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from: Destiny Foundation/Rabbi Berel Wein <info@jewishdestiny.com>

reply-to: info@jewishdestiny.com

subject: Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein

Home Weekly Parsha EKEV 5781

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

In this week's portion, the Torah seemingly indicates that there is a simple formula for Jewish life and success while living in the land of Israel. If we follow the commandments of God and observe the laws of the Torah, the Jewish people will be showered with physical blessings of health, longevity, and prosperity. And if the Jewish people, for whatever reasons, chooses to deviate from the service of God, then physical calamities will befall them. A literal reading of the Torah portion would certainly bring the reader or student to this conclusion. And yet, this understanding, i.e., observance of the commandments as the determining factor in achieving blessings and success in life in this world, flies in the face of the famous victim of the rabbis of the Talmud, that states that a reward for observing the commandments does not really exist in this world.

If that is the case, then what are we to make of the obviously literal lesson that this week's Torah portion seemingly teaches us? If reward and punishment are not to be based upon the performance of the commandments,

then what does the Torah really mean to teach us? These issues and questions have been raised by the scholars and commentators for many centuries. As one can well imagine, there are several different approaches to this question. All of them are worthy of mention, but in this short essay, I will restrict myself to one of the central ideas advanced regarding this problem.

The promises advanced by the Torah for the observance of the commandments is not meant as a reward, so much as it is intended to be a natural consequence of good behavior and enduring faith. True reward and permanent blessings are rare events in human existence. Many times, a person rejoices when having, what he or she believes, to be a stroke of good luck. Unfortunately, just as often in life, it turns out that the good luck was not so good after all. And the same thing is true in reverse. Many times, we are discouraged by events that occurred to us, only to later see, in the fullness of time, that we should be grateful for that experience. Heaven uses a different measure of goodness and reward than the one that we use in this world.

We all pray for length of life and longevity of years. However, we have learned that our father Abraham, who was apparently scheduled to live for 180 years, passed away five years prematurely. The Talmud saw this as a blessing, so that he would not be alive when his grandson Esau began his sinful rampage of murder and rape. Standards of reward and punishment that are exhibited by heavenly judgment are beyond human comprehension and understanding. And the rewards of heaven are eternal, while all the good or benefit in this world is always temporary. Therefore, it is indeed possible to say that reward and punishment are truly not present in this world.

Shabbat shalom Rabbi Berel Wein

from: Rabbi Sacks <info@rabbisacks.org>

subject: Covenant and Conversation

To Lead is to Listen (Eikev 5781)

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

"If only you would listen to these laws..." (Deut. 7:12). These words with which our parsha begins contain a verb that is a fundamental motif of the book of Devarim. The verb is sh-m-a. It occurred in last week's parsha in the most famous line of the whole of Judaism, Shema Yisrael. It occurs later in this week's parsha in the second paragraph of the Shema, "It shall be if you surely listen [shamo'a tishme'u]" (Deut. 11:13). In fact, this verb appears no less than 92 times in Devarim as a whole.

We often miss the significance of this word because of what I call the fallacy of translatability: the assumption that one language is fully translatable into another. We hear a word translated from one language to another and assume that it means the same in both. But often it doesn't. Languages are only partially translatable into one another.[1] The key terms of one civilization are often not fully reproducible in another. The Greek word megalopsychos, for example, Aristotle's "great-souled man" who is great and knows he is, and carries himself with aristocratic pride, is untranslatable into a moral system like Judaism in which humility is a virtue. The English word "tact" has no precise equivalent in Hebrew. And so on.

This is particularly so in the case of the Hebrew verb sh-m-a. Listen, for example, to the various ways the opening words of this week's parsha have been translated into English:

If you hearken to these precepts...

If you completely obey these laws...

If you pay attention to these laws...

If you heed these ordinances...

Because ye hear these judgments...

There is no single English word that means to hear, to listen, to heed, to pay attention to, and to obey. Sh-m-a also means "to understand," as in the story of the tower of Babel, when God says, "Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand [yishme'u] each other" (Gen. 11:7).

As I have argued elsewhere, one of the most striking facts about the Torah is that, although it contains 613 commands, it does not contain a word that means “to obey.” When such a word was needed in modern Hebrew, the verb *le-tzayet* was borrowed from Aramaic. The verb used by the Torah in place of “to obey” is *sh-m-a*. This is of the highest possible significance. It means that blind obedience is not a virtue in Judaism. God wants us to understand the laws He has commanded us. He wants us to reflect on why this law, not that. He wants us to listen, to reflect, to seek to understand, to internalise and to respond. He wants us to become a listening people.

Ancient Greece was a visual culture, a culture of art, architecture, theatre and spectacle. For the Greeks generally, and Plato specifically, knowing was a form of seeing. Judaism, as Freud pointed out in *Moses and Monotheism*,^[2] is a non-visual culture. We worship a God who cannot be seen; and making sacred images, icons, is absolutely forbidden. In Judaism we do not see God; we hear God. Knowing is a form of listening. Ironically, Freud himself, deeply ambivalent though he was about Judaism, invented the listening cure in psychoanalysis: listening as therapy.^[3]

It follows that in Judaism listening is a deeply spiritual act. To listen to God is to be open to God. That is what Moses is saying throughout *Devarim*: “If only you would listen.” So it is with leadership – indeed with all forms of interpersonal relationship. Often the greatest gift we can give someone is to listen to them.

