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from: **Rabbi Yochanan Zweig** <genesis@torah.org>
to: rabbizweig@torah.org
date: Aug 6, 2020, 11:11 PM
subject: Rabbi Zweig on the Parsha - The Spice Of Life
Parshas Eikev

The Spice Of Life

"You shall place these words of Mine upon your heart..." (11:18)
In the second portion of the Krias Shema, we find the instruction to constantly contemplate and internalize the Torah and its precepts. The Talmud interprets the word "vesantem" – "you shall place" as "vesam tam" – "a perfect elixir"; the Torah is the ideal cure for the "yetzer hara" – "evil inclination". The following analogy is offered by the Talmud: A father educating his child finds it necessary to strike him. The father then instructs his child to place a compress on the inflicted wound, saying to his son "As long as the compress is in place, you may eat and drink what you desire, you may bathe with hot or cold water, and you need not fear that your wounds will become infected. However, if you remove the compress, your health is at risk." Similarly, Hashem says "My son, I created the evil inclination and I created the Torah as its 'tavlin' – 'antidote'" 1

We generally understand that Hashem created the Torah for man to follow, with the yetzer hara as the obstacle which man must overcome in his pursuit of Torah study and adherence. However, from the aforementioned passage in the Talmud, we see that this perception is not entirely correct. The Sages of the Talmud describe the Torah as a "tavlin" – literally, "condiment" or "spice" used to enhance the flavor of the main course. It would appear that the primary creation is the yetzer hara, with the Torah being the necessary

but secondary creation. This notion is substantiated by the parable given in the Talmud; the child's punishment, which is analogous to the yetzer hara, is a necessary facet of his education, while the compress serves as the counterbalance or antidote which prevents the beating from having a negative consequence. How do we understand the idea that the Torah is merely the spice that enhances the yetzer hara's natural flavors?

The Talmud states that the yetzer hara threatens to overpower a person every day and kill him.² What function of the yetzer hara makes its existence necessary?

Hashem created man with an enormous potential for accomplishment. Man's overwhelming awareness of his capabilities, coupled with the fear that he may not be able to live up to his potential, leads him on a path of self-destruction. Man indulges in behaviors which either block out the awareness of his capabilities, or demean him to the extent that he can rationalize that the expectations of him are unfounded.

The part within us which makes us aware of our potential is the yetzer hara. Left unharnessed, this awareness develops into man's most destructive force, the destruction he wreaks upon himself. The Torah is the tool through which we can actualize and develop our potential. Without the yetzer hara making us aware of our potential, the Torah's capacity to actualize and develop that potential would not be utilized. Our Sages therefore confer upon the yetzer hara the significance of being Hashem's primary creation for without the aspirations of what he can become man's potential would be wasted.

1. Kiddushin 30b 2. ibid

Trivial Matters

"This shall be the reward when you listen..." (7:12)

The simple interpretation of the verse is that if we observe the ordinances of Hashem, we will be rewarded and He will love us. However, Rashi interprets the verse midrashically. The word "eikev" means "heel". The verse is referring specifically to those mitzvos which we trample underfoot, for we perceive them to be less important.¹ The Mizrahi questions the need for Rashi's interpretation, especially since the Midrash apparently contradicts the simple interpretation. The simple interpretation implies that the verse refers to all ordinances. Rashi limits the verse to only those which we perceive as less important.²

The Mishna in Pirkei Avos warns us to be as meticulous in our observance of the less important mitzvos as we are in the more important mitzvos, for we do not know on what basis we are being rewarded.³ If it is possible to distinguish between less important and more important mitzvos, why, in fact, are we not rewarded more for those which are more important?

The stronger the relationship you have with a person, the more at ease you are with asking him to do something which is relatively trivial. However, in a relationship which is not so strong, you tend to limit requests to matters of significance. For example, a person would not think twice about waking up a mere acquaintance at two o'clock in the morning for medical assistance, but the same person would find it inconceivable to wake up the acquaintance asking for a pint of ice cream. On the other extreme, a woman will have no problem with asking her husband to buy her a pint of ice cream at two o'clock in the morning.

We are naturally more meticulous with those precepts which we perceive to be more fundamental, for example belief in Hashem and honoring one's parents. Moreover, for those precepts which Hashem commands us to observe, in which we do not perceive any major fundamental principles, it is possible to approach them with less enthusiasm. However, it is with these very mitzvos that we show our commitment and express our love for Hashem. The stronger the relationship, the more apt one is to acquiesce to a seemingly trivial request. Therefore, our observance of "themitzvos kalos", the less serious mitzvos, is the yardstick for our relationship with Hashem.

With this, we can understand what the Mishna in Pirkei Avos is teaching us. We do not know on what basis we are rewarded for observance of the

precepts, whether it is the gravity of the precept or the reflection of commitment and love in adherence of the precept. The Midrash understands that these are the precepts which the verse is alluding to, for the verse is referring to those mitzvos for which we are rewarded with Hashem's love. This must be because those mitzvos express our love for Hashem. This, the Midrash explains, must be the mitzvos which are perceived to be less important, for our observance of them truly expresses our love for Hashem. 1.7:12 2. Ibid. 3. Avos 2:1

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fw from hamelaket@gmail.com

from: Destiny Foundation/Rabbi Berel Wein <info@jewishdestiny.com>

reply-to: info@jewishdestiny.com

subject: Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein

Home Weekly Parsha EKEV

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

The word that this week's Torah reading derives its name from is Ekev. There are many subtle nuances that exist within this short three letter Hebrew word. Our teacher Rashi uses a midrashic interpretation that connects the word to the Hebrew noun which refers to the heel of a person. He indicates that there are important considerations in Torah and life that people somehow step upon with their heel without understanding the importance and ramification of so doing.

Most commentators interpret the word to mean a causative issue. It indicates that because a person does or does not do certain actions and behaviors, immense consequences flow from that seemingly unimportant decision. We are all aware that the Torah views the events of personal and national life to be one of cause and effect. Nothing happens in a vacuum or at random and it is human behavior that sets the stage for all later events, even events that will occur centuries or millennia down the line. This lends importance to every act or omission of an act that a human being performs. And thus, the interpretation of Rashi falls in line with the general interpretation of the word Ekev.

We are being taught that there is nothing in life that should be considered completely unworthy of contemplation. Every situation, no matter how minor we may deem it to be, or inconsequential is a matter of importance and contains within it ramifications that we are unaware of but are present. The course of life is always mysterious, surprising, unexpected, and basically inexplicable. No one in our world today would have expected it to look the way it does just six months ago. We had all made plans for our immediate and long-range future. All those plans have been dashed by the dreaded coronavirus and its consequences. And yet, as we stand dazed and confused by what has struck us, deep down we are aware that there is a cause that has activated this situation. I am not speaking about an immediate direct cause – the escape of the virus from the Wuhan Chinese laboratory.

That is only a superficial cause that answers little and explains even less. Rather, there is a deep-seated cause within human society of the early 21st century that has provoked this reaction to the behavior, agendas and thought processes of modern civilization. If the cause is to be searched for in our attitudes and behavior, then that requires contemplation and rational thought instead of preconceived utopian ideas. It requires a sense of humility and a return to the basic values of human life as represented to us by the Torah and taught to us by Moshe our revered teacher

Human civilization needs a little less hubris, less arrogance, more minimal expectations of life, and a realization that even though man may have many great ideas, it is the will of the Lord so to speak that will eventually prevail one way or another.

Shabbat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

In My Opinion JEWISH PRIVILEGE

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

Anti-Semitism is an old and pernicious disease, for which much of mankind has never found an adequate antidote or cure. It reappears in every generation, and almost in every clime and country. However, like many other deadly viruses, it constantly mutates, assuming different ideologies, slogans, and activities in each different instance. But its goal is always the same – to demonize the Jewish people, and to discredit the people, its Torah, and its achievements. The anti-Semites never realize that in so doing, they are really harming themselves to a great extent. The calls for boycotting products from Israel would paralyze the technological computer world, as well as the everyday lives of billions of people on the face of this globe.

Anti-Semitism, like many other highly contagious diseases, is not easily contained. It eventually reaches far beyond the Jewish world, and its victims are not restricted to members of the Jewish people alone. One simply can see the consequences of World War II and Hitler's Germany, Stalin's Russia, and the rest of Europe generally. The Jews, naturally, suffered greatly from these murderous anti-Semites. But in terms of sheer numbers and damage done to societies and long-standing empires, it was the non-Jewish world that really experienced the whirlwind that anti-Semitism first ignited and brought about. The current, modern world is very reluctant to learn anything from the past, even the immediate past. We are witness to a new spate and spike of anti-Semitism throughout the world, even in those countries that proclaim themselves to be tolerant and democratic.

The new anti-Semitism has developed from several mistaken economic and social theories and premises, advanced by the progressive left. It originates in the idea that somehow income inequality is evil per se, and must, somehow, be corrected to have a more fair and just society. History shows us that income inequality began with Cain and Abel and has always existed,

George Orwell in his famous book Animal Farm pointed out that all pigs were equal, but that there were some pigs that were to be more than equal. The drive to income equality and its correction always creates a ruling class that itself becomes the paragon of income inequality and ruthless power. The idea of taking from the rich by taxes or confiscation, to distribute wealth amongst the poor, has a romantic and appealing note to it. But it never has worked out that way in the annals of human history. Just ask the people of Venezuela how they are doing now that they have theoretically equalized everyone's income. The search for the cause of income inequality leads people to believe and foster a reverse, but just as evil racism that is called white privilege. If certain people do not seem to be successful in life, it must be because they are victims – someone else has done this to them, and they are not responsible for their own condition or status. The theory is that all people who are of the Caucasian race are, by definition, inescapable racists, who benefit solely because they are white. Therefore, white privilege must be destroyed, so that everyone can be equally unsuccessful in life. But now, this dangerous theory has morphed into a more specific enemy – the Jews. Jews appear, on the surface at least, to be more successful and affluent than other competing ethnic groups in Western society and the only reason that this occurs must be because there is Jewish privilege. There are too many Jews in elite universities, corporate board rooms, sports leagues, financial institutions, medicine, and high positions in the economic structure of the country, etc. By succeeding in these areas, Jews have automatically made other victims – those who do not gain admittance to these institutions.

