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<http://www.rabbisacks.org/the-power-of-gratitude-ekev-5775/>  
**The Power of Gratitude (Ekev 5775)**

### **Rabbi Jonathan Sacks**

In the early 1990s one of the great medical research exercises of modern times took place. It became known as the Nun Study. Some 700 American nuns, all members of the School Sisters of Notre Dame in the United States, agreed to allow their records to be accessed by a research team investigating the process of ageing and Alzheimer's Disease. At the start of the study the participants were aged between 75 and 102.[1] What gave this study its unusual longitudinal scope is that in 1930 the nuns, then in their twenties, had been asked by the Mother Superior to write a brief autobiographical account of their life and their reasons for entering the convent. These documents were now analysed by the researchers using a specially devised coding system to register, among other things, positive and negative emotions. By annually assessing the nuns' current state of health, the researchers were able to test whether their emotional state in 1930 had an effect on their health some sixty years later. Because they had all lived a very similar lifestyle during these six decades, they formed an ideal group for testing hypotheses about the relationship between emotional attitudes and health. The results, published in 2001, were startling.[2] The more positive emotions – contentment, gratitude, happiness, love and hope – the nuns expressed in their autobiographical notes, the more likely they were to be alive and well sixty years later. The difference was as much as seven years in life expectancy. So remarkable was this finding that it has led, since then, to a new field of gratitude research, as well as a deepening understanding of the impact of emotions on physical health. What medicine now knows about individuals, Moses knew about nations. Gratitude – hakarat ha-tov – is at the heart of what he has to say about the Israelites and their future in the Promised Land. Gratitude had not been their strong point in the desert. They complained about lack of food and water, about the manna and the lack of meat and vegetables, about the dangers they faced from the Egyptians as they were leaving and about the inhabitants of the land they were about to enter.

They lacked thankfulness during the difficult times. A greater danger still, said Moses, would be a lack of gratitude during the good times. This is what he warned: When you have eaten your fill and have built fine houses and live in them, and when your herds and flocks have multiplied, and your silver and gold is multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied, do not exalt yourself, forgetting the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery ... Do not say to yourself, 'My power and the might of my own hand have gained me this wealth.' (Deut. 8:11-17) The worst thing that could happen to them, warned Moses, would be that they forgot how they came to the land, how God had promised it to their ancestors, and had taken them from slavery to freedom, sustaining them during the forty years in the wilderness. This was a revolutionary idea: that the nation's history be engraved on people's souls, that it was to be re-enacted in the annual cycle of festivals, and that the nation, as a nation, should never attribute its achievements to itself – "my power and the might of my own hand" – but should always ascribe its victories, indeed its very existence, to something higher than itself: to God. This is a dominant theme of Deuteronomy, and it echoes throughout the book time and again. Since the publication of the Nun Study and the flurry of further research it inspired, we now know of the multiple effects of developing an attitude of gratitude. It improves physical health and immunity against disease. Grateful people are more likely to take regular exercise and go for regular medical check-ups. Thankfulness reduces toxic emotions such as resentment, frustration and regret and makes depression less likely. It helps people avoid over-reacting to negative experiences by seeking revenge. It even tends to make people sleep better. It enhances self-respect, making it less likely that you will envy others for their achievements or success. Grateful people tend to have better relationships. Saying "thank you" enhances friendships and elicits better performance from employees. It is also a major factor in strengthening resilience. One study of Vietnam War Veterans found that those with higher levels of gratitude suffered lower incidence of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Remembering the many things we have to be thankful for helps us survive painful experiences, from losing a job to bereavement.[3] Jewish prayer is an ongoing seminar in gratitude. Birkot ha-Shachar, 'the Dawn Blessings' said at the start of morning prayers each day, form a litany of thanksgiving for life itself: for the human body, the physical world, land to stand on and eyes to see with. The first words we say each morning – Modeh/Modah ani, "I thank you" – mean that we begin each day by giving thanks. Gratitude also lies behind a fascinating feature of the Amidah. When the leader of prayer repeats the Amidah aloud, we are silent other than for the responses of Kedushah, and saying Amen after each blessing, with one exception. When the leader says the words Modim anachnu lakh, "We give thanks to You," the congregation says the a parallel passage known as Modim de-Rabbanan. For every other blessing of the Amidah, it is sufficient to assent to the words of the leader by saying Amen. The one exception is Modim, "We give thanks." Rabbi Elijah Spira (1660–1712) in his work Eliyahu Rabbah,[4] explains that when it comes to saying thank you, we cannot delegate this away to someone else to do it on our behalf. Thanks has to come directly from us. Part of the essence of gratitude is that it recognizes that we are not the sole authors of what is good in our lives. The egoist, says Andre Comte-Sponville, "is ungrateful because he doesn't like to acknowledge his debt to others and gratitude is this acknowledgement." [5] La Rochefoucauld put it more bluntly: "Pride refuses to owe, self-love to pay." Thankfulness has an inner connection with humility. It recognizes that what we are and what we have is due to others, and above all to God. Comte-Sponville adds: "Those who are incapable of gratitude live in vain; they can never be satisfied, fulfilled or happy: they do not live, they get ready to live, as Seneca puts it." Though you don't have to be religious to be grateful, there is something about belief in God as creator of the universe, shaper of history and author of the laws of life that directs and facilitates our gratitude. It is hard to feel grateful to a universe that came into existence for no reason and is blind to us and our fate. It is precisely our

faith in a personal God that gives force and focus to our thanks. It is no coincidence that the United States, founded by Puritans – Calvinists steeped in the Hebrew Bible – should have a day known as Thanksgiving, recognizing the presence of God in American history. On 3 October 1863, at the height of the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln issued a Thanksgiving proclamation, thanking God that though the nation was at war with itself, there were still blessings for which both sides could express gratitude: a fruitful harvest, no foreign invasion, and so on. He continued: No human counsel hath devised nor hath any mortal hand worked out these great things. They are the gracious gifts of the Most High God, who, while dealing with us in anger for our sins, hath nevertheless remembered mercy ... I do therefore invite my fellow citizens in every part of the United States ... to set apart and observe the last Thursday of November next, as a day of Thanksgiving and Praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the Heavens. And I recommend to them that while offering up the ascriptions justly due to Him for such singular deliverances and blessings, they do also, with humble penitence for our national perverseness and disobedience, commend to His tender care all those who have become widows, orphans, mourners or sufferers in the lamentable civil strife in which we are unavoidably engaged, and fervently implore the interposition of the Almighty Hand to heal the wounds of the nation and to restore it as soon as may be consistent with the Divine purposes to the full enjoyment of peace, harmony, tranquillity and Union. What might such a declaration made today – in Israel, or the United States, or indeed anywhere – do to heal the wounds that so divide nations today? Thanksgiving is as important to societies as it is to individuals. It protects us from resentments and the arrogance of power. It reminds us of how dependent we are on others and on a Force greater than ourselves. As with individuals so with nations: thanksgiving is essential to happiness and health.

[1] See Robert Emmons, *Thanks!: How the New Science of Gratitude Can Make You Happier*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2007. [2] Danner, Deborah D., David A. Snowdon, and Wallace V. Friesen. "Positive Emotions in Early Life and Longevity: Findings from the Nun Study." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 80.5 (2001): 804-13. [3] Much of the material in this paragraph is to be found in articles published in *Greater Good: The Science of a Meaningful Life* @ <http://greatergood.berkeley.edu>. [4] Eliyahu Rabbah, *Orach Chayyim 127: 1*. [5] Andre´ Comte-Sponville, *A Short Treatise on the Great Virtues: The Uses of Philosophy in Everyday Life*. London: Heinemann, 2002.