Viktor Frankl, who survived Auschwitz and went on to create a new form of psychotherapy based on “man’s search for meaning,” once told the story of a patient of his who phoned him in the middle of the night to tell him, calmly, that she was about to commit suicide. He kept her on the phone for two hours, giving her every conceivable reason to live. Eventually she said that she had changed her mind and would not end her life. When he next saw the woman he asked her which of his many reasons had persuaded her to change her mind. “None,” she replied. “Why then did you decide not to commit suicide?” She replied that the fact that someone was prepared to listen to her for two hours in the middle of the night convinced her that life was worth living after all.^[4]

As Chief Rabbi I was involved in resolving a number of highly intractable *agunah* cases, situations in which a husband was unwilling to give his wife a *get* so that she could remarry. We resolved all these cases not by legal devices but by the simple act of listening: deep listening, in which we were able to convince both sides that we had heard their pain and their sense of injustice. This took many hours of total concentration and a principled absence of judgment and direction. Eventually our listening absorbed the acrimony and the two sides were able to resolve their differences together. Listening is intensely therapeutic.

Before I became Chief Rabbi, I was head of our rabbinical training seminary, Jews’ College. There in the 1980s we ran one of the most advanced practical rabbinics programmes ever devised. It included a three-year programme in counselling. The professionals we recruited to run the course told us that they had one precondition. We had to agree to take all the participants away to an enclosed location for two days. Only those who were willing to do this would be admitted to the course. We did not know in advance what the counsellors were planning to do, but we soon discovered. They planned to teach us the method pioneered by Carl Rogers known as ‘non-directive’ or ‘person-centred’ therapy. This involves active listening and reflective questioning, but no guidance on the part of the therapist.

As the nature of the method became clear, the Rabbis began to object. It seemed to oppose everything they stood for. To be a Rabbi is to teach, to direct, to tell people what to do. The tension between the counsellors and the Rabbis grew almost to the point of crisis, so much so that we had to stop the course for an hour while we sought some way of reconciling what the counsellors were doing with what the Torah seemed to be saying. That is when we began to reflect, for the first time as a group, on the spiritual dimension of listening, of *Shema Yisrael*.

The deep truth behind person-centred therapy is that listening is the key virtue of the religious life. That is what Moses was saying throughout *Devarim*. If we want God to listen to us, we have to be prepared to listen to Him. And if we learn to listen to Him, then we eventually learn to listen to our fellow humans: the silent cry of the lonely, the poor, the weak, the vulnerable, the people in existential pain.

When God appeared to King Solomon in a dream and asked him what he would like to be given, Solomon replied: *lev shome’a*, literally “a listening heart” to judge the people (1 Kings 3:9). The choice of words is significant. Solomon’s wisdom lay, at least in part, in his ability to listen, to hear the emotion behind the words, to sense what was being left unsaid as well as what was said. It is common to find leaders who speak, very rare to find leaders who listen. But listening often makes the difference.

Listening matters in a moral environment as insistent on human dignity as Judaism. The very act of listening is a form of respect. To illustrate this, I would like to share a story with you. The royal family in Britain is known always to arrive on time and depart on time. I will never forget the occasion – her aides told me that they had never witnessed it before – when the Queen stayed for two hours longer than her scheduled departure time. The day was 27 January 2005, the occasion, the sixtieth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. The Queen had invited survivors to a reception at St James’ Palace. Each had a story to tell, and the Queen took the time to listen to every one of them. One after another came up to me and said, “Sixty years ago I did not know whether tomorrow I would be alive, and here I am talking to the Queen.” That act of listening was one of the most royal acts of graciousness I have ever witnessed. Listening is a profound affirmation of the humanity of the other.

In the encounter at the Burning Bush, when God summoned Moses to be a leader, Moses replied, “I am not a man of words, not yesterday, not the day before, not from the first time You spoke to Your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue” (Ex. 4:10). Why would God choose a man who found it difficult to speak to lead the Jewish people? Perhaps because one who cannot speak learns how to listen.

A leader is one who knows how to listen: to the unspoken cry of others and to the still, small voice of God.

fw from hamelaket@gmail.com

from: Rabbi Chanan Morrison <chanan@ravkooktorah.org>

to: rav-kook-list@googlegroups.com

subject: [Rav Kook Torah]

**Eikev: Balancing Torah and Work
Rav Kook Toah**

Constant Torah Study?

What is the ideal? Should we strive to dedicate ourselves totally to Torah study? Or should we divide our time between Torah study and an occupation?

The Sages debated this issue on the basis of an apparent contradiction between two verses. On the one hand, we are exhorted to study Torah constantly:

“This book of Torah shall not depart from your mouth; you shall meditate in them day and night” (Joshua 1:8).

Yet, the Torah also says, “You shall gather your grains, your wine and your oil” (Deut. 11:14) - implying that we should occupy ourselves with working the land and a livelihood. Which is correct?

Rabbi Ishmael explained that the verse exhorting constant Torah study cannot be taken literally. The second verse teaches us that one should combine the study of Torah with a worldly occupation. Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, however, disagreed:

“Can it be that a person will plow and plant and harvest and mill and winnow, each labor in its season? What will become of Torah? Rather, when Israel fulfills God’s will, their work will be performed by others ... And when

Israel does not fulfill God's will, they must perform their own labor." (Berachot 35b)

The Nature of the Human Soul

According to Rashi, both scholars agreed that the ideal is full-time Torah study. Rabbi Ishmael, however, took a pragmatic stand that it is better to have a livelihood and not be dependent on charity.

But Rav Kook explained that the disagreement is not a matter of practicality versus an ideal state. Rather, they disagreed about the nature of the human soul and its spiritual capabilities.

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai held that the human soul is meant to be continually occupied with intellectual and spiritual pursuits. If necessary, we may be forced to deal with mundane matters, but such activity is, in fact, beneath our true potential. The human soul is so elevated that it can only be satisfied with total dedication to study and contemplation.

Thus, the command that "This book of Torah shall not depart from your mouth" should be understood literally. It applies to the complete human being who has not become soiled by sin. Some people may feel a weakness in spirit due to excessive study, but this frailty is only due to flaws in character. As the Jewish people perfect themselves, their work will be performed by others, and their sole desire will be to dedicate themselves to knowing God and His ways.

