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INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON **Ki Savo** - 5772

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from: Shabbat Shalom shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org date: Thu, Sep 6, 2012 at 8:03 PM subject: Conversations About Marriage, Change Your Life, Listening - Parshat Ki Tavo - Shabbat Shalom from the OU
Do You Make Your Time Count?
By Rabbi Eliyahu Safran

Just as the ticking of the seconds become minutes that become hours and that become days, the days become weeks, become months and become years. What is the worth of marking time? What makes one day different than the next? How do we value the boxes on our calendars that help us to distinguish one day from another, with birthdays, anniversaries, business meetings, doctor appointments and holiday celebrations? In an interesting way, we are very much as our calendars present us. Do we take "one day at a time" or a full week? Do we plan for the immediate, or do we plan long-range? I speak not of a "calendar" in the theoretical, philosophical sense; that is, the lines we place on time so that it progresses in a way that is meaningful and measurable to us. Instead, I speak of the physical calendars we carry, or set upon our desks, or hang from our walls. Go into any office supply

store and you will find many different calendars and styles to choose from. There are calendars that display a single day at a time so that, at the end of the day, the day's page is torn away and it is as if they day is lost, gone. At the end of 365 days, the year too, is essentially discarded. All that is left is a cover bereft of pages, of days and weeks. Of time or substance. There are other calendars designed so that an entire month can be viewed "at a glance." Such calendars invite the user to take the longer view, and to tear off a page not every day but every month, but tear and discard nonetheless. What does it mean to be a person who lives according to these types of calendars? How does such a person view his or her accomplishments and events that have occupied their time? Their days and months and years fly by, quickly discarded, too often forgotten, and lost to the shadows of ill-defined time. For them, the days and weeks have no more real significance than the paper pages of the calendars that they discard so thoughtlessly. For these people, their calendars govern their lives only insofar as they dictate schedules, and impose arbitrary boundaries on the vast sameness of time and experience. Their response to their calendars is fundamentally passive, a nod to the passage of time rather than the embrace of the moment. If their calendars communicate anything at all, it is that time is passing and fleeting – and empty of meaning. But there are others for whom a calendar is a significant document. They are serious and sensitive people who rebel against having time determined by pre-designed calendars. For them, time is a physical reality, like the world around them. They seek to embrace the beauty of it and so they design their own calendars. These are people who recognize that the days of a man's life are brief, and each moment is too precious to be discarded simply because a calendar leads to the end – of a day, a week, a year.

They live their lives actively. Their calendars do not determine how time is marked but they determine their calendars. They imbue time with meaning, and find the meaning in time. Their calendars are unique, quirky, idiosyncratic, special. They cannot be mass produced, nor can they be mass mailed by synagogues, yeshivot (schools of Torah), hospitals or orphanages. They are diligently and lovingly handwritten, drawn, measured, and designed by thoughtful and prudent individuals. When the days, weeks and years of these calendars are realized, they are not torn or discarded. They are treasured and preserved for posterity, to be passed on to future generations as legacies of human fulfillment and achievement. * * * The Midrash records a conversation between the Almighty and the angels. "When is Rosh Hashanah, and when is Yom Kippur?" the angels ask. G-d is amazed by the question and responds, "Why are you asking me? Let us go down to the lower [human] court and find out. Does it not explicitly say: 'Blow the shofar at the new moon, at the full moon for the feast day. For it is a statute for Israel, an ordinance of the G-d of Jacob.'" By his response, G-d is teaching the angels that man has the knowledge and ability to meaningfully create and design his own days of celebration. Man has tools, methods and techniques to infuse his days with values, content and meaning. While it is true that the seasons of harvest and planting, the pilgrimages and certain holidays are set, it falls to man to use his intellect to celebrate and mark these days with fervor and meaning. In teaching Moshe about the celebration of sacred days, G-d says, "These are the special times that you must celebrate as sacred holidays at their appropriate times." Proper celebration of G-d's festivals requires the complete and full participation of man; Halachically through Kiddush Ha-Chodesh (sanctification of the new month), cross examination of witnesses, announcements of the new moon to other distant communities and personally, by infusing the days with meaning, and spirit. There was once a little girl who taped a new calendar on her wall. "It is going to be a beautiful year," she exclaimed to her mother, who was watching her. "How do you know it is going to be a beautiful year? A year is a long time, and you never know what will happen." "Yes," she

answered, “but a day is not a long time. I am going to take a day at a time and make it beautiful. Years are only days put together, and I am going to see that every day in the New Year gets something beautiful into it.” The wisdom of the innocent! That little girl was determined to author her own calendar. Let us each learn from her wisdom and approach the beginning of this new year with a resolve to be the author and designer of our own calendar. Let us not be enslaved to predesigned schedules, programs, timetables and resolutions. Let us not simply “tear off” and discard the most precious aspect of our lives – time. May our 5773 calendars be designed with care, adorned with precision and love, accompanied with health, happiness and contentment – so that our individual and collective accomplishments are many. Shanah Tova, wishing you a happy and sweet New Year. Who will stand at your synagogue’s pulpit? Rabbis across the U.S. and Canada exchange pulpits and inspire with a special Kinus Teshuva program.

Rabbi Dr. Eliyahu Safran serves as OU Kosher’s vice president of communications and marketing.

from: ravadlerstein@torah.org to: netziv@torah.org date: Thu, Sep 6, 2012 at 12:05 PM

subject: **Netziv: Davar B'Ito - Parshas Ki Savo**

by Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein

To sponsor an edition of the Netziv: Davar B'Ito e-mail list, click here [Blame It On The Angels](#) 1

Gaze down from Your holy abode, from the heavens, and bless Your people Israel and the ground that You gave us...

How do we see something? It all depends how you look at it.

You can look critically, admiringly, lovingly or contemptuously. The Torah uses different verbs to connote the different ways we look at things. We are therefore surprised that the Torah pleads with Hashem: “Hashkifah”/ gaze down from the heavens. Hashkifah always means to look disapprovingly! The angels sent to overthrow Sodom “gaze down²” at the city; Hashem “gazed down³” upon the Egyptians just before bringing the Sea crashing down upon their heads. Twice is every shemittah cycle a person declares before G-d in the beis hamikdash that he has done his duty in regard to all the ma’asros and directed them to their proper recipients. Immediately thereafter, he asks Hashem for a brachah. He begins by requesting that He “gaze down⁴” from His abode – employing the verb that means looking disapprovingly! Why would a person ask Hashem to look at us disapprovingly?

Chazal had a fix for this. The Torah, they tell us, wishes to convey that the merit of the proper distribution of ma’aser produce is so great, that it can change Hashem’s glance from a negative one to a positive one⁴. But we still do not understand. Why employ a double negative to get to a positive? Instead of calling for Hashem’s disapproving gaze, and then neutralizing it in the merit of the mitzvah of ma’aser, why not avoid the unsavory reference, and simply ask Him to smile upon His children in the first place?

And just where do we fix Hashem’s residence, kevayachol, in our pasuk? Is “holy abode” the same as “the heavens?” This might seem defensible, but really is not, on the level of plain pshat. If the pasuk were trying to convey to us that they are one and the same, there would be no need to repeat the word “from,” as if they were two distinct places. Indeed, the gemara⁵ speaks of seven different heavens. “Abode” - in contradistinction to shomayim, the place of the celestial spheres – is seen by the gemara as the place of the ministering angels. Yet it offers no proof for this assertion, unlike the other levels of heaven mentioned there!

Here is what our pasuk actually means. The questions speak to each other; taken together, everything falls into place. “Heaven” and “Abode” do refer to distinct realms. We ask that Hashem should behold us from His heavens, and shower us with berachah – but not until He first look

disapprovingly at the Abode. The reason for disapproval is straightforward, even if difficult for us to fully comprehend. We would expect that the contrast between fallible and often failed human beings and their spiritual competitors should be huge and absolute. The ministering angels ought to make us look bad. The point is that they don’t. Chazal somehow are critical of them. The celestial citizens don’t always get it right. For example, the angels who told Lot “we are about to destroy the place⁶” performed imperfectly, either by prematurely revealing what should have been kept hidden, or by implying that they possessed some independent power, rather than Hashem⁷.

Rather than make us look bad, they do the opposite. We daven to G-d: Please gaze down – disapprovingly – by way of Your own ministering angels. Do You find perfection in them? Or is that reserved only for Yourself, without exception? You will certainly not be entirely pleased with what You detect in the world of the angelic. If the angels cannot deliver on perfection, is it so surprising that mortal humans fall short of that goal? Don’t humans deserve to be judged with a yardstick of compassion?

The pasuk thus means: Gaze down disapprovingly at Your angels in the Abode, and then look approvingly at us humans from the other heavens! The second phrase really ought to have employed a different verb in place of “gaze” – one that is more upbeat and accepting. Here is where the ma’amar Chazal we mentioned earlier comes in. While such a verb (like from the other heavens) would fit more naturally, the Torah utilized hashkifah for both phrases, to teach that in the merit of properly assigned ma’aseros, Hashem changes His stance from judgment to compassion!

