

THE POWER OF THE INDIVIDUAL Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

Historians over the past few centuries have been heavily influenced by a Marxist view of the world and of human events. In this understanding of the past, present and future, great external forces such as the competition of the classes, stages of economic development and powerful historical and sociological forces somehow determine human behavior and explain human history as well as current events. These theories have, in effect, turned human history on its head.

No longer can or should the individual count for much since it is these outside, inexorable forces that are pushing all of us along, whether we wish it or not. The eventual result of such beliefs and theories is that individual human beings really count for little. It is these beliefs that were able, in the 20th century, to bring about the destruction of tens if not even hundreds of millions of people in order to 'construct a better world.' In other words, the individual is only a cog in the great machine of the determinist view of the human story. These theories still exist and find popularity in academia, in the rarefied atmosphere that willfully ignores the destruction they have wrought over the recent centuries. I personally find it depressing to hear of this drivel repeated from the lips of these 'experts' and 'wise men.' This is just another example of the arrogance and elitism that afflicts much of the academic world in our time.

Over the last two centuries many Jews have subscribed to the above theories of history and current events. However, Judaism itself and traditional Jewish ideas and values stand in opposition to such determinist views of human life and society. Judaism sees history as the work of individuals, who, because of their own free will and individuality, shape events, form ideas and influence the progress of human civilization. Individuals created Judaism and the Jewish nation was formed by the actions and beliefs of individuals.

Even though Judaism believes that events in this world are influenced and guided by Heavenly forces, nevertheless it is the free choice of individuals and their actions that determines what occurs in this world and forms the outlines and basis of all human history. This is a central belief of Jewish life and is repeated many times in the holy Scriptures and the Talmud.

An individual has great powers and is of immense worth. That is why Judaism treasures human life above all other values. It states that the life of an individual is equal to that of the entire world. It allows for very rare exceptions to this rule of behavior and attitude of the mind and heart. Physically, and in terms of raw materials, a human being may not be worth very much. But emotionally, spiritually and intellectually, every human being is priceless, and beyond assessment and monetary measurement.

It requires a great deal of self-worth and a deep understanding of one's own being to feel important in a world of 7 billion other individuals. But that is a flawed way of looking at things. Every individual has his or her own specific DNA that does not exist anywhere else amongst those other billions of individuals. Our Creator values us as individuals and did not intend to make us all the same. The challenge of life is to retain our individuality and to also incorporate ourselves into the general human race. This is a challenging goal, but it is simply the only way that we can determine our value and our purpose in living life in this world.

Too much individuality can lead to narcissism and arrogance. No individuality makes life meaningless and without true purpose. Judaism always preaches balance in life in order to avoid social, intellectual and religious pitfalls. We see the earliest manifestations of individuality in the youngest and smallest of infants because that is the basis for human existence and purpose. We should never allow individuality to be completely stifled but we should also be aware that carried to an extreme it will be a negative trait harmful to the individual and to general society. Shabbat shalom Berel Wein

KI TAVO

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

Saying thank you is one of the basic courtesies of human interaction. Though elementary and straightforward, it is often forgotten or neglected. In saying thank you, we are acknowledging that we are dependent upon the goodness and consideration of others and that we are not completely in control over events and even of our own decisions in life.

In traditional homes, both Jewish and general, some of the first words that children are taught are "thank you," "please" and "may I." In fact, these words are the building blocks of civilized behavior and of being able to get along peacefully and gently in this world. But because of our egotistical nature, as children and later in life as adults, we resent the necessity of having to use these words and to thereby acknowledge our dependence upon others.

It is always ironic that we expect expressions of gratitude from others but are very sparing in granting them ourselves. If this be true, as I feel it is in families and among other relationships, it is also true regarding our relationship to our Creator. The Torah refers to the lack of gratitude as a cardinal sin of personality. It is based in arrogance and a false assessment of one's place in the world. Therefore, Judaism stresses humility, for only in humility can one expect to find expressions of gratitude.

The Torah reading of this week begins with the necessity for expressions of gratitude for the blessings of a bountiful harvest and the first fruits of the agricultural year. These fruits were to be brought to the Temple in Jerusalem as an offering to the priests serving there and as an acknowledgment of appreciation to God for having provided this bounty to the farmer.

There is no question that the farmer invested a great deal of effort, sweat and toil in bringing his crops to fruition. Because of this effort and the investment on the part of the farmer, there is a temptation that he will view these new fruits as an entitlement. For after all, he was the one who devoted the time and effort necessary to produce them. There is a danger that he will forget that there really are no entitlements in life and that one has to say thank you for everything that is achieved, though ostensibly we have labored to achieve this much desired goal.

Rather, it is incumbent upon the farmer to thank his Creator for the land and the natural miracles that occurred daily in the production of food, grain and fruit. As the old year winds down, we should all remember to say thank you for life, goodness and family, and pray that the new year will bring us more of the same.

Shabbat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

A Nation of Storytellers (Ki Tavo 5779)

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

Howard Gardner, professor of education and psychology at Harvard University, is one of the great minds of our time. He is best known for his theory of "multiple intelligences," the idea that there is not one thing that can be measured and defined as intelligence but many different things – one dimension of the dignity of difference. He has also written many books on leadership and creativity, including one in particular, *Leading Minds*, that is important in understanding this week's parsha.[1] Gardner's argument is that what makes a leader is the ability to tell a particular kind of story – one that explains ourselves to ourselves and gives power and resonance to a collective vision. So Churchill told the story of Britain's indomitable courage in the fight for freedom. Gandhi spoke about the dignity of India and non-violent protest. Margaret Thatcher talked about the importance of the individual against an ever-encroaching State. Martin Luther King told of how a great nation is colour-blind. Stories give the group a shared identity and sense of purpose.

Philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre has also emphasised the importance of narrative to the moral life. "Man," he writes, "is in his actions and practice as well as in his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal." It is through narratives that we begin to learn who we are and how we are called on to behave. "Deprive children of stories and you leave them unscripted, anxious stutterers in their actions as in their words." [2] To know who we are is in large part to understand of which story or stories we are a part.

The great questions – "Who are we?" "Why are we here?" "What is our task?" – are best answered by telling a story. As Barbara Hardy put it: "We dream in narrative, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticise, construct, gossip, learn, hate and love by narrative." This is fundamental to understanding why Torah is the kind of book it is: not a theological treatise or a metaphysical system but a series of interlinked stories extended over time, from Abraham and Sarah's journey from Mesopotamia to Moses' and the Israelites' wanderings in the desert. Judaism is less about truth

as system than about truth as story. And we are part of that story. That is what it is to be a Jew.

A large part of what Moses is doing in the book of Devarim is retelling that story to the next generation, reminding them of what God had done for their parents and of some of the mistakes their parents had made. Moses, as well as being the great liberator, is the supreme storyteller. Yet what he does in parshat Ki Tavo extends way beyond this.

He tells the people that when they enter, conquer and settle the land, they must bring the first ripened fruits to the central sanctuary, the Temple, as a way of giving thanks to God. A Mishnah in Bikkurim[3] describes the joyous scene as people converged on Jerusalem from across the country, bringing their first-fruits to the accompaniment of music and celebration. Merely bringing the fruits, though, was not enough. Each person had to make a declaration. That declaration became one of the best known passages in the Torah because, though it was originally said on Shavuot, the festival of first-fruits, in post-biblical times it became a central element of the Haggadah on seder night:

My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down into Egypt and lived there, few in number, there becoming a great nation, powerful and numerous. But the Egyptians ill-treated us and made us suffer, subjecting us to harsh labour. Then we cried out to the Lord, the God of our ancestors, and the Lord heard our voice and saw our misery, toil and oppression. So the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror and with signs and wonders. (Deut. 26:5-8)

Here for the first time the retelling of the nation's history becomes an obligation for every citizen of the nation. In this act, known as vidui bikkurim, "the confession made over first-fruits," Jews were commanded, as it were, to become a nation of storytellers.

This is a remarkable development. Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi tells us that, "Only in Israel and nowhere else is the injunction to remember felt as a religious imperative to an entire people." [4] Time and again throughout Devarim comes the command to remember: "Remember that you were a slave in Egypt." "Remember what Amalek did to you." "Remember what God did to Miriam." "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."

The vidui bikkurim is more than this. It is, compressed into the shortest possible space, the entire history of the nation in summary form. In a few short sentences we have here "the patriarchal origins in Mesopotamia, the emergence of the Hebrew nation in the midst of history rather than in mythic prehistory, slavery in Egypt and liberation therefrom, the climactic acquisition of the land of Israel, and throughout – the acknowledgement of God as lord of history." [5]

We should note here an important nuance. Jews were the first people to find God in history. They were the first to think in historical terms – of time as an arena of change as opposed to cyclical time in which the seasons rotate, people are born and die, but nothing really changes. Jews were the first people to write history – many centuries before Herodotus and Thucydides, often wrongly described as the first historians. Yet biblical Hebrew has no word that means "history" (the closest equivalent is *divrei hayamim*, "chronicles"). Instead it uses the root *zachor*, meaning "memory."

There is a fundamental difference between history and memory. History is "his story," [6] an account of events that happened sometime else to someone else. Memory is "my story." It is the past internalised and made part of my identity. That is what the Mishnah in Pesachim means when it says, "Each person must see themselves as if he (or she) personally went out of Egypt." [7]

Throughout Devarim Moses warns the people – no less than fourteen times – not to forget. If they forget the past they will lose their identity and sense of direction and disaster will follow. Moreover, not only are the people commanded to remember, they are also commanded to hand that memory on to their children.

This entire phenomenon represents a remarkable cluster of ideas: about identity as a matter of collective memory; about the ritual retelling of the nation's story; above all about the fact that every one of us is a

guardian of that story and memory. It is not the leader alone, or some elite, who are trained to recall the past, but every one of us. This too is an aspect of the devolution and democratisation of leadership that we find throughout Judaism as a way of life. The great leaders tell the story of the group, but the greatest of leaders, Moses, taught the group to become a nation of storytellers.

You can still see the power of this idea today. As I point out in my book *The Home We Build Together*, if you visit the Presidential memorials in Washington you will see that each one carries an inscription taken from their words: Jefferson's 'We hold these truths to be self-evident . . .', Roosevelt's 'The only thing we have to fear, is fear itself', Lincoln's Gettysburg Address and his second Inaugural, 'With malice toward none; with charity for all . . .' Each memorial tells a story.

London has no equivalent. It contains many memorials and statues, each with a brief inscription stating who it represents, but there are no speeches or quotations. There is no story. Even the memorial to Churchill, whose speeches rivalled Lincoln's in power, carries only one word: Churchill. America has a national story because it is a society based on the idea of covenant. Narrative is at the heart of covenantal politics because it locates national identity in a set of historic events. The memory of those events evokes the values for which those who came before us fought and of which we are the guardians.

A covenantal narrative is always inclusive, the property of all its citizens, newcomers as well as the home-born. It says to everyone, regardless of class or creed: this is who we are. It creates a sense of common identity that transcends other identities. That is why, for example, Martin Luther King was able to use it to such effect in some of his greatest speeches. He was telling his fellow African Americans to see themselves as an equal part of the nation. At the same time, he was telling white Americans to honour their commitment to the Declaration of Independence and its statement that 'all men are created equal'.

England does not have the same kind of national narrative because it is based not on covenant but on hierarchy and tradition. England, writes Roger Scruton, "was not a nation or a creed or a language or a state but a home. Things at home don't need an explanation. They are there because they are there." [8] England, historically, was a class-based society in which there were ruling elites who governed on behalf of the nation as a whole. America, founded by Puritans who saw themselves as a new Israel bound by covenant, was not a society of rulers and ruled, but rather one of collective responsibility. Hence the phrase, central to American politics but never used in English politics: "We, the people."

By making the Israelites a nation of storytellers, Moses helped turn them into a people bound by collective responsibility – to one another, to the past and future, and to God. By framing a narrative that successive generations would make their own and teach to their children, Moses turned Jews into a nation of leaders.

