

Weekly Parsha KI TISA
Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

Population numbers do matter and they matter greatly. This is undoubtedly one of the many messages communicated to us in the Torah reading of this week. We see throughout the Torah that the Jewish people are counted often and in fairly exact detail. This is because there is an obvious lesson that has to be absorbed within Jewish society and that is that in order for Judaism and its value system to continue to operate and be of influence in world society, there must be a physical Jewish people.

There is no Judaism without Jews. And even though we are relatively small in number, when compared to the billions of others that inhabit our planet, the number of Jews that are in the world is a very important matter. One of the more worrisome developments in the Jewish world after World War II has been the lack of any real increase in the Jewish population. Apparently, there were 19 million Jews in the world in 1939 and about 13 million Jews in the world in 1945. Since then – almost 80 years later – the overall Jewish population in the world is estimated to be only about 15 million people. And this number undoubtedly includes many people who call themselves Jewish but who under many interpretations of Jewish law are not really Jews.

It was estimated in 1950 that there were about 6 million Jews living in the United States. Though no real accurate account is available today, estimates range between 4.5 million to 7.5 million Jews. Again, this estimate does not take into account Jewish law, but rather only deals with people who identify themselves as being Jewish. As one can see this is a woeful and tragic situation.

There are many factors that go into this population crisis in the Jewish world. Very high rates of intermarriage never produce Jewish children in any meaningful way. There is a tendency for Jews in the Western world, particularly in the United States, to place education and profession above marriage, family and children. There is also a general social feeling in the world that personal comfort and happiness is all that is important, which is juxtaposed to marriage and raising children which might engender sacrifice and stress.

Statistics have shown that large families with many children, are only found amongst Orthodox Jews throughout the Diaspora. Here in Israel the birth rate is, thank God, high and stable, even in much of the non-Orthodox community. Again, except for the Orthodox, Jewish communities in the diaspora are rapidly shrinking and the prognosis for the future is very clouded and dire.

At the beginning of the 19th century, the Jewish population in Europe had shrunk to about 3 million Jews. By the beginning of World War II, it had risen to approximately 11 million Jews. This enormous growth over a short period of time enabled the Jewish people to somehow weather the storm of the Holocaust and rebuild itself in the miraculous fashion that it has done here in Israel and throughout the world. But we should always remember that numbers matter.

Shabbat shalom
Rabbi Berel Wein

[from: JewishPress.com <JewishExpress@webads.co.il>
date: Feb 22, 2019, 7:25 AM

A Stiff-Necked People
Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

It is a moment of the very highest drama. The Israelites, a mere forty days after the greatest revelation in history, have made an idol: a Golden Calf. G-d threatens to destroy them. Moses, exemplifying to the fullest degree the character of Israel as one who “wrestles with G-d and man,” confronts both in turn. To G-d, he prays for mercy for the people. Coming down the mountain and facing Israel, he smashes the tablets, symbol of the covenant. He grinds the calf to dust, mixes it with water, and makes the Israelites drink it. He commands the Levites to punish the

wrongdoers. Then he re-ascends the mountain in a prolonged attempt to repair the shattered relationship between G-d and the people.

G-d accepts his request and tells Moses to carve two new tablets of stone. At this point, however, Moses makes a strange appeal:

And Moses hurried and knelt to the ground and bowed, and he said, “If I have found favor in Your eyes, my Lord, may my Lord go among us, because [ki] it is a stiff-necked people, and forgive our wickedness and our sin, and take us as Your inheritance.” (Ex. 34:8–9)

The difficulty in the verse is self-evident. Moses cites as a reason for G-d remaining with the Israelites the very attribute that G-d had previously given for wishing to abandon them:

“I have seen these people,” the L-rd said to Moses, “and they are a stiff-necked people. Now leave Me alone so that My anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation.” (Ex. 32:9)

How can Moses invoke the people’s obstinacy as the very reason for G-d to maintain His presence among them? What is the meaning of Moses’ “because” – “may my Lord go among us, because it is a stiff-necked people”?

The commentators offer a variety of interpretations. Rashi reads the word ki as “if” – “If they are stiff-necked, then forgive them.” Ibn Ezra and Chizkuni read it as “although” or “despite the fact that” (af al pi). Alternatively, suggests Ibn Ezra, the verse might be read, “[I admit that] it is a stiff-necked people – therefore forgive our wickedness and our sin, and take us as Your inheritance.” These are straightforward readings, though they assign to the word ki a meaning it does not normally have.

There is, however, another and far more striking line of interpretation that can be traced across the centuries. In the twentieth century it was given expression by Rabbi Yitzchak Nissenbaum. The argument he attributed to Moses was this:

Almighty G-d, look upon this people with favor, because what is now their greatest vice will one day be their most heroic virtue. They are indeed an obstinate people...But just as now they are stiff-necked in their disobedience, so one day they will be equally stiff-necked in their loyalty. Nations will call on them to assimilate, but they will refuse. Mightier religions will urge them to convert, but they will resist. They will suffer humiliation, persecution, even torture and death because of the name they bear and the faith they profess, but they will stay true to the covenant their ancestors made with You. They will go to their deaths saying Ani ma’amin, “I believe.” This is a people awesome in its obstinacy – and though now it is their failing, there will be times far into the future when it will be their noblest strength. (This is my paraphrase of the commentary cited in the name of R. Yitzchak Nissenbaum in Aaron Yaakov Greenberg, ed., *Itturei Torah, Shemot* (Tel Aviv, 1976), 269–70.)

The fact that Rabbi Nissenbaum lived and died in the Warsaw ghetto gives added poignancy to his words.

Many centuries earlier, a Midrash made essentially the same point:

There are three things which are undaunted: the dog among beasts, the rooster among birds, and Israel among the nations. R. Isaac ben Redifa said in the name of R. Ami: You might think that this is a negative attribute, but in fact it is praiseworthy, for it means: “Either be a Jew or prepare to be hanged.”

Jews were stiff-necked, says Rabbi Ami, in the sense that they were ready to die for their faith. As Ralbag explained in the fourteenth century, a stubborn people may be slow to acquire a faith, but once they have done so they never relinquish it.

We catch a glimpse of this extraordinary obstinacy in an episode narrated by Josephus, one of the first recorded incidents of mass non-violent civil disobedience. It took place during the reign of the Roman emperor Caligula (37–41 CE). He had proposed placing a statue of himself in the precincts of the Temple in Jerusalem, and had sent the military leader Petronius to carry out the task, if necessary by force. This

is how Josephus describes the encounter between Petronius and the Jewish population at Ptolemais (Acre):

There came ten thousand Jews to Petronius at Ptolemais to offer their petitions to him that he would not compel them to violate the law of their forefathers. "But if," they said, "you are wholly resolved to bring the statue and install it, then you must first kill us, and then do what you have resolved on. For while we are alive we cannot permit such things as are forbidden by our law..."

Then Petronius came to them (at Tiberius): "Will you then make war with Caesar, regardless of his great preparations for war and your own weakness?" They replied, "We will not by any means make war with Caesar, but we will die before we see our laws transgressed." Then they threw themselves down on their faces and stretched out their throats and said that they were ready to be slain... Thus they continued firm in their resolution and proposed themselves to die willingly rather than see the statue dedicated."

Faced with such heroic defiance on so large a scale, Petronius gave way and wrote to Caligula urging him, in Josephus' words, "not to drive so many ten thousand of these men to distraction; that if he were to slay these men, he would be publicly cursed for all future ages."

Nor was this a unique episode. The rabbinic literature, together with the chronicles of the Middle Ages, are full of stories of martyrdom, of Jews willing to die rather than convert. Indeed the very concept of kiddush Hashem came to be associated in the halachic literature with the willingness "to die rather than transgress."

The rabbinic conclave at Lod (Lydda) in the second century CE, which laid down the laws of martyrdom (including the three sins about which it was said that "one must die rather than transgress") may have been an attempt to limit, rather than encourage, the phenomenon. Of these many episodes, one stands out for its theological audacity. It was recorded by the Jewish historian Shlomo ibn Verga (fifteenth to sixteenth centuries) and concerns the Spanish expulsion:

One of the boats was infested with the plague, and the captain of the boat put the passengers ashore at some uninhabited place... There was one Jew among them who struggled on afoot together with his wife and two children. The wife grew faint and died... The husband carried his children along until both he and they fainted from hunger. When he regained consciousness, he found that his two children had died.

In great grief he rose to his feet and said: "O Lord of all the universe, You are doing a great deal that I might even desert my faith. But know You of a certainty that – even against the will of heaven – a Jew I am and a Jew I shall remain. And neither that which You have brought upon me nor that which You may yet bring upon me will be of any avail."

One is awestruck by such faith – such obstinate faith.]

Shabbat Shalom: Parshat Ki Tisa (Exodus 30:11 – 34:35)

By Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Efrat, Israel – "And God spoke unto Moses: Take unto you sweet spices, stacte [nataf], onycha [shelet] and galbanum [helbena], these sweet spices with pure frankincense [levona], all of an equal weight." (Exodus 30:34)

One of the most unique aspects of the Sanctuary, continued in the Holy Temples, was the sweet-smelling spices of the incense burned on a special altar and whose inspiring fragrance permeated the House of God. In the portion of Ki Tisa the Torah lists the different spices, and their names – in Hebrew or English – are strange to our modern ears. But stranger still is the Rabbinic commentary that one of those spices – specifically helbena – is hardly sweet smelling. On the contrary, as Rashi writes, helbena "...is a malodorous spice which is known [to us as] gelbanah [galbanum]. Scripture enumerates it among the spices of the incense to teach us that we shouldn't look upon the inclusion of Jewish transgressors in our fasts and prayers as something insignificant in our eyes; indeed, they [the transgressors of Israel] must also be included amongst us" (Rashi, ad loc.).

Rashi is conveying a most significant Rabbinic insight. The community of Israel – in Hebrew a tzibur – must consist of all types of Jews: righteous (the letter tzadi for tzaddikim), intermediate (the letter bet for benonim), and wicked (the letter reish for resha'im), just as the incense of the Sanctuary included spices of unappetizing fragrance. Perhaps because we must learn to take responsibility for every member of the "family" no matter what their behavior, perhaps because what appears to us as wicked may in reality be more genuine spirituality, perhaps because no evil is without its redeeming feature or perhaps merely in order to

remind us not to be judgmental towards other human beings, the message of the incense could not be clearer: no Jew, even the most egregious sinner, dare be dismissed with mockery and derision from the sacred congregation of Israel. Every Jew must be allowed to contribute, and only when every Jew is included does the sweet fragrance properly emerge.

