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Rabbi Reisman – Parshas Eikev 5775

The Parsha has in it (11:13) the Parsha of (הקנה, אם-ש'מע), the second Parsha of Kriyas Shema and in that Parsha we are warned 11:16 (השקרו לכם) we are warned to be very careful. The Posuk says (פן יפתה לבבכם; וסרתם) you may stray and (ועבדתם אלהים אחרים) you will go on to idolatry. What is (וסרתם)? Rashi says (לפרוש מן התורה) from Torah, learning not from Mitzvos. What is going on? (וסרתם) because you are not going to be learning? (ועבדתם אלהים אחרים) you will fall into idol worship? Those are two extremes!

There is a Frum Yid in the middle, there is a Frum Yid who learns on the right, and there are idolaters far on the left. What is going on? (וסרתם) should say that you won't keep Shabbos, you won't put on Tefillin. What is it saying that you won't learn Torah?

In the Igros of Rav Hutner in the Pachad Yitzchok in Igeres 75 which is not a letter but rather a speech, a Dvar Chizuk that we can call a Maimar that Rav Hutner gave to Bnei Torah. He spoke to them about this question. He said if you would tell a person that if you don't eat the fanciest foods you will die of hunger we will say that doesn't make sense. Fancy foods are one extreme, hunger is the other extreme and there is plenty in between. That is true. When it comes to serving HKB"H we say if you don't learn Torah you will fall to idolatry. You will fall to negative influences. Why? Says Rav Hutner, nature abhors a vacuum. When it comes to Shittas Hachaim, to ideas in a person's life, thoughts in a person's life, if a person doesn't have Torah something else will take its place. If a person doesn't have Torah then he is not just failing to have one Mayla but he is leaving himself open to a vacuum of influence from the world around him. Keeping Mitzvos is our primary goal in serving HKB"H. But the Limud Hatorah, besides the Mitzvah, is our protection against the influences around us. It is our Taiva (תבנה), our protection.

Therefore, says Rav Hutner there is a powerful lesson that we say every day. (וסרתם) if you don't learn Torah, be careful, it is a cliff. You will fall G-d

forbid (אלהים אחרים) as far as idolatry. Idolatry referring to the influences of the world around us. What a strong Mussar.

3. We have also in the Parsha of Kriyas Shema, the reference to a successful crop. 11:14 (ואספת דגנה, ותירשך ויצהרך). The Torah says that you will gather your wheat, wine, and oil. Actually there are 7 fruits with which Eretz Yisrael is blessed. Four of them are mentioned here. Wheat includes (הקנה וישערה). We are missing the dates, figs, and pomegranates which are not mentioned here. They are mentioned on a different occasion. This is a rule for Kol Hatorah Kulah. The Torah always seems to use Dagan, Tirosh, and Yitzhor as the primary crops.

Terumah and Maaser according to most Shittos are obligatory Min Hatorah only on Dagan, Tirosh, and Yitzhor. What is special about these 3 crops? Rav Schwab in Mayan Bais Hashoeiva in Parshas Shelach (page # 326 in the piece that goes on 15:2-5) says Dagan, wheat is related to wisdom. The Gemara in Maseches Berachos 40a (3 lines from the bottom) says ( שאין דגן (התינוק יודע לקרות אבא ואמא עד שיטעום טעם דגן). Until a child has tasted a Kezayis Dagan he doesn't recognize some certain simple things. Tirosh, wine, affects a person as it says in Tehillim 104:15 (ויין, וישמה לבב-אנוש). Oil of course is the symbol of light and not only that but it has the idea of being Tov L'zikaron as the Gemara says in Maseches Horayos 3 that olive oil is good for Zikaron. We find elsewhere that the drinking of olive oil brings a certain level of understanding, of knowledge.

We say in Al Hamichya (ל'אכול מפרנה ולשבוע משיבה) We want to eat the Peiros of Eretz Yisrael, the Bach in Siman 208 in Orech Chaim says that the Kedusha of Eretz Yisrael is Mashpia. How is it Mashpia? It is Mashpia on certain fruits that they affect us in a positive way. Dagan, Tirosh, and Yitzhor are those fruits. And so, it is learned here (ותירשך ויצהרך) that even in a person's work the Dagan, Tirosh, and Yitzhor have a positive influence on people in Eretz Yisrael and that should be the Kavana of one's eating and drinking, of one's purchase of Dafka wine from Eretz Yisrael, wine which has this extra Segulah of Kedushas Eretz Yisrael.

With these thoughts I wish one and all an absolutely wonderful Shabbos. Hoping that you are enjoying your summer. For those of you who are traveling up to the mountains, remember those 6 hours that you spend traveling up to the mountains. Ok for some people it is 5 hours. These are hours which you will designate for Limud Hatorah once the summer comes to an end. Suddenly you have these extra 5 hours in your week, make good use of them. IY"H we hope to remind you of this when the summer comes to an end. A Gutten Shabbos to one and all!

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Rashi comments that the word Ekev used here as meaning because or therefore is really the same word in Hebrew for the heel of a human being. Like all parts of our bodies, the heel is valuable, useful and vulnerable. Just ask Achilles! Fashion states that sinful people use the heel to trample on Godly commandments and moral strictures. The heel thus becomes a negative representation of the use of the human body for nefarious purposes. In American slang when wish to insult someone or describe that person in a negative fashion we call that person a heel. This can perhaps help us to understand the name of Yaakov in the Torah. He was called Yaakov because at birth he was holding on to the 'ekav' of his brother Eisav. The mission of the righteous is to prevent the wicked from trampling, with their heels, on all that is moral, holy and good. In that sense the task of the Jewish people throughout its history has been to hold on to the heel of Eisav and prevent it from crushing goodness and morality. And so this struggle remains with us until this very day.

Ekev in the sense of heel also represents stability and proper balance. If God forbid our heel is injured or hurts badly we cannot eat or certainly run

properly. We limp and moan and pray for medical relief. Well the same idea applies to situations when we use our heel improperly to step upon any of the commandments and values of the Torah.

The wicked limp through life unbalanced and morally crippled. The heel that tramples on good, aches. It is a constant reminder of the true cost of sin and disobedience. This is really the substance of the entire message of the oration of Moshe to all of Israel here in the book of Dvarim. Nothing can be clearer to us than the words of Moshe. He warns us to be very careful of how we use our heel. We should treat it as a vital organ and limb and not foolishly misuse or abuse it. Be careful what you step on. Perhaps this is implicit in the words of the Talmud, that one should lower one's eyes when walking in the public street. Step carefully.

Shabbat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

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Britain's Former Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

Why Civilisations Fail (Eikev 5777)

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

What is the real challenge of maintaining a free society? In parshat Eikev, Moses springs his great surprise. Here are his words:

Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God... Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery... You may say to yourself, "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me..." If you ever forget the Lord your God... I testify against you today that you will surely be destroyed. (Deut. 8:11-19)

What Moses was saying to the new generation was this: You thought that the forty years of wandering in the wilderness were the real challenge, and that once you conquer and settle the land, your problems will be over. The truth is that it is then that the real challenge will begin. It will be precisely when all your physical needs are met – when you have land and sovereignty and rich harvests and safe homes – that your spiritual trial will commence.

The real challenge is not poverty but affluence, not insecurity but security, not slavery but freedom. Moses, for the first time in history, was hinting at a law of history. Many centuries later it was articulated by the great 14th century Islamic thinker, Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406), by the Italian political philosopher Giambattista Vico (1668-1744), and most recently by the Harvard historian Niall Ferguson. Moses was giving an account of the decline and fall of civilisations.

Ibn Khaldun argued similarly, that when a civilisation becomes great, its elites get used to luxury and comfort, and the people as a whole lose what he called their *asabiyah*, their social solidarity. The people then become prey to a conquering enemy, less civilised than they are but more cohesive and driven.

Vico described a similar cycle:

"People first sense what is necessary, then consider what is useful, next attend to comfort, later delight in pleasures, soon grow dissolute in luxury, and finally go mad squandering their estates."

Bertrand Russell put it powerfully in the introduction to his *History of Western Philosophy*. Russell thought that the two great peaks of civilisation were reached in ancient Greece and Renaissance Italy. But he was honest enough to see that the very features that made them great contained the seeds of their own demise:

What had happened in the great age of Greece happened again in Renaissance Italy: traditional moral restraints disappeared, because they were seen to be associated with superstition; the liberation from fetters made

individuals energetic and creative, producing a rare fluorescence of genius; but the anarchy and treachery which inevitably resulted from the decay of morals made Italians collectively impotent, and they fell, like the Greeks, under the domination of nations less civilised than themselves but not so destitute of social cohesion.

