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INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON EIKEV - 5784

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date: Aug 22, 2024, 10:35 AM
subject: **Rabbi Daniel Stein - Living Beyond the Letter of the Law**

Rabbi Daniel Stein

Living Beyond the Letter of the Law

The Gemara (Berachos 35b) raises an apparent contradiction between two pesukim. On the one hand, the pasuk states "And you shall gather your grain" (Devarim 11:14), which ostensibly commands personal engagement with the natural order and the expending of effort to procure a livelihood. While at the same time we are instructed, "This Torah shall not depart from your mouths and you shall contemplate in it day and night" (Yehoshua 1:8). Rabbi Yishmael resolves to blend

the two pesukim and endorses a balanced and integrated approach, "in the way of the world." Each person should set aside some time for working and other times for Torah study. Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai passionately disagrees and argues, "is it possible that a person plows in the plowing season and sows in the sowing season and harvests in the harvest season and threshes in the threshing season and winnows in the windy season." If he is constantly busy and preoccupied with his job "what will become of the Torah?" Rather, in his view, Torah learning demands total dedication and a singular focus, to the exclusion of all other endeavors.

According to Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai, the pasuk "And you shall gather your grain" is referring specifically to a time when the Jewish people are "ain osin ratzono shel makom - not doing the will of Hashem." Only then, will they be required to support themselves manually. But if they act appropriately and meet Hashem's expectations, their physical work will be delegated to others, as it states, "And strangers will stand and feed your flocks and foreigners will be your plowmen and your vinedressers" (Yeshayahu 61:5), providing them the freedom to study Torah continuously "and contemplate in it day and night."

However, the Maharsha (Berachos ad loc) and Nefesh Hachaim (1:8) note that Rabbi Shimon's reading of the pasuk, "And you shall gather your grain", does not seem to jibe with its broader context. This clause is found immediately following the words, "And it will be, if you obey the commandments that I enjoin upon you this day, loving Hashem your God and serving Him with all your heart and soul, I will grant the rain for your land in its season" (Devarim 11:13-14). If the Torah is discussing the consequences and blessings that will follow if the Jewish people adhere properly to the mitzvos, how can Rabbi Shimon claim that the conclusion of the pasuk addresses the scenario of "ain osin ratzono shel makom - not doing the will of Hashem." Rav Eliyahu Baruch Finkel deduces that it is possible to be in technical compliance with all the mitzvos but still be "ain osin ratzono shel makom - not doing the will of Hashem." If the Jewish people are fastidiously obsessed with the letter of the law but ignore the larger question of, "what ultimately is the will of Hashem," they are still in a perilous and inadequate space.

Not every behavior or attitude that a Jew must embrace is articulated explicitly. Some are intuited or inferred meta-halachic principles. Rav Elchanan Wasserman (Kuntras Divrei Sofrim 1:22-23) classifies this set of mitzvos as "ratzon haTorah - the will of the Torah", a designation which is explored and expanded upon further by Rav Asher Weiss (Minchas Asher, Devarim 75).[1] For example, while the specific fulfillment of mitzvos by children is only mandated rabbinically, it is untenable to suggest that the general notion of educating and training children to live a life of Torah and mitzvos once they reach maturity is not of Biblical origin, despite the absence of any definitive directive. After all,

Avraham Avinu was only chosen as the progenitor of the Jewish people because he was trusted to "instruct his children and his posterity to keep the way of Hashem by doing what is just and right" (Breishis 18:19). Ironically, it is quite possible that the relative paucity of overt source material regarding certain foundational issues only highlights their overarching nature further. Some things are so fundamental they simply cannot be contained or limited to one verse, jot, or tittle.

In the section of the Gemara (Gittin 58a) that deals with the precursors to the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash, the concluding item mentioned is a tragic incident involving a certain carpenter's apprentice who set his eyes upon his master's wife. Once it happened that the master needed to borrow some money, and his apprentice generously suggested, "Send your wife to me and I will lend her the money." He dispatched his wife to him, but the apprentice delayed her for three extra days before granting her leave. The apprentice then hurried back to his master, ahead of his returning wife, whereupon the master questioned him, "Where is my wife whom I sent to you?" The apprentice said to him, "I sent her back immediately, but I heard that she became romantically involved with the youth along the way." The master turned to his trusted apprentice and asked, "What shall I do?" The apprentice responded, "If you listen to my advice, divorce her." The master objected, "But her kesubah is large and I do not have the money to pay it." The apprentice assured him, "I will lend you the money, and you will give her payment of her kesubah." The master accepted his terms and divorced her at once. Not long after, the apprentice went and married her himself. When the due date for the debt arrived, the master did not have the means with which to repay the apprentice. The apprentice offered him, "Come and work off your debt with me." And so it was, the apprentice and his new wife would eat and drink, while he, the woman's first husband, would stand over them and serve them. As the master's tears of humiliation and betrayal dropped from his eyes and fell into their cups, the Jewish people's sentence was sealed for the crime of remaining silent in the face of such an injustice.