From: Shabbat Shalom <shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org> reply-to: shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org date: Thu, Aug 6, 2015 at 5:00 PM

**The Challenge of Wealth**  
**Rabbi Eliyahu Safran**

The commonly held view is that wealth is an impediment to a meaningful spiritual life; that wealth is accompanied by necessary hubris that makes humility and godliness nearly impossible. In this view, it is the poor who, seemingly because of their poverty and need, who gravitate toward spirituality.

But is this "commonly held view" accurate? Is it more difficult for the wealthy or the one in want to experience genuine spirituality?

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It is told that a rich Chasid came to his master for a blessing. Before giving it, the Rebbe asked, "What is the conduct of your household, and what table do you set from day to day?"

Eager to demonstrate his piety, he replied, "My household is conducted with great simplicity. My own meal consists of dry bread and salt."

The Rebbe's countenance showed his feelings about the rich man's response. "Why do you not favor yourself with meat and wine, as becomes a man of wealth?"

Stunned, the rich man was speechless. He remained so as the Rebbe continued to berate him.

"Enough! Enough!" the rich man said, raising his arms in surrender. "I will treat myself with greater consideration and enjoy more elaborate meals."

It was not only the wealthy Chasid who had been taken aback by the Rebbe's behavior. When the Chasid had departed, the pupils approached the Master: "What matters it to you whether he eats bread with salt or meat with wine?"

"It matters a great deal," the Rebbe replied. "If he enjoys good fare and his meals consist of fine delicacies, then he will understand that the poor man must have at least bread with salt. But if, being wealthy, he renounces all enjoyment of life and lives so stingily, he will believe that it is sufficient for the poor to eat stones."

In short, he with great wealth must reap the benefits of that wealth else how will he appreciate the plight of the poor?

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So then, is it a greater nisayon, a greater ordeal, to be wealthy or to be poor? The dangers of wealth are clearly evident – haughtiness, arrogance, snobbery, vanity, and egotism. It is nearly impossible to open a newspaper and not read an account making clear the boorish behavior of the rich and entitled.

By the same token, the aches and pains of poverty can hardly be overstated. Misery, hunger, want and fear; daily adversity seems to be the fate of the needy in every society. The poor must rely on others for the basic necessities of their lives. They are, moment by moment, robbed of dignity.

So, again, which is the greater nisayon? Who is the more challenged – he with readily available cuts of prime ribs prepared to his exacting demands or the poor soul in continuous dependence on God's manna? This is not a question relevant only by the demands of the day's political environment. Indeed, it is a Divine question, posed by God.

Soon after crossing the Red Sea, as the Jews began their long sojourn in the desert, the newly-freed slaves feared for their next day's bread; they trembled at the thought that the next day might not find a source of water. Their response to these very powerful fears? They complained! They cried out their wish that they'd have died by God's hand in Egypt where, at least, they "could sit by pots of meat and eat our fill of bread."

How quickly they forgot how they'd cried to God for deliverance! Instead, they berated Moses and Aaron, "You had to bring us out to this desert, to kill the entire community by starvation."

Faced with the test of poverty and deprivation, they fell short. God listened to their complaints and He showered them with water, quail, and manna, covered with dew. At the same time, however, He declared, "Yes, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and collect a certain portion every day, l'maan anasenu – so that I may test them, whether or not they will keep my law."

The delivered former slaves were undoubtedly "poor". But what kind of poverty was this, where they received what they needed at just the right cost? What does God mean when He says that with getting manna, there is a simultaneous nisayon – l'maan anasenu, "so that I may test them"? According to the Abarbanel God's providing the manna was a chesed, not a nisayon! How can we possibly view the gift of the life-sustaining manna as a test? Certainly the opposite would seem to be true. The deprivation caused by desert travel was the test; the manna a Divine solution to the problem.

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The Chatam Sofer once spent time as a house guest of a member of the Rothschild family who was not only a wealthy man but also very pious. As the great scholar was preparing to leave, he was asked by his host, "Please tell me if there is any aspect of my household which is not run according to Torah thought." And then, to demonstrate his determination to be as pious as possible, he added, "If so, I will immediately rectify the situation."

The Chatam Sofer pondered for a moment and then replied, "Everything that I see within your household is neged haTorah, contrary to Torah thought."

The pious philanthropist nearly collapsed. He was aghast at this response. Before his response could cause his host any more concern, the Chatam Sofer smiled and explained, "The Torah predicts, vayishman yeshurun

vayivat. When the Jewish people accrue wealth, they will rebel. Your home, however, is clearly an exception to this prophecy. You have passed the test of plenty. God grant that all those who are prosperous follow your example.”

When Reb Mendel of Kotsk was seven or eight years old, he was reported to have asked his teacher in cheder, “When the Israelites were in the desert, and they each received the exact measure of manna necessary to sustain each member of the household, not more and not less, how were they able to fulfill the mitzvah of tzedakah?” The teacher is reported to have remained speechless by the question.

What a test! To have everything I need, yet not being able to share. What good is having plenty – delivered by God Himself – but am left unable to give? Chesed and tzedakah are, after all, what gives us our humanity.

What a nisayon – what a test!

Some commentaries, notably the Sforno and Orach Chayim, see the test of the manna as a test of wealth. When one is poor, he has by necessity to devote most of his time to meeting his physical needs. But when one has wealth, when he possesses plenty, he has the opportunity to develop spiritually, intellectually, and religiously.

With the time-consuming burden of acquiring the physical necessities of life, the test of spirituality becomes what will one do with the time, and peace of mind wealth and comfort bestow? In the Sforno’s words, Kesheyihey mitparnes belo tzaar – now that you are sustained without agony and hardship, what will you accomplish which you could not have accomplished had you been afflicted with hardship, poverty, and the daily concerns of parnasah?

Taking the other view, the Rashbam, Ibn Ezra, and others view the test of manna as a test of those in need; the challenge of dependence, the anxieties of insecurity and the daily dependence upon a Higher Being, God. The Ramban interprets the Jews’ bickering and complaining in Beha’alothcha – “Now our souls are dried away other than our dependence on the manna” – as “that even the manna on which we live is not in our possession so that our soul can be nourished and satisfied with it; but we desire it and are dependent upon it at all times, in anticipation that it will come to us; thus we have nothing at all save our hope for manna.”

Manna only came down in the quantity required for the day, and none was to be left for the following day. They were therefore in constant worry for their next day’s food. Is it any wonder that our Sages taught, “One cannot compare a person who has bread in his basket with one who does not have bread in his basket? It takes great faith, emunoh, and bitachon to overcome the test of dependence, the anxieties of reliance. This is perhaps what led Reb Yehoshua to teach that an individual should go out and work every day and not depend on miracles, just as the Israelites gathered manna every day, and even on Friday worried about the next day’s portion, the double portion.

Yet, on the other hand, Reb Eliezer Hamodai takes the exact opposite lesson from this same manna report, that one should not be concerned for the next day’s bread, as long as there is enough for today. “Whoever has enough to eat today, and says, ‘What will I eat tomorrow?’ such a person is lacking faith.”

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Who has the greater nisyonot, he who is wealthy or he who is poor? The simple truth is that each and every life comes with its joys and rewards, challenges and heartaches. Rich or poor, no one escapes the nisyonot of life. The Magid of Mezritsch said that the nisayon of the manna was meant to test one’s genuine and authentic faith in God. Why? Because to have been assured of one’s basic needs and sustenance without worries, concerns, and deagot and still remain faithful to God and cognizant of our dependence upon Him, is a much greater nisayon than being poor and having faith in God.