We have already seen how the Torah portion of Ki Tisa contains another striking example of the significance of every single Jew in Israel in the aftermath of the great sin in the desert. We read that soon after the revelation at Sinai, Moses' prolonged communion with the divine frightened the people into worshipping a golden calf. Our Sages teach: "And God said to Moses, 'Go down' (Ex. 32:7). R. Elazar interprets: God was commanding Moses to descend from his elevated position. The only reason I gave you greatness is because of Israel, and now that Israel has sinned, what do I need you for?" (Berakhot 32a)

God is reminding Moses that God's covenant with Abraham was with every single Jew. No Jew dare be discounted; every Jew must be loved, taught, and at least given the opportunity to come closer to God and our traditions. Even the Jew who is serving idols must be spoken to, ministered to!

A month or so after this portion is read, the Seder itself becomes a living demonstration of the necessity to include rather than to exclude any Jew. Take note of the proverbial four children: the wise child, the wicked child, the simple child and the child who knows not what to ask. It is instructive that the wicked child is not defined by the compiler of the Haggadah as one who eats non-kosher food or desecrates the Sabbath; the wicked child is rather the one who says "Of what value is this work for you?" Wickedness is defined as excluding oneself from the general Jewish community. And even if a person excludes herself – and is therefore called wicked – we dare not exclude her. Our Seder table must always be welcoming enough to include everyone, no matter who.

Indeed, towards the end of the Seder we are instructed to open the door for Elijah the prophet, forerunner of the Messiah. In the past I've commented that opening the door for Elijah seems superfluous given Elijah's uncanny ability to visit every single Seder in the world; anyone capable of accomplishing such a remarkable feat certainly would not be stopped by a closed door. One answer that I've proposed is that the opening of the door is not really for Elijah; it is rather a symbolic gesture of opening the door to the fifth child, the child who has moved so far from the Jewish people that he isn't even at the Seder! We must go out to find him – even if he is at a neighborhood disco or a Far East ashram – and invite him to come back in. And why is Elijah associated with this gesture toward the fifth child? The closing verse of the last prophet included in the canon, Malakhi, declares: "Behold I will send Elijah, the prophet, before the coming of the great and awesome day of God, and he shall turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers..." (Malakhi 3:23). No one, not the "wicked" child, and not even the "invisible" child, is to be excluded from the Seder, the commemoration of our first redemption. Parents and children must all join together in a loving and accepting reunion.

There is a fascinating halachic ramification of our desire to include rather than to exclude. The Talmud (Eruvin 69b) suggests that a public desecrator of the Sabbath is comparable to an idolater, whose wine cannot be drunk and who cannot be counted for a statutory quorum (minyan) for prayer. Does this mean that a Jew who does not observe the Sabbath laws and rituals forfeits his rights to belong to a proper Jewish congregation? One of the towering Torah giants of nineteenth-century Germany, Rabbi David Zvi Hoffman, raises this very question in his collection of responsa, Mellamed Leho'il (Responsum 29), where he resoundingly rules that the Talmudic comparison no longer applies. He explains that during Talmudic times, when the overwhelming majority of the Jewish people was observant, and when a Jew was defined in terms of their Torah observance, any Jew who publicly desecrated the Sabbath was effectively testifying to their exclusion from the Jewish people. Therefore, in Talmudic times, a public Sabbath desecrator became the equivalent of an idolater; in effect, the perpetrator of such a public crime was excluding himself from the congregation of Israel and such a person was thereby relinquishing any rights to Jewish privileges.

However, explains Rabbi Hoffman, when – sadly enough – the overwhelming majority of Jews are not observant (and today this is even truer than it was in nineteenth-century Germany), a Jew who publicly desecrates the Sabbath is not at all making a statement of exclusion from the peoplehood of Israel. On the contrary, the very fact that such a desecrator attends a synagogue (if only a few times a year) and is willing to partake in the service indicates a definite feeling of belonging and a will to belong to the historic community of Israel. Therefore, Rabbi Hoffman concludes, a Sabbath desecrator must not only be included in a minyan, but should be encouraged to become more involved.

Shabbat Shalom!

**Ki Tissa: When Bad Things Happen to Good People
Rav Kook Torah**

After Moses succeeded in petitioning God to forgive the Jewish people for the sin of the golden calf, he made an additional request from God: "If You are indeed pleased with me, allow me to know Your ways" (Ex. 33:12).

What exactly did Moses desire to know? The Talmud (Berachot 7a) explains that Moses wanted to understand the age-old problem of reward and punishment in this world:

"Master of the Universe, why is it that some righteous people prosper, while others suffer? Why do some wicked people prosper, and others suffer?"

Two Factors

According to Rabbi Yossi, God fulfilled Moses' request. The Talmud initially explains that anomalies in divine justice in this world are the result of ancestral merit. A righteous person whose parents were wicked may undergo suffering in this world, while a wicked person whose parents were righteous may be rewarded.

However, the Sages were not satisfied with this explanation. Why should a righteous person who rejected his parents' evil ways be punished? He should be rewarded doubly! The Sages concludes that if there are righteous who suffer, it must be because they are not fully righteous. (This is usually understood that they are punished in this world to atone for their sins so that their reward in the next world will be complete.) Similarly, the wicked who prosper must not be totally evil. They receive reward in this world for the few merits they do possess.

(The Talmud also mentions an additional factor, called "Afflictions of Love." Even a perfectly righteous individual may suffer in this world in order to gain additional reward in the afterlife.)

Upon inspection, we discover that these two mitigating factors - ancestral merit and incompleteness of righteousness or wickedness - are interrelated. All actions may be broken up into two categories. Some actions are performed purposely, by choice; while others - the majority - are done without thought, but by habit or training. For a righteous person from a righteous family, good deeds come naturally. He does not need suffering in order to refine his soul. The righteous individual born in a wicked family, on the other hand, must work harder. His good deeds are a conscious effort, going against his education and natural bent. He therefore needs the refinement that comes from suffering in order to perfect his character traits.

The wicked person who hails from a righteous family is naturally helpful to others, and may have inherited many other positive character traits. Therefore, his portion in life is good, as he contributes to the world. But the wicked who comes from a wicked family is usually an utterly evil person. His lot in life is made difficult and unstable, in order to limit the damage that he may cause in the world.

Beyond Our Grasp

The Talmud records a second opinion, Rabbi Meir, who disagreed with Rabbi Yossi. According to Rabbi Meir, God did not fulfill Moses' request to explain the mechanics of suffering and reward in this world. The complex calculations of how much of our actions is a function of free will, and how much is due to society, education, and family background - belong to the Creator alone. The knowledge needed in order to understand divine justice in this world is beyond the grasp of all humans - even the master of all prophets, Moses.

(Gold from the Land of Israel (now available in paperback), pp. A 162-163. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. I, p.32)

Rav Shlomo Aviner Shlit" a

Ha-Rav answers hundreds of text message questions a day. Here's a sample:

The Rebbe as Mashiach

Q: How is it possible to say that the Lubavitcher Rebbe is not the Mashiach if he himself said that he is?

A: I do not know if he said this. In any event, it does not say in the Torah that the Halachah always follows the last Lubavitcher Rebbe.

Rather, as in the case of opinions of all Rabbis, there are general principles that determine how to decide if there is a dispute.

Rules for Soldier Shooting His Gun

Q: The rules for when a soldier may shoot his gun do not make sense. He has to think 10 times before shooting!

A: This is how it is in all the Western World. We are signatories on the Geneva Convention, and we are obligated to follow those rules (even if some of them are incorrect), since we need international agreement in these areas, and the gain is greater than the loss.

Theatrical Megilah Reading

Q: There is a new phenomenon of Megilah reading with different voices and sounds, including naying horses, in order to bring the Megilah "to life". Is this a good idea?

A: It is not good. The Megilah reading is a Mitzvah which is to be fulfilled with awe of holiness, "Blessed are You Hashem, our G-d, King of the World, who has sanctified us with His Mitzvot...". It is not a theater or circus. What makes the Megilah "alive" is the saving of the Nation of Israel from death.

Bringing Book to Wedding

Q: I see that Yeshiva students bring books to wedding and learn there. Is this proper?

A: On condition that it is not at the expense of the main reason one attends a wedding, which is bringing joy to the groom and bride. It is obviously proper to bring a book to learn when traveling to and from the wedding, and also during breaks. There are however Gedolei Yisrael who refrain from bring books out of a fear that they will be so involved in the learning that they will forget to bring joy to the groom and bride (Ha-Rav Shmuel David Ha-Cohain Friedman, Magid Shiur in Kehal Shomrei Emunah and Kol Ha-Lashon, related that he heard from his father-in-law, Ha-Rav Feivel Sofer, who merited serving as the Shamash of Ha-Admor Reb Hershele of Spinka for 10 years, that the Admor would say that he does not bring a Sefer to a wedding, since the whole reason he is attending is to participate in his friend's, student's or relative's Simchah.. And if he is absorbed in learning, his thoughts are far away from participating in the Simchah. If he did have some free time during the wedding, it was impossible for him to sit by idly. He therefore looked at the guests at the Simchah, and tried to find a G-d-fearing Jew and learn a proper character trait or behavior from him. If he did not find such a person, he looked at someone and learned how not to act. In the introduction to the book 'Sedei Tzofim' on Moad Katan-Chagigah).

Prayer for the Peace of the State of Israel

Q: Who wrote the Prayer for the Peace of the State of Israel?

A: The Chief Rabbi, Ha-Rav Yitzchak Isaac Herzog. He sent it to Shai Agnon to be edited.

Lying in Survey

Q: Is it permissible for me to lie in a survey about the elections in order to strength a particular party?

A: No.

Wedding or House of Mourning

Q: If I am unable to go to both, which is preferable - to go to a wedding or to comfort a mourner?

A: If one of them is your family, then family takes precedence. If not, then go to where you are most needed. If you are needed equally in both places, then it is preferable to comfort a mourner. Kohelet 7:2.

Missionary Literature

Q: I received a booklet from Missionaries with verses from the Tanach. I heard that Ha-Rav said to throw such material in the garbage. Should I throw it out immediately or can I bring it home and show my children that I am throwing it out?

A: Show your children (One time in the Yeshiva, Ha-Rav brought a booklet like this and threw it out in front of the students – M.T.).

Learning Torah with Screaming

Q: It is permissible to learn Torah with screaming?

A: If it does not bother others.

Criminal Donating Money to Shul

Q: In our Shul, a criminal made a large donation. Is it permissible to benefit from the money which he received through committing a crime?

A: No. But ask the Rabbi there.

HaRav Yochanan Zweig

Weekly Insights

This week's Insights is dedicated in memory of Reb Avigdor Ben Eliezer Chanoch z"l. "May his Neshama have an Aliya!"

ANALYZE THIS

And the Almighty passed by before him, and proclaimed, Hashem... (34:6)

Rashi (ad loc) explains that the name "Hashem" refers to the Almighty's attribute of mercy. Rashi goes on to quote the Gemara in Rosh Hashanah (17b), which explains why the Torah mentions the name "Hashem" twice in the possuk: "The first name 'Hashem' refers to the attribute of mercy before a person sins, and the second one refers to the attribute of mercy after one sins."