Once again, in the name of fairness and justice, the anti-Semites wish to destroy Jewish privilege as a means of persecuting and destroying the Jewish people itself. By raising the bugaboo of Jewish privilege, they also intend to shame Jews themselves into feeling guilt over any form of their achievements or success. The world is viewed as being a zero-sum game, but rather, that any group or individual that is successful must have achieved that success at the expense of others.

This is one of the most dangerous and subversive lies being peddled today by the progressive left and its allies in the media and academia. There is no such thing as Jewish privilege. There is only Jewish difference, and that has been the main contribution of the Jewish people to society over the ages – the right and benefit of being different.

Shabbat Shalom

Berel Wein

from: Rabbi Sacks <info@rabbisacks.org>

subject: Covenant and Conversation

The Covenant and the Love (Eikev 5780)

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

An interesting phrase appears at the end of last week's parsha and at the beginning of this week's, and they are the only places where it appears in the Torah. The phrase is *ha-brit v'ha-chessed* (Deuteronomy 7:9) or in this week's parsha, *et ha-brit ve-et ha-chessed* (Deut. 7:12).

Know therefore that the Lord your God is God; He is the faithful God, keeping the brit and the chessed to a thousand generations of those who love Him and keep His commandments. (Deut. 7:9)

If you pay attention to these laws and are careful to follow them, then the Lord your God will keep the brit and the chessed with you, as He swore to your ancestors. (Deut. 7:12)

The phrase is strange. The relationship between God and Israel is defined by brit, covenant. That, essentially, is the content of the Torah. What then is added by the word *chessed*?

The translators have a problem with it. The Jewish Publication Society's translation of the opening verse of our parsha is: "And if you do obey these rules and observe them carefully, the Lord your God will maintain faithfully for you the covenant that He made on oath with your fathers." This translates *chessed* as "faithfully" and takes it as a qualification of the verb "maintain" or "keep". This is a very stretched translation.

A non-Jewish translation, the New International Version, translates *ha-brit v'ha-chessed* as "covenant of love." This is a very Christian translation. The covenant entered into between the Israelites and God was a covenant of law, not just of love.

Aryeh Kaplan, in *The Living Torah*, got it right when he translated it as "God your Lord will keep the covenant and love with which He made an oath to your fathers." Not "covenant of love" but "covenant and love." But still: what is the covenant, and what is the love that is distinct from the covenant?

This might seem a minor matter were it not for the fact that this phrase, which is rare in Tanach, makes an appearance at key moments of Jewish history. For example, it figures in King Solomon's great prayer at the consecration of the Temple in Jerusalem:

"Lord, the God of Israel, there is no God like You in Heaven above or on Earth below—You who keep the covenant and love with Your servants who continue wholeheartedly in your way." (1 Kings 8:23)

When, after the Babylonian exile, the nation gathered around Ezra and Nehemiah in Jerusalem and renewed the covenant, they said:

"Now therefore, our God, the great God, mighty and awesome, who keeps His covenant and love, do not let all this hardship seem trifling in Your eyes—the hardship that has come on us, on our kings and leaders, on our Priests and Prophets, on our ancestors and all Your people, from the days of the kings of Assyria until today. (Neh. 9:32)

At these critical moments, when Moses renewed the covenant on the banks of the Jordan, when Solomon dedicated the Temple, and the people in Ezra and Nehemiah's time rededicated themselves, they took care to define the relationship between God and the people as one of brit and *chessed*, covenant and love. It seems that both are necessary, or they would not have used this language on these three defining occasions many centuries apart. What then is the meaning of *chessed*? Significantly, Maimonides dedicates the penultimate chapter of *The Guide for the Perplexed* to the analysis of three words: *chessed*, *tzedakah* and *mishpat*. On *chessed* he says:

In our Commentary on *Pirkei Avot* (5:7) we have explained the expression *chessed* as denoting excess. It is especially used of extraordinary kindness. Loving-kindness is practised in two ways: first, we show kindness to those who have no claim whatever upon us; secondly, we are kind to those to whom it is due, in a greater measure than is due to them ... The very act of creation is an act of God's loving-kindness: "I have said, 'The universe is built in loving-kindness'" (Ps. 89:3)...[1]

The difference between the three terms is that I am legally entitled to *mishpat*. I am morally entitled to *tzedakah*. But to *chessed*, I am not entitled at all. When someone acts toward me in *chessed*, that is an act of pure grace. I have done nothing to deserve it.

Maimonides notes, citing the phrase from Psalms that "The universe is built in loving-kindness," that creation was an act of pure *chessed*. No one ever creates something because it deserves to be created. Creations do not exist before they are created.

We can define this in human terms more precisely. The book of Ruth is known as the work, par excellence, of *chessed*: "Rabbi Zeira said, 'This book does not have anything in it concerned with impurity or purity, forbidden or permitted. Why then was it written? To teach us the greatness of the reward for acts of *chessed*.'"[2]

There are two key scenes in the book. The first occurs when Naomi, bereaved of her husband and two sons, decides to return to Israel. She says to her two daughters-in-law, "Go back, each of you, to your mother's home. May the Lord show you kindness, as you have shown kindness to your dead husbands and to me..." She was telling them that they had no further obligations toward her. They had been married to her sons, but now they are widows. Naomi has no other sons. Being Moabite women, they will be strangers in Israel: they have no reason to go there. You owe me nothing, she is saying. You have been kind, you have been good daughters-in-law, but now we must go our separate ways.

The second speech occurs when Ruth has gone to gather grain in the field of Boaz, who treats her with great care and consideration. She asks him: "Why have I found such recognition in your eyes that you notice me—a foreigner?" The two key words here are "recognition" and "foreigner." "Recognition" means that you have behaved toward me as if you had obligations to me. But "I am a foreigner." The word used here is not "stranger," i.e. a resident alien to whom certain duties are owed. It means, a complete outsider. Ruth is saying to Boaz, you do not owe me anything.

That is what makes Ruth the supreme book of *chessed*, that is, of good done to another who has no claim whatsoever upon you. What Ruth does for Naomi, and what Boaz does for Ruth, are not *mishpat* or *tzedakah*. They are pure *chessed*.

Now let us return to the question with which we began. Why did Moses, and Solomon, and Nehemiah define the relationship between the Jewish people and God not in terms of a single concept, covenant, but added to it a second idea, namely *chessed*, meaning an act of love.

Covenant is essentially reciprocal. Two people or entities pledge themselves to one another, each committing to a responsibility. This is how it was defined by God at Mount Sinai: "Now if you obey me fully and keep My covenant, then out of all nations you will be My treasured possession, for all the earth is Mine" (Exodus 19:5). If you are My people, I will be your God. If you serve me, I will bless you. Every covenant has an if-then quality to it. Therefore, every covenant is inherently vulnerable. That is what Moses emphasised throughout *Devarim*. Don't take the land or its blessings for granted. If you do well, things will go well, but if you do badly, great dangers lie in store.

That is covenant. *Chessed*, in contrast, has no if-then quality. It is given out of the goodness of the giver, regardless of the worth of the recipient. When Moses, Solomon and Nehemiah referred to *chessed* in addition to the covenant, they were making an implicit request of God of the most fundamental significance. Even if we fail to honour the covenant, please God be gracious to us, for You are good even when we are not, and You do good even when we do not deserve it, when we have no claim on You whatsoever – *ki le-olam chasdo*, for His *chessed* is eternal.

The verses in our parsha sound conditional: "If you pay attention to these laws ... then the Lord your God will keep the brit and the chessed ..." This suggests that we will be shown *chessed* if we deserve it, but if not, not. But it isn't so. At the end of the curses in *Bechukotai*, God says: "Yet in spite of this, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them or abhor them so as to destroy them completely, breaking my covenant with them: I am the Lord their God."

God will never break the covenant, even if we do, because of His *chessed*. Tanach describes the relationship between God and Israel in two primary

ways: like a husband and wife, and like a parent and a child. Between husband and wife there can be a divorce. Between parent and child there cannot be. They may be estranged, but the parent is still their parent and the child is still their child. Marriage is a covenant; parenthood is not. Do not forsake us, we say to God, because whatever we have done, You are our parent and we are Your children. Chessed is the kind of love a parent has for a child, whether they deserve it or not. Chessed is unconditional grace.

I believe that chessed is the highest achievement of the moral life. It is what Ruth did for Naomi, and Boaz for Ruth, and from that kindness came David, Israel's greatest king. Reciprocal altruism – I do this for you, and you do this for me – is universal among social animals. Chessed is not. In chessed God created the universe. In chessed we create moments of moral beauty that bring joy and hope where there was darkness and despair. Shabbat Shalom

fw from hamelaket@gmail.com
from: Rabbi Chanan Morrison <chanan@ravkooktorah.org>
to: rav-kook-list@googlegroups.com
subject: [Rav Kook Torah]

Eikev: Nourishing the Soul
Rav Kook Torah

Rabbi Isaac Luria, the master kabbalist of 16th-century Safed, asked the following question: I understand how food sustains our bodies. But how can the soul, which is purely spiritual, be nourished from physical food? How is it possible that food enables the soul to remain bound to the body? The scholar explained that all created matter in the universe - whether human, animal, plant, or mineral - exists only through the power of God's Ten Sayings when He created the world. So this power of Divine "speech" also exists in food. And that is the spiritual nourishment which the soul is able to absorb when the body eats. When we recite a berachah before eating a piece of fruit, we acknowledge that God is the "Ruler of the universe, Who creates the fruit of trees." This recognition awakens the fruit's inner spiritual force, providing spiritual sustenance for the soul.

Blessing over Torah Study

It is quite strange. The obligation to recite a blessing over a meal is explicitly stated in the Torah:

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

But what about Torah? What is the source for reciting a berachah before studying Torah? According to Rabbi Ishmael, this blessing is derived a fortiori:

"If we recite a blessing for that which sustains life in this transient world, then certainly we should recite a blessing for that which enables eternal life in the World to Come." (Berachot 48b)

Why should the blessing over Torah study be based on the blessing for food? Why is there no explicit source for this obligation? 1

Appreciating the Torah

Rav Kook explained that we are unable to fully grasp the greatness of the Torah. It is a Divine gift of immeasurable value. In this world, it is easier for us to appreciate material gifts. Only in the future world will we properly appreciate the Torah's eternal worth.

