The Canaanite king of Arad who dwelt in the south heard that Israel had come ... and he warred against Israel." (21:1)

Previously, in perek 13, passuk 29, however, we were told that the nation of Amalek lived in the south. The Midrash explains that by identifying the people who attacked Bnei Yisrael as those "who dwelt in the south," the Torah is actually informing us that it was indeed the nation of Amalek who led the attack, not the Canaanim. The

geographical reference is given merely to hint at that nation's true identity.

Why, then, does the Torah name the Canaanim when it was really our sworn enemies, the nation of Amalek? The Midrash goes on to explain that Amalek knew that a direct assault against the Jews would be useless, because as soon as Amalek were to strike, Bnei Yisrael would begin davening to Hashem, Who would undoubtedly come to our aid. Therefore, Amalek devised a deceitful strategy in order to win; they disguised themselves as Canaan in the hopes that Bnei Yisrael would daven to Hakadosh Baruch Hu that He save us from that nation, naming them specifically. Since they were actually Amalek, the prayers would be in vain, and they would thus be able to win the battle against us.

In essence, the Torah writes part of the story in a hidden way because it correlates to the way the attack was planned – Amalek, too, approached and attacked in a devious and hidden manner.

In the next passuk, the Torah states that Bnei Yisrael "Made a vow to Hashem and said, 'If you will deliver this people ... I will consecrate their cities,'" and the following passuk tells us clearly that "Hashem heard the voice of Israel, and He delivered the Canaanite..." How did the plan of Amalek fail?

In describing the tefillos of Bnei Yisrael, the Torah is once again hinting to us that all is not as it seems; here, we are being shown that Bnei Yisrael was suspicious about who the attackers actually were, and were therefore slightly vague in their prayers to Hashem. Rather than ask Him to save them from Canaan, they asked Him to "deliver these people," without naming anyone specific. The prayer was accepted, and Bnei Yisrael emerged victorious.

But what was it that caused Bnei Yisrael to be suspicious? Why did they think it was anyone other than the Canaanim? The Midrash further explains that Amalek changed their language to that of the Canaanites, but they did not change their mode of dress. Thus, Bnei Yisrael heard what sounded like an army of Canaanites but looked like Amalek, and so phrased their prayers to encompass both of those nations.

The question that begs to be asked is, if Amalek took the time to teach their soldiers an entirely new language in order to deceive the Bnei Yisrael, why didn't they realize that by not changing their Amaleki garb to that of the Canaanites, they would essentially be making the language switch ineffectual? Could the Amaleki generals have been so oblivious to such an obvious flaw in reasoning? Furthermore, isn't it far easier to change one's mode of dress than to adopt an entirely new language? If a soldier has to pause to think about what he's just been ordered to first translate the command into his mother tongue, doesn't that confusion then thwart the attack, thereby jeopardize the entire mission?

The answer given by the commentators is that a change of dress implies a real change of who one is. In other words, had Amalek worn the clothing of the army of Canaan, then they would not have been Amalek dressed like Canaan but would have become actual Canaanim, which is not what the king of Amalek wanted. The idea was not to turn into Canaanim to successfully attack the Bnei Yisrael but do so in disguise while remain Amalek at heart.

As the summer progresses, we can take this lesson and apply it to our own lives. In short, we are what we wear.

Most of us have separate summer and winter wardrobes, and it is always a challenge to dress modestly in the heat of the summer. Of course, there is nothing wrong with trying to be as comfortable as possible, but we must ensure at all times that we still appear to be who we are – Bnei Yisrael. If our clothing begins to take on the appearance of other nations, before long we will become them, and no amount of comfort is worth losing our status as the Chosen People.

The Rav of Dzikov (Sefer Likutim 10, following Parashas Pekudei) quotes Chazal in stating, "Praiseworthy is the man who arrives here (the Next World) with his learning in his hand." The Rav then asks, "How is the unlearned man going to respond on Judgment day?" After all, not

every person has the opportunity to become a great scholar. He responds that every Jew can be redeemed on the merit that he kept his code of dress and outwardly appeared to be a member of Bnei Yisrael. Just as we were zocheh to leave Egypt for this very merit, so too does each and every one of us have the opportunity to gain Olam Haba as its reward. The Rav of Dzikov proves this by showing us that the acronym of the first letters of the words *?? ??? ???? ?????? ???? (who arrives here with his learning in his hand) spells ????? – clothing – when rearranged.*

Harav Shlomo Zucker, in his sefer *Bier Shlomo**, adds that when Yaakov awoke from his dream in Parashas Vayeitzei, he said that he “hoped to return to his father’s house in peace,” and Rashi explains the word *peace – b’shalom* – as “free from sin – that I [Yaakov] will not learn to follow the ways of Lavan.” *B’shalom*, too, can be rearranged as *????*. Yaakov understood that the way for him to return to Hashem without being affected by the ways of foreign nations is by remaining true to our mode of dress.

As we embark upon the summer, we hope and pray that this year we will not be commemorating the destruction of the previous two Batei Mikdash, but will all be together in Yerushalayim having achieved its return. The first step towards fulfilling that goal is to remain true to who we are by dressing in a manner appropriate for children begging to return to their Father’s home.