The Ohr HaChaim (34:6) quotes Rosh's comments on the Gemara: "Why does one need the attribute of mercy before one sins; 'Because Hashem knows that a person is going to sin.'" The Ohr HaChaim understands this to mean that even though Hashem knows that a person is going to sin He takes no action because of his attribute of mercy.

The Ohr HaChaim asks; "I do not understand this answer, for if Hashem would punish someone before that person sins (knowing that a sin is going to be committed), then what is the point of someone being born? Hashem, with His omniscience, can hold every soul accountable to their future actions and judge them right away."

In other words, since Hashem knows what a person is going to do, He can hold him responsible prior to him actually sinning. Therefore Hashem, in His benevolence, initiates the attribute of mercy and withholds punishment. As the Ohr HaChaim points out, this approach presents a philosophical dilemma; what is the point of living if Hashem has already begun judging you before you actually act?

A careful reading of Rosh's actual words can, perhaps, give us a different understanding of what he really means. The exact language of Rosh is, "Even though He knows that a person will eventually come to sin, He treats each person with the attribute of mercy." Rosh never says anything about Hashem's right to punish which, in turn, is being restrained by the attribute of mercy.

Perhaps Rosh means to say something entirely different. Very often when a person knows that he is being carefully evaluated or analyzed, such as on a first date or when a mother in law comes to visit, he is very uncomfortable and feels as though he is navigating landmines; every step has to be carefully considered before being made.

Similarly, when one is driving next to a state trooper on the highway, there is always a feeling that the trooper is just waiting to pounce and give you a ticket for some infraction.

Unfortunately, many people also feel this way about their parents or spouse; "they are just waiting for me to make a mistake so that they can criticize me." This leads to a terrible family dynamic because there is an inherent discomfort in being around that person. No one likes to feel like they are being judged every second of every day.

Thus, Rosh is teaching us a fundamental lesson in Hashem's benevolence. Of course Hashem judges us and there is accountability; that is a basic tenet of life. But He does so in order help us make decisions that are good for us and the world around us. The point of creation is for Hashem to bestow good upon us, therefore, even when

mistakes are made He initiates His attribute of mercy to lessen or eliminate the punishment.

Just as one would feel more comfortable driving next to a state trooper with a "get out of jail free" card in one's pocket, so too does Hashem provide a cushion by letting us know that there is an attribute of mercy even before we sin. Hashem displays His mercy first to demonstrate that He isn't looking to pounce on us for mistakes.

Hashem is also demonstrating the delicate balance that we must strive to achieve with our families. Of course there must be accountability in a family, but we must always convey that it is coming from a place of love; we support each other, even when one makes a mistake, because we care much more about what is done right than what is done wrong.

ETERNALLY YOURS

Let my anger burn against them and I shall annihilate them...Moshe pleaded with Hashem...why should Egypt say, "With evil intent did He take them out...to annihilate them from the face of the earth" (32:10-12).

Parshas Ki Sisa details the unfaithfulness of Bnei Yisroel through their sin of the Golden Calf, and Hashem's threat to totally wipe out the Jewish people. Moshe begs Hashem to reconsider with the argument that if Hashem annihilated Bnei Yisroel then the Egyptians would say that Hashem took them out of Egypt with the intention of destroying them. Seemingly, Moshe is saying that it reflects poorly on Hashem to destroy Bnei Yisroel.

On the face of it, this argument seems nothing short of ludicrous. First of all, Hashem made such incredible miracles on the Jewish people's behalf: the ten plagues, the splitting of the Red Sea, and the delivery of food and water in the desert - where is the intent to destroy them? But even more compelling, Bnei Yisroel actually committed a capital offense by being unfaithful to Hashem. Clearly, Hashem is well within His right to utterly wipe them from the face of the earth.

In order to understand what Moshe is really saying, we have to consider the state of Bnei Yisroel when they were about to leave Egypt. During the time that it took for the ten plagues to play out (close to a year) there was a dramatic shift in the status of the Jews in Egypt. In fact, Chazal teach us that a full eighty percent of the Jews didn't leave Egypt. During that year of plagues, Egyptians had developed a whole new respect for the Jews who now had a powerful ally that was punishing the Egyptians for their misdeeds. Jews also began to accumulate wealth because they were impervious to the effect of the plagues. Furthermore, the Egyptians began to build friendships with members of Bnei Yisroel.

Consider for a moment an individual who has a guaranteed job with a generous salary and an employer that will guarantee his future. He enjoys the city he lives in and the friendships he has built over time. What do you think would happen if this person were to be offered a new job with a salary that is five times what he is currently earning but with two stipulations; 1) he has to move to a new city 2) the new job carries no guarantees - that is he can be fired "at will." Clearly, this individual would be crazy to leave his comfortable guaranteed first job and an environment he loves.

This was the situation Bnei Yisroel faced after the ten plagues. For all intents and purposes the Egyptians were accepting them as friends and doing business with them. This is why so many stayed behind. The only possible reason that Bnei Yisroel could rationalize leaving Egypt was that Hashem was promising them a guaranteed permanent relationship. Of course the destination was mostly unknown to them, but their desire to enter into a permanent relationship with Hashem propelled the remaining twenty percent to leave Egypt and follow Hashem.

This is Moshe's argument, "Hashem, the reason Bnei Yisroel left Egypt is because of the guarantee of a permanent eternal connection. If you wipe them out, the Egyptians will laugh and say Hashem never intended to have a permanent relationship with them; the Jews were fooled!" By redeeming us from Egypt, Hashem guaranteed that we would survive as a nation - His nation. This is what Bnei Yisroel bought into when they decided to leave Egypt. Hashem agrees with Moshe's argument and the threat of annihilation is removed.

This is also what is said in the Haggadah; "In every generation someone rises up to annihilate the Jewish people - and every time Hashem saves

us from their hands." This, perhaps, is the greatest miracle of all. Every empire that sought to destroy the Jewish people is long gone and mostly forgotten. Yet, the Jewish people not only survived, we have thrived and succeeded under the bleakest of circumstances. This is a testament to Hashem's promise of our continued existence because of our eternal relationship with Him.

Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Ki Tisa
For the week ending 23 February 2019 / 18 Adar I 5779
Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonofthemoon.com

Insights

Only One Way

"I have seen this people, and behold! It is a stiff-necked people." (32:9)

Two things stick out in my memory of Uncle Solly, a"ח. One was the enormous glass pickling jars in his greenhouse. Uncle Solly's "cukes" were the gold standard for the Spivack family. The other thing I remember vividly to this day was an interesting drive with him around the East End of London together with my cousin Gary Lyons. Because of the docks, London's East End was always the first point of welcome for immigrants. Now even though Britain didn't exactly have an Emma Lazarus to proclaim, "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free," Britannia received many Jews either willingly or grudgingly during the years of the terrible Russian pogroms at the turn of the 20th century. The East End was Uncle Solly's "back-yard" — he knew it like the back of his hand. He had a furniture factory under the arches of an elevated section of the railway. I don't remember exactly where.

Anyway, Uncle Solly and Gary and I were zooming around the East End. (By the way, he was helping us fit out our new recording studio which later would go down in history as the studio where Queen mixed Bohemian Rhapsody.) And, suddenly, he turned sharp right into a tiny street which had two, unmistakable, red "NO ENTRY – ONE WAY" signs on both sides of the street. Gary said to him, "Uncle, this is a one-way street!" To which Uncle Solly replied in his inimitable cockney twang, "Well I'm only going one way, aren't I?"

"I have seen this people, and behold! It is a stiff-necked people." (32:9)

The Berditchever Rebbe, Reb Levi Yitzchak once prayed: "Ribono shel Olam, Master of the World, I want to propose a deal. We have many sins. You have much forgiveness. Let us exchange our sins for Your forgiveness. And if You should say to me that this is not a fair exchange, then my reply is, 'If we had no sins, what would You do with Your forgiveness?'"

At first blush this sounds a bit like the old Yiddish joke:

"Shloime, close the window. It's cold outside."

"Moishele, and if I close the window, it should be warm outside?"

However, far from being a person with chutzpa, the Berditchever was tapping into a truth older than time. Chazal tell us that teshuva predates the world. The verse states, "Before mountains were created... You said: Repent, sons of man." (Tehillim 90: 2-3). This teaches that the concept of teshuva exists even before a sin has been committed.

G-d created the world for teshuva. G-d created the world for forgiveness. If it's possible to say, G-d created the possibility of sin — that distance that sin brings — in order that the coming close could be even greater. He created night before day ("And it was evening, and it was morning") only so that the perception of the light would be that much greater. It is part of His love for His people that however stiff-necked we are, He created those one-way streets of life only to be at the end of them to forgive us.

© 2018 Ohr Somayach International

OU Torah

Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb
The Inevitable Comedown

It was over forty years ago, but I remember the feelings very well. They were overwhelming, and were not dispelled easily.

It was just after I had completed all of my course requirements and dissertation defense in the process of obtaining my doctorate in psychology. Like any graduate school experience, this was the culmination of several years of study and hard work. The ordeal was now over, and a celebration was in order.

And celebrate I did, together with my wife, my young children, several other students, and assorted friends. But then, the celebration was suddenly over. I found myself inexplicably moody and depressed. A sense of emptiness enveloped me. At first I thought it was just a result of a transition from a state of being busy to a state of boredom.

However, the feelings lingered for quite some time. I tried to rid myself of my moodiness in various ways, and it must have been difficult for those close to me to be around me. Luckily, the feelings were soon gone, as suddenly and as mysteriously as they had come.

Quite a while later I learned that this curious phenomenon was very common. When people achieve great accomplishments, having put great effort and toil into them, they experience a sense of exhilaration and excitement. A "high". Soon afterwards, and often very soon afterwards, there is a "comedown" from that "high".

It is as if, now that the goal with which one had been long preoccupied was reached, life had become meaningless. There is nothing further to do, no ongoing purpose. A pervasive sense of emptiness ensues.

The struggle to fill that emptiness is fraught with danger. In my own case, the emptiness thankfully passed in relatively short order, with no harm done, and no unusual "acting out" on my part. But others in similar predicaments frequently attempt to fill that emptiness in ways which result in great, and sometimes tragic, difficulties.

The psychological mechanism I have just described helps to explain a most puzzling event in this week's Torah portion, Ki Sisa (Exodus 30:11-34:35). I refer, of course, to the episode of the Golden Calf.

Just a few short weeks ago, in the Torah portion of Yitro, we read of how the children of Israel experienced the most momentous occasion in human history. The Almighty revealed Himself to them at Mount Sinai in an awe inspiring atmosphere of thunder and lightning. They heard the voice of God, and they were spiritually elevated by His revelation. They were, almost literally, on a "high".

Moses then ascends Mount Sinai, and remains there for 40 days and 40 nights. During that time, the people come down from their "high". His disappearance mystifies them, they become impatient and irritable. We can empathize with their sense of emptiness, although we are shocked by the manner in which they choose to deal with that emptiness.