We can employ the same approach to shed light on an enigmatic passage in Tehilim:

You will arise and show Tziyon mercy, for there will come the time to favor her, for the appointed time will have come. For Your servants have cherished her stones, and favored her dust. Then the nations will fear the Name of Hashem, and all the kings of the earth Your glory. He will have turned to the prayer of the aroused⁸ one, and not have despised their prayer. Let this be recorded for the final generation, so that the newborn people will praise G-d. For he gazed from His exalted Sanctuary. Hashem looked down from heaven to earth, to hear the groaning of the prisoner, liberate those doomed to die, to declare in Tziyon the Name of Hashem, and His praise in Yerushalayim, when peoples gather together, and kingdoms to serve Hashem⁹.

The psukim move back and forth between singular and plural. They can be understood as describing a future time, when people will daven on Rosh Hashanah for the full flowering of G-d’s Kingship. They are not all equal to the task.

“He will have turned to the prayer of the devastated one” – some, out of true love of Hashem, will pray only to see His honor flourish. Because there are few of them, the Psalmist, looking prophetically to the future, uses the singular.

“And not have despised their prayer” – He switches to the plural, to include the many who daven to lift themselves out of the oppression of galus, and even to those who do not consider at all what they are saying, and merely mouth the words. Because both of these groups gather together with the enlightened individual, their prayers are also not rejected.

“So that the newborn people will praise G-d” – each Rosh Hashanah, all people become as if newly created. They will, on the holiday of Sukkos, gladly sing Hashem’s praises, confident that their tefilos during the Yomim Nora’im will have been answered, in whole or in part.

“For he gazed from His exalted Sanctuary” disapprovingly, to contemplate the imperfections of the angels.

“Hashem looked down from heaven to earth” After gazing that way at the angels, He is able to look with compassion upon the rest of creation, including fallible Man.

“To hear the groaning of the prisoner” Hashem listens to the isolated individual who thinks of nothing but the pain of the Shechinah groans constantly in galus. No matter how comfortable or secure is his own situation, he will always see himself as a prisoner in galus.

“Liberate those doomed to die” G-d compassionately finds room to accept the prayers of those who daven entirely out of concern for their own fate, not for the pain of the Shechinah.

“To declare in Tziyon the Name of Hashem, and His praise in Yerushalayim, when peoples gather together, and kingdoms to serve Hashem” When different groups come together to daven, even when they pray for vastly different concerns, Hashem listens to all of them!

The ideas in this passage are all first evoked in our pasuk in Devarim!

1. Based on Ha'amek Davar and Harchev Davar, Devarim 26:15
2. Bereishis 18:16
3. Shemos 14:24
4. Cited in slightly different form by Rashi, Bereishis 18:16
5. Chagigah 12B
6. Bereishis 19:13
7. Bereishis Rabbah 68:12
8. See Metzudas Tziyon
9. Tehilim 102:14-23

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Ki Tavo

Some Fruit

by Rabbi Josh Kahn

Of Torah, Am Yisrael and Bikkurim, Bikkurim is clearly the outlier. The common denominator, however, is that the Midrash at the beginning of Sefer Bereishit (parts of which are quoted in Rashi) states that the world was created for each of these items. While the importance of Torah and Klal Yisrael doesn't need to be elaborated on, the inclusion of Bikkurim, bringing the first fruit to the Beit HaMikdash, seems out of place. What is the important message conveyed through the Mitzvah of Bikkurim which alone would have warranted the creation of the world?

Summarizing some of the details of Bikkurim sheds insight into the broader message imbedded in this Mitzvah. A person would take the first fruits he grew, bring them up to the Beit HaMikdash, stand in front of a Kohen and recite a paragraph recorded in the Torah entitled "Arami Oveid Avi." This paragraph, well-known to us because it is the centerpiece of the Maggid section of the Seder on Pesach, is a brief summary of the fulfillment of the Brit Bein HaBetarim, beginning with Yaakov's travel to the house of Lavan and culminating with this person standing in the Beit HaMikdash. What is the significance of this recitation at this particular occasion? Furthermore, the Meforshim (see Rashi, Ramban and Kli Yakar) discuss the ideal type of Kohen to whom one should bring the Bikkurim. The Torah allows us to bring the Bikkurim to whichever Kohen happens to be doing the service in the Beit HaMikdash, but the Kli Yakar emphasizes that we might have a "Hava Amina," an initial thought, that we should be required to bring the Bikkurim specifically to a Kohen who is a Talmid Chacham. Why would there be an emphasis on bringing the Bikkurim to a Talmid Chacham specifically? The process of bringing Bikkurim to Hashem may symbolize a broader sense of religious service. By bringing his first fruits, the farmer recognizes that the blessings that have been bestowed upon him ultimately come from Hashem. The first fruit he grows, upon which he rejoices, must be dedicated to Hashem. This process should

remind us of an obligation to recognize each blessing bestowed upon us as a gift from Hashem. Internalizing this crucial message may provide an insight into the details of Bikkurim previously mentioned. A person brings each gift, physically or figuratively, that has been bestowed upon him, and recites Arami Oveid Avi. He recalls where he comes from and the legacy that has been provided for him. He stands in the Beit HaMikdash and reflects upon his forefathers. But he also looks in front of him and ideally will see a Kohen who is a Talmid Chacham. This Kohen represents the present leader in Bnei Yisrael, someone who has accomplished incredible feats in the study of Torah. After reflecting on the past and present, he looks to the future and hopes to become a Talmid Chacham himself. The way to accomplish this inspiring goal is to take those gifts which have been bestowed upon him and dedicate them to the service of Hashem. This fusion of past, present and future is the powerful message of the Bikkurim. As the Mishnah states, "Know from where you came, where you are going and in front of whom you will ultimately give a full accounting" (Avot 3:1). This challenge is the reason the world was created; to enable each and every one of us to fulfill his potential by elevating the mundane gifts he is given into the realm of Kedushah. There is no object that was created for no reason. The message of Bikkurim is to take everything we can and use it to properly serve Hashem.

Easier Does It by Moshe Aharon Poleyeff

The beginning of Parshat Ki Tavo deals with the laws of Bikkurim. When one goes to Yerushalayim to offer his Bikkurim, he recites a passage that begins, "Arami Oveid Avi VaYeired Miztraymah VaYagor Sham," "An Aramean (Lavan) tried to destroy my forefather (Yaakov), and he descended to Egypt and sojourned there" (Devarim 26:5). At first glance, these two incidences do not relate to each other. What does Lavan's attempt to destroy Yaakov have to do with Yaakov's descent to Miztrayim? Why does the Torah juxtapose these two events? Rav Moshe Feinstein explains that in Sefer Bersheit (32:5), Rashi comments that despite all the trials and hardships to which Yaakov was subjected in Lavan's house, he nonetheless remained steadfast in his commitment to Hashem. Had he never experienced Lavan's house and the spiritual and physical trials it presented, Yaakov would not have willingly taken his family to Miztrayim. Although Yosef was the Mishneh LaMelech, had great power in Miztrayim and did not waver from his devotion to Hashem, Yaakov would not have wanted to expose his family to the lifestyle there, thereby taking a chance that other family members would not remain committed to Hashem like Yosef did. Hashem wanted Yaakov to enter Miztrayim of his own free will and not to be forced there as Yosef was. It was therefore necessary for Yaakov to spend time in Lavan's house to be assured that he could handle and overcome attempts to destroy his family. Later on, Yaakov would then agree to descend to Miztrayim since he had already overcome hardships in his life. Thus, Lavan's attempt to destroy Yaakov was necessary before Yaakov could voluntarily go to Miztrayim. Therefore, those two events are connected by the Mikra Bikkurim ceremony. The Netziv (TABC Talmid Gabi Wiseman is a nephew of the Netziv) offers another explanation. The Gemara (Pesachim 87b) comments that when the first Beit HaMikdash was destroyed, our ancestors were destined to be exiled to Aram. However, when Hashem saw how cruel the Arameans were, he exiled Bnei Yisrael to Bavel instead. This same idea applied to Yaakov with Lavan. Avraham's descendants were destined to be exiled, as the Brit Bein HaBetarim had promised. Yaakov's 22 years spent in Aram could have been the start of the 400-year exile (see Rabbi Jachter's article on this topic available at www.koltorah.org). However, when Hashem saw how poorly Lavan treated Yaakov, He decided to send him down to Miztrayim to begin the exile there. Thus, these two incidents are recorded in the same Pasuk because the Galut in Miztrayim is a direct result of Yaakov's suffering at the hands of Lavan. The Netziv's

explanation teaches us a powerful lesson. Although it may have appeared that Yaakov suffered needlessly at Lavan's hands, that suffering actually eased the much longer exile in store. Hashem always has a plan; nothing happens accidentally. With true Bitachon in Hashem, we will be able to weather any hardship with the knowledge that it is for our ultimate good.

