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Rabbi Yaakov Neuburger

A Longing for Torah and the Power of Prayer

It is eight pesukim long. It briefly lists some of the miracles of the desert generation. It occurs on a specific day, the date of which is kept a secret. It follows some fifty pesukim of doom and gloom, of unspeakable tragedies and national embarrassment, much of which has been surely witnessed. That is about all that is clear to us about the closing parsha of Ki Savo (29:1-8).

Tucked away in, and probably central to, this puzzling recollection of the miracles of yetzias Mitzrayim, desert life and the initial conquest of a homeland, Moshe says, "Ad Hayom Hazeh - Until this day Hashem has not given you the mind to understand, or the eyes to see, or the ears to hear". We cannot but wonder what changed on "this day" that brought a national epiphany of sorts? What happened and how does it relate to the tochecha?

Indeed the medarsh, cited by Rashi, discloses that herein lies a reference to an otherwise untold story of an uprising against Moshe. This uprising once again accused Moshe of nepotism and a severe lack of faith in anyone who was not shevet Levi. Nevertheless it surprisingly gave Moshe great pleasure! It all came to a head when Moshe gave his shevet and, at first, only his shevet, its own sefer Torah, an event recorded in parshas Vayelech (31:19). Envious of Levi's prize and jealous of what might indicate Levi's rightful propriety over the Torah, the rest of us confronted Moshe. Moshe, ever so happy that he lived to see his children fighting to lay claim to the Torah, announced with great excitement and probably enjoying the sweetness of great satisfaction, "It was not until this day that Hashem graced you all with mind to understand and the eyes to see and the ears to hear".

Why is Moshe's reaction juxtaposed to the tochecha and recorded even before the event to which he is reacting? No doubt the jealousy expressed was borne out a yearning to be a full partner in the observance of Torah and its transmission. Moreover, the envy spoke of an appreciation of the great privilege it is to be a partner and ultimately of the pride that would ensure our success as a partner. Now at the heart of the tochecha, the frightening record of diaspora and its tragedies, is Hahem's rebuke that all of it stemmed from the lack of happiness and joy in our service to Hashem (28:47). Can you think of a more optimistic and even instructive ending to all of this, than recording the deep seated pride that we all harbor, but may only rise to the surface when threatened?

However, according to the tradition of Rabbi Shmuel bar Yitzchak, this parsha refers to an entirely different event, one which does not share the optimism of Rashi's medrash but may be at least equally instructive. It takes place just before the seventh day of Adar, during Moshe's final days amongst his people. Confronting his own passing, the one and hundred year old Moshe expects his children to implore Hashem to extend his life.

Disappointed that it was not happening, Moshe summons the people and reprimands them, "One man was able to redeem 600,000 people who sinned at the eigel, can't 600,000 people band together and pray on behalf of one?" Reading this into our text, Moshe is terribly upset and complains, "They still don't get it!" or "Yet to this day Hashem has not given you the mind nor the eye nor the ear to understand what you can accomplish through prayer and the power you wield as a people!!! Accordingly, in this parsha, Moshe reminds us of the great miracles that Hashem employed to watch over us and of His commitment to us which should inspire confidence in our prayers.

Thus Ki Savo completes the tochecha with Moshe's "If only they would know..." If only we would know who we are and how precious we and our service are to Hashem, we may well have never had the tochecha cast upon us. If only we would forever remember the strength of our prayers, we may have come through it in a more wholesome and miraculous fashion.

Certainly this is a timely reminder as we enter into the days of prayer - may they all be accepted on High to bring profound blessing to all. Kesiva vachsimah tovah l'alter l'chaim tovim v'aruchim.

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Selichos: It Pays To Be 'First In Line'

The opening poetic composition of the Motzaei Shabbos [Saturday night] Selichos liturgy (the very beginning the pre-Rosh Hashana Selichos) begins with the words "B'Motzaei Menucha Kidamnucha techila" [With the going out of (the day of) rest, we are first to greet you]. The Izbitzer Rebbe notes that the two words "Kidamnucha techila" [we are first to greet you] introduces the entire idea of Selichos.

Why, after all, do we say these penitential prayers 4 to 10 days before Rosh Hashanna? This is not, formally, the "High Holiday period," which technically begins on Rosh Hashanna and runs through Succos. What does Selichos accomplish in this period that is neither -- strictly speaking -- a period of either judgment or atonement?

The Izbitzer Rebbe explains that the idea behind Selichos is that the earlier we get started asking forgiveness from the Almighty, the more successful we will be. The Izbitzer Rebbe cites a proof to this idea from a Biblical incident.

Dovid HaMelech [King David] had a very tumultuous life. One of the indignities that he suffered was having his monarchy overthrown by his son, Avshalom. In one of the most pathetic chapters of the entire Tanach [Shmuel II 15], Dovid HaMelech had to leave Jerusalem with his family and entourage to flee from his son who took over the throne. In this moment of great personal tragedy, Shimee ben Gerah took the opportunity to add insult to injury. He laced into the King and bitterly cursed him. Shimee figured that at this point, Dovid HaMelech's kingship was ended. Shimee, who had a personal grudge against Dovid HaMelech, mercilessly cursed the fleeing monarch.

Dovid HaMelech eventually retook the monarchy and returned to Jerusalem. All the people who sided with the wrong side, and especially Shimee ben Gerah who had cursed the king, were fearful for their lives. In fact they were deserving of death, for in the times of the Biblical monarchy, one who rebelled against the king (mored b'Malchus) was deserving of the death penalty. The Rambam rules that the King can personally -- without trial -- execute such rebels.

Shimee ben Gerah knew that he was a 'dead man'. So what did he do? "Shimee son of Gera, the Benjamite who was from Bahurim, hastened and went down with the men of Yehudah to greet Dovid HaMelech." [Shmuel II 19:17] He reached the King and told him "...For your servant knows that I have sinned, and here I have come today, first among all the House of Yosef, to come down and greet my master the king." [Shmuel II 19:21].

Shimee emphasized that among the thousands of people who were asking Dovid HaMelech for mechila [forgiveness], he was one of the first. "I know I did wrong, I know I sinned against you. I know that I should lose my life for it. I apologize and I am sorry. I am not even going to wait in line to tell you this. I want to be the FIRST person that has the opportunity to express my remorse."

The Izbiter Rebbe says that this exactly parallels what we are doing in our pre-Rosh HaShana Selichos.

Strictly speaking, one could wait until Rosh HaShannah to approach the Almighty with these requests. Theoretically, one could even wait until Yom Kippur. There are procrastinators in life -- such as the fellow who always files his (U.S.) income tax forms on the night of April 15th! The Jewish counterpart of the April 15th tax filers are those who wait until Neilah (the final Yom Kippur prayer) to make their sincere request to the Almighty for Forgiveness and for Mercy.