"When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mount, the people came together unto Aaron, and said unto him: 'Up, make us a god'... And all the people broke off all the golden earrings which were in their ears, and brought them unto Aaron...he... made it a molten calf and they said: 'this is thy god, O Israel'... He built an altar before it... And the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to make merry." (Exodus 32:1-6)

What a comedown! How can one explain a process of spiritual deterioration as drastic as this? Just weeks ago the Jewish people were on the highest possible level of religiosity and commitment to the one God. Now they are dancing and prancing before a golden idol. Is this not inexplicable?

Yes, it is inexplicable, but it is a common human phenomenon. People are capable of attaining greatness, but they are not as capable of sustaining greatness. They can achieve "highs" of all kinds, but they cannot maintain those "highs". There is an inevitable "comedown".

This concept is so very well expressed in the following verse:

Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord?

Who may stand in His holy place?" Psalms 24:3

Homiletically, this has been interpreted to mean that even after the first question is answered, and we learn "who may ascend the mountain", the question still remains: "Who can continue to stand there?" It is relatively easy to ascend to a high level; much more difficult is remaining at that high-level and preserving it.

My revered colleague, one of the most insightful spiritual thinkers of our age, Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz, believes that the best example of deterioration following an exciting climax is the experience of childbirth itself. He points to the phenomenon known as “postpartum depression”. A woman, a mother, has just experienced what is probably the highest of all “highs”, the emergence of a child from her womb. But quite commonly, that experience is followed by a sense of depression, which is sometimes incapacitating, and sometimes even disastrous.

The physiological process of giving birth calls upon the utilization of every part of the mother’s body, from her muscles and nervous system to her hormonal fluids. Her body has exerted itself to the maximum. In the process she has achieved the greatest of all achievements, the production of another human being.

But soon afterwards when the body, as it were, has nothing left to do, she feels depleted and empty. She can easily sink into a depression, sometimes deep enough to merit a clinical diagnosis of “postpartum depression”.

This is an important lesson in our personal spiritual lives. Often we experience moments of intense spirituality, of transcendence. But those moments are brief, and transitory. When they are over we feel “shortchanged”, and we despair of ever returning to those precious experiences.

We must take hope in the knowledge that almost all intense human experiences are transitory, and are followed by feelings of hollowness. We can ascend the mountain, but we cannot long stand there.

We must humbly accept our descent, our frustrating failures and limitations, and persist in climbing the mountain. Ups and downs, peaks and valleys, are to be expected in all aspects of our life.

We will experience “highs”, but we must expect the inevitable “comedown”. And we must “hang in there”, and try and try again to recapture those “highs”.

This is the lesson of this week’s Parsha. Our people ascended a spiritual mountain. They then descended into an orgy of idolatry. But then they persisted and with the assistance of God’s bountiful mercy, and as we read later in the Torah portion, received this divine assurance:

“And he said, behold, I make a covenant: Before all Thy people I will do marvels, such as have not been done in all the earth... And all the people... Shall see the work of the Lord...” (Exodus 34:10)

Drasha Parshas Ki Sisa
Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky
Masked Emotions

In what is probably the most anti-climactic event in Jewish history, the nation that was about to receive the Torah from Moshe turns away from the will of Hashem. After 40 days they begin to worry that Moshe will never return and they panic. They create a new leader for themselves — The Golden Calf.

The Torah describes the scene in Exodus 32:6: “The people offered (the calf) peace offerings and they sat down to eat and drink and they got up to revel.”

Hashem immediately commands Moshe to descend Mount Sinai in order to admonish his corrupt nation. As Moshe comes down the mountain he hears tumultuous shouts emanating from the people who were celebrating their new found deity. His student, Yehoshua, also hears the sounds and declares (Exodus 32:17) “the sound of battle is in the camp.” Moshe listens and amends the theory. He tells Yehoshua, “It is not the sound of victory, nor the sound of defeat: I hear the sound of distress.” When Moshe sees the Golden Calf he breaks the Tablets and restores order, sanity, and the belief in Hashem.

What is strange about the episode is the contrast of the sounds made and the sounds heard. If the Jewish People reveled and celebrated then why did Yehoshua hear sounds of war and how did Moshe hear sounds of distress? They should both have heard the sound of celebration and festivity.

Rav Chaim of Sanz had a custom: he would test the local children on a monthly basis. The children would recite orally from the Mishnah or

Talmud and Rav Chaim would reward them generously with sweets and money. Once a group of secular Jews decided to dupe Rav Chaim. They taught a Talmudic selection to a gentile child and reviewed it with him until he knew it perfectly. They dressed him like a Chasidic child and had him stand in line with all the other children to be tested.

The rabbi listened to the young boy intently. The other children were puzzled: they did not remember this boy from their cheder, yet they were amazed at the remarkable fluency he displayed in reciting his piece. Rav Chaim was not impressed at all. He turned to the young man and said, “please tell your father that there are better ways to earn a few coins!” With that he dismissed the child.

The secularists were shocked. “How did the Rabbi know?” Their curiosity forced them to approach Rav Chaim. Rav Chaim smiled as he answered them. “There are two ways to say the Gemorah. One is filled with spirituality. The child’s body is swaying and filled with the emotion of Torah. The other is just repetitive rote. This young man lacked the fire and the true joy that the Jewish children have when learning Torah. I knew he was not one of ours.”

The Jews got up to revel around the golden calf. Moshe and Yehoshua however knew the difference between true joy — simcha — and confusion. The Jews revel were in essence distressed but it was masked with drinks and noise makers. True joy is coupled with a certainty and a sense of direction; something lacking for those Jews celebrating the idol. The Jews may have gotten up to celebrate, but it was no celebration. It may have looked like a party to the untrained eye, but Moshe knew the true sound of joy. It did not exist with the Golden Calf. True joy is the harmony of spirituality and contentment. Superficial sounds of euphoria and celebration are heard by those with true insight as sounds of battle and distress.

*Dedicated in memory of Leah Lieberman by Jonathan and Sarah Weber
Good Shabbos!*

Copyright by Rabbi M. Kamenetzky and Project Genesis, Inc.

Rabbi M. Kamenetzky is the Dean of the Yeshiva of South Shore.

Drasha is the e-mail edition of FaxHomily, a weekly torah facsimile on the weekly portion. FaxHomily is a project of the Henry and Myrtle Hirsch Foundation

Drasha © 2018 by Torah.org.

njop.org

Rabbi Buchwald's Weekly Torah Message - Kee Tisah 5779-2019
“The ‘Vengeful’ G-d”

(Revised and updated from Kee Tisah 5760-2000)

In this week’s parasha, parashat Kee Tisah, we read of the infamous episode of the Golden Calf.

In preparation for the Revelation, Moses had gone up to Mount Sinai for forty days and forty nights to study Torah with the Al-mighty. But, because of a miscalculation regarding the date of Moses’ return, the People of Israel thought that Moses had abandoned them, and demanded of Aaron to make for them a new leader. Aaron tried to delay the people, but eventually the Golden Calf is created. The crazed people cry out to the Golden Calf (Exodus 32:4) אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ, This is your God, O’ Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!

G-d is furious at the people’s actions and tells Moses to descend from the mountain, saying to Moses that the people that *he* (Moses) has brought up from Egypt have become corrupt. G-d, in anger, denounces the people, saying in Exodus 32:9, רָאִיתִי אֶת הָעָם הַזֶּה וְהִנֵּה עַם קָשָׁה עֲרֵף הוּא, “I have seen this people and behold, they are a stiff-necked people.” “And now Moses,” says G-d, “desist from Me, let My anger flare against them, and I will annihilate them, and shall make of you [Moses] a great nation.”

Moses pleads with G-d that the destruction of Israel will be seen by the other nations as G-d’s lack of omnipotence. G-d reconsiders, so to speak, and Moses comes down the mountain with the two tablets of testimony in his hands. When Moses (Exodus 32:19) sees the people dancing joyously around the Gold Calf, his own anger flares. He throws the tablets from his hands and shatters them at the foot of the mountain.

Moses then calls out (Exodus 32:26): “Whosoever is for G-d, join me!” All the Levites gather around him and exact vengeance on those who had led the rebellion of the Golden Calf. Three thousand men of Israel fall that day at the hands of the Levites. Despite Moses’ pleas to G-d on behalf of the Jewish people, G-d strikes the people with a plague.

Moses spends the next forty days praying that G-d restore Israel to its previous state of eminence. The second set of tablets is delivered to the Jewish people. The story concludes when G-d reveals to Moses His “Thirteen Attributes of Mercy.”

Although the reading of the Book of Exodus (the second of the Five Books of Moses) has not yet been completed, one could already conclude that the G-d of Israel is a “vengeful G-d.” This is the G-d Who destroys the world by means of a Flood in the times of Noah; the G-d Who asks Abraham to sacrifice his son; the G-d Who enslaves the Jewish people in Egypt; the G-d Who kills Nadav and Abihu, Aaron’s sons, on the greatest day of Aaron’s life, at the investiture of the *מִשְׁכָּן*—*Mishkan*, the Tabernacle; the G-d Who swallows up Korach and 250 of his men as the earth opens; the G-d Who decrees that an entire generation of Jews will never be allowed to enter the land of Israel because of the sin of the spies; the G-d Who refuses to allow Moses and Aaron to enter the land of Israel because Moses hit the rock, rather than speak to the rock. These seemingly unending instances of Divine anger and acts of retribution are perhaps why the nations of the world refer to the G-d of the Hebrew scriptures, the G-d of the so-called “Old Testament,” as the “G-d of Vengeance,” while the G-d of the Christian Bible is often called the “god of love” or the “god of mercy.”

The Torah in Leviticus 19:18, clearly forbids vengeance. *לֹא תִקֹּם וְלֹא תוֹרֵר*, *אַתָּה בְּנֵי עַמֶּךָ*, You shall not wreak vengeance nor bear a grudge toward the people of your nation. The Talmud, in *Yoma* 23a, defines vengeance, by citing the following example: If one farmer asks to borrow a hoe from a second farmer and is refused, that first farmer is not permitted to be vengeful and refuse to lend a spade to the farmer who was unkind to him, should he ask to borrow one. Leviticus 19:18, however, goes even further, demanding, “Do not bear a grudge.” The Talmud explains that this means that one is not even permitted to say to the farmer who was unkind yesterday: “I’m not like you, I’m not a low-life. Here, take my spade and use it in good health!” And yet, the same G-d who prohibits vengeance and harboring a grudge, seems to be both a vengeful and grudge-bearing G-d. How could that be?

Of course, there is a profound difference between people being unnecessarily mean, and a G-d who demands accountability. One cannot equate a valid and deserving punishment meted out to a wicked person, with vengeance against an arrogant or mean neighbor.