Studies have shown that once basic needs have been met, having more money, larger houses, and fancier cars do not bring greater happiness.

Ultimately, the answer to the question is unique to each life. Each of us must

respond based on our understanding the nisayon facing us, on our ability to deal with the very real manna God provides us.

Rather than constantly believing that “the grass is always greener” in another’s garden, we should pause and consider the blessings of our simple lives. And when we hear the siren song calling us to have, “a dollar and a dream” we might want to think long and hard about giving away a dollar in order to win five million.

Would such a winning really make us happier? Better? More fulfilled?

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from: Shema Yisrael Torah Network <shemalist@shemayisrael.com> to: peninim@shemayisrael.com date: Thu, Aug 6, 2015 at 8:14 PM

### **Peninim on the Torah**

**by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum**

Parshas Eikev

PARASHAS EKEV

Not by bread alone does man live, rather by everything that emanates from the mouth of G-d does man live. (8:3)

The phrase yichyeh ha’adam, does man live, is mentioned twice in the pasuk. Interestingly, Targum Onkeles uses two variant translations for the word yichyeh. With regard to the first part of the pasuk - “Not by bread alone does man live,” he writes, miskayeim enasha - is a man sustained/preserved. In the second part of the pasuk - “rather by everything that emanates from the mouth of G-d does man live,” he writes, chayeim enasha, man lives. Why does the text change? (The variant translations are to be found in the older Chumashim. Many contemporary printings follow the standard corrected translation of yiskayeim enasha).

Horav Eliyahu Baruch Finkel, zl, distinguishes between the words that precede each of the phrases which accompany the phrase, yichyeh ha’adam. The first one addresses the sustaining power of bread. The word, chai, refers to life itself - not the sustaining force that maintains it. Therefore, in connecting with bread, Onkeles translates yichyeh ha’adam as miskayeim, is sustained. The second part of the pasuk addresses the motza Pi Hashem, that which emanates from the mouth of Hashem. While it is true that the pasuk is referring to the Heavenly bread, the Manna, the vernacular “that which emanates from the mouth of Hashem,” reflects life itself. Torah is life itself; it is the essence of life, without which there is no life. Torah does not simply sustain life; it is life!

This is consistent with an episode that took place in pre-World War II Europe at a conference of leading Roshei Yeshivah and rabbanim concerning the plight of the yeshivos. The yeshivah world was coming under attack from the secular government. One of the rabbanim arose and declared, “The Torah is the oxygen of life. We must, therefore, safeguard the Torah.” Hearing this, Horav Boruch Ber Lebowitz, zl, Kamenitzer Rosh Yeshivah, screamed out, “Torah is not the oxygen of life; it is essential life!”

Rav Eliyahu Baruch would often quote a story to accompany the above dvar Torah. There was a certain Rosh Yeshivah in Yerushalayim who, whenever Yeshivas Mir would be studying the same Meseches, Tractate of Talmud, that his own yeshivah was studying, he would ask Rav Eliyahu Baruch to send him a student with whom he could learn b’chavrusa, as a study partner. The Rosh Yeshivah specifically wanted a study partner from a different yeshivah. The diverse approaches towards understanding a sugya, topic, in the Talmud were energizing. Obviously, whomever Rav Eliyahu Baruch sent would be a student at the top of the class. This time he sent a bright student who happened to be an American.

Two weeks elapsed and the bachur, student, asked Rav Eliyahu Baruch if he could give up the chavrusa. Apparently, the Rosh Yeshivah was advanced in age and would often doze during their learning. They studied at night when many people younger than this Rosh Yeshivah had already retired for the evening. Rav Eliyahu Baruch replied that it would be a shame to give up such a chavrusa, given that the Rosh Yeshivah was one of the more distinguished students of the Brisker Rav. A few more weeks went by, and

this time the student was emphatic. He felt he could achieve more during this time.

Rav Eliyahu Baruch remarked that he did whatever he could to avoid meeting the Rosh Yeshivah, since he had no simple way of conveying the reason that the student had stopped coming to learn. One day, he was walking through Meah Shearim, and he met the Rosh Yeshivah. When the Rosh Yeshivah questioned him about why the bachur had not been coming to learn, he had to tell the truth diplomatically, "The bachur feels that he is a hindrance to the Rosh Yeshivah, perhaps causing him to stay awake later at night because of him."

The Rosh Yeshivah was a wise man and understood a lame excuse when he heard it. He replied, "Oy, the American bachur thinks that everything is a 'course.' They come to Eretz Yisrael to study Torah in much the same way they would be attending an American school of higher education." A minute went by, and then the Rosh Yeshivah raised his voice, "Torah is a course?... Torah iz der leben - nu! Un tzu den inmiten leben shloft men nit amal? Torah is life! Do we (are we not allowed to) sleep once in a while in the middle of life?"

Rav Eliyahu Baruch added that once a group of students "debated" with Rosh Yeshivah Horav Nochum Partzovitz, zl, concerning a student's dress code during learning. There were those who felt (as is common in Chassidic yeshivos) that the students should wear a jacket during learning. Others felt encumbered by the extra garment - especially since they were learning all day and a good part of the night. Rav Nochum replied, Eilu v'eilu divrei Elokim chaim, "These and those are words of the living G-d." In other words - both opinions were correct; they both had support. If one views Torah study as avodas Hashem, service to the Almighty, he should be dressed in shemoneh begadim, all "eight garments" as was the Kohen Gadol, High Priest, when he served in the Bais Hamikdash. It should be no different than davening, when a jacket is worn out of respect. If, however, Torah is essential life - does a person "live" all day wearing his hat and jacket?

Horav Mordechai Gifter, zl, Rosh Yeshivas Telshe, exemplified this unique appreciation of the meaning of Torah. Torah was his essence, the substance which galvanized him and animated his life. He lived to learn, and he learned to live. He valued Torah as one values life, because, without Torah, there is no life. While some will "talk the talk," the Rosh Yeshivah "walked the walk," living life to its fullest by studying Torah to its utmost. To him, Torah study was pure joy, as he embraced the very core of his life source.

I observed this over the years that I learned in Telshe. I experienced it firsthand when, in 1992, I asked the Rosh Yeshivah for his *haskamah*, approbation, for my first *Peninim Al HaTorah*. I went to the dormitory, which served as home to the Rosh Yeshivah and Rebbetzin when they returned from Eretz Yisrael. They had a simple apartment composed of three dormitory rooms. They required very little.

I came to the door and was welcomed by the Rebbetzin, who immediately led me to the Rosh Yeshivah's study. He was sitting by a simple (school) desk, learning from an open *Gemora*. He greeted me with his signature smile, and, after I explained the purpose of my visit, he began to peruse the manuscript. Having grown up in Telshe, the Rosh Yeshivah had known me for over thirty years. We had often spoken in learning. The process of obtaining his approval was thus accelerated.

The Rosh Yeshivah took out his pen, and, with a trembling hand, attempted to write. He could not produce anything legible. The illness that was robbing his body of its vitality was causing his hands to tremble uncontrollably. Suddenly, the Rosh Yeshivah began to cry, and, with tears rolling down his face, he cried out to me, "I am miserable that I cannot learn in the same way as I did before. When I learn, I immediately put my *chiddushim*, original thoughts, down on paper. Now, I am no longer able to write. I cannot learn with the same fervor as before!" And then the Rosh Yeshivah broke down in heavy weeping.