Niall Ferguson, in his book *Civilisation: the West and the Rest* (2011) argued that the West rose to dominance because of what he calls its six "killer applications": competition, science, democracy, medicine, consumerism and the Protestant work ethic. Today however it is losing belief in itself and is in danger of being overtaken by others.

All of this was said for the first time by Moses, and it forms a central argument of the book of Devarim. If you assume – he tells the next generation – that you yourselves won the land and the freedom you enjoy, you will grow complacent and self-satisfied. That is the beginning of the end of any civilisation. In an earlier chapter Moses uses the graphic word *venoshantem*, "you will grow old" (Deut. 4:25), meaning that you will no longer have the moral and mental energy to make the sacrifices necessary for the defence of freedom.

Inequalities will grow. The rich will become self-indulgent. The poor will feel excluded. There will be social divisions, resentments and injustices. Society will no longer cohere. People will not feel bound to one another by a bond of collective responsibility. Individualism will prevail. Trust will decline. Social capital will wane.

This has happened, sooner or later, to all civilisations, however great. To the Israelites – a small people surrounded by large empires – it would be disastrous. As Moses makes clear towards the end of the book, in the long account of the curses that would overcome the people if they lost their spiritual bearings, Israel would find itself defeated and devastated.

Only against this background can we understand the momentous project the book of Devarim is proposing: the creation of a society capable of defeating the normal laws of the growth-and-decline of civilisations. This is an astonishing idea.

How is it to be done? By each person bearing and sharing responsibility for the society as a whole. By each knowing the history of his or her people. By each individual studying and understanding the laws that govern all. By teaching their children so that they too become literate and articulate in their identity.

Rule 1: Never forget where you came from.

Next, you sustain freedom by establishing courts, the rule of law and the implementation of justice. By caring for the poor. By ensuring that everyone has the basic requirements of dignity. By including the lonely in the people's celebrations. By remembering the covenant daily, weekly, annually in ritual, and renewing it at a national assembly every seven years. By making sure there are always prophets to remind the people of their destiny and expose the corruptions of power.

Rule 2: Never drift from your foundational principles and ideals.

Above all it is achieved by recognising a power greater than ourselves. This is Moses' most insistent point. Societies start growing old when they lose faith in the transcendent. They then lose faith in an objective moral order and end by losing faith in themselves.

Rule 3: A society is as strong as its faith.

Only faith in God can lead us to honour the needs of others as well as ourselves. Only faith in God can motivate us to act for the benefit of a future we will not live to see. Only faith in God can stop us from wrongdoing when we believe that no other human will ever find out. Only faith in God can give us the humility that alone has the power to defeat the arrogance of success and the self-belief that leads, as Paul Kennedy argued in *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (1987), to military overstretch and national defeat.

Towards the end of his book *Civilisation*, Niall Ferguson quotes a member of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, part of a team tasked with the challenge of discovering why it was that Europe, having lagged behind

China until the 17th century, overtook it, rising to prominence and dominance.

At first, he said, we thought it was your guns. You had better weapons than we did. Then we delved deeper and thought it was your political system. Then we searched deeper still, and concluded that it was your economic system. But for the past 20 years we have realized that it was in fact your religion. It was the (Judeo-Christian) foundation of social and cultural life in Europe that made possible the emergence first of capitalism, then of democratic politics.

Only faith can save a society from decline and fall. That was one of Moses' greatest insights, and it has never ceased to be true.

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subject: Rabbi Riskin on the Weekly Torah Portion Shabbat Shalom" – Ekev 5777

Rabbi Shlomo Riskin's Weekly Parsha Column

Parshat Ekev (Deuteronomy 7:12-11:25)

Efrat, Israel – “And it shall come to pass, because you hearken to these laws, safeguarding and keeping them, that the Lord your God shall keep the covenant with you and the mercy that He swore unto your ancestors, and He will love you, and bless you...in the land which He swore to your ancestors to give you” [Deut. 7:12–13].

How secure can world Jewry – and the citizens of Israel – feel about the future of the Jewish State? Have we returned to Israel for good, or does this “third commonwealth” represent only a possible opportunity, its long-term stability dependent on the moral, ethical, and spiritual commitment of its residents?

In this week's portion of Ekev we find two passages that, at first glance, seem to contradict each other concerning this issue. The first passage, cited above, speaks for itself: our entire relationship to the land depends on our fidelity to the terms of the covenant. In fact, the opening word of the portion, “Ekev,” is a conditional term (the desired goal will result “because,” “ekev”), underscoring the theme of qualification.

If the Jewish People were to forsake the covenant, they would have to pay the price of not inheriting the land. If they uphold the covenant, then God will bless them in the land that He promised our ancestors. The observance of the commandments may be compared to mortgage payments; default on the mortgage and the property gets taken away.

However, the Torah continues: “Not for your righteousness or for the uprightness of your heart did you go to possess their land; but it was because of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord your God drove them out before you” (ibid., 9:5).

Here the Almighty presents a different approach to our right to the land; it has less to do with our worthiness, and more to do with our neighbors' lack of worthiness. We are being judged in comparison to the nations around us rather than in the absolute terms of our own conduct.

To reconcile these passages, Rabbi Hayyim Ibn Attar [“Or HaHayyim HaKadosh”] distinguishes between two stages in the redemptive process: entering the Land of Israel, and remaining there for good.

Our initial entry into the land comes about as a result of the evil of the other nations rather than our own righteousness, as well as God's promise to the Patriarchs. But whether or not we remain on the land, whether a particular “return” will become the anticipated redemption or a mere passing episode, depends solely upon our ethical, moral, and spiritual conduct, as indicated by the initial verse of our Torah reading.

There is also an alternate (and more comforting) way to orchestrate these verses, as Ohr HaHayyim explains. Initially, when the Almighty makes His covenantal guarantee that the descendants of Abraham will inherit the promised land, He stipulates that as soon as the Canaanites demonstrate totally unacceptable moral behavior, “in the fourth generation, they [the Jewish People] will return here” (Gen. 15:16).

Then the Torah outlines the ultimate boundaries of Israel: “On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abraham saying, ‘Unto your seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates’” (v. 18).

Hence, Ohr HaHayyim suggests that whether or not we prove ourselves worthy, God promises that He will take us out of Egypt and out of every enslavement and bring us to our homeland, unconditionally.

But how much of the Promised Land comes into our possession – whether or not we get to inherit the full boundaries from the Nile to the Euphrates – depends upon our actions and morality. And what is clear from the second interpretation of Ohr HaHayyim is that our ability – or worthiness – to remain on Israeli soil is not an “all-or-nothing” situation. If we are partially good, we have a good chance of remaining on a goodly portion of Israel. This second interpretation is much more optimistic and heartening for us today; but it also teaches us that if we are forced to give up parts of the land, we may be receiving an important message from Above that our behavior is not what it ought to be – especially in terms of how we behave towards each other. It is because of His compassionate righteousness that the Almighty initially chose Abraham (ibid., 18:19) and because of Israel's lack thereof that our Holy Temple was destroyed (Is. 1).

Nahmanides explains that after the destruction of the first Temple, God guaranteed that He would effectuate deliverance no matter what. After the second destruction, there would also be a deliverance, but it would be dependent upon our doing teshuva, upon our repentance. According to Maimonides, this act of repentance is not a commandment, but is rather a guarantee. God promises that we will repent and then we will be redeemed. Obviously, the sooner we repent the sooner will come the redemption, but the Almighty guarantees that redemption will arrive!  
Shabbat Shalom

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Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim

From the teachings of the Rosh Yeshiva

Ha-Rav Shlomo Aviner Shlit"a

Rav Shlomo Aviner

Who Establishes What Occurs in the World?

Question: If you say that Hashem establishes what occurs in the world, then why do we exert effort, Hashem has already decided what will happen? If a sick person will be cured, why should the doctor toil? And if you say that people establish what occurs in the world, everything will be out of control and a mess. If people establish what occurs, what will happen to the world? Oy vavoy!