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The Power of Speech

Moshe Shulman

In Parshas Ki Savo we find a recurring theme; we discover the power of words. Words do not seem to be as powerful as actions, as actions have the power to affect the world, while words are, on first glance, harmless. Indeed, the Mishna in Pirkei Avos (1:15) quotes Shammai as saying that one should say little and do much. However, in this week's Parsha we see speech in an entirely different light.

The first Mitzva of the Parsha is that of bringing Bikkurim, the first fruits. Every year, the first fruits of a harvest were brought to Yerushalayim, where the farmer would present them to a Cohen and recite a passage of the Torah. This passage must be read aloud in Hebrew, in the exact language recorded by the Torah. One who adds even one word has not fulfilled his requirement to perform this commandment (Minchas Chinuch 606:1).

What is the reason for the reading of the passage of Bikkurim, which the Torah takes so seriously? The Sefer Ha-chinuch explains that what one says affects his personality and his mind. Speech is a tool for expressing one's ideas and a tool to provoke thought. When Hashem blesses us with a good harvest, or any harvest at all, we must use this tool to recognize all that He has done for us. It is for this reason that the passage that the farmer reads outlines Jewish history; this is an opportunity for meditation on all that Hashem does for us.

The Torah then commands us to perform Viduy Ma'aser. Every three or four years, when the three-year cycle of Ma'asros ends, we go to the Beis HaMikdash and declare that we have properly performed the Mitzvos of and relating to Ma'aser. Although this formula may be said in any language, the Torah still lists each detail of what must be said; additionally, unlike most Mitzvos that depend on speech, one cannot perform this Mitzva by listening to another recite the Viduy.

The Sefer Ha-Chinuch explains that there are some who are more careful about their speech than about their actions. The reason for doing so is that speech differentiates humans from animals; animals as well as humans can act, while only humans can speak. Speech is thus a "great splendor" for humans, and many are thus very careful about it. The Torah recognizes this and commands us to verbalize the declaration stating that we have fulfilled our obligations vis-?-vis Ma'aser. Those who are more careful about their speech than their actions will not lie and will fulfill their Ma'aser obligations.

The Torah then enumerates blessings for those who follow the words of the Torah and curses for those who do not. These are verbalized, as are most such blessings and curses. The Gemara in Brachos (20b) quotes a discussion about whether a different type of blessing, Birchos Krias Shema and Shemoneh Esrei, must be verbalized. Indeed, the Shulchan Aruch (62:3) writes that such a blessing must be verbalized. Similarly, the other type of blessing, that of promising reward to those who do good and promising punishment to those who do bad, must be verbalized.

We are now in the midst of Elul, a time for reflection and repentance. This week's Parsha presents us with an opportunity to focus on our speech. Are we careful about what comes out of our mouth? Do

we realize that our speech affects our personalities and identities? Will we internalize the message of Mikra Bikkurim?

Will we be careful about preserving the purity of the quality that differentiates humans from animals? Will we be careful to speak the truth? Will we internalize the messages of Viduy Ma'aser?

Will we realize the power of speech to help or harm? Will we be careful to pronounce our Brachos? Will we internalize the messages of the Brachos and Klalos?

We must not, of course, minimize the importance of action in Judaism. Indeed, Viduy Ma'aser protects people from violating the Torah by not doing the actions relating to Ma'aser. The Mishna quoted earlier is another indication of the importance of action. However, this week's Parsha teaches us that there is power in words, and this is not to be underestimated. May we be Zoche to conquer our power of speech and use it constructively.

Thanks to hamelaket@gmail.com for collecting the following items:

From Destiny Foundation/Rabbi Berel Wein info@jewishdestiny.com
Subject Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein

In My Opinion :: CARDIAC REHAB :: Rabbi Berel Wein

I have been attending and participating in a cardiac rehab exercise program for the past fifteen months. I attend twice a week and spend an hour each time doing rather vigorous exercise under the watchful eyes of those in charge of the program. Even though I was only originally approved to the program for one year I have continued on my own past the mandatory time.

All of my fellow sufferers in the program have had, as I have had, a cardiac incident. Most of them are already senior citizens – though I hazard to say that I somehow am the most senior of all of the seniors – but there are a few much younger people present who unfortunately suffered a cardiac incident at a relatively young age.

The group is composed of a mix of Israeli Jerusalem society – charedi, religious, secular and indeterminate. We all get along very well, courteously sharing time and turns on the various exercise machines and being friendly, but not intrusively so, one to another. The fact that all of us realize how much at risk each one of us is undoubtedly contributes to this atmosphere of camaraderie and politeness.

The usual rough edges of our societal behavior are not present in the exercise room. It is serious business there and there is no time or space for the everyday pettiness and foibles that so color our relationships with others in our usual everyday lives. Though it would be an exaggeration on my part to say that I enjoy attending cardiac rehab twice a week, I do admit to myself that aside from the physical and health benefits of the program there are important ancillary benefits to me as well.

Firstly, the hour of exercise allows me an hour that I cannot do anything else. As a workaholic Type A person, I was terribly frustrated during the first months of the program. I was constantly thinking of what else I could be doing during that hour - and of all those tasks that I was now not doing, which became so important and pressing.

But now more than a year later I use the hour on the bicycle, the treadmill, the ski machine, the hands-only bicycle, to think about plans and about myself. Especially in this month of Elul, an hour's worth of introspection is worth a great deal.

Maimonides posits that before one speaks publicly one must think about what one is about to say three or four times before actually speaking. And he says that when writing and publishing one's thoughts and opinions, one should review them a thousand times before disseminating them!

Well, I cannot claim to have fulfilled those requirements in a literal and exact fashion, but the hour in the cardiac rehab exercise room does afford me the necessary time to at least think seriously about issues that I will discuss publicly sometime in the future. And that is a great benefit to me and I hope to you, the reader of this column.

But another benefit of the cardiac rehab exercise program is that it proved to me once again the omnipresent possibilities of resilience and rehabilitation and self-improvement. Somehow the arteries and heart muscle upon which our very existence depends can be strengthened, even repaired by our own efforts and exertion. I am told that a significant number of those who enroll in the program unfortunately do not complete their year of rehabilitation for various reasons. It is too boring, too demanding of time and schedule, the results are never immediately visible and it is not very enjoyable.

All of these excuses are valid but not nearly as valid as is the necessity to stay with the program and rebuild one's cardiac functions to the extent that one can do so. This lesson of resilience, of repairing and healing is not confined to cardiac rehabilitation. It is the message of Torah and Jewish tradition regarding all areas of our lives – our social behavior, our charitable giving, our practices of observance and our direct relationship to our Creator.

The prophet Yechezkel promises us that the Lord will yet remove from us our current heart of stone and replace it with a heart of flesh. So to speak, that will be the cardiac rehabilitation program of the ultimate redemption of the Jewish people. But that cardiac rehab will also require our participation – our faith and diligence, our self-discipline and exertion, our willingness to discard the heart of stone in order to acquire the gift of a heart of flesh. May the good new year bring us strong and healthy hearts.

Shabat shalom.

From Destiny Foundation/Rabbi Berel Wein info@jewishdestiny.com
Subject Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein

Weekly Parsha :: KI TAVO :: Rabbi Berel Wein

The explicit descriptions of the disasters, personal and national, that make up a large portion of this week's parsha raise certain issues. Why do Moshe and the Torah paint such a harsh and unforgiving picture of the Jewish future before the people? And if we expect people to glory in their Jewishness, is this the way to sell the product, so to speak? We all support the concept of truth in advertising but isn't this over and above the necessary requirement?

The fact that the description of much of Jewish history and its calamitous events related in this parsha is completely accurate, prophecy fulfilled to the nth degree, only compounds the difficulties mentioned above. But in truth, there is clear reason for these descriptions of the difficulties inherent in being Jewish to be made apparent.

We read in this book of Devarim that God poses the stark choices before the Jewish people – life or death, uniqueness or conformity, holiness or mendacity. Life is made up of choices and most of them are difficult and fateful. Sugar coating the consequences of life's choices hardly makes for wisdom. Worse still, it erodes any true belief or sense of commitment in the choice that actually is made.

Without the necessary commitment, the choice itself over time becomes meaningless. The Torah tells us that being a Jew requires courage, commitment, a great sense of vision and eternity and deep self-worth. So the Torah must spell out the down side, so to speak, of the choice in being Jewish. The folk saying always was: "It is difficult to be a Jew." But, in the long run it is even more difficult and painful, eventually, for a Jew not to be a Jew in practice, thought and commitment.

According to Jewish tradition and Halacha, a potential convert to Judaism is warned by the rabbinic court of the dangers of becoming Jewish. He or she is told that Jews are a small minority, persecuted by many and reviled by others. But the potential convert also sees the vision and grandeur of Judaism, the inheritance of our father Avraham and our mother Sarah and of the sheltering wings of the God of Israel that guarantee our survival and influence. The potential convert is then asked to choose whether he or she is willing to truly commit to the project. Without that commitment the entire conversion process is a sham and spiritually meaningless. And the commitment is not really valid if the downside, so to speak, of being Jewish is not explained and detailed. Judaism is not for fair weather friends or soldiers on parade. The new phrase in the sporting world is that the players have to "grind it out." Well, that is what being Jewish means – to grind it out, daily, for an entire lifetime.