On an abstract, intellectual level, we may recognize the Torah's importance, but this is beyond our emotional faculties. Yet we can deepen our appreciation for the Torah by contemplating the connection that Rabbi Ishmael made between Torah and physical sustenance. If we are filled with sincere feelings of gratitude for that which keeps us alive in this temporal world, all the more we should be thankful for that which provides us with eternal life.

This contemplative exercise, Rav Kook noted, is one way we can actualize the teaching of Rabbi Isaac Luria on how to elevate physical pleasures. When we deepen our appreciation for all of God's gifts, we gain spiritually from the inner essence of food. As Rabbi Luria wrote: "Not by bread alone does man live, but by all that comes from God" (Deut. 8:3). This implies that also the soul lives by bread.

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from: Ohr Somayach <ohr@ohr.edu>
to: weekly@ohr.edu
subject: Torah Weekly

Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parsha Insights
For the week ending 8 August 2020 / 18 Av 5780
Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com
Parashat Ekev

Wealth and Poverty

"See! I am putting in front of you today a blessing and a curse." (11:26)
Wealth and poverty do not always have the same effect on people.

There are those whose wealth influences them for the good, and through the blessing of their wealth they come to a greater appreciation of Hashem. However, had they been poor, they would have been so occupied trying to find food that they would have forgotten their Creator. This was the case in Egypt, where the Bnei Yisrael were so exhausted by the hard labor that they did not listen to Moshe.

On the other hand, there are those whom wealth removes from the path of righteousness. We have seen too often in our history that the Jewish People become successful and self-satisfied and forget Who gave them what they have. However, when a person is poor and "broken," Hashem never ignores his supplications.

That is what the verse is saying here: "See! I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse" — and don't think that the blessing is wealth and the curse is poverty. Rather, everything depends on how a person deals with his riches or poverty. And whether he is rich or poor, if he turns his focus to the Torah and mitzvahs, then whatever his status is in life — he receives the blessing.

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fw from hamelaket@gmail.com
from: Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald <ezbuchwald@njop.org>
subject: Weekly Torah Message From Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald
rabbibuchwald.njop.org

Rabbi Buchwald's Weekly Torah Message
"The Inter-marriage Conundrum"
(updated and edited from parashat Eikev 5761-2001)
Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

The opening verses of this week's parasha, parashat Eikev, conclude the theme that was the focus of the final part of last week's parasha, Va'etchanan.

Deuteronomy 7 raised the issue of the religious problems that the People of Israel would face with the anticipated move into the land of Canaan. How is Israel to deal with the powerful influences of the idolaters and the idolatrous sects they will find in Canaan? After all, for the first time since the exodus from Egypt, the Israelites, whose own religious practice are not yet firmly established, will be exposed to alien cultures whose decadent lifestyles will be highly seductive.

The Torah's rules for those entering the new land are therefore extreme in their directness: The Torah declares that all the native inhabitants who pose a danger to Israel's spiritual survival are to be banished or destroyed. Marriage with them is strictly forbidden, and all pagan images and idolatrous sanctuaries are to be demolished. If Israel will follow these prescriptions, all

will be well, and blessings will attend them. But, if not, the very devastating destructions that would otherwise befall their enemies, will be visited upon Israel itself.

In Deuteronomy 7:3, the Torah firmly tells the entire Jewish nation: לֹא תִתְּנֶנּוּ בְּתוּתֵיכֶם לְבָנֵי אֲרָצוֹת אֵלֶּה וְלֹא תִתְּנֶנּוּ בְּתוּתֵיכֶם לְבָנֵי אֲרָצוֹת אֵלֶּה, You shall not intermarry with them [the Canaanites], do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons, for they will turn your children away from Me to worship other gods. And the L-rd's anger will blaze forth against you, and He will promptly wipe you out.

In light of the critical problem of intermarriage, which hovers above 70% among the non-Orthodox in the United States today, I would like to share with you the following letter to a woman who is contemplating intermarriage.

Dear Jennifer (fictitious name),

I deeply appreciate your candid reply to my letter. As you know, I regard you highly and always consider your opinions very seriously. I am engaging in this exchange of letters not to badger you, but to help sharpen both your and my perception of the very vital issue of Jewish in-marriage, and the future of Jewish life in America.

I know you love "Paul" very dearly, and everything I have heard about him indicates that he is a wonderful person. I truly believe you when you write that you feel that you must marry him because you believe that he is your "soul mate," and that his presence in your life leaves you greatly fulfilled. The fact that he happens to be a non-Jew is terribly disappointing to you as well, but you feel that your personal happiness must come first. I appreciate what you are saying. In fact, I am prepared to acknowledge that you and Paul can probably live together and be deliriously happy in marriage, despite your different faiths.

If my last sentence surprised you, allow me to explain.

The truth of the matter is, that most American Jews today are not very Jewish. In fact, they are very much like the average American non-Jew. That is because, while we hardly realize it, 99 44/100 percent of our daily lives are not very Jewish. In fact, much of our lives are pretty Christian! The average Jew in America knows who was the mother of Jesus, but has no clue as to who was the mother of Moses. No, it wasn't Miriam (she was his sister). It was Jocheved! The average Jewish child in America can sing the words to "Deck the Halls" but doesn't have an idea of what Maoz Tzur (the Chanukah hymn) is! In effect, the differences between Jew and gentile in America have really diminished to the point of them being inconsequential. That is why I believe that there is really no truly compelling reason why both Jews and non-Jews shouldn't seek out the most socially acceptable "soulmate" for themselves, irrespective of faith.

Furthermore, I don't believe that the slightly higher rate of divorces that intermarried couples experience makes a big difference, after all, more than a third of all marriages in America end in divorce anyway. Neither do I feel that because six million Jews died in the Holocaust, you or anyone else has an obligation to marry Jewish in order to perpetuate the Jewish people. If one is positively moved to perpetuate the Jewish people in light of the Holocaust, fine. Otherwise, it's important for every person to do what's best for themselves.

Yes, it's true that the "melting pot" that our grandparents prayed for in America has turned into a "meltdown" for Jewish life. But, those are cosmic issues of Jewish continuity and Jewish survival, and it's unreasonable for anyone to expect that those issues should play a decisive role in our choice of individual mates. We have to live our lives as best we can, and let the "cosmic powers" work out the cosmic issues.

I do, however, believe that there is one compelling reason why a Jew might choose not to intermarry.

You see, throughout human history, the Jewish people have been at the forefront of working toward what we Jews call "Tikun Olam" (seeking to perfect the world). Our Torah (sometimes called the Old Testament) introduced many revolutionary ideas into the world, and we, the Jewish

people, so to speak, are "chosen" to be a "light unto the nations," "ambassadors" so to speak, to bring these ideas into the broad marketplace and to popularize them in the general society.

It was our Torah that first introduced the revolutionary concepts of "Love thy neighbor as thyself," care for the orphan, the widow, the infirm, the stranger. Our Torah mentions "love of the stranger" 36 times, more than any other mitzvah mentioned in the Torah! It was our Torah that first introduced to the world the concept of not causing undue pain to animals, and, yes, even the concept of conservation. It's our Torah that says that a person must "work" the land and "guard" the land, that the land must lay fallow one year in seven to regenerate itself. It's our Torah that says that even in times of war, one may not cut down a fruit-bearing tree, even when Jewish soldiers' lives are at stake. It is also forbidden to divert the waterworks of the city under siege. It's our Torah that, says that even in times of battle, soldiers must carry a spade with them in order to properly dispose of their bodily wastes. In effect, we Jews were the first members of the Sierra Club, we were the first movers-and-shakers to save the whales and preserve the Darter Snail.

Despite the enormous challenges, we Jews have successfully transmitted these beautiful and revolutionary ideas to the nations of the world, not by force or jihads, but through the power of intellectual persuasion and personal modeling. In fact, it was our Torah that proclaimed for the first time "Thou shalt not murder." And, although Hammurabi recorded the exact same words 300 years earlier in his Babylonian code, its meaning for the ancient Babylonians was entirely different. According to Hammurabi's code, if I killed my neighbor's son, my neighbor had the right to kill my son. If I raped my neighbor's daughter, my neighbor could rape my daughter, or take my daughter as a concubine. If I killed my neighbor's slave, I could give my neighbor fifteen camels and we'd be even.

For Hammurabi, human life was regarded simply as chattel, property.

Therefore, if I caused my neighbor to suffer a loss of his property, then I had to restore it, or suffer a similar loss myself.

Three hundred years after Hammurabi, the Torah also declared, "Thou shalt not murder"—the words were exactly the same, but the intention and implementation were light-years apart. Our Torah boldly maintains that every person is responsible for his/her own actions, for his/her own sin or crime. The Torah insists that a third person, such as an innocent son, cannot be punished for a crime that another person committed! In fact, our Torah enlightened the world with the idea of the concept of the "sanctity of human life"—that a murderer who takes a human life, has committed a crime against what the ancients called "G-d," and what sociologists today call "society." That's why murder indictments today are usually in the form of the "State of California vs John Doe," because the whole world has adopted our view of what "Thou shall not murder" means, and subscribes to the Jewish idea of the sanctity of human life.

I could go on citing hundreds, perhaps thousands, of revolutionary ideas that Jewish tradition has introduced into this world that Western society has adopted. The Jewish people have worked assiduously to perfect the world, and while the world is not yet perfect, we can proudly look upon Jewish history as one unending series of ethical and moral triumphs and accomplishments. And, perhaps even more remarkably, the Jews did not enlighten the world by forcing their beliefs on others through crusades and holy wars. Jews did not say "Kiss the Jewish star or we'll chop off your head!" We did it by modeling. And, while we still have a long way to go, we can be extremely proud of what we've accomplished.

Yes, Jennifer you can live happily-ever-after with Paul. But, if you choose to marry him, you will no longer be part of this incredible legacy which has worked so effectively to spiritually purify and enlighten the world.

You might say "big deal," that is your choice. Well, truthfully, I and many of my fellow Jews feel that it is indeed a "big deal." In fact, it's the most important thing that we can do with our lives—"to enlighten the world under the rule of the Al-mighty."