Answer: Both Hashem and people establish what occurs. How do these work together? Many of our Sages discuss this subject and provide various answers, but the most simple answer is that Hashem causes good to be brought about through the agency of righteous people and bad to be brought about through the agency of evil people. This means that Hashem decides the outcome and we decide the means. Hashem decides that a sick person will be healed and the doctor decides that it will be through his agency because he works with self-sacrifice to save him. Or Hashem decides that a sick person will die and the doctor decides that it will be through his agency because he acts in a negligent fashion. The Gemara in Shabbat (32a) discusses the Mitzvah of the "Maakeh" - a person must build a guardrail around his roof. Why? The Torah literally says, "Because a falling person may fall from it" (Devarim 22:8). The Gemara says that of course a falling person will fall off the roof, who else will fall off a roof – a person who is not falling? Our Sages state that the reason he is referred to as a "falling person" is that it was decreed that he will fall. If it was decreed that he will fall than why do we have to make a guardrail? If it was decreed that he will

fall, he will fall even with a guardrail, and if it was decreed that he will not fall even without a guardrail he will not fall. Answer: Hashem decreed that he will fall with or without a guardrail, but if he falls and you have a guardrail, you are not guilty. If you did not make a guardrail and he falls, however, you are guilty – woe to you - because bad occurred through the agency of a person lacking merit.

Another example is brought by Rashi on the Torah (Shemot 21:12): There are two men, one who killed inadvertently and should be exiled to one of the cities of refuge and one who killed intentionally and should be kill, but there were no witnesses to either event. Thus, the first was not exiled and the second was not killed. Hashem brings them together in one inn. The one who killed inadvertently climbs a ladder, slips and falls on to and kills the one who killed intentionally. As a result, the one who killed intentionally is killed as he deserves and the one who killed inadvertently killed inadvertently again. He is exiled since there are many witnesses in the inn. This is called, "Wickedness comes forth from the wicked" - Hashem causes bad to be brought about through the agency of evil people.

Obviously, good also comes through the agency of good people. Massechet Semachot (chapter 8) says: Do not think that the entire Redemption was in the merit of Moshe Rabbenu, and if it were not for Moshe Rabbenu the Nation of Israel would not have been redeemed? No, good comes through the agency of righteous people. It occurred through Moshe Rabbenu because of his righteousness. The Pesach Haggadah says: "Me and not an angel, Me and not a Seraf, Me and not an agent." But Moshe Rabbenu was an agent?! Even though Moshe Rabbenu was the national leader and divine messenger, do not think that it was dependent on him. If it was not Moshe Rabbenu who brought us out, Hashem would have found somebody else. Our Sages also say that the Torah had to be given to the Nation of Israel, and even without Moshe Rabbenu, Hashem would have found another messenger (ibid.). The Temple would have been built even with David and Shlomo. And the Jews would have been redeemed in the time of Haman, even without Mordechai and Esther. It is an explicit verse in the Megillah, "For if you continue to remain silent at a time like this, relief and salvation will come to the Jews from some other place" (Esther 4:14). And so too, on the other side, even without Pharaoh we would have been enslaved, and we would have been exiled even without Nebuchadnezzar. Good things are brought about through the agency of righteous people and bad things are brought out through the agency of evil people. Hashem has many agents, and many snakes and many scorpions. Question: Why were the Egyptians punished for oppressing the Jews when the Torah says (Bereshit 16:13): "Your offspring will be strangers in a land not their own, they will serve them, and they will oppress them four hundred years"? The Rambam explains that the Egyptians did not oppress the Jews because Hashem forced them to do so, but because they wanted to do so (Hilchos Teshuvah 6:5). What would have happened if none of the Egyptians wanted to oppress us? Do not worry, when there is a need to oppress the Nation of Israel or to perform evil in general, there are always plenty of volunteers. So too, when good needs to be performed in the world – there are also plenty of volunteers. "For Hashem will not cast off His Nation, nor will He forsake His heritage" (Tehillim 94:14).

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Personal Supplications on Shabbos and Yom Tov

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

In Parshas Eikev, the Torah tells us that Moshe Rabbeinu prayed for the Jewish people.

Would he have been permitted to do this on Shabbos? And would he have been permitted to pray for the needs of an individual on Shabbos, or perhaps just for the entire community?

Question # 1: Harachaman Hullabaloo

"I know that some people do not recite the harachamans at the end of bensching on Shabbos, but I was raised saying them. Am I doing something wrong?"

Question #2: The Monotonous Mishebeirach Mode

I am impatient calls me with the following question: "Can we do anything to reduce the number of mishebeirachs in our shul? It is taking longer and longer, and I find the delay quite disturbing."

Question #3:

Kibud Av versus Kavod Shabbos

Michal's father asks her to arrange a minyan to daven on his behalf on Shabbos. May she?

Question #4:

On Shabbos morning, Shlomo asks the shul's gabbai. "My father will be having surgery this week. Can we say a chapter of Tehillim on his behalf after davening when everyone is still in shul?"

Answer:

In several places, the Gemara mentions that one may not pray for individual needs on Shabbos (e.g., Taanis 19a; Bava Basra 91a; Yerushalmi, Shabbos, 15:3). At least two reasons are quoted for this prohibition. Some sources include it under what the Navi Yeshaya (58:13) commanded when he declared, Vechibadto mei'asos derachecha mimitzo cheftzecha vedabeir davar, "You shall honor the Shabbos by not performing your own matters, seeking out your own needs and speaking of them" (Vayikra Rabbah 34:16; Rashba, Shabbos 113a). This proscription is usually simply called dabeir davar.

A second opinion

Others prohibit praying for personal requests on Shabbos because it violates one's oneg Shabbos. Praying for personal needs causes one to focus on what troubles him, which leads a person to be sorrowful (see Rambam, Hilchos Shabbos 30:12 and Ran, Shabbos, Rif page 5b). Shabbos is to be a day of joy.

According to both reasons, dabeir davar and oneg Shabbos, we now understand why, on Motza'ei Shabbos, we insert the passage atah chonantanu, which is a declaration of havdalah ending Shabbos, in the fourth brocha of shemoneh esrei, which is the first of the weekday brachos. The reason is that we may not recite the middle brachos of the shemoneh esrei until we have recited havdalah (Yerushalmi, Brachos end of 5:2; Shu"t HaRashba #739; Magen Avraham 294:1). Someone who forgot to recite atah chonantanu and realizes while in the middle of shemoneh esrei may continue the shemoneh esrei, but should not add any personal supplications to his prayer. The reason for this ruling will be explained shortly.

"Provide us, sustain us..."

If personal supplications are prohibited on Shabbos, how can we say in our bensching the personal requests to Hashem "Provide us, sustain us..."? The same question exists in many of the prayers that we recite on Shabbos, such as the Yehi ratzon prayer we recite at the end of the morning birchos hashachar. How are we permitted to recite this prayer on Shabbos?

This question is asked in the Gemara Yerushalmi, which I quote:

We learned: It is prohibited to pray for one's needs on Shabbos. Rabbi Ze'eira asked Rabbi Chiya bar Abba, "When reciting the bensching, may one say 'Tend to us, provide us with livelihood' [re' einu, zuneinu, in the third brocha]?" Rabbi Chiya bar Abba answered him that this is permitted because this is the standard structure of the brocha (Yerushalmi, Shabbos 15:3).

Thus, the Yerushalmi introduces a new idea: that something that is a standard part of a tefillah or brocha may be recited on Shabbos, a concept called tofeis brocha. For this reason, we do not modify the words of bensching or the other brachos that we usually recite.

What is the logic behind permitting tofeis brocha? This is still a request that should be prohibited for one of the two reasons mentioned above.

I found three interpretations to explain why we may recite a prayer that is included in a tofeis brocha.

I. Distorted brachos

The Korban HaEidah, one of the primary commentaries on the Yerushalmi, explains that tofeis brocha is permitted because of concern that changing the wording on Shabbos might cause one to get confused and recite the entire brocha incorrectly.

II. Changing the nusach

The Rivash (Shu"t HaRivash #512) explains the reason for tofeis brocha is because one does not change a text established by Chazal. Thus, the prohibition against making personal requests on Shabbos never applied to standard texts. The Rivash then extends this idea even to selichos and piyutim – and it is for this reason that when we recite these passages on Shabbos that falls on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, we recite the exact same text as we do when Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur fall on a weekday.