The positive can only outweigh the negative if the negative is known and defined. Those who look for an easy faith, a religion that demands nothing, who commit to empty phrases but are never willing to pay the price of practice, adherence and discipline will not pass the test of time and survival that being Jewish has always required.

Shabat shalom

From Ohr Somayach <ohr@ohr.edu>

To weekly@ohr.edu

Subject Torah Weekly

Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Ki Tavo

For the week ending 8 September 2012 / 20 Elul 5772

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com

Insights

Buried Treasure

"And G-d has distinguished you today to be for Him a treasured people..." (26:18)

I must be very innocent.

I always thought of the Olympic athletes as being locked up in the Olympic Village dedicating every ounce of their energy to winning that elusive Gold Medal; that the atmosphere of the Olympic Village was somewhere between an private school for girls in the fifties and an open prison.

This picture could not be further from the truth.

Apparently, the Olympic Village was a hotbed of immorality, and the Greek celebration of the physical did not end on the playing field.

I couldn't help being struck by an amazing parallel.

It says in the book of Kohelet (Ecclesiastes), "This opposed to this, G-d created."

G-d creates everything in this world together with its polar opposite.

Light and dark. Hot and cold. Good and evil.

The closing ceremony of the Olympics in London was a staggering display of theatrics that the ancient Greeks would certainly have applauded. It took place in front of 100,000 people. That number struck a chord with me, because it was also 100,000 people who had come together a mere eleven days prior to celebrate the completion of the twelfth seven-year cycle of the completion of the Daf Yomi, the daily learning of one page of the Babylonian Talmud.

And interestingly enough, it appears that the greatest problem that faced the organizers of that elevated event was how to ensure the modest separation of men and women to ensure the holiness of the occasion.

A problem that apparently was not very high on the list of the organizers of the Olympics.

Jews may not be perfect, and sometimes it's difficult to see why we are a 'treasured people.' But then sometimes something comes along shows that buried treasure.

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From Shema Yisrael Torah Network <shemalist@shemayisrael.com>
To Peninim <peninim@shemayisrael.com>
Subject Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum Parshas Ki Savo

All these blessings will come upon you and overtake you, if you hearken to the voice of Hashem, your G-d. (28:2)

The word v'hisigucha, "will come upon you," is enigmatic. Are we running from blessing, that it must overtake us? If that is the case, let us stop running! The answer is simple. At times, a person thinks he is chasing blessing, when, in truth, what he is pursuing is far from a blessing. What he thinks is beneficial and fortuitous could actually catalyze his downfall. Thus, the Torah tells us that the blessing, the real blessing, the one which we mistakenly thought was not a blessing, will overtake us, even though we have done everything to prevent it from reaching us.

Horav Zev Weinberger, Shlita, suggests a practical explanation. The blessings will overtake/reach the person as he is now. The blessings will not transform him into a different person - one who is far-removed from the present decent person he is today. Success can often have a harmful effect on a person who is not prepared to deal with the changes that occur. Financial success, prestige, catapult a person into an arena for which he is often ill-prepared. V'achalta, v'savata... hishamru lachem pen yifteh levavchem, "And you will eat, and you will be satisfied... Beware for yourselves, lest your heart be seduced" (Devarim 11:15,16). Success and satisfaction can go to a person's head and have an ignominious effect on his personality and lifestyle.

Hashem is telling us that the blessing will reach us - as we are. Blessing will not change us. That alone is a blessing. Likewise, when the Torah issues the curse, "And all these curses will come upon you and overtake you" (ibid 28:15), Hashem is saying that, even when we are cursed, we should not despair. Hashem will not abandon us. The curses will change neither us nor our relationship with Hashem. He will always be there for us.

The v'hisigucha has taken place in our generation - especially with regard to the curses over the centuries, particularly during the recent European Holocaust; it has undergone most of the ninety-eight curses detailed in the Tochechah, Rebuke, of Parshas Ki Savo. We have seen good, observant Jews who were destroyed physically, emotionally and spiritually as a result of the recent k'lalos, curses. They suffered so much; they lost everything. They cannot be blamed in any way. Yet, there are those in whom the v'hisigucha has been active in full force. They suffered beyond belief, but emerged with even greater faith in the Almighty. He never abandoned them, and they knew it.

A prime example of this type of spiritual super-hero was the Klausenberger Rebbe, zl. During the war he was imprisoned in the concentration camps and subjected to cruel and bitter punishment. Yet, despite the misery and pain which he endured, he emerged from the Holocaust a much stronger person, his relationship with Hashem forged in uncanny devotion that almost goes beyond description. His adherence to every mitzvah of the Torah under the most difficult and life-threatening circumstances has become legend. He did not, however, stop with his own personal spiritual development. He was a man on a mission - one that he accomplished to the best of his ability.

To comprehend the significance of the Rebbe's actions fully, during - and especially following - the war, one must understand the emotional state of the survivor. These men, women and children were shattered, body and soul. Hashem's Rebuke was executed on them. These were emotional wounds that would never heal. This was especially true after

the war, since during the war, they suppressed all of their emotions and did not allow themselves to think. Following liberation, they were able to sit down and give thought concerning the members of their families who had fallen victim to Hitler's diabolical persecution. When they began to look at what they had once had and the shards to which they were now relegated, they became overcome with helplessness. Hope for a Jew is like air. It defines his Jewishness, because a Jew does not give up hope. What made it worse was the notion that while they lay bleeding and dying on the blood-soaked soil of Europe, an indifferent world chose not to care. Every survivor was affected by this spiritual crisis. They blamed G-d and eschewed His service.

The Klausenberger was like the phoenix, a powerful bird who - according to legend - supposedly rises from the ashes. The Rebbe was everything to his survivors: he was the Rebbe, father, mother and sibling. His life following the war was wholly dedicated to reaching out to all Jews. He was a primary example of one who had suffered greatly - yet continued on with his faith in Hashem unabated. A surrogate father to many young orphans who survived the war, bereft of their families, the Rebbe was the address for both the many young people who needed a shoulder to cry on, and to those who had become emotionally numb and could no longer cry.

Countless stories abound about his heroic efforts to provide spiritual sustenance to the survivors, but that really is what we expect of a Torah giant. What impressed me was the special care, the extreme sensitivity, he expressed to the young orphans from a physical perspective, acting as father and mother to so many emotionally scarred children. Indeed, he worried over "his" orphans as if they were, indeed, his biological children.

One poignant story says it all. Fifty years after the war, following the Rebbe's passing from this world, his family was visited during the shivah, seven-day period of mourning, by a woman who had been in the Feldafing DP Camp. She related to the family how, as a young girl, she had been so poor that she walked around the DP camp with no socks. Upon seeing her one day, the Rebbe took off his own socks in the middle of the street and gave them to her saying, "It is unbecoming/Es past nischt, for a Jewish girl to have to walk around this way."

He was a Torah giant whose concern for the Jewish People emanated from love - fatherly love. He exemplified the Jew who was dealt a curse, but did not allow it to affect him personally. Even when we are cursed, Hashem does not abandon us. We will continue in our commitment, despite the necessary "slap" that we have received - because it is the slap of our Heavenly Father - a slap of love.

Hashem will strike you with madness...You will go mad from the sight of your eyes. (28:28, 34)

Twice we are cursed with the dreadful affliction of meshugah, insanity. Is once not enough? If we peruse the Tochechah, Rebuke, we note that with each successive curse of the ninety-eight curses, the misfortune that has to befall us gets greater and greater. Since each curse is associated with a harsher punishment, it is strange that the Torah repeats the curse of insanity. Insane is insane! Does making a person "more" insane add to the curse?

The Ketzos HaChoshen explains that there are truly variant levels of insanity. When a person loses his mind, when he no longer thinks rationally, when he is not in control of his faculties, it is extremely tragic. In some scenarios, however, the individual is unaware of his actions, and does not regret his behavior. He knows not what he is doing. In fact, he thinks that he is normal. It is the rest of the world which is insane.

There is a worse conceivable situation. This is when a perfectly normal person is subjugated by one who has lost his mind. In this situation, the crazy person compels the normal person to act in a crazy manner, because, sadly, this is all he knows. His bizarre perspective on life has become the new "normal." He, therefore, expects the normal person

under his control to act as bizarrely as he does. There is nothing worse than a normal person being relegated to act as if he were meshugah. The Torah writes, V'hayisa meshuga mimareh einecha asher tireh; "You will go mad from the sight of your eyes that you will see." This means that we will become distraught from the way we are forced to act before others, knowing fully well that we are not crazy - they are! We are perfectly sane and normal, but we are being driven out of our minds by having to witness our insane behavior just to satisfy others.