As the story of the Golden Calf concludes, a second set of tablets are carved out. In Exodus 34:4, Moses rises early in the morning and ascends Mount Sinai. G-d descends in a cloud and stands with Moses. Moses calls out the name of G-d, as G-d proclaims: “*Hashem, Hashem*, G-d, G-d, Compassionate and Gracious, Slow to Anger and Abundant in Kindness and Truth, Preserver of Kindness for Thousands of Generations, Forgiver of Iniquity, Willful Sin, and Error, and Who Cleanses, but does not Cleanse Completely, recalling the iniquity of parents upon the children and grandchildren to the third and fourth generation.” These, so-called, “13 Attributes of G-d’s Mercy” represent the ultimate level of Divine forgiveness. By invoking the 13 attributes, G-d gives the Jewish people a second chance.

Let’s look at this again! There is an inconsistency, a blatant inconsistency in the thirteen attributes!! Exodus 34:7 reads, *לֹא יִנְקָה, לֹא יִנְקָה, פִּקֹּד עוֹן אָבוֹת*, stating clearly that G-d does *not* entirely cleanse the sinners. In fact, He recalls the iniquity of the parents on the children and the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations!

Meir Karelitz, the brother of the [Chazon Ish](#), was asked a profound question: If we are required, as the Torah in Deuteronomy 11:22 states, *לֵלְכֶת בְּכָל דְרָכָיו, וְיִדְבַקְתֶּם בּוֹ*, to walk in all His [G-d’s] ways and cling to Him, and urged to constantly imitate G-d, then perhaps we, humans, should be vengeful as well, since the last of G-d’s “13 Attributes of Mercy” is vengeance, and not cleansing completely? He answered: If a

human being’s act of vengeance is preceded by 12 qualities of mercy, then perhaps that person is truly entitled to be vengeful as well.

In real life, there is vengeance that is entirely legitimate. In fact, sometimes legitimate vengeance is not cruel at all, but may actually be a reflection of mercy. There comes a time when those in authority need to say, “Enough is enough!” Just as G-d also says: “Enough is enough, this cannot continue, this must stop!” And by stopping the undesirable actions, we perform an act of mercy, not vengeance. Stopping a cruel and wicked person is certainly an act of mercy for the victims. It may even be an act of mercy for those cruel and wicked people themselves.

Let’s face it, Judaism’s goals are radically different from conventional practices. Judaism sees the world differently and values the world differently. Our G-d, the G-d of the Hebrews, is surely a G-d of love, but also a G-d of accountability. In the Jewish religion, one doesn’t just walk away from one’s misdeeds. People are held accountable, responsible, and expected to mend their ways when they err; and if they don’t, there’s a price to be paid by all for improper actions.

Yes, our G-d holds His people to a strict account. But, by holding the Jewish people to a strict account, He performs for them a great act of mercy. As a result, His people, hopefully, become better people, stronger, more knowledgeable and even more merciful people, especially when we ultimately see the toll that sinfulness exacts on us and upon others.

Yes, as Meir Karelitz, the brother of the Chazon Ish said: If vengeance is preceded by 12 qualities of mercy, then perhaps vengeance is indeed justified!

May you be blessed.

torahweb.org

Rabbi Mordechai Willig

Undistracted Prayer

I

Moshe said, "Please show me Your glory." Hashem said, "I will call out with the Name Hashem before you" (Shemos 33:19). Rashi explains this teaches us the order of requesting mercy. As you see Me enwrapped and reciting the Thirteen Attributes, you should teach Yisroel to do so.

Hashem passed before him and called out the Thirteen Attributes (34:6,7). Hashem, as it were, enwrapped Himself like a shaliach tzibbur and told Moshe, When Yisroel sin before Me, they should perform this order before Me in this order and I will forgive them (Rosh Hashana 17b).

The Maharal (Be'er Hagola 4, Machon Yerushalyim edition, p. 488-499 with Rav Hartman's notes) explains that it is impossible to see Hashem's glory. One can only see His attributes and thereby cleave unto Him, which was Moshe's request. We are taught to cleave unto His attributes, particularly Chesed (Sotah 14a). By performing Chesed on our own beyond absolute requirements, we fulfill "After Hashem your G-d you shall walk" (Devarim 13:5).

If one concentrates in Tefilla and does not turn away from Hashem, Hashem responds by being with him completely. A shaliach tzibbur wraps himself in a talis, so as not to look right or left, to daven with total kavana, from the depths of his heart (see Mishna Berura 91:6). Hashem is close to those who call to Him truthfully (Tehillim 145:18).

The Maharal notes that one who is in crisis is more likely to daven with the focus linked to *ituf*. Thus, a "poor man prays when he is enwrapped" (Tehillim 102:1) both physically, in a talis (Metzudah) and mentally, focused on his crisis, without any distraction (see *perushei Maharal in Artscroll Tehilim Mikra'os Gedolos* 2017 edition), pouring out his heartfelt prayer to Hashem (*ibid*). Similarly, (*ibid* 107:4-6) when hungry, thirsty and lost in the desert, the enwrapped souls cry out to Hashem in their crisis, and He saves them from their dangerous plight. When one concentrates completely, without turning right or left, Hashem responds in kind, enwrapping Himself as a shaliach tzibbur. Hashem is then close to the person, who then cleaves to the goodness of Hashem, achieving the greatest possible closeness, as Moshe requested.

II

Tefilla without any extraneous thoughts, as the Maharal defines proper prayer, is exceedingly difficult to achieve. Even the Amora'im did not always succeed (see Yerushalmi Brachos, end of 2:4).

Perhaps for this reason, the Ramban (Sefer Hamitzvos 5) limits the Torah obligation of prayer to times of crisis. In an Eis tzara focused prayer is more attainable. As there is "no atheist in a foxhole," tefilla when life is on the line is more intense and focused. In shul, uninspired tefilla is often followed by devotional Tehilim in case of war or life threatening illness. Intense prayer, and even tears, are much more common on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur when the books of life and death are open before Hashem.

The Rav zt"l (Reflections of the Rav, p. 80-81) suggested that the Rambam agrees fundamentally with the Ramban. He counts daily prayer as a Torah command because, in a sense, every day is an eis tzara. Our lives are always in danger, and our continued existence and welfare depend on Hashem's kindness. Internalizing this idea is the key to focused prayer.

The Rashba (Berachos 13b) states that if one's mind wanders in the middle of the first Beracha of Shemone Esrei it may invalidate the beracha (see Be'ur Halacha 101:1). We don't repeat Shemone Esrei if we fail to focus on the meaning of the first bracha only because we will likely fail in our second attempt as well (Rama Orach Chaim 101:1). The other case when distraction is possibly an invalidation is the first passuk of Shema. For this reason, it is customary to cover our eyes so that we should not look at anything which will prevent kavana (Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 61:5).

The first beracha of Shemone Esrei and the first passuk of Shema are not supplications. They affirm belief in Hashem and His rule as a King who helps, saves and protects us. We must recite these prayers with no distractions. This will allow us to focus for the remainder of Shema and Shemone Esrei. One's head covered by a talis in Shemone Esrei resembles covering one's eyes at the beginning of Kriyas Shema.

III

When we daven, every effort should be made to avoid distractions. During the entire Shemone Esrei, one must either close his eyes or read from a siddur (Mishna Berura 95:5). Even during Chazaras Hashatz, one should follow along by looking in the siddur (Mishna Berura 96:9).

The Chasam Sofer (Choshen Mishpat 190) rules that we separate women from men in shul so that when men daven, they should not be distracted by the sight or the voice of women. For prayer to be effective, one's thought must be pure and focused.

Nowadays, cellphones, especially smartphones, pose a constant distraction. Except for emergency responders, these devices should, ideally, not even enter the shul. Certainly, except for emergencies, email and text messages should not be read or sent. Obviously, all sounds must be turned off, lest others be distracted as well. A shul must be accorded at least as much respect as a courtroom and a theater.

In this vein, non-essential conversations must be avoided in shul. The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 51:4) prohibits all conversations between Baruch She'amar and the end of Shemone Esrei. The Mishna Berura (9) citing Elijah Raba (3) extends the prohibition until after Tachanun, thereby including Chazaras Hashatz as well, a point explicitly and frighteningly made in the Shulchan Aruch (124:7). The Elijah Raba (ibid) forbids conversation during tefilla b'tzibbur until after Aleinu as well as idle chatter in shul at all times.

The Maharal adds that Hashem taught Moshe not only what to say - in context, the Thirteen Attributes, and by extension, the words of our tefilla - but also how to pray: enwrapped in a talis, denoting total and undistracted concentration. May we all strive towards that ideal, so that our tefillos be answered and our mutual closeness to Hashem be achieved.

Copyright © 2019 by TorahWeb.org

blogs.timesofisrael.com

Ki Tisa: We Haven't Even Started

Ben-Tzion Spitz

The world is round and the place which may seem like the end may also be only the beginning. - Ivy Baker

At the beginning of this week's Torah reading, God commands Moses to take a census of the Jewish nation. Both the process for taking the census, as well as the language that is used, is unusual. There is a prohibition to count Jews directly. God commands Moses to gather a half shekel from each man above the age of twenty years old (basically, those eligible for army service). The rich can't give more and the poor can't give less. Based on the funds that were collected they would indirectly know the number of people who could serve.

At the heart of the verse which gives the command is the Hebrew verb "phkod," which can be translated as "to count" or "to enroll." A literal translation of the verse would look as follows:

"And God spoke to Moses, saying: When you raise the head of the children of Israel according to their count (li'phkudeihem), and they shall give each man an atonement for their soul to God when they are counted (bi'phkod), and there shall not be a plague upon them when they are counted (bi'phkod)." – Exodus 30:11-12

The Berdichever explains that the word "li'phkudeihem" ("to their count"), is a language which demonstrates that something is lacking. With that understanding, he explains how we should view our own service of God, namely that we should always view ourselves as if we hadn't even started serving God. Paradoxically, when one keeps in mind that he hasn't started, then he has reached someplace in his divine service. Conversely, if one were to think that they've reached a certain level in serving God, then in fact, they haven't reached anything yet.

All of this is hinted at in the verse. When it refers to "raise the head," it means that the way to become elevated is to feel a sense of lack, to understand that we really haven't started to serve God properly. When someone gives "an atonement for their soul," they start to connect to and serve God from a sense of humility, with a constant sense of purpose and dedication, with daily renewing vigor.

May we have the humility to realize where we're at and the strength to always strive further.

Shabbat Shalom.

Dedication - To the Padowitz family of Ramat Bet Shemesh for hosting a great Zehut event.

Ben-Tzion Spitz is a former Chief Rabbi of Uruguay. He is the author of three books of Biblical Fiction and over 600 articles and stories dealing with biblical themes.