III. Familiarity breeds content

Others provide yet a third reason to explain why one may recite a supplication that is incorporated in a tofeis brocha: something that one says regularly does not cause him suffering (Kuntrus Bakashos BeShabbos page 3, quoting Yafeh Mareh and Ateres Paz 1:2:2). This approach assumes that the reason we may not pray for personal

supplications on Shabbos is not because of the takkanah of dabeir davar but only because of the reason of oneg Shabbos.

Harachaman Hullabaloo

At this point, we can already discuss the first question raised above:

“I know that some people do not recite the harachamans at the end of bensching on Shabbos, but I was raised saying them. Am I doing something wrong?”

No, you are in good company, together with many well-respected poskim. The Mishnah Berurah (188:9) rules that one may recite the harachamans on Shabbos – they are also considered tofeis brachos.

Some authorities extend the lenience of tofeis brocha considerably, ruling that the prohibition against reciting supplications on Shabbos applies only to a prayer that one constructs oneself, but does not apply to any standardized prayer (Shu”t Rav Pe’alim, Orach Chayim 2:46).

Pikuach nefesh

Aside from the situation of tofeis brachos, there is another case when one may recite personal supplications on Shabbos, and that is when the situation is one of pikuach nefesh, life-threatening emergency. Just as saving lives supersedes Shabbos and most mitzvos of the Torah, so one is permitted to pray for deliverance when faced by an immediate life-threatening emergency. For example, the Mishnah (Taanis 19a) teaches that one prays on Shabbos that Hashem save the people when a city is surrounded by invaders, when a river overflows, or when a boat is floundering at sea.

The same is true for an individual. Just as pikuach nefesh of an individual supersedes Shabbos, so, too, praying for an individual’s deliverance in a life-threatening circumstance supersedes Shabbos when it is a sakanas hayom – a circumstance that presents an immediate, life-threatening emergency (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 288:9, 10). Therefore, if someone is very seriously ill and his life is in immediate danger, we say Tehillim and pray on his behalf, even on Shabbos. However, if the person is seriously ill but not in immediate danger, we do not say Tehillim for him on Shabbos, but wait until after Shabbos. Thus, the Mishnah Berurah (288:28) rules that a woman giving birth or a woman who gave birth within the past week are both considered sakanas hayom, and one may pray for them on Shabbos.

Out-of-town ill

Is one permitted to daven on Shabbos for an ill person who is not in my city? Why does it make a difference where the ill person is?

Some authorities contend that since one does not know if his condition is a sakanas hayom, these prayers might be desecrating Shabbos unnecessarily (Maharil cited by Machatzis HaShekel 288:14). The accepted practice follows those who permit these prayers, considering them a safek pikuach nefesh (Nachalas Shivah).

Can I get rid of all those mishebeirachs?

At this point, let us examine a different one of our opening questions.

Iam Impatient asked: “Can we do anything to reduce the number of mishebeirachs in our shul? It is taking longer and longer, and I find the delay quite disturbing.”

I mentioned above the dispute as to whether the prohibition of personal supplications on Shabbos is because of the law of dabeir davar, meaning that one should not discuss this-worldly matters on Shabbos, or it is because of oneg Shabbos -- praying for personal needs may cause one to become sorrowful. Is there any difference in halachah between the two reasons?

Indeed, there are some differences in halachah that result from this disagreement. One dispute that results is germane to whether one may recite a mishebeirach for an ill person on Shabbos. The standard text for this mishebeirach when recited on a weekday includes a short prayer that the ill person should have a complete recovery. Logically, it should be prohibited to recite this on Shabbos, since it is a private request. Yet, some early authorities rule that when the ill person is not nearby, one may recite these mishebeirachs on Shabbos, reasoning that one does not become sorrowful when reciting a mishebeirach for someone not present (responsum of Rav Yaakov Beirav, in Shu”t Avkas Rocheil #11). This line of reasoning assumes that the prohibition of praying for personal requests on Shabbos is because it causes suffering.

However, several other authorities prohibit reciting a mishebeirach for ill people on Shabbos, expressly stating that it is forbidden because of dabeir davar (She’ei’las Yaavetz #64; Gra”z, Orach Chayim 288:9). The She’ei’las Yaavetz prohibits reciting a mishebeirach for the ill on Shabbos except for a choleh who is in the category of sakanas hayom. He also prohibits reciting these mishebeirachs for an additional reason that will make Iam happy: Yaavetz contends that they are prohibited because they inconvenience the community by delaying the services (tircha de’tzibura).

A compromise position rules that one may recite a mishebeirach for ill people on Shabbos provided that one modifies the text, and instead of closing with a prayer for a swift recovery, one blesses the ill person, and then makes a statement that on Shabbos we are not permitted to cry out, but recovery is soon to come (Magen Avraham 288:14). The prevalent custom in most places today follows the last approach, and that is why, in many shullen, mishebeirachs are recited for the ill even when it is not a sakanas hayom.

Of course, this ruling, which is probably the practice in Iam’s shul, is what is upsetting Iam.

Some authorities add an additional factor in favor of the reciting of the mishebeirach: it is considered a special merit to pray for someone during, or immediately after, the reading of the Torah. To quote the Aruch HaShulchan (Yoreh Deah 335:12): “If one has a family member who is ill... the custom is to pray in shul during kerias haTorah for those who are sick, for then Divine Compassion is aroused.”

In answer to what is the best thing to do, I refer to a responsum of an earlier authority, the Rivash (Shu”t HaRivash #512) on a related topic: whether one should recite Avinu Malkeinu on Shabbos of Rosh Hashanah, Shabbos Shuvah and Yom Kippur. After noting the different customs that he saw in several communities, and explaining the reasons why reciting Avinu Malkeinu on Shabbos does or does not violate the prohibition against reciting personal requests on Shabbos, he concludes that one should follow the prevalent local custom. Similarly, regarding whether one recites a mishebeirach on Shabbos, he should follow established community or shul custom. May I pray for personal spiritual requests?

The Mishnah Berurah (288:22) permits praying on Shabbos for spiritual help or for any other request that is not a result of difficult circumstances. It seems that this should be permitted according to both reasons mentioned above. According to the first reason, one should not pray on Shabbos about one’s own needs, but spiritual needs are Hashem’s realm. According to the second reason, most people do not become saddened regarding their spiritual failings and “troubles.”

Based on the above, on Shabbos one may recite the prayer of Rav Nechunia ben Hakanah requesting divine assistance for one’s Torah learning (Halichos Shlomoh, 14:11).

Yom Tov versus Shabbos

Does the prohibition against requesting personal supplications apply only on Shabbos, or does it apply equally on Yom Tov? This topic is discussed by the halachic authorities in a variety of places.

The Magen Avraham (128:70) notes that although the custom among Ashkenazim outside Eretz Yisroel is to duchen only on Yom Tov, some communities do not duchen when Yom Tov falls on Shabbos. He suggests the reason for this practice is because the members of the congregation recite the prayer for bad dreams when the kohanim duchen, and that, if the kohanim duchen on Shabbos, people will say this prayer on Shabbos, which violates the prohibition against reciting personal supplications. The Magen Avraham states that there is no concern with reciting this prayer on Yom Tov, notwithstanding the fact that it qualifies as a personal supplication. Although he certainly agrees that one may not recite personal supplications on Yom Tov, he rallies evidence that there is a difference between Yom Tov and Shabbos regarding the severity of this prohibition. After all, we omit reciting the prayer Avinu Malkeinu on Rosh Hashanah when it falls on Shabbos, yet we have no problem with reciting Avinu Malkeinu when Rosh Hashanah falls on a weekday. We could similarly demonstrate this difference between Yom Tov and Shabbos from the fact that we recite certain personal requests and the 13 midos of Hashem when we take out the sefer Torah on Yom Tov, but refrain from reciting these prayers when Yom Tov falls on Shabbos.

However, the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chayim 576:12) implies that there is no difference between Yom Tov and Shabbos – that personal requests are prohibited equally on both days, a position reiterated by other later authorities (Shu”t Rav Pe’alim 2:46). It appears that Ashkenazim and Sefardim differ as to the accepted position. Ashkenazim follow the ruling of the Magen Avraham and are more lenient on Yom Tov, whereas Sefardim are stricter about reciting personal requests on Yom Tov.

Kibud Av versus Kavod Shabbos

At this point, I would like to address the third question asked above: “Michal’s father asks her to arrange a minyan to daven on his behalf on Shabbos. May she?”