You will grope at noontime as a blind man gropes in darkness. (28:29)

The Talmud Megillah 24b quotes Rabbi Yosi who asks: What difference does it make to the blind man whether he is groping around in the afternoon or in the evening? Regardless of the external light, the blind man's world remains dark. Rabbi Yosi says that he was troubled by this question for some time, until once he was walking through the streets on a very dark night. As he walked, he noticed a blind man groping his way down the street. What was unusual about the blind man was that he was carrying a torch in his hands. "Why carry a torch?" Rabbi Yosi asked. "After all, what is a blind man to do with a torch? How does it help him see?" The blind man was far from a fool. He replied, "As long as I walk with a torch, people notice me and lead me away from the various obstacles that might cause me injury." Chazal teach us an important lesson: the benefit we derive from something is not always determined by what we see, but rather, by what we do not see. Preventative maintenance is as critical as ministering and offering assistance following the fact.

Horav Shmuel Dovid Walkin, zl, applied this Chazal in his hesped, eulogy, for the Chafetz Chaim: "Every generation is blessed with great, distinguished Torah luminaries. Do we appreciate them? When the Chafetz Chaim was alive, did we value his presence among us? Did we expend every effort to benefit from him, to absorb the kedushah, sanctity, which emanated from him? Since the answer to these questions are probably 'no,' we must ask ourselves: What loss did we sustain with the passing of the Chafetz Chaim? If, for all intents and purposes, we did not really appreciate him, how can we assess his loss to us? We were like blind men who did not see the incredible spiritual light which emanated from him. A blind man really perceives no difference between night and day. If so, what did we lose?"

Rav Walkin continued with his reply, "The incident related in the Talmud concerning the blind man carrying the torch is enlightening. The blind man carries the torch not for him to see, but rather, to be seen by others! Thus, he will be protected from whatever obstacles present themselves in his path. We will apply a parallel to a generation that has Torah luminaries but does not 'see' them, thus precluding the unique opportunity of absorbing their inspiring light.

"While we do not make proper use of the unique opportunity, we still have something left, something to hold onto, something to protect us from the vicissitudes and challenges which confront us every step of our journey through life in exile. The gedolei ha'dor, Torah giants of each generation, are not appreciated. While we may not necessarily be infused by their greatness, we can still hold onto them for dear life, so that their presence protects us.

"Thus, rabbosai, my friends, the Chafetz Chaim was an individual whose spiritual light illuminated a generation. He is gone. His light has been extinguished, and for this we mourn. Indeed, the 'entire House of Yisrael should bewail the conflagration which Hashem has ignited'" (Vayikra 10:6).

If you will not be careful to perform all the words of this Torah... to fear this honored and awesome Name: Hashem your G-d. (28:58)

The Torah is admonishing us to guard the Torah by observing its tenets, the mitzvos which Hashem has given us. A lack of observance is indicative of a lack of fear concerning the awesome Name of Hashem. The Torah intimates that Torah observance is intrinsically connected to a

Jew's reverence and fear of Hashem. One who understands and reflects on the awe-inspiring, exalted nature of Hashem simply must respond with total observance and complete devotion to His Torah. There just cannot be any other way. To acknowledge the awesome nature of Hashem is to fear Him. To fear Hashem is to carry out His commandments. This is what it is all about. Anything else is simply a lame excuse for non-observance.

In his Sefer Nitzotzos, Horav Yitzchak Hershkowitz, Shlita, relates the story of Reb Yudel, a chasid, talmid, disciple, of the Baal HaTanya, which serves as an excellent analogy to explain the relationship between fearing Hashem and upholding His mitzvos.

Reb Yudel was the consummate chasid, attached to his Rebbe with a fiery passion and unflinching devotion. His Rebbe was the vehicle through which he derived inspiration for the ultimate service to the Almighty. Reb Yudel was really a chasid of Hashem. The Baal HaTanya, as all Rebbes, guided and inspired him and thousands more about how to best serve the Almighty. He was counted among the true bnei aliyah, rising stars, in the Chabad Chassidic court. In fact, Reb Yudel was the most shining star. The area in which he best exemplified his avodas Hashem, service to the Almighty, was in the area of tefillah, prayer. When Reb Yudel prayed, one could sense the angels halting their service to observe how a human being of flesh and blood could pour out his heart in profound supplication to the Almighty. To watch Reb Yudel daven was a sight to behold, savor and cherish. Indeed, if ever a mashgiach, ethical supervisor, felt that a student required special prodding concerning his tefillah, he would have the young man stand next to Reb Yudel, as the chasid stood in supplication before Hashem. That scene usually left a lasting impression on the student.

In Chassidic literature, there is a well-known maxim that status quo is actually the beginning of spiritual descent. One either rises or he falls. Standing still is tantamount to falling. One day, Reb Yudel felt he was not ascending in his spiritual demeanor. His passion was lacking; his fervor wanting. While this was relative to the extreme spiritual level of the tzadik, righteous man, falling from a high precipice can cause greater injury - physical or spiritual. He presented himself before the Baal HaTanya. "Rebbe," he said, "I feel a coldness during my davening. What can I do?"

"Yudel," asked the Rebbe, "What maintained your fervor until now?"

Reb Yudel closed his eyes and said, "During my youth, I heard an intriguing story which has inspired me throughout my life. Regardless of the situation, the spiritual challenges, the physical vicissitudes that confronted me, I remind myself of the story and it keeps me going."

Obviously, the Rebbe wanted Reb Yudel to share the story with him. John was a Cossack in the army of Czar Nikolai. Together with thousands of other soldiers, John was sent to the frigid Siberian frontier. They had one purpose: to guard the large weapons storehouses. John would stand outside in the bitter cold for long hours, guarding the building from attack. Despite the fact that no sane person would attack in the Siberian winter, these hapless soldiers were required to follow the Czar's orders. They all knew that the punishment for failure was final and swift. As much as the men hated the cold, the alternative of a bullet in the head was non-negotiable. They would suffer the cold.

That fateful day was an unusually bitter cold day. The thermometer read fifty degrees below zero; the howling of the wind added to the savage cold. John did everything to stay warm, to no avail, until he finally collapsed. It took a short while for the other guards to notice that one of their own was missing. Finally, they discovered John's frozen body covered with a sprinkling of snow.

John was half-dead when his compatriots carried him into the warm barracks to thaw out. It was touch and go for a while until John finally opened his eyes, and slowly began to recuperate. Two days after the incident, John was back at his post. The story, however, does not end

here. One month after the incident, John received a summons to appear before the army magistrate. The charge:

leaving his post. Hearing the trumped-up charge, John almost passed out. How could a soldier who almost froze to death be held in contempt? He had done no wrong! In fact, he had almost died serving the Czar! Is this the way a devoted soldier is treated?

As John stood before the judge, he could no longer contain himself. He began to lose it. "Is this how a dedicated soldier is treated? I nearly died out there. I felt I was breathing my last breath as everything went dark and I passed out from the cold. How could you do this to me?" he screamed hysterically.

The judge had been about to render a judgment of innocent, but that was prior to John's hysterical outburst. The prosecutor saw a moment of hesitation on the judge's face, and he immediately pounced. "Judge, let me ask your honor: Is this not a dereliction of duty? How is it possible for a soldier to freeze? The mortal fear of the Czar should be sufficient for one's entire body to 'warm up' considerably, to break out in an enormous sweat. How is it possible for a soldier in the Czar's army to freeze from cold?"

This is what Reb Yudel related to the Rebbe. The fact that one knows that he is in active service of Hashem should provide sufficient fervor to one's prayer. How could one stand apathetically before Hashem? How can one's tefillah be emotionless, indifferent, dispassionate? If one acknowledges his presence before G-d, he must feel the "heat." If he does not, then apparently he has no understanding about before Whom he stands. He is no different than "John"!

David Hamelech says in Tehillim 19:2, "The Heavens recount the glory of Hashem, and the expanse declares the word of His hands. Day to day expresses speech and night to night communicates knowledge. (Yet) There is no speech; there are no words; their voice is not heard." The question is glaring and obvious: If the Heavens recount and the expanse declares, if the days speak and the nights communicate, how is it possible for there to be people in the world who do not hear the message and do not know what is taking place? Horav Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler, zl, explains that David HaMelech gives us the answer: There is no speech, there are no words - for one who does not want to hear. The wicked are acutely aware of the message, the sound, the communication. They are not interested in listening.

This is why, explains Rav Dessler, there has never been a real apikoras, heretic. Whoever denies G-d knows deep in his heart that he is hiding from the truth. The rasha, wicked man, is afraid to look, afraid to listen and understand, because he realizes that if he were only to look at the truth, he would be compelled to return - and this he is determined to avoid at all costs. It is not much different than our Cossack soldier, John. Denial is a deliberate pretense.

In his heart, every individual knows the truth. He is acutely aware of the beauty and value of a Torah life, but realizes that to embrace the truth means altering a lifestyle that is disingenuous as well as destructive. He likes his own version of the truth, however, and he is stuck in its mire. The only way to resolve the sham of a life that he leads, and the inner compulsion which tells him he is a fool, is to deny Hashem. This is why Rav Dessler posits that all heresy is rooted in falsehood. The only thing more tragic than one who cannot see is one who refuses to see.