I will never forget the sight of Rav Gifter weeping incessantly because he could no longer learn in the manner in which he was accustomed. For him,

writing was an integral part of his learning dialectic. Torah was his life and permeated the recesses of his heart. Now, he was slowly losing his most prized possession, the most important thing in his life, the one thing that gave his life meaning - his ability to engage fully in his learning process of the Torah. This is why he cried.

You will eat and you will be satisfied, and bless Hashem, your G-d. (8:10)  
When a person eats or drinks, he prefaces his eating with a blessing and, upon completion, he once again offers his blessing. What if a person has no desire to eat, he is just not hungry, or he does not particularly care for the food that is being served? One would think that he has no obligation to eat. One does not eat just to avail himself the opportunity to recite a blessing - or should he eat just for the blessing? The following episode should enlighten us. The Bobover Rebbe, Horav Shlomo, zl, related that, when he was a young lad of about eight years old, his mother put a dish of cabbage in front of him. He had no desire to eat cabbage, and he refused to eat it. All of his mother's pleas and incentives did not change his mind. He was not eating cabbage.

When his father, the saintly Kedushas Tzion, Horav Ben Tzion, zl, heard of the incident, he spoke to his son in a very caring, but firm, manner, "My son, let us attempt to calculate the amount of grain, vegetable and fruit that grows throughout the world. How much is left for human consumption? Most is either in parts of the world where man rarely treads, or has been destroyed prematurely as a result of climate change. Heavy rain, snowstorms, strong winds, all tend to have an adverse effect on growing vegetation. Thus, many do not reach full maturity. Most that do achieve this "milestone" are sold to gentiles who will not recite a blessing over them. Additionally, sadly, not all Jews recite a blessing when partaking of Hashem's gift. Thus, if a fruit or vegetable finally makes it to the table of an observant Jew - how can such a Jew refuse to recite a blessing over it? Excuses will not support him when he stands before the Heavenly Tribunal to explain why - after Hashem availed him of His gift -he refused to do his part by blessing and eating."

This is a powerful lesson concerning the attitude one should manifest regarding the gifts we receive from Hashem, which we often take for granted. Furthermore, it offers some practical advice concerning how a parent should reprove a child: no putdown; no voice raising; simple logic and explaining. When parents make a child feel mature, he has already won half the battle.

Beware for yourselves lest your heart be misled and you turn away and serve other gods and bow down to them. (11:16)

Rashi interprets *v'sartem*, and you turn away, as referring to one who abandons Torah study. Accordingly, one who severs his relationship with Torah will ultimately become an idol worshipper. This is a strong statement. Will abandoning the Torah lead one so far away that he would serve idols? Apparently the answer is, "Yes." We wonder why. Horav Shimon Schwab, zl, addresses this question and explains that there are two diverse ways of understanding the term *elohim* *acheirim*, other gods.

The words, *elohim* *acheirim*, in the context of this *pasuk* can be defined either as "other gods," which would thus denote *elohim* as plural - gods. It can also be interpreted as a god of others, whereby *elohim* is singular, referring to a god that others have chosen to serve. Does it really make a difference? After all is said and done, he is not serving Hashem, the only G-d of Heaven and earth, the G-d of Creation and the G-d of history. Rav Schwab explains that, when someone strays from Torah learning, the Torah tells him that while he may still purport to believe in G-d - it is the *elohim* *acheirim*. It is not the Jewish G-d; it is another god, or perhaps the god of others, because the G-d of the Jews is intrinsically linked to the study of Torah. One cannot serve Hashem, yet abandon Torah study. They are one and the same. One who does so is essentially practicing another religion, serving another god, which is synonymous with idol worship.

These are strong words, but the truth will, at times, make some people uncomfortable. In his commentary to the *Siddur*, Rav Schwab expounds on

this subject. One who attempts to worship Hashem without Torah study does not worship the Creator of the Universe, because the Jewish religion is inextricably bound to the Torah. We may act in a manner similar to members of other religions who also pray, observe rituals, maintain various prohibitions and enjoin their adherents to practice specific positive behaviors and deeds. Judaism, however, they are not practicing. Unless the Torah is included, the worship of G-d is nothing more than *elohim acheirim*. A gentile who wishes to embrace Judaism - to do and accept everything except Torah study - might as well remain connected with his original religion. A Jewish religion without the Torah is not Judaism - at all. Our Torah may not - and cannot - be divorced from the religion, its practice and observance. A "Torahless" Judaism is not Judaism.

Rashi explains the term *elohim acheirim*, "Because they are strangers to those who worship them. One pleads with it (the god), but it does not respond. Consequently, this 'other god' is a 'stranger' to the person who prays to it." Rashi is teaching us (as per Rav Schwab) that the first step on the road to actual idol worship is deserting the Torah. Despite one's attempt to maintain a relationship with Hashem, the interaction will be as different as if it were with a stranger. Without Torah learning, Hashem is "strange" to us. The individual may still believe that Hashem *Echad*, Hashem is One, and that he certainly is not an idol worshipper, but, as a result of his estrangement from Hashem, he no longer has the feeling that someone is listening to his prayers. Feeling unwanted, unlistened to, the person slowly drifts away to a "place" where he convinces himself that someone is listening. We all know where this is leading. One who seeks a relationship, but cannot seem to find it because he is not upholding his part of the equation, will conjure up in his mind some mystical experience and imagine that now "someone" is listening to him. Had the lost youth and adults of the last fifty years (and longer) been guided to the Torah - they would have been "found."

In order to prolong your days and the days of your children upon the Land. (11:21) The Talmud in Berachos 8a relates that, when Rabbi Yochanan heard that there were elderly Jews in Bavel/Babylonia, he was surprised, since it is written in the Torah, "In order to prolong your days and the days of your children upon the Land." This is a reference to Eretz Yisrael, not to *chutz l'aretz*. There is no promise of longevity in the diaspora. Once they informed Rabbi Yochanan that the elders of Bavel were people who rose early to attend shul in the morning and remain in the shul until late in the evening, he said that this was the merit that earned them such a unique reward. It is a wonderful lesson, very inspirational, but what is the reason? Horav Yisrael, zl, the Viznitzer Rebbe, gave a practical explanation, bordering on the anecdotal.

The Rebbe had occasion to be on the road when it was time to daven *Minchah*. Since he was in the vicinity of a shul in a small town, he stopped there to daven. When *Minchah* was concluded, all of the shul's worshippers (there were not many) recited *Kaddish Yasom*, the Mourner's *Kaddish*. The Rebbe was surprised by this, since one recites *Kaddish* only during the first year following the passing of a close loved one - usually a parent. The Rebbe turned to the shamesh, sexton, of the shul, and asked, "Are they all *yesomim*? (Are all the members orphans during the first year?)"

The shamesh replied, "Sadly, our minyan is comprised solely of those who must recite *Kaddish* for a loved one. Otherwise, we would not have the required quorum of men. The men of our town are all involved in business and do not have time to break away to daven." (At least *Kaddish* still carried weight for them, even if davening with a minyan did not).

When the Rebbe heard the shamesh's reply, he said, "Now I understand the dialogue in the Talmud Berachos 8a that ensued between Rabbi Yochanan and scholars concerning the longevity of the people of Bavel. When informed that the Babylonians had achieved longevity, Rabbi Yochanan was taken aback, since this phenomenon was inconsistent with the *pasuk* in the Torah, whereby Hashem promises old age only to those who reside in the

Holy Land. Upon hearing that they attended Shul regularly, he assumed that it must be their commitment to shul attendance, both morning and evening, which was the catalyst for their special reward.