We know that even when Jews marry other Jews, it is very difficult to live the kind of committed life which will bring honor to the Jewish people and to G-d. There are “zillions” of in-married Jews who have no idea of what the Divine mission is for the Jewish people. They might remain nominal Jews, but their impact on the world will be negligible. It is very likely that only a small number of Jewish “fanatics” – those who devote their lives passionately to preserve and transmit this Divine message, are going to continue to make a difference in this world. Unfortunately, for those who are not married to Jews, the chances of promoting those ideas and ideals, no matter how noble their intentions, are virtually nil.

And, so, in the final analysis, you need to realize that the choice you are making is not only a decision to live your life with a particular wonderful man, who happens not to be Jewish. The choice you are making now is the choice of being part of one of the greatest legacies, an unbroken legacy, of, perhaps, 150 generations of Jews who preceded you, who fought to preserve their values and ideals, and, in many instances, put their lives on the line to keep the chain of this Divine mission alive. It is this determination that has allowed us today the privilege of living in an enlightened environment that has adopted so many of those ancient Jewish traditions and incorporated them into their own value system.

Jennifer, I want you to know that I will always respect you and value our very special friendship. But, if you choose to marry Paul and he does not convert, know that you will have effectively cut yourself off from 3,300 years of the most glorious and enlightened tradition, a tradition which has been single-mindedly dedicated to the sacred mission of teaching the world the idea of the sanctity of human life and “perfecting the world under the rule of the Al-mighty.”

All I can ask now, is that you consider these words and thoughts and make an informed decision.

Dear Reader,

There are hundreds of thousands of intermarried Jews in the US, and many more Jews who are presently contemplating intermarriage, who need to hear this message. Help us share it with them. But, do it pleasantly and gently. *This year, the joyous festival of Tu b'Av, the fifteenth of Av, is celebrated on Tuesday night and Wednesday, August 4th and 5th, 2020. Happy Tu b'Av. May you be blessed.*

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Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis *chiefrabbi.org*

Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

Dvar Torah: Eikev

A change in the order provides a major lesson for all time!

A change in the order presents us with a crucially important lesson for life. Last Shabbat, Parshat Va'etchanan, we read the first paragraph of the Shema which is so very well known to us. In it we have the important mitzvah of וישננתם לבנוך ודברתם בו – we must teach Torah to our children. A bit later in the same paragraph, we're given the Mitzvah of Tefillin – וקשרתם לאות על ירך. Now in the second paragraph of Shema which we will be reading in Parshat Eikev this coming Shabbat, we have, yet again, the mitzvah of tefillin – ולמדתם אותם את בניכם לדברתם בו and that is followed by First Tefillin and then Talmud Torah.

So my question is this: Why is it that in the first paragraph, the teaching of Torah precedes the mitzvah of Tefillin, whereas in the second paragraph, first, we have the mitzvah of Tefillin followed by the mitzvah to teach Torah. Now we know of course that the first paragraph of the Shema is in the singular. It therefore, addresses each and every one of us in our own individual capacities. The second paragraph is in the plural, indicating that we fulfil the mitzvot of Hashem as an integral part of Am Yisrael as a collective, with a responsibility to all of Am Yisrael.

Allow me therefore to suggest the following: When a child is born, the parents immediately have the mitzvah of וישננתם לבנוך – to teach Torah to their child. To instil within the heart and the mind of that child an appreciation of Torah values and eventually as suggested by the first paragraph, the child will grow up. As girls reach the age of 12 and boys reach the age of 13 when they put on Tefillin, they become members of the adult community of Am Yisrael and they embrace fresh responsibilities. But that's not the end of the story.

The second paragraph of the Shema picks it up from there. First of all, Tefillin and after that, yet again, Talmud Torah. Indicating that as an adult, the study of Torah must always continue.

In this spirit, we say in our davening every evening, כי הם חיינו וארך ימנו ובהם – that the words of Torah are our lives and they are the length of our days – they are there to inspire and to guide us throughout our lives. Let no one therefore think, God forbid, that there comes a time in one's life when one 'graduates' from Torah study, or from a commitment to keep the law of Hashem. Quite the contrary: Talmud Torah needs to be a part of our lives both as children and thereafter, throughout our entire existence. And thanks to Torah, we have the keys to a meaningful life filled with joy and happiness always.

Shabbat shalom

Rabbi Mirvis is the Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom. He was formerly Chief Rabbi of Ireland.

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Parsha Parables By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Drasha - Parshas Eikev :: Letting Go

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

In this week's portion Moshe talks about what was perhaps the most traumatic moment of his career. After spending 40 days and nights on the highest level of spiritual elevation, he returned from Mount Sinai to a scene that filled him with horror. At the foot of the mountain the Jews were reveling around a golden calf.

Naturally Moshe was appalled. Here he was, holding the luchos (tablets), a G-d-given immortal gift, and he faced a nation plunged into an act of idolatry. He smashes the luchos.

But if we analyze the narrative there is an interesting word that Moshe inserts as he describes his actions on that day. “I descended from the mountain and the two tablets were in my hands. Then I saw and behold! You had sinned unto G-d; you made yourselves a molten calf. So I grasped the two luchos and I threw them from my two hands and smashed them in front of your eyes” (Deuteronomy 9:15-17).

Moshe was holding the tablets when descending the mountain. Why did he clutch them before throwing them from his hands? Weren't they already in his hands?

Shouldn't the verse tell us “Then I saw and behold! You had sinned and you made yourselves a molten calf. So I threw the tablets from my two hands and smashed them in front of your eyes.” Why, and in what way did he grasp them?

A friend of mine told me a story about his great grandfather, a brilliant sage and revered tzadik. Whenever he saw one of his children commit an action that was harmful to their physical or spiritual well-being he would stop them. But this sage knew that stopping a child is not enough. The youngster would need a punishment too, whether it be potch (Yiddish for slap), reprimand, lecture, or the withholding of privileges.

But when a potch or harsh rebuke was due, the rabbi would not give it immediately. He would jot the transgression down in a small notebook and at the end of the week he would approach the young offender. After giving the child a hug and embrace, he reminded the child of the incident and explained to the child that his actions were wrong.

"I should have punished you immediately when I saw you commit your act," he would say, "but honestly, I was angry then, and my punishment may have been one spurred by anger, not admonition. Now, however, that occurrence is in the past and I am calm. Now I can mete your punishment with a clear head. And you will know that it is given from love, not anger."

He then proceeded to punish the child in a way that fit the misdeed. Moshe was upset. But he did not want to throw the luchos down in rage. He therefore grabbed them and held them tight before hurling them. Moshe, in his narrative tells us that he seized the luchos before breaking them. He wanted to send a clear message to the revelers below. That the mussar (ethical reprove) that he was affording with this action was not born out of irrational behavior or in anger.

Before smashing the luchos Moshe embraced them, just as a father hugging a child that he would soon admonish. Because Moshe wanted to tell us that before we let loose, we have to hold tight.

Good Shabbos!

Dedicated in memory of Roslyn Usdan (Chaya Raizel Bas Reb Yosef Nechemia) by Burt & Lois Usdan and family

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

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The Point of the Land of Israel (Ekev)

Ben-Tzion Spitz

Every great person has first learned how to obey, whom to obey, and when to obey. - William Arthur Ward

The Torah repeatedly declares the primacy of the Land of Israel. The whole purpose of the Exodus from Egypt was to bring the Jewish nation to that land "flowing with milk and honey." The Land of Israel is an inheritance to the Children of Israel, from the days of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The whole focus, the whole goal of Israel's journey through the desert is to eventually get to the Promised Land. The entire book of Deuteronomy revolves around preparing the people for their entry into the land.

Therefore, it may seem counterintuitive and even shocking, that with such definitive historical, legal, and textual centrality that the Land of Israel has for the people of Israel, that the connection between land and people is conditional.

Deuteronomy 8:1 states:

"You shall faithfully observe all the Instruction that I enjoin upon you today, that you may thrive and increase and be able to possess the land that the Lord promised on oath to your fathers."

The Meshech Chochma on that verse reads the statement as conditional. If you observe the commandments, then you will possess the land. If you don't observe the commandments, you won't possess the land. This is not an original statement, as the Torah in various places states this unequivocally. Not only will we not possess the land, but we will be kicked out of the land for lack of obeying God's laws.

What is noteworthy about the Meshech Chochma's analysis is his statement that not only will we not possess the land if we don't follow God's directives, but that the entire purpose, the entire reason why the Children of Israel were given the Land of Israel, was exclusively to follow God's commands. Once we stop following God's commands our very reason for having the land disappears. That deal is nullified, broken, revoked.

The Meshech Chochma takes this understanding a step further. One might have thought that if the deal of possession of the land is void, then all of the "strings," all of the responsibilities and commandments which were placed on Israel would likewise be voided. That we would be absolved of further wrongdoing. However, that conclusion would be wrong, especially in the area of idol worship. We are still liable. The covenant is not broken, despite

our "treason." God holds us accountable regarding His commandments, even if we don't think we are.

The Meshech Chochma brings as proof the fact that the prior inhabitants of Israel were expelled, in part, because of their idolatrous practices, and all of humanity, since the time of Noah, had already been warned and commanded to refrain from idolatry.

May we become worthy of possessing the land of Israel.

Dedication - To the 15th of Av, one of the happiest days of the year in ancient times.

Shabbat Shalom

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

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to: weeklydt@torahweb2.org

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Rabbi Yakov Haber

The Fruits of Eretz Yisrael: Outer and Inner Dimensions

Parashas Eikev, perhaps more than any other single parasha in Chumash Devarim extolls the spiritual and physical blessings of the Holy Land. "A land flowing with milk and honey" (11:10), "a land in which you will not eat bread sparingly, nothing will be lacking in it, whose stones are iron and from its mountains you will hew copper" (8:9), "a land upon which Hashem's eyes rest from the beginning of the year until the end of the year" (11:12). Here, we would like to focus on one of the most famous aspects of Eretz Yisrael, its acclaimed fruits, specifically the "seven species".

"אֶרֶץ חִטָּה וּשְׂעוּרָה וּגְפֵן וְתַאֲמָה וּרְמֹן, אֶרֶץ זֵית שֶׁמֶן וְדֹבֶשׁ" (8:8). Why are specifically these species enumerated in praise of the land?

Why does the word "eretz" appear twice at specific locations dividing the list of seven into two groups of five and two respectively?