"Also every sickness and every plague, which is not written in this Torah, Hashem will bring upon you." (28:61)

One would think that ninety-seven curses should be sufficient warning to impact the nation. One has only to read the curses specifically, and his hair would stand on end from fright. Yet, it appears that Hashem seems to "throw in" one more curse for "good measure." In case there might be something that was missed, any sickness or plague that was not specifically covered will be included.

Horav Shimshon Pincus, zl, explains that the Tochechah is more than an admonition. It is referred to as Divrei HaBris, Words of the Covenant.

Indeed, the tragedies which are misfortunes that are destined as a result of our egregious behavior are in themselves part of our covenant with Hashem. Without the threat of punishment, our bond with Hashem would be severed. Without the fear of serious retribution, without realizing this fear, we might disconnect from the Torah way of life and eventually leave Hashem altogether. It is only as a result of this painful rod that we keep on returning. We know what happens when we leave; therefore, we keep on returning.

What happens after we have, Heaven forbid, exhausted all ninety-seven curses? What will become of us? How will we be able to maintain the Divrei HaBris? This is why the Torah adds one last curse, throwing every imaginable punishment at us. We do not have to worry. Even after Hashem has delivered all of the previous punishments, there is still more. He will never let us go. Regardless of how much we have suffered, Hashem will keep the sword over our collective heads to ensure our eventual return. These are dreadful curses, but they are the admonishment of a loving Father, who will do whatever it takes to see to it that His children never leave.

Va'ani Tefillah

Baavur avoseinu she'batchu becha, va'tilamdeim chukei chaim.

For the sake of our forefathers who had faith in You, and You taught them the laws of life.

What is the relationship between bitachon, trust in Hashem, and Torah learning? One learns; one knows. It is as simple as that. One who does not concern himself with learning cannot begin to fathom Torah, nor should he expect to - regardless of how much bitachon he possesses. Horav Moshe Feinstein, zl, offers a practical explanation. In order to learn, one must live. To live, one must eat, have nourishment, have shelter. If he is learning, however, how can he provide for himself and his family? Additionally, one who is always in a state of anxiety concerning his livelihood, can hardly concentrate properly. Thus, one who has bitachon understands that he does his part; he learns and devotes himself to Torah study and dissemination. Hashem will provide for him. We pray that He grant us the ability to profess such faith and trust, so that our learning will be substantial.

Sponsored by Ruthie and Sam Salamon in loving memory of Mr. Victor Gelb Avigdor ben Moshe z"l niftar 19 Ellul

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Subject Rabbi Frand on Parsha

Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Ki Savo

The Gain is Proportional to the Pain

Parshas Ki Savo begins with the chapter of 'Mikra Bikurim' (reciting the declaration of the first fruits). As soon as the crops began to bud, each farmer marked the first fruits with a string or a ribbon so that when they were fully ripened, he would be able to recognize them and bring them as his 'First Fruits' to the Bais HaMikdash in Yerushalayim. The Mishna in Tractate Bikkurim describes the great pomp and circumstance surrounding the journey to Yerushalayim by the farmers with their first fruits. This was done on an annual basis. The farmers would bring the first fruits to the Kohanim and would read the chapter of 'Mikra Bikurim' [Devorim 26:1-11].

The Medrash Yalkut Shimoni [Chapter 27] states that when a person would bring his first fruits to the Kohen, a Heavenly Voice (Bas Kol) would come forth and miraculously announce "next year you will merit to perform this ritual again."

The Sefas Emes, in the Likutim of Parshas Ki Savo, asks a very interesting question: How did anyone ever die in the time of "Mikra Bikurim"? If every year the farmer was given a Heavenly Guarantee that

"next year again" – how could such an annual blessing ever fail to come true?

The Sefas Emes answers his question based on the principle of "l'fum tza'ara agra" – the harder it is to do a mitzvah, the greater the reward. Two people can do the exact same mitzvah but one person will get greater reward for the mitzvah than the other by virtue of the fact that there was more trouble and effort involved on his part to accomplish this mitzvah. One person can hear shofar because he has a shul down the block from where he is. A second person lives in a small town and has to pack up his family and stay in a Holiday Inn with makeshift eating arrangements over Rosh Hashannah so that he can be at a minyan where shofar is blown. The latter fellow will get a greater reward for the same mitzvah than the former fellow.

The Sefas Emes writes that the blessing of the Bas Kol "May you do this again next year" was because the mitzvah of bringing the First Fruits to Yerushalayim involved significant effort. Unlike the Second Tithe, where it was not necessary to transport the produce to Yerushalayim (a person could redeem it for cash and take the money to Yerushalayim for the purchase of food there), a person had to carry the heavy baskets of fruits all the way. For this very reason, the Rabbis introduced the pomp and ceremony to encourage people to make the effort – recognizing that indeed "it is a big deal!"

But, says the Sefas Emes, the year after a person received a Bracha, it was not such an effort. The blessing in effect "put winds in a person's sails" and made the effort much easier to accomplish. So, the Sefas Emes writes, the blessing of the Bas Kol did not come every year – it only came every OTHER year. The next year when you brought the Bikkurim without a blessing, it was harder, so you needed a bracha to encourage you to accomplish it the following year. And so it went – the blessings were only given on alternate years. Consequently, writes the Sefas Emes, the farmer could only die in the alternate year following the time he did not receive the blessing of "may you accomplish this once again next year!"

This is a cute 'chap', but the real lesson here is the lesson of "the reward is according to the effort". Some people can open a page of Talmud and can go through it like someone reads an article in the newspaper. Some people have to look up the meaning of every Aramaic word and it becomes very difficult and frustrating. Two people can learn the same page of Gemara, for one it will take 20 minutes and for one it will take 1 hour and 20 minutes, but l'fum tza'ara agra and that is the way it is with every mitzvah. Let us remember this when we sometimes find it difficult to accomplish certain mitzvahs: The gain is proportional to the pain.

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

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Rabbi Yakov Haber The TorahWeb Foundation Converting Everything to Good

Look down (hashkifa) from the abode of Your Holiness, from the Heavens and bless Your nation Israel and the land which You have given us, as You swore to our ancestors, a land flowing with milk and honey (Ki Tavo 26:15).

This prayer ends the vidui ma'asros, the declaration recited at the time of bi'ur ma'asros, every fourth and seventh year of the shemitta-cycle. Rashi (VaYeira 18:16) quotes the Midrash that all instances of the word hashkifa in Tanach are for punishment except for this one. The Midrash elaborates that so great are the gifts to the poor – part of the ma'asros

being ma'aseir 'ani, the tithe given to the poor, mentioned in the vidui – that it even converts the middas haRogez, quality of Divine anger, to that of Rachamim, mercy.

Sheim MiShmuel presents an important explanation of the quality of charity to accomplish this Providence-changing result of converting Divine anger to mercy. A poor person for some Divine reason has an aspect of middas haDin, or justice, drawn against him acting to create and continue the poverty. Someone who gives tzedaka utilizes this situation not to accuse the poor of c"v not being worthy of charity but utilizes this manifestation of middas haDin as an opportunity to develop the midda of chessed. In turn, this awakens the Divine middas haRachamim on the poor and the entire world. This analysis is reminiscent of the Gemara Bava Basra (10a) which presents the Roman general Turnusrufus' question to R. Akiva: "If your G-d loves the poor, why does he make them poor?" R. Akiva responds: "If there were no poor, how would we save ourselves from punishment!" meaning how would we have opportunities to develop our qualities of kindness. Sheim MiShmuel gives several other parallels to utilize seemingly bad situations for the good. The famous Gemara in Yoma (86b) quotes Reish Lakish as teaching that one who returns to G-d out of love succeeds in having his sins converted into sources of merit. How can repentance convert sins to sources of merit? It would seem that the maximum repentance could accomplish is the erasure of the sins! One of the popular understandings of this statement is that the sinner, when internalizing how distant he is from the Source of Life and what he lost through his transgressions, yearns ever more for nearness to the Beloved, the Source of his life. Many compare this phenomenon to a spring: The more it is pushed, creating greater distance, the more it propels the item pushing it upward. It was precisely the sins that led to this greater longing, increase of love for Hashem, and more intensified return. Hence, they become sources of merit. This concept also has been used to explain the opinion in the Talmud (B'rachos34b) that the level which Baalei Teshuva reach is higher than that of the totally righteous. The penitents were pushed even higher by their feelings of forsakenness and distance created by their sins.

A similar idea exists in the relationship between the six days of the workweek and the holy Shabbos. Through the engagement in the mundane world, the Jew recognizes how much he is "wandering" in the physical aspect of life and longs for a higher purpose. This purpose is represented by Shabbos, which in Sifrei Chasidus is explained to also be an especially appropriate time for teshuva. The very word Shabbos contains a similar root (S-B-S) to the root letters of teshuva (S-B). The shofar, in the well-known words of Rambam, awakens us from the havlei haz'man, the relatively worthless activities of This World. Only one who has erred in "getting caught up" in viewing life in this world as an end in and of itself and not as an end to a means, can be appropriately awakened and inspired by the sound of the shofar to return to G-d with even greater zeal.

The Talmud at the end of B'rachos (63a) teaches us based on the passage in Mishlei (3:6) "b'chol d'rachecha da'eihu" - "know G-d in all your ways" - va'afilu lidvar 'aveira, even in matters of sin. Many different interpretations have been given to this passage. The Sheim MiShmuel's analysis provides us with another. The Gemara adjures us: Do not allow sin to serve solely as a means of distancing yourself from the Almighty! Rather, utilize it as a spring to thrust you to return ever closer to your Father in Heaven! Our lives are complicated with tremendous upheavals of good and bad. One thing is constant. G-d's Providence is precisely orchestrated to allow us to grow from all the events in our lives allowing us to become ever greater. May we merit utilizing the opportunity to prepare during the days of Selichos well for teshuva sheleima to The Source of all.

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Rav Kook List Rav Kook on the Torah Portion

Ki Tavo: Studying Together
Moses commanded the people: "Pay attention and listen!" (Deut. 27:9)
The word has'keit - 'pay attention' - is unusual. The Talmud gives the following homiletic interpretation:
"Form groups ('asu kittot') and study Torah; for Torah knowledge is only acquired through group study." (Berachot 63b)

Intolerance, Ignorance, and Iniquity
Rabbi Yossi went even further. He warned that scholars who study alone are liable to acquire three negative traits: intolerance, ignorance, and sin. What is so terrible about studying by oneself?
This question may be addressed both on a practical level, and in terms of the essential nature of Torah study.
There are three practical benefits when scholars study together. The first advantage is that they become accustomed to hearing opinions different than their own. This trains them for greater openness and tolerance. Scholars who study by themselves are not exposed to their colleagues' views and ideas. They grow to be intolerant of any opinion that differs from their own interpretation. This intolerance is a major factor in disputes, and can lead to verbal and even physical violence.
Secondly, scholars who study alone or in small groups will not succeed in properly analyzing matters of faith and fundamental Torah views. In terms of these basic subjects, such reclusive scholars remain ignorant and misinformed.
And finally, a lack of clarity in legal issues will cause those who study by themselves to err in Halachic decisions. As teachers and leaders, these scholars are judged according to their negative impact on the people. Furthermore, their solitude may lead to unnecessary stringencies, which are referred to as 'sinful,' as in the case of the Nazarite.

Torah of Life

On a fundamental level, there is a contradiction between a Torah lifestyle and a life of reclusiveness and rejection of the world. The Torah is a Torat chaim, a Torah of life. It values those proper enjoyments which enrich life and bestow happiness. By its very nature, the Torah and its mitzvot require a framework of social and communal living. This approach leads to a healthy society, and an appreciation for friendship and camaraderie.

The pursuit of solitude and isolation from society - which many mistakenly think leads to closeness to God - is alien to the Torah's viewpoint. This outlook is so contrary to the Torah, that even the acquisition of Torah knowledge may not be properly accomplished by solitary study.

(Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. II, pp. 389-390)

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Yoshev Rosh - Vaad HaRabanim of Detroit

Weekly Halacha by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

Gender Relationships

Question: If a lady fell and the only way to help her up entails touching her, may a man (literally) give her a hand?

Discussion: It goes without saying that if she fell and finds herself in a life-threatening situation, anything and everything must be done to save her life.¹ While affectionate physical contact between the genders is strictly forbidden²—indeed, at times it falls into the category of yehareig va'al ya'avor³—when the contact is not of an affectionate nature (derech chibbah) it is permitted.⁴ The same halachah applies if the lady is in danger of losing a limb or of if she were to suffer any other permanent disabling injury. Even if she is not injured but simply cannot get up by herself due to infirmity, a man may extend a hand to help her rise and steady herself, especially if there is no one else around to assist her.

The halachos apply equally in reverse – if a man falls, and only a woman is available to assist him.

Question: May one accept change from a cashier if he is concerned that his hand will touch hers in the process?

Discussion: If one's intention is merely to receive the change, he need not be concerned about any unintended touch. Obviously, if one's intention is to touch her hand and to enjoy the sensation, it is strictly forbidden.

Question: Is it ever permitted to shake hands with a woman? Is there a dispensation to do so if otherwise one would suffer a substantial loss or would embarrass the woman, possibly causing a chillul Hashem?

Discussion: As mentioned earlier, physical contact between the genders is strictly forbidden when it is an expression of affection. When it is clearly not so, it is permitted. Shaking a woman's hand in a social setting, e.g., at a wedding, or in order to establish a friendship or a personal relationship is strictly forbidden according to all views, and at times falls into the category of yehareig va'al ya'avor. Even if the woman extended her hand first, one must not shake it; rather one must decline in the most sensitive and gracious way possible. The concern that she will be embarrassed if the man does not shake her hand is of no consequence—it remains strictly forbidden.⁵

There are, however, some situations where a handshake is offered as a matter of protocol, such as an introduction to a customer or an employer, to a doctor or to a distinguished politician. In these situations, the handshake is not a sign of affection, friendship or a personal relationship and would, theoretically, be permitted. Still, the poskim are in agreement that one must do whatever he can to avoid shaking hands under these circumstances as well. This is because the yetzer hara for arayos is overwhelming. An innocent handshake may lead to a casual embrace; a harmless introduction may blossom into a full-blown illicit relationship. It is extremely difficult to define what is and what is not derech chibbah when it comes to a handshake, and it is, therefore, the consensus of the poskim to be stringent in this matter.⁶

Under extenuating circumstances, e.g., one would lose his job were he not to shake hands with a female customer, or if, by refusing an extended hand, one would publicly humiliate a prominent personality, there are some poskim who find some room for leniency to return a handshake, if the hand is proffered in a manner which is clearly not affectionate.⁷ All poskim agree that one must do whatever he can to avoid being caught in such a situation.

All of these halachos apply equally to men and women.

Question: What, if any, are the restrictions on affectionate physical contact [putting arm around shoulder, stroking cheek, hugging, kissing, etc.] between a man and his female relatives?

Discussion: For the purpose of these halachos, we shall divide “relatives” into three separate groups: 1) Affectionate physical contact between a man and his mother, daughter, granddaughter, or sister under the age of 11 is categorically permitted. 2) Affectionate physical contact between a man and his sister over the age of 11, or a “blood” aunt [his father’s or mother’s sister] is neither strictly forbidden nor expressly permitted. Rather, in the words of the Shulchan Aruch,⁸ it is “most deplorable, a prohibited (type of) action, and an act of foolishness.”⁹ 3) Affectionate physical contact between a man and all other female relatives (such as cousins, nieces or in-laws) over the age of 3 is strictly forbidden.

1 Sotah 21b.

2 See Sha’arei Teshuvah 3:80 and Beur Halachah, 339:3, s.v. lehakel.

3 Rama, Y.D. 157:1; Chayei Adam 21:13; Nidchei Yisrael 19:2.

4 Shach, Y.D. 157:10; Igros Moshe, E.H. 2:14.

5 Oral ruling in the name of the Chazon Ish, quoted in Karyana Digarta 162 and Moadim u’Zmanim 4:316.

6 Igros Moshe, O.C. 1:113; E.H. 1:56; E.H. 4:32-9; Rav Y.Z. Gustman, quoted in Halichos Yisrael, pg. 281; Az Nidberu 2:73.

7 See Nishmas Chayim (Rav Chaim Barlin) 135; Teshuvos v’Hanhagos 4:300, quoting an oral ruling from Rav M. Feinstein; Emes l’Yaakov, E.H. 21, note 4; Rav C.P. Scheinberg, quoted in Halichos Yisrael, pg. 282.

8 E.H. 21:7.

9 Igros Moshe, Y.D. 2:137 explains that the Rabbis have deemed it “deplorable” and “foolish” because it may lead to physical contact with other relatives with whom physical contact is strictly forbidden.

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By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

French Toast, Croutons, and Challah Kugel – What Bracha do I recite on them?

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Since brachos figure so significantly in this week’s parsha, I decided to send an article on the topic.

Question: I eat matzoh brei for lunch all year round. Although I have been making the brachos of mezonos and al hamichyah before I eat it, someone told me that I should wash and make hamotzi on some bread instead. Is this true?

Question: The chef in our yeshiva stuffs the meatloaf with huge pieces of leftover challah. Do we need to wash netilas yadayim and make hamotzi before eating meatloaf?

Question: I have been told that the bracha on licorice is shehakol, even though the first ingredient listed on the label is flour. Why is this?

In a different article (entitled Pizza, Pretzels and Pastry, available both on the website, or by e-mail from me), I discussed the unusual halachic category called pas haba’ah bekisnin, and found that crackers, pretzels, and certain pastry-type items require the bracha of mezonos before eating them and al hamichyah afterwards, unless they are eaten as a meal, in which case they require netilas yadayim, hamotzi, and benching. However, there are numerous other foods prepared from flour that are not typical bread. In order to explore what bracha one recites on these foods, we will start our discussion with items made from cooked, or fried, bread.

FRENCH TOAST

Although the words “French Toast” were unknown in the times of Chazal, the Gemara (Brachos 37b) discusses what bracha to recite on chavitzta, a dish that contains cooked pieces of bread. The Gemara rules that if the pieces are the size of a kezayis (the volume of an olive -- about one fluid ounce), the bracha is hamotzi and requires full benching afterwards. This is because a large piece of bread does not lose its significance even if it is cooked or fried. However, if all of the pieces are smaller than a kezayis, the bracha is mezonos and al hamichyah afterwards. If some of the pieces are larger than a kezayis and others smaller, then one recites hamotzi as long as one piece is at least the size of a kezayis (Mishnah Berurah 168:53).

Based on this Gemara, we conclude that one must wash netilas yadayim and recite hamotzi before eating French toast, and bench afterwards, since most of the pieces are at least a kezayis (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 168:10).

WHAT BRACHA DOES ONE MAKE ON KNEIDELACH?

Kneidelach are made from ground matzoh that is kneaded into new dough and cooked. Most poskim rule that since the matzoh is ground into small pieces before it is cooked, the bracha is mezonos and al hamichyah even if one eats a very large amount. Another opinion contends that if the pieces of matzoh meal are kneaded together into balls larger than a kezayis before they are cooked, their bracha is hamotzi (Magen Avraham 168:28). The accepted psak is to make a mezonos and al hamichyah on kneidelach (Mishnah Berurah 168:59).

This leads us to an unusual shaylah I was once asked:

YESHIVA MEATLOAF DELUXE

A yeshiva bachur once asked me whether one should make hamotzi on the meatloaf served at his yeshiva. I thought he was attempting to draw attention to the quality of the cuisine, but indeed he was asking a serious shaylah. It turned out that the cook in his yeshiva stuffed large pieces of leftover challah into the meatloaf.

This is an unusual situation. Many people include matzoh meal or bread crumbs in their meatloaf, but these lose their importance in the finished product. However, the Yeshiva Meatloaf Deluxe included kezayis-sized pieces of challah. As we mentioned above, pieces of bread this size do not lose their status as bread. Thus, as strange as it might seem, one is required to wash al netilas yadayim before eating this meatloaf, and its correct brachos are hamotzi and full benching.

This situation was very unusual because typically people soak challah or bread until it falls apart before adding it to kugel or meatloaf, which changes the halachic status of the bread. However, Yeshiva Meatloaf Deluxe calls for bread that is only moistened before being added to the meatloaf, but does not fall apart.

BAKING AND SAUTÉING (frying in a small amount of oil)

On Pesach, my wife makes an item she refers to as “matzoh rolls,” which involve taking matzoh meal, and making dough together with oil and eggs, and baking them. Although this is prepared from matzoh meal, the bracha on these items is hamotzi since the dough is subsequently baked rather than cooked.

Similarly, if someone made matzoh rolls by sautéing the dough with a little oil (merely enough so that the dough does not burn) the completed product should be treated as bread for all halachos (Mishnah Berurah 168:69). Thus, a matzoh kugel made on the top of the stove would be hamotzi, even if the pieces are smaller than a kezayis.

FRYING VS. COOKING – THE MATZOH BREI SAGA

Thus far we have learned that one recites hamotzi on large pieces of bread even if they were subsequently cooked or fried, and that small pieces lose their status as bread when they are cooked. However, some poskim contend that frying small pieces of bread does not change their status and they still require netilas yadayim and hamotzi (Magen Avraham 168:39). According to this opinion, matzoh brei, which is made from fried pieces of matzoh similar to the way that one makes French toast, requires netilas yadayim, hamotzi, and full benching. Other

poskim disagree, contending that fried small pieces of bread lose their status as bread just like cooked pieces (see Mishnah Berurah 168:56). These poskim contend that one recites mezonos and al hamichyah on matzoh brei unless one of the pieces is the size of a kezayis. The Mishnah Berurah concludes that the halacha is uncertain and one should avoid this problem by eating these items within a meal. Thus, an Ashkenazi should not eat matzoh brei without washing and making hamotzi on a piece of bread or matzoh first.

Sefardim recite mezonos before eating matzoh, unless they eat more than four kebeitzim of matzoh, except on Pesach, when they make hamotzi when eating even a small amount. If a Sefardi is eating less than four kebeitzim of matzoh brei, he would recite mezonos before and al hamichyah afterwards. If he plans on eating four kebeitzim or more of matzoh brei, he should wash netilas yadayim and make hamotzi on some bread.

According to all opinions, deep frying small pieces of bread or matzoh is the same as cooking since the oil completely covers the food. Thus, the correct bracha on chremzelach (deep-fried matzoh latkas) is mezonos and al hamichyah (Mishnah Berurah 168:59).

CROUTONS

Commercial croutons are produced by either frying or toasting small pieces of seasoned bread. If they are deep fried, then the bracha is mezonos and al hamichyah. If they are fried or toasted, then they are pas haba'ah bekisnin.

Home-made croutons toasted from leftover bread are hamotzi. Deep-fried, they are mezonos; fried, they are subject to the same shaylah mentioned before as to whether they are hamotzi or mezonos, and should be eaten after making hamotzi on bread.

CHALLAH KUGEL

Most people make challah kugel (or matzoh kugel) by soaking the challah or matzoh before mixing it with other ingredients and baking it. When the challah or matzoh disintegrates into a mush before it is mixed with the other ingredients, the resulting kugel has the halachic status of pas haba'ah bekisnin, which means that its bracha is mezonos when eaten as a snack and hamotzi when eaten as a meal.

Sometimes the challah remains in small pieces and this is often the case when making a matzoh kugel. When this is the case, the resulting kugel must be treated as bread, requiring netilas yadayim and hamotzi, as we pointed out earlier concerning baked goods. Since the halacha here depends on some complicated halachic details, it is better in this case to make hamotzi on a piece of bread first.

MATZOH LASAGNA

While I was writing this article, I was asked the following shaylah. A guest arrived at someone's house and was served a portion of matzoh lasagna. In this particular recipe, the matzoh was soaked, mixed with meat and other ingredients, and baked.

Must he wash netilas yadayim and what bracha should he recite?

We cannot answer this question without first ascertaining whether there are noticeable pieces of matzoh in the lasagna. If there are noticeable pieces, even if they are small, the guest should wash netilas yadayim and make hamotzi on bread before eating the lasagna kugel. If the matzoh all turned to mush, it should probably be treated as pas haba'ah bekisnin and require borei minei mezonos on a snack size, but would be hamotzi and require benching if eaten as a meal. The exact definition of a meal for these purposes is discussed in my article on pas haba'ah bekisnin.

PANCAKES, BLINTZES AND CREPES

These items are all made from a batter rather than dough and then baked in a pan, form, or griddle. Since they never have a bread-like appearance, they are always mezonos and al hamichyah. This is true even if one eats a large amount, since they are not considered bread or pas haba'ah bekisnin. Thus, one can have an entire, very satiating meal of pancakes or blintzes without washing netilas yadayim, and one recites the bracha of al hamichyah afterwards.

WAFFLES, WAFERS, ICE CREAM CONES

These items are also made from a batter, but in this case the batter is poured into a mold or waffle iron that bakes it into its final shape. Although these items have a slightly more bread-like appearance than pancakes and blintzes, without the mold these items would never have a bread-like shape, and they do not have a tzuras hapas (bread-like appearance) even after baked. Therefore, they are not considered pas haba'ah bekisnin but regular mezonos. As a result, they do not require netilas yadayim, and the brachos are mezonos and al hamichyah even if one made a full meal out of them. Thus, one can enjoy as many wafers as one wants and recite an al hamichyah when complete.

ENGLISH MUFFINS

Most English muffins have a consistency noticeably different from regular bread, and therefore are pas haba'ah bekisnin. However, some English muffins have a consistency that is more like bread. If it tastes like bread, swims like bread and quacks like bread, treat it as bread.

KISHKA AND LICORICE

Although these are two very different foods, the halachic discussion that involves them is similar.

The Gemara (Brachos 37b and 36b) discusses a food called rihata, which was made of flour, oil, and honey that were cooked or stirred together in a pot until they hardened. The Gemara cites a dispute whether the bracha is mezonos, because of the general halachic importance of flour, or shehakol, because the main taste comes from the honey. We rule that the bracha is mezonos because flour is usually considered the main ingredient of a food unless the flour is there only to hold it together.

Whenever the flour is added to provide taste, the bracha is mezonos, even if the main taste comes from the honey.

Kishka has the same halacha as rihata. Although the main taste comes from the other ingredients, the flour certainly adds taste as well.

Therefore, its bracha is mezonos.

Although licorice contains a significant amount of flour, the flour is added only to give licorice its stiff shape, and not to add anything to the taste or to make it more filling. Therefore, the bracha on licorice is shehakol (Shulchan Aruch 208:2 and Mishnah Berurah ad loc.).

According to the Gemara (Bava Kamma 30a), someone who desires to become a chassid (exemplary in his behavior) should toil in understanding the halachos of brachos. By investing energy into 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 Hashem. Furthermore, when reciting the proper bracha, one is acquiring the item from Hashem in the proper way.