* Sefer *Bier Shlomo* was published in 1927 with many *haskamos* from prominent Rabbanim, including the *Michchas Elazar* and the *Maasei Lamelech*.

Nachum Eliezer ben Tzvi Hersh as well as, Devora Leah Chaya bas Yaakov Eliyahu *???*

Rabbi Moshe Hubner is an author and *Maggid Shiur* who has been giving lectures in the tri-state area for more than a decade. He has published five *sefarim*, including the English-language two-volume *Chain of Thought: Torah Linked Through the Ages; Strength Through Fire: A Chizuk Handbook*; and three Hebrew *sefarim*, including *Uryan T’Lisai*, a best-selling commentary on *Megillas Rus*. He can be reached at hubners@gmail.com or 347-439-7154

From YUTorah <office@yutorah.org> date Tue, Jun 28, 2011
subject This week on YUTorah - Chuk

Holy Cow

Rabbi Daniel Z. Feldman

Tuesday June 22, 2004

K’riat haTorah, for the most part, is a rabbinical obligation. The one exception generally noted is the reading of the parashah of Amalek before Purim (according to many understandings of the Rosh in B’rakhot). However, many *rishonim*, such as Rashba (Berakhot 13a) have included another reading as a biblical obligation: Parashat Parah, which appears originally in Parashat Chukkat, and is traditionally read right after Purim. This notion is quoted as well in *Shulchan Arukh* (Orach Chaim 146 and 685).

This is a somewhat puzzling assertion – it is unclear where exactly in the Torah we find such a commandment (See *Magen Avraham*, O.C. 685, and *Arukh HaShulchan* 685:7). Such a gaping hole has led some authorities (such as the *Vilna Gaon*) to maintain that the entire reference is actually a scribal error, and the reference was not to Parashat Parah but another section referred to with the same initials such as the aforementioned passage about Amalek, or “Parashat Purim”. Others, hesitant to label as error a statement found in numerous *rishonim*, offer innovative theories to explain the source. (See, for example, *Meshekh Chokhmah* and *Torat Moshe*, as well as *Responsa Divrei Yatziv*, Orach Chaim 288).

One theory that is put forward (see *Artzot haChaim* of the *Malbim*, *Hilkhot Tzitzit*, and *Responsa Arugat HaBosem*, Orach Chaim 205) concerns those select concepts and commandments that the Torah has

distinguished with an imperative of “remember” (the *zekhirot*).

Authorities differ as to the precise count of these precepts, but they include prominently such concepts as Amalek, Shabbat, and the exodus from Egypt. And indeed these three find halakhic expression: we remember Amalek through the special *k’riat haTorah*; Shabbat through *kiddush* Friday night; and the exodus is mentioned twice a day in the third paragraph of *k’riat shema*.

However, one concept that appears to deserve inclusion seems to lack halakhic representation. The Torah commands: “Remember, do not forget, how you angered Hashem, your G-d, in the desert.” (*Devarim* 9:7). If so, how come no ritual or reading commemorates the incident of the golden calf? Should there not be an implementation in Jewish practice of this obligation?

Therefore, it is suggested, that perhaps this could indicate a source for a biblical obligation of Parashas Parah. Chazal perceived a linkage between the *mitzvah* of Parah Adumah and the sin of the golden calf. As Rashi quotes, “Let the mother come and clean up the soiling of the child”. The adult cow symbolizes the parent, and in atoning for the sin is “cleaning up” the mess of the calf.

Within that understanding, it may be posited that the sin of the calf is indeed commemorated, in an indirect manner. Rather than directly evoke the disgraceful episode of the golden calf, we chose a less embarrassing path, reading of the commandment that atones and not the transgression that incurred guilt.

Such a reading would reflect back on the very nature of the obligation of remembering the calf. The focus is not on the sin, but rather on the path back from impurity. The Torah wishes to impress upon the psyche that even in the aftermath of egregious moral failing the route of return remains open.

However, there were those who assumed a different theme in this commandment of remembering. Some suggest that we are told to constantly recall the instance of the calf as a cautionary measure. At the time of the sin, the Jewish people were on an extremely high level of spirituality, so close to the occasion of the giving of the Torah. At such a time, one may believe himself invulnerable to temptation or moral error, protected by a bubble of holiness. The incident of the calf must always be remembered to warn that no one is protected in that manner, and that descent to sin can happen whenever inadequate care is taken.

If that is the theme, then, it would seem that using the Parah Adumah as a reminder would be an ineffective method. It may represent atonement, perhaps, but the message of spiritual vigilance would be lacking.

However, it might be suggested that even this motif is present as well in the Parah Adumah. We are well aware of the central paradox of this commandment. At the same moment that it confers purity upon the impure, it incurs impurity on to the purifiers. From a straight logical perspective, this is confounding: is the Red Heifer a vehicle of purity, or of impurity?

It might be suggested that this is precisely where the warning of Parah Adumah lies. At times, one may feel on such a high level as to be invulnerable from stumbling. This could have been the mentality of the Jews at the time of the golden calf; at such a point in history, how could they sin? We are bidden to constantly remember this incident in order to remind us that no one is absolved of the responsibility of personal vigilance.