Rabbi Ishmael, on the other hand, felt that human nature is a composite of both theoretical and practical inclinations. According to his view, to occupy oneself with worldly matters in the proper measure is not just a concession to the current state of the world; rather, it meets an innate need of our inner makeup. Rabbi Ishmael came to this conclusion through his observation that most people are not satisfied to spend their days only in study and spiritual pursuits.

Who Was Right?

The Talmud records that many followed the advice of Rabbi Ishmael, and it worked well for them. Those who followed Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, on the other hand, were not successful.

There may be a select few who feel they are destined for greatness and are happy to delve constantly in wisdom and Torah. However, the Torah was not given to angels; its teachings must be suitable for the majority of people.

While it is difficult to determine the true capacity of the human soul, we can ascertain from empirical evidence that what works for most people is indicative of humanity's true inner nature. Many followed Rabbi Ishmael's counsel and found satisfaction in both their Torah study and their material accomplishments, while those following Rabbi Shimon's opinion felt less successful, due to an internal resistance to constant Torah study. This indicates that Rabbi Ishmael's assessment of human nature is accurate for the vast majority of people. Rabbi Shimon's outlook is only valid for the select few who are blessed with rare spiritual gifts.

The Right Balance

Having ascertained that for most people it is preferable to combine Torah study with an occupation, we still need to determine the proper balance between Torah and work. How should we divide our time and effort between them?

The Talmud (Berachot 35b) made the following observation:

"See what a difference there is between the earlier and the later generations. Earlier generations made the study of Torah their main concern and their livelihood secondary to it, and both prospered in their hands. Later generations made their livelihood their main concern and their Torah study secondary, and neither prospered in their hands."

Even in worldly matters, one's sense of contentment and happiness is influenced by his spiritual state. A person who has acquired virtuous character traits, a strong faith and an awe of heaven is protected against many of the aspects of life that can lead one astray and that make life's burdens so difficult. Such a person is content with his portion in life. For this reason, the earlier generations who made Torah study and ethical pursuits

their principal concern, were successful in both their spiritual and material endeavors.

However, one who has not properly developed his ethical nature, since he concentrated all of his energy on his livelihood, will never be content with what he has acquired. His flawed character traits will lead him to chase after ill-advised cravings. Even if he succeeds in amassing great wealth, he will not be satisfied and will never feel true peace of mind.

Quality, not Quantity

Rav Kook concluded with a very significant comment. The amount of time devoted to a particular activity is not the sole factor in determining that this is our main pursuit in life. What truly matters is our mindset. That which we consider to be the central focus of our life, even if we are unable to devote most of our time to it, constitutes our principal activity.

(Gold from the Land of Israel (now available in paperback), pp. 310-313. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. II pp. 173-175.)

from: Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff <ymkaganoff@gmail.com>

to: kaganoff-a@googlegroups.com

How much must I Bensch?

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question:

I mistakenly recited al hamichyah, when I was required to bensch. Am I now required to bensch?

Introduction

Prior to answering our opening question, we need to review many of the basic laws of brachos after eating, and their sources, which will help us understand the topic at hand. Parshas Eikev opens by teaching that when we observe all of Hashem's mitzvos, we will be rewarded with a beautiful land. Shortly afterwards, the Torah continues: Ki Hashem Elokecha me'viacha el eretz tovah... eretz chitah u'se'orah vegefen u'se'einah verimon eretz zeis shemen u'devash. Eretz asher lo bemiskeinus tochal bah lechem, lo sechsar kol bah. "For Hashem, your G-d, is bringing you to a good land... a land of wheat and barley, grape vines, figs and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey. A land where you will eat bread without poverty; you will be missing nothing" (Devorim 8:7-9).

Bensching in the Torah

The Torah then continues: Ve'achalta ve'savata uveirachta es Hashem Elokecha al ha'aretz hatovah asher nosan loch, "And when you eat and are satisfied, you shall bless Hashem, your G-d, for the good land that He gave you." This wording implies that we are required to bensch min haTorah only when a person has eaten enough to be fully satisfied, and this is the halachic opinion of most, but not all, rishonim. This law has halachic ramifications for someone who is uncertain whether he has a requirement to recite bensching. This uncertainty might be due to the fact that he does not remember if he bensch, or he was delayed and does not know if he has missed the time in which he can still bensch. When his doubt involves a possible Torah requirement, the rule is safeik de'oraysa lechumra, and he should recite bensching. However, if his question is regarding a rabbinic requirement, then the rule is safeik brachos lehakeil, and he does not recite the bracha acharonah. According to most rishonim, someone who ate a full meal and now is uncertain whether he is required to bensch should do so. If he ate less than a full meal, he does not bensch in case of doubt.

The requirement to recite a bracha acharonah after eating a snack is only midrabbanan. Therefore, if someone has a doubt whether he is required to recite this bracha, he does not, because of the rule of safeik brachos lehakeil.

Three aspects

The wording of the posuk that we should bless Hashem al ha'aretz hatovah asher nosan loch, "for the good land that He gave you," implies that, in addition to thanking Hashem for providing us with sustenance, our bensching must include a reference to Hashem granting us Eretz Yisroel. Furthermore, the Gemara (Brachos 48b) derives that bensching must include reference to Yerushalayim and the Beis Hamikdash. These three aspects are

represented in the first three brachos that we recite in our bensching. The first bracha is thanks for the fact that Hashem provides us, and the entire world, with food and sustenance. The second bracha praises Him for having given us Eretz Yisroel; and the third bracha is for the special gift of Yerushalayim and the Beis Hamikdash. Since, unfortunately, the Beis Hamikdash is now destroyed, the third bracha emphasizes our plea that Hashem have mercy on the land and rebuild it.

The Gemara explains that Moshe established the first bracha of bensching when the man first fell in the desert, Yehoshua established the second bracha of bensching when the Jews entered Eretz Yisroel, and Dovid Hamelech and Shelomoh Hamelech established the third bracha of bensching – Dovid establishing the reference to Yisroel and Yerushalayim, and Shelomoh adding the reference to the Beis Hamikdash (Brachos 48b).