"How did Rabbi Yochanan know this? Where do we find shul and minyan attendance as a merit, a talisman to ward off a premature visit from the Malach HaMaves, Angel of Death? Upon visiting this shul and observing a minyan comprised of *Kaddish* *zuggers*, reciters, my question was resolved. When people attend minyan/shul only when someone close to them dies, 'they' are arousing judgment, creating a situation whereby the Angel of Death is 'called in' to 'assist' in seeing to it that the people attend shul. If reciting *Kaddish* is their only motivator, then a 'reason' for reciting *Kaddish* will be created.

"When Rabbi Yochanan heard that in Bavel, shul attendance was exemplary, with people coming early and leaving late, so that they could spend as much time as possible in shul, he realized that, in this community, the Angel of Death could be put on hold. The people attended shul because they wanted to - not because they had to. Why not reward these people with long life so that they could continue doing what is vital to them - learning and davening in shul." This story's lesson is quite clear. My commentary would only be superfluous.

Dedicated in honor of Dr. Stanley and Libby Brody May the Almighty grant you many more years of health and happiness together Peninim mailing list Peninim@shemayisrael.com shemayisrael.com/mailman/listinfo/peninim\_shemayisrael.com

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from: Torah Musings <newsletter@torahmusings.com> reply-to: Torah Musings <newsletter@torahmusings.com> date: Wed, Aug 5, 2015 at 10:19 AM subject: Torah Musings

### **How to Undo a Minhag by R. Gil Student**

The term *minhag*, custom, actually refers to multiple types of practices with different kinds of obligations. By understanding better these differences, we can explore which *minhagim* are subject to removal and how to accomplish that, if you so wish.

Generally speaking, a *minhag* is a type of *neder*, an explicit or implicit vow to observe a practice. Some *nedarim* are subject to annulment through *hataras nedarim*, a fairly common practice. When can we do *hataras nedarim* on a *minhag* we no longer wish to observe? When can we stop observing it even without *hataras nedarim*?

#### I. Types of *Minhagim*

There are four types of customs, four scopes of customs and three sources of customs.

Types:

- Legal - You mistakenly thought that a practice is forbidden and therefore refrained from it. It isn't an actual law so it is a *minhag*.
- Ruling - You had a question and asked your rabbi. While this is a matter of debate, he ruled for you. This ruling is your *minhag*. Others might follow another view and have a different *minhag*.
- Pious Practice - You adopt extra practices and stringencies out of religious fervor, a desire to do extra.
- Fence - Out of concern that you might sin, you erect a safeguard, an extra stringency to protect you from sinning. This is your personal fence and not a rabbinic enactment. It is your *minhag*.  
Scopes:
  - Personal - A *minhag* can be your own personal practice, self-tailored to match your personality and inclinations.
  - Family - Many families gave unique practices that are handed down for generations.
  - Local - While we do not see this too much today, in past generations there were unique regional and city *minhagim*.
  - Universal - Some *minhagim* are observed by the entire Jewish people (more or less).  
Sources:
    - Self - A *minhag* can be something that you adopt. You find a specific practice meaningful so you start doing it yourself.
    - Inherited - As is often the case, we are taught *minhagim* by our parents.
    - Mandated - A third source of *minhag* is a practice an ancestor adopted specifically that his

descendants should follow. This has halakhic significance. With all this in mind, let's address when you can remove a minhag. Two debates are crucial for understanding this topic. Rav Baruch Simon's recent *Imrei Barukh*: *Tokef Ha-Minhag Ba-Halakhah* contains three chapters (chs. 3-5) that I found very useful in explaining this subject.

## II. Permit Us

The (Babylonian) Talmud (*Pesachim* 50b) tells the story of Bnei Beishan who had the minhag of refraining from going to the marketplace on Friday, in order to ensure proper preparation for Shabbos and avoid any potential Shabbos violations. They wished to annul this minhag that they had inherited. Rabbi Yochanan told them that they could not because *Proverbs* (1:8) says: "Listen, son, to the rebuke of your father and do not abandon the teaching of your mother."

The Talmud *Yerushalmi* (*Pesachim* 4:1) says that if people observed a minhag because they thought it was the actual law, then if they ask you can permit it for them. If they knew it was not required by the technical law and still observed as an extra measure, then even if they ask, you cannot permit it for them.

The Talmudim take minhagim seriously. You cannot simply drop a custom that you don't like. However, there may be ways of removing them.

## III. Fences

The Ramban and many others (*Rashba*, *Ra'avad*, *Rivash*,...) understand the story of Bnei Beishan as teaching that a custom adopted as a fence cannot be removed. However, other minhagim, that are not intended as fences, may follow different rules. A pious practice, as described above, can be annulled through *hataras nedarim*. The *Rosh* disagrees, arguing that even a fence may be permitted. According to the *Rosh*, Bnei Beishan could have asked for their minhag to be annulled with *hataras nedarim*. Rabbi Yochanan merely told them that, as things stood at the time, they were bound by the minhag. But they could have gotten out of it with *hataras nedarim*.

Significantly, the *Shulchan Arukh* (*Yoreh De'ah* 214:1) follows the *Rosh*, as do all subsequent standard authorities. However, the *Pri Chadash* (*Orach Chaim* 497, par. 5; followed by *Chayei Adam* 127:9) writes that, even according to the *Rosh*, all or most of the people subject to the minhag have to annul it. If an individual receives his own (mistaken) annulment, it doesn't work and he is still bound by the minhag.

Rav Shlomo Luria (*Responsa Maharshah*, no. 6) adds that a custom can only be annulled by someone not bound by it. Therefore, a custom universally practiced by Jews cannot be removed. The *Shakh* (*Yoreh De'ah* 214:4) follows this ruling, as does the *Pri Chadash* (*ibid.*, par. 6), who say that "this is clear." Therefore, universal Jewish customs can never be annulled.

## III. Mistaken Practice

All agree that a practice adopted due to a mistaken understanding is not binding. For example, if you thought a specific food is forbidden and therefore refrained from eating it, and later discovered that there is no basis to consider the food forbidden, you may freely eat that food. The minhag is not binding. You do not even need to do *hataras nedarim*.

The *Pri Chadash* (*ibid.*, par. 2) uses this to explain a rabbi's halakhic ruling on a controversial subject. If there is a long-standing debate about a practice and a community follows one specific view, can they switch to another opinion? Quoting the *Maharshdam* (*Responsa*, *Yoreh De'ah* 40), the *Pri Chadash* explains when and why this is allowed. If a contemporary rabbi proves to his satisfaction that the view the community follows is incorrect, he has rendered their practice a minhag based on a mistake that does not even require *hataras nedarim*.

In other words, if there is a debate between *Rashi* and *Rambam*, and the community's former rabbi had ruled like *Rashi*, the new rabbi has to prove that *Rambam* was right and *Rashi* wrong in order to uproot the established ruling. The *Pri Chadash* adds that few are qualified to weigh in as equals in such debates. He says that in his times, in the seventeenth century, only one or two in a generation are capable. (Yes, he invokes the concept of a *gadol ha-dor* without using the term.) The *Chayei Adam* (127:10) follows this *Pri*

*Chadash* but only mentions one per generation, presumably for stylistic and not substantive reasons. ((Note that the *Chayei Adam* includes this ruling in his chapter on *kitniyos*, which he did not consider a mistaken custom but a fence. As we discussed elsewhere, even Rav Ya'akov Emden, the most authoritative view against *kitniyos*, believed it is a binding custom.))