In its own way, the Parah Adumah makes this point as well. If one is involved in a religious activity, in a rite of purification, it might be assumed that one is insulated from any spiritual failing. Yet, we find that even this activity contains the elements of impurity. The message is clear: no context or activity is a spiritual guarantee; it is only through constant, careful, self-awareness that one can ensure that his behavior is actually a true expression of the *ratzon Hashem*.

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Jerusalem Post

A SINISTER PATTERN

Friday, July 1, 2011

The parshiyot of the Torah of this month reflect a depressing and sad pattern in Jewish public life. The pattern is based mainly in evil speech. It begins with the complaints of the people regarding the food in the desert and the evil speech against the gift of the manna that fed them for forty years in the wilderness. The complainers died horribly and the lesson of evil speech should have been taken to heart. Nonetheless, we then read of the conversation of Miriam and Aharon regarding Moshe's personal domestic life. Once more this is an instance of evil speech. Though their intentions may have been noble, and in their eyes even justified, the Lord punished Miriam publicly for initiating such a conversation. Again, the message should have been clear to the Jewish people – do not engage in evil speech, the Lord does not tolerate such a breach of etiquette and holy behavior. However, for some reason the message did not sink into the Jewish psyche of the time. Even great leaders did not yet internalize the destructive powers of evil speech. Thus the leaders of Israel who were sent forth by Moshe to explore the Land of Israel and report back upon its goodness and wonders spoke negatively about the land that God had promised to our ancestors and to us. The prohibition against evil speech is herewith expanded. One cannot say bad things not only about other humans. One cannot say bad things even upon inanimate objects such as the Land of Israel. Evil speech is evil speech and it damages the speaker surely as much as it does the subject of the evil speech. The fact that the Land of Israel is inanimate is really irrelevant to the issue of evil speech. Ultimately, when one speaks evilly about anything in God's world, indirectly one is speaking about the One Who is the creator of that person, object or place. And therefore evil speech is always evil speech no matter whom or what the subject of the speech may be. The Torah then continues with the story of Korach and his rebellion against Moshe and Aharon. Korach, Datan and Aviram, the instigators and ringleaders of the rebellion have terrible things to say about Moshe particularly and the Jewish state of affairs generally. In their twisted diatribe against Moshe, it is the land of Egypt that suddenly is the land of milk and honey and Moshe's intent is to destroy the Jewish people in the desert of Sinai or later in the Land of Israel. Though they couch their words in populist high-sounding sloganeering, their statements are again only pure evil speech, demagoguery of the worst sort. Having learned apparently nothing from the complainers over the manna, the fate of Miriam and the incident of the spies, they too are doomed to destruction because of this sin of evil speech. Evil speech wreaks terrible havoc amongst its perpetrators. But tragically, it always seems to live on in Jewish life and society, continually punishing everyone involved in it - victim, perpetrator and society at large. Then we read in the Torah of the champion of evil speech, Bilaam. His profession and means of supporting himself is evil speech. He is available for hire to curse and ridicule others. The Lord Himself, so to speak, has to intervene in order to prevent his nefarious scheme of cursing the people of Israel from taking hold or effect. Bilaam's words have a magical quality of literary beauty that envelops them. But they are poisonous and virulently so, evil speech incarnate. In the great literary storehouse of civilization there certainly is much beauty and genius. Tragically there is also much evil speech and base opinion. And as King Solomon noted in Kohelet: "Dead flies can make even the sweetest and most desirable ointments

repugnant." The harm done by evil speech has over and over again overcome any beauty or genius in the words of that literature. So Bilaam, like his predecessors before him dooms himself to punishment and death because of his intemperate violation of the prohibition against evil speech. We see that the entire pattern of the parshiyot of the Torah this month revolves itself about this cardinal issue of evil speech and its deleterious effects upon the nation of Israel. I feel this to be a very important lesson that we should take to heart in our current situation and society as well. The absence of evil speech will enhance every aspect of our personal and national lives. Shabat shalom. Berel Wein

Rabbi Wein 29 Sivan 5771 / 01 July 2011

Weekly Parsha

CHUKAT

Friday, July 1, 2011

This week's parsha points out to us the inscrutable face, so to speak, of God and the difficulties embedded in our relationship with the infinite. The parsha opens with the famous commandment and ritual of the red heifer, which according to Jewish tradition defies all human rational understanding. It is the ultimate "I told you to do it, so do it and don't ask any questions!" instruction in the Torah. The ritual defiles the pure and purifies the defiled. It is technical and detailed in the utmost and requires an unblemished animal of red color without black hairs appearing on its body. The Mishna in tractate Parah labors to ferret out all of the details inherent in this ritual but the basic mystery that underlies all discussion of the matter can never be satisfactorily addressed. We are brought face to face with the fact that finite humans cannot fathom the infinite Creator and truly understand His motives and reasons for the commandments of the Torah. The Torah warned us of this fact when it said: "... humans cannot see Me and live."