Rav Shlomo Aviner Shlit"a

Segulot that Work

Since people today are searching day and night for Segulot, inventing new ones and paying a fortune for them, we decided to collect all of the proven Segulot which we have heard from our Rabbis:

Segulah for Shalom Bayit

A husband should help his wife or, more precisely, the two of them should take care of the family's needs together since theirs is a shared life.

Satmar Chasidim end Shabbat very late due to a long Seudat Shelishit and the Rebbe's talk. Once, on a Saturday night, the Satmar Rebbe saw that one of his Chasidim was the last one in the Beit Midrash and was folding his Talit with great precision. The Rebbe asked him what he was doing. The Chasid said that he saw in various books that care in folding one's Talit is a Segulah for Shalom Bayit. The Rebbe responded: A better Segulah is to go home and help your wife wash dishes (And others say this incident in the name of Ha-Rav Chaim Shmulevitz, Rosh Yeshivat Mir. The book "U-Piryo Matok - Bereshit" of Ha-Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, p. 140).

Segulah for the Education of One's Children

A good education, since for education, one has to work and invest.

Ha-Rav Chaim Kanievski related that someone once came to Ha-Griz Soloveitchik – the Brisker Rav – and asked for a blessing that his son should be a Torah scholar and G-d-fearing. The Rav said that he will be a Torah scholar based on how much you learn with him, and he will be G-d-fearing based on how many tears his mother sheds during Davening for him (Minchat Todah p. 89).

Segulah for Learning Torah

Learn consistently and without interruption.

Ha-Rav Herschel Schachter relates that after he was married, he and his wife did not have children, and they therefore decided to visit Eretz Yisrael. He was told that it is worthwhile to receive a blessing from the Steipler Gaon. The way it worked was that one bought a book from him and at the same time asked for a blessing. The Steipler was hard of hearing, and one would therefore communicate with him by writing on a notepad. The Steipler yelled in Yiddish: What can I do for you? Rav Schachter wrote that he wants to buy Kehilat Yaakov on Kiddushin, the Massechet they were then learning in Yeshiva. He bought it, received the change and said that the Steipler could keep the change as a donation. The Steipler said that he did not need the money, business is business. Then Rav Schachter asked for a blessing for children, and he blessed him. The Steipler asked: What else can I do for you? Rav Schachter said that he was learning in Kolel, and is it possible to receive a blessing for success in learning? The Steipler said: All the blessings in the world will not help. Rather sit and learn and you will succeed.

Segulah for Debts

If someone has debts, he should spend less than he earns and not rely on the miracle of overcoming the rules of mathematics.

The Tur wrote that one should limit his expenses. And the Mishnah Berurah wrote that this is a harsh criticism against those who are enticed to spend money on luxuries without seeing the consequences, which in the end will lead to theft and disgrace (Biur Halachah chap. 529). One should plan well.

Segulah for a Long Life

“Who is the man that desires life and loves days of seeing good? Let him guard his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking evil.” Tehillim 34:13- 14.

Segulah against Traffic Accidents

Driving carefully and performing kindnesses to those who need a ride.

And the Belzer Rebbe – Ha-Rav Aharon Rokeach – also gave the Segulah that if one follows the traffic laws with the strictures of the 10 Commandments, and also gives rides to those who need them, in the merit of these kindnesses which he does on the road, he will be saved from any bad occurrence (Shut Shevet Ha-Kehati 5:241).

All of these pieces of advice can be found in Ha-Rav Chaim Kanievsky's answer to the question: How do we know which Segulot are true? - "I only know that which is written in the Shulchan Aruch" (Segulot Raboteinu p. 321). And the Belzer Rebbe said that there is no greater Segulah than "Yirat Hashem" (Fear of Hashem), as it says (Devarim 28:58): "If you do not observe all of the words of the law, which are written in this book, to fear this Glorious and Awesome Name of Hashem, your G-d" (Shut Az Nedbaru 1:79 #179. Beit Baruch 1, 405. Brought in Shalmei Yehudah chap. 10 note #41).

Ki Tavo: Two Paths of Bikkurim

Rav Kook Torah

Fresh and Dried Fruits

The mitzvah of bringing the first fruits (Bikkurim) to the Temple, the spiritual focal point of the nation, contains an important message for our own service of God. The Bikkurim offering demonstrates how each individual is able to connect his private activities - the fruits of his labors - to the nation's holiest aspirations.

The Mishnah explains how the first fruits were brought to the Temple:

“Those close to Jerusalem would bring fresh figs and grapes, while those further away would bring dried figs and raisins.” (Bikkurim 3:3)

The Mishnah describes the Bikkurim offerings of two groups of people: those who lived near to Jerusalem and could bring fresh fruits; and those

who lived further away, and had to be content with bringing an offering of dried fruit that could withstand the long journey.

Two Paths: Torah and Prophecy

These two situations - living in close proximity to Jerusalem and living some distance away – correspond to two spiritual paths the Jewish people have taken throughout history: the path of Torah and the path of prophecy, each with its own advantages and benefits.

The path of Torah is paved through the development of the Oral Law, as the nation applies Halachah to all aspects of life. The fruit of these legalistic efforts, however, may seem dry and uninspiring. This is particularly true when this path is compared to that of prophecy, which deals with Divine wisdom and lofty matters, and is closely connected to meditative prayer and the Torah's mystical teachings.

When the Jewish people lived in the Land of Israel and the Shechinah dwelled in their midst, their spiritual world centered primarily on prophetic enlightenment. We have been promised that the gift of prophecy will return to us - and on an even higher level - thus providing a lofty holiness that engages the heart and soul with knowledge of God. When we will be able to guard this gift, we will merit it once more - when we are back in our land, close to God's Presence, and protected from the misguided beliefs of foreign nations.

However, after we were banished from our beloved homeland, it became necessary to take the second path - a path capable of retaining its special character, despite exile and dispersion. This is the path of Torah, as the Sages wrote: ‘From the day the Temple was destroyed, the Holy One has only the four cubits of Halachah in His world’ (Berachot 8a). The legal system of Halachah may appear to be dry and barren; but like the dried fruits of the Bikkurim offering, it contains hidden reserves of spiritual life and vitality. It is this path of Torah that preserved the Jewish people throughout the difficult challenges of a long and bitter exile.

Complementary Paths

The switch between the path of prophecy and the path of Torah took place during the Second Temple period, when prophecy ceased. In preparation for the exile that would follow, those spiritual forces of the nation that had previously focused on prophecy now concentrated their talents on the discipline of Halachah, developing and refining the study of Torah. These efforts enabled the Jewish people to survive as a separate nation in foreign lands, distinguished from other nations by an all-encompassing Halachic lifestyle.

These two paths are reflected in the paradigm of the Bikkurim offerings. Those close to the spiritual center prefer the delicious fresh fruits. However, the gifts from those living far away - dried figs and raisins that may appear to be shriveled and lifeless, but have the advantage of retaining their flavor despite the long journey - are also valued and beloved. Together, the two conduits of Torah and prophecy provide endurance and vitality for the nation's special service of God.

Parshas Ki Savo

The Curse of Madness / The Ultimate Curse

Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Two Dimensions of the Curse of Madness

Parshas Ki Savo, as we all know, contains the Tochacha – 98 curses that will happen if, Heaven forbid, Israel does not keep the Torah. It is a very scary parsha. That is why the custom in Israel is that we read it in an undertone. Among the curses mentioned, the pasuk says, “You will go mad from the sight of your eyes that you will see” [Devorim 28:34]. Unfortunately, we have heard too many stories of things that happened in the Holocaust in which mothers had to see their children taken away from them – this can literally cause people to go out of their minds from the things they have had to witness.

It is difficult to understand that a few pasukim earlier, the Torah says, “Hashem will strike you with madness and with blindness and with confounding of the heart” [Devorim 28:28]. There too, the pasuk says that the L-rd will smite us with madness (sheegaon). The Ketzos HaChoshen wants to know the difference between pasuk 28 and pasuk 34. Pasuk 28 is “Yakcha Hashem b'sheegaon” [the L-rd will smite you

with madness] and pasuk 34 says “You will go mad from the sight of your eyes...” What is the difference between these two curses? They seem to be redundant.

The Ketzos HaChoshen gives an incredible insight – and I have seen this happen. There are some people that are literally crazy and are not in touch with reality. They live in their own world. They do not walk through the streets thinking, “Gee, what do people think of me?” The person is so crazy, he does not even contemplate what other people think about him. This is total insanity – completely out of touch with reality.

But then you can have a person who is not totally out of touch with reality. In fact, he can at times be quite lucid and at other times not lucid at all. What is tragic about such a person is that when he is lucid and looks at other people and people look at him, he is cognizant of the fact that people are looking at him somewhat strangely. He realizes that people think he is crazy – even though, at those moments, he is not crazy. At those moments, he is very aware of who he is and what he is thinking and what everybody else is thinking about him. It is extremely painful for that person.

I once knew a person who suffered from dementia – be it Alzheimer’s or some other type of dementia. This person had periods of lucidity and periods of not dealing with reality. You could tell that when he was lucid, it was very painful for him to realize that people were looking at him askance. He “got it” that people were looking at him funny. It was very uncomfortable for him.

The Ketzos HaChoshen said that pasuk 28 (the L-rd will smite you with madness) is the person who is totally out of touch with reality—crazy, and not aware of his situation. He is not aware of what people think or people say. But pasuk 24 (You will go mad from the sight of your eyes) is speaking of the other situation. You will see things with your eyes and you will see that things are not right. You will see that people are not dealing with you like a normal person. This will drive you to an even deeper state of madness – from the situation that you see with your own eyes! This is an even worse curse.

To be both “in touch” and “out of touch” and to go between the two states and to have to deal with that on an ongoing basis is far worse than to be completely “out of touch with reality.”

The Ultimate Curse: No One Would Buy the Jewish Slaves

The last pasuk in the Tochacha is noteworthy: “Hashem will return you to Egypt in ships, on the road of which I said to you, ‘You shall never again see it!’ And there you will offer yourselves for sale to your enemies as slaves and slave-women – and there will be no buyer!” [Devorim 28:68] Rashi writes on this pasuk, “You want to be bought as a slave, and yet no one will buy you!”

It is a chilling statement. But I learned something recently that makes it even more chilling.

The Ramban in Parshas Bechukosai explains that the first Tochacha in Chumash, the one in Parshas Bechukosai at the end of Vayikra, refers to the destruction of the First Bais Hamikdash, while the second Tochacha, here in our parsha, refers to the destruction of the Second Bais Hamikdash. He shows how all the things mentioned at the end of Vayikra happened at the end of the First Jewish Commonwealth and subsequently, in the Babylonian exile that followed. However, he says that the Tochacha in Parshas Ki Savo is referring to what happened at the end of the Second Jewish Commonwealth and in the exile subsequent to it.

It is a long Ramban, I will just quote a few lines:

The Curses in Devorim predict that the Almighty will bring upon us an enemy from a far-away land. This refers to the Roman conquest, a nation who was very far from the Land of Israel. It speaks there about “a nation that you do not recognize and whose language you do not understand.” This was only the case in the second exile, not in the Babylonian exile, where they were taken away to nearby Babylonia by a nation they knew and whose language they understood. ... So too “and the L-rd will disperse you from one end of the earth to the other end of the earth” which is mentioned in Parshas Ki Savo – that refers to our present exile where we are spread out across the globe.

Finally, the Ramban points out regarding the Tochacha in our parsha that it concludes with the words “and He will bring you back to Egypt in boats.” This happened, he says, in our present exile. Titus, the Roman general who destroyed the Second Temple, filled slave boats with Jewish prisoners and took them all over the world.

This past summer, I had the good fortune of acting as a scholar in residence on a tour of Italy. In our last day there, we were in Rome and went to the Roman Coliseum. It was perhaps the most moving part of the trip, although it brought to mind a very tragic point in our history. They built the Roman Coliseum with money that Titus stole from the Beis HaMikdash treasury, which he plundered at the time of the destruction of the Second Commonwealth. He took with him 95,000 captives that built the Roman Coliseum.