Shema Yisrael Torah Network

Peninim on the Torah - Parshas Ki Tisa

פרשת כי תשא תשעט

כי תשא את ראש בני ישראל לפקדיהם ונתנו איש כפר נפשו...ולא יהיה בהם נגף בפקד אתם

When you take the count of Bnei Yisrael to their numbers, each man shall give an atonement pledge...so that there should not be a plague when you count them. (30:12)

Jews are counted when necessary, but with great sensitivity and trepidation. *Rashi* explains that when counting Jews, we refrain from taking a head count; rather, each person gives a *machatzis*, half-shekel, [to represent] themselves. These half-shekels are counted in their stead. In this manner, we avoid the chance of *ayin hora*, evil eye, which, when cast upon a person (even inadvertently), can catalyze a plague. (We take *ayin hora* very seriously!) *Rabbeinu Bachya* writes that when we count people individually, we single them out; likewise, Hashem examines their deeds individually. We are in a better position as part of the larger aggregate of Jews.

According to *Rashi*, counting Jews directly is a recipe for creating a plague. *Rabbeinu Bachya* seems to explain that when people are singled out, they lose the general Divine protection afforded to the *Klal*, communal group, the nation as a whole. The *Malbim* supplements this, saying that, when we count *shekalim*, rather than people, we place our primary focus on the sum total, instead of on the individual *shekel*/coin.

Apparently, the manner in which we are to execute a Jewish census provides us with a mixed message/lesson: It is not healthy/safe to stand out as individuals. It is much better to blend into the community, be a part of the whole nation. This goes against everything that we teach our children: Be yourself; be an individual; do your thing; be a leader, not a follower, etc. Did Hashem not grant us our individual talents and personality for a reason: To be ourselves? Should we simply blend in with the masses, surrender to the group without allowing for individual expression?

Horav Tzvi Kushlefsky, Shlita, teaches that we should most definitely acknowledge our talents, assert and employ them for the greater good of the community/others, who can benefit from us. Thus, we use our individuality for the greater good – the nation. In this context, we translate the word, *sissha* (as in, *ki sissah*), as “to lift up,” in both a positive and a negative sense. The message would then be: When we attempt to elevate/lift ourselves up for personal, individual aggrandizement, we fail. Life is not about “us.” If, however, we lift ourselves up for the purpose of helping the community, we truly rise.

Life presents us with this challenge on a regular basis. The dilemma of focusing on our personal growth, as opposed to working for the benefit of others, presents a challenge. Some people really cannot do both: “It is either ‘me’ or ‘them.’ I cannot do both.” Such a person has much more with which to contend than this decision. He is so engrossed in himself that he probably cannot be of much help to the community. The *Rosh Yeshivah* posits that those who assist others, thereby utilizing their resources and talents for the greater good, will be sufficiently blessed, such that they themselves will experience unprecedented growth. When Moshe *Rabbeinu* (as *Klal Yisrael’s* advocate) came forward to plead the nation’s case, he said, “And now, if You would but bear their sin – but if not, erase me now from Your Book that You have written” (*Shemos* 32:32). As a result, he was rewarded with the nation being called, “the nation of Moshe” (*Midrash Tanchuma, Beshalach* 10). One does not lose out by devoting his talents to the benefit of the community.

Mordechai was the fifth (from the top) in fame on the *Sanhedrin* (*Talmud Megillah* 16b). Yet, the *Talmud Chullin* 139b implies that Mordechai was the most distinguished member of the *Sanhedrin*. The contradiction can be resolved, explains *Rav Kushlefsky*, by asserting that, indeed, in personal erudition he was fifth, but, from a national perspective, he was the elite, the top. Mordechai devoted all of himself, all of his G-d-given talents and qualities, to benefit his people. This dedication catapulted him to the top. Action defines greatness. Mordechai was great, but, by accepting the challenge of dedicating himself to *Klal Yisrael*, he became greater. He dared – he grew!

This, concludes the *Rosh Yeshivah*, is the lesson of the *machatzis ha’shekel*, which was required of every adult male, regardless of position, i.e. social and financial strata. This money was used for the *korbanos tzibbur*, communal sacrifices. The Torah issues a prohibition against giving less than a half-*shekel*, as well as a prohibition against giving more. This begs elucidation. More is good!

I have yet to be called by an organization that does not “ask” me to increase my annual pledge. Yet, the Torah demands “half” – no more – no less – from everyone, period. *Horav Yeruchem Levovitz, zl* (*Daas Chochmah U’Mussar* 1:19), explains that even the avaricious man for whom parting with a penny is a life-threatening experience, would be likely to contribute a large sum of money if he would receive an honorarium, prestige, his name on the wall. When everyone is limited to a half-*shekel*, he no longer has an opportunity to highlight his individual achievement or pride. We are all the same (which for some is a life-altering experience). This limitation is all about joint, communal effort.

ועשיית אותו שמן משחת קודש

Of it you shall make oil of sacred anointment (30:25)

The *shemen ha’mishchah*, oil of anointment, was used exclusively for sacred purposes, such as anointing the *Ohel Moed*, the *Kohen Gadol* and the *keilim*, vessels in the *Mishkan/Bais Hamikdash*. In

examining the *shoresh*, root, of the *mitzvah*, the *Sefer HaChinuch* writes that Hashem wanted us to perform an act ourselves, on the day that we go up to be inaugurated to the honor of performing His holy service *l’haros banu gedulah u’shevach*, to indicate greatness and praise in us. This is the anointing of the oil. *Horav Yitzchok Zilberstein, Shlita*, comments that the words, “to indicate greatness and praise in us,” are counter to everything the *ben Torah/ben aliyah* stands for. Personal eminence is the antithesis of what the Torah wants for us. The last thing one who is dedicated to Torah study should consider is personal praise and aggrandizement of any sort. He should not think about his achievements and personal attributes; rather, he should focus on learning and continued learning. It is not about “me”; it is about the Torah. Yet, the *Sefer HaChinuch* writes that “on the day that we go up to be inaugurated...we should focus on personal greatness and praise.”

The term *ben aliyah* refers to a young man who is in the process of being *oleh*, going up, ascending the ladder of spirituality and Torah scholarship. *Rav Zilberstein* explains that the concept of *ben aliyah* is based upon a *halachic* decision rendered by the *poskim, halachic* decisors. They posit that just as Moshe *Rabbeinu* refused (as an infant) to nurse from a gentile woman, because the mouth that would speak with the *Shechinah*, Divine Presence, cannot be so defiled, likewise, no Jewish child should nurse from a gentile. The question is obvious: Moshe was clearly destined to speak with the *Shechinah*. How does this apply to the typical Jewish boy? What are the chances that a typical Jewish boy will speak with Hashem?

Horav Eliyahu Baruch Kamai, zl, explained that, in reality, every Jewish boy eventually speaks with the *Shechinah* when he studies *Gemorah*. When he learns a *blatt Gemorah*, passage of the *Talmud*, or any Torah segment, he is speaking to Hashem. This should be his attitude when he learns Torah. This is the definition of a *ben aliyah*; one who studies Torah should have his eyes on High, focused on what his learning Torah means. It is his conversation with Hashem! If this is how he learns, if this is his attitude, he is a *ben aliyah*.

Rav Zilberstein relates a well-known vignette concerning *Horav Shmuel HaLevi Vosner, zl*. The addendum to the often repeated story is not well-known. As a young teenager, *Rav Vosner* traveled to Lublin in order to gain entrance to the famous *Yeshivas Chachmei Lublin*. It was, at the time, the preeminent *yeshivah* of its day. Acceptance to the *yeshivah* was an indication of a student’s high level of erudition. Entrance to the *yeshivah* was reserved for high caliber students who, due to their brilliance or extreme diligence in Torah study, would be enabled to reach a pinnacle of Torah knowledge accessible only to a select few.

When *Rav Vosner* initially took his entrance *bechinah*, test, he failed. This in no way meant that he was a weak student. Indeed, he was an excellent student. It was just that, due to his young age, he lacked the achievement required for a Chachmei Lublin student. “Next time” was their response. A few hours later, the *Rosh Yeshivah* and founder of Chachmei Lublin, *Horav Meir Shapiro, zl*, visited the *bais hamedrash* (which he did many times daily) and noticed a young boy diligently studying in the corner of the room. It was young Shmuel Vosner. “What are you still doing here?” the *Rosh Yeshivah* asked. “I thought that we did not accept you?” he added. “Yes, I was not accepted. However, I have a few hours left before my return train to Vienna (his home town). What better way to spend them than learning?” the teenager responded. “If this is your attitude, I want you as my student!” was *Rav Meir Shapiro’s* reply. The rest is history.

This is the well-known part of the story. Now, for the addendum. A man who was in charge of seeing to it that the *bais hamedrash* of *Rav Shmuel Vosner* (in the *Zichron Meir* section of Bnei Brak) stayed clean and orderly found a batch of *kesavim*, letters and writings dating back to 1928, to which *Rav Vosner* affixed his name, *Shmuel HaLevi Vosner, Av Bais Din Lodz*.” Chief Rabbi of Lodz (Poland)! First of all, *Rav Vosner* was never this distinguished (Jewish) city’s *Rav*. Furthermore, when he wrote this, he was but a young boy. What was he thinking at the time?

The distinguished *Rav* and *posek* explained why he had signed his name in such a manner: “When I was accepted in the *yeshivah*, I was much younger than the other *bachurim*, students. The *bachurim* that were engaged in Torah study in Chachmei Lublin were exceptional scholars. The *rebbeim* were Torah giants. How was I to ever reach their level? I had to do something that would motivate, as well as encourage, my rise to the pinnacle of Torah erudition. I decided to do something tangible by giving myself a title that was at that time, for me, unheard of and undreamed of. I was quite far from becoming *Av Bais Din* of Lodz, but that was exactly how I wanted to challenge myself. I felt that by striving for this tangible, but far - off position, I would be able to motivate myself daily to learn more and more until, perhaps one day, I would become worthy of this title.” *Rav* Wosner accomplished beyond his wildest dreams. To be *Rav* of Zichron Meir for over seventy years, a community that was home to *gedolei ha'dor* of every generation, was no simple feat.

Bnei Brak is home to a number of *chadorim* whose *rebbeim* are quite creative in motivating their young charges to *shteig* in learning and to grow and excel in Torah study. One first - grade *rebbe* applied *Rav* Wosner's self-motivation to his students. The month of *Nissan* is reserved for lectures, with every *Rav* delivering both *halachic* and *aggadic* lectures pertaining to the upcoming festival of *Pesach*. The *rebbe* gave each student an individual placard that detailed a list of the varied *rabbanim* of Bnei Brak who would hold forth, their topic, and when and where the event would take place. Included among the names of the *rabbanim* was the name of the young first grader (each student had an individual placard) with full title, announcing his upcoming lecture. Instead of the date of the lecture taking place that year, however, the *rebbe* had added twenty years (making the boy all of 26 years old). This was the *rebbe's* manner of intimating to his students, “You, too, can one day lecture in a large *shul* in Bnei Brak. It is all up to you.”