Our great teacher Moshe was rebuffed in his attempt to understand more than what mortals could achieve in understanding God's conduct, so to speak, in matters of this world. That is the great lesson of the red heifer – the clear divide between human rational understanding and the Divine will. It humbles us to think that there are things that we cannot understand, puzzles that we cannot solve, knots that we cannot unravel. But those are the facts of human existence. In this week's parsha we are witness to another event that is not easily understood. Moshe is barred from entry into the Land of Israel. Though the Torah gives us the reason that he smote the rock instead of speaking to it at Mei Merivah, the commentators to the Torah searched for more substantial reasons to justify the punishment of this great person for what apparently is a relatively minor offence. At the end of all of the explanations we are again faced with the reality that we just cannot understand the ways of the infinite Creator as He deals with humans. The men of the Enlightenment, both Jews and non-Jews, blinded by their own arrogance, rejected the Torah and eventually God since they could not rationally understand everything about it. Their motto was and is: "If I don't understand it then it does not exist or have relevance for me." But all of us, even the most knowledgeable and intelligent among us, know that there are mysteries in life that are beyond our ability to find a solution. Moshe's fate is certainly one of those mysteries. And again, that is the reason that the Torah tells us of this incident so that we, like Moshe, realize that we cannot peer beyond the veil of Heaven. The entire issue of the righteous suffering and the evildoers prospering gnaws at our faith and equilibrium. Yet the realization that we will never really understand these matters should serve as a solace and comfort for us. We must accept our finite state as we deal with the infinite Torah. Shabat shalom. Rabbi Berel Wein

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Come and make a Cheshbon

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"Regarding this, the poets ('hamoshlim') would say, come to Cheshbon" (Bamidbar 21:27). Chazal comment: "'hamoshlim' refers to those who rule over their evil inclinations, 'come to Cheshbon' means let us consider the account of the world; the loss incurred by the fulfillment of a Mitzvah against the reward secured by its observance, and the gain gotten by a transgression against the loss it involves (note: the literal meaning of the word 'cheshbon' is an account)" (Baba Batra 78b). What Chazal have not explained are the opening words of the pasuk: "al ken" "regarding this". Such an expression generally denotes a continuation of the previous sentence. What can be the nature of the relationship between this pasuk and the previous one: "For Chesbon - it was the city of Sichon, king of the Amorites; and he had warred against the first king of Moav and took all his land from his control until Arnon" (Bamidbar 21:26)? At first glance we see very little connection between these two subjects. The opening words "al ken", however tell us that there must be some sort of connection.

Let us for a moment elaborate on the contents of the previous pasuk in today's terms. Sichon has just defeated Moav. The media is filled with stories surrounding this great triumph over the mighty king of Moav - "Sichon today, through great military prowess defeated his arch-enemy. This defeat is bound to alter the face of the Middle East". What was truly behind this victory? Hashem caused Sichon to prevail over Moav in order that the Jewish nation be able to capture this same piece of land from Sichon. This roundabout manner was necessary, for we are commanded: "you shall not distress Moav and you shall not provoke war with them" (Devarim 2:9). The only way to capture the land, therefore was for another nation to defeat Moav and the Jewish people would then overcome that nation ("Amon and Moav were purified by Sichon" (Chullin 60b)).

Clearly, Hashem had an account to settle with each and every non-Jewish Moabite or Emorite who was killed in the battle. In addition, however, there was the overall plan to provide victory and to capture the land for the Jewish people. This is in fact how Chazal interpret the pasuk: "regarding this the 'moshlim' would say, 'come to Cheshbon'" - "regarding this - regarding that war which Sichon waged against Moav" (Rashi) - "let us consider the account of the world; the loss incurred by the fulfillment of a Mitzvah against the reward secured by its observance, and the gain gotten by a transgression against the loss it involves". It is from observing and studying this war that we conclude that although we may see "the wicked bloom like grass" (Tehillim 92:8) it is ultimately "to destroy them till eternity" (ibid.). The victory of the wicked is but temporary. How many of the great military campaigns carried out by those kings does anyone remember? The only war anyone remembers is that which is recorded in the Torah of the Jewish nation - Sichon defeated the king of Moav and the Jewish people ultimately defeated Sichon - only this remains for generations. The rest are "over and gone" (Shir HaShirim 2:11) - leaving no trace whatsoever.

"Bo-u Cheshbon" - come calculate - is it worth our while to align ourselves with the wicked who flourish only temporarily, or would we rather be among those "planted in the house of Hashem" (Tehillim 92:14), who "in the courtyards of our G-d they will flourish" (ibid.) - for eternity. If we view things from a short term perspective it would appear that the kingdom of Sichon is blossoming, but in the long run it became clear that the only purpose of this victory was to provide the Jewish nation with this land. "Al ken" - therefore - do not view anything in the short term, for you will be filled with questions: "why does the way of the wicked prosper" (Yirmiyahu 12:1). When viewing the greater picture, however, you may at times find answers to your questions - answers you could not have seen unless events are viewed in the context of history. Man does not live long enough to see things from this overall perspective, but when viewed in context of the history of the world the answers become clear.

If one were to ask me two hundred years ago what England did to merit ruling over such a large portion of the world (the atlases used to be full of British colonies in Africa, Asia, America, and Australia), I would not have been able to provide a clear answer. I would have responded that they probably did some Mitzvah and Hashem was rewarding them in this world. Only later, following World War I did it become clear what Hashem's intent was. The British Empire needed to be powerful in order to drive the Turks out of Eretz Yisrael, sign the Balfour Declaration, and bring the Jewish people back to the Land of Israel. They came short of carrying out this task to completion, but they did accomplish something. World War II showed us another purpose served by their empire. Had it not been for the British, Eretz Yisrael would have fallen to the hands of those wicked Germans, may their name be obliterated. At that time, the assistance of British colonies in places hardly heard of before or since such as Malta and Gibraltar, were required to save Eretz Yisrael from falling into the clutches of those evil

oppressors. In general, England played a large role in the defeat of the enemy. The truth is, however, once World War II ended hardly any remnant remained from the British Empire, only a few places remained under their rule, the rest had gained independence.

Even if with "short-sightedness" we do not understand the ways of Hashem, while at times the broader picture provides us with some answers, we cannot be aware of world history in its entirety, only of Hashem does it say "from the beginning I foretell the outcome" (Yeshayahu 46:10), and only He knows what should take place and what should not. What we understand - we understand, what we do not understand in this world will perhaps become clear during the period of the Moshiach.

The Torah tells us: "When Hashem will have judged His people, He shall relent regarding His servants, when He sees that enemy power progresses, and none is saved or assisted ... for I shall raise My hand to heaven and say 'as I live forever, if I sharpen My flashing sword and My hand grasps judgment, I shall return vengeance upon My enemies and upon those that hate Me shall I bring retribution'" (Devarim 32: 36,40-41). If you wonder why the enemies are prevailing, the answer is: "I shall return vengeance upon My enemies and upon those that hate Me shall I bring retribution, I shall intoxicate My arrows with blood and My sword shall devour flesh, because of the blood of corpse and captive, because of the earliest depredations of the enemy" [15] (ibid. 41-42). When Hashem will square up His account with the nations of the world, it will begin from "the earliest depredations of the enemy" - "from the beginning of the enemy's breaches, for when the Holy One, Blessed is He, takes His due from the nations, He takes into account against them, their sin and the sins of their ancestors from the beginning of the breach which they broke through against Israel" (Rashi). There will not be a single detail that is unaccounted for. The result will be "O nations - 'harminu' - sing the praises of His people, for He will avenge the blood of His servants, He will bring retribution upon His foes" (ibid. 43). Onkelos tells us that "harminu", they will praise - the other nations will be so impressed with the exactness of the judgement meted out against them - that they will sing Hashem's praises. Today there's a bomb, tomorrow some other terrorist act, unfortunately we hardly see any retribution for the atrocities wrought upon us. In the future, however, we will realize that judgment was always very exact. The Jewish people have, unfortunately received what they deserve, but the other nations will get what they deserve as well. Everything will be taken into account - a person who only shouted "Jude" will not be judged the same way as a person who also spat. Justice for the one who spat will not be the same as for the one who did other terrible things. Not a single act will escape notice - the preciseness of the justice will be clear to all. What is still beyond our comprehension even in the days of the Moshiach will perhaps become clear in the Next World. The Messilat Yescharim (perek 1), after all tells us that man was not created for this world but for his standing in the Next World. If so, a few questions, a few difficulties in understanding the goings on in this world is not that significant - it will become clear in the Next World! Some things may become clear in this world - during the period of the Moshiach.

We do not always understand why a small innocent child is killed in a terrorist incident, or why a young person dies, G-d forbid. There are many possible explanations. The man who died young, for example, may have descended from the house of Eli of whom it was decreed: "but there will be no old people in your family for all time ... and all those raised in your house will die as young men" (Shmuel I 2:32-33). One would have to trace his lineage back to many previous generations to know this. A person may die young because he was sent to this world as a "gilgul" - reincarnation of someone who had fulfilled most of his task in this world during his previous lifetime. Some simply accomplish in a short time what it takes others many more years to complete. The Talmud Yerushalmi (Brachot 2:8) tells of R' Bon who died at the young age of 28. R' Zeira eulogized him saying "R' Bon toiled in Torah for twenty eight years and accomplished that which an experienced Talmid Chacham could not accomplish in one hundred years". This does not imply that his Torah knowledge paralleled that of Rebbe or R' Yochanan ben Zakkai, but he accomplished what was expected of someone on his level and there was no longer reason for him to remain in this world, Hashem therefore immediately rewarded him with life in the Next World. The opposite may also be the case - Hashem may give a person extra years because he has not yet fulfilled the tikkun he was sent for!

Moshe Rabenu, after all, wrote an entire book - Iyov which deals with the idea of the suffering of the righteous while the wicked prosper - "righteous people for whom things are bad, wicked people for whom things are good" (Brachot 7a) - see Baba Batra 14b). One who studies the book of Iyov, however, does not emerge with a clear answer to this question. In the final analysis, Hashem's answer regarding his suffering is "do you know the time when the mountain goats give birth or anticipate the labor pains of the gazelle" (Iyov 39:1) you cannot hope to

understand, just as you cannot know precisely when the goat is supposed to give birth! This is but one of many of the ways of Hashem that you will never understand!