Imagine you are in this place which is now in ruins, but is still very recognizable as a coliseum. It is not a whole lot different from a football stadium. It is round and there is a “playing field.” It sat seventy thousand people. You are there looking at this place and you are thinking, “Jewish money and Jewish hands built this.” It is such a tragic place. The non-Jewish tour guide knew the history of Rome. She told us about what went on in the Coliseum. The gladiators used to fight to the death there.

This went on there every day for 500 years! Football is eight or ten games a year. However, imagine the Roman Coliseum – 500 years, every day, 70,000 people from all over the Roman Empire, including the Roman Emperors themselves. The Jewish historian that accompanied the group (Rabbi Nissel) told us that for the crowd’s entertainment, they used to have prisoners and slaves, who they forced to run out onto the field where there were starving lions waiting, who had not been fed for three or four days. The lions would come out and rip these people to pieces, devouring them. This was the entertainment of the “Holy Roman Empire.” People in the stands used to cheer when the lions would rip these prisoners to shreds.

Many of those people ripped to shreds were Jewish slaves. The problem is that they were not really slaves. That is what our pasuk is teaching. They were offered for sale as slaves – but no one purchased them! They were so weak, so old, so emaciated. No one wanted to buy a slave like that. A slave must be a worker, an able-bodied person. So what happened to all the sick, infirm, and old Jews who were offered as slaves but no one wanted to purchase them? They were the people who were fed to the lions. This is the final curse of the Tochacha.

Imagine how bad things get when it is actually a “blessing” to be purchased as a slave!

Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Ki Tavo

For the week ending 21 September 2019 / 21 Elul 5779

Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com

Insights

Can't Take My Eyes Off You

“And Hashem has distinguished you today...” (26:18)

The Mona Lisa by Leonardo da Vinci has been called “the best known, the most visited, the most written about, the most sung about, the most parodied work of art in the world.” Like many examples of phenomenal success, such as the Beatles, critics and curators are at a loss to define exactly why the Mona Lisa has become the greatest icon of painting. Some say that it’s the way the Mona Lisa’s eyes follow you around the room. But that’s true of any portrait where the subject is looking directly at the viewer. I once made a photographic portrait of Rav Moshe Shapiro, zatzal. A student of his purchased a print from me in the largest size I made. After a few weeks he told me that he gave it away to another talmid of Reb Moshe’s because “his eyes kept following me round the room and I felt I was being watched all the time.”

In his book “Adjusting Sights,” about a religious soldier fighting on the Golan Heights in the Yom Kippur War of 1973, Chaim Sabato describes fighting in one of the most desperate battles — Nafah quarry — in which his platoon was wiped out by the Syrians. He writes that he had with him a book of Tehillim (Psalms), stained with the tears of his mother, and he opened it up and started to read, “Mizmor L’David,

Hashem Ro'i..." — Hashem is my Shepherd, I will not want." The Syrians were closing in on all sides and he got to the verse, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of Death, I shall not fear, for You are with me." He was walking, quite literally, through the valley of the shadow of Death. He writes, "It was as though King David had written it just for me. What was it that made you feel that all his Tehillim were about you? Like a portrait whose eyes stayed focused on you from every angle"

"And Hashem has distinguished you today..."

Because the Jewish People accepted the Torah and rejected idolatry, they "distinguished" Hashem as their only G-d, and Hashem has distinguished the Jewish People as His only people. Just as a lover who only has "eyes" for his "beloved," so too the Jewish People sense the "Eyes" of Hashem following them wherever they are. The words of King David, who said of himself, "I am prayer," are the voice of the Jewish People for all time, both in times of sadness and oppression, in times of war and death, and in times of joy and salvation. We never take our eyes off Hashem, and He never takes His "Eyes" off us.

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OU Torah

In the Good Old Days

Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

It was the kind of thing you would hear from old men. "Things just ain't the way they used to be." "This new generation is going to hell in a handbasket." "I remember when things were different and better, back in the good old days!"

Now that I am becoming a bit older myself, I find that I sometimes parrot some of those phrases. Increasingly, my attitude has become negative and critical of the contemporary world around me. It is at such moments that I feel convinced that things were indeed much better in the past, and certainly much different.

My tendency to value the past over the present is especially marked when it comes to reflecting upon leadership phenomena. It is easy to say that presidents and prime ministers were once great statesman and that the individuals now holding those positions are at best mediocre. Authors, poets, artists, and even the composers of days gone by definitely seem superior to individuals currently in those roles.

It is especially in the area of religion that the past took on an aura of holiness, of grandeur, of purity, that seems to be totally absent in today's religious world. It is easy to come up with the names of fifteen or twenty outstanding rabbis in the previous generation or two, or even three. It is hard to find more than a few in today's generation.

Is this attitude, which I suspect is prevalent even among individuals far younger than me, fair? Is it correct? Or is it based upon nostalgic memories which distort the realities of the past, as well as the conditions of the present? Dare I even speculate that this attitude stems from a cynicism which, some would say, is typical of older people?

Personally, I have found correctives for this attitude in my own experience and in my Torah study.

My personal experience was fortunately blessed by my acquaintance with a number of older men, among whom I count my own and my wife's grandfathers, who all felt that the current generation was in many ways superior to the earlier generations that they knew. In their conversations, they not only did not glorify the past, but well remembered that past generations had their own blemishes, some of which were quite severe.

This week's Torah portion, Parshat Ki Tavo, opens with the mitzva to bring the first fruits of one's new harvest to "the place where the Lord your God will choose to establish His name," (Deuteronomy 26:2), which we know eventually was designated as Jerusalem. The next verse continues, "You shall go to the kohen (priest) in charge at that time..." After reciting the proper recitations, the fruits were given to that kohen. Rashi notes how very odd it is that we are told to bring those fruits to the kohen "in charge at that time." To what other kohen could we possibly have given them? To the kohen of a time gone by?

To those of us who were paying careful attention to the Torah portion that we read just two weeks ago, Shoftim, this question sounds very familiar. For in that parsha, we encountered two similar phrases, not with reference to the kohen, but with regard to the judges whom we consult.

Thus, we read that we were to "appear before... the magistrate in charge at that time, and present your problem" (Deuteronomy 17:9). Later in that same parsha, we learned that "the two parties to the dispute shall appear... before the magistrates in authority at that time" (Deuteronomy 19:17).

The Talmud derives a powerful lesson from these three phrases which all stress "... at that time." The lesson is that we are not to denigrate the judges or priests of our time. We are not to say that the judges of yore were well-suited to their positions, but that the judges of our own times are inferior and indeed unqualified. Jephtha, the leader of a rag tag group of warriors, was for his generation every bit as qualified to be a judge as was Samuel, the prophet of a later time.

I have always understood this teaching to mean that it is futile to compare the leaders of one generation to those of another. Each generation has its own special character and unique requirements, and the leaders who emerge, especially in the religious sphere, are precisely the ones most appropriate for that generation. As Rav Kook, the first Chief Rabbi of the Land of Israel, whose 79th yearzeit we recently commemorated, put it, "Every generation shines with its own qualities." If this lesson applies to what our attitude should be to the judges of our time, how much more it applies to what should be our proper attitude toward the contemporary kohen. We are not to say that the kohanim of yesteryear were spiritually worthy of offering the priestly blessings, whereas today's kohen is unqualified to do so. Rather, we ought to follow Maimonides' ruling that everyone born a kohen is fit to utter the priestly blessing "even if he is not learned, not punctilious in his observance of mitzvot, and even if there are persistent rumors about him." (Mishneh Torah, Laws of Prayer 15:6).

I close by quoting the words of the wisest of old men, indeed, the wisest of all men, King Solomon:

"The end of a matter is better than the beginning of it.

Better a patient spirit than a haughty spirit...

Don't say, 'How has it happened that former times were better than these?'

For is not wise of you to ask that question." (Ecclesiastes 7:8-10)

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Rabbi Buchwald's Weekly Torah Message – Kee Tavo 5779-2019

"Welcoming the Stranger"

(Revised and updated from Kee Tavo 5760-2000)

This week's parasha, parashat Kee Tavo, opens with the ritual of bringing בִּכּוּרִים —Bikkurim, the first fruits of the season, to the Temple in Jerusalem.

Deuteronomy 26:1 records the following declaration: It shall be, that when you enter the land that the L-rd your G-d gives you as an inheritance, when you possess it and dwell in it, that you shall take the first of every fruit of the ground that you bring in from your land that the L-rd your G-d gives you, and shall put it in a basket, and go to the place that the L-rd your G-d will choose, to make His name rest there.

By bringing the Bikkurim to the Temple and delivering them to the Kohen—the priest, Jews symbolically acknowledge that all their material assets are a gift of G-d. The Jew, therefore, brings this symbolic portion to G-d, as a sign of gratitude for G-d's goodness.

The Mishnah in Bikkurim 3:1 describes the ritual of selecting the first fruits, recalling how the farmer tied a cord to the stems of the selected offerings and declared: "This is the Bikurim."

Once the first fruits are harvested, they are brought with great fanfare to Jerusalem for dedication. The farmer would bring his Bikurim in a basket to the Kohen, then take it back temporarily, as he recited a brief summary of Jewish history underscoring how the land of Israel is a gift of G-d. At the conclusion of this declaration, the farmer would place his basket down before the altar, delivering it as a permanent gift to G-d.

Focus for a moment on one practical portion of the farmer's declaration to the Kohen of those days: Deuteronomy 26:3, I declare today to the L-rd, your G-d, that I have come to the land that the L-rd swore to our forefathers to give us.

The rabbis ask the fundamental question: How can later generations of Jews say: "I have come to the land that the L-rd swore to our forefathers to give us"? Wouldn't it be more precise to say: "Our forefathers came to the land"? A response to this question can be found in the Passover Haggadah where we declare *בְּכָל דּוֹר וָדוֹר חַיֵּב אֲנִי לְרְאוֹת אֶת עַצְמוֹ כְּאֵלוֹ הוּא* *הָאֵל מִצְרַיִם*, In every single generation each person must see themselves as if they themselves went out of Egypt. In effect, all Jews have an obligation to see themselves as an inseparable part of the Jewish nation, and everything that occurred to our forefathers in Egypt, happened not only to the ancient Israelites, but to us as well. Thus, the claim of Jewish tradition is that the Land of Israel was given personally to each Jew. Therefore, it is entirely appropriate for contemporary Jews to declare: *כִּי יָרַדְתִּי אֶל הָאָרֶץ*—I personally came to the land.

A fascinating aspect of this question is the issue of whether a ger—a convert to Judaism, is entitled to say this declaration for the Bikkurim. After all, G-d did not give his/her ancestors the land. The Mishnah in Bikkurim (1:4) records this dispute. "The proselyte brings [first fruits], but does not recite [the declaration], since he cannot say: Which the L-rd swore unto our fathers to give to us...(Deuteronomy 26:3), and when he prays in private he says: 'The G-d of the forefathers of Israel.' When he prays in the synagogue he says: 'The G-d of our fathers.'"

This opinion, cited in an anonymous Mishnah, which is usually attributed to Rabbi Meir, indicates that when making a declaration before G-d, one must be absolutely truthful. Therefore, a convert to Judaism may not say "G-d of my fathers," since it is not true.

However, this practice is not the accepted ruling. In fact, it is explained entirely differently in the Jerusalem Talmud (Bikkurim 1:4): "It was learned in the name of Rabbi Judah—A proselyte himself brings the first fruits and recites the [regular] formula. Why so? 'For a father of a multitude of nations have I made thee.'" Originally, he [Abraham] was the father of Aram [the country of his birth], from now on he is the father of all humanity. Rabbi Joshua ben Levy said: "The laws are in accordance with Rabbi Judah."

Maimonides, in his epistle to Obadiah, the proselyte, concurs: "Behold that has made clear to you that you should say, 'Which the L-rd swore to our forefathers.' And that Abraham is your father, and that of all the righteous who follow his ways. This applies to all benedictions and prayers. You should not alter anything."

Maimonides, as the rabbis before him, proves clearly that Judaism is not a biological or racial tradition, it is rather a spiritual inheritance. Consequently, anyone who adopts the spiritual teachings of Judaism is entitled to say that he/she is the disciple of Abraham, who introduced monotheism to the world.