What is the parting message of this stirring story? Rav Yaakov Emden claims that perhaps the apprentice did not violate any official prohibition or precept. He graciously lent money twice to his former master and was careful to only marry his wife after she was already divorced. At the same time Hashem is disgusted by his duplicity and hypocrisy in plotting to achieve his desired outcome. His treachery constituted a particularly despised sin precisely because of his perverted halachic machinations. Sometimes because of our intimate knowledge of halacha and advanced learning, we too, paradoxically, fall into a similar trap. Before following rabbinic guidance, many erstwhile yeshiva students will insist upon a written source, whilst forgetting that just because a certain practice is not expressly proscribed by a particular siman or seif in Shulchan Aruch, does not mean it is automatically sanctioned or advised.

Indeed, the Netziv (Haamek Davar, Introduction to Breishis) writes that at the time of Second Beis Hamikdash, though they were pious and toiled in Torah study, they were still not upright - yashar - in their societal dealings, and that alone was sufficient grounds for the churban.

In concert with investigating and investing in the legalities of the mitzvos, which is wonderful and admirable, we must also always remember to ask ourselves, "what does Hashem truly want?" Moshe encourages the Jewish people, "And now, Yisrael, what is Hashem, your God, asking of you, other than to fear Hashem, your God, to go in all His ways and to love Him, to serve Hashem your God wholeheartedly and with your whole being" (Devarim 10:12). The Chafetz Chaim (Ahavas Chesed 2:11) interprets the word "now" to mean the universal "now," namely, that one should always stop to consider, "What is Hashem asking of me?" This should be our religious compass and objective throughout life in all that we do. We must be able to transcend the letter of the law and the details of Jewish life to create a unified spiritual existence that is "upright and good in the eyes of Hashem" (Devarim 6:18).

[1] See also Rabbi Yonasan Sacks, Ratzon HaTorah.

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from: **Ira Zlotowitz** <Iraz@klalgovoah.org>

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subject: **Tidbits for Parashas Eikev**

Klal Gavoah In Memory of **Rav Meir Zlotowitz ZT"L**

Daf Yomi - Shabbos: Bavli: Bava Basra 60 • Yerushalmi: Challah 23 • Mishnah Yomis: Bava Kama 7:4-5 • Oraysa: Next week is Succah 45a-47a. Pirkei Avos: Perek 5 Shabbos Mevorchim Chodesh Elul is next Shabbos, Parashas Re'eh, August 31st. Rosh Chodesh Elul is on Tuesday & Wednesday, September 3rd-4th.

Parsha in a Paragraph: EIKEV: If you follow Hashem's commandments, He will display His love for you and bless you • Do not be afraid of the nations • The nations of Canaan will be uprooted little by little to save you from the peril of wild animals • Do not be enticed by idols; destroy them completely • Remember these forty years • Remember the Mann - and that it is not food but Hashem's word that sustains man • Hashem's chastisements are those of a loving father • Hashem is bringing you to a good land especially blessed with the Shivas Haminim • Bircas Hamazon • Don't forget Hashem when you prosper; recognize that everything is from Hashem • If you follow idols, Hashem will utterly destroy you • The great nations will be destroyed because of their wickedness and not due to your righteousness • Remember how you constantly provoked Hashem these past forty years (e.g., at Taveira, Massah, Kivros HaTaavah and Kadeish Barnei'a) • When I witnessed the idol worship of the Eigel, I shattered the Luchos • Only through intense prayer were you spared from Hashem's wrath • The Second Luchos • "Now Israel, what is it

that G-d demands of you...” • Everything belongs to Hashem, yet He delights only in you, the offspring of the forefathers • Love and fear Hashem with all your hearts • All of you saw Hashem’s miracles with your own eyes • If you will listen to Hashem, the land will flourish; otherwise you will suffer (V’haya Im Shamo) • If you will carefully heed the words of Hashem, you will triumph!

Haftarah: The haftarah begins with lamenting Hashem’s apparent abandonment of His nation; forgetting His chosen people. The pesukim, however, continue to explain that Hashem never forsakes His nation and ultimately happiness and joy will return to Zion. (Yeshaya 49:15-51:3)

Taryag Mitzvos Parashas Eikev: 111 Pesukim • 6 Obligations • 2 Prohibitions 1) Do not derive benefit from adornments of avodah zarah. 2) Do not derive benefit from avodah zarah or its accessories and do not bring them into your property. 3) Recite Bircas Hamazon after a ‘filling’ meal. 4) Love the Ger. 5) Fear G-d. 6) Serve G-d through Tefillah and praise. 7) Attach yourself to Torah scholars and benefit them. 8) When swearing an oath or promise, do so in Hashem’s name.

Mitzvah Highlight: Through davening we inculcate within ourselves a recognition of Hashem’s existence and His benevolence in providing for us. This recognition, in and of itself, brings about blessing (Sefer HaChinuch).