The verse in Tehillim states: "a boor cannot know, nor can a fool understand this" (Tehillim 92:7). We can grasp this using the following analogy. A person with less than a rudimentary understanding of astronomy, physics, and other sciences arrives at Cape Kennedy and is shown the launching pad from which the rockets are sent to the moon and other places. He points and says "I do not understand the function of this screw". How do we answer such a person? You fool! You do not understand what function this screw has? Do you understand anything else that is going on here? Do you realize what went into designing and building this in order that the rocket fire precisely towards its destination. "A boor cannot know, nor can a fool understand this" - there is NOTHING we understand of Hashem's ways, yet a fool will claim that he does not understand THIS - (one particular issue) - "why do the wicked bloom like grass". Hashem responds to Iyov - "you wish to understand why a tzaddik like you is suffering? Does this imply that you understand everything else? Obviously you do not, just add this to your list of question. What we have just said appears to be the final answer Hashem gives Iyov. The Ramban, however, tells us that a tzaddik like Iyov suffered because he was a "gilgul". He may not have sinned in this world, but he was placed here to correct the wrongs of his previous lifetime (see Ramban's commentary to Iyov 33:30).

The AR"l HaKadosh writes that Iyov was a "gilgul" of Terach (see Shaar HaGilgulim Introduction 36). Although Chazal tell us that Terach repented (see Rashi Bereishit 15:15), it would appear that he nevertheless had to suffer for handing his son over to Nimrod to be thrown into the furnace, and for causing his other son Haran to literally burn (see Rashi Bereishit 11:28). We are but guests in this world here for only a short stay - we may not be aware of our actions as a previous "gilgul", but Hashem certainly knows. Hashem sees until the end of generations and is well aware of what our actions were. Iyov's question of why "tzaddik vera lo" is no longer difficult - we cannot know for "our days upon the earth are but a shadow" (Iyov 8:9). The passing shadow appears in the west in the morning, in the east towards evening, and is almost non-existent in the middle of the day. At any given time we only observe its present location, we do not see the entire picture. If an artist was to paint a black stripe in the middle of a large picture, and someone were to question how this stripe adds to the beauty of the picture, he would respond: "wait until I complete the picture, only then will you understand what its purpose is". When focusing on one point only, we see no beauty. If we view it, however, as part of a greater painting with a street scene or a landscape, then we can understand its purpose. When we view only part of the picture we have many questions, when looking at the overall painting, all the questions cease to exist.

HaRav David Auerbach zt"l, brother of the Rav, lost a son in a terrorist act that took place in Bayit Vegan (in 5738). I went to make a condolence call during the Shiva and rather than my comforting him, I felt that it was I who was being comforted. He told the following story: The Ramban had a dearly beloved student who took ill. The Ramban gave him a special amulet telling him "know - when you leave this world, this amulet will gain you entry into all the gates of the heavens until the last one - the Heavenly tribunal in which the Shchina Himself presides. When you enter that final gate I want you to ask a number of major questions I have regarding the Jewish nation". The Ramban gave him the list of questions and asked that the student appear to him in a dream with the answers. The student died from his illness and a short while later he appeared to the Ramban in a dream. He told his Rebbe that indeed the amulet had gained him entrance to all the gates of heaven and he was able to rise all the way to the top, yet when it came time to ask his Rebbe's questions he immediately realized that in the "Olam HaEmet" the questions were suddenly gone. In the Next World there is only truth and justice (see Yalkut Me-Am Loez to Sefer Shoftim page 81). Only in this world are there things that are difficult to understand, in the World to Come there are no questions and thus there was nothing left to ask.

The Chafetz Chaim had a beautiful analogy of his own. A traveler was once required to spend Shabbat in a strange place. Shabbat morning he arrived at the Synagogue and noticed that the Gabbai was apportioning the aliyot in a seemingly random order - Shlishi to the man in one row, Revii to the man on the other end, etc. He could not contain his bewilderment and approached the Gabbai asking him would it not be simpler to make some sort of order - for instance to give all the aliyot to those sitting in the first row this Shabbat, the next row on next Shabbat, etc. The Gabbai explained to his visitor that he had a basic misunderstanding of how the Minyan operated. Had he attended this Synagogue regularly he would have known that the man who was given Shlishi, for example, has *yahrzeit*, while someone else had a Bar Mitzvah - all the aliyot were given for a particular reason. We do not readily understand Hashem's ways in this world for we are only passing

through - we do not know what took place in previous generations nor what the future has in store. Hashem exists for eternity - "after all has ceased to be, He the awesome one will reign alone", and He knows all that happened in the past. Only in this context can the goings on of the world be fully understood.