It is no coincidence that parashat Kee Tavo is read in the month of Elul, prior to the High Holidays of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, the Days of Repentance and introspection. Parashat Kee Tavo includes the terribly ominous *תּוֹכַחָה* —To'chay'cha, the warning of the retribution that G-d will visit upon those who do not follow G-d's words. This shrill message, shakes us to the core, reminding us that it is time for self-evaluation and repentance. But, how does the ritual of bringing of Bikkurim, the first fruits, dovetail with the theme of the Days of Awe and Repentance? Perhaps the question that was previously raised serves as the connection. After all, each of us is a *גֵּר* —ger, each of us is in some way a stranger to Judaism.

During the month of Elul and the High Holidays, it is incumbent upon all Jews, whether man or woman, to look inside themselves, to check their deeds, to find the "stranger," the "alien" in themselves that has allowed them to succumb to forbidden actions. We are not Canaanites, we are not Jebusites—we are all the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah. We have boldly and proudly declared that the L-rd is our G-d. There is no room for the alien in us, because there is no alien. The stranger within us needs to be welcomed,

and become an integral part of ourselves, dominated by good deeds and superior morality.

It is in this spirit that we enter the month of Elul, the time of Teshuvah, and the Days of Repentance.

May you be blessed.

Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz

כי תבוא - תשע"ט - Ki Tavo 5779

At the beginning of this week's Torah portion, Ki Tavo, we read the conclusion of Moses' long speech – the speech of the commandments. From here until the end of the Torah we will read admonitions, warnings, blessings, promises, and the moving descriptions of Moses' parting from the nation. But we will no longer read many commandments, other than building the altar and the covenant on Mount Ebal, and a few commandments relating to writing a Torah scroll and its future use: how to treat it and when to read it.

Our Torah portion begins with two commandments and they conclude the long commandments speech: the commandment of "offering the first fruits" and "poor-man's tithe". These two commandments relate to the agricultural harvest in the Land of Israel and try to educate people, providing a Jewish-value perspective on the economic sphere of life. These two commandments, one that happens at the beginning of the agricultural harvest and the other after the harvest has been collected – directly relate to the two relationships man has in life: his relationship with G-d, and his relationship with others.

We find a vivid description of the commandment to bring first fruit in the Mishna:

How does one set aside bikkurim? A man goes down into his field, he sees a fig that ripened, or a cluster of grapes that ripened, or a pomegranate that ripened, he ties a reed-rope around it and says: "Let these be bikkurim."

How were the bikkurim taken up [to Jerusalem]? All [the inhabitants of] the cities of the maamad would assemble in the city... Early in the morning the officer would say: "Let us arise and go up to Zion, into the house of the Lord our G-d"... The flute would play before them until they would draw close to Jerusalem...All the skilled artisans of Jerusalem would stand up before them and greet them saying, "Our brothers, men of such and such a place, we welcome you in peace." Even King Agrippas would take the basket and place it on his shoulder and walk as far as the Temple Court. When he got to the Temple Court, the Levites would sing the song.

(Mishna, Tractate Bikkurim, Ch. 3)

We notice that the commandment begins with the first fruits that ripen on the tree. At this moment of satisfaction, the person is called upon to mark the first fruit and recognize that the results of his deeds and work do not make him master of the harvest. It is the first fruit that is taken to the Temple and given to the kohanim (priests).

The end of this commandment teaches us that this call is not meant to suppress the naturally human sense of satisfaction. On the contrary. When a person acknowledges that his assets and livelihood are a gift from G-d, the result is satisfaction and joy. This is how the description of the commandment concludes:

Then, you shall rejoice with all the good that the Lord, your G-d, has granted you and your household you, the Levite, and the stranger who is among you.

(Deuteronomy 26, 11)

From here, we move on to the next commandment, poor-man's tithe, focused on man's relationship with others, and we can see this as a direct result of the message we are taught by the commandment of first fruit.

Every year, the farmers of the Land of Israel are commanded to give a certain percentage of their harvest to the Kohanim and the Levites. In addition, during most years, the farmer sets aside a "second tithe" – a certain percentage of the harvest is eaten by the farmer and his family in Jerusalem. But there are years (the third and sixth years in the seven-year cycle of shmita) during which the farmer does not set aside the

“second tithe” but rather the poor-man’s tithe given to “the stranger, the orphan, and the widow”.

This commandment expresses the farmer’s Jewish compassion that gives him the responsibility for others’ fate. The fact that one person has a harvest but another does not have the ability to support himself calls upon him to repair this social reality. The person is pleased with the fruit of his labor, with the abundance that removes worry for the upcoming year, and at the same time, he is demanded to make sure his poor neighbor merits the same joy.

The greatest of Jewish rabbinical authorities, Maimonides, said the following in a different context:

While eating and drinking, one must feed the stranger, the orphan, the widow, and other poor unfortunates. Anyone, however, who locks the doors of his courtyard and eats and drinks along with his wife and children, without giving anything to eat and drink to the poor and the desperate, does not observe a religious celebration but indulges in the celebration of his stomach.

(Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Yom Tov, Chapter 6)

It is permissible to be happy and one must be happy, but we must not forget those who do not have joy. For joy not to be a humiliation, we must look around us, pay attention to those in need, and provide for them.

The writer is rabbi of the Western Wall and Holy Sites.

Shema Yisrael Torah Network

Peninim on the Torah - Parshas Ki Savo

פרשת כי תבוא תשעט

ובאת אל הכהן... ואמרת אליו הגדתי היום לד' אלקיך

You shall come to the Kohen... and you shall say to him, “I declare today to Hashem, your G-d.” (26:3)

The individual who brings *Bikurim* makes a declaration: “I have come to the Land that Hashem swore to our forefather to give to us.” *Rashi* explains the need for making a declaration which underscores the fact that *Eretz Yisrael* is our land which Hashem bequeathed to us. Why is it necessary to mention our gratitude to Hashem for giving us the Land? *Rashi* says: *She'eincha kafui tov*; “That you are not an ingrate.” How important it is for us that the actions we perform ingrain in our psyche the importance of recognizing and acknowledging the good that we receive from others. The entire *parsha* of *Bikurim* is focused on *hakoras hatov*, gratitude. We many never forget that the land which is ours is in our possession only because Hashem assigned it to us.

Hakoras hatov, says *Horav Aharon Leib Shteinman, zl*, is not a *halachah*, law; rather, it is *aleph bais* (abc) of *tzuras ha'adam*, the image of a man. One who is deficient in his sense of *hakoras hatov* is equally lacking in his *tzuras ha'adam*. In other words, he is simply not a human being! *Chazal* (*Avodah Zarah* 5b) teach that the *taanai*, complaint/accusation, against Adam *HaRishon* for eating of the *Eitz HaDaas*, Tree of Knowledge, was his *kafui tov*, ingratitude. One would think that he had committed a much greater sin than ingratitude. He transgressed Hashem’s command. The Almighty said, “Do not eat.” Adam ate. Is there a greater sin than direct insubordination to G-d’s word? *Chazal* teach us that if one acts with ingratitude, he is no longer an *adam*, a man, a person, a human being. This was the first critique of Adam *HaRishon*. The rest followed. *Chazal* distinguish between the actual sin of the eating of the *Eitz HaDaas* and its precursor – Adam’s lack of gratitude. (We must never forget that any deficiency that is attributed to the early giants of our history are only relative to us as mere mortals in comparison to their awesome greatness.)

The *Ramban* cites the ingratitude of the nations of Ammon and Moav – whose ancestors, Lot and his two daughters, were saved from certain death as a result of the prayers of Avraham *Avinu* – as the reason for distancing them from our People. This is a powerful statement. After all, it is not as if the descendants of Lot, centuries later, had any connection to Avraham. While it is, indeed, true that one who derives benefit from someone should be grateful, Ammon and Moav were not the direct recipients of this favor. How are they to remember what had occurred five hundred years earlier – especially since it was not

Avraham who needed their favor, but rather, it was his descendants? In other words, the benefactor and beneficiary were long gone. This was a new generation that neither knew the benefactor nor the beneficiary. Should the obligation of *hakoras hatov* still be in force?

Horav David Kronglass, zl, explains that it is, in fact, their sin. They should never forget that they are alive today only due to the spiritual and moral generosity of Avraham *Avinu*, Patriarch of the Jewish People. Time does not erase or mitigate the obligation of *hakoras hatov*. The critique against Ammon and Moav was so strong, observes *Horav Leib Chasman, zl*, that as a result of their ingratitude, they were forever barred from entering *Klal Yisrael*. How can we accept someone who lacks human decency? One might muse; let bygones be bygones; what happened thousands of years ago should not affect our lives today. Apparently, a deficit in ingratitude is part of one’s DNA and is transmitted, like a family disease, throughout the generations.

In a compelling *hesped*, eulogy, for *Horav Yeruchem Levovitz, zl*, the venerable *Mashgiach* of Mir, *Horav Shlomo Harkavi, zl* (*Mashgiach* of Grodno) asserted that every *bachur*, student, should study *Mishnayos* in memory of *Rav Yeruchum*, since they are inextricably bound to his soul via the unbreakable bonds of *hakoras hatov* that they have to him for the guidance that he gave them.

We have no dearth of stories concerning the *hakoras hatov* evinced by our *gedolim*, Torah giants, to anyone, regardless of station in life or level of erudition or observance. I have chosen to focus on a few short vignettes. In his youth, *Horav Aryeh Levin, zl*, studied in *Yeshivas Kaminetz* under *Horav Baruch Ber Leibowitz, zl*. He studied *b'chavrusa* with *Rav Baruch Ber* and completed *Meseches Eiruvim*. During his tenure in the *yeshivah*, he studied all of *Seder Nashim*, committing the entire *seder* to memory. Despite his extraordinarily close relationship with his *rebbe*, *Rav Aryeh* left the *yeshivah* without telling anyone and transferred to *Yeshivas Volozhin*. He knew that *Rav Baruch Ber* would probably be displeased with his sudden move, but he felt it necessary as a result of the changing spiritual climate in the house in which he ate dinner every night. (This was the custom in those days. *Yeshivos* did not have kitchens. Instead, they enlisted the voluntary participation of the kind, generous members of the community to feed the students.) Apparently, the *baal habayis*, householder, at whose home *Rav Aryeh* ate was becoming infected by the spiritual malaise known as *Haskalah*, Enlightenment. Sadly, it affected many people who, as a consequence, began to look askance on the Torah way of life. Some of these people eventually became apostates. Fearing that the environment in which he ate dinner would eventually take its toll on his spirituality, *Rav Aryeh* left the *yeshivah*.

Rav Aryeh never shared his plans with his *Rebbe*. Indeed, he attributed all of the *tzaros*, troubles, that he endured in his life to the fact that he had upset his *Rebbe*. When asked why he had not informed *Rav Baruch Ber* of his decision, *Rav Aryeh* explained that the *baal habayis* was actually a fine, decent person (as were so many who fell prey to the scourge of the *Haskalah*); he had opened his home to him and made him feel comfortable. He felt it would demonstrate a lack of *hakoras hatov* if he would relate to his *Rebbe* his concerns regarding this man’s spiritual deviation. His *Rebbe* would be hurt, knowing that the man whom he had recommended for his student’s sustenance had become a wolf in sheep’s clothing.

In his *tzaavah*, will, *Rav Aryeh* wrote, “I was very careful not to be ungrateful to anyone from whom I benefited.”

One more vignette concerning *Rav Aryeh* demonstrates not only his consummate adherence to being *makir tov*, but also indicates his elevated spiritual plane. *Horav Eliezer Ozer, Shlita*, is *Rosh Yeshivah* of *Yeshivas Lomza*, Petach Tikva. His grandfather, founder of the *yeshivah*, *Horav Eliezer Shulevitz, zl*, was a primary student of *Horav Yisrael Salanter, zl*. Prior to opening the *yeshivah* in Petach Tikva, *Rav Eliezer* lived in Yerushalayim, where he gave a nightly *shiur*, lecture, in *kabbalah*, mysticism/the secrets of the Torah, to the premier Torah scholars of the city. Among them was *Rav Aryeh Levin* and *Horav Yaakov Moshe Charlop, zl*, *Rav* of Shaarei Chesed and *Rosh Yeshivah* of *Mercav Horav*. As a result of his attendance at this *shiur*, *Rav Aryeh* felt

a tremendous sense of gratitude to the entire Shulevitz family, resulting in his maintaining a very close relationship with them. This continued on to include *Horav Moshe Ozer, zl*, son-in-law and successor to *Rav Eliezer*, and, later on, his son, *Rav Eliezer Ozer*.