Borei Nefashos

As we are all aware, other than the full bensching, there are two forms of bracha acharonah that we recite after we eat. One is a short bracha that begins with the words borei nefashos, which we recite after eating foods not mentioned in the above pesukim, including, but not exclusively, items upon which we recite the brachos of shehakol and ha'adamah. According to all opinions, this bracha is required only because of a takkanas chachomim, but is not included under the Torah's mitzvah.

Bracha mei'ein shalosh

The other bracha, colloquially referred to as al hamichyah, is called in halachic sources bracha mei'ein shalosh, literally, a bracha that abbreviates three. This is because this bracha acharonah includes all three of the themes that are included in the posuk, similar to the full bensching. The difference is that in al hamichyah, each theme does not have its own separate bracha, whereas in the full bensching that we recite after eating bread, each theme does.

There are three types of bracha mei'ein shalosh. We recite most frequently al hamichyah, the version that is said after eating grain products other than bread. This bracha is derived from the fact that the Torah praises Eretz Yisroel as "a land of wheat and barley." Although there are also three other grains upon which we recite al hamichyah, namely spelt, rye and oats, these three are considered halachically as sub-categories of wheat and barley. The second version of bracha mei'ein shalosh, al ha'eitz, is recited after eating olives, dates, grapes, figs, and pomegranates, all of which are also included in these pesukim. The order I chose, which has halachic significance, is not the order of the posuk, but reflects the proximity of each fruit to the word eretz in the posuk.

Although dates are not mentioned explicitly, the honey referred to in the posuk is date honey, not bee honey. (Silan, or date syrup, often used today as a natural, although not dietetic, sweetener, is similar to date honey. Silan is usually produced by cooking dates into syrup, whereas date honey in earlier days was produced simply by crushing dates.)

The third version of the bracha mei'ein shalosh is recited after drinking wine or grape juice, also alluded to in the posuk as the product of grapes. This is the only instance in which we recite bracha mei'ein shalosh after consuming a beverage. It is a reflection of the prominence we give wine, also evidenced by such mitzvos as kiddush and havdalah, and the fact that wine is used for such ceremonies as weddings, sheva brachos, brissin and pidyon haben.

These three versions are not mutually exclusive. Someone who ate grain products and fruit includes both texts in his bracha, as does someone who ate grain products and wine. Someone who ate all three "special" foods recites a bracha that includes all three references.

We should note that, since the Torah mentions all these varieties of food, there are rishonim who contend that the requirement to recite a bracha after consuming them is min haTorah. There are many halachic ramifications that result from this issue; however, that sub-topic requires its own article.

Fourth bracha

Our full bensching also has a fourth bracha, which is usually referred to as Hatov vehameitiv, which was added to the bensching by Chazal after the

destruction that took place in Beitar, two generations after the churban (Brachos 48b). We will leave discussing the details of that topic for a different time, but I want to point out that this explains why this theme is not mentioned in the bracha of al hamichyah. When Chazal added this bracha, they added it only to the full bensching and not to the abbreviated version that is al hamichyah.

Harachaman

Common custom is to add a long list of general requests (Avudraham, Seder Birchas Hamazon) followed by a recital of several pesukim, after the fourth bracha of bensching. The origin for this practice is a passage of Gemara (Brachos 46a) that quotes a text that a guest should recite to bless his host. There, the Gemara quotes a basic bracha and then notes that others added to it. Based on this background, the Rambam (Hilchos Brachos 2:7) teaches that a guest can freely add to this blessing, and this has generated various additional texts to this bracha.

In his monumental work, Even Ha'azel, Rav Isser Zalman Meltzer notes that, according to the Rambam, the prayer of the guest for the host is an addendum to the fourth bracha of bensching. It would appear that, in the Rambam's opinion, a person should not answer "amen" when a guest recites the words leolam al yechasreinu, since he has not yet completed his bracha until he blesses the host. This approach is not accepted, practically. The opinion of other halachic authorities (Avudraham, Seder Birchas Hamazon) as well as prevailing custom is to recite the blessing for the host a bit later in the bensching, after other prayers beginning with word Harachaman have already been expressed.

With time, many other requests were added to the bensching. Some individuals follow the practice of the Gra and recite these prayers only on weekdays, but not on Shabbos and Yom Tov when we generally do not make personal prayer requests, although the accepted halachic practice is to recite these prayers and blessings on Shabbos, also.

Three brachos or one?

We noted above that the Torah requires the mention of three topics in our bensching, (1) thanks for sustenance, (2) thanks for the Land of Israel, and (3) a prayer for Yerushalayim and the Beis Hamikdash. However, it is disputed whether the Torah requires that each of these three themes have its own bracha, and that bensching min haTorah must contain at least three different brachos, or whether the Torah requirement is fulfilled by reciting one bracha that emphasizes the three different themes, and reciting three different brachos is only a rabbinic requirement.

There are several differences in practical halacha that result from this dispute. One obvious difference is that, although one is certainly required to recite all the brachos of bensching, according to one approach, this requirement is only midrabbanan, whereas, according to the other approach, reciting three brachos is required min haTorah. We will soon see other halachic differences that result from this dispute.