The difference is that the U.S. Internal Revenue Service (IRS) does not care if the tax forms are filed on February 1st or just before midnight on the 15th of April. As long as the envelope is post-marked by April 15th, it is all the same to the IRS. However, if one is wise enough and spiritually sensitive enough to try to "catch the Master of the Universe early" -- to be "first in line" -- that does make a difference! Even if one's sins are as incriminating as those of Shimee ben Gerah against Dovid HaMelech -- humiliating and abusing the king -- nevertheless it pays to be "first in line."

Shimee ben Gerah should have been a 'dead man'. But his haste to see the king paid off. Dovid HaMelech did not kill him. He did not even direct his son Shlomo [Solomon] to kill him. Why did this wicked person merit such merciful treatment? Shimee ben Gerah merited merciful treatment because he knew the secret of "coming first" to plea for his life.

This year, there are eighteen days between the start of Selichos (on the night following September 24th) and Yom Kippur (October 13th). One might ask -- why do we need to recite Selichos this Motzai Shabbos? What is the rush? We have plenty of time!

But there is significance to coming early. This tone of Selichos is set with the opening words of the first Selicha-poem recited on the Motzai Shabbos when we begin to recite the first penitential prayers: "B'Motzai Menucha kidamnucha techila." At the conclusion of resting, we are first in line to greet you.

It is all a matter of showing up early to sincerely say and demonstrate "I am sorry!" Let us be like Shimee ben Gerah regarding this one matter of showing up first, rather than waiting for the masses to come and present their requests for forgiveness.

"The Kohen Who Will Be In Those Days"

Parshas Ki Savo contains the mitzvah of the Declaration accompanying the bringing of the First Fruits (Mikra Bikurim). The verse [pasuk] says: "You shall come to the Kohen who will be in those days and you shall say to him, 'I declare today to Hashem, your G-d, that I have come to the land that Hashem swore to our forefathers to give us.'" [Devorim 26:3]

Rashi on this pasuk makes a comment that he also makes elsewhere in a similar vein: Rashi is bothered by the expression "the Kohen who will be in

your days." (Obviously one would not go to a Kohen who was not living in his time!) Rashi explains: "You have none but the Kohen in your days, as he is."

Rashi makes a similar comment on the earlier pasuk "You shall come... to the judge who will be in those days..." [Devorim 17:9]: "Even if he is not like the other judges who were before him, you must listen to him. You have none but the judge who is in your days." This is the idea of 'Yiftach in his generation was like Shmuel in his generation.'

Rashi's words seem to make more sense in the earlier pasuk (in Parshas Shoftim). When one goes to a judge, he needs to seek out a Talmid Chochom, a scholar. It makes sense that one would think he requires the greatest personality of intellect and knowledge to properly adjudicate a dispute (Din Torah). A person might understandably be tempted to say, "The people today are not of the caliber of the people who once were -- even a generation ago!"

One of the ubiquitous comments made at the Siyum HaShas every seven years is -- "Look who is no longer with us! Remember who graced our presence at the last Siyum Hashas!" This is the nature of the "yeridas hadoros" [decrease in generations]. Therefore, regarding judges, we understand that Rashi had to remind us "We can only look to the judges who are before us in our generation."

However, a Kohen is a Kohen! Who cares about his level of scholarship? As long as he has the proper lineage, he meets our needs! We are not asking him to rule on any halachic matters (pasken shaylos). All he needs to do is accept the Bikkurim fruits. What is Rashi pointing out to us?

I saw an interesting interpretation in the Shemen HaTov by Rabbi Dov Weinberger: Many times, we are asked to do acts of kindness and to give charity. Most of us like to give charity to nice, neat, clean, presentable individuals. However, when we are asked to give donations to unkempt, scraggly looking individuals, we do not get that same feeling of satisfaction. This is particularly true regarding the mitzvah of Hachnasas Orchim. One can host a truly enjoyable guest or one can host a guest whereby he feels that he is doing a real chessed [kindness] just to have the guest sit at his table.

The pasuk is teaching that if all the Kohanim in our time and place are not like Kohanim used to be -- they are not elegantly dressed, they do not carry themselves with the full dignity of their office -- it does not make a difference! Regarding tzedakah and chessed, the less appealing the person, the bigger the mitzvah. The less enjoyable the performance of the mitzvah, the better it is for the one performing the mitzvah (assuming of course the recipient is truly worthy of the kindness and charity).

Rav Pam once mentioned that his father was a Rav in Europe. The custom on Friday evening was that poor people would gather in the back of the shul. It was the job of the Gabbai to circulate and find places for all the poor people to eat. As is always the case, certain 'guests' were more in demand than others. Some of the people looked nice; they looked presentable and honorable (b'kavodik). The Gabbai always had an easy time finding places for the decent looking people.

However, it was not so easy to place the people who looked like "schleppers". Who wanted to have such a person at his table? When the Gabbai couldn't find a place anywhere else -- for the worst looking person in shul -- the senior Rav Pam would have the 'privilege' of hosting him.

One time, the Gabbai apologized to Rav Pam's father saying, "I'm sorry I have to give you this guest, but I couldn't find anywhere else for him." Rav Pam's father told the Gabbai: "On the contrary. I am not looking for a chavrusa. I am looking for a person who can eat a meal. This guy looks like he can really handle a meal!"

This is what the pasuk is teaching: "You shall come to the Kohen who will be there in those days." He might not be the greatest Kohen who ever lived. He may be an ignoramus. He may not live up to the standards of past Kohanim. That is not what we are looking for in dispensing the priestly gifts: We give Bikurim to the Kohen in need who is before us in our generation.

The Blessing Of Sitting Back And Being Able To Enjoy One's Blessings
The pasuk in this week's parsha says, "And all these blessings will come upon you and they will overtake you (v'heeseegucha)" [Devarim 28:2]. There are many interpretations and insights regarding the meaning of the word "v'heeseegucha" in the context of the blessings mentioned in this chapter. In previous years we have quoted several of them.

I recently came across a new interpretation: There are people who become very successful financially. They earn a significant amount of money. Unfortunately many times -- if not most of the time -- these people do not know when to stop. They just keep on going and going and going. They have made enough money for themselves and their children and their grandchildren. This is the nature of mankind -- "One who loves money will not be satisfied that he has enough money" [Koheles 5:9].

Our Sages say that every person dies without having achieved even half of his material desires [Koheles Rabbah 1:13]. Therefore, this pasuk is teaching that all these blessings will come upon us and we will have time to enjoy them. We won't be so preoccupied with another deal and another investment and another venture that we won't have time to sit back and enjoy what we have already achieved. The blessing of v'heeseegucha is that our other blessings should be satisfactory to us. We should be able to say "I've had enough."

We thank G-d after eating a meal. We come to the point where we say "I'm full" and we stop eating. One's stomach can only take so much. If people continue eating more and more, there comes a point when they will simply regurgitate. However, money is different. We never become "full". Therefore, we are blessed with the added dimension of v'heeseegucha, so that just like our appetite has limits, our desire for wealth should reach a point where we feel that we have already achieved all that we need to achieve.