When *Rav Moshe Ozer's* daughter married, the family requested that *Rav Aryeh* act as *mesader kiddushin*, officiate. *Rav Aryeh* demurred, citing his *Rebbetzin's* (final) illness, which did not allow him to leave home for any extended period of time. Traveling to Petach Tikvah was not a short trip. The family felt bad, but they understood that *Rav Aryeh* could not attend. How surprised they were when in the middle of the *chupah*, *Rav Aryeh* appeared. They were only too happy to have him participate by reciting one of the *sheva brachos*, seven blessings recited at a nuptial ceremony. Nonetheless, they were very curious about why he had changed his mind.

After the *chupah*, *Rav Aryeh* asked to speak with the *kallah's* parents. *Rav Eliezer* was also in attendance when *Rav Aryeh* revealed to them why he came to the wedding. He explained that the previous night, their late son (the *Ozer's* had a son who was killed in the war) had appeared to him in a dream and asked him to attend his sister's wedding and to relay to them his *bircas mazel tov*. He added, "You will encounter a number of challenges 'created' to prevent you from arriving at the wedding in a timely fashion, but, regardless, you should make the attempt." *Rav Aryeh* left at noon, allowing sufficient time for arriving to the wedding. Everything that could have gone wrong – did. First, the bus broke down. He then ordered a taxi that had a flat midway to Petach Tikvah. The next taxi did not fare much better than its predecessor. Finally, after a number of replacements, he made it eight hours later to the *chupah*. Why did he do it? He owed a debt of gratitude to the Shulevitz family for the *shiur* in *Kabbalah* he had attended many years earlier. Also, he simply could not refuse the "deceased" son's request.

וירעו אתנו המצרים ויעננו ויתנו עלינו עבודה קשה

The Egyptians mistreated us and afflicted us, and placed hard work upon us. (26:6)

Previously in *Sefer Devarim* (5:15; 15:15; 16:16; 24:22), the Torah exhorts us to remember that we were once slaves in Egypt. Here the Torah focuses on our affliction and persecution. The liberation was the high point in our spiritual education. We were introduced to *emunah*, faith, in Hashem, amidst the many miracles leading up to, including those that were a critical part of the Exodus. Why focus on servitude if the primary lesson was our freedom from this wretched bondage?

The *Sefer Chareidim* derives from here a powerful lesson concerning our obligation to – and the manner in which we should – serve Hashem. Clearly, remembering that we were liberated and taken out of a country from which no slave had ever escaped is a formidable memoir, which catalyzes many important lessons. A particular aspect of this remembrance, however, is crucial to our serving Hashem. We survived as slaves. We were there and "done that." We "walked the walk" and emerged a better people as a result, because now we know that slavery does not break us; it made us. Thus, if we can "make it" and survive as slaves, we should take those abilities and incorporate them in our "servitude" to the Almighty. We went from being slaves to the Egyptians to becoming servants of Hashem.

We are being taught an important and vital principle: we should never forget that we have the ability to serve. We should garner the lessons learned from this experience – the strengths: physical, emotional and spiritual – that make us better people – and apply them to serving Hashem. Every life experience serves a purpose in shaping the physical, emotional and spiritual character of a person. Hardship tempers one's emotional stamina. Challenges make us into better people. We should never forget that we were once slaves – especially when it comes to serving Hashem. He is the Supreme Master Whom we serve with love. Not only is it an obligation, it is also a privilege.

ובאו עליך כל הברכות האלה והשיגך

All these blessings will come upon you and overtake you. (28:2)

The various commentators focus on the word, *v'hisigucha*; "and (they will) overtake you." *Chazal* have written much about this blessing. *Horav Reuven Karlinstein, zl*, explains this blessing

practically: They will "reach" you. At times, we are the beneficiaries of great blessing, but, sadly, we either do not perceive the blessing due to a lack of depth of understanding or due to downright obtuseness, resulting in our going out of our way to ignore, downplay and even denigrate the blessing. In all these cases, Hashem promises to see to it that the blessings reach us, that we open up our minds and hearts to realize and acknowledge Hashem's gift to us.

A classic case cited by *Rav Karlinstein* is the incident of a young *talmid chacham*, a Torah scholar, of note, an individual replete in *middos tovos*, wonderful, positive character traits. He was a *yarei Shomayim*, G-d-fearing, whose spiritual and ethical integrity was balanced and in-sync with his extraordinary relationship with people. He was absolutely a gem of a human being. *Rav Karlinstein* was singing his praises to his father who, albeit a wonderful person, was sorely lacking in his personal knowledge of Torah and concomitantly his appreciation of what Torah does for a person and the unbelievable heights to which one who excels in Torah can soar. Therefore, when he heard the accolades concerning his son, he countered, "What does he have from all of this learning? I still have to support his family! In the field of material success, he is a dismal failure!"

This man should be the proud father of a diamond. Yet, he did not know it. This is to what the Torah is alluding: At times, Hashem blesses a person, but the person is clueless about the blessing. He may be holding a precious gem in his hand, but, for all intents and purposes, he has a simple rock. Hashem will see to it that the blessing will reach him and he will become more aware of his blessing.

Some individuals approach life as one big negative: nothing is good; whatever they see is in a negative light. The *nachash*, serpent, was cursed that everything he would eat would maintain the flavor of dirt. He could bit into the most luscious steak, and it would taste like mud. This was his curse. There are people like that, who are the beneficiaries of amazing good fortune – yet, they only see the negative. *V'hisigucha*; "it will reach you." You will have a *hasagah*, an understanding, an appreciation of the blessing. This is how it will reach you. You will realize it is knocking at your door.

This, explains *Rav Karlinstein*, is the beauty of *maaser beheimah*, the tithing of animals, which requires that every tenth animal to go through the pen be marked and set aside as the tithe. Rather than count each animal and mark the tenth, why not simply take ten percent of his total herd and designate it as holy? The problem with taking ten percent off the herd is that a person begins to question his contribution. For example, if one has a thousand animals and he is asked to give one hundred animals, the amount will tug at his heart. After all, one hundred animals is a large contribution. If, however, one counts, one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine – he realizes that he has a large herd for which he should be thankful:

"I keep nine animals, so what if I give one away?" To give one hundred times is much simpler than giving one hundred, because one does not have the opportunity to focus on all of the good that he possesses. Realizing that the first nine belong to him goes a long way in assuaging his begrudging feelings concerning *maaser beheimah*.

והיו חיידך תלאים לך מנגד... ולא תאמין בהיידך

Your life will hang in the balance... and you will not be sure of your livelihood. (28:66)

At first glance, these curses appear to be ominous. *Rashi's* explanation, however, makes these curses sound like minor inconveniences or the bleak economic picture to which many of us are accustomed. "Your life will hang in the balance" – refers to one who must purchase wheat from the market. "You will not be sure of your livelihood" – refers to one who relies on the baker/bakery for his bread. I never thought of being "relegated" to shop in the store for food, or to visit the bakery for a loaf of bread, as a curse.

Horav Chaim Shmuelevitz, zl, explains that the curse is: *V'lo saamin b'chayecha* (literally – you will not believe in your life), "And you will not be sure of your livelihood" means that you will be lacking in *emunah*, faith, in Hashem – a shortcoming that results in (at first) moderate (then extreme) depression. When one has a deficiency in his

belief in Hashem – he is a cursed person. On the other hand, one whose faith in Hashem is unshakeable – even if he has nothing, he is blessed. This was the level of *Klal Yisrael* during their forty-year sojourn in the wilderness. It is not the challenge that confronts us which determines blessing or curse; rather, it is how we respond that makes this designation. “The greatness of a person is determined by the challenges he is willing to overcome.”

Chazal understood that the ideal situation is when one has the ability to be self-sustaining. This is life in its truest form. Relying on others creates a feeling of uncertainty. This is a curse. Perhaps this is what the *Tanna* Hillel meant when he declared, *Im ein ani li – mi li*, “If I am not for myself – who will be for me” (*Pirkei Avos* 1:). We each have an “Ani”, “I”. We must live our lives – not that of someone whom we follow. If we do not live our lives – who will?

Va'ani Tefillah

שמע קולנו ד' אלקינו – *Shema Koleinu Hashem Elokeinu*. Hear our voice, Hashem, our G-d.

Horav Shimon Schwab, zl, notes that we do not say “Hashem, hear our *tefillah*,” rather we plead, “Hear our voice.” *Koleinu*, our voice, does not mean the sound of our *tefillah*, since the *Shemoneh Esrai* is recited quietly. There is no voice (so to speak) to hear. It must mean (says the *Rav*) that the *tefillah* to which we refer when we say *Shema Koleinu* is a reference to the *kavanah*, intention, and thought one has when he prays. We ask Hashem to not simply listen to our voices, but to our *kavanah*, the intent, that accompanies our voices. Indeed, the true meaning of the *tefillos* which we recite are given their true meaning via our voices – the thought and emphasis which we inject into our prayer.

Rav Schwab employs a well-known analogy of a father that comes to his *Rav* with a complaint concerning his son who went off to *yeshivah*. “Father, send money!” How dare he send such an audacious letter? The father presented the letter to the *rav* and said, “Look, do you see what my son wrote to me? The sheer *chutzpah* of the boy!” The *rav* took the letter and began to read it. He then looked at the father and said, “You did not read this letter properly. In a trembling and pleading voice, the *rav* read the letter as a plea from the son begging his father to please send him some money. Upon hearing the *rav*'s rendition of the very same letter that he had just read, the father broke down in tears: “I cannot refuse such a heart-wrenching plea for funds.” It is all in the reading. Likewise, we ask Hashem to listen to the tone and inflection of our prayers, because they take on a completely new meaning once they are delivered pleadingly and with supplication. Indeed, when we rattle off our prayers like the caller at an auction, they have very little meaning.

Dedicated by Rthie and Sam Salamon in loving memory of Mr. Victor Gelb Hebrew Academy of Cleveland, ©All rights reserved prepared and edited by Rabbi L. Scheinbaum

Maaser Sheini

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question #1: Where?

Many mitzvos can be performed only between the “walls” of Yerushalayim. Do these laws apply to everywhere within the walls of today’s “Old City”?

Question #2: What?

“What may I not remove from Yerushalayim?”

Question #3: When?

“When am I permitted to eat maaser sheini?”

Introduction:

This week’s parsha includes the mitzvah of maaser sheini. Although people currently living in chutz la’aretz often feel that they do not need to know the laws applicable to the agricultural mitzvos of the Torah, everyone must know the basic laws of this mitzvah for many reasons, including:

1. When in Eretz Yisroel, to which we all aspire, we need to be sure that all terumos and maasros are properly separated. Someone living outside of Eretz Yisroel also needs to know the details of the laws on produce that grows in Eretz Yisroel.

2. We daven three times daily for Moshiach to come so that we can live in Eretz Yisroel and observe the mitzvos that apply there. Although most of the laws of maaser sheini do not apply today even in Eretz Yisroel, they will all apply again, iy’H, when the Beis Hamikdash is rebuilt and we can achieve a state of taharah

by virtue of the ashes of the parah adumah.

3. Fruits of chutz la’aretz may have the status of neta reva’ie, which shares the laws of maaser sheini.

The basics

Produce grown in Eretz Yisroel and the lands nearby must have several small portions separated from it before it may be consumed. These are:

Terumah

First, a small amount is separated as terumah, which is property of the kohen. When we are all tahor, the owner gives the terumah to a kohen of his choice. Terumah may be eaten by any close member of the kohen’s family – including his wife, sons, and unmarried daughters -- as long as they are completely tahor.