This question, whether bensching min haTorah must contain at least three different brachos, or whether the Torah requirement is fulfilled by reciting one bracha, is the subject of a dispute between Tosafos and the Rambam. The opinion of Tosafos is stated in his comments germane to the following topic, to which I provide an introduction:

There is a general Talmudic assumption that a worker who is hired for a day is required to work a full day, and that taking time to check his personal email or to make a phone call violates his contractual obligation to his employer. (In today's world, when it is assumed that a worker may take an occasional coffee break, presumably one may take time off that is assumed to be included in one's work schedule. However, doing anything else at the time that a person is obligated to work for someone is certainly forbidden.) In this context, the Gemara (Brachos 16a) quotes the following beraisa: "Hired workers are required to read the Shema and to pray. When they eat bread, they are not required to recite a bracha before eating, but after eating they are required to recite two brachos. Which two brachos do they recite? The first bracha of bensching is recited in its usual fashion. The second

bracha begins the way it usually begins, but includes the third bracha.” In other words, the Gemara assumes that the worker’s responsibility to his employer is more important than his requirement to recite the full benschung! Tosafos, there, notes: “Although reciting both the second and third bracha is required min haTorah, the Sages have the ability to uproot a Torah requirement for the benefit of these workers, who are occupied with performing the work of their employer.” In order to explain how a worker is permitted to omit a bracha of the benschung, Tosafos utilizes a halachic principle called yeish koach be’yad chachomim la’akor davar min haTorah, that the Sages have the ability to “uproot” a law of the Torah, when deemed necessary. It is clear that Tosafos assumes that the requirement to recite three brachos is min haTorah.

In his monumental anthology, in which he gathers all the earlier halachic opinions, the Beis Yosef (Orach Chayim 191) indeed quotes Tosafos’ approach, but then disagrees, contending that there is no need to apply the principle of yeish koach be’yad chachomim la’akor davar min haTorah in this case. To quote the Beis Yosef: “It appears to me that there is no need for this answer, since there is no requirement min haTorah to recite several brachos to fulfill the mitzvah of birchas hamazon. This can be demonstrated from the words of the Rambam in his Sefer Hamitzvos, in which he writes: ‘The nineteenth mitzvah is that we are commanded to bless Him after eating.’ The Rambam makes no mention that there is a Torah requirement to recite several brachos. Notwithstanding that the Gemara derives the requirement of three brachos from verses, these derivations are only asmachta (which means that the requirement to do so is only rabbinic).” In other words, although one is required min haTorah to mention all three themes, there is no Torah requirement that each theme have its own bracha. That requirement is only rabbinic. Since Chazal were the source of the requirement to recite three brachos for benschung, they had the ability to dispense with the requirement to recite all three brachos in the case of the hired worker. Thus, in the Beis Yosef’s opinion, whether three brachos are required min haTorah is a dispute between Tosafos and the Rambam, and the halacha follows the Rambam’s approach, that the requirement to recite three brachos is only midrabbanan. Those who disagree with the Rambam and contend that all three brachos are required min haTorah will be forced to find a way of explaining why the workers are exempt from reciting a full benschung, and will probably have to follow Tosafos’ difficult approach to resolve the conundrum.

It is significant that the Bach, in his commentary on the same chapter of Tur Orach Chayim, agrees that the Rambam rules that the requirement to recite three brachos for benschung is not min haTorah, but contends that his opinion is the minority. The Bach concludes that Tosafos’ approach is the primary one. In other words, both the Beis Yosef and the Bach recognize that there is a dispute among the rishonim whether we are required min haTorah to recite three brachos for benschung; they dispute regarding which of these approaches is considered the normative halacha.

Al hamichyah

Here is another practical difference that results from this dispute: According to the Beis Yosef, someone who recited al hamichyah when he was required to recite the full benschung has fulfilled his requirement min haTorah, although he has not fulfilled his requirement midrabbanan. A ramification of this will be that if he recited al hamichyah and he has a safeik whether he is required to recite the entire benschung, he will neither be required nor permitted to recite the full benschung. Since he has fulfilled his Torah requirement and what remains is an unresolved question regarding a rabbinic requirement, the rule of safeik brachos lehakeil applies.

However, according to the Bach, someone who recited al hamichyah when he was required to recite the full benschung may be missing a Torah requirement to recite three brachos. This could mean that the rule of safeik de’oraysa lechumra applies, and he is required to repeat the benschung.

Uncertain identity

This analysis may explain exactly such a dispute between the Beis Yosef and the Bach that appears in a different context (Orach Chayim 168). The question concerns a food about which there is an unresolved question whether it is considered regular bread, requiring full benschung, or whether its bracha is mezonos, after which one should recite al hamichyah. The Beis Yosef appears to hold that one may eat the food and recite al hamichyah afterwards, whereas the Bach does not permit this approach, insisting that such a food should be eaten only as part of a regular bread meal in which hamotzi and full benschung were recited for the regular bread. Apparently, the Beis Yosef considers al hamichyah to be a type of benschung, whereas the Bach rejects this approach, which implies that they are consistently following the positions that each advocated in chapter 191.

Before we close, let us return to our opening question, which we can now resolve:

“I mistakenly recited al hamichyah, when I was required to bensch. Am I now required to bensch?”

The answer is that in this instance, one is required to bensch to fulfill the recitation of the three brachos that Chazal instituted. However, if there is a safeik whether there is a requirement to bensch, then, according to the Beis Yosef, since one has already fulfilled his Torah obligation by reciting al hamichyah, there is neither a requirement, nor should one bensch.

Conclusion:

According to the Gemara (Bava Kamma 30a), someone who desires to become exemplary in his spiritual behavior should toil in understanding the laws of brachos. By investing energy in understanding the details of how we praise Hashem, we realize the importance of each aspect of that praise, and how we must recognize that everything we have is a gift from Him.

fw from hamelaket@gmail.com

from: Rabbi Yochanan Zweig <genesis@torah.org>

to: rabbizweig@torah.org

subject: Rabbi Zweig

Rabbi Yochanan Zweig

Weekly Insights

This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of an individual who was instrumental to the development of the Yeshiva's campus: Mr. Sami Rohr of blessed memory.

“May his Neshama have an Aliya!”

It's the Little Things that Count

Therefore it shall come to pass, if you fulfill these laws, and keep, and do them, then Hashem your God shall keep with you the covenant and the kindness which he swore to your fathers (7:12).

74

This week’s parsha begins with outlining the basis of our relationship with Hashem; if we keep the mitzvos Hashem will keep the covenant and kindnesses promised to our forefathers. Rashi (ad loc), surprisingly, says that the mitzvos that are being referred to here are those that we trample underfoot – in other words, this refers to mitzvos that we feel are insignificant.