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Weekly Halacha Overview- Pat Akum: The Halachic Status of Bread Baked by a Non-Jew

RABBI JOSH FLUG

Pat Akum: The Halachic Status of Bread Baked by a Non-Jew

The Mishna, Avodah Zarah 35b, prohibits eating bread that was baked by a non-Jew. This prohibition is known as Pat Akum. The Gemara, Avodah Zarah 35b, explains that the prohibition was instituted in order to prevent intermarriage. This week's article will discuss the parameters of the prohibition, its applicability nowadays and some practical applications of this prohibition.

Was the Prohibition Revoked?

There is a lengthy discussion in the Gemara, *ibid*, whether the prohibition against Pat Akum was revoked. One opinion is that it was not revoked. One opinion is that the rabbis permitted one to eat the bread of a non-Jewish baker (pat palter) but not of a private individual, so long as there is no bread baked by a Jew (pat Yisrael) available. One opinion is that in rural areas one may eat pat palter, but not in urban areas. The Talmud Yerushalmi, Avodah Zarah 2:8, states that pat palter is permitted but privately baked bread is still subject to the prohibition.

There is a dispute among the Rishonim regarding which opinion one should follow. Tosafot, Avodah Zarah 35b, s.v. Michlal, note that the entire discussion regarding whether the prohibition was revoked implies that the prohibition itself is revocable. Tosafot add that the widespread practice to eat bread that was baked by a non-Jew relies on the assumption that the prohibition was revoked in a generation subsequent to the Talmudic discussion. Rabbeinu Asher, in his responsa (19:20), notes that there are communities who have adopted the position of the Talmud Yerushalmi and permit pat palter. Rashba, Torat HaBayit HeAroch 3:7, rules in accordance with the opinion that pat palter is permitted, but only if there is no pat Yisrael available. Rashba adds that if there is pat Yisrael available but the pat palter is qualitatively superior, one may eat pat palter.

Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh De'ah 112:2, rules in accordance with the opinion of Rashba and only permits pat palter when there is no pat Yisrael available. Rama, *ad loc.*, (and in Torat Chatat 75:1) rules in accordance with the opinion of Tosafot that the prohibition was revoked and all bread is permitted (assuming the other rules of kashrut are followed). Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh De'ah 112:5, also codifies the opinion of Rashba that if the pat palter is qualitatively superior, one may eat it. Shach 112:9, rules that even Ashkenazic Jews should follow the opinion of Rashba and refrain from eating privately baked pat akum, and from eating pat palter when there is pat Yisrael available. Shach adds that one may rely on the opinion of Rashba that one may eat pat palter when it is qualitatively superior to pat Yisrael. [Many pious individuals eat pat palter even though pat Yisrael is available in most Jewish communities. Furthermore, many kashrut organizations certify breads that are pat palter. This may be due to one of three reasons (or a combination of these reasons). First, they may follow the Rama despite Shach's recommendation to follow Shulchan Aruch. Second, they may consider the pat palter to be qualitatively superior to the pat Yisrael that is available. Third, it is arguable that if the pat Yisrael is more expensive, it is the equivalent of a case where pat palter is qualitatively superior.]

Bread Baked by a Non-Jew in a Jewish Home

One would logically think that if pat palter is permissible, it is certainly permissible to allow a non-Jew to bake bread in a Jewish home. Nevertheless, Tur, Yoreh De'ah no. 112, rules that if a non-Jew bakes bread in a Jewish home, the bread is prohibited. R. Moshe Feinstein, Igrot Moshe, Yoreh De'ah 1:45, asks: Why should bread that is owned by a Jew have a more stringent status than bread that is owned by a non-Jew? He answers that any leniency that applies to pat akum is due to the necessity to have bread available. Therefore, the rabbis relaxed or revoked the rules. However, if the bread is being baked in a Jewish home, there is no reason to relax the rules and the original pat akum rule remains intact. R. Feinstein notes that based on the comments of Tur one should not allow non-Jews to bake bread in a Jewish bakery or factory. Rather, the Jewish owner should either ignite the ovens or place the bread in the ovens himself. However, if the factory is so large that it would be extremely difficult to have the owner light the ovens himself, the reasoning of Tur no longer applies and one may be lenient and allow the non-Jews to bake the bread.

Glazed Bread

In a previous issue, we discussed the prohibition of bishul akum, the prohibition against eating food that was cooked by a non-Jew. Rabbeinu Asher, in his responsa (19:21), notes that any food that has the halachic

status of bread is subject to the rules of pat akum and any other food is subject to the rules of bishul akum. Rabbeinu Asher's comment is codified by Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh De'ah 112:1.

Tosafot, Chullin 64a, s.v. Simanim, also note that some foods are subject to the rules of pat akum and some are subject to the rules of bishul akum. Based on this categorization, Tosafot note that if bread has a glaze on it, the actual bread is subject to the rules of pat akum (and would be permissible in most situation based on the leniencies presented previously) and the glaze is subject to the rules of bishul akum. For this reason, Rama, Yoreh De'ah 112:6, rules that bread that was made by a non-Jew and that is glazed with an egg is prohibited (assuming none of the leniencies of bishul akum apply). Rashba, op. cit., implies that glazed bread is only subject to the rules of pat akum because the main ingredient in the bread is the flour and all of the other ingredients are secondary. For this reason, R. Avraham Borenstein, Avnei Nezer, Yoreh De'ah no. 94, rules that if one is lenient on this matter "he does not lose out."

Aseret Yemei Teshuva

The Talmud Yerushalmi, Shabbat 1:3, states that ideally, one should exclusively eat food that is ritually pure. Since, this is very difficult, one should endeavor to eat ritually pure foods seven days of the year. Ran, Rosh HaShanah 12b, s.v. Garsinan B'Yerushalmi, notes that since nowadays it is impossible to eat ritually pure foods, many have adopted the custom to eat pat Yisrael exclusively during the Aseret Yemei Teshuva, the ten days starting on Rosh HaShanah and concluding on Yom Kippur. Ran notes that there is no need to include Rosh HaShanah in this stringency because most people bake their own bread for Rosh HaShanah regardless of this stringency. Thus, the seven days between Rosh HaShanah are days designated as days of stringency when many people do not eat pat palter. Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 603:1, writes that even one who does not normally refrain from pat akum should do so during the Aseret Yemei Teshuva.

One might argue that Shulchan Aruch is simply following his own opinion that the prohibition against pat akum was never revoked and one may only be lenient and eat pat palter if there is no pat Yisrael available. Therefore, during the Aseret Yemei Teshuva, it is appropriate to be stringent on the matter. However, Rama, who is of the opinion that the prohibition against pat akum was revoked, might not require one to be stringent during Aseret Yemei Teshuva. Nevertheless, Rama himself (Torat Chatat 75:1) recommends refraining from pat akum during the Aseret Yemei Teshuva. Apparently he too is of the opinion that the issue of whether the prohibition was revoked is itself the subject of a dispute and although he generally adopts the lenient position, during the Aseret Yemei Teshuva, he favors following the stringent opinion.