One of the proofs for this ruling is *Chullin* 111a. Rav Bar Shva went to eat at his teacher Rav Nachman's home. Rav Nachman served liver, which some forbid because of the difficulty in removing blood from the meat. When house servants or other guests informed Rav Nachman that his student was refusing to eat the liver, clearly following the strict view, Rav Nachman instructed them to force the liver down his throat. Rather than show respect for this alternate view, Rav Nachman took a stand for leniency because he had decisively ruled that eating liver is permissible (when prepared properly).

## IV. Received Customs

The rules about annulling customs we have discussed so far have generally referred to the people who initially adopted the customs. If you decide to fast on every Monday to enhance your spirituality (i.e., a pious minhag) or as a way to avoid forbidden foods that are more common in your weekly routine on Monday (i.e., a fence), can you change this practice? Most minhagim we observe today are received from previous generations.

The *Maharshdam* (*ibid.*) argues that you may not annul a received custom. Only the people who accept a custom may annul it because only they know the full reason the custom was adopted. Subsequent generations, who inherit the practice, must follow it. He proves it from Bnei Beishan, who were not allowed to annul the custom (according to the *Ramban* et al).

The *Pri Chadash* (*ibid.*, par. 8) disagrees. He argues that the heir has the same power as the originator. If the person who accepts a custom can annul it, so may his descendants. In this, he follows the *Rosh* (as above) that Bnei Beishan could have annulled their custom but their question was whether they must follow it absent annulment.

The *Pri To'ar* (39:32) takes a middle position. When someone accepts a practice with the intent that his descendants must follow in his footsteps, that custom is binding on them. Otherwise, absent that explicit intent, the custom is a personal stringency that his children need not follow.

## V. Local and Family Customs

Who or what is Beishan? The *Pri Chadash* (*ibid.*, par. 7) explains that Beishan is a contraction of *Beis She'an* (or *Beit She'an* or *Beth She'an*), a city in Israel that still exists. The people of that city, the members of *Beis She'an*, approached Rabbi Yochanan about discarding a local custom. The *Pri To'ar* (*ibid.*) disagrees and assumes that Beishan was a family name. Members of that family asked Rabbi Yochanan about their family custom.

According to the *Pri Chadash* a local custom is binding. As long as you associate with that place, you must follow its customs. The *Mishnah* (*Pesachim* 50a) states that someone who comes from a place with a specific custom must observe it even if he is spending time elsewhere. The *Gemara* (*ad loc.*, 51a) adds that if you move to a place, you become a member of that city and adopt its customs.

Therefore, if you live in a city with a custom you wish to discard, you can move to a city with a contrary custom. However, this only works if the new place has a custom that contradicts the custom of the old place; the new custom overrides the old one. If you move to a city that has no standard custom, in which many people with different customs coexist within one community, then there is no new custom to override the old custom. You must continue practicing your old custom.

Rav Moshe Feinstein (*Iggeros Moshe*, *Even Ha-Ezer* 1:59) writes that there is no such thing as a local custom in America. Everyone who moves to America must keep their prior customs. Similarly, Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (quoted in *R. Yerachmiel Fried*, *Yom Tov Sheini Ke-Hilkhaso* 19:5) rules similarly that Jerusalem has no single custom and no one who moves there may change his customs, except for a few unique customs accepted by all the communities there.

However, according to the Pri To'ar, there is also a concept of a family custom. Even if you move to a place with an established custom, you still have to follow your family customs. Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv rules this way. ((As quoted in R. Moshe Fried, Responsa Va-Yishma Moshe, pp. 267-268; Sefer He'aros Al Masekhes Pesachim, p. 293, both cited by R. Baruch Simon, *ibid.*, p. 71)) Rav Hershel Schachter ("Hashbei'a Hishbi'a" in Beis Yitzchak 39, 2007) explains that some customs are family-based and some locale-based, although they are not always easy to differentiate. You must follow a family custom even if you move to a place that has a different custom. He adds that if you change families, you change family customs. One example is a woman who marries and, generally speaking, adopts the customs of her husband's family. However, sometimes a man with little knowledge of his lineage (e.g. a ba'al teshuvah) marries a woman of prominent lineage and adopts her family's customs.

#### VI. Undoing a Custom

In summary, you can discard a custom if:

- It falls into the category of a mistaken custom
- It is based on a prior halakhic ruling and one of the unique Torah scholars of the generation ruled against this practice
- All (or most) of the people subject to the custom formally annul it (which is not possible with a universal custom)
- You move to a place with a contrary custom, except for family customs
- You change families

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Rabbi Berel Wein <info@jewishdestiny.com> reply-to: info@jewishdestiny.com date: Thu, Aug 6, 2015

#### Parshat Eikev 5775

##### Rabbi Berel Wein

The word with which this week's Torah reading begins literally means 'because of' or 'as a consequence of' one's actions and behavior. However Rashi chooses to define the word 'eikev' in a more allegorical sense. Rashi traces the word to its root where it means the heel of a person. We find that this is its meaning when the Torah describes our father Jacob holding onto the heel of his brother Eisav. Rashi comments that there are "light" or "easy" commandments that people readily denigrate and step upon with their heels. We are warned in Avot that one should not treat any commandment lightly. We human beings are unaware of the true value and reward that attaches to the observance of any commandment. In effect, we are being taught that when it comes to Jewish values and behavior, observance of commandments and moral behavior there is nothing that is trivial or inconsequential. Veins of gold and other valuable metals lie beneath the surface of the earth that we trod upon. If this be true in the physical world that we inhabit how much more so is it true regarding the spiritual - and always mysterious and unpredictable - world in which we exist. We tend to trivialize many important things. This is the part of our makeup which allows us to substitute our human judgment for God's holy commandments. We say that things are unimportant without realizing where this attitude and the behavior that it engenders will lead us to in the future. The road of the Jewish people in history is strewn with the debris of commandments discarded and tradition ignored or ridiculed. We should be careful what we step upon and where our heels leave a mark. Judaism recognizes and allows for changes in societies and circumstances. What it does not allow for is disregarding the commandments of the Torah in favor of current fads and political correctness. Being up-to-date today in behavior, dress and attitude almost guarantees that one will be obsolete tomorrow. There is a tendency in the current Jewish world to somehow separate observance of commandments from Judaism or from Jewish values. All of our history has shown us that these attempts are futile and eventually lead to assimilation and the complete alienation of millions of Jews from the very same Judaism to which they wish to ascribe. Even though we are always influenced by the general culture which surrounds us and we are inescapably touched by it, true change in the Jewish world always comes from within. It also will never occur through

legislation, coercion or hostile behavior towards others. Those who think and act in such a fashion are really stepping upon the very commandments that they wish to uphold. Stepping upon an object on the road or sidewalk can have devastating physical results. Stepping upon the commandments of the Torah occasions spiritual disasters and eventually national consequences. We should not only guard our thoughts and words but our heels as well. Shabbat shalom Rabbi Berel Wein

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from: Shlomo Katz [skatz@torah.org](mailto:skatz@torah.org) to: [hamaayan@torah.org](mailto:hamaayan@torah.org)  
date: Wed, Aug 5, 2015 subject: Hamaayan - Parshas Eikev

#### Hamaayan

##### by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Eikev

##### Rewards

This week's parashah speaks extensively of the praises of Eretz Yisrael. R' Chaim Palagi z"l (1788-1868; chief rabbi of Izmir, Turkey) writes: The sefer Reishit Chochmah [quoting the midrash Kohelet Rabbah] notes that Tanach uses similar terminology to describe the human body and the earth. This is because, just as a person's limbs and organs differ in their qualities, so do various parts of the world differ in their qualities. Some produce iron, some copper, some silver, some gold, and some produce gems. In contrast, Eretz Yisrael's worth is not determined by the minerals it produces, but rather by the fact that it is infused with the Shechinah, which is more precious than gems.