Mizrachi (ad loc) wonders why Rashi is limiting the fulfillment in the verse to those types of mitzvos. In fact, it seems contrary to the simple reading of the verse! What compelled Rashi to explain the possuk in this manner?

Imagine for a moment, that you received a call from your neighbor at two in the morning begging you to come over because his wife had unexpectedly gone into labor and they need someone to come over right away to stay in the house with the other young children. Undoubtedly, you, like most people, would respond in the affirmative and immediately make your way over there.

Now imagine receiving a call at two in the morning from this very same neighbor, but instead he asks you to go to Walgreens to pick up a jar of pickles and then go to 7-Eleven to get some ice cream for his wife who

suddenly has an intense craving for pickles and ice cream. In this scenario you would hardly be as accommodating. You might just begin to wonder whether or not your friend has lost his mind, and you would surely question the long term viability of this friendship.

Yet, for some inexplicable reason, a wife has no qualms about asking her husband to get out of bed at two in the morning and pick up items that would satisfy her cravings. Why? The answer, of course, lies in the nature of the relationship. When you are closely connected to someone you might ask things of them that seem insignificant because they know if the situation were reversed you would do the same for them.

This applies to our relationship with Hashem as well, and particularly in how we fulfill the mitzvos. Obviously it is crucially important to fast on Yom Kippur, but does that really comment on the strength of the bond as it relates to fulfilling all that Hashem desires of us? Not really. In fact, there are many marginally connected Jews who fast on Yom Kippur, but otherwise do very little else that Hashem asks of us throughout the year.

Observing, in particular, the mitzvos that one would tend to see as trivial is the real indicator of the strength of our bond with Hashem. That is why it is the observance of these mitzvos that guarantees that Hashem will fulfill the covenant that he promised our forefathers.

Living for Martyrdom?

And it will come to be, if you diligently listen to my commandments which I command you this day, to love Hashem your God... (11:13)

Rashi (ad loc), quoting the Sifri, explains that the rewards bestowed upon one who follows all of the mitzvos come as a result of loving Hashem. In other words, one is not supposed to do the mitzvos in order to receive reward, but rather to fulfill the mitzvos out of love for Hashem. Rashi continues, "One should not say 'I will study Torah in order to become rich; I will study in order to be called a Rav; I will study in order to receive reward...' but rather all that one does should be done out of love." Rashi is clearly articulating that we do the mitzvos because we have a relationship with Hashem, not because of the reward.

This is akin to what Chazal teach in Pirkei Avos (1:3), "Antignos of Socho used to say: 'Do not be as servants who serve the Master to receive reward. Rather, be as servants who serve the Master not to receive reward.'"

The trouble is that Rashi ends his comment on this verse with a very perplexing statement, "and in the end the honor will surely come."

Therefore, even though one isn't supposed to focus on the reward for doing the mitzvos, one shouldn't worry as the reward will surely follow. Rashi is seemingly undoing the lesson that he just taught! It's almost as if we are supposed to do all the mitzvos "altruistically" – wink, wink – knowing all the while that, ultimately, we really are receiving a reward.

If we aren't supposed to do the mitzvos in order to receive the reward, then what's the point of making assurances that in the end you will receive it? Aren't we supposed to grow to the level where you aren't doing the mitzvos for the reward?

The answer lies in understanding why people commit acts of martyrdom and self-sacrifice. Why, to a lesser extent, do so many people practice hero worship, create fan clubs, and walk around dressed as comic book and movie characters? The answer is that they are seeking recognition. There is a gnawing emptiness in their lives that they seek to fill, and being recognized in such a way gives meaning to their lives. True, this meaning is pretty shallow, but it creates a fleeting moment of relevancy for the person.

In an extreme example, one may actually commit self-destructive acts to fill this void. In fact, the more seemingly altruistic and self-sacrificial the act is, the more recognition they receive. Paradoxically, it seems that it is the survival instinct that drives this bizarre behavior. Thus, how does someone become immortal and live forever in the hearts and minds of others? By sacrificing themselves for the cause.

Judaism abhors this behavior (a clear reason why Christianity was a nonstarter alternative). Our whole understanding of why the world was

created is based on the bestowal of good on mankind. The highest level of good is an immortal relationship with the Almighty. Therefore, everything that we do is out of love for Hashem, not out of compulsion to achieve recognition for ourselves. The word korban is commonly translated as sacrifice, but this is not really an accurate translation. The word korban comes from the root word "karov – to be close." Meaning, the highest level of service to Hashem was a way to achieve a closer relationship.

How do we know that we are in a relationship with Hashem and that it isn't merely a Master ordering His slaves to be obedient? How do we know that Hashem doesn't want us to act in a self-sacrificing way? Because, as Rashi points out, the motivation for the mitzvos must be our love for Hashem. Still, you might ask, but who's to say that this is a two-way relationship, perhaps it is like idol worship which is entirely one-way?

Because Hashem assures us that the reward is going to come in the end. Just like in a healthy marriage we (hopefully) don't act in a quid pro quo way, that is, we don't expect the wife to make dinner for her husband because he did the shopping and now she feels obligated. We all want our spouses to do things for us out of love, not obligation. That is why Rashi finishes with "in the end the reward will come." Knowing that Hashem is interested in rewarding us tells us that we are in a loving relationship and not in an altruistic self-sacrificial one.

Did You Know...

In this week's parsha, it says that Hashem will send (according to Rashi) a flying insect known as "tzirah" to attack our enemies, so that even those who are hiding will be destroyed. Rashi (ad loc) explains that the venom that these insects discharge can cause impotency and blindness.