Several commentaries indicate that these fruits provide basic, important nourishment (see Ibn Ezra and Abravanel quoting the Greek physician Galen).[1] Seforno adds that the two groups of five and two preceded by the word "eretz" are divided into the nutritive fruits and the ma'adanei melech, the royal delicacies of olive oil and date-honey. R' Eliyahu of Vilna in Aderes Eliyahu similarly notes the division into two groups and, on a pshat level, states that the first lists mazon, food; the second comprises items which are a hybrid of both food and drink.[2]

The Gemara (Berachos 41b) concludes that the fruits are listed in order of importance with an emphasis being placed on the proximity of each fruit to the word eretz. This leads to the following list in order of importance: wheat, olives, barley, dates, grapes, figs and pomegranates. Sheim MiShmuel (Haggada shel Pesach) directs us to two Talmudic passages indicating the interrelationship between wheat-product (Berachos 40a) and olive oil (Menachos 85b) consumption and the acquisition of wisdom. Since Eretz Yisrael is known as a land most conducive to the acquisition of wisdom (Bereishis Rabba 16:4), whose very air induces wisdom - אֵירָא דְאֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל - אֵירָא דְאֵרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל (Bava Basra 158b), the agricultural products most directly connected to wisdom are considered the most important.[3]

Bach (Orach Chaim 208) and Chasam Sofer[4] remarkably write that consumption of the fruits of Eretz Yisrael induce sanctity into those eating them. Based on this concept, Bach justifies the view that in the bracha mei'ein shalosh we recite "וְנֹאכַל מִפְרִיָּהּ וְנִשְׂבַע מִטּוֹבָהּ" - and may we eat of its fruits and be satiated from its goodness". Several Rishonim (see Tur 208) struck out this phrase as it appears to focus on the importance of the physical side of land, something that Chazal seem to diminish by assuming that

clearly Moshe Rabbeinu did not pray to enter the Promised Land לאכול מפריה ולשבע מטובה (Sota 14a)! How can we then pray to Hashem for precisely that! Bach explains that even the fruits themselves of the Holy Land generate sanctity and are worthy of praying that we merit to partake of them. (Although Bach does not address the question from Moshe Rabbeinu, presumably Chazal understood that Moshe was praying for directly spiritual activities - the mitzvos dependent on the land.) Bach's actual words are extremely revealing both as to the benefits of partaking of the even the physical bounty of the land, but also the great danger in defiling its sanctity: The sanctity of the land which emanates from the sanctity of the upper (supernal) Land also permeates its fruits which are nourished from the sanctity of the Divine Presence which dwells in the midst of the land. Therefore He adjures (Bamidbar 35:34) "Do not contaminate the land in which you dwell which I dwell in, for I am Hashem Who dwells among the Children of Israel." He states that if you do contaminate the land, impurity will also be drawn into its fruits which nourish from it when the Divine presence has been removed from the land... What follows then is I will remove my Presence from bnei Yisrael whom until now have been "heichal Hashem"... for the Divine presence was literally dwelling among them... Therefore it is understandable that we say מפריה ונשבע מטובה "" for by consuming its fruits we are nourished by the sanctity of the Shechina and from Its purity and we are satiated from Its goodness.[5] R' Yaakov Zvi Mecklenburg in his HaKesav v'HaKabbala opines that the division of the seven species of fruits into two groups splits them into fruits in their original form and products which are pressed from the original fruits (olive oil and date honey). Conceptually, perhaps one of the messages in this division is that Hashem is conveying to us two aspects of His Providence over His people in the land, one without (or minimal) human involvement and one with a significant amount of human endeavor. Hashem grants both salvation and success, the former without human effort, the latter with.[6] To be sure, some agricultural labor must be invested into growing fruits as well, but the product is consumed as is. With olive oil and date honey, the final product itself only emerges after human involvement. This then is directly parallel to verses immediately following ours. "Lest you eat and be satiated ... and your heart will grow arrogant, and you will forget Hashem, your G-d... and you will state in your heart 'My might and the strength my hand have amassed for me this great wealth.' And you shall remember that it is Hashem, your G-d, who has granted you the strength to amass wealth..." (8:12,14,17-18). In partaking of Divine blessing anywhere in the world, even of the sanctified fruits of the Holy Land, even if produced with much human effort, one must always recall that ultimately all of this great bounty is meant to bring us closer to the Almighty by being recipients of His kindness and not chas v'shalom to cause distance.

A final thought on the division of the fruits into two groups: I heard from Rav Mendel Farber shlit"a, a longtime Rebbe at Yeshiva Darchei Noam where I have been privileged to teach for the last thirteen years, that the difference between the two sub-lists of fruits is that the first represents the apparent, the external fruit itself, the second denotes the inner dimension, the extract inside. This helps explain why the spies only took grapes, figs and pomegranates as samples of the fruits of the land (Bamidbar 13:23) and not olives and dates. The Torah's description of olives and dates in our parasha as olive oil and date-honey represents their inner essence. Thus, the spies only looked at the outer surface of the Holy Land they entered, and therefore returned with a negative report. Had they looked beneath the surface, they would have fallen in love with the land and returned with a positive, even excitedly gushing report of its physical and spiritual beauty. Moshe Rabbeinu knowing this truth, asks Hashem "Let me pass over and see the land" (Devarim 3:25). Kli Yakar explains that the physical part of his request was denied - he was not permitted entry. But the spiritual aspect of his request - to see the land - was granted. Indeed, Moshe's looking at the land allowed him to see its inner quality, a land infused with the Divine presence and partake, even if from a distance, of its supernal pleasure.

May Hashem grant us the ability to always partake of the sanctified, physical bounty of the Holy Land, to avail ourselves of all of the land's spiritual and physical blessings and to create the opportunities to do so. When the world situation does not allow us to enjoy those blessings, may we increase our longing for the Coveted Land's abundant gifts. More importantly, may we always appreciate the "Land upon which Hashem's eyes rest" constantly.

[1] *Much has been written about the health benefits of olives, grapes, dates, pomegranates and figs, but many other fruits also have significant health benefits. The particular nutritive advantage - if there is one according to current nutritional knowledge - of these fruits over others, intuitively true and taken for granted by at least some of the commentaries, remains a fascinating topic of research.*

[2] *See there that on a deeper level the five and two division is directly parallel to the hatavas hamenorah, the cleaning out of the menorah in the mikdash, which was divided into cleaning five receptacles of oil and then the remaining two later. Also see there where the Gaon analyzes each fruit in the list kabbalistically.*

[3] *See Maharsha (Horayos 13b) and Pardes Yosef (Eikev 8:8) who explain based on this concept why olive oil and date honey are mentioned rather than olives and dates.*

[4] *See Seifer Eretz Yisrael b'Mishnas HaChasam Sofeir (2:52 ff.).*

[5] *Fascinatingly, the Bach's words concerning the fruits of Eretz Yisrael are directly parallel to Ramban's understanding of the mann in the desert (see his comments to Shemos 16:6). This directly follows from the thesis that the midbar experience supernaturally gave a foretaste of what would be happening in Eretz Yisrael in a more hidden way. This can be generalized to Torah study, parnassa, and Providence in general. See Mann and Parnassa and The Mishkan, Har Sinai, Torah and Eretz Yisrael for further elaborations on these themes.*

[6] *Also see Sukkos: Two Types of Divine Providence.*

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 subject: Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

**Shema Yisrael Torah Network
 Peninim on the Torah - Parshas Eikev**

עקב פרשת תש"פ

..
 ועתה ישראל מה ד' אלקיך שאל מעמך כי אם ליראה את ד' אלקיך
And now, Yisrael, what is Hashem, your G-d, asking of you, other than to fear Hashem, your G-d. (10:12)

In his commentary to *Sefer Shemos* (3:22) *Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl*, distinguishes between various meanings for the word *sho'ail*, to borrow/to ask. His rule is: When the word *sho'ail* is followed by the word *mei'eis*, from, it means to request, as it says (*Shemos* 3:22), *V'sho'alah ishah mishchentah*, "Each woman shall request from her neighbor." When the word *sho'ail* is followed by the word *mei'im*, with, it means to borrow, as in (*Shemos* 22:13), *V'chi yishal ish mei'im reieihu*, "If a man shall borrow from his fellow." The reason for this is that, when one borrows an object, he does not become its owner. Ownership is retained by the object's physical owner. Thus, the owner who lends an object will "come along with it" (so to speak) and he is still *imach*, "with you."

With this idea in mind (*imach* implies that the owner comes along with the object), *Horav Shimon Schwab, zl*, homiletically renders the above *pasuk* which addresses *yiraas Shomayim*, fear of Heaven. Why does the Torah write, *Mah Hashem... sho'ail mei imach*, "What does Hashem wish (to borrow) (request) from you?" What is the meaning of Hashem "borrowing" our *yiraas Shomayim*? It should rather have said, *Mah Hashem sho'ail mei itach*, "What does Hashem request of you?"

Rav Schwab cites Chazal (*Niddah* 16b) who teach, “Everything is in the hands of Heaven except for the fear of Heaven.” Everyone must expend his own effort and toil to achieve *yiraas Shomayim*. There are no “free tickets,” no easy way. Nonetheless, in our *tefillos*, prayers, we implore Hashem, *V’yacheid levaveinu l’ahavah u’l’yirah es Shemecha*, “Unify our hearts to love and to fear Your Name.” If we ask for it, it means that this is a way of achieving it. Apparently, this *tefillah* implies that *yiraas Shomayim* can be had for the asking, even without expending our own effort.

Initially, one must do it himself. He must toil to achieve *yiraas Shomayim*. After one has acquired a modicum of *yiraas Shomayim* by virtue of his own exertion, however, we pray to Hashem that He “borrow” this *yiraas Shomayim* and “repay” it with interest. We know that achieving the optimum level of fearfulness is beyond our ability. Thus, we ask for Heavenly assistance, knowing full well that unless we achieve the first rung, we will not be able to climb the ladder on our own.

Yiraas Shomayim means *yiraas ha’romemus*, fear of awe. A person is awestruck with fear of the greatness of Hashem; thus, he diligently does everything possible to uphold the *mitzvos* and everything that Hashem asks of us. It is a constant *mitzvah*, because Hashem is constantly with us; otherwise we would not exist. *Shivisi Hashem l’negdi tamid*, “I set Hashem before me always (*Tehillim* 16:8) is a halachic imperative which enjoins us to act appropriately all of the time, regardless where and in what circumstances, we find ourselves. *Horav Moshe Soloveitchik, zl*, would not stand *Shemoneh Esrai* a minute longer in public than when he recited it in private. He saw this practiced by his father, *Horav Chaim Soloveitchik, zl*. *Rav Chaim* dressed in public as he dressed in private. One’s behavior must be consistent, because one always stands before Hashem.

Horav Mordechai Gifter, zl, taught, “Man’s very essence is directed solely to the goal of recognizing the Creator and, consequently, not only his soul is bound together with the Master of the Universe, but even his body and his entire existence are rooted in the great purpose for which he is intended.” (*Rav Gifter*, Rabbi Yechiel Spero). I can attest that these emotions were evident in the *Rosh Yeshivah*’s total demeanor. He once wrote, “If man finds his Creator, he has found everything.” This was not a mere aphorism; this was the way the *rosh yeshivah* lived his life.

Horav Aryeh Levin, zl, the *Tzaddik* of Yerushalayim, was wont to say, “A person who is truly reverent in his fear of Heaven is one who lies awake at night worrying, ‘What have I done today to relieve the suffering of a Jew made wretched by his troubles?’” *Rav Aryeh* had an uncanny ability to relate to the entire social and religious gamut of Jewry. He had feelings for them all and was acutely aware that what caused one to be on the outskirts of religion was usually circumstances in his life that were often beyond his control. He saw through the cloud of ambiguity which others refused to penetrate; thus, he was able to reach out to love and be loved by all. He saw Hashem in each and every Jew. To achieve such a spiritual plateau, one must truly be a *yarei Shomayim*.

Horav Avraham Kalmanovitz, zl, was one of the leaders of the *Vaad Hatzalah*, Relief and Rescue. Following World War II, he worked feverishly to save Jews, both physically and spiritually. He was instrumental in the spiritual reclamation of Moroccan Jewry which was falling prey to the heresy preached by the *Alliance Israelite Universelle*. (This was a Paris-based secular Jewish organization founded in 1860 by the French statesman Adolphe Cremieux to safeguard the human rights of Jews around the world. In North Africa, they attempted to secularize the Jewish legal and educational systems, attempting to alienate Jews from the Orthodox way of life.) This motivated *Rav Kalmanovitz*’s clarion call for help. “Save Moroccan Jewry,” he cried to anyone who would listen. He travelled to *Eretz Yisrael* and called a meeting of the *gedolim*, Torah leaders, and implored them to help: “Give me someone who speaks their language, who is a scholar, righteous and G-d-fearing, who can turn the tide of assimilation.” The Torah leaders chose a young man, *Horav Raphael Abo, zl*, and charged him with the mission.

Rav Raphael spoke with his revered *Rebbe*, the *Rosh Yeshivah* of Porat Yosef, *Horav Ezra Attiyah, zl*, and asked his advice. The *Rosh Yeshivah* not only agreed, but gave him *tzedakah*, charitable funds, to ease the burden of starting up the program. *Rav Raphael* left his young wife in Yerushalayim as he trail-blazed the spiritual wasteland that was Morocco at the time. After searching for a suitable community in which to establish a *yeshivah*, he arrived in a city which had a sizeable Jewish community that seemed interested. Indeed, the *rosh ha’kahal*, *Reb Moshe Yifrach*, a distinguished man of means, even agreed to join in the endeavor. His presence would surely turn the tables in *Rav Abo*’s favor.

At the very last minute, *Reb Moshe* called that something had come up. He could not attend the meeting. “But I need you,” the young *Rav* asserted. “If you do not attend, it will all be in vain. The *kahal* respects you. Your attendance is critical to our success.” “I am very sorry. My son is ill and I just picked up medicine at the pharmacy. I do not want to be late in giving him the medicine,” was *Reb Moshe*’s reply. “Please, I beg of you, without your presence, everything that we had planned will be a waste. Your son will be well. Hashem will see to his cure. I assure you!”

The plea emanating from *Rav Raphael*’s pure heart moved *Reb Moshe*. (*Rav Raphael* was all of thirty years old at the time.) *Rav Raphael* spoke passionately to the crowded *shul*, where a standing-room only crowd had gathered to listen. Undoubtedly, *Reb Moshe Yifrach*’s presence would make a difference. Suddenly, the doors burst open, and the pharmacist came running in, pushing himself through the crowd. As soon as he saw *Reb Moshe*, he fell on him and asked, “Where are the pills?” “What pills?” *Reb Moshe* asked. “The ones that I gave you.” “Here, in my pocket.” When the pharmacist saw the jar of pills, he all but fainted.

“You have no idea how lucky you are,” the pharmacist cried out. “When I finished my day’s work, I reviewed the pharmacy receipts and prescriptions. I suddenly realized, to my horror, that I had given you the wrong medicine. The pills had somehow been exchanged and placed in the wrong container. The pills that I sold you would have killed your son. Hashem looked after you!”

At that moment, the entire congregation gazed at *Rav Abo*, knowing full well that it was his perseverance in demanding that *Reb Moshe* attend the meeting that had saved the day. It did not take long for the Moroccan community to learn that they had a *tzaddik* living in their midst. *Rav Abo*’s deep-rooted commitment to Hashem set the foundation for the Otzar HaTorah educational network to grow in Morocco.

ולמדתם אתם את בניכם לדבר בם

You shall teach them to your children to discuss them. (11:19)

The *Bnei Yissachar*, *Horav Tzvi Elimelech Shapiro, zl*, cites (*Takanos Tamchin D’Oraisa*) *Chazal* (*Bava Basra* 21a) who credit Rabbi Yehoshua Ben Gamla with being the innovator of universal Torah education for all children. He was concerned for orphans who had no parent to teach them Torah. He set up Torah teachers in every province and district so that all children, regardless of parents or financial ability, would be availed Torah instruction. *Chazal* laud him for having ensured that the Jewish People would not forget the Torah. In the *Shulchan Aruch*, *Yoreh De’ah* 245:7, it is ruled that communal monies may be used to provide Torah instruction for all children, to the point that members of the community may be taxed to fulfill this responsibility.

The *Bnei Yissachar* observes that while one fulfills the Biblical injunction of *V’limadetem osam es bneichem* by teaching Torah to one’s own child, he does not execute the Rabbinic command unless he provides for the instruction of all children – rich or poor. He adds that once Rabbi Yehoshua enacted his decree concerning universal Torah education, it underscored the Biblical *mitzvah* to the point that unless one provides Torah education for all children, he does not fulfill his personal Biblical *mitzvah* of *V’limadetem osam es bneichem*. Torah education that does not reach all aspects of the Jewish community is deficient in fulfilling the *mitzvah*.

This idea is based upon a ruling made by the *Pri Megadim* in his *pesichah*, preface, to *Orach Chaim* (3:78) where he states that if *Chazal* have added *chumros*, stringencies – which they feel enhances the *mitzvah* – one is not *yotzei*, does not fulfill his Biblical obligation unless he follows the Rabbinic enhancements. By adding their Rabbinic stringencies to the Biblical commandment, *Chazal* have altered the criteria from Biblical fulfillment, since the Torah commands us to follow Rabbinic interpretation. Therefore, since Rabbi Yehoshua *ben Gamla* entered his innovation into the *mitzvah*'s criteria, one must see to it that all children study Torah. Otherwise, he has not fulfilled the Biblical command of *V'limadetam*.

Horav Yissachar Shlomo Teichtal, *zl*, concurs that the *mitzvah* of *V'limadetam* demands universal education in order to fulfill (even) the Biblical command, but for a different reason. He quotes *Ramban* in his commentary in *Devarim* 33:14 concerning the *pasuk*, *Torah tzivah lanu Moshe, morashah Kehillas Yaakov*, “The Torah that Moshe commanded us is the heritage of the Congregation of Yaakov.” *Ramban* observes the Torah choice of the word *kehillas*, congregation, over *bais*, house (*bais Yaakov*), or *zera*, seed/children (of Yaakov). He suggests this alludes to the Torah's inclusion of not merely those born to Jewish parents, but all Jews, every Jew who joins the Jewish nation, accepting its *mitzvos* and living according to its traditions. Torah is the inheritance of all those who enter under the *halachic* rubric of Judaism. Torah for the *kahal*, congregation, includes converts. With this in mind, *Rav Teichtal* posits that if Torah is the possession of the congregation, it should be the responsibility of each and every Jew to see to it that every member of the Jewish *kahal* have access to it, even if he has no father to teach him. How is this achieved? How do we see to it that every member of the *kehillah* receives a Jewish education? We follow Rabbi Yehoshua *ben Gamla*'s precedent. He showed us the way by providing Torah teachers in every Jewish community. It is insufficient to reach out only to individuals, since the Torah is a “group” inheritance, not an individual bequest. Thus, it behooves us to think outside of our self-proclaimed “box”, and view all Jewish children as being part of our extended family, because – when all is said and done – they are.

ולמדתם אתם את בניכם לדבר בם

You shall teach them to your children to discuss them. (11:19)

The Torah provides a unique criterion for teaching Torah to one's children. They should be able to discuss Torah; or, alternatively, when they speak, Torah should emerge from their mouths. Speech is the communication or expression of thoughts. An individual who speaks Torah thinks Torah. One's cognitive dynamic should be shaped by Torah, so that when he expresses an opinion, a comment, it is Torah-based, the expression of a Torah mind. Thus, *Rashi* explains, as soon as a child is able to speak, his father should teach him Torah, so that it will be his “language” of communication. Therefore, everything which the child will eventually learn: *halachah*, *mussar*/ethics, *hashkafah*, philosophy/outlook/perspective, will all be the tools of his manner of expression. The Torah's language is eternal. It speaks the language of the past, present and future. We just have to listen.

What does one do in a situation in which the parents have exhausted every method, every avenue, of educating their child, all to no success. The child either simply refuses, or he is unable to grasp/retain the material, resulting in frustration, depression, friction. The following vignette is illuminating as well as inspiring. An eighth grade student in a prominent Torah institution was doing poorly. Regardless of the motivator, he remained unmotivated. Nothing turned him on to learning. He had no desire to learn, and, as a result, he was lazy and uncaring. His parents were outstanding people and incredible parents. They would stop at nothing, spare no expense, to somehow light a fire under their son, to arouse him to the beauty of Torah. They knew fully well that if one does not learn, he will soon fall into a bind and eventually dislike learning and everything associated with it. Religious observance often suffers as a consequence of the negativity that ensues. This was eighth grade. Which *yeshivah* would accept him as a student?

Time passed, and one day the *rebbe* who had made some serious attempts at inspiring the boy to learn, noticed a *yeshivah* boy *davening Shemoneh Esrai* in the corner of the *shul*. The *kavanah*, concentration, and devotion on this *bachur*'s face was evident and moving. It was obvious that he was really into the *davening*, expressing himself with unusual feeling. The *rebbe* asked someone who this *bachur* was. The response floored him, “Oh, he is that boy that everyone had given up on. Something occurred, a sudden transformation; he was accepted into an excellent *yeshivah* where he has been learning nonstop and growing into an exceptional *ben Torah*.” The *rebbe* was flabbergasted. How could this be the very same boy who was essentially just taking up a seat in his classroom? He had tried everything to motivate him to learn, all to no avail. What happened? He decided to speak to the parents. He went to their house and conveyed his surprise. “First of all, *mazel tov* on your son's *aliyah*, advancement, in Torah. I am so happy for you and for him. How did you do it? When we finished the school year, I was certain that public school was his next place. What happened?” the *rebbe* asked.

The father slowly began to speak, “Truthfully, when school closed for the semester we were in a quandary. We knew that our son must go to *yeshivah*, but, with his dismal record of achievement and dispirited attitude toward learning, no mainstream institution would consider him for enrollment. We felt that we had exhausted every avenue of endeavor. We had tried everything and spoken to everyone. Then it dawned on me: We had a ‘third’ partner in our son. We should not have to shoulder all of the responsibility. *Hashem Yisborach* is a one-third *shutaf*, partner. We decided that very night we would open a *Sefer Tehillim* and pour out our hearts to our other Partner. We had done our share in caring for our son; now, we would turn to Him to do His share!

“Within a very short period of time, we began to notice a change in our son's habits, his attitude. He began to *daven* with fervor and concentration. Learning occupied every free moment. This was a new child, not the boy that we had known, but the boy for whom we had prayed. He was accepted into a *yeshivah* based solely on merit, not on mercy. We realized that while we had *davened* to Hashem often, we never spoke to Him as a *shutaf* in ‘our’ son's development.”

How true this is. What would be so strange if we were to express our feelings to our Father in Heaven in such a manner; talking to Him as our partner in our child? “*Avinu, Av HaRachaman*, Our Father, our compassionate Father; this child with which You have blessed us is actually less ours than Yours. You are truly our Partner in his life. You created his *neshamah*, soul. You formed him and breathed into him the breath of life. You raised him, strengthened him and maintained his health. Please do Your share and help him along spiritually, so that we will all share in his *nachas*. Thank You, Hashem!”

Va'ani Tefillah

הטוב כי לא כלו רחמיך והמרחם כי לא תמו חסדיך – *HaTov ki lo chalu*

Rachamecha, v'ha'Meracheim ki lo samu Chasadecha. The Beneficent One, for Your compassions were never exhausted; and the Compassionate One for Your kindnesses never ended.

Few people have both: compassion; and the wherewithal to provide for those for whom they care. Some are compassionate, but lack the funds or ability to help. Others have no shortage of material assets, but lack the emotion to empathize with the needs of those whom they could help – if they would feel like it. Hashem's compassion is never exhausted, and His ability to bestow kindness has no parameters.

Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, explains that a father, regardless of his extraordinary love and compassion for his child, will eventually age and have physical limitations placed on his ability to provide. As a result, he must settle for lesser goals concerning his children. It is not that he does not want, he is simply not able. Hashem neither ages, nor does He have any limitations whatsoever. He is always there for His children, and for this we thank Him profusely.

ל"ל נ נתן אריה בן זאב ל' - יום היא' צ ה"א - ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.
ל"ל נ יקריאל בן יודל ל' - יום היא' צ כ' אב - ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.
By the Feigenbaum family
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prepared and edited by Rabbi L. Scheinbaum

fw from hamelaket@gmail.com
from: Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff <ykmkaganoff@gmail.com>
to: kaganoff-a@googlegroups.com

The Basics of Birkas Hagomeil Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Since parsha Eikev includes many references to brochos thanking Hashem for all His kindness, it is certainly an appropriate week to study:

Question #1: "I recently underwent some surgery. At what point in my recovery do I recite birkas hagomeil?"

Question #2: "May I recite birkas hagomeil if I will not be able to get to shul for kri'as haTorah?"

Answer:

There are two mitzvos related to thanking Hashem for deliverance from perilous circumstances. In Parshas Tzav, the Torah describes an offering brought in the Mishkan, or the Beis Hamikdash, called the korban todah.

There is also a brocha, called birkas hagomeil, which is recited when someone has been saved from a dangerous situation. The Rosh (Brachos 9:3) and the Tur (Orach Chayim 219) explain that this brocha was instituted as a replacement for the korban todah that we can no longer bring, since, unfortunately, our Beis Hamikdash lies in ruin. Thus, understanding the circumstances and the laws of the korban todah and of birkas hagomeil is really one combined topic.

Tehillim on Salvation

The Gemara derives many of the laws of birkas hagomeil from a chapter of Tehillim, Psalm 107. There, Dovid Hamelech describes four different types of treacherous predicaments in which a person would pray to Hashem for salvation. Several times, the Psalm repeats the following passage, Vayitzaku el Hashem batzar lahem, mimetzukoseihem yatzileim, when they were in distress, they cried out to Hashem asking Him to deliver them from their straits. Hashem hears the supplicants' prayers and redeems them from calamity, whereupon they recognize Hashem's role and sing shira to acknowledge His deliverance. The passage reflecting this thanks, Yodu lashem chasdo venifle'osav livnei adam, they give thanks to Hashem for His kindness and His wondrous deeds for mankind, is recited four times in the Psalm, each time expressing the emotions of someone desiring to tell others of his appreciation. The four types of salvation mentioned in the verse are: a wayfarer who traversed a desert, a captive who was freed, someone who recovered from illness, and a seafarer who returned safely to land.

Based on this chapter of Tehillim, the Gemara declares, arba'ah tzerichim lehodos: yordei hayam, holchei midbaros, umi shehayah choleh venisra'pe, umi shehayah chavush beveis ha'asurim veyatza -- four people are required to recite birkas hagomeil: those who traveled by sea, those who journeyed through the desert, someone who was ill and recovered and someone who was captured and gained release (Brachos 54b). (Several commentators provide reasons why the Gemara lists the four in a different order than does the verse, a topic that we will forgo due to limited space.) The Tur (Orach Chayim 219) mentions an interesting method for remembering the four cases, taken from our daily shmoneh esrei prayer: vechol hachayim yoducha selah, explaining that the word chayim has four letters, ches, yud, yud and mem, which allude to chavush, yissurim, yam and midbar, meaning captive, the sufferings of illness, sea, and desert -- the four types of travail mentioned by the verse and the Gemara. (It is noteworthy that when the Aruch Hashulchan [219:5] quotes this, he has the ches represent "choli," illness [rather than chavush, captive], which means that he would explain the yud of yissurim to mean the sufferings of captivity.)

Rav Hai Gaon notes that these four calamities fall under two categories: two of them, traveling by sea and through the desert, are situations to which a person voluntarily subjected himself, whereas the other two, illness and captivity, are involuntary (quoted by Shu"t Chasam Sofer, Orach Chayim #51). Thus, we see that one bensch gomeil after surviving either of these types of dangers, regardless of whether it was within his control or not.

Some commentaries note that the Rambam cites the Gemara passage, arbaah tzerichim lehodos, four people are required to thank Hashem, only in the context of birkas hagomeil and not regarding the laws of korban todah. This implies that, in his opinion, korban todah is always a voluntary offering, notwithstanding the fact that Chazal required those who were saved to recite birkas hagomeil (Sefer Hamafteich). However,

both Rashi and the Rashbam, in their respective commentaries to Vayikra 7:12, explain that the "four people" are all required to bring a korban todah upon being saved. As I noted above, the Rosh states that since, unfortunately, we cannot offer a korban todah, birkas hagomeil was substituted.

A Minyan

When the Gemara (Brachos 54b) teaches the laws of birkas hagomeil, it records two interesting details: (1) that birkas hagomeil should be recited in the presence of a minyan and (2) that it should be recited in the presence of two talmidei chachamim.

No Minyan

Is a minyan essential for birkas hagomeil, as it is for some other brachos, such as sheva brachos? In other words, must someone who cannot join a minyan to recite birkas hagomeil forgo the brocha?

The Tur contends that the presence of a minyan and two talmidei chachamim is not a requirement to recite birkas hagomeil, but only the preferred way. In other words, someone who cannot easily assemble a minyan or talmidei chachamim may, nevertheless, recite birkas hagomeil. The Beis Yosef disagrees regarding the requirement of a minyan, feeling that one should not recite birkas hagomeil without a minyan present. However, he rules that if someone errantly recited birkas hagomeil without a minyan, he should not recite it again, but should try to find a minyan and recite the text of the brocha without Hashem's Name, to avoid a brocha levatalah, reciting a blessing in vain (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 219:3). The Mishnah Berurah follows an approach closer to that of the Tur, ruling that someone unable to assemble a minyan may recite birkas hagomeil without a minyan. However, he adds that someone in a place where there is no minyan should wait up to thirty days to see if he will have the opportunity to bensch gomeil in the presence of a minyan. If he has already waited thirty days, he should recite the birkas hagomeil without a minyan and not wait longer.

When Do We Recite Birkas Hagomeil?

The prevalent custom is to recite birkas hagomeil during or after kri'as haTorah (Hagahos Maimaniyos 10:6). The Orchos Chayim understands that this custom is based on convenience, because kri'as haTorah also requires a minyan (quoted by Beis Yosef, Orach Chayim 219). The Chasam Sofer presents an alternative reason for reciting birkas hagomeil during or after kri'as haTorah. He cites sources that explain that kri'as haTorah serves as a substitute for offering korbanos, and therefore reciting birkas hagomeil at the time of kri'as hatorah is a better substitute for the korban todah that we cannot offer (Shu"t Chasam Sofer, Orach Chayim #51).