To answer this question, I refer to a responsum on a related topic from Rav Moshe Feinstein.

On the last day of Pesach, someone who was seriously ill, but not a sakanas yom, requested that the members of a shul pray on his behalf. They then recited a few chapters of Tehillim on his behalf and recited the appropriate prayer. After Yom Tov, they were able to ask Rav Moshe whether they had done the correct thing. Rav Moshe ruled that although this was not a sakanas yom, since the ill person himself had requested that they pray on his behalf, and he was in a situation of general pikuach nefesh, it was proper that they prayed on his behalf. Although ordinarily one may not pray on someone’s behalf if it is not a sakanas yom, in this situation we do pray on his behalf out of concern that he would become upset, which could aggravate his precarious condition. This concept is called shelo tifrot daato, that the ill person should not become distressed, and is used in several different halachic contexts.

However, Rav Moshe notes, this ruling applies only when the ill person himself made the request. If family members ask that people pray on his behalf on Shabbos, one

should not accede to their request, if it is not a case of sakanas yom (Shu"t Igros Moshe, Orach Chayim 1:105).

At this point, I would like to refer to the last question I raised above: "On Shabbos morning, Shlomoh asks the shul's gabbai. "My father will be having surgery this week. Can we say a chapter of Tehillim on his behalf after davening, when everyone is still in shul?"

The answer to the question is that since there is no sakanas hayom here and the ill person himself was not the source of the request, one should not say Tehillim and daven for him until after Shabbos.

Conclusion

The words of Yeshaya that include the words dabeir davar are read as part of the haftarah that we recite on Yom Kippur. There the Navi concludes "If you remove your internal yoke from yourself, pointing fingers at one another and evil speech... then Hashem will always guide you... if you refrain from doing your matters on My holy day... you honor it by not performing your own matters, seeking out your own needs and speaking of them. Then you will delight with Hashem and I will mount you on the highest places on Earth. I will feed you the heritage of your father Yaakov, for Hashem has spoken."

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Only One Purpose

Jonathan Rosemblum

Rabbi Leib Bakst, the late rosh yeshiva of Yeshivas Bais Yehudah of Detroit, was one of the great Mirrer talmidim who spent the war in Shanghai. Though he rarely spoke about himself and his life history, there was one story that he shared on more than one occasion with talmidim, presumably because he felt the message was such an important one.

While in Shanghai, Rabbi Bakst suffered a burst appendix, and hovered between life and death as the doctors in a Shanghai hospital sought to bring the infection under control and save his life. While in that state, he had a dream.

In his dream, he was before a Heavenly beis din, appointed to determine his fate. Three dayanim were present. Reb Leib did not recognize two of the dayanim. But one was unmistakably, the great Mashgiach of the pre-War Mirrer Yeshiva, Rabbi Yeruchom Levovitz. Rabbi Bakst had learned under Reb Yeruchom from the time he arrived in Mir just after his bar mitzvah until the latter's passing six years later.

Reb Yerucham led the interrogation. He asked his talmid, "We know that a malach (angel) can perform only one shlichus (mission). But nowhere do we see such a limitation on a man. How can it be that a malach, who is at a much higher spiritual madrega (level) can seemingly not do as much as a human being?"

In the dream, Reb Leib challenged the premise that human beings can do more than one shlichus at a time. A malach who has been sent by Hashem for a particular task performs that task with total concentration and effort, without being diverted in any way, he said. Only because human beings do not act with a similar total concentration and determination do they perceive themselves as capable of performing more than one task at a time.

But, in fact, we have only one overarching mitzvah: to be marbeh kavod Shomayim in this world. And that must be the focus of our concentration in whatever situation we find ourselves.

At that point, Reb Yerucham nodded slightly. As soon as Reb Yerucham nodded, Reb Leib's fever broke and he regained consciousness, on the way to a full recovery.

In honor of his deliverance, Rabbi Bakst reprinted in Shanghai, the classic Torah work Tomer Devorah by the great Tzefat kabbalist Rabbi Moshe Cordevero to which he appended his own ma'amar on the horrible destruction then overtaking European Jewry. Fittingly, Tomer Devorah is a guide to how we can each imitate the middos of Hashem in our lives – the greatest possible increase of Kavod Shomayim.

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from: Torah in Action /Shema Yisrael <parsha@torahinaction.com>

subject: R' Jacob Solomon Dvar Torah

R' Jacob Solomon PARSHA HASHAVUA

PARASHAT EKEV - D'VAR TORAH – 5777

In his final address, Moses guarantees the Israelites that they will not go hungry in the Promised Land:

You will eat and you will be satisfied. You will bless G-d for the good land that He gave you (8:10).

Yet immediately he adds a warning:

Be careful not to forget G-d... lest you eat and be satisfied, you build nice homes and settle... and everything you have will prosper... and you say to yourself "I produced this wealth all by myself..." (8:11-17).

The Land, Moses tells them, will support all their needs. "Ve-achalta ve-savata - You will be eat and you will be satisfied". Yet almost in the same breath, he warns the Israelites to be careful not to forget G-d "pen tochal ve-savata - lest you eat and be satisfied". On one hand, Eretz Yisrael and its yields of good produce are gifts. On the other hand, the Israelites are told to be wary when enjoying those gifts.

In response, the Kli Yakar observes that ve-savata can be translated in two different ways. It can mean "you will be satisfied", the vav changing the tense from the past to the future. It can also mean "and you have already become satisfied", the vav meaning simply "and". The rest of the phrase remains in the past.

Thus the Kli Yakar understands those passages in a different way. After Moses assures the Israelites that their needs will be taken care of: "You will eat and you will be satisfied", he warns them to be careful not to forget G-d "pen tochal ve-savata – lest you eat, having already been satisfied". "Uvatim tovim tivneh ve-yashavta – and having settled down, you continue to build homes".

In other words, Moses is saying that the Land will supply all your needs, but beware of using the Land's resources to produce more than your needs, with selfish objectives. You can only eat one meal at a time. You can only sleep in one home at a time. Beware of piling up wealth for the sake of being rich, and devoting life to being wealthier and wealthier: "I produced all this wealth myself", and thus forget G-d and His requirements and service.

The Torah does not promote living as an ascetic. Your material needs are genuine and it is good to live comfortably: "You shall eat and be satisfied". It is when satisfaction turns to greed and money making becomes one's god rather than one's support line that there is a danger of putting money-making first and foremost, forgetting G-d in the process

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Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

חדשות ערוץ 7

Israel National News

Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

In his D'var Torah this week, the Chief Rabbi highlights that there is no Mitzvah in the Torah for us to recite a blessing before we eat our food.

There is no Mitzvah in the Torah to recite a blessing before eating food.

In this week's Parasha of Eikev, we learn that the Mitzvah of the Torah is to say the blessing after eating food – 'Veachaltah Vesavata Uveirachta Et Hashem Elokecha', 'And you shall eat, and you will be satisfied, and then you will bless'. From there we learn about the Mitzvah of Bentsching (Grace after meals).

The Gemarah in Mesechet Berachot (21a) tells us, that our Rabbis deduce from here a 'Kal Vechomer' – if we have to bless after we eat, 'how much more so' should we bless before we eat?

And then our Rabbis contrast this to the study of the Torah. You see, there is a Mitzvah in the Torah to make a blessing before we study it. There the Gemarah says, 'if we recite a Brachabefore we study Torah, then Kal Vechomer, how much more so, should we offer a blessing at the conclusion of the study of the Torah.

When it comes to physical delights in this world, when we are starved of something – we really look forward to it with a sense of passion and keen anticipation.

So, for example, if we're hungry and we're looking forward to a meal, nobody needs to tell us that we are appreciative of what Hashem has been doing for us. It's after the meal, however, that we need the Mitzvah, we need to Bentsch, especially, if perhaps, the journey has been better than the destination and the meal has not been that brilliant. And seeing as we have that Mitzvah to bless God afterwards, how much more so should we bless God beforehand, when we appreciate what we're just about to have.

With regard to the study of Torah, it's just the opposite. You see, after I learn, that's when I appreciate it. That's when I've had an exhilarating Shuir, an incredibly fulfilling Chavruta or a wonderful experience when I've opened a Sefer and I've learnt by myself. But before I learn, to try and get to that point, sometimes I need to be stimulated, sometimes I need to be inspired to do it – it's not easy. So, therefore, if I have a Mitzvah to bless God before I learn, Kal Vechomer, how much more so, at the conclusion of the study?