1. Some authorities identify the tzirah here with the hornet, *Vespa Orientalis* (see *Living Torah* by Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan).
2. It was a species known to multiply in times of war.
3. It was a honey-producing insect (*Makh'shirim* 6:4).
4. In Talmudic times, it was also known to be dangerous (*Shabbos* 80b; *Taanis* 14a).
5. According to others, tzirah denotes a kind of plague (*Saadia*; *Ibn Janach*; *Radak*; *Sherashim*).
6. It's possibly related to leprosy (*Ibn Ezra*).
7. The *Gemara* (*Shabbos* 80) relates an incident whereby one of these wasps stung a certain Galilean and he died from it.

Additionally, the type of hornet thought to be the tzirah—the *Vespa Orientalis*—is very interesting:

1. Their stings are very painful to humans and their stingers can be used multiple times. Because of this, a person can die from just one hornet, if stung multiple times.
2. They can transmit some serious diseases, which can also affect fruits and plants.
3. They have specialized antennas that enable them to harvest solar energy and store it in their heads, which helps them work during the day so that they could burrow and build their nests (underground).

www.peninim.org Rabbi A. Leib Sheinbaum

ידדעת עם לבבך כי כאשר ייסר איש את בנו ד' אלוקיך מיסרך

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

We have undergone much hardship throughout our tumultuous history.

These were not isolated occurrences during which we were subject to the whims and fancies, disdain and loathing, all products of a cruel, envious world who blamed every one of life's incongruities on the Jews. Whatever happened to us did not "just happen." It was all Heavenly-designated by a loving Father, Who, at times, was either meting out fatherly discipline or providing us with "opportunities" to secure our spiritual future. Everything was the result of the profound love that a father has for his son.

The *Kedushas Levi* (m'Berditchev) explains why the month of Av is the

month during which we minimize simchah, joyful expression. He quotes the pasuk in Shemos 17:8, Va'yavo Amalek va'yilachem b'Yisrael; "Amalek came and battled Yisrael." Previously (Perek 7), the people tested Hashem, saying, Ha'yesh Hashem b'kirbeinu? "Is Hashem among us?" The Midrash explains the juxtaposition of the people's questioning Hashem's Presence among them upon Amalek's arriving to battle them, comparing it to one who is sitting upon his father's shoulders, so that he is carried in this manner. While they are moving, he meets his friend and asks him, "Have you seen my father?" His father interjects, "You are riding on my shoulders, yet you ask, 'Where is my father?' I will show you. I will put you down on the ground and see how you react when your enemy attacks you." Likewise, Hashem protected Klal Yisrael ever since they departed from Egypt. The Pillar of Clouds and Pillar of Fire sheltered them from their enemies. Yet, they had the unmitigated audacity to question, "Is Hashem in our midst?" We derive from here (says the Berditchever) that, in some instances, the Father causes adversarial diversions as a way of imbuing us with fear, in order that we should realize that we have a Heavenly Father who has not, and will not ever, forsake us. Thus, the month during which both our Batei Mikdash were taken from us is called Av, Father, so that we always remember that whatever tragedies occurred during this month, it was all about reminding us that it is the work of our Father, Who cares deeply about each and every one of us.

Horav Yissachar Shlomo Teichtal, zl, applies the words of the Berditchever to explain our opening pasuk, "As a father cherishes his son," as Hashem's message to us: "I am doing this to remind you that I am always here and I love you. This is not discipline. This is love."

from: **Shlomo Katz** <skatz@torah.org>
 reply-to: do-not-reply@torah.org
 to: hamaayan@torah.org
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1) Faith Ginsburg, on the yearzeits of her uncle Benjamin Lavin (Binyamin Beinsh ben Raphael a"h, on 10 Av) and her father-in-law Maurice Ginsburg (Yisroel Moshe ben Yosef a"h, on 20 Av)
 2)

Robert & Hannah Klein in memory of h r father
 Shlomo ben Zvi Koplowitz a"h (28 Av)

In this week's Parashah, we are taught the Mitzvah of Birkat Ha'mazon / "Bentching" after eating. R' Moshe Yechiel Epstein z"l (1889-1971; Ozharover Rebbe in New York and Tel Aviv) writes: A blessing, in general, and Birkat Ha'mazon, in particular, involves both accepting the yoke of Heaven as well as praying for G-d's continued beneficence. He explains: Because reciting a blessing involves accepting the yoke of Heaven, our Sages (Tosefta, end of Berachot) describe reciting blessings as "performing Mitzvot." Indeed, the word "Mitzvah" means "something we are commanded to do." When one does something he is commanded to do, he, in effect, accepts upon himself the yoke of the one who commanded him to do that thing—in this case, Hashem.

He continues: When Pharaoh commanded Bnei Yisrael to leave Egypt, he said (Shmot 12:32), "You shall bless me." The Aramaic translation Onkelos renders this: "You shall pray for me." Rashi z"l, as well, explains: "Pharaoh was a firstborn, and he wanted Moshe to pray that he not die in the plague." Thus, we find that the term "Berachah" can mean "to pray."

We read (Shmot 23:25), "You shall worship Hashem, your Elokim, and He will bless your bread and your water . . ." The Gemara (Berachot 48b) states: Do not read, "He will bless," but rather, "You shall bless." At first glance, the Gemara's comment seems directly contrary to the P'shat of the verse.

However, writes the Ozharover Rebbe, if we understand that our own recitation of blessings leads Hashem to continue providing for us, then there is no contradiction. (Be'er Moshe p268)

"He afflicted you and let you hunger, then He fed you the Mahn that you did not know, nor did your forefathers know, in order to make you know that not by bread alone does man live, rather by everything that emanates from the mouth of Hashem does man live." (8:3)

We read that when King Chizkiyah was deathly ill, he prayed (Yeshayah 38:3), "Please, Hashem, remember now that I have always walked before You faithfully and wholeheartedly, and I have done what is good in Your eyes." The Gemara (Berachot 10b) explains: What did he mean by, "I have done what is good in Your eyes"? It refers to his hiding the "Book of Cures." Rashi z"l explains that Chizkiyah hid the Book of Cures so that people would pray for mercy instead of relying on the ready cures that were at their disposal. [Until here from the Gemara and Rashi]

R' Yerachmiel Shulman z"l Hy"d (Menahel Ruchani of the Bet Yosef-Novardok Yeshiva in Pinsk, Poland; killed in the Holocaust) writes: The way of the world is to memorialize great innovators and inventors, not those who turn the state of knowledge back in time by concealing what is already known. Why then is Chizkiyah's action praiseworthy? R' Shulman explains: Though all forms of wisdom are beneficial to the world—especially medicine, which brings "light" to the world—when knowledge reduces man's Bitachon / trust in Hashem, it is bad. The moon is a source of light, but when it gets in front of the sun and causes an eclipse, it brings darkness to the world. So, too, wisdom that eclipses the "sun" of Bitachon is a source of darkness.