For the Shabbos Table

כִּי תֹאמַר בְּלִבְבְּךָ רַבִּים הַגּוֹיִם הָאֵלֶּה מִמֶּנִּי אֵיכָּה אוֹכֵל לֶהֱרִישָׁם: לֹא תִירָא מֵהֵם זָכֹר תִּזְכֹּר אֶת אֲשֶׁר-עָשָׂה ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְפָרְעֹה וּלְכָל-מִצְרָיִם

“Perhaps you will say in your heart, ‘These nations are more numerous than I; how will I be able to drive them out?’ Do not fear them, you shall remember what Hashem your G-d did to Pharaoh and Mitzrayim” (Devarim 7:17-18)

The importance of believing in Hashem and not fearing our enemies is a basic tenet of our faith, as is recalling the miraculous redemption from Mitzrayim. Why does the Torah command here specifically in response to those questioning the nation’s ability to conquer the land?

Rav Moshe Feinstein zt”l explains that in essence one would think that having experienced so many great miracles in Mitzrayim, as well as in the desert, the nation’s faith in Hashem would be strong. Yet in truth, without internalizing the miracles, man’s nature is to be weak in faith, to the extent that even a witness to the miracles will question Hashem’s future actions. To this end, the Torah implores a person to work on his faith by remembering Hashem and recalling the great miracles we saw in Mitzrayim. This will internalize his faith in Hashem to the point where no adversary can make him feel threatened. While it may be true that there are no atheists in a foxhole, true believers may not be present either. True emunah and bitachon come from a person training himself to recognize Hashem and His total control overall.

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MANNA FROM HEAVEN

Rabbi Frand on the Parashah

Hamachilcha Man Bamidbar .. uLimaan Nasoscha - The One Who feeds you manna in the desert . . . in order to test you. (8:16)

Everyone knows that life is a test. We struggle to make a living, to raise our children, to build up our communities. Nothing comes easy, and our test is to deal with the hardships and frustrations in the best way possible.

But what if our livelihood were served up to us on a silver platter? How wonderful that would be! No more worries about how to pay for the children’s tuition or the new roof. What if everything we needed came to us like manna from heaven? Would we consider this a test? Hardly. We would consider it a blessing. The Torah, however, seems to say otherwise. No sooner had the Jewish people come forth from Egypt that they complained (Shemos 16:3), “If only we had died by the hand of God in the land of Egypt when we were sitting beside the fleshpots, when we ate our fill of bread; now you have brought us out into the desert to let the entire congregation starve to death.”

“Behold, I will rain down bread from the heavens on you,” Hashem replied (ibid. 16:4). “The people shall go out to collect their daily portion every day, in order to test whether or not they will follow My Torah.”

The commentators wonder what kind of test this is. What could be better than having everything you need delivered to your doorstep every day? This is a test? This is a blessing! Rashi explains that Hashem was referring to the laws that govern the manna. One could not store away any manna for the next day. One had to collect a double portion on Friday. And so forth. This was the test. Would the Jewish people observe the laws of the manna scrupulously? This test is also mentioned in Parashas Eikev, “The One Who feeds you manna in the desert ... in order to test you.” Sforno explains that the test is to see if the Jews would still follow the Torah when they do not have to worry about their livelihood.

Yes, there is a great test in “bread raining down from heaven.” Affluence without effort is a dangerous thing. It comes with a great amount of leisure time and freedom of action.

What do we do with that leisure time and that freedom of action? Do we use our leisure time and freedom of action to taste the forbidden? This is the great test of the manna.

We are all aware of the test of poverty. We are all aware of the trials and tribulations of being poor. However, says Sforno, affluence also comes with great temptations. It puts a tremendous responsibility on a person. This is the test of the manna, and it is the test for many Jews in these affluent times. The Chovos Halevavos writes in Shaar Habitachon that one of the reasons people, unlike birds and animals, must make a great effort to earn their livelihood is to control the yetzer hara. If we had too much time on our hands, we would be unable to resist the temptations he puts before us. As it is, we are either

too busy or too tired most of the time. And even then it is a struggle to resist temptation.

The Maggid of Mezritch once said that when people face troubles, sickness or mortal danger, Heaven forbid, they all become religious. They all come to shul. They pray fervently. They say Tehillim with tears streaming down their cheeks. They give charity generously. But when things are going well, when they are going wonderfully, do they give much thought to the Almighty? This is the test of the manna.

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date: Aug 22, 2024, 5:30 PM
subject: **Don't Be Afraid to Visit Your Broken Places** -
essay by Rabbi YY

Don't Be Afraid to Visit Your Broken Places
Why Breaking the Tablets Was Moses' Greatest
Accomplishment

By: Rabbi YY Jacobson

"The world breaks everyone, and afterwards some are stronger
in the broken places." -- Ernest Hemingway
Broken

The simple reading of the story (recorded twice in Torah, in Exodus, and then again in Deuteronomy, in this week's portion) goes like this: After the Jews created a Golden Calf, Moses smashed the stone tablets created by G-d, engraved with the Ten Commandments. Moses and G-d then "debated" the appropriate response to this transgression and it was decided that if the people would truly repent, G-d would give them a second chance. Moses hewed a second set of stone tablets; G-d engraved them also with the Ten Commandments, and Moses gave them to the Jewish people.