Why then, asks R' Palagi, does our parashah (8:9) seem to praise Eretz Yisrael as: "A Land whose stones are iron and from whose mountains you will mine copper"? He answers: The correct interpretation of this verse is that, after the Torah praises the Land, it adds that if we do not observe the mitzvot, the Land will not produce fruits, as if it was made of iron or copper. The reason for this is that Eretz Yisrael does not produce fruits naturally, as do other lands. Rather, as we read later in the parashah (11:13-14), "It will be that if you listen to My commandments . . . then I shall provide rain for your Land in its proper time, the early and the late rains, that you may gather in your grain, your wine, and your oil."

R' Palagi adds in the name of his son, R' Yitzchak Palagi [z"l]: In the verse quoted above, the Hebrew word "avanehah" / "its stones" has the same letters as the Hebrew word "bana'eha" / "its builders." The initial letters of the Hebrew phrase, "Avanehah barzel u'mei'hararehah tachtzov" / "its stones are iron and from its mountains you will mine [copper]" spells "Avot" / the Patriarchs. And, "barzel" / "iron" is the initial letters of Yaakov Avinu's four wives: Bilhah, Rachel, Zilpah, and Leah. This teaches that Eretz Yisrael is built on the merits of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs. (Artzot Ha'chaim p.26)

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"Not because you are more numerous than all the peoples did Hashem desire you and choose you, for you are the fewest of all the peoples . . ." (7:7)

"You might say in your heart, 'My strength and the might of my hand made me all this wealth!'" (8:17)

"Not because of your righteousness and the uprightness of your heart are you coming to possess their Land . . ." (9:5)

R' Meir Chodosh z"l (1898-1989; mashgiach ruchani of the Chevron Yeshiva in Yerushalayim) writes: We say in Al Ha'nissim on Chanukah that Hashem "gave the powerful into the hands of the weak and the many into the hands of the few." We all know that victory does not depend on strength or on numbers, so why do we even mention these?

He explains: A person is, in fact, extremely susceptible to falling into the trap of believing: "My strength and the might of my hand made me all this wealth!" Thus, the authors of Al Ha'nissim wish to remind us that a prerequisite to calling upon Hashem for salvation is the understanding that,

paraphrasing our verse, not because we are more numerous than all the peoples does Hashem desire us and choose us.

R' Chodosh continues: For a person to have confidence in his physical or military strength is "shtut gamur" / sheer stupidity. Our third verse above teaches that we likewise should not be confident in our own righteousness.

Avraham Avinu understood all of this! That is why he humbly referred to himself in his prayer (Bereishit 18:27) as "dirt and ashes." Not coincidentally, this is the same Avraham who miraculously survived Nimrod's furnace ("ashes") and who, according to the Gemara (Sanhedrin 108b), defeated the Four Kings by throwing dirt at them, which miraculously turned into spears. (Meir Netivot: Moadim p.179)

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"This shall be the reward eikev / when you listen to these ordinances, and you observe and perform them; Hashem, your Elokim, will safeguard for you the covenant and the kindness that He swore to your forefathers. He will love you, bless you and multiply you, and He will bless the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your Land; your grain, your wine, and your oil; the offspring of your cattle and the flocks of your sheep and goats; on the Land that He swore to your forefathers to give you." (7:12)

R' Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev z"l (1740-1809) writes: All of these things, and even man's reward in olam ha'ba, are not the primary reward for man's mitzvah. They are only the "eikev"--literally, the "heel," the lowliest part of man's reward. Man's true reward is the satisfaction of knowing that he made Hashem happy by doing His Will. This is the meaning of our Sages' teaching: "Schar mitzvah mitzvah" / "The reward for a mitzvah is the mitzvah." The very opportunity to do a mitzvah is its own reward. (Kedushat Levi)

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"You shall observe the commandments of Hashem, your Elokim, to go in His ways and fear him." (8:6)

"Now, Yisrael, what does Hashem, your Elokim, ask of you? Only to fear Hashem, your Elokim, to go in all His ways and to love Him, and to serve Hashem, your Elokim, with all your heart and with all your soul." (10:12)

"For if you will observe this entire commandment that I command you, to perform it, to love Hashem, your Elokim, to go in all His ways and to cleave to Him." (11:22)

R' Yisrael Meir Hakohen z"l (the Chafetz Chaim; died 1933) observes that the command to go in Hashem's ways appears in a different place in each of these three verses from our parashah. In the first verse, going in His ways is a prelude to fearing Him. In the second verse, going in His ways comes after fearing Him, and before loving Him. In the third verse, going in His ways follows loving Him and precedes cleaving to Him. He explains:

There are three different levels in serving Hashem: yirah / fear, ahavah / love and d'veikut / cleaving or attachment. The difference between the second and third of these, writes the Chafetz Chaim, is that a person with ahavah may experience love for Hashem only occasionally, while d'veikut is a constant state of feeling love for Him.

The Torah is teaching us, continues the Chafetz Chaim, that the way to advance from one level to another is only by accustoming oneself to "go in His ways," i.e., to emulate Him. Just as He is merciful, so you should be merciful, just as He is gracious, so you should be gracious, just as He does kindness, so you should do kindness. The first verse above teaches that going in His ways is a prerequisite to attaining yirat Shamayim / fear of Heaven. However, a person who has attained yirat Shamayim shouldn't think that now he can study Torah and think lofty thoughts with no concern for the world around him. No! Going in His ways is a prerequisite for attaining ahavat Hashem / love of Hashem as well. Likewise, it is a prerequisite for attaining the highest level--d'veikut to Hashem. (Ahavat Chessed: Introduction)

from: Shabbat Shalom <shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org> reply-to: shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org date: Thu, Aug 6, 2015 at 5:00 PM

### **Does History Need to Be True?**

#### **Rabbi Gil Student**

August 3, 2015 From the Orthodox Jewish perspective, history is a means to an end rather than a goal in itself. There is no similar concept to Torah for its own sake--history for its own sake. This translates into two different utilitarian attitudes. One sees history as a source of inspiration, a method of increasing devotion to religious principles. The other sees history as a series of lessons on human nature and divine providence. Both view history from a utilitarian lens, but the different perspectives yield radically different results that pit segments of Orthodox society against each other.

If history is a source of inspiration, it need not be accurate. History consists of stories, almost parables based on a true story. As long as the story works, it can be accepted as history; if it fails to inspire, it must be rejected. Historical truth is only as valuable as its positive message. This entails no intellectual dishonesty as long as there is no real claim to accuracy. History is meant to convey themes, as the punchline goes: "I don't know if the stories about [any given rabbi] are true but they don't tell such stories about you and me."

On the other hand, if history is a series of case studies in religious personalities and communities, it must be preserved in its full glory. We may not be able to make sense of the complex events immediately but we must first determine what happened and then attempt to learn from it. If we distort the past, we cannot properly apply it to our times. Changing history will condemn us to repeat the mistakes of our ancestors. This is the tradition I was taught.