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- A Service of Anshe Emes Synagogue (Los Angeles)

G. Peninim on the Torah (Rabbi A.L. Scheinbaum)

1. Our joy. "And now behold I have brought the first of the fruit of the land which You have given me Hashem". Is there any doubt that he is offering his fruits to Hashem? HaRav Yoseph N. Kornitzer explains that clearly everything belongs to Hashem. Consequently, what portion of our own belongings do we personally possess in mitzvot performance? We don't have possession of the actual mitzvah; however, there is a specific essential component of each mitzvah which is inherently ours -- our sensitive involvement in its performance. The joy and enthusiasm which

one applies to mitzvah performance is his part of the mitzvah. The Charity money, Tefillon and candles, for example, belong to Hashem; but the emotion, fervor and excitement in performing their related mitzvot belongs to us. It is this joy which give us "license" for their possession.

2. Serving Hashem with joy. "Because you did not serve Hashem with joy and gladness of heart." This suggests that the source of all punishment is serving Hashem without joy. Joy is an essential component of the service of Hashem. The Yalket Me'am Loez explains this ideal with a simple but profound analogy. A king had an uncontrollable son, whose unrestrained acts of self-indulgence were often a source of embarrassment to the king.

Whenever the king was about to punish him, the son would put on a sweet, angelic smile. When the king observed the happiness and sweet innocence in his son's eyes, it became difficult for him to execute his planned punishment. When Hashem sees the inherent joy and happiness emanating from our service of Him, He defers punishment. Even if one is intellectually aware of the value of Torah and a Torah lifestyle, he must nonetheless experience it through joy.

H. The Majesty of Man (Rabbi A. Henach Leibowitz).

Concern for the perpetuation of Torah. Moshe, at Hashem's command, gave a special Sefer Torah to the Levite Tribe. The other Tribes, upon hearing of this, became fearful, insisting that if Moshe gave the Sefer Torah to the Levite Tribe, their descendants would claim that the Torah was only given to them and not to all of the Tribes. This could lead to the Torah being lost from the Jewish people. Moshe had an unusual reaction to their complaints -- he rejoiced! Moshe explained that until their complaint, he was unsure whether the Jews' devotion to Torah was complete. Now that he saw their concern about future generations, he realized that their devotion was whole-hearted for it evidenced a concern for the perpetuation of Torah even in the face of a remote possibility that might occur in the distant future. This is the supreme manifestation -- the litmus test -- of faith and devotion to Hashem. Personal piety isn't enough. One can't say that he truly values Torah if he doesn't appreciate the need to safeguard it for future generations and ensure the Jewish education of his children and fellow Jews. Rabbi Yaakov Emden notes that we have been privileged to see a miracle even greater than those witnessed at Mt. Sinai -- the Torah has been studied and the mitzvot performed by Jews throughout history, for 3,000 years, through persecution and oppression. This is a miracle of the highest order.

I. Growth Through Torah (Rabbi Zelig Pliskin)

1. Be grateful for spiritual benefits before material ones. "And He brought us to this place, and He gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey". Rashi explains that "this place" refers to the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. Shouldn't the order of this verse be reversed, for the Jews entered the land much before they built the Temple? Rabbi Naftoli Tzvi explains that the Temple was a spiritual benefit and the land a physical benefit. We too should express our gratitude to Hashem in the same order.

2. Gain an awareness that all you have is a gift from Hashem. "And now I brought the first fruits of the land that Hashem gave me, and you shall place it before Hashem and you shall bow down before Hashem. Rabbi Chaim Shmuelvitz noted that we don't find the idea of bowing down to Hashem in other commandments. Why is it mentioned here? The concept of bringing the first fruits to the Temple was to show gratitude to Hashem for all that He have given. It is an expression our awareness that everything we have is a gift from Hashem. Therefore, the Torah mentions that we bow down to Hashem, symbolizing our total submission to His will, because all that we have is from Him. The greater our awareness that all we have is a gift from Hashem, the more we will appreciate it. As our Sages point out, even a small gift from a important dignitary is precious; the greater the giver the more you treasure the gift. When you live with the realization that all you have is a gift from Hashem, you will enjoy immensely all that you have.

3. Rejoice with all the good that Hashem has given you. This a mitzvah -- we are obligated to feel joy with what we are given by Hashem. Why do we need a directive to rejoice, since we should automatically be happy when we have good things? Man's nature is to constantly want more than he presently has. "He who has 100 wants 200" (Koheles Rabbah). Our moments of joy are mixed with sadness over what we lack. Therefore, the Torah commands us to rejoice over what we have, to strive to feel a joy that is complete. As Pirke Avos teaches, a wealthy person is one who feels joy with his/her lot.

4. When you are deserving of blessing, it will reach you even if you run away from it. "And it will come to you all of these blessings, and they will reach you, when you listen to the voice of Hashem". If the blessings will "come to you", why is it necessary to say "and they will reach you"? At times, a person doesn't realize what is truly good for him and he mistakenly runs away from the blessing. Therefore, the Torah guarantees that the blessing will pursue the person and reach him even though he is trying to escape from it. Only after he receives the blessing will he become aware of what is truly good for him. This idea saves one much suffering -- when things happen that at first glance appear to be negative, be patient before making final judgment. As one event leads to another, you may see that what you thought was negative is clearly positive in the end.

5. When you worry about the future, you are needlessly causing yourself mental anguish in the present. "Your life shall hang in life before you, and you shall fear day and night, and you will have no assurance of your life." The Talmud explains that the: (a) first level refers to one who doesn't own land and buys a year's supply of grain each year; though he has grain for this year, he worries about the next year; (b) the second level refers to one who buys grains once a week; he is in a worse situation, since he must find new grain every week; and (c) the third level refers to one who has to buy grain daily and constantly has something to worry about. Rabbi Chaim Shmulevitz cites this to point out that we create our own mental torture by our thoughts. If we have enough food for today, and can appreciate what we have, we are fortunate and will lead a happy life. If, however, we constantly worry about the future, we will never have peace of mind. Regardless of what will be in the future, we are causing ourselves suffering right now. Learn to have mental self-discipline -- don't dwell on what is missing unless it can lead to constructive planning. Why cause yourself unnecessary pain and anguish when you can keep your thoughts on what you do have in the present? The Chofetz Chaim said that everyone has something to worry about; it is preferable for a person to worry about spiritual matters and then he will be freed from worrying about material matters.

J. Reflections on the Sedra (Rabbi Zalman Posner).

True Bikurim. Moshe tells his people that when they enter Israel, they are to take "the first of the fruits" and bring it to "the place that G-d will choose." This is the commandment of Bikurim, the ceremonious bringing of the new fruits to Jerusalem. It is interesting to note that while the law of bikurim stressed that the very first fruit to ripen be consecrated, there was no minimum quantity required. One grape or one fig could technically fulfill the letter of the law. How does this apply to us today? We all have our priorities. Some things are important; others are secondary. Some things are luxuries; others are necessities. Somewhere on the scale is our religious observance. Exactly what position on our "scales" does Judaism occupy? Bikurim is the first fruit. Before the Jew took care of his personal desires, he discharged his obligations to G-d. How much bikurim he gave was not important so long as it was his first. One of Rabbi Posner's Rabbis remarked about three people, one who studied Torah 16 hours a day, one only 15 minutes, and the third not at all. "Which two are closer to each other?," he would ask. Quantity is not the primary consideration. Even 15 minutes a day devoted to Torah study makes one a student of Torah, but those few minutes must have top priority, and then they are true bikurim.