Yet a few major questions come to mind.

1. Moses, outraged by the sight of a golden calf erected by the Hebrews as a deity, smashed the stone tablets. He apparently felt that the Jews were undeserving of them, and that it would be inappropriate to give them this Divine gift. But why did Moses have to break and shatter the heavenly tablets? Moses could have hidden them or returned them to their heavenly maker?

2. The rabbis teach us that, "The whole tablets and the broken tablets nestled inside the Ark of the Covenant[1]." The Jews proceeded to gather the broken fragments of the first set of tablets and had them stored in the Ark, in the Tabernacle, together with the second whole tablets. Both sets of tablets were later taken into the Land of Israel and kept side by side in the Ark, situated in the Holy of Holies in the Temple in Jerusalem.

This seems strange. Why would they place the broken tablets in the Holy of Holies, when these fragments were a constant

reminder of the great moral failure of the Jewish people[2]? Why not just disregard them, or deposit them in a safe isolated place?

3. In its eulogy for Moses, the Torah chooses this episode of smashing the tablets as the highlight and climax of Moses' achievements.

In the closing verses of Deuteronomy we read: "Moses, the servant of G-d, died there in the land of Moab... And there arose not since a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom G-d knew face to face; all the signs and wonders which G-d sent to do in the land of Egypt... that mighty hand, those great fearsome deeds, which Moses did before the eyes of all Israel."

What did Moses do "before the eyes of all Israel?" Rashi[3], in his commentary on Torah, explains "That his heart emboldened him to break the tablets before their eyes, as it is written, 'and I broke them before your eyes.' G-d's opinion then concurred with his opinion, as it is written, 'which you broke—I affirm your strength for having broken them.'"

This is shocking. Following all of the grand achievements of Moses, the Torah chooses to conclude its tribute to Moses by alluding to this episode of breaking the tablets! Granted that Moses was justified in breaking the tablets, but can this be said to embody his greatest achievement? How about his taking the Jews out of Egypt? Molding them into a people? Splitting the Red Sea? Receiving the Torah from G-d and transmitting it to humanity? Shepherding them for forty years in a wilderness? Why does the Torah choose this tragic and devastating episode to capture the zenith of Moses' life and as the theme with which to conclude the entire Torah, all five books of Moses?!

In the Fragments

We need to examine this entire episode from a deeper vantage point.

Moses did not break the tablets because he was angry and lost his control. Rather, the breaking of the tablets was the beginning of the healing process. Before the golden calf was created, the Jews could find G-d within the wholesomeness of the tablets, within the spiritual wholesomeness of life. Now, after the people have created the golden calf, hope was not lost. Now they would find G-d in the shattered pieces of a once beautiful dream.

Moses was teaching the Jewish people the greatest message of Judaism: Truth could be crafted not only from the spiritually perfected life, but also from the broken pieces of the human corrupt and demoralized psyche. The broken tablets, too, possess the light of G-d.

Which is why the sages tell us that not only the whole tablets, but also the broken ones, were situated in the holy of holies. This conveyed the message articulated at the very genesis of Judaism: From the broken pieces of life you can create a holy of holies.

G-d, the sages tell us, affirmed Moses' decision to break the tablets. G-d told him, "Thank you for breaking them[4]."

Because the broken tablets, representing the shattered pieces of

human existence, have their own story to tell; they contain a light all their own. Truth is found not only in wholesomeness, but also—sometimes primarily—in the broken fragments of the human spirit[5]. There are moments when G-d desires that we connect to Him as wholesome people, with clarity and a sense of fullness; there are yet deeper moments when He desires that we find Him in the shattered experiences of our lives.

We hope and pray to always enjoy the "whole tablets," but when we encounter the broken ones, we ought not to run from them or become dejected by them; with tenderness, we ought to embrace them and bring them into our "holy of holies," recalling the observation of one of the Rebbe's, "there is nothing more whole than a broken heart."

We often believe that G-d can be found in our moments of spiritual wholesomeness. But how about in the conflicts that torment our psyches? How about when we are struggling with depression, addiction or confusion? How about when we feel despair and pain? How about in every conflict between a godless existence and a G-d-centered existence? We associate "religion" with "religious" moments. But how about our "non-religious" moments?

What Moses accomplished with breaking the tablets was the demonstration of the truth that the stuff we call holiness can be carved out from the very alienation of a person from G-d. From the very turmoil of his or her psychological and spiritual brokenness, a new holiness can be discovered.

It is on this note that the Torah chooses to culminate its tribute to Moses' life. The greatest achievement of Moses was his ability to show humanity how we can take our brokenness and turn it into a holy of holies. There is light and joy to be found in the fragments of sacredness.[6]

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[1] Talmud Bava Basra 14a. [2] On Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year, the high priest would not perform the service with his usual golden garments, since gold was remotely reminiscent of the golden calf. Yet in this instance, throughout the entire year, the very symptom of the golden calf – the broken tablets – were stored in the holy of holies! Cf. Ramban and Ritva to Bava Basra ibid; Likkutei Sichos vol 26 Parshas Ki Sisa. [3] Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki (1040-1105), whose work is the most basic of biblical commentaries. [4] See Talmud Shabbas 87a and Rashi ibid; Rashi to Deut. 34:12, the final verse of the Torah. [5] "G-d said to Moses: 'Do not be distressed over the First Tablets, which contained only the Ten Commandments. In the Second Tablets I am giving you, you will also have Halachah, Midrash and Aggadah'" (Midrash Rabbah, Shemot 46:1.) This means, that it was precisely the breaking of the tablets that became the catalyst for a far deeper divine revelation. [6] This essay is based on a talk delivered by the Lubavitcher Rebbe, on the 20th of Av 5725, August 18th 1965, on the occasion of his father's yartziet. In this talk,

in which the Rebbe broke down twice, he described the agony of many deeply spiritual Jews put in situations where they are unable to study Torah and observe its Mitzvos. "There are times when G-d wants your mitzvos," the Rebbe said, "and other times when He wants your 'broken tablets.'"

<https://www.jewishpress.com/indepth/opinions/a-biblical-story/2024/08/22/>

A Biblical Story

Rabbi Moshe Taragin

October 7 shattered many illusions. We believed we had constructed an impenetrable defense, fortified by sophisticated technology and capable of shielding our citizens and cities from Arab brutality. This conception proved to be false. Conversely, our enemies assumed we were too fractured to rally and defend our land. Fortunately, our enemies were also wrong.

In addition to these false conceptions, another devastating illusion was shattered. Those who believed that antisemitism and hatred toward Jews had been eradicated were, tragically, also proven wrong.

In particular, many residents of communities near Gaza, who were profoundly committed to peaceful coexistence with their Arab neighbors, saw their dreams of harmony go up in flames. They had dedicated themselves to peace initiatives, fostering a vision of mutual respect and understanding. But on Oct.7, their communities were rampaged and burned.

One of the most poignant examples is that of Vivian Silver, a peace activist from Kibbutz Be'eri, who had selflessly driven Palestinians from Gaza to receive medical treatment in Israeli hospitals. On that fateful day, she was abducted, and after weeks of uncertainty, it was confirmed that she had been killed. Countless others across Israel, who had devoted themselves to building bridges, came to the bitter realization of how deeply we are hated by many, perhaps most Palestinians both in Gaza and in neighboring areas.

It wasn't only the illusions of Jews in Israel that were shattered on Oct. 7. Many Jews around the world had built their Jewish identity on the mission of creating a more just and perfect society – the program of tikkun olam.

Especially for those who found traditional rituals less compelling, the pursuit of social justice became the centerpiece of their Jewish experience. As they marched alongside other minority groups in the battle against discrimination, they assumed that Jews had been embraced by modern society as equal partners in the fight for social justice.

In the aftermath of Oct. 7, however, many of the minority groups whose rights they had campaigned for turned their backs on them. Those with whom they had stood shoulder to shoulder in the noble struggle for equality, betrayed them while unleashing a torrent of venomous antisemitism. The halls of academia, once viewed as bastions of enlightenment

and education and assumed to be forces against racism and antisemitism, became hotbeds of hatred and violence. The world they thought they knew, and the society they believed was civil and enlightened, revealed darker realities. Their vision of an enlightened world, one striving for a society free of racism and hatred, was shattered.

In both Israel and the broader Jewish world, deeply held beliefs were shattered. We realized the persistent toxicity of antisemitism lurking beneath the surface, ready to erupt at any moment. Opportunistic antisemites will always align themselves with whichever political movement advances their agenda of hate and bigotry. Many mistakenly believed that the trauma of the Holocaust had etched a permanent revulsion to antisemitism into the human conscience.

Yet, 80 years later, antisemitism still rages unchecked. On Oct. 7, our naive conceptions of a modern and enlightened world – whether in Gaza, on US campuses, or along the boulevards of Europe – came crashing down.

A Biblical World

However, Oct. 7 caused an even more profound and sweeping transformation of Jewish identity. It didn't just showcase the enduring malignancy of antisemitism but also provided a vivid reminder of our place within biblical history. That fateful day and its harrowing aftermath revived the ancient echoes of the Torah and its prophecies, reminding us that we are part of a timeless narrative. It reaffirmed, with striking clarity, the profound connection between our people, their history, and the Land of Israel.

Often, the discourse in Israel revolves around the divide between religious and secular Jews, between those who adhere to a halachic lifestyle and those who do not. Yet, a more profound divide exists: between those whose lives are shaped by Biblical narratives and those whose experiences are detached from the Torah. This division is not merely about observance but about how we perceive the relevance of the Torah in our modern, technology-driven world.

For many, the Bible has become a historical document, offering only moral guidance and a record of our national past. It is seen as a relic from an ancient, sandy desert, disconnected from our current urbanized, technologically advanced reality.

In this view, history has moved beyond the pages of the Torah. Conversely, others perceive the Torah and its teachings as the foundation of their identity and existence. They see their lives and the Jewish mission as intricately woven into the promises and prophecies of the Torah. Even those who may not follow a classic, halachic lifestyle still view their lives and our national struggle through the lens of Biblical narratives. Our ongoing effort to settle the land and confront international hostility is viewed as a chapter within a sacred book which is just as compelling now as it was thousands of years ago.

Israeli society may not be growing more religious, but it is undeniably embracing a more Biblical or Torah-oriented essence.

This wasn't always the case. Zionism began as a secular nationalist movement, largely detached from the Torah's narratives. The early Zionist leaders, including Herzl, envisioned the State of Israel not as a continuation of ancient prophecies but as a means to combat the age-old hatred of antisemitism. They believed that the creation of a Jewish homeland could overcome the prejudices rooted in Jewish exile and the experiences of living among foreign nations. In its early years, the State of Israel was more shaped by Marx than by Moses.

Over the past 75 years, the character of the State of Israel has undergone a profound transformation. Secular Israeli society today is imbued with far more Biblical influence than the secular culture of its early years. This shift is partly due to the influx and growing impact of Jews from Sephardic lands. Sephardic Jews, even those not classically observant, often bring a more traditional perspective compared to their Ashkenazi counterparts. The secularizing movements that shaped European Jewry in the 19th and 20th centuries largely bypassed the Jews of Sephardic regions. Additionally, the rise of religious society in Israel, including a robust national-religious sector, has significantly influenced Israeli public life, particularly within the military and political spheres.

The ongoing struggle over our land has powerfully transformed Israeli secular society into a more Biblical one. The relentless hostility towards our presence here, the disproportionate judgment and double standards imposed on the State of Israel, and the sheer ferocity of the violence on Oct. 7 – all of these elements defy a purely geopolitical explanation. The intensity of the hatred we face suggests that our conflict transcends territorial disputes; it is embedded in a Biblical narrative, entwined with profound, ancient themes about the people of Hashem and the land promised to them. This story reaches beyond mere human dimensions.

Oct. 7 has not only reshaped Jewish identity worldwide but has also profoundly impacted broader Israeli society. It has reinforced the realization that the Bible is not merely an ancient document but a living text, reflecting the modern chapters of the enduring story of Hashem's people.

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Eikev 5784: The Miracle & Blessing of Eretz Yisrael

Speaker: **Mrs. Michal Horowitz**

Date: August 20 2024

In Parshas Eikev, the beautiful and stirring words of Moshe Rabbeinu, during the last days of his life, continue to inspire, elevate and teach us. One of the main themes of the final teachings of Moshe is the topic of our beloved Land, Eretz Yisrael. Though Moshe was never allowed to enter the land (not in life, nor in death for kevurah), he speaks of the Land's beauty, miraculous nature, holiness and special qualities. Here is a small selection of pasukim regarding Eretz Yisrael from this week's parsha:

Devarim 7:13 - וְאַהֲבֵךָ וּבֵרַכְךָ וְהִרְבֶּה וּבִרְבֵּי בָטְנֶךָ וּבִרְיֵי אֲדָמָתְךָ דְגָנְךָ - וְתִירְשֶׁךָ וְיִצְהַרְךָ שְׂגֵרֵי אֲלֵפִיךָ וְעֵשְׂתֵרֶת צֹאֲנֶךָ עַל הָאָדָמָה אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לְאַבְרָהָם וְיִרְשֶׁתָּם וְיִרְשָׁתָם אֶת-הָאָרֶץ, אֲשֶׁר-נִשְׁבַּע ה' לְאַבְרָם - אַנְד הֵו וִילֹוּב יֹו וּבְלֵס יֹו וּמִלְּטֵי יֹו; הֵו וִילֵב הַפְּרִי שֶׁל בֶּטֶן וְהַפְּרִי שֶׁל אֲדָמָתְךָ דְגָנְךָ, יַיִן, וְשֵׁן, וְהַפְּרִי שֶׁל אֲדָמָתְךָ וְהַפְּרִי שֶׁל אֲדָמָתְךָ לְתֵּן לְךָ; הֵו וִילֵב הַפְּרִי שֶׁל אֲדָמָתְךָ וְהַפְּרִי שֶׁל אֲדָמָתְךָ לְתֵּן לְךָ;

8:1 - כָּל-הַמְצָוָה, אֲשֶׁר אֶנְכִי מְצַוֶּה הַיּוֹם--תִּשְׁמְרוּן לַעֲשׂוֹת: לִמְעַן תִּחְיוּן - 8:1 - Every commandment that I command you this day you shall keep to do, that you may live and multiply, and come and possess the land that Hashem swore to your forefathers;

v.7 - כִּי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ, מְבִיאֶךָ אֶל-אֶרֶץ טוֹבָה אֲרָץ, נְחָלִים מַיִם--עֵינֹת וְתַהֲמַת, v.7 - For Hashem your G-d is bringing you to a good land, a land with brooks of water, fountains and depths, that emerge in valleys and mountains;

v.8 - אֶרֶץ חֹטֵה וְשֵׁעֶרָה, וְגִפְנֵן וְתַאֲנָה וְרִמּוֹן; אֲרָץ-זֵית שֶׁמֶן, וְדִבְבָשׁ - v.8 - a land of wheat and barley, vines and figs and pomegranates, a land of oil producing olives and honey;

v.10 - וְאָכַלְתָּ, וְשִׂבַּעְתָּ--וּבֵרַכְתָּ אֶת-ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ, עַל-הָאָרֶץ הַטּוֹבָה אֲשֶׁר נָתַן-לְךָ - v.10 - And you shall eat and be satiated, and you will bless Hashem, your G-d, for the good land that He has given you;

אֲרָץ, אֲשֶׁר-ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ דֹרֵשׁ אֹתָהּ תָּמִיד, עֵינֵי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בָּה--מְרֻשֵׁית 11:12 - אֲרָץ, אֲשֶׁר-ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ דֹרֵשׁ אֹתָהּ תָּמִיד, עֵינֵי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בָּה--מְרֻשֵׁית 11:12 - it is a land that Hashem, your G-d, seeks out; the eyes of Hashem, your G-d, are always upon it, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year.

Though he never merited to enter into the Land, as an emissary of Hashem, Moshe was in love with Eretz Yisrael. He knew that it was the only place where Torah and mitzvos could be properly fulfilled as prescribed by the Torah (Sotah 14a), and Moshe exhorts us - over and over again - to love, appreciate and cherish the good Land.

Over the last close-to-eleven months, Hashem yerachem aleinu, much of the happenings from Eretz Yisrael are exceptionally, painfully difficult and impossible to comprehend. From the brave soldiers fighting for us all, the fallen who gave their lives, the hostages and their families, the evacuees from the North and South, the continuous barrage of missiles, rockets and drones in the North, the businesses destroyed, the hatred of the world for our State and our Nation... our beloved Land and nation are under attack.

However, despite all the losses and all the pain, we must remember that Hashem loves us and His Land, and His eyes are upon the Land always (cf. Devarim 11:12, quoted above).

Earlier this week, a great miracle occurred in Tel Aviv, reminding us of Hashem's ever-present Hashgacha and shemira upon us. During these challenging times, it behooves us, and encourages us, to remember that Hashem's Merciful Guidance is always present.

Rav Avraham Meshulam, the Gabbai of the Rashbi shul in southern Tel Aviv, where a great neis occurred on Sunday evening (August 18, 2024) when a suicide bomber's powerful bomb prematurely exploded ten meters away from it, spoke to

the media on Monday about the magnitude of the neis (miracle). "The explosion was louder than I've ever heard before," he said. "The whole shul shook like in a powerful earthquake. The electricity went out in part of the building and the glass of the windows shattered on people. Miraculously there were no people on the street at the time except for one passerby who was injured and we daven for his speedy recovery."

"They saw on the security cameras that the terrorist had already approached the entrance of the shul, checked out the area and saw that there was a shul there full of people. Afterward, you see him going back ten meters and sitting on a bench and fiddling with the buttons inside his knapsack. HKB"H caused him to accidentally press the wrong button, activating the device at that moment and not several minutes afterward. It truly was a neis. The building next to the shul, a hardware store, was destroyed – the wall completely exploded. The glass that shattered on us was really marginal, nothing. None of us were hurt, not even a little. We believe that HKB"H protects us and saved us."

Rav Meshulam told B'Chadrei Chareidim that the shul has a Yeshivas Bein Hazemanim every day, the largest one in the city, and the shul is especially crowded at night with mispallelim and lomdei Torah – exactly the time that the device exploded. "Just last week, the Sephardi Rav of Bnei Brak, HaGaon HaRav Masoud Ben-Shimon, came to the opening ceremony for Yeshivas Bein HaZemanim, and said: 'Know one thing – this Yeshivas Bein HaZemanim protects all of Tel Aviv.' At that time, people didn't attribute much importance to his words and thought it was simply a statement of chizzuk. But B"H, everyone understands the koach of Torah – that's what protects Am Yisrael. It could have ended in a mass-casualty incident – the explosion was extremely powerful. My father built this shul 75 years ago in the name of Rav Shimon Bar Yochai. The shteibelach have been here for 75 years and are full of tefillos and Torah all the time" www.theyeshivaworld.com.

May we merit to witness the ultimate Revelation and Redemption, with the coming of Moshiach; כִּי תִמְלֵא הָאָרֶץ דַּעַת - כִּי תִמְלֵא הָאָרֶץ דַּעַת - For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of Hashem, as the water covers the sea (Chavakuk 2:14).

בְּרַכַּת בְּשׂוֹרוֹת טוֹבוֹת וְשִׁבַּת שְׁלוֹם

from: **Rabbi Chanan Morrison** <chanan@ravkooktorah.org>

date: Aug 22, 2024, 3:48 AM

subject: Rav Kook on Eikev: Four Blessings after the Meal **Rav Kook Torah**

Eikev: Four Blessings After Eating

"When you eat and are sated, you must bless the Lord your God for the good land that He has given you." (Deut. 8:10) The Torah does not specify the exact text of Birkat Hamazon, the blessing recited after eating a meal. The Talmud, however,

informs us that it comprises four blessings, authored over a period of a thousand years:

Moses composed the first blessing, הַיְיָ (“the One Who provides sustenance for the entire world”), when the manna fell in the desert. Joshua composed the second blessing, עַל הָאָרֶץ (“For the Land”), when the Jewish people entered the Land of Israel.

David and Solomon composed the third blessing, בּוֹנֵה יְרוּשָׁלַיִם (“the One Who rebuilds Jerusalem”). David, who established Jerusalem as his capital, wrote, “Your people Israel and Your city Jerusalem.” And Solomon, who built the Temple, added, “The great and holy Temple.” The Sages of Yavneh¹ composed the final blessing, הַטּוֹב וְהַמְיֻטֵּב (“The good King and Benefactor”), to commemorate the miracle that occurred with the dead of the city of Beitar. These Jews were killed by the Romans during the failed Bar Kochba revolt of 135 C.E. For months, the Roman authorities refused to let them be buried, but miraculously, their bodies did not rot.

The Order of the Blessings

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

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

In order to attain this higher awareness, we must climb the ‘ladder’ step by step: The first rung of the ladder relates to our own personal physical welfare. On the next rung, we express our concern for the physical welfare of the nation. On the third rung, we focus on the spiritual well-being of the nation. Lastly, we aspire to be a “light unto the nations,” a holy people who influence and uplift all who were created in God’s image.

This progression is accurately reflected in the blessings of Birkat Hamazon. First, we recite the blessing of “Who sustains the world,” composed when the manna fell. This prayer corresponds to the physical needs of each individual, just as the manna-bread sustained each Israelite in the barren desert. The manna also provided loftier benefits, as it spiritually uplifted all who witnessed this miracle. But its primary function was to provide for each individual’s physical needs. The second level — concern for the physical welfare of the entire nation — is the subject of the second blessing, “For the Land.” When Joshua led the people into their own land, the Land of Israel, he set the stage for the establishment of a nation with all of the usual national assets: security and defense, self-government, agriculture, economy, natural resources, and so on. Concern for the spiritual well-being of the Jewish people

is the theme of the third blessing, which deals with the spiritual center of the Jewish people: Jerusalem. King David composed the first part, “For Your people Israel and Your city Jerusalem,” expressing our prayers for the spiritual state and unity of the Jewish people.

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

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

The Promise of Beitar

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

With the fall of the great city of Beitar, the last hopes for Jewish independence were crushed for thousands of years. Nonetheless, the Sages saw tremendous significance in the fact that the dead did not decompose, and were eventually given a proper burial. This was a Heavenly sign that even if the nation of Israel appears to be lifeless, struck down by the sword of our enemies, we nonetheless retain our spiritual essence, like an inner fire smoldering imperceptibly inside a black piece of coal, cool to the touch. We are confident that we will yet attain our highest aspirations, despite the many years we may have to wait. Just as those who sleep in the dust will return to life in the appointed hour, so too, the Jewish people will rise to national greatness in the end of days. (Sapphire from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. II, p. 218)

1 Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai transferred the Sanhedrin from Jerusalem to Yavneh after Jerusalem’s destruction at the hand of the Romans in 70 C.E.

2 A similar progression may be found in the requests of the Amidah prayer.

from: **Rav Immanuel Bernstein**

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date: Aug 22, 2024, 7:14 AM

subject: **Meshech Chochmah on Ekev**

MESHECH CHOCHMAH

Ekev

The Mitzvah of Cleaving to Hashem

אֵת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ תִירָא אֹתוֹ תַעֲבֹד וְבוֹ תִדְבֹק

You shall fear Hashem your God... and to Him you shall cleave (10:20)

Defining the Mitzvah

The Ramban explains that the phrase “and to Him you shall cleave” refers to those righteous individuals for whom an awareness of and desire for Hashem is constantly present in their thoughts and actions. The Meshech Chochmah, however, takes issue with this approach, on the basis of the assertion that any mitzvah that is addressed to the Jewish people in a general way must be able to be fulfilled by every member of the people on their level, not just by a select few.

Therefore, the Meshech Chochmah explains that this mitzvah contains a basic Jewish obligation that is elaborated upon at length in Neviim and Kesuvim, namely, bitachon – trust in Hashem.

The basis of this trust is twofold:

A citizen of a country will generally trust in the king to uphold his moral duty to protect his subjects.

A son will naturally trust his father who loves him to look after him and provide for him.

Certainly, then, Hashem, who is both our Father and our King, should be the recipient of our trust to care and look after us.

Indeed, in His infinite knowledge, He knows better than we do ourselves what we need, and has infinite capacity to take care of those needs.

This is the mitzvah of cleaving to Hashem; it involves the person recognizing that he is connected to Hashem’s Divine care and providence, and trusting in Him accordingly.

Moreover, this mitzvah can be performed by anyone among the Jewish people, regardless of their spiritual stature, as the Midrash states, that even a wicked person who trusts in Hashem will be enveloped by His kindness and protection.[1]

To be sure, the highest level of this mitzvah involves a person’s every thought