Since no kohen is tahor today, terumah may not be eaten. If the terumah is itself tamei, it is destroyed, preferably by burning it. If the terumah is tahor, we are not permitted to eat it, nor to destroy it. What does one do with it?

We put it in a place where no one will mistakenly eat it, and leave it there until it decomposes to the point that people will not eat it. At that point, it is disposed of. We will soon explain why decomposition permits one to destroy terumah.

Maaser rishon

After terumah has been separated, a tenth of the remaining produce is separated as maaser rishon, which is the property of the Levi. The Levi is required to separate one tenth of what he receives, which is called terumas maaser and has all the laws of terumah as explained above. The remaining maaser rishon has no sanctity, and therefore may be eaten by anyone, even when tamei. Therefore, maaser rishon can be eaten today, even though we are all tamei, and the Levi can sell it or give it away to whomever he chooses. Furthermore, none of the restrictions we will discuss shortly regarding redemption or use applies to maaser rishon.

Maaser sheini/maaser ani

After maaser rishon is separated, there is an obligation to set aside a tenth of what is left. Depending which year it is relative to the shemittah cycle, either maaser sheini or maaser ani is separated.

These two types of maaser are halachically very different. Maaser ani is the property of the poor and has no sanctity, similar to maaser rishon. The owner of the field decides to which poor person or persons he gives the maaser ani. There is detailed halacha defining who qualifies as “poor” for the purposes of this mitzvah, but since the theme of this article is maaser sheini and not maaser ani, we will leave this question for a different time.

When is one required to separate maaser sheini, and when is one required to separate maaser ani? The halacha is that Eretz Yisroel follows a seven year shemittah cycle. In the first, second, fourth and fifth years, the second tithe is maaser sheini, and in the third and sixth years it is maaser ani. Since shemittah produce is ownerless, there are usually no terumah and maasros separations that year. In the unusual instances where there is, which is a topic for a different time, there is extensive halachic discussion whether the second tithe is maaser sheini or maaser ani.

Maaser sheini, the topic of our article, must be eaten in Yerushalayim by people who are tahor. Any tahor Jew is permitted to eat it, but it must be eaten within the walls of the ancient city of Yerushalayim. We will soon discuss what that means and we will also see that there are many other laws that apply to it. We will also discuss what can be done if it is impractical to transport all of one’s maaser sheini to Yerushalayim.

Which maaser?

We should note that the term maaser, without specifying which one, is used sometimes to refer to maaser rishon and sometimes to refer to maaser sheini, notwithstanding that their laws are very different from one another. Usually, one can understand from context which maaser is intended. If the context alludes to maaser owned by a Levi, or to the first maaser being separated, maaser rishon is intended. If it refers to something that has sanctity, usually maaser sheini is intended. Since the rest of this article will be discussing the specific and unusual sanctity of maaser sheini, I will henceforth use the term maaser to mean only maaser sheini.

The parsha

At this point, let us examine the appropriate pesukim in this week’s parsha: “And you shall eat the maaser of your grain, your wine, and your olive oil... before Hashem your G-d, in the place that He will choose to rest His Name -- so that you will thereby learn to be in awe of Hashem at all times. However, when you are blessed by Hashem, your G-d, such that you are unable to carry [the maaser sheini] to a place as distant as the one that Hashem chooses, then you may exchange it for money that you bring with you on your visit to that place that Hashem has chosen. Once you are there, you shall exchange the money for cattle, sheep, wine or anything else you desire, which you shall eat there, before Hashem, your G-d. In this way, you and your family will celebrate” (Devarim 14:23-26).

Obviously, the place that He will choose to rest His Name refers to the city of Yerushalayim. Thus, we are told the following halachos: Maaser should be brought with you when you travel to Yerushalayim. However, if you have more

produce than you can easily carry to Yerushalayim, you may redeem the maaser produce, a process that removes the sanctity and special laws from the maaser produce and places it on coins. The Torah shebe'al peh teaches that this redemption can be performed only onto minted coins. When the owner is redeeming his own maaser produce, he must redeem it for coinage that is worth 25% more than its value. Then he brings this money to Yerushalayim, where it is used to purchase food to be eaten within the confines of the city. This acquisition transfers the maaser sheini sanctity from the money to the food, which means that this newly acquired food can be eaten only within the walls of Yerushalayim and must be eaten while tahor.

Vacation fund

Whether one transports one's maaser sheini produce itself to Yerushalayim, or purchases food with the money to which the sanctity has been transferred, the farmer remains with a lot of maaser sheini that may be consumed only in Yerushalayim, a city bursting with sanctity and special, holy people. The beauty of this mitzvah is that it entices the farmer to ascend to the Holy City and be part of the spiritual growth attainable only there.

One can even look at the maaser sheini as "vacation fund" money that the Torah provides. Although the farmer may not be wealthy, when he arrives in Yerushalayim, he can eat and drink like a king!

Sanctity and purity

As mentioned above, the original maaser sheini that was separated and brought to Yerushalayim, and the food purchased in Yerushalayim with the redemption money are holy and may be eaten only within the walls of the old Yerushalayim and only when both the food and the individual eating it are tahor, ritually pure.

In addition, there is another halacha pertaining to Yerushalayim. Once maaser produce has been brought within the Holy City's walls, it may not be removed or redeemed.

O' my Jerusalem!

By the way, the current "Old City" walls of Yerushalayim, constructed by the Ottoman Turks almost 1500 years after the churban, are not the borders that define the halachic sanctity of the city. The Turkish walls encompass areas that were not part of the city at the times of Tanach and Chazal, and therefore do not have the sanctity of Yerushalayim; and, without question, parts endowed with the sanctity of the Holy City are outside these walls. Thus, it will be necessary when Moshiach comes to determine exactly where are the borders of the halachic "old city of Yerushalayim."

What food?

What food may one purchase with maaser sheini money? There are many laws regarding what one may purchase. The Torah specifies that, once in Yerushalayim, one may exchange maaser sheini money for cattle, sheep, wine or anything else you desire, which seems both wordy and unusual. The Torah shebe'al peh explains this to mean that one may not purchase any food with maaser sheini money, but only those that grow either from the ground or meat and poultry, that grow "on the ground." Therefore, one may use maaser sheini money to purchase fruit, vegetables, breads, pastry, meat or poultry; but not fish, which do not grow on the ground; nor salt or water, which do not grow; nor mushrooms, which are fungi and are therefore not considered as growing from or on the ground.

The pasuk's reference to purchasing cattle or sheep teaches a new law. It is considered exemplary to purchase animals that will then be offered in the Beis Hamikdash as korbanos shelamim. The owner takes home most of the meat of these korbanos to eat with whomever he chooses to invite. Of course, this must be eaten following all the laws of korbanos shelamim, which includes that everyone eating it must be tahor and that the meat is eaten only within the walls of the city, as explained above. Among many other laws, the meat may be eaten only until nightfall of the day following the offering of the korban. Whatever is not eaten by that time must be burned.

There is an interesting halacha germane to those who purchase animals for korbanos shelamim with maaser funds. One may use maaser funds to purchase an animal as a korban, even though it is not completely eaten. Parts of the animal are burned on the mizbei'ach, and the hide and bones are not consumed by anyone. Notwithstanding the strict rules governing the consumption of maaser, the hide, which was purchased as part of the animal with maaser funds, has no sanctity and belongs to the owner!

Sanctity of maaser sheini

Although any tahor Jew is permitted to consume maaser, there are many detailed rules governing how one must consume maaser. For example, one may not cook foods that are usually eaten raw, nor may one eat raw produce that is usually cooked. Therefore, one may not eat raw maaser sheini potatoes, nor may one cook maaser sheini cucumbers or oranges.

Similarly, juicing vegetables and most kinds of fruit is considered "ruining" maaser sheini produce and it is therefore prohibited, although one may press grapes, olives and lemons, since the juice and oil of these fruits are considered more valuable than the fruit itself.

How do we determine whether processing a food "ruins" it or not? Some poskim contend that one may not process maaser in such a way that its brocha is changed (Shu"t Mishpat Cohen #85, based on Brachos 38a and Rambam, Hilchos Shevi'is 5:3). Others contend that it is permitted when this is the most common use of this fruit (Minchas Shelomoh, Shvi'is pg. 185). A practical difference in halacha between these two positions is whether one is permitted to squeeze oranges and grapefruits.

One must certainly be careful not to actively destroy maaser sheini. Therefore, one may not destroy it when it could still be eaten. Similarly, peels that are commonly eaten, such as those of cucumber or apple, still have kedusha and may not simply be disposed of. One is required to place them in a plastic bag and then place the bag in a small bin or box called a pach maaser, where it remains until the food is inedible. When it decomposes to this extent, one may dispose of it in the regular garbage.

Sanctity until spoilage

This leads us to a question: If indeed one may not throw maaser sheini produce in the garbage because it has sanctity, why may one do so after the produce decomposes? Does decomposition remove kedusha?

Indeed it does. Kedushas maaser sheini means that as long as the food is still edible, one may not make it inedible or use it atypically. This is because maaser sheini food is meant to be eaten. However, once the maaser sheini is inedible, it loses its special status and may be disposed of as trash.

This sounds very strange. Where do we find that something holy loses its special status when it becomes inedible?

Although the concept that decay eliminates sanctity seems unusual, this is only because we are unfamiliar with most of the mitzvos where this principle applies. Other mitzvos where this concept exists are shevi'is, terumah, challah, bikkurim, and reva'ie (Rambam, Hilchos Terumos Chapter 11; Hilchos Maaser Sheini 3:11; Hilchos Shevi'is 5:3). Of these types of produce that are holy, but meant to be eaten, only shevi'is may be eaten by someone tamei. Even though someone tamei may not consume tahor terumah, challah, or maaser sheini, one also may not dispose of them or even burn them. Instead, one must place them in a secure place until they decay and only then dispose of them (Tur, Yoreh Deah 331). We burn the special challah portion after separating it, only because it has become tamei. If it did not become tamei, one may not destroy the challah portion, but must place it somewhere until it decays on its own.

Contemporary maaser sheini

The fact that one must be tahor to consume maaser sheini changes the way one observes this mitzvah today, since we cannot become tahor. Without the ashes of a parah adumah with which to purify ourselves of certain types of tumah, we cannot eat maaser produce, nor the food purchased with the redeeming coins. Because we cannot eat maaser food, it is pointless to purchase food with these coins; instead, maaser coins remain unused and are eventually destroyed. To avoid excessive loss, one is permitted to redeem large quantities of maaser sheini onto a very small value within a coin, and this is the way we redeem maaser sheini today. Of course, we are missing the main spiritual gain of consuming the foods in Yerushalayim, but this is one of the many reasons for which we mourn the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash and pray many times daily for its restoration.

There is another law that is different because of our unfortunate circumstances. Since the maaser will not be consumed, it is permitted to redeem tamei maaser produce onto coins, even within the boundaries of the Holy City. Otherwise, one is permitted to redeem maaser produce only in a place where it cannot be eaten.

In conclusion, when we buy produce that grew in Israel, either we should check that there is a good hechsher that attended to all the maaser needs or we should make sure to separate all the terumos and maasros ourselves and redeem the maaser sheini.

Neta reva'ie

I mentioned above that all the laws that apply to maaser sheini also apply to reva'ie. Reva'ie is the fruit that grows in the fourth year of a tree's life. In a different article, I have explained how we calculate the years of a tree's life. There is also an article, on the website RabbiKaganoff.com under the title Could the Fruit of My Tree Be Orlah? where I discussed whether and when the laws of reva'ie apply to trees planted in chutz la'aretz or only to those in Eretz Yisroel.

Conclusion

A prominent talmid of Rav Moshe Feinstein once related to me the following story. A female calf was born that was completely red. Of course, conversations were abuzz: Could this possibly be a hint that Moshiach will be coming soon, and that we would soon have a parah adumah to use in removing our tumah?

Some of the talmidim in Rav Moshe's yeshivah approached him with this information, expecting to see his reaction to the great news. Much to their astonishment, Rav Moshe did not react at all. Surprised, one of them asked Rav Moshe: "Does not the Rosh Yeshivah think that this might be a sign that Moshiach will be coming soon?" To this, Rav Moshe answered: "A parah adumah is not kosher until it is three years old. I daven that Moshiach should come today, not in three years."

We should all have Rav Moshe's desire for Moshiach to be here, today, and, to demonstrate this desire, be as knowledgeable as we can in all the halachos that will then be germane. May we soon see the day when we can bring our maaser sheini and our re'ava'ie and eat them betaharah within the rebuilt walls of Yerushalayim!

Ohr Somayach :: Insights into Halacha

For the week ending 21 September 2019 / 21 Elul 5779

The Rosh Hashanah Meat Mystery

Rabbi Yehuda Spitz

There is a well-known halachah that one is not allowed to fast on Rosh Hashanah barring certain specific circumstances. Although it is a Day of Judgment, and there are shittos of the Gaonim that do permit one to fast, nevertheless the halachah is that Rosh Hashanah is also a festive Yom Tov and we must honor it properly. In fact, the Yerushalmi mentions that we must eat, drink, and be mesamayach on Rosh Hashanah.[1][2] This includes partaking of fine delicacies, as it is written in Sefer Nechemiah[3] regarding Rosh Hashanah, that everyone should "Eat fatty foods and drink sweet drinks...for this day is holy."

Interestingly, there are various customs related to the permissibility of partaking of meat on Rosh Hashanah, although it is considered to be the most distinguished of foods, and therefore seemingly the most appropriate delicacy with which to honor the holiday.[4]

Many readers are probably puzzled by the last paragraph, and might exclaim after rereading it: "What? How is that possible? Everyone eats meat on Rosh Hashanah. In fact it is even widely used as one of the Simanim.

Simana Milsa

The Gemara recounts that Abaye exhorted us to eat certain specific foods on Rosh Hashanah as symbolic omens for the upcoming year.[5] This practice is even codified as halachah in the Shulchan Aruch.[6]

According to the famed Maharal M'Prague and later the Chayei Adam, and based on the Ramban, the purpose of performing these Simanim is that a physical action, small as it may be, serves as a conduit to actualize and channel a Divine decree.[7]

And one of the foods that is commonly eaten as one of these Simanim is a Rosh Keves, the head of a ram, which by definition is definitely a type of meat. So why would anyone not partake of meat on Rosh Hashanah? Furthermore, how can something meant to properly usher in the New Year possibly be prohibited? Where's the Beef?

The answer to these questions lie in an interesting minhag found in a somewhat obscure sefer titled "Maggid Meisharim," that is cited by several authorities, including the Magen Avraham and Elyah Rabba, not to eat meat or drink wine[8] on Rosh Hashanah.[9] While that alone does not seem too noteworthy, as everyone can simply say "to each his own; he'll follow his custom and I will follow mine", in this case, however, it is the author of the sefer that demands our attention.

The author of the Maggid Meisharim is none other than the great Rav Yosef Karo, codifier extraordinaire and author of our authoritative Code of Law, the Shulchan Aruch. Moreover, this particular sefer is a compilation of the halachos that he personally learned from a Malach from Shamayim; in other words, from an angel. This means, that according to the Heavenly spheres it seems that we should actually refrain from eating meat on Rosh Hashanah.

But if so, how do we reconcile the directive of Ezra Hasofer cited in the aforementioned Sefer Nechemiah about "eating fatty foods?" This surely refers to eating meat. Furthermore, there are several Mishnayos referencing that one should eat meat on Rosh Hashanah.[10] Additionally, as mentioned previously, the Shulchan Aruch himself cites the minhag to eat a Rosh Keves (a lamb's head) on Rosh Hashanah night as a Siman.[11] What is the proper ruling?[12]

The Meat of the Matter

There seem to be several different views on how to resolve this glaring contradiction. One answer is that the Maggid was only referring to refraining from eating meat on Rosh Hashanah day. Conversely, on Rosh Hashanah night, when most people perform the Yehi Ratzons, the positive omens[13] beneficial for starting the year off on the right foot, meat is indeed permitted. Accordingly, one may still have his lamb's head (as one of the simanim) and eat it too.[14]

Another possible solution is that the Maggid's proscription was only meant for certain specific individuals who attained a high degree of spirituality (Yecheidei Segulah), and was never meant for the general populace, who may certainly partake of a fleishig seudah on Rosh Hashanah.[15]

Heaven on Earth?

However, the most widely accepted resolution is similar to that found in Gemara Bava Metzia 59b - in an analogous debate regarding the great Rabbi Eliezer who brought proof for his minority opinion by performing open miracles. The Gemara concludes that nevertheless, "Torah Lo Bashamayim Hee,"[16] meaning we do not base our halachic decisions on how the relevant issue is viewed in the Heavenly realms.

Likewise, regarding our pertinent discussion, many authorities categorically reject this prohibitive view with nary a mention of it, and allow eating meat on Rosh Hashanah. Several even aver that it is an outright obligation to do so, in order to properly commemorate Rosh Hashanah. Several authorities point out that had the Shulchan Aruch meant for his Maggid's words to be authoritative psak, he would have codified the Maggid's rulings as part of his Shulchan Aruch and not in a separate sefer.[17]

Eating meat on Rosh Hashanah has since become the common minhag, as Rav Nitronai Gaon, as well as many Rishonim including Rashi, Rabbeinu Gershom, the Meiri, Rav Yehuda Hachassid, and Rabbeinu Efraim,[18] and the vast majority of Acharonim from across the Jewish spectrum, including the Rema, Levush, Noda B'Yehuda, Yaavetz, Chayei Adam, Shulchan Aruch Harav, Matteh Efraim, Ben Ish Chai, Kitzur Shulchan Aruch, Aruch Hashulchan, and Kaf Hachaim, all write that the proper minhag is that one should eat bassar shamein on Rosh Hashanah.[19] This is also explicitly cited as the normative minhag by several contemporary Sefardic poskim, including Rav Ovadiah Yosef zt"l, Rav Yaakov Hillel, and Rav Yitzchok Yosef.[20] The Kaf Hachaim actually concludes that even "Yecheidei Segulah" do not have to follow the Maggid's words, and accordingly should eat meat on Rosh Hashanah.

In the final analysis, we mere mortals, apparently unlike angels, can and should properly celebrate the holiday of Rosh Hashanah in style, giving it the honor it deserves, including by eating fleishig delicacies l'kavod Yom Tov. However, it is important to note that many poskim caution that even so, it is proper not to incite our internal desires by overindulging ourselves on Rosh Hashanah.[21] Therefore, it would be prudent for us to remember before enjoying our Yom Tov roasts, that the essence of the day is not about gastronomical delight, but rather our avodah of crowning Hashem as our King.[11]

Postscript: Many later authorities, including the Chacham Tzvi, Rav Chaim Volozhiner, and the Chazon Ish, among others, share an interesting and different viewpoint regarding the Shulchan Aruch's Maggid.[22] This author has also heard this view averred b'sheim noted mekubal Rav Yaakov Hillel.[23]

They understand that a Maggid does not actually rule with Heavenly authority; rather it uses the individual's own merit and koach to present rulings. Meaning, although Rav Karo cites psakim from the Maggid, it is essentially utilizing his own personal hidden strengths to bring out these rulings. Therefore, concludes Rav Chaim Volozhiner, that in this instance it must be that notwithstanding his incredible greatness, Rav Karo must have somehow and inexplicably personally made a mistake, and the outcome of that resulted in a potentially erroneous conclusion being 'taught by the Maggid.' [24]

In a similar vein, the Minchas Elazar wrote that in his estimation, the Maggid Meisharim's teachings and psakim, although of Divine origin, were only meant for Rav Karo himself and not necessarily the general populace.[25] Either way, and whichever understanding, in this instance it is quite understandable why the common minhag is to partake of meat L'kavod Rosh Hashanah, and not necessarily following the assertion of the "Maggid."

Much of this article is based on Rabbi Eliezer Brodt's fascinating Likutei Eliezer (Ch. 4, pg. 90-118).

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[1] See Tur / Shulchan Aruch, Levush, Bach, Taz, Shulchan Aruch Harav, Birkei Yosef, Aruch Hashulchan, Mishnah Berurah (all Orach Chaim 597: 1), Chayei Adam (vol. 2, 139: 11), Matteh Efraim (Orach Chaim 597: 5; although he adds that if one does so, "ain mochin b'yado"), Shu"t Shaagas Aryeh (101 and 102), Shu"t Chasam Sofer (Orach Chaim 168), Kaf Hachaim (Orach Chaim 597: 3), and mv"r Rav Yosef Yitzchok Lerner's excellent Shemiras HaGuf V'Hanefesh (vol. 2: Ch. 137) at length. Although there are shittos in the Gaonim that one may fast on Rosh Hashanah - see Mordechai (Rosh Hashanah Ch. 1: 708 at length, and Yoma Ch.1: 723), Rosh (at the very end of Maseches Rosh Hashanah), Ran (ad loc.), Sefer Hamanhig (Hilchos Rosh Hashanah 1), Terumas Hadeshen (Shu"t 278), Haghos Maimoniyos (Hilchos Rosh Hashanah Ch. 1: 1), and Beis Yosef (Orach Chaim 597), this is not the normative halachah. In fact, the Yerushalmi mentions that we must eat, drink, and be mesamayach on Rosh Hashanah. See also the Rogatchover Gaon's Shu"t Tzafnas Pane'ach (in the Divrei Torah between volumes 2 and 3) for a fascinating and deep hesber to answer up the shittos of those Gaonim who maintain that one may indeed fast on Rosh Hashanah. This was addressed in a previous article titled "The Rosh Hashanah 'Dug' Dilemma."

[2] However, the Gaonim's opinion of allowing fasting on Rosh Hashanah does have practical ramifications: whether Birkas Hamazon must be repeated if someone forgot Yaaleh V'Yavo inBentching. Generally speaking, as Shabbos and Yom Tov have a requirement of 'Seudah,' if one does not mention the Yom Tov day in Birkas Hamazon as part of Yaaleh V'Yavo (or likewise, Retzei on Shabbos), he must repeat the whole Bentching. Yet, a day such as Rosh Chodesh is different. Although there is a Mitzvah to have a 'Seudah' on it, as it is not actually halachically required, Bentching would not be repeated if Yaaleh V'Yavo was

forgotten. [This topic was addressed at length in a previous article titled "Facts and Formulae for the Forgetful."] Regarding Rosh Hashanah, due to the shittah of the Gaonim, several Poskim maintain that there is no actual obligation to have a 'Seudah' on Rosh Hashanah (as opposed to Shabbos and Yom Tov), and therefore rule that if one forgot Yaaleh V'Yavo on Rosh Hashanah, Bentsching is not repeated. These authorities include the Magen Avraham (Orach Chaim 188: 7), Pri Megadim (ad loc. Eishel Avraham 7), Shulchan Aruch Harav (Orach Chaim 188: 10), Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (44: end 14), Kaf Hachaim (Orach Chaim 188: 25), the Ba'er Moshe (Shu"t vol. 3: 38, 13; however he does admit that this ruling is not so clear, therefore it is preferable for one who forgot Yaaleh V'Yavo to ask someone else to be motzie him m'safek), and Rav Moshe Sternbuch (Moadim U'Zmanim vol. 1: 4 haghah and vol. 8, Lekutei Haaros on vol. 1: 4 and Shu"t Teshuvos V'Hanhagos vol. 2: 269). On the other hand, other Poskim, including the Elyah Rabba (Orach Chaim 188: 8), Aruch Hashulchan (ad loc. 21; who maintains that this the pashut pshat in the Rambam and Shulchan Aruch), Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt"l (Halichos Shlomo, Moadim vol. 1, Rosh Hashanah Ch. 1, footnote 87) and the Shemiras Shabbos K'Hilchasa (vol. 2, Ch. 57: 7 and footnote 23) rule that one must indeed repeat Bentsching in such a scenario. Interestingly, the Mishnah Berurah (ad loc. 19) brings down both sides of this machlokes but does not rule conclusively. For more on this topic, see mv"r Rav Yosef Yitzchok Lerner's award-winning Shgiyos Mi Yavin (vol. 1, Ch. 25: 21, pg. 343).

[3] Nechemiah (Ch. 8: 10).