Do We Count the Talmidei Chachamim?

I quoted above the Gemara that states that one should recite birkas hagomeil in the presence of a minyan and two talmidei chachamim. The Gemara discusses whether this means that birkas hagomeil should be recited in the presence of a minyan plus two talmidei chachamim, for a total of twelve people, or whether the minyan should include two talmidei chachamim. The Rambam (Hilchos Brachos 10:8) and the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chayim 219:3) rule that the minyan includes the talmidei chachamim, whereas the Pri Megadim rules that the requirement is a minyan plus the talmidei chachamim. Notwithstanding the Pri Megadim's objections, the Biur Halacha concludes, according to the Shulchan Aruch, that one needs only a minyan including the talmidei chachamim. No Talmid Chacham to be Found

The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chayim 219:3) then adds that if someone is in a place where it is uncommon to find talmidei chachamim, he may recite birkas hagomeil in the presence of a minyan, even without any talmidei chachamim present.

Time Limits

Is there a time limit within which one must recite birkas hagomeil? Indeed, many early authorities contend that one must recite birkas hagomeil within a certain number of days after surviving the calamity. The Beis Yosef (Orach Chayim 219) quotes a dispute among rishonim, the Ramban holding that one should recite birkas hagomeil within three days, the Rashba, five days, and the Tur implying that there is no time limit. The Shulchan Aruch (219:6) concludes that one should preferably not wait more than three days to recite birkas hagomeil, but someone who waited longer may still recite it, and there is no time limit. Based on this conclusion, the Magen Avraham (219:6) rules that someone released from captivity after kri'as haTorah on Monday should not wait until Thursday, the next kri'as haTorah, to recite birkas hagomeil, since this is already the fourth day from when he was saved. It is preferred that he bensch gomeil earlier, even though he will do so without kri'as haTorah. As I mentioned above, the Mishnah Berurah permits bensch gomeil even after thirty days, although he prefers a delay of no longer than three days.

What about at night?

May one bensch gomeil at night? If bensch gomeil is a replacement for the korban todah, and all korbanos in the Beis Hamikdash could be offered only during the day, may we recite the birkas hagomeil at night? This question is addressed by the Chasam Sofer in an interesting responsum (Shu"t Chasam Sofer Orach Chayim #51). The

Chasam Sofer's case concerned Chacham Shabtei Elchanan, who was the rov of the community of Trieste. This city is currently in northeastern Italy, but, at the time of the Chasam Sofer, it was part of the Austrian Empire, which also ruled the Chasam Sofer's city of Pressburg. (Today, Pressburg is called Bratislava and is the capital of Slovakia.) Rav Elchanan had returned from a sea voyage, and his community, grateful for their rav's safe arrival, greeted him with a joyous celebration on the evening of his homecoming. At this gathering, Rav Elchanan recited the birkas hagomeil in front of the large congregation.

One well-known local scholar, Rav Yitzchak Goiten, took issue with Rav Elchanan's reciting the birkas hagomeil at night, contending that since the mitzvah of birkas hagomeil is a substitute for the korban todah, it cannot be performed at night, as korbanos cannot be offered at night. Furthermore, he was upset that Rav Elchanan had not followed the accepted practice of reciting birkas hagomeil at kri'as haTorah. This question was then addressed to the Chasam Sofer: which of the eminent scholars of Trieste was correct?

The Chasam Sofer explains that although birkas hagomeil substitutes for the korban todah, this does not mean that it shares all the laws of the korban. The idea is that since we cannot offer a korban todah today, our best option is to substitute the public recital of birkas hagomeil.

The Chasam Sofer noted that the gathering of the people to celebrate their rav's safe return was indeed the appropriate time to recite birkas hagomeil. In this situation, the Chasam Sofer would have recited birkas hagomeil in front of the assembled community, but he would have explained why he did so in order that people would continue to recite birkas hagomeil at kri'as haTorah, as is the minhag klal Yisroel.

Ten or Ten plus One?

There is a dispute among the authorities whether the individual reciting the brocha is counted as part of the minyan or if we require a minyan besides him (Raanach, quoted by Rabbi Akiva Eiger to 219:3). Most authorities rule that we can count the person reciting the brocha as one of the minyan (Mishnah Berurah 219:6). Shaar Hatziyun rallies proof to this conclusion, since it says that one should recite the brocha during kri'as haTorah, and no one says that one can do this only when there is an eleventh person attending the kri'as haTorah.

Stand up and Thank

The Rambam (Hilchos Tefillah, 10:8) requires that a person stand up when he recites birkas hagomeil. The Kesef Mishneh, the commentary on the Rambam written by Rav Yosef Karo -- the author of the Beis Yosef and the Shulchan Aruch -- notes that he is unaware of any source that requires one to stand when reciting this brocha, and he therefore omits this halacha in Shulchan Aruch.

The Bach disagrees, feeling that there is an allusion to this practice in Tehillim 107, the chapter that includes the sources for this brocha, but other commentators dispute this allusion (Elyah Rabbah 219:3). The Elyah Rabbah then presents a different reason why one should stand, explaining that birkas hagomeil is a form of Hallel, which must be recited standing.

Still other authorities present different reasons for the Rambam's ruling that one must stand for birkas hagomeil. The Chasam Sofer explains that this is because of kavod hatzibur, the respect due an assembled community of at least ten people. Yet another approach (Nahar Shalom 219:1) is that since birkas hagomeil replaces the korban todah, it is similar to shmoneh esrei, which is said standing and which is similarly bimkom korban (Brachos 26b).

The Rama does not mention any requirement that birkas hagomeil be recited while standing, implying that he agrees with the Shulchan Aruch's decision, but the Bach and other later authorities require one to stand when reciting the brocha. The later authorities conclude that one should recite the brocha while standing, but that bedei'evid, after the fact, one who recited the brocha while sitting fulfilled his obligation and should not repeat the brocha (Mishnah Berurah 219:4).

Only these four?

If someone survived a different type of danger, such as an accident or armed robbery, does he recite birkas hagomeil? Or was birkas hagomeil instituted only for the four specific dangers mentioned by the pasuk and the Gemara?

We find a dispute among rishonim regarding this question. The Orchos Chayim quotes an opinion that one should bensch gomeil after going beneath a leaning wall or over a dangerous bridge, but he disagrees, contending that one recites birkas hagomeil only after surviving one of the four calamitous situations mentioned in the Gemara. On the other hand, others conclude that one should recite birkas hagomeil after surviving any dangerous situation (Shu"t Rivash # 337). The Rivash contends that the four circumstances mentioned by Tehillim and the Gemara are instances in which it is common to be exposed to life-threatening danger and, therefore, they automatically generate a requirement to recite birkas hagomeil. However, someone who survived an attack by a wild ox or bandits certainly should recite birkas hagomeil, although it is not one of the four cases. Furthermore, the Rivash notes, since Chazal instituted that the

person who was saved and his children and grandchildren recite a brocha (she'oso li/le'avi neis bamokom hazeh, see Brochos 54a and Brachos Maharam) when seeing the place where the miracle occurred, certainly one should recite a brocha of thanks over the salvation itself!

The Shulchan Aruch quotes both sides of the dispute, but implies that one should follow the Rivash, and this is also the conclusion of the Taz and the later authorities (Mishnah Berurah; Aruch Hashulchan). Therefore, contemporary custom is to recite birkas hagomeil after surviving any potentially life-threatening situation.

Before going on to the next subtopic, I want to note that a different rishon presents a diametrically opposed position from that of the Rivash, contending that even one who traveled by sea or desert does not recite birkas hagomeil unless he experienced a miracle. This approach is based on the words of the pesukim in Tehillim 107 that form the basis for birkas hagomeil (Rabbeinu Manoach, Hilchos Tefillah 10:8, quoting Raavad). (In halachic conclusion, the Biur Halacha writes that one recites birkas hagomeil even if there was no difficulty on the sea voyage or the desert journey, notwithstanding the verses of Tehillim.)

How Sick?

How ill must a person have been to require that he recite birkas hagomeil upon his recovery? I am aware of three opinions among the rishonim concerning this question.

(1) Some hold that one recites birkas hagomeil even for an ailment as minor as a headache or stomach ache (Aruch).

(2) Others contend that one recites birkas hagomeil only if he was ill enough to be bedridden, even when he was not dangerously ill (Ramban, Toras Ha'adam, page 49; Hagahos Maimoniyus, Brachos 10:6, quoting Rabbeinu Yosef).

(3) A third approach holds that one should recite birkas hagomeil only if the illness was potentially life threatening (Rama).

The prevalent practice of Sefardim, following the Shulchan Aruch, is according to the second approach -- reciting birkas hagomeil after recovery from any illness that made the person bedridden. The prevalent Ashkenazic practice is to recite birkas hagomeil only when the illness was life threatening, notwithstanding the fact that the Bach, who was a well-respected Ashkenazic authority, concurs with the second approach.

How Recuperated?

At what point do we assume that the person is recuperated enough that he can recite the birkas hagomeil for surviving his travail? The poskim rule that he does not recite birkas hagomeil until he is able to walk well on his own (Elyah Rabbah; Mishnah Berurah).

Chronic illness

The halachic authorities rule that someone suffering from a chronic ailment who had a life threatening flareup recites birkas hagomeil upon recovery from the flareup, even though he still needs to deal with the ailment that caused the serious problem (Tur).

Conclusion

Rav Hirsch (Commentary to Tehillim 100:1) notes that the root of the word for thanks is the same as that for viduy, confession and admitting wrongdoing. All kinds of salvation should elicit in us deep feelings of gratitude for what Hashem has done for us in the past and does in the present. This is why it can be both an acknowledgement of guilt and thanks.

We often cry out to Hashem in crisis, sigh in relief when the crisis passes, but fail to thank Him adequately for the salvation. Our thanks to Hashem should match the intensity of our pleas. Birkas hagomeil gives us a concrete brocha to awaken our thanks for deliverance. And even in our daily lives, when, hopefully, we do not encounter dangers that meet the criteria of saying birkas hagomeil, we should still fill our hearts with thanks, focus these thoughts during our recital of mizmor lesodah, az yashir, modim or at some other appropriate point in our prayer.