That's why there is a Mitzvah to inspire and to get us going, but afterwards, it's natural to feel satisfied and to be grateful to Hashem.

So therefore, we find that when it comes to spiritual delights in this world, they by far transcend physical delights. This very notion is encapsulated in yet another important verse in this week's Parasha: 'Ki Lo Al Halechem Levado Yichye Ha'adam Ki Al Kol Motzah Phi Hashem Yichye Ha'adam', 'People don't live by bread alone, rather we attain meaningful living through following and through studying the word of Hashem'.

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Eikev: Four Blessings After Eating

"When you eat and are sated, you must bless the Lord your God for the good land that He has given you." (Deut. 8:10)

The Torah does not specify the exact text of Birkat Hamazon, the blessing recited after eating a meal. The Talmud, however, informs us that it comprises four blessings, authored over a period of a thousand years: Moses composed the first blessing, Ha-Zahn ("the One Who provides sustenance for the entire world"), when the manna fell in the desert. Joshua composed the second blessing, Al Ha'Aretz ("For the Land"), when the Jewish people entered the Land of Israel.

David and Solomon composed the third blessing, Boneih Yerushalayim ("the One Who rebuilds Jerusalem"). David, who established Jerusalem as his capital, wrote, "Your people Israel and Your city Jerusalem." And Solomon, who built the Temple, added, "The great and holy Temple."

The Sages of YavnehI composed the final blessing, HaTovve-haMeitiv ("The good King and Benefactor"), to commemorate the miracle that occurred with the dead of the city of Beitar. These Jews were killed by the Romans during the failed Bar Kochba revolt of 135 C.E. For months, the Roman authorities refused to let them be buried, but miraculously, their bodies did not rot.

The Order of the Blessings

Is there a pattern to the order of these four blessings? Rav Kook explained that the blessings follow a clear progression: from the needs of the individual to those of the nation; and from our physical needs to our spiritual aspirations.<sup>2</sup>

The very acting of eating contains a certain spiritual danger. Over-indulgence in gastronomic pleasures can lower one's goals to the pursuit of sensual gratification and physical enjoyment. The Torah therefore provided a remedy - a special prayer to be recited after the meal. Birkat Hamazon is "a ladder resting on the ground yet reaching the Heavens," a spiritual act that enables us to raise ourselves from petty, self-absorbed materialism to lofty spiritual aspirations.

In order to attain this higher awareness, we must climb the 'ladder' step by step:

The first rung of the ladder relates to our own personal physical welfare.

On the next rung, we express our concern for the physical welfare of the nation.

On the third rung, we focus on the spiritual well-being of the nation.

Lastly, we aspire to be a "light unto the nations," a holy people who influence and uplift all who were created in God's image.

This progression is accurately reflected in the blessings of Birkat Hamazon. First, we recite the blessing of "Who sustains the world," composed when the manna fell. This prayer corresponds to the physical needs of each individual, just as the manna-bread sustained each Israelite in the barren desert. The manna also provided loftier benefits, as it spiritually uplifted all

who witnessed this miracle. But its primary function was to provide for each individual's physical needs.

The second level — concern for the physical welfare of the entire nation — is the subject of the second blessing, "For the Land." When Joshua led the people into their own land, the Land of Israel, he set the stage for the establishment of a nation with all of the usual national assets: security and defense, self-government, agriculture, economy, natural resources, and so on. Concern for the spiritual well-being of the Jewish people is the theme of the third blessing, which deals with the spiritual center of the Jewish people: Jerusalem. King David composed the first part, "For Your people Israel and Your city Jerusalem," expressing our prayers for the spiritual state and unity of the Jewish people.

King Solomon added, "For the great holy Temple." This reflects the highest goal: the spiritual elevation of all humanity. When dedicating the Temple, Solomon prayed that this holy building — "a house of prayer for all nations" — would ensure "that all the peoples of the world will know that God is the Lord, there is no other" (I Kings 8:60).

In this way, Birkat Hamazon bestows profound spiritual value to our private meals — a prayer that guides us, step by step, to a holier world.

The Promise of Beitar

One might become discouraged, however, when faced with the bitter reality of the exile and the current state of the Jewish people. Therefore, the rabbis of Yavneh, following the destruction of the Temple and the failed Bar Kochba revolt, composed the final blessing, "The good King and Benefactor."

With the fall of the great city of Beitar, the last hopes for Jewish independence were crushed for thousands of years. Nonetheless, the Sages saw tremendous significance in the fact that the dead did not decompose, and were eventually given a proper burial. This was a Heavenly sign that even if the nation of Israel appears to be lifeless, struck down by the sword of our enemies, we nonetheless retain our spiritual essence, like an inner fire smoldering imperceptibly inside a black piece of coal, cool to the touch. We are confident that we will yet attain our highest aspirations, despite the many years we may have to wait. Just as those who sleep in the dust will return to life in the appointed hour, so too, the Jewish people will rise to national greatness in the end of days.

(Sapphire from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. II, p. 218)  
1 Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai transferred the Sanhedrin from Jerusalem to Yavneh after Jerusalem's destruction at the hand of the Romans in 70 C.E.  
2 A similar progression may be found in the requests of the Amidah prayer.

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Parashas Eikev

ואתפלל אל ד'

I prayed to Hashem. (9:26)

The effect of prayer can never be overstated. We have no idea of its power: to alter a decree; to incur favor; to demonstrate our love for the Almighty in recognizing that it is all in His hands and that, without His constant will, we are nothing. We think of prayer as requesting something positive. After all, why would anyone ask for something bad to occur? The following story is a wake-up call, but it is the punch line that really delivers an inspirational message.

A distinguished rav/motivational speaker was dispatched to speak to a group of irreligious Jews in a settlement in southern Eretz Yisrael. Following his speech, an elderly couple approached him with a strange request: "Rabbi, could you please pray for us – that we die?" they asked. We can only imagine how the rabbi must have felt to hear such a request. "I have

never been asked to do something so unusual. You must have a good reason for such a request,” he responded.

“Let us tell you our story. We grew up in Communist Russia. Finally, we were able to immigrate to the Holy Land. Life was difficult; acclimating was hard; financially we were challenged every step of the way. Nonetheless, we had one blessing, one comfort, a double gift from G-d: our two daughters, both of whom were a great source of pleasure and satisfaction. One daughter is a graduate student at the Technion in Haifa; the other one lives in Los Angeles. Both are successful and are on the road to even greater achievement.

We recently saved up some money and purchased tickets to visit our daughter in Los Angeles. We spent a month visiting, touring, spending time with our daughter. It was absolutely wonderful. On the last day of the trip, our daughter accompanied us to the airport, where she broke to us her tragic news: ‘Ima, Abba, I have a request of you. Please erase my number from your phone book. I have decided that I want to move on with my life, acculturate myself, and sever my relationship with the past. As long as I am connected with you, I am still in the old country. I want to live!’

“Understandably, our twelve-hour return trip was filled with grief, and we wept the entire way home. We comforted ourselves, however, that we still had one other daughter. We traveled to Haifa to share our unfortunate news with our other daughter – who shocked us with a similar request. She felt that we are backwards and, if she were to remain connected with us, she could never become a part of the ‘now’ scene. Rabbi, it is now one full year that we have had nothing to do with either of our daughters. Our lives are worthless. This is why we want to die.”

If there has ever been a sad story – this is it. The rav listened, looked at them with caring eyes and asked, “Rather than have me pray that you die, why do you not pray to G-d that He open your daughters’ hearts? Why do you not pray for them?” he asked.

“Rabbi, we are over seventy years old, and never once have we prayed to G-d. We have no clue how to pray to Him,” the parents replied.

“My friends,” the rav began, “can you imagine the feelings of a Father Who has waited over seventy years for His children to speak to Him? You have been sitting by the phone for a year – everyday – waiting, hoping that perhaps your daughters might call. Your Heavenly Father has been waiting for you for over seventy years! Call Him, talk to Him, cry to Him! Use any language that is comfortable – but call!”

**מה ד' אלקיך שואל מעמך**

What does Hashem, your G-d, ask of you? (10:12)

Horav Yeruchem Levovitz, zl, views ahavas Hashem, love for Hashem, as the yesod, foundation, of the entire Torah. To love Hashem is not a mitzvas asei, positive commandment; rather, it is the principle upon which hinges all of the mitzvos of the Torah. Every mitzvah is just another aspect of our love for Hashem; mitzvos are our expression of love. When we carry out a mitzvah, we are demonstrating our unabiding love for the Almighty. This love is reciprocal, because we understand and acknowledge Hashem’s love for us. A Jew’s commitment to Judaism -- the very same commitment that impelled him to declare, “O Yehudai O’ tzlav; “Either I am a Jew or I am prepared to die” -- is derived from his total connection, his overriding dveikus, clinging to Hashem, all of which is founded in love.

As a result of this connection founded in love for Hashem, we understand the idea behind the pasuk (Yehoshua 1:8), V’heegesa bo yomam valaylah; “Rather, you should contemplate it day and night.” If one takes a “break” from learning, he severs the connection. Rav Yeruchem explains that one’s connection with Torah should be like a magnet that does not break its pull on the metal. One who learns Torah on an “on and off... whenever” basis is not learning Torah. Those individuals to whom Torah-study is total immersion, feel nothing, sense nothing, are aware of nothing outside of the Torah which they learn. The reason for this, explains the Mashgiach, is because we do not learn Torah for the purpose of knowing Torah. Veritably, yedias haTorah, knowing Torah, is important, but that is not why we learn.

We study Torah out of love! It is our expression of love for Hashem. When we study Hashem’s Torah, He speaks to us. When we daven, we speak to Him.

The love is reciprocal. We know that Hashem chose us from all of the nations, as a result of His love for us. When one knows that he is loved, he returns the love. One who does not express his love for Hashem does not really perceive the love Hashem has for him. Otherwise, his own love for the Almighty would be more forthcoming.

Hashem has granted us certain mitzvos to (sort of) wrap ourselves in them as a sign of His love. They include the mitzvos of Tzitzis, Tallis, Krias Shema, Succah, Mezuzah, Tefillin and Tefillah. We wrap ourselves in the Tallis; the Tefillin are on our body. The Mezuzah protects our home, and the Succah surrounds us, protecting us from the elements. We speak to Hashem in prayer and accept upon ourselves the Heavenly yoke of observance when we recite Krias Shema. Indeed, the underlying motif of the mitzvos that were given to us at Har Sinai is to maintain our relationship with Hashem, that no instance goes by during which we do not maintain our connection with Hashem. From the moment we arise, when we recite Modeh Ani in gratitude to Hashem, until the moment that we retire and recite Krias Shema – our day is all filled with expressions of love to Hashem via the mitzvos which He gave us out of love. When we become mitzvah-selective, picking and choosing which mitzvos are more convenient and which are too costly, we demonstrate that we are not acting out of love, but out of compulsion and constraint. We may not always immediately see the reward for our love, but it is there - guaranteed.

The following story is one of many which underscore the meaning of the love we must manifest for Hashem. It was winter 2015, and the northeast was blanketed with snow. Roads were impassable, the city streets snow-covered, the weather outside with the added wind-chill was below zero. Many people called in sick to work, since it was physically impossible to negotiate the walk from their homes to the subway. Much of life in the big city was at a standstill. Chaim Goldman (fictitious name) had left his Tallis and Tefillin in shul the night before (as usual). He was now confronted with the stark reality that he lived a mile from shul, and it was impossible to get there – either by car or by foot. What would he do? Did he have to do anything?

As all frum Jews should, he contacted his rav and asked him flat out if he had to make an attempt to retrieve his Tefillin from shul. The Rav suggested calling the city to inquire if a snow plow could get him through to the shul. He called and spoke to the harried foreman in charge of snow removal. Yes, they could provide a snow plow for an emergency. The price tag: \$10,000 for approximately three hours of work. (The truck would have to be brought over and returned, plus overtime; and, after all, it was a large metropolitan city in the east coast.)

Chaim was floored by the price. He attempted to negotiate, but it was useless. Apparently, he was not the only one who claimed that he had an emergency. This was the going price. Chaim called his rav and asked him what he should do. The rav asked him if he had the money. Chaim replied in the affirmative. “If this is the case,” the rav replied, “you should do what you think is right.”

Chaim began to mull over the question seriously. The Torah exhorts us to love Hashem with all our heart, all our soul, and all our material possessions. Here was a simple case of demonstrating his love for Hashem to the tune of \$10,000. If he really loved Hashem, the money should not be a factor. How could a day pass during which he did not put on Tefillin? He called the city, paid the fee and went to shul. That was his most meaningful davening, because he knew that he had acted out of love for Hashem.

Far be it for me to wonder how many of us would lay out \$10,000 to put on Tefillin. Truthfully, I am almost afraid to wonder. Having said that, we may wonder why, although putting on Tefillin daily and attending Shacharis cost nothing but our time, many people still cannot find the time to carry out this mitzvah. Perhaps we might ask ourselves: If Hashem

responded to our petition in the same manner and attitude that we attend shul – would we be pleased? Perhaps it might be proper to consider that what goes around comes around

**את ד' אליך תירא**

Hashem, your G-d, shall you fear. (10:20)

Fear is a powerful word which connotes various emotions, from respect to anxiety, love to awe. Since Hashem is beyond anything we can imagine, the definition of fear with regard to the Almighty must also be unique. The notion of comparing the fear one should have for a talmid chacham, Torah scholar, to that which one should have for Hashem begs elucidation. The Midrash Tanchuma (Beha' alosecha) teaches us that the es, conjunctive word, which precedes (es) Hashem Elokecha (tira) instructs us to fear one who has mastered the Torah. (Clearly, such mastery involves much more than erudition. It applies to one who embodies the Torah, eruditely, spiritually and ethically – in mind and action.) What aspect of fear of Hashem includes the talmid chacham? It certainly does not mean fear of retribution. Scholars do not go around excoriating and issuing maledictions against people. For the most part, they are in their own world of devotion to Hashem. We may disturb that world by gently “knocking” and ask to be allowed in to obtain counsel and inspiration, blessing and encouragement. Fear? What is there to fear? The Torah scholar is a unique individual whose entire persona is honed by the Torah that he has learned and the relationship he has established with Hashem. Where does fear enter the equation?

In his work, “A Vort From Rav Pam,” Rabbi Sholom Smith quotes Rav Pam as suggesting that the fear the Torah expects that we manifest towards our Torah sages is much like that mentioned concerning Avraham Avinu following the Akeidas Yitzchak, Binding of Yitzchak. After waiting for a century to finally beget a son the caliber of Yitzchak, a son who was worthy and would carry on his life’s work, Avraham was instructed by Hashem to slaughter his son, sacrifice his hope, his future, his legacy. Just as he was about to execute Hashem’s command, he was stopped, by an angel representing Hashem. The angel said: “Now I know that you are a yirei Elokim, G-d-fearing man, since you have not withheld your son, your only one, from Me (Bereishis 22:12).

Without a doubt, Avraham had reached an unprecedented pinnacle of service and devotion to Hashem. Yet, following such outstanding achievement, he is merely described as having just proven he is a yarei Hashem. Is that all? We really do not understand the depth of meaning concerning fear of Hashem. Rav Pam cites the Zechusa D’Avraham who explains (based on Kabbalistic sources) that there are two levels of yiraas Shomayim, fear of Heaven: yiraah tataah, lower fear; and yiraah ilaah, higher fear. The lower fear is an apt description of the primary source of fear to which most of us can relate: a fear of getting into trouble; of being on the receiving end of anger catalyzed by our misdoings; a fear of punishment. This fear motivates him to refrain from sin, because once one understands the consequences, he would have to be slightly “off” to continue with his errant behavior.

We identify a higher level of yiraah, one that is even more sublime than ahavah, love (of Hashem). This fear is one that is inspired solely by his feelings of afsius, nothingness, of bitul lifnei romemuso u’kedushaso Yisborach Shemo, total obedience and subservience before the sublime, lofty greatness and holiness of his (Creator). Such fear transcends not only punishment, but even love.

The Torah wants us to have a similarly profound fear of the talmid chacham, because the scholar is someone who has devoted every aspect of his being to serve Hashem. He has spent his life immersed in the sea of Torah, plumbing its depths and delving into its profound wisdom. In addition to his uncanny erudition, he has refined himself spiritually by struggling to elevate his neshamah, soul, overcoming his yetzer hora, evil inclination, under the most challenging circumstances. He has perfected his middos, character traits, thus developing an intimate relationship with Hashem through his constant prayer. In other words, the scholar embodies

the Torah at its apex. He is the perfect specimen, a consummate nachas, source of satisfaction and pleasure to Hashem. When we come across such a holy Jew, it is incumbent on us to treat this individual with the respect and reverence that he deserves. This is the meaning of fear of a talmid chacham.