Chazal tell us "this world from which we must eventually depart is like a wedding celebration" (Erubin 54a). A wedding begins and ends within a short period of time - "grab and eat, grab and drink" (ibid.), for "our days upon the earth are but a shadow". Life is very short and we have little time to eat, for soon the wedding feast will come to an end and the waiters will begin clearing the table. Chazal, of course, do not mean for us to seize all the ice cream we can in this world! Chazal are telling us that now is the time to grab as many Mitzvot and good deeds as possible, for "whoever does not toil on the eve of Shabbat (i.e. in this world) from where will he eat on Shabbat (i.e. in the next world) (Avoda Zara 3a). Moshiach may come at any day and we will no longer have the opportunity to fulfill Mitzvot - the time to avail ourselves of this is now! Chazal describe the period of the Moshiach as "years of which you will say 'I have no desire for them'" (Kohelet 12:1 - see Shabbat 151b). Do we have no desire for the arrival of the Moshiach? Do we not pray daily for his arrival? What Chazal mean is that during that time man will not have much free choice and thus the reward for Mitzvah observance will not be as great. Now is the time to "grab and eat", when there is free choice and thus a greater reward.

The story is told that shortly before his passing, the Vilna Gaon grabbed hold of his tzitzit and began to cry. His students asked: Rebbe why are you crying, in only a short time you will be able to sit among all the great tzaddikim in Gan Eden, is this not cause for joy? Explained the Gr"a: I am crying for I am about to depart from this world where for a mere few kopecks I can fulfill the Mitzvah of tzitzit, whereas in the world I am about to enter, even all the gold and silver will not enable me to observe a single Mitzvah! (see Aliyot Eliyahu footnote 117). The Gr"a spent his entire life seeking out the opportunity to observe more Mitzvot, to serve Hashem. He was devastated over the fact that he was about to leave the only world in which he can truly serve Hashem. Although his destination was a world in which Hashem will reward him, he can no longer serve the A-lmighty there. In the World to Come we only receive Hashem's good, while in this world we give as well. There may be many tzaddikim in the Next World working and praying on our behalf, but the essence of the Next World is to receive. The Gr"a cried over the prospect of leaving a world in which he has the opportunity to give, to serve Hashem by wearing tzitzit or fulfilling any one of a host of Mitzvot, for a world in which serving Hashem is impossible.

There is another aspect to this world. In addition to learning Torah and observing Mitzvot, we are here to work on our character - to perfect our middot. The Rambam writes: "Do not say that tshuva only applies to sins of actions, such as illicit relations, theft, and robbery. Rather, just as one must repent for these sins, one must search his thoughts, and repent from such negative character traits as: anger, animosity, jealousy, and mockery, from pursuit of money and honor, and being obsessed with food. One must repent for everything. Returning from these sins is more difficult than from actions as it also says: 'Let the wicked one forsake his way and the iniquitous man his thoughts, let him return to Hashem' (Yeshayahu 55:7) (Rambam Hilchot Tshuva 7:3). Not only must we work on our actions but on our character traits as well. If one were to meticulously observe the laws of Shabbat, Kashrut, Tefillin, and tzdaka, yet not be of good character, then he has to work on remedying this.

Where are we commanded regarding our middot? A small number of negative character traits are mentioned in the Torah, but the vast majority of them merit no specific mention. R' Chaim Vital (Shaarei Kedusha volume 1, shaar 2) explains that the Torah has no explicit commandment regarding one's middot, because good character is "the basic preparation for the 613 Mitzvot". Before even approaching Torah learning, one must have good middot. The Torah did not command us to have good middot because the Torah refers only to people of good character. It is true that the Torah serves to purify and improve our character, yet the basic foundation must exist before one sits down to learn. One of man's tasks in this world is to work on his middot, for only with good character can one's soul serve as a receptacle for the G-dly light of the Next World. A soul with a defect is of no use, for of what use is all the good the Next World has to offer if the only vessel you have with which to receive it contains holes - whatever is placed in it will flow right out through the holes. If a person with a less than sterling character was placed in Gan Eden, there would be nothing there for him to enjoy, for his defective soul would be unable to contain the G-dly light. It is in this world that we must prepare ourselves to receive all the good of the Next World by working on our middot.

The Rishonim wonder why it is that if the Next World is one of the foundations of our belief, there is no mention of it in the Torah. There is only an allusion - "so

that it will be good with you' (Devarim 22:7) - so that it will be good with you to the world that is entirely good, 'so that your days will be lengthened' (Devarim 5:16) - so that it will be long to the world that is entirely long" (Kiddushin 39b). There are two explanations offered by the Rishonim. At first glance these answers would appear contradictory, yet a further analysis will show that in fact they complement each other. One answer is that the whole concept of life in the Next World is something very deep that is beyond our comprehension. Just as we would find it difficult to describe the beauty of a painting to one who was blind from birth, there are no tools with which the Torah can explain to us what life in the Next World is about. Another answer is that had the Torah described to us the true meaning and implication of life in the Next World, we would have such desire for it that we would not perform any Mitzvot "lishma" but only for the sake of being rewarded.