Horav Mordechai Gifter, zl, Rosh Yeshivas Telshe, entered the *yeshivah* world with a burning desire to study Torah and make it his life's vocation. As a young boy growing up in Portsmouth, Virginia, and later on in Baltimore, Maryland, his background in Torah was far from impressive. His brilliant mind and unprecedented diligence and thirst for Torah helped him to catch up and soon overtake those who were older than he. When he was a teenager, his wall was adorned with pictures of *gedolim*, Torah giants. In the middle of them all was an empty frame with the words, “What about you?” His life was devoted to answering that question.

וישב העם לאכל ושתו ויקמו לצחק

The people sat to eat and drink and they got up to revel. (32:6)

Rashi explains that the term, *l'tacheik*, to revel, implies the three cardinal sins: idolatry; licentiousness; and murder. In addition to their worship of the Golden Calf, *Bnei Yisrael* committed immoral acts and murdered Chur (nephew of Aharon *HaKohen* and Moshe *Rabbeinu* and son of Miriam *HaNeviah* and Kaleiv ben Yefuneh). He attempted to restrain them and, as a result, he became their first victim. Chur sacrificed his life *Al Kiddush Hashem*, to sanctify Hashem's Name. He is the first and only Jew who died *Al Kiddush Hashem* in the Torah. Surprisingly, there is no overt mention of his *mesiras nefesh*, self-sacrifice. Why?

Veritably, Chur was not the only one to die *Al Kiddush Hashem*. One other man met his death sanctifying Hashem's Name, albeit prior to the giving of the Torah. Haran, Avraham *Avinu's* brother, was given a choice to accept the pagan rite or meet his Maker via the agency of the fiery cauldron in *Uhr Kasdim*. He figured that if his brother, Avraham, had emerged unscathed, he, too, could pull it off. He was wrong. He was not Avraham. Like Chur, Haran's untimely death is not mentioned in the Torah. Why? Two individuals, perhaps one more devoted than the other, but Chur knew much more, having witnessed the exodus from Egypt, the Revelation with the Giving of the Torah, so he was much more attuned to dedicating his life to Hashem. Haran lived with pagans. Indeed, his father sold idols and even informed on his son to the wicked Nimrod.

Haran had one primary religious role model: Avraham. As a result, he was prepared to relinquish his life for Hashem. Two exceptional people; two unprecedented acts of spiritual heroism. Yet, no mention is made of them in the Torah.

The *Chasam Sofer, zl*, observes that their acts of devotion were certainly not glossed over in Heaven. Each of them was blessed with extraordinary progeny, individuals who left their indelible stamp on the nation. Chur died a tragic death. He had a grandson who was but a lad of thirteen years of age. This young boy was selected from among all of *Klal Yisrael* to be the architect of the *Mishkan*. Betzalel was Chur's reward.

Haran is the one who apparently gets by under the radar. He is mentioned in the Torah only slightly in passing, although he was the first person to have died *Al Kiddush Hashem*. This is no simple distinction. His reward? The *Chasam Sofer* observes that Haran did fairly well for himself, despite the fact his act of *Kiddush Hashem* was not mentioned in the Torah.

Haran was Sarah *Imeinu's* father. Sarah went by the name *Yiskah*, but she was the same person who married Avraham *Avinu*. She was the mother of *Yitzchak Avinu*, the first Matriarch, the progenitress of our People. I would consider this a charitable reward. There is, however, more. Haran had another daughter whose name was *Milkah*. She married Nachor; their union produced a son, *Besuel*, who was not a very reputable person. Despite *Besuel's* shortcomings, he married and had an exceptional daughter, *Rivkah Imeinu*. Haran became the progenitor of two *Imahos*, Matriarchs. There is still more. *Rivkah* had a brother, a swindler, a thief and an all-around nefarious person. Yet, he fathered two very special daughters, *Rachel Imeinu* and *Leah Imeinu* – two more Matriarchs who became part of Haran's legacy. Haran was the first one to die sanctifying Hashem's Name. He was blessed with the four Matriarchs and a son, *Lot*, who was also not an exceptional person. His two sons, *Ammon* and *Moav*, however, produced *Naamah haAmonis*, wife of *Shlomo HaMelech*, mother of *Rechavam* and *Rus HaMoaviah*, Mother of *Royalty*, and the House of *David HaMelech*. In the final analysis, Haran did quite well for himself. Yet, his act is not mentioned in the Torah.

The following vignette might give us a directive on life, its goal and objective, thereby allowing us a perspective on the ultimate sacrifice for Hashem's Name. One day, *Horav Yitzchak Blazer, zl* (popularly known as *Rav Itzele Peterberger*), one of the leaders of the *mussar*, character refinement, movement, met *Horav Yosef Yoizel Hurwitz, zl* (later to become known as the *Alter m'Novarodok*), who was a promising *talmid chacham*, Torah scholar and leader. Due to a family tragedy, he was compelled to set aside his Torah study and enter the world of commerce, a field in which he prospered. With his considerable profits, he was able to support his greater family. On the day that he met *Rav Itzele*, he was rushing to his place of business. *Rav Yosef Yoizel* stated, “A person must have a source of livelihood. A person must have from what to live.” (“*Fun vos vellen mir leben?* From what will we live?”) *Rav Itzele* listened and immediately retorted, “I understand, but a person must also have from where to die.” (“*Fun vos vellen mir shtarben.* From what will we die?”)

The words stunned *Rav Yosef Yoizel*. In a short terse comment, *Rav Itzele* had crystallized the Torah outlook on life. Now, as never before, *Rav Yosef Yoizel* was brought to realize that life on this world has one purpose: to gain entrance to *Olam Habba*. Our world is merely a *prozdor*, vestibule, entranceway, that allows us to gain entry into the World of Truth, the Royal Palace of the King. This comment catalyzed a new trajectory in *Rav Yosef Yoizel's* life. He now began to concentrate on “life” – on living a life totally devoted to achieving spiritual ascendancy. He isolated himself from the world in order to begin a course of intensive study and profound introspection, geared towards elevating his physical life to a greater spiritual standard. In the two years of 1894 and 1895, he founded nine *yeshivos* as part of the burgeoning *Novarodok Yeshivah* network. All of this occurred as a result of *Rav Itzele's* quip concerning the meaning of life.

The above story teaches us a profound lesson. Life is about living for a purpose. Dying – even if it is to sanctify Hashem’s Name – does not take the place of life. As long as one lives, he serves Hashem on a constant basis, thereby earning entry to *Olam Habba*, which is the reason that he is alive. Dying for the sake of Hashem is not our ideal. It is certainly better than dying without purpose. Although it is the penultimate way to leave this world, dying for the sake of Hashem in no way replaces the opportunities one has to live life. Thus, the Torah plays down the tragic deaths of these martyrs. We venerate death with purpose. We venerate life with purpose even more. Dying *Al Kiddush Hashem* is a privilege reserved for *yechidei segulah*, unique, special individuals. *Kiddush ha’chaim*, living a sanctified life dedicated to Hashem, is a way of life available to everyone. We must all aspire to be worthy of this ideal.

Sadly, the concept of *kiddush ha’chaim*, the sanctification of Hashem’s Name through daily life, received its greatest reinforcement under the most tragic conditions of the Holocaust. During this period, Jews were admonished to do everything possible to live, because the Nazis were bent on destroying Jewish life. Thus, our imperative was to live and to sanctify the Name of Hashem, remaining committed to Him, despite the persecution to which we were being subjected.

While hiding in Zelichov in the summer of 1942, the *Zelichover Rebbe, Horav Avraham Shalom Goldberg, zl*, responded to the increasingly despondent fellow Jews who were with him, “We must remain hidden; perhaps it will save one life. Every Jew who remains alive sanctifies the Name of Hashem. He is, indeed, a man of courage, because he will not submit to the Nazis and he will not extinguish his own life.”

Horav Menachem Zamba, zl, summarized the *kiddush ha’chaim* motif during his zealous plea for resistance prior to the Warsaw Ghetto uprising in April, 1943, “Thus, by the authority of the Torah, I insist that there is absolutely neither purpose nor value to *Kiddush Hashem* inherent in the death of a Jew. *Kiddush Hashem* in our present situation is embodied in the will of a Jew to live.” He explained that the struggle for survival amid extreme pain and deprivation is a *mitzvah*. It is our *nekamah*, act of vengeance. Our *mesiras nefesh*, self-sacrifice and devotion to live, is far greater and loftier than relinquishing our lives. In this manner, we are being *mekadesh*, sanctifying, *Shem Shomayim*, the Name of Heaven. The Nazis wanted us dead. Why should we have given them what they wanted?

Va’ani Tefillah

ולירושלים עירך ברהמים תשוב ותשכון בתוכה – *V’L’Yerushalayim ircha b’rachamim tashuv v’sishkon b’sochah*. And to Yerushalayim, Your city, may You return with compassion, and dwell there.

We ask that Hashem, in His compassion, return to Yerushalayim. The prayer for Hashem’s return to Yerushalayim follows immediately after the prayer *Al Hatzaddikim*, the prayer for the righteous. The *Levush* explains that the juxtaposition of these two prayers reflect the fact that they are interrelated. Hashem cares for the righteous, because of what they represent. Thus, we pray that they receive the honor and respect they deserve and to which they are entitled. Their lives are purposeful, focused on contributing to the world. When they are appreciated, their influence becomes a reality.

Yerushalayim is similar in concept. The Holy City is not merely a geographical location. It represents the place in the world where Hashem’s Presence is recognized. As we pray for the recognition of those who live and fight for Hashem, so, too, do we pray that Hashem’s Presence and Glory radiate and illuminate the world. Yerushalayim should be the center that represents and publicizes the greatness of – and respect due to – Hashem.

Sponsored by Jeffrey and Jane Belkin On the occasion of his grandfather’s 100th yahrzeit

יעקב צבי בן פינחס ז"ל

כ"א אדר א' תרע"ט - February 20, 1919

ת.צ.ב.ה.

Hebrew Academy of Cleveland, ©All rights reserved
prepared and edited by Rabbi L. Scheinbaum

Hilchos Adar & Purim

8174. "When Adar comes in, one increases one's Simcha". Some opinions say that this is applicable even in Adar Rishon in a year with two Adars such as this year, while others disagree. Shulchan Aruch w/Mishnah Brurah 686:3, Nit'ay Gavriel 11:1

8175. Beginning Rosh Chodesh Adar there is a custom to hang a sign in the home that says "Mishenichnas Adar Marbin B'simcha" - "When Adar comes in, one increases one's happiness". Some have the custom to place this sign to cover the "Zecher L'churban" unfinished wall area that many have the custom to retain in their home. Piskei Tshuvos 686:5, Nit'ay Gavriel 11:4

Ohr Somayach :: Insights Into Halacha To Bentch or Not to Bentch (between milk and meat)?

For the week ending 9 June 2012 / 18 Sivan 5772

Rabbi Yehuda Spitz

That is the Question...