Horav Rafael Boruch Toledano, zl, was such an individual. He possessed a vast knowledge of Torah – both the revealed and the hidden. His primary ambition in life was to study Torah and perform mitzvos. Nothing else mattered. He excelled in mitzvos bein adam l’chaveiro, between man and his fellowman. If there was a possibility somehow to alleviate the pains of one who was ill or poverty stricken, he was there. On the other hand, he refused to turn a blind eye to one who would desecrate the Torah. To him there was no compromising on the supremacy of the Torah. His prayers were a lesson in total self-abnegation and devotion to Hashem. When he davened, one could sense that he was speaking directly to the Almighty (which is something that we should all feel). His majesty and nobility, his modesty and humility, were products of his yiraas Shomayim, fear of Heaven. They all focused together in total harmony to create a tzadik whose feet walked the earth, but whose mind was in Heaven.

As Rav of Meknes, Morocco, Rav Toledano not only oversaw the Jewish spiritual concerns of his community, but he was also a Torah giant who was present for all Jews. His prime concern was always the children, and providing for their Jewish education. The distance from Meknes to Oujda in eastern Morocco is approximately 400 kilometers. When word reached him that the education of the Jewish children in Oujda was hanging in the balance, he immediately left to speak with the powers that be. We must keep this trip in perspective. It was during World War II, the roads were dangerous, and love for Jews was at an all-time premium. It was not a time to take a trip in the best of health – a state which Rav Toledano never was in. He was a sickly person who was physically weak his entire life.

The Rav arrived in Oujda and immediately convened a meeting of the heads of the community. He explained to them the significance of a Jewish school. True, it was World War II, and people were short on funds. Nonetheless, Torah study must prevail. It must take center stage in the life of a Jew. He begged them to support the local Torah institutions. They listened, smiled, and said that they were not interested. It was not uppermost on their list of priorities. When he heard their response, the Rav began to weep. At first, it was a few tears; then it became full-blown crying. The men attempted to assuage his feelings, to get him to stop crying. They understood his concerns, but Torah study was not prioritized on their “to do” list.

“Do you think I am crying about you? No! I am crying for myself! Our sages teach that anyone who has fear of Heaven, his words (requests) will be heard (listened to). I spoke with you; I pleaded with you, but you ignored my requests. This is a sign from Hashem that I lack sufficient fear of Heaven. Thus, the onus of guilt is upon me.”

When they heard these pure, heartfelt words, they realized that they were standing in the presence of greatness. Their hard-heartedness suddenly softened, as they opened up their hearts and their wallets in support of the children of Oujda.

**למען ירבו ימיכם וימי בניכם על האדמה אשר נשבע ד' לאבותיכם**

In order to prolong your days and the days of your children upon the land that Hashem has sworn to your forefathers. (11:21)

I just came across a homily published in 1929 by Horav Elazar Meir Preill, zl, Rav of Elizabeth, New Jersey, in which he decries the lack of respect for the “older” generation. There used to be a time (he writes) when the older generation were the pillars of the Jewish community, their advice sought, appreciated and accepted. “Here” (in America at that time), the younger generation has taken charge – relegating their forebears to a place of honor in a nursing home or to a corner of their homes. Not only is their opinion not sought, it is not accepted. They are “has beens” who have little to no value with regard to the furtherance of their respective communities. This was ninety years ago. The reason for the change of communal leadership between Europe and America, explains Rav Preill, is that the

values had changed. What was important and valued in Europe no longer carries weight in America. Here an alternative set of values reigns.

In a society in which people prioritize spiritual values in their life and weltenshaung-- as was the case concerning the members of the previous generation who had "been there and done that," who had life experience and were closely connected to the spiritual leadership of the past -- the people turn to their elders for advice and counsel. When life, however, is all about material advancement, fulfilling our physical passions and living up to the standards of a hedonistic, narcissistic society whose barometer of culture is the ancient Greeks -- well, obviously we are not interested in a course of history and ethics. We are not concerned with hearing "no!" -- we want to hear "yes!" -- that is when we even bother asking.

Rav Preill quotes a fascinating Chazal, which he uses as a foundation for addressing the Jew in relationship with society, but very applicable (with a dose of this author's license) to contemporary times. The Talmud Berachos 8A quotes Rabbi Yochanan (who himself was blessed with outstanding longevity) wondering how there could be old people in Bavel, Babylonia, considering that the blessing of longevity (according to our opening pasuk) is reserved for residents of Eretz Yisrael. The response was, "There are people who arise early to attend synagogue in the morning and stay late in the synagogue in the evening." In other words, shul attendance (obviously followed by real davening) can make the difference in one's lifespan.

The bais haknesses has always been the centerpiece of our Yahadus, Judaism. It has been our spiritual home: the place where we go to pray, to learn; the place for spiritual resuscitation and revival. It is there that we pour out our hearts in supplication to Hashem. The shul has been the font from which our souls imbibed their spiritual sustenance, thus allowing us to maintain the proper values and outlook. When the fortress of protection is breached from within -- or worse, when the people who require its stability and preservation do not remain inside, or they simply do not show up -- they lose the insurance that it provides.

There used to be a time when the shul was truly the centerpiece of Judaism in a community. (Please consider that Rav Preill wrote this in 1929, and America did not have much established to speak of at that time. Thus, he must have been referring to Europe, whose culture was dominantly Torah oriented.) Sadly, in the present (so he writes), the shul has been supplanted by the lodge, the country club, the board room. People no longer have the time or the inclination to spend their days, beginning with early morning and ending in the evening, in the shul. Understandably, one must leave to earn a living, but, as long as his primary focus is Torah and tefillah, he is safe.

The shul changed, as it became more and more the place where people gather to socialize, shmuess, do business, decide the future of the world -- everything but daven and learn. The older generation became extinct, and the young and more powerful-- with their material successes to bolster their strength -- took over, making decisions based upon a new set of values. This, explains Rav Preill, does not lend itself to arichas yamim, spiritual and physical longevity.

Now, let us fast forward ninety years and consider the state of our shuls today. We are leagues ahead of the past in our Torah knowledge, but is davening with a minyan, on time, remaining in the sanctuary for the duration of the service, a priority? Do we make a point to come to shul a few minutes early to recite Tehillim or to learn as our fathers did, or do we come on time for Borchu, put on Tallis and Tefillin, and leave prior to the last Kaddish? Davening used to be a daily staple, our singular opportunity to speak with Hashem. Although we certainly daven, it does not have the same critical importance. Do the shul and tefillah b'tzibur play a vital role in our lives, or do we attend only when we have time, settling instead to daven wherever and whenever? The sanctity of the synagogue is contingent upon the sanctity of our prayers. They go hand in hand. If our tefillos take a distant second place to everything else, what can we say for the edifice that is supposedly dedicated to prayer?

Va'ani Tefillah

וְרַפְאֵנוּ ד' וְנִרְפָּא – Refaeinu Hashem v'neirafei Heal us Hashem and we will be healed.

The Sefarim HaKedoshim (Kabbalistic writings) teach that all of the prayers which we recite anywhere throughout the world must make their way to Eretz Yisrael -- then to Yerushalayim; to the Bais Hamikdash (the place where it was situated); to the Kodesh HaKedoshim, Holy of Holies, where the Angels dispatch the prayers to Heaven. The entire "journey", from prayer recital until it reaches the Heavenly Throne, is fraught with challenge, as there are a number of spiritual obstacles along the way that can impede the prayer's "arrival" in Heaven. All of this changes with regard to prayer on behalf of a choleh, sick person. We are taught that the Shechinah, Divine Presence, rests above the head of a sick person. Thus, the prayer need not take a circuitous route to reach Hashem. He is right there! We say Heal us, Hashem, v'neirafei, and we will be healed, immediately, since there is nothing in the way to impede the prayer from reaching its goal. We must, however, make sure to offer a sincere prayer, with meaning and devotion. Peninim is published weekly by Peninim Publications in conjunction with the Hebrew Academy of Cleveland, Cleveland, Ohio 44118

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