At first glance it would appear that these are contradictory explanations, for if we do not have the tools to perceive it, how can we covet it? Yet in truth the ideas complement each other. The state of our souls at the present is such that we cannot begin to fathom what life in the Next World is about. Even, however, had Hashem created man differently, in such a way that understanding of the Next World is within our grasp, we would have such a desire for it that we would not be able to speak of observing Mitzvot "lishma". In spite of this, we must understand that the Next World is a lofty ideal that is beyond our complete understanding. We must also know that each Mitzvah we observe brings us closer to Olam Haba, while every sin distances us further from it.

What, after all is the purpose of the Next World? To bring us to a clear recognition that "Hashem is our G-d, Hashem is the One and Only" (Devarim 6:4). We, of course, believe it even in this world - we pronounce twice daily "Shma Yisrael Hashem Elokenu Hashem Echad". In spite of this - "on that day Hashem will be One and His Name will be One" (Zecharia 14:9) - today we can only believe in it. In the Next World we will see it clearly. This recognition will grow stronger and stronger and penetrate us deeper and deeper. This is the delight of the Next World we must strive for.

Although Chazal tell us "Be not like servants who serve their master for the sake of receiving a reward" (Avot 1:3), we pray daily "may we merit that we live and see and inherit goodness and blessing in the years of Messianic times and for the life of the World to Come". If we are told not to serve Hashem for the sake of a reward, why do we pray for life in the Next World? One possible explanation is that the prayer for life in the Next World is not on our behalf but on behalf of our fellow Jew. I am not serving Hashem for the sake of a reward, but I pray that my fellow Jews inherit the blessings of the time of the Moshiach and the World to Come. If I also happen to merit these wonderful rewards that would be fantastic, yet this is not what I am praying for. Kavana such as this does not stem from a desire for reward but is based on my love for my fellow Jews - just as I daven that Hashem provide others with physical well being, I pray for their spiritual life as well.

What we have just stated does not appear to be the simple meaning of this daily tefilla. The words appear to be referring to ourselves as well as others. Tosafot offer another explanation (see Avoda Zara 19a "al menat"): the prohibition against serving Hashem for the sake of reward is only if he makes it a "tnai kaful" - a two sided condition. In our case this would mean stating "if I am rewarded that would be great, if I am not rewarded then I regret any good deeds I may have done until now". Asking to be rewarded with life in the Next World is a one-sided condition, and although it may be serving Hashem for the sake of a reward, it is not a violation of "Be not like servants who serve their master for the sake of receiving a reward". (This view of Tosafot is consistent with the view of the Rambam that the term "al menat" "for the sake of" always implies a "tnai kaful" - see Rambam Hilchot Ishut 6:17). We can now explain that when we pray "may we merit that we live and see and inherit goodness and blessing in the years of Messianic times and for the life of the World to Come", we are not including the other side of the condition - that should we not be rewarded, G-d forbid, we regret all that we have done. We are simply praying that we would like to be rewarded for all the good we have done.

In my humble opinion we can offer another answer to this question. There are two possible reasons for accepting the gifts of another - 1) I value the gift and want it for myself, and 2) by being the recipient of this gift I am respecting the giver who wishes to honor me with his gift - it would be insulting to him should I refuse to accept what he wishes to give me. In the first case I am "taking" the gift, while in the second case by receiving I am in fact "giving", for I am giving pleasure to the one giving me the gift. The Gemara relates how certain amoraim would refuse an invitation to dine at the house of the Reish Galuta, claiming "one who hates gifts will live" (Mishle 15:27). Other Amoraim, however, would accept the invitation claiming that they were honoring him with their presence that he requested (see Megilla 28a).

Hashem wishes to shower us with good. The entire purpose of the creation, after all is only to provide for us and the best thing He can give us is life in the Next

World. We see much of the A-lmighty's good in this world as well, yet the main goal of the creation is for man to be able to delight in the radiance of the Divine Presence (see Messilat Yesharim chapter 1). The only true place this can be accomplished is in the Next World. If so, when we pray that we merit the times of Moshiach and life in the Next World, we are praying that the will of Hashem be fulfilled. Hashem, after all, wishes to provide us with good. One who has in mind that Hashem's will be fulfilled by providing us with life is not simply asking for reward but is serving Hashem, just as at times we accept gifts from others as a means of honoring them.

We bless Hashem one hundred times daily - "baruch ata Hashem". What can we possibly bless Hashem with? We can bless a human being with wisdom, wealth, health, and longevity. Can we say the same of Hashem. Can we bless Him with longevity? His years are endless! Can we bless Him with wealth? Not only does He have no need for it, all the gold and silver in the world is already His. If it does not suffice, He can create more. Can we bless Him with wisdom? Any wisdom we may have comes from Him! There does not appear much that we have to offer that would be of any use to Him. There is one thing, however, that we can bless Hashem with - that His will be fulfilled in this world. Hashem wishes to provide good for all of His creatures, although this includes the entire world, He mainly wishes to provide for the Jewish nation.

The blessing we can give Hashem is that the world be run in accordance with His will - that He have the ability to shower His creations with good as He wishes and that the world be one filled with chesed - "May only goodness and kindness pursue me all the days of my life" (Tehillim 23:6). This would mean the revelation of His honor - that which Hashem truly wants and the one blessing we can provide for Him.