R' Shulman continues: There are those who ask rhetorically, "In that case, let us hide the world's bread, for the ready supply of bread causes man to not place his trust in Hashem!" In fact, answers R' Shulman, when Hashem thought that hiding the world's bread would be beneficial to us, He did so. Thus the Gemara (Yoma 76a) teaches: "Why did the Mahn fall every day, instead of once a year, enough for the whole year? So that Bnei Yisrael would turn their hearts toward Heaven." (Peninei Ha'chochmah 1:34)

"You will eat and you will be satisfied, and you shall bless Hashem, your Elokim, for the good Land that He gave you." (8:10)

R' Yitzchak Arieli z"l (1896-1974; Mashgiach of Yeshivat Merkaz Harav; author of Enayim La'mishpat) writes: Many wonder why, in the second blessing of Birkat Ha'mazon, we mention the gift of the Land before we mention the Exodus, seemingly out of chronological order. The answer is that the Land was promised to us before we were enslaved in Egypt, as it is Hashem's practice to "create the cure before the plague." Indeed, the fact that He promised us the Land was our guarantee that the redemption would indeed come. (Haggadah Shel Pesach Shirat Ha'geulah p.79)

"Now, Yisrael, what does Hashem, your Elokim, ask of you? Only to fear Hashem . . ." (10:12)

Our Sages ask: Is fearing Hashem so easy that the Torah can say, "What does Hashem ask of you? Only to fear Him!"?

R' Chaim of Volozhin z"l (Belarus; 1749-1821) answers: In any event, we fear many things, usually unpleasant things. Apparently, fearing is easy for us. If we could train ourselves to direct our tendency to fear toward fearing something good—Hashem—we would be saved from all our other fears. (Ruach Chaim 4:22)

"Hashem, your G-d, shall you fear, Him shall you serve, to Him shall you cling . . ." (10:20)

The Gemara (Bava Kamma 41b) teaches: Rabbi Akiva explained that this verse instructs us to cling to Torah scholars.

R' Yaakov Moshe Charlap z"l (Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Merkaz Harav; died 1952) observes: Rabbi Akiva doesn't mean that clinging to a Torah scholar is the next best thing to clinging to Hashem. A true Torah scholar nullifies himself completely before G-d; his ultimate goal is to feel as if he

has no existence independent of G-d. Thus, when one clings to a Torah scholar, he is actually clinging to G-d Himself.

In addition, R' Charlap writes, Rabbi Akiva is teaching another lesson. The only way to cling to Hashem is by clinging to a Torah scholar. This is demonstrated by the fact that as soon as Bnei Yisrael loosened their connection to Moshe (thinking that he was not returning from Har Sinai) they immediately fell to the level of making the Golden Calf. (Mei Marom V p.272)

“In order to prolong your days and the days of your children upon the Land that Hashem has sworn to your forefathers to give them, like the days of the heaven over the earth.” (11:21)

The Gemara (Sanhedrin 90b) cites this verse as one of the allusions in the Torah to Techiyat Ha'meitim / resurrection of the dead. The Gemara explains: It is not written, “The Land that Hashem has sworn to your forefathers to give you,” but rather, “To give them.” This indicates that the Patriarchs will one day receive Eretz Yisrael, which necessarily indicates that there will be Techiyat Ha'meitim.

R' Yehuda Gruenwald z"l (1845-1920; rabbi of Szatmar, Hungary) writes: In light of this, we may interpret the end of the verse (“like the days of the heaven over the earth”) as follows: Just as a person receives reward in “heaven”—i.e., in the World of the Souls—after his death, so he will receive reward on “earth” after his death, i.e., when his body and soul are reunited at the time of Techiyat Ha'meitim. (Shevet Mi'Yehuda)

Tefilah

This year, we will devote this space to discussing various aspects of our prayers. This week, we continue discussing the thirteen types of prayer identified by the Midrash Rabbah and Midrash Yalkut Shimoni.

R' Shimshon Dovid Pincus z"l (rabbi of Ofakim, Israel; died 2001) writes: “Kri'ah” means “calling” to Hashem out of recognition that Hashem hears the one who calls Him, calling with a clear understanding that it is Hashem's practice to listen to people's prayers and that He has the ability to grant a person's request. This is analogous to calling to a friend when we know that he is close and can hear us. It is man's nature to cry out when he is in trouble even if he does not know that anyone can hear him, but that is called “Ne'akah,” not “Kri'ah.” Kri'ah means calling to someone specific because the caller knows that that someone can hear him, calling out to establish a connection for the purpose of making a request or delivering a specific piece of information.

R' Pincus continues: This is the foundation of prayer and all service of Hashem—simply grasping that Hashem's presence is real, no less real than all the inanimate objects, plants, animals, and people that surround us all the time. Hashem is a real, “living” Being, plain and simple, to Whom we can speak and call, and Who hears us in the most literal sense of the word. This is what our Sages mean when they say, “If only your reverence of Heaven would be equal to your fear of man.” The more that a person lives with the recognition of this reality, the clearer his prayers will be, the more genuine his Divine service will be, and the more he will merit G-d's assistance in all his affairs. (She'arim B'tefilah p.75)