#### **Editing History**

Professor Marc Shapiro, in his recent book *Changing the Immutable: How Orthodox Judaism Rewrites Its History* (Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2015; \$37.95) reveals a wide variety of what he considers censorship in the Orthodox community and beyond. I am sure he would agree that some examples are merely editorial decisions. Every living author has an editor who polishes the manuscript. A deceased author deserves the same privilege, although the editor must observe the same restraint he would use with a live author.

Shapiro, as a historian, wants access to unedited manuscripts because they offer valuable historical insights. However, publishers must use sound editorial judgment to preserve the quality of their product. Failing to do so risks tarring the authors' reputations by depriving them of the editorial services they would have received in their lifetime.

This only becomes censorship when the editor wields his red pen too strongly. Shapiro describes the debate surrounding Rav Tzvi Yehudah Kook's editing of his father's writings. Shapiro clearly feels that the younger Kook took too much liberty with his father's previously unpublished writings while others believe he was merely serving the role of faithful editor.

#### **Changing History**

Some publishers believe they can re-edit previously published books. A reasonable argument can be made that sensibilities change and the author would write differently for a contemporary audience. I believe that once a book is published, it is complete; only its author should be allowed to revise it and only if he clearly marks it as a new edition. We cannot un-ring a bell or un-publish a book.

Shapiro tells how publishers in the mid-20th century removed criticism of the Rambam from Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch's classic, *Nineteen Letters*. Those from the inspirational school of history see it as an important edit, given changing sensibilities since mid-19th century Germany. I see it as an attempt to erase a piece of history, to deprive Rav Hirsch of his opinion, even though I believe it mistaken. If we cut off a piece of Rav Hirsch's personality, we lose sight of who he truly was.

In 1954, a publisher, reportedly on instructions from the Satmar Rebbe, published a commentary by Rav Moshe Sofer, omitting a passage implying that Shabbos ends 35 minutes after sunset. Those who insist that Shabbos ends later may not want such an authoritative, contrary source. Alternately, maybe they wanted to preserve contemporary respect for the lenient scholar. Regardless, the interests of learning from the past demands that we accurately know what past scholars truly believed.

Shapiro's examples range from the benign to the outrageous. Because Shapiro wrote this book as a collection of examples and not a balanced presentation of the Orthodox community's beliefs, as he states explicitly, he emphasizes the attitude that sees history as inspirational material. He spends almost no time on those within the Orthodox community who strongly object to this activity.

#### Frustrating Censors

Those who adopt the other view, that history should be studied as it happened, find great frustration in many of these acts of censorship. When publishers of Rav David Tzvi Hoffmann's responsa whited out a letter in which the author discussed Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch's policy that students in his school sit bareheaded during secular studies, they deprive us of an important example of balancing a traditional life with the pressures of living in a modern society. We don't have to follow this precedent to learn from it, perhaps considering it the wrong balance. Thankfully, a new edition of this volume was published in 2010 with the responsum returned to its rightful place.

About a decade ago, I consulted with one of the more right-leaning senior YU roshai yeshiva about a possible scholarly project compiling commentaries on the Torah. When the issue arose of controversial statements by medieval biblical commentators, he told me in no uncertain terms, "We do not censor Rishonim (medieval commentators)." I believe he would say the same about Torah giants from any other period. Orthodox Judaism does not need its history to look like its present. We are blessed by variety, even if many opinions remain marginal. By censoring the past, we lose a part of our Torah heritage, even if we follow a different opinion.

A review of Artsroll biographies, which Shapiro does not do, reveals a surprising mix of attitudes to historical accuracy. On the one hand, the biography of Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch, a detailed and scholarly study, rewrites him as a contemporary Charedi. However, the biography of Rav Eliyahu Dessler includes pictures of rabbinic wives with uncovered hair, a historical fact that must surely frustrate contemporary Charedim. The Artsroll biography of the Vilna Gaon, a translation of Rav Betzalel Landau's Hebrew work, contains a previously unpublished chapter detailing the heated controversy over Chasidism (Shapiro criticizes Landau on p. 51 but seems to have missed this addition to the English translation). And, while not published by Artsroll, Rav Dov Eliach's 3-volume biography of the Vilna Gaon lays out the controversy in enormous detail.

Controversy does not increase the glory of God. However, wiping out the memory of controversy condemns us to repeat the mistakes of history. Thankfully, many in the Orthodox community object to the overzealous ideological editing that Shapiro documents in his book.

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From: Chanan Morrison <ravkooklist@gmail.com> reply-to: rav-kooklist+owners@googlegroups.com to: Rav Kook List <**Rav-Kook-List**@googlegroups.com> date: Wed, Aug 5, 2015 at 6:50 AM subject: [Rav Kook List] **Eikev: Blessings Over Bread and Torah**

Eikev: Blessings Over Bread and Torah

#### Two Blessings from the Torah

Most blessings are of rabbinical origin. There are, however, two exceptions to this rule - blessings that are derived directly from the Torah itself. The first is Birkat Hamazon, recited after meals; the second is the blessing said before learning Torah.

The obligation to bless God after eating bread is stated explicitly:

"When you eat and are satisfied, you must bless the Lord your God..." (Deut. 8:10). The Sages derived the blessing before studying Torah from the verse,

"When I proclaim God's name [or: when I read God's teaching], praise our God for His greatness" (Deut. 32:3). These two blessings differ not only in the source for our feelings of gratitude - one is for physical nourishment, the other for spiritual sustenance - but also in when they are said. Why is Birkat Hamazon recited after the meal, while the blessing for Torah study is recited before studying?

#### Two Benefits of Food

We derive two benefits from food. The first is our enjoyment from the act of eating, especially if the food is tasty. This is a fleeting pleasure, but it nonetheless deserves to be acknowledged. The primary benefit from eating, however, is the sustenance it gives our bodies, enabling us to continue living. This primary benefit reflects the nutritional value of the food, regardless of its taste.

Our recognition of the principal benefit of eating should take place after the meal, when the body digests and absorbs the food. Since Birkat Hamazon expresses our gratitude for physical sustenance, its logical place is at the end of the meal.

Parenthetically, there are also blessings that are recited before eating. These blessings are in recognition of our pleasure in the act of eating itself. We acknowledge this secondary benefit of eating with rabbinically-ordained blessings.

#### Two Benefits of Torah Study

Torah study also provides us with two benefits. The first is the knowledge acquired in practical areas of Halachah, enabling us to live our lives according to the Torah's wisdom.

The second benefit lies in the very act of learning Torah. Torah study in itself is a tremendous gift, even if it does not provide any practical applications. When we learn Torah, the soul is elevated as our minds absorb the sublime word of God.

Which benefit is greater? The Sages taught that the unique sanctity of the Torah itself is higher than all deeds that come from its study: "One who studies Torah for its own sake is raised and uplifted above all actions" (Avot 6:1). The benefit of practical knowledge is important, but is only a secondary gain.

Therefore, we recite the blessing over Torah before studying. If the blessing was meant to acknowledge the practical benefit of how to perform mitzvot, then it would be said afterwards, since this Halachic knowledge is gained as a result of Torah study. But the blessing over Torah refers to the principle gift of Torah study. When we bless God before studying, we acknowledge the spiritual elevation that we enjoy in the very act of contemplating God's Torah.

Now we can understand why the source in the Torah for this blessing reads, "When I proclaim God's name." Why does the verse refer to the Torah as "God's name"? This blessing requires that we recognize the sublime inner essence of the Torah as "God's name." With awareness of this truth, Torah study can enlighten and uplift us "above all actions."

(Gold from the Land of Israel, pp. 307-309; adapted from Ein Eyah vol. I, p. 103 (on Berachot 20).)

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