K. Living Each Week (Rabbi Abraham Twerski).

Absorbing the tefillin. "And all the nations of the earth will see that the name of G-d is called upon you and will fear [revere] you." The Talmud states that "the name of G-d is called upon you" refers to the Tefillin of the head. Why is it, then, that although so many people wear the tefillin, they have not achieved the reverence of other people? Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev suggests that the words of the Talmud must be scrutinized more carefully. The Talmud does not state tefillin that are "on the head," but "in the head." It is only if the messages inscribed on the parchments within the tefillin are absorbed and have been incorporated into one's mind that one can achieve the reverence of other people. These messages are the belief in the unity of G-d, the acceptance of serving Him with all one's heart, soul and fortune, even to the extent of yielding one's life to sanctify G-d's name, and the remembrance that G-d delivered us from bondage to make us truly free. Tefillin on the head refers to a rather superficial ritual and while it is a mitzvah is of limited value. Tefillin in the head is the ideal -- it refers to integrating the tefillin within one's character, a sincere dedication and commitment to everything written in them, so that one's every thought and every act is processed through the principles of the four portions contained in the tefillin.

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Covenant & Conversation
Thoughts on the Weekly Parsha from
Sir Jonathan Sacks

Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Commonwealth

[From 2 years ago - currently 5765]

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

Ki Tavo

Ki Tavo begins with the ceremony of bringing firstfruits to the Temple. The Mishnah (Bikkurim 3) gives a detailed account of what happened:

Those that were near to Jerusalem brought fresh figs and grapes, and those that were far away brought dried figs and raisins. Before them went the ox, its horns overlaid with gold, and with a wreath of olive leaves on its head.

The flute was played before them until they came near Jerusalem. When they were near to Jerusalem, they sent messengers before them and bedecked their first fruits. The rulers and the prefects and the treasurers of the Temple went forth to meet them. According to the honour due to them that came in, they used to go forth. All the craftsmen in Jerusalem used to rise up to meet them and greet them, saying, "Brothers, men of such-and-such a place, you are welcome."

The flute was played before them until they reached the Temple Mount. When they reached the Temple Mount, even King Agrippa would take his basket on his shoulder and enter in as far as the Temple Court . . . It was a magnificent ceremony. In historical context, however, its most significant aspect was the declaration each individual had to make:

"My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down into Egypt with a few people and lived there and became a great nation, powerful and numerous . . . Then the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror and with miraculous signs and wonders." (Deut. 26: 5-10) This passage is well-known. It became the text expounded as part of the Haggadah on seder night on Pesach. Its familiarity, though, should not blind us to its revolutionary character. Listening to these words, we are in the presence of one of the greatest revolutions in the history of thought.

The ancients saw the gods in nature, never more so than in thinking about the harvest and all that accompanied it. Nature does not change. Natural time is cyclical -the seasons of the year, the revolution of the planets, the cycle of birth, death and new life. When the ancients thought about the past, it was not the historical but a mythical/metaphysical/cosmological past

- the primeval time-before-time when the world was formed out of the struggle between the elements.

That is precisely what did not happen in ancient Israel. It might have been otherwise. Had Judaism been a different kind of religion, the people bringing firstfruits might have recited a song of praise to G-d as the author of creation and sustainer of life. We find several such songs in the Book of Psalms:

Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving; make music to our G-d on the harp. He covers the sky with clouds; he supplies the earth with rain and makes grass grow on the hills. and bread that sustains his heart. (Ps. 147: 7-8)
The significance of the firstfruits declaration is that it is not about nature but about history: a thumbnail sketch of the sequence of events from the days of the patriarchs to the exodus and then conquest of the land. Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi gave the best analysis of the intellectual transformation this involved:

It was ancient Israel that first assigned a decisive significance to history and thus forged a new world-view . . . Suddenly, as it were, the crucial encounter between man and the divine shifted away from the realm of nature and the cosmos to the plane of history, conceived now in terms of divine challenge and human response . . . Rituals and festivals in ancient Israel are themselves no longer primarily repetitions of mythic archetypes meant to annihilate historical time. Where they evoke the past, it is not the primeval but the historical past, in which the great and critical moments of Israel's history were fulfilled . . . Only in Israel and nowhere else is the injunction to remember felt as a religious imperative to an entire people. (Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory, p.8-9) This history was not academic, the province of scholars or a literary elite. It belonged to everyone. The declaration was recited by everyone. Knowing the story of one's people was an essential part of citizenship in the community of faith. Not only that, but it was also said in the first person: "My father . . . Then the Lord brought us out of Egypt . . . He brought us to this place". It is this internalization of history that led the rabbis to say: "In each generation, every person should see himself as if he personally came out of Egypt" (Mishnah Pesachim 10: 5). This is history transformed into memory.

To be a Jew is to be part of a story that extends across forty centuries and almost every land on the face of the earth. As Isaiah Berlin put it:

All Jews who are at all conscious of their identity as Jews are steeped in history. They have longer memories, they are aware of a longer continuity as a community than any other which has survived . . . Whatever other factors may have entered into the unique amalgam which, if not always Jews themselves, at any rate the rest of the world instantly recognizes as the Jewish people, historical consciousness - sense of continuity with the past - is among the most powerful. (Against the Current, p. 252) Despite Judaism's emphasis on the individual, it has a distinctive sense of what an individual is. We are not alone. There is no sense in Judaism of the atomic individual - the self in and for itself - we encounter in Western philosophy from Hobbes onwards. Instead, our identity is bound up horizontally with other individuals: our parents, spouse, children, neighbours, members of the community, fellow citizens, fellow Jews. We are also joined vertically to those who came before us, whose story we make our own. To be a Jew is to be a link in the chain of the generations, a character in a drama that began long before we were born and will continue long after our death.

Memory is essential to identity - so Judaism insists. We did not come from nowhere; nor does our story end with us. We are leaves on an ancient tree, chapters in a long and still-being-written story, a letter in the scroll of the book of the people of the Book.

There is something momentous about this historical sense. It reflects the fact - itself one of the great themes of the Bible - that it takes time for human beings to learn, to grow, to rise beyond our often dysfunctional and destructive instincts, to reach moral and spiritual maturity and create a society of dignity and generosity. That is why the covenant is extended over time and why - according to the sages - the only adequate guarantors of the covenant at Mount Sinai were the children yet to be born.

That is as near as we get to immortality on earth: to know that we are the guardians of the hopes of our ancestors, and the trustees of the covenant for the sake of the future. That is what happened in Temple times when people brought their firstfruits to Jerusalem and, instead of celebrating nature, celebrated the history of their people from the days when "My father was a wandering Aramean" to the present. As Moses said in some of his last words to posterity:

Remember the days of old; consider the generations long past. Ask your father and he will tell you, your elders, and they will explain to you. (Deut. 32: 7) To be a Jew is to know that the history of our people lives on in us.

Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

- Parshas Ki Savo Inbox Shema Yisrael Torah Network
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PARSHAS KI SAVO

Then you shall call out and say before Hashem, your G-d. (26:5) When one brings his Bikkurim, first fruits, to the Bais Hamikdash, he recites a formal declaration, which includes a short sketch of Jewish history. This awakens within the bearer of the Bikkurim the awareness that the Land and its fruit belong to him only as a result of Hashem's intervention. Had "history" been untouched, he would have had nothing. The word v'anisa, is translated by Rashi as, "you shall call out (loud)." V'anisa, in this context, means to raise one's voice. In an alternate explanation, the Sefas Emes says that v'anisa is derived from the word, ani, poor man. Thus, v'anisa, means, "you shall make yourself like a poor man," lowly, self-effacing and meek. Before one approaches Hashem in prayer, he must prepare himself emotionally. He must come subdued, like a poor man who stands at the door begging for alms, with a heavy heart, acknowledging that he himself is nothing, and that he has nothing to offer Hashem. He is just here to beg, to plead, to supplicate His positive response.

One prepares himself to pray by expressing his own lowliness before he is ready to articulate Hashem's praises. This is what the Mishnah means when it says, maschil b'gnus u'msayeim b'shevach, "He begins with the shame and concludes with praise." The author of the Haggadah uses this phrase to describe the Jewish People's journey through history. Originally descendants of Terach, father of Avraham Avinu an idol worshipper and subject of Nimrov, self-proclaimed G-d of the world, we developed into a nation that is deserving of the appellation mamleches Kohanim v'goi kadosh, "a kingdom of Priests and a holy nation." In this sense, however, we are saying that the individual must sense the v'anisa, his inferiority as he approaches Hashem, and only then can he begin to articulate Hashem's praises and entreat Him for His favor.

The Sefas Emes reconciles his definition of v'anisa, with that of Rashi. Clearly, the obsequious poor man standing at the door does not raise his voice. Nonetheless, the two definitions do not contradict one another, since the more one subdues himself, the louder his voice becomes, so that he can be heard. In other words, it is not always the loud "voice" that is heard. Indeed, the "loudness" may stifle the sound if it is the product of arrogance. One does not have to raise his voice in order for Hashem to hear, but he does have to lower himself if he wants Hashem to listen.

Horav Yitzchak, zl, m'Vorka was wont to say, "Chassidim should know how to be bent over when standing erect, to cry out when they are silent, and to dance without making any movement." This is a profound and eloquent statement. It is also a demanding manifesto, but it can be accomplished. With the proper discipline and state of mind, one can transport himself into a different world, while his physical body remains stationary. This is how one connects with Hashem.

As I try to come to grips with this idea, I am reminded of a story which Rabbi Yechiel Spero relates in "Touched By A Story 3." The Rizhiner Rebbe zl, would conduct his Friday night tisch, chassidic gathering around

the Rebbe's table, without uttering a word of Torah. Indeed, he hardly spoke at all. Nonetheless, his tisch was the gathering place for hundreds of chassidim. They would come there merely to bask in the rebbe's presence. Two young cynics heard about this "silent" tisch and decided to see for themselves what all the "commotion" was about. They had heard of the Rebbe's captivating powers, but this did not seem possible.

They traveled to Rizhin, but by the time they prepared themselves it was too late. The tisch had already ended. The only one left in the shul was the gentile janitor who was busy cleaning up. They had traveled so far and they were not prepared to return without learning something about the Rebbe's tisch. Therefore, they asked the janitor, "Perhaps you can tell us exactly what takes place during the tisch."

The janitor was not Jewish, nor was he very erudite but he possessed a sense of perception that exceeded his acquired knowledge. "I am not really sure what transpires," he began. "All I know is that the holy rabbi sits at the head of the table, with his followers sitting on two tables parallel to his. He just sits there and does not say a word. His followers also sit there - and listen to what he does not say."

The reply touched these two men like nothing else could have. The gentile's simple description, coupled with his admiration and reverence for the Rebbe, inspired them to return once again - as participants. They would also sit and bask in the Rebbe's silence. You see, it is not always what a person says that pierces through to the neshamah, soul. At times, it is what he does not say - his silence - his devotional - that speaks louder, loud enough for the heart to hear. There is a tremendous need for silence in our shuls. A shul is a place where one goes to pray, to express his feelings, to articulate his thoughts and emotions. It is also a place for silent devotion. There are people who daven by raising their voices, beating their chests and swaying with intensity. There are others who just meditate and say the words quietly, almost silently. There are also those who, regrettably, use the shul as their social hall, gym or business office, regardless of how much it may disturb others.

The following parable related by Horav Ezra Hamway, zl, Rosh Bais Din of Aram Sova, should serve as a deterrent for us, especially as we approach the Yimai Ha'Din, Days of Judgment, when our tefillos play a critical role in our lives. The yetzer hora, evil inclination, and yetzer tov, good inclination, once met and stopped to chat. The yetzer hora said, "It is getting out of hand. We are constantly at each other's throats. Let us work out a compromise in which I will have one part of man's world, and you will have the other. In this way, we will have clearly defined boundaries, so that our bickering and quarreling will finally be put to rest."

The negotiations were simple, since each one had a proclivity for a certain space where it would feel most comfortable. The yetzer tov opted for the domain of the bais hamedrash, the shuls, and any place endemic to holiness. The yetzer hora laid claim to the cafes, theaters, and other places of frivolity and entertainment. All went well until the day in which the yetzer tov entered a synagogue and discovered, to his chagrin, that the yetzer hora was firmly ensconced there. "What are you doing here on my property?" the yetzer tov asked. "I thought we had agreed to stick to each other's boundaries. The synagogue is my domain!"

"Yes," answered the yetzer hora. "It may appear to be a synagogue. It has an Aron Kodesh, Sifrei Torah and a bimah in the middle. For all appearances, you are right. It looks like a shul, but just listen to the sounds. There are people speaking about business deals, lashon hora, slanderous speech, and all sorts of mundane, trivial matters. It sure does not sound like a synagogue. This place looks more like it belongs in my domain!"

And He brought us to this place, and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. (26:9)

The fact that Eretz Yisrael is described as a "land flowing with milk and honey" is somewhat enigmatic. This quality notwithstanding, there certainly must be other attributes of Eretz Yisrael that the Torah could have emphasized. Since when does a land's physical qualities play such a

significant role? Rashi comments that makom ha'zeh, "this place," is a reference to the Bais Hamikdash. The individual is praising the Holy Land for being home to the Bais Hamikdash. He is, thus, making a spiritual statement. Eretz Yisrael's intrinsic kedushah, holiness, elevates it above all other lands, but is the connection to milk and honey?

Horav Meir Shapiro, zl, suggests that "flowing with milk and honey" is actually a metaphor for the Holy Land's spiritual character. Milk and honey are both foods that seem to be unkosher. Milk is a derivative of a cow's blood that has metabolically become milk. Furthermore, it should also be considered eiver min ha'chai, an organ from a living animal, which is also not permissible to be eaten. Despite these two characteristics, milk is kosher because Hashem says that the process which changes blood into milk is a completely transformative process which also changes its halachic status, rendering it kosher.

Likewise, a bee, which is a ritually unclean insect, should produce a similarly unclean product, which would cause it to be unkosher. Hashem, however, does not look at it this way. Since the process which produces honey occurs outside of the bee's body, it is rendered kosher. Two products, milk and honey; both should not be considered kosher, but are kosher because a transformation occurs which converts them into a totally new entity.

Eretz Yisrael has that effect on a person. The land is holy, and the individual who lives there is suffused in holiness as he immerses himself in its atmosphere. Eretz Yisrael is such that a person who has strayed throughout his life seeks to return to his faith after experiencing its greatness. There is, however, a negative aspect to this distinctive character of holiness: it has little tolerance for those who challenge it. If an individual insists on living a life of secularism and degeneracy, despite being in the world's center of kedushah, the holiness of Eretz Yisrael provides a glaring and deprecating contrast which magnifies his illicit behavior. One cannot have it both ways. Therefore, "choose life."

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

Joy is more than a frame of mind; it is a prerequisite for serving Hashem. It is also a barometer for measuring one's level of service to Hashem. An unhappy person is unproductive and, for all intents and purposes, does not really function effectively as an observant Jew. Furthermore, the mere fact that he is unhappy is indicative that something is terribly wrong with the manner in which he serves Hashem. Otherwise, how could he be unhappy? This pasuk implies that a lack of joy in mitzvah observance catalyzed the churban, destruction of the Bais Hamikdash.

The Talmud Yoma 9 posits another reason for the destruction: sinaas chinam, unwarranted hatred, among Jews. Which is it? Hatred, or a lack of joy? The Shem M'Shmu'el explains that they are one and the same. One who is unhappy lacks the zest for life, probably the most important ingredient for being able to tolerate a situation, to endure a crisis, to rise above adversity. A bitter, depressed person does not get along with people. His jaundiced outlook distorts everything that he sees and generates a feeling of self-destructiveness which extends to his relationships with others. He sees demons everywhere, and he believes that every person is out to get him. Such a person is filled with self-loathing, which envelops him as he focuses on others. He begins to hate. First, it is those whom he feels who have hurt him directly or indirectly. The circle becomes smaller and tighter, as he begins to hate those who once had been his closest friends and even relatives. Yes, the Bais Hamikdash was destroyed as a result of unwarranted hatred. That hatred, however, was foreshadowed by a lack of joy in mitzvah observance, which created the unhappy person who found an outlet for his self-loathing: hatred for others.

Torah study should inject a sense of joy in a person. Yet, one who is a bitter, depressed person cannot benefit from Torah's therapeutic effect. How then is he to become happy? It is all a question of perspective: How does one view Torah study? Is it a scholarly objective, an academic

challenge that he must master, or is it a Divine gift, the word of G-d, something that transcends the parameters of this world? Those who have studied Torah as just another branch of wisdom or ethics, have robbed themselves-- or have been robbed-- of its true essence. In his commentary to Devarim 26:8, the Ohr HaChaim Hakadosh writes that if people would sense the sweetness and pleasantness of Torah they would go out of their minds in their quest to consume more and more of it. Indeed, all of the gold and silver of the world would be nothing in comparison. We do not fully realize what Torah is and, therefore, cannot experience its ultimate sweetness.

Once a person begins to realize the depth and breadth of Torah, when he grasps what it is and what is its source, and Who is its Author, his entire attitude will change. Only then can Torah take its effect. In fact, as the Igrai Tal writes in his forward: "It is a mistake for one to say that he who studies Torah lishmah, purely for its own sake, with no ulterior motive, 'and enjoys' his learning - that he is detracting from the lishmah, because of his enjoyment. They are wrong! On the contrary, the essence of the mitzvah of Torah study is for the individual to be happy and filled with joy and to develop a strong sense of satisfaction and pleasure from his learning. Then the words of Torah will course in his veins and become a part of him. The more he enjoys the Torah, the greater becomes his bond to it." It is all a question of attitude.

The Alter m'Slobodka, Horav Nosson Tzvi Finkel, zl, asked Horav Yisrael Salanter, zl, to define the correct approach to teaching students. Rav Yisrael replied, "To generate life to the lowly and make those who are in pain come alive." In other words: imbue them with a sense of geshmak, joy and satisfaction in what they are doing. When a student enjoys his learning, he will continue it as a life-long endeavor. The one who is bored will soon give up on his learning - and everything else, for that matter.

Rav Nosson Tzvi made every effort to generate a spirit of cheerfulness and joy among his students. This was especially true during the Chagim, Festival period, when there was much singing and dancing reverberating throughout the halls of the yeshivah. He felt that one who studies Torah should not walk around as if he is carrying the world's problems on his shoulders. In fact, he discouraged his students from being too serious and never smiling. It demonstrated a lack of simchas ha'chaim, joy in living. The fact that one can study Torah and perform mitzvos -- which truly catalyzes a greater closeness with Hashem -- should elevate a person to a heightened sense of joy.

Rav Meir Feist, zl, was such a person. Born in Mt. Vernon, New York, in 1907, to a family of Alsatian Jews, he was stricken with polio at the age of four and was confined to a wheelchair for the rest of his life. His family was not observant, but he chose a life of Torah observance for himself, devoting much of his time to Torah study, eventually receiving smichah from Horav Mendel Zaks, zl, son-in-law of the saintly Chafetz Chaim. He earned his living in the family business of music publishing, which brought him into contact with the unconventional, the bohemian, and the creative personalities of the artists that frequented Manhattan's Greenwich Village. He would spend entire nights talking, guiding and inspiring the people with whom he came in contact.

When he turned fifty, he decided to intensify his religious observance. He grew a beard, began to study mussar, chassidus and kabbalah. Shortly thereafter, he sold his business and move to Lakewood, New Jersey, where he spent day and night immersed in Torah study in Beth Medrash Govohah. In 1974, he visited Eretz Yisrael and decided that he would finally realize his lifelong dream of settling there. Alas, he became ill with double pneumonia and passed away at the age of sixty-eight. When he became ill as a child, the doctors had declared that he would never live past the age of forty.

Rav Meir's life was filled with chronic disease and excruciating pain. During half of his life, he lived alone in the world, without parents or family. Yet, to anyone who knew or came into contact with him, he was a wellspring that radiated love and overflowed with kindness. His humility

was typical of a tzadik, a righteous person, whose life had been molded by Torah and mussar. He exemplified a harmony of piety with a deep and loving sense of humanity, insight and love for others. Everything that he did-- from his avodas Hashem, service to Hashem, to more mundane matters-- was manifested in freshness and enthusiasm. He never failed to smile and make those around him feel good. Above all: he never complained about all of the adversity that he had had to endure. He never said a harsh word to anyone. Indeed, people would aptly describe him as "the happiest man in the world."

How does someone carry such a heavy burden of pain and deprivation and avoid sinking into the abyss of despair and bitterness? How does one see others walking around, raising families, planning for the future, while he is resigned to his little cubicle, his partner a wheelchair, his companions seforim and books, and not feel a tinge of envy? How does one continue with a will - no, a zest - for life? How does one radiate a joyful countenance, a pleasant and patient disposition, a sense of tranquility, a feeling that he is the beneficiary of good fortune? How does one maintain a sense of hope while simultaneously encouraging others? Indeed, Rav Meir integrated happiness into his very being and exuded it to everyone who came in contact with him. How?

He explained, applying David HaMelech's pasuk in Tehillim 84:11, "One day in Your courtyard is better than a thousand (elsewhere)." Rashi explains, "It is better to be in Your courtyard and die the next day than to live a thousand days in another place." Since the destruction of the Batei Mikdash, Hashem's courtyard is the yeshivah and study halls where Torah is studied. Thus, living as a ben Torah for a single day is more rewarding than living a life of pleasure for a thousand years.

Wow! This was the secret of Rav Meir's success. He understood and felt that every day that was afforded him to spend studying Torah in the bais hamedrash was an unsurpassed opportunity for dwelling in the chatzar, courtyard, of Hashem! Every day that he lived and experienced avodas Hashem was an unparalleled opportunity for dveikus, clinging, to Hashem. Only in this way could he have continued to live in joy and contentment throughout his misery and pain.

The Navi says in Megillas Eichah (3:39), "For what should the living complain." Chazal explain that just being alive is sufficient reason for a person not to complain. Rav Meir exemplified this quality. For him, the mere fact that he was alive, despite all of his hardships, was an opportunity that should not be wasted. He understood the infinite value of life. Indeed, he lived life to its fullest.

In an alternative exposition, Horav Mordechai Pogremonsky, zl, views this pasuk homiletically. "Because you did not serve Hashem" is a general statement referring to sin. One who does not serve Hashem is sinful. Sin is bad, but one would think that a sinner at least has feelings of remorse and regret for his lack of observance. No! "You remained with gladness and goodness of heart." Not only did the sin not bother you, but you retained a sense of happiness despite having rebelled against Hashem. Why? How could one continue to feel so self-satisfied, so smug, even filled with joy after knowingly transgressing His mitzvos? It is because "everything was abundant." We had it good. We possessed wealth, prestige, all the good. We became obese as a result of Hashem's benevolence; we took, and gave nothing in return. We asserted that we gained everything through our own powers and doing - ignoring the Almighty. Is it any wonder that one is not troubled by his iniquity? He has it too good.

Va'ani Tefillah Yehi chasdecha Hashem aleinu kaasher yichalnu lach. May the loving kindness of Hashem be upon us, while we eagerly await Him.

Hareinu Hashem chasdecha v'yeshacha titen lanu Let us see Your kindness Hashem, and give us Your salvation.

The word lach (yichalnu lach) is usually translated as "you." In his Michtav M'Eliyahu, Horav Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler, zl explains that when we entreat Hashem for kindness, it is not for our own personal gratification. Rather, it is yichalnu lach, whatever "You," Hashem, sees fit

for us, whatever You decide is good for us. Everything which You do for us is chasdecha, an act of kindness, "Your" kindness, which is boundless and limitless. Rav Dessler adds that just as when one visits a doctor he places his life in the hands of the physician, the same attitude certainly should prevail in our relationship with Hashem, Who cannot only do whatever He wants, but also knows what is best for us.

We first ask that Hashem's chesed should be "upon" us. We then conclude, Hareinu Hashem chasdecha, "Let us 'see' Your kindness, Hashem." Why do we change our request? The Shalah Hakodesh explains that there are covert miracles and concealed acts of kindness of which we are unaware. They are revealed only to Hashem. These are the acts of kindness that are "upon" us. They affect our lives without our awareness of them. Only Hashem knows. There are also those acts of kindness which are overt and well-known to us. These are the kindnesses which we "see." They are titen lanu, "given to us."

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literally taken place before our eyes. And, this paradoxically gives us the hope and promise for the better times that God's promise extends to us.

As we contemplate the shambles of the tochacha that surround us currently, we may take hope in the future- that the times of peace, spiritual accomplishment and serenity of soul will also be literally fulfilled in the great and good year that is about to dawn upon us and all of Israel.

Shabat shalom.

Rabbi Berel Wein

<http://www.rabbiwein.com/Weekly-Parsha/2007/09/188.html>

Weekly Parsha

KITAVO

RABBI BEREL WEIN

One of the most bitter curses that the Torah describes in the tochacha that forms such a major portion of this parsha itself is that one's labor and efforts, even all of one's life struggles and sacrifices, will turn out to be empty, fruitless, of no purpose or benefit. We all work in life to achieve certain goals – financial, personal fulfillment, family serenity, and the wish to be remembered and appreciated. There is therefore perhaps nothing in the tochacha that is as deflating and saddening as the statement that all of our efforts will be for naught, all of our ambitions, ideas and struggles ultimately pointless and of no lasting value.

It is clear to most of us, not particularly blessed with enormous wealth or unique creative genius, that there are relatively few ways that we can make our mark on the world and our lives purposeful. One of those ways however is in building family ties and harmony. People are able to see their accomplishments in the accomplishments of others if those others are their offspring or close relatives.

That is the reason that family relations, especially parent-child relationships, are so delicate and emotional. For even if one feels that one's efforts in life have been successful, we feel that the verdict on our achievements is yet to be rendered and that it depends upon the continuing success of our future generations as well. And therefore the words of the tochacha are truly frightening for it portends that the future generations can undo all previous achievements of their predecessors. We are all too bitterly aware that this is true especially in our generatrions.

This inconsonance between generations is emphasized further in the tochacha when the Torah describes "that your children shall be given to another nation and that you will be powerless to prevent it." The Torah refers here not only to actual enslavement and imprisonment of one's children but it also implies being given to a foreign, non-Jewish culture and way of life. The effects of the secularization of the youthful generations of Eastern European Jewry and of American and Israeli Jewry are so serious as to be almost catastrophic.

Our generation and times are left to pay the bill for those previous defections from Jewish life. And, what the appeal of false ideals that overwhelmed the Jewish street then did not destroy, the Holocaust - described in minute detail in the tochacha – completed. If it were not for God's promise that ends the tochacha, that Israel will survive and rejuvenate itself, we would almost be without hope or comfort. But it is the sad fact that the tochacha, in all of its awful prophecies and events, has