3 "Ain Simchah Ela B'Bassar". See Gemara Pesachim (109a), Midrash Rabba (Parshas Nasso 10: 5), Rambam (Hilchos Yom Tov Ch. 6: 18), Sefer Hachinuch (Parshas Re'eh, Mitzvah 488), Magen Avraham (Orach Chaim 249: 6), Aruch Hashulchan (Orach Chaim 529: 5), and Biur Halachah (529 s.v. keitzad).

[5] Gemara Horiyos 12a and Krisus 6a. There is however, a difference in girsa between the two sources. The Gemara in Krisus mentions "eating" (l'meichal) the Simanim, while the Gemara in Horiyos refers to "seeing" (l'mechzei) them. Most authorities, including the Tur and Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 583: 1), only cite the minhag of eating them. Yet, others, such as the Aruch (erech "Kra"), Beis Yosef (Orach Chaim 583: 1 s.v. amar), and Kol Bo (64), do indeed cite the variant viewing version. See Chiddushei Haghos on the Tur (ad loc. 3) who explains that truly, me'ikar din, viewing is indeed sufficient, but the Tur justifiably used the wording of the more common minhag, additionally taking blind people into account. The Kaf Hachaim (ad loc. 6) adds that one who for whatever reason cannot actually eat some of the Simanim, or if one suspects possible insect infestation, may certainly rely upon viewing them, especially as the Yehi Ratzon are not actual brachos, but rather bakashos rachamim for the New Year. See also Tosafos (Avodah Zara 5b s.v. Erev Yom Tov) and Ben Ish Chai (Year 1, Parshas Nitzavim 4) at length, as well as Shu"t Divrei Yatziv (Orach Chaim vol. 2: 253).

[6] Tur and Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 583: 1) and relevant commentaries. See also Tosafos (Avodah Zara 5b s.v. Erev Yom Tov) and Ben Ish Chai (Year 1, Parshas Nitzavim 4) at length. This was discussed in a previous article titled "The Rosh Hashanah 'Dug' Dilemma." As to why this does not fall under the prohibited category of Neichush, divining, see the Mordechai (Yoma 723), Meiri (Horiyos 12a), Haghos to Sefer Haminhagim (Rosh Hashanah 110), Derishah (Orach Chaim 583: 1), Pri Megadim (ad loc. Mishbetzos Zahav 1), Shlah (Maseches Rosh Hashanah, Ner Mitzvah 22 - 23), Biur HaGr"a (Yoreh Deah 179: 6; based on the Rema ad loc. 2, citing the SMA"K 136), and the aforementioned Kaf Hachaim (Orach Chaim 583: 6 and 11).

[7] Maharal in Be'er HaGolah (Be'er HaSheini s.v. b'perek gimmel; cited by the Mekor Chaim - Orach Chaim beg. 583) and Chidushei Aggados (to Horiyos 12a). This is also cited by the Chayei Adam (vol. 2, 139: 6), Elef Hamagen (583: 17), and Katzeh Hamatteh (583: 9) [both commentaries on the Matteh Efraim], among later authorities. This understanding of the Simanim is derived from a Klal set by the Ramban (Parshas Lech Lecha Ch. 12: 6, and in his introduction to Sefer Shemos; based on the Midrash Tanchuma Parshas Lech Lecha 9), who expresses great interest in every detail related by the Torah, and introduces us to the fundamental concept of "Maaseh Avos Siman LaBanim." This refers to the idea that the actions of our forefathers created a spiritual reality which was symbolic for their descendants. In other words, the challenges met by our great patriarchs transmitted to their children a unique form of spiritual DNA, whereby the potential was created for their descendants to emulate their deeds. This is why, he explains, the Torah records the stories of our forefathers in great detail. Showcasing their actions demonstrates that they serve as a conduit to actualize Divine decrees; in this case creating and enabling abilities in future generations. So too, explains the Maharal, this is the intention of these seemingly mysterious omens on Rosh Hashanah night. The purpose of these Simanim is to perform a physical action, small as it may be, to function as a means to channel a Heavenly decree. Therefore, we are utilizing these "omens", with their specific characteristics, as a unique but positive way to channel Divine blessing for the New Year. See at length Rabbi Eliezer Brodt's "Minhag Achilas Simanim B'Leil Rosh Hashanah V'Taamav" (printed in Kovetz Datz"ah vol. 100, pg. 4 - 5).

[8] The Minchas Elazer (cited in Likutei Eliezer pg. 91, footnote 7) writes that obviously this prohibition of the Maggid's does not include wine for Kiddush.

[9] Magen Avraham (beg. Orach Chaim 597), Elyah Rabba (ad loc.), Maggid Meisharim (end Parshas Nitzavim).

[10] See Chullin (Ch. 5: Mishnah 3 and 4) and Gemara Avodah Zara (5b).

[11] See Shulchan Aruch and main commentaries (Orach Chaim 583: 2). This minhag is based on a pasuk in Parshas Ki Savo (Ch. 28: 13; see commentaries ad loc. for differing views as to this bracha's intent), and aside for it being mentioned by the classic Acharonim,

dates quite far back with reports of Rishonim, including the Ravyah (vol. 2, Rosh Hashanah beg. 547), Maharam M'Rottenberg (cited in Shu"t Tashbatz 118), Ohr Zarua (vol. 2, Hilchos Rosh Hashanah beg. 257), Machzor Vitry (vol. 1: 323), Abudraham (Seder Tefillas Rosh Hashanah pg. 266), Maharil (Minhagim, Hilchos Rosh Hashanah 8), Terumas Hadeshen (cited in Leket Yosher vol. 1: pg. 129), Haghos Ashiri (Rosh Hashanah Ch. 1: 5), and the Tur (Orach Chaim 583) partaking of a Rosh Keveess or Rosh Ayil on Rosh Hashanah night, referring to it as a "minhag hakadmonim." Many emphasize the significance of the zeichus of Akeidas Yitzchok as an additional factor for this minhag. See also Ben Ish Chai (Year 1, Parshas Nitzavim 4 s.v. v'achar) who stresses that one should not use a Rosh Aiz, the head of a goat. The common minhag to use a "Rosh Dug," a fish head, is mentioned explicitly by the Chayei Adam (vol. 2, 139: 6), and Aruch Hashulchan (Orach Chaim 583: 3). This Rosh Hashanah night minhag is indeed cited as proper in many contemporary calendars, including Rav Yechiel Michel Tukachinsky's authoritative Luach Eretz Yisrael (Rosh Hashanah), Rav Yosef Elyahu Henkin's essential Luach Ezras Torah (Rosh Hashanah), and Rav Yaakov Hillel's Luach Dinim U'Minhagim Ahavat Shalom (Rosh Hashanah).

[12] Many authorities ask these hard-hitting questions including Rav Chaim Volozhiner (cited by his talmid, Rav Dovid Luria in his Kidmos Sefer HaZohar, Anaf 5, 3: 2), the Mahar"i Assad (Shu"t Yehuda Yaaleh, Orach Chaim 163), Rav Rachamim Nissim Palagi (Yafeh Lalev, Orach Chaim 597: 1), the Beis Meir (ad loc.), Maharsham (Daas Torah, beg. Orach Chaim 597), Adnei Paz (ad loc.), Lekutei Chaver Ben Chaim (cited in the Yalkut Meforshim in the Friedman edition of Shulchan Aruch ad loc.), Katzeh Hamatteh (on the Matteh Efraim 583: 7) and the Sdei Chemed (vol. 8, Maareches Rosh Hashanah 2: 3). Although not the "pashut pshat" and in fact disputed by many authorities, the Maggid Meisharim writes that Sefer Nechemiah's "fatty foods" must really be referring to fatty milk products, not meats.

[13] See Gemara Kerisus 6a, Horiyos 12a, and Tur / Shulchan Aruch and relevant commentaries to Orach Chaim (583: 1).

[14] This solution is proposed by several authorities including the Maharsha (Chiddushei Aggados to Beitzah 15b s.v. baalei), the Pnei Yehoshua (Kesuvos, Kuntress Acharon 5a), the Mishkenos Haro'im (Shu"t vol. 1: 1), the Maharsham (Daas Torah, Orach Chaim 597: 1), and the Orchos Chaim (Spinka; ad loc. 1).

[15] The Radal (Rav Dovid Luria; Kidmos Sefer HaZohar, Anaf 5, 3: 2), Elef Hamagen (on Matteh Efraim 583: end 11), and the Ben Aryeh (Haghos Ben Aryeh to Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 597: 1), are proponents of this resolution.

[16] Devarim (Parshas Nitzavim, Ch. 30: 12).

[17] See Likutei Eliezer (pg. 103-104).

[18] Shu"t HaGaonim (Orach Chaim 61), Rashi (Avodah Zara 5b s.v. v'chein), Rabbeinu Gershom (Chullin 83a), the Meiri (Beis Habechirah to Chullin 83a), Rav Yehuda Hachassid (Sefer Gematriyos vol. 2, Parshas Masei 5), and Rabbeinu Efraim (Parshas Re'eh, pg. 181 and vol. 2, Behaaloscha).

[19] Rema (Orach Chaim 583: 1), Levush (Levush Hachur Orach Chaim 583: 2), Noda B'Yehuda (Tzlach - glosses to Beitzah 20b s.v. Rashi), Yaavetz (Siddur Shaar Hashamayim vol. 2, Shaar Shevii, Shaar Hatzon, Chodesh Elul 72), Chayei Adam (vol. 2, 139: 6), Shulchan Aruch Harav (Orach Chaim 583: 4), Matteh Efraim (583: end 1), Ben Ish Chai (Year 1, Nitzavim 5), Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (129: 9), Aruch Hashulchan (Orach Chaim 583: 2), and Kaf Hachaim (Orach Chaim 597: 11).

[20] Chazon Ovadiah (Yomim Noraim pg. 100, footnote 21), Luach Dinim U'Minhagim Ahavat Shalom (5776, pg. 23), Yalkut Yosef (Moadim pg. 32: 8 and Kitzur Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 583: 19).

[21] Including the Meiri (Chibur HaTeshuva, Meishiv Nefesh, Maamar Sheini, Ch. 2), Sefer HaAgudah (Rosh Hashanah Ch. 4: 21), Matteh Yehuda (581: 8), Pri Megadim (ad loc. Eshel Avraham 10), Yosef Ometz (ad loc.), Shulchan Aruch Harav (Orach Chaim 597, 1), Yaavetz (Siddur Shaarei Shamayim pg. 284), Chayei Adam (ibid.), Yesod V'Shores H'Avodah (Shaar 11, Ch. 2, pg. 301), Elef Hamatteh (on Matteh Efraim, 583: 11), and Kaf Hachaim (ibid.).

[22] Chacham Tzvi (cited by his son the Yaavetz in his Toras Hakinaos 8), Rav Chaim Volozhiner (cited by Rav Sroyah Debilitzky in his introduction to the recent edition of Maggid Meisharim; see also the Radal's Kidmos Sefer HaZohar ibid.), and Chazon Ish (cited in Maaseh Ish vol. 1, pg. 119)

[23] See also Rav Hillel's Shu"t Vayeishev HaYam (vol. 2: 14, pg. 227).

[24] See also footnote 18 on pg. 231 of the recent Weinreb edition of Maaseh Rav (207; Hilchos Yomim Noraim).

[25] Nimukei Orach Chaim (426: 1, pg. 273). Interestingly, in the actual case he was referring to, regarding when one may recite Kiddush Levana, it turns out that the Maggid's psak was actually in line with Kabbalistic practice as well as the Shulchan Aruch's own ruling, and not as the Minchas Elazar presumed. See previous article titled "Kiddush Levana During the Megillah?!"

Disclaimer: This is not a comprehensive guide, rather a brief summary to raise awareness of the issues. In any real case one should ask a competent Halachic authority.

L'iluy Nishmas the Rosh HaYeshiva - Rav Chonoh Menachem Mendel ben R' Yechezkel Shraga, Rav Yaakov Yeshaya ben R' Boruch Yehuda, and l'zchus for Shiria Yaffa bas Rochel Miriam and her children for a yeshua teikef u'miyad!

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