Several recent articles touched upon the topic of dairy food items and what needs to be done before one is permitted to partake in a meat meal [1]. The Shulchan Aruch mandates that one who has partaken of milk products must do a personal three step process [2]: kinuach - palate cleansing by eating a hard food item (ex. cracker), rechitza - hand washing [3], and hadacha - rinsing out of the mouth, as well as removing any remnants and leftovers of the dairy meal, all before being able to have a meat meal.

Yet, that is all that the Shulchan Aruch necessitates. If so, why do many people also wait a half hour before eating anything meaty? And, why are many people particular to also recite Birkas HaMazon between a dairy and a meat meal? Is the Shulchan Aruch’s ruling not good enough for them?

Zohar Zehirus

The answer to the first question actually predates the Shulchan Aruch by quite a bit and lies in a cryptic comment found in the Zohar. The Zohar writes [4] that everyone should wait between dairy and meat meals “one meal or one hour”. Although there are many interpretations offered for this enigmatic remark [5], the most common one is that “one hour” is referring to mandating a waiting period of one hour even after eating dairy [6]. Several authorities, including the Pri Chadash, actually rule like this[7], and the Shulchan Aruch himself, in his Beis Yosef commentary [8], implied this way as well. Yet, when it came down to the practical ruling, the Shulchan Aruch did not mandate following the Zohar’s view.

That is why according to the basic halacha no actual waiting period is required after partaking of dairy foods. Nevertheless, there are those who try to take the Zohar’s opinion into account and at least “meet him halfway”, as we find in several places in the Talmud and Rabbinic Literature that the majority of an hour is akin to an hour[9]. Therefore, as an added stringency, a custom has developed among several groups to wait a half-hour between a dairy meal and a meat one.

Bentching Brouhaha

The matter of whether Birkas HaMazon is also required after a dairy meal is addressed by the Magen Avraham in the Laws of Shavuot [10]. Since it is customary on the holiday of Shavuot to eat milchigs aside from the traditional meat seudah [11], a common question is whether one may have them as part of the same meal, by merely doing the basic rinsing, washing and palate cleansing mandated by the Shulchan Aruch, or whether one must have the milk dishes and meat dishes each as part of a separate seudah.

The Magen Avraham rules that unless one ate hard cheese, which would require a full 6 hour wait [12], one need not have the dairy dishes and following meat dishes as separate meals. Thus, no bentching is required. Many authorities follow the Magen Avraham’s ruling, and do not require Birkas HaMazon between a dairy and a meat meal [13].

However, many other decisors, including the Knesses HaGedolah and Shla"h, disagree and mandate Bentsching. The Ba'er Mayim Chaim [14] even maintains that the Magen Avraham's opinion must have been a printing mistake and that certainly one may not eat milk and meat as part of the same meal. To add another wrinkle, anyone who follows the Zohar's view of waiting even after dairy would undoubtedly require Birkas HaMazon as well, as he maintains a higher degree of separation. Therefore, many later and contemporary authorities rule that one should bentsch after milchigs if at all possible, even though it may not be required by the letter of the Law [15].

Still, others, ardently defend the Magen Avraham's position, and refer to this bentsching as a "chumra yeseira" [16]. Additionally, if it were truly a printing mistake, the Magen Avraham's son-in-law, Rav Moshe Yekusiel Kaufman-Cohen, would have corrected it in his comprehensive sefer onhalacha and minhag, Chukei Chaim. Yet, instead he rules exactly as his father-in-law did [17]. This is also the final ruling of the Aruch Hashulchan and Mishna Berura, that one is not required to make two separate meals out of his different dishes, unless one ate hard cheese [18].

In the final analysis, all one needs to do after partaking of a dairy item is the rinsing, washing and palate cleansing prescribed in halacha. One is not required to wait an extra hour, nor half-hour, nor bentsch before a meat meal. Nevertheless, many have the custom do some or all of the enumerated, to go "above and beyond" the letter of the Law to properly ensure that their meat and milk stay distinctly separate, and "ne'er the twain shall meet". But it is equally important that one should never lose sight of what is actual codified halacha and what is truly a chumra [19].

[1] Including "Hard Cheese Complexities", "The Halachic Challenges of the Cheesecake", "The Halachic Power of a Diyuk", and "Ma'aseh Avos = Halacha L'Ma'aseh".

[2] Y"D 89, 2 & 4.

[3] Although most civilized people generally use utensils such as forks and knives to eat and their hands remain clean, and therefore may not actually require handwashing [Pri Chadash (Y"D 89, 20), Shulchan Gavoa (ad loc. 8), Ba'er Heitiv (ad loc. end 13), Rashash (Chullin 103), Mor U'Ketziyah (end 181), Aruch Hashulchan (Y"D 89, 8)], nevertheless, many authorities feel that since handwashing involves minimal effort, one should still do so, even after eating dairy items with proper utensils (cheesecake, anyone?) [Including the Pri Megadim (Y"D 89 S.D. 20), Pischei Teshuva (ad loc. 4), Chida (Shiyurei Bracha ad loc 15), Atzei Ha'Olah (Hilchos BB"C 3, 12 & Chukei Chaim 9), Ben Ish Chai (Year 2, Parshas Shlach 14), and Kaf HaChaim (Y"D 89, 34). See also Chaguras Shmuel (ad loc. 25) who maintains that even when one eats with a fork it is inevitable that some residue will remain on his hands]. See recent article titled: "The Halachic Power of a Diyuk".

[4] Zohar (Parshas Mishpatim pg. 125, 1) cited in Biur HaGr"a (Y"D 89, 11).

[5] See Chemdas HaYamim (Shabbos Ch. 8, Sod Seudas Shabbos, end s.v. umah), Levush (O.C. 173, 1), Pri Toar (Y"D 89, 6), Kreisi U'Pleisi (Y"D 89, 3), and Chaguras Shmuel (Y"D 89, 18), who each have a completely different approach to understanding the Zohar's intent.

[6] See Beis Yosef (O.C. 173, s.v. V'yesh machmirin), Shach (Y"D 89, 15), Pri Chadash (Y"D 89, 6), Gr"a (ibid.), Chida (Shiyurei Bracha Y"D 89, 6, s.v. v'ani and Kikar L'Aden 5, Likutim, 8), and Ikrei HaDa"t (Ikrei Dinim Y"D 10, 5).

[7] Including the Pri Chadash (ibid.), Pri Toar (ibid.), Shulchan HaTahor (173, 2), Shu"t Kol Gadol (64). See also Shiyurei Bracha (ibid. 13) and Shu"t Teshuvos V'Hanhagos (vol. 2, 390) who cite waiting an hour as a proper minhag. Yet, several authorities, including the Pri Chadash, Pri Toar, Ya'avetz (Mor

U'Ketziyah end 173) and Aruch Hashulchan (Y"D 89, 11) qualify this ruling, that the one hour waiting period does not apply before eating fowl.

[8] Beis Yosef (O.C. 173, s.v. V'yesh machmirin).

[9] See Matteh Reuven (186), Shu"t Maharshag (vol. 1, Y"D 13, s.v. annam), Shu"t Divrei Chachamim (Y"D 1, 3 - quoting Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky), Shu"t Teshuvos V'Hanhagos (Vol. 2, 390), Shu"t Shraga HaMeir (vol. 7, 105, 2), Netei Gavriel (Shavuos Ch. 31, 5), Shu"t Maadanei Melachim (85, 3), Shu"t Mishneh Halachos (vol. 10, 135), Halichos Shlomo (Moadim vol. 2, Ch. 12, footnote 49), Kovetz M'Beis Levi (on Y"D pg. 35, 15), and sefer Minhag Yisrael Torah (O.C. vol. 3, 494, 8 s.v. v'hinei).

[10] Magen Avraham (O.C. 494, 6).

[11] See recent article titled: "The Halachic Challenges of the Cheesecake".

[12] See recent article titled: "Hard Cheese Complexities".

[13] Including Levush (ad loc.), Matteh Yonason (ad loc.), and Machatzis Hashekel (O.C. 494, 6). See also Shu"t Rivash (vol. 1, 384, cited in Shaarei Teshuva O.C. 206, end 1).

[14] Shiyurei Knesses HaGedolah (O.C. 493, 3, cited in Darchei Teshuva Y"D 89, 14), Shla"h (Shavuos, Ner Mitzvah, 8), Ba'er Mayim Chayim (Parshas Vayera Ch. 18, 8, cited in Pischei Teshuva vol. 3, 287, 1). Other authorities who rule this way include the Minchas Yaakov (76, 5), Pri Chadash (Y"D 89, 6), Pri Megadim (ad loc. S.D. 6 & 15), Elyah Rabbah (O.C. 173, 8 & Elyah Zuta O.C. 494, 6), Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (46, 11) and the Kaf Hachaim (Falag'i 24, 25).

[15] See Shu"t Maharshag (ibid.), Shu"t VaYa'an David (vol. 1, Y"D 115), Shu"t Beis Yisrael (O.C. 97), Shu"t Maharsham (vol. 3, end 126 s.v. umah), Shu"t Igros Moshe (O.C. vol. 1, 160), Shu"t Teshuvos V'Hanhagos (ibid.), Shu"t az Nidberu (vol. 4, 42), and Netei Gavriel (Shavuos Ch. 31, 1).

[16] Including Matteh Reuven (187), Shu"t Melamed L'Hoye'el (vol. 2, 23), Shu"t Keren L'David (140), Shu"t Mishnas Sachir (vol. 1, 29) and Shu"t Yad Yitzchak (vol. 3, 189).

[17] Chukei Chaim (Os Shin, 2, Dinei Chag HaShavuos, pg. 112a) "d'eino tzarich lehafsik b'Birkas HaMazon im aino ochel gevina kasheh, v'yizaher likach mapah acheres".

[18] Aruch Hashulchan (Y"D 89, 9), Mishna Berura (494, 15). The chumra to bentsch after milchigs is also noticeably absent from the Chochmas Adam, who only cites the lenient ikar din. Other contemporary authorities who are lenient include the She'arim Metzuyanim B'Halacha (vol. 1, 46, 6), Rav Chaim Kanievsky shlit"a (cited in Kuntress Ma'aneh Ra"Ch pg. 54, 446 - 447), and the Badei Hashulchan (Y"D 89, 75).

[19] See Shu"t Yabia Omer (vol. 6, Y"D 7, 4 & 5) and Shu"t Yechaveh Daas (vol. 3, 58).

For any questions, comments or for the full Mareh Mekomos / sources, please email the author: yspitz@ohr.edu.

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 Shira Yaffa bas Rochel Miriam and her children for a yeshua teikef u'miyad!

Rabbi Yehuda Spitz serves as the Sho'el U' Meishiv and Rosh Chabura of the Ohr Lagolah Halacha Kollel at Yeshivas Ohr Somayach in Yerushalayim. He also writes a contemporary halacha column for the Ohr Somayach website titled "Insights Into Halacha"

For any questions, comments or for the full Mareh Mekomos / sources, please email the author: yspitz@ohr.edu.

© 1995-2019 Ohr Somayach International

לע"נ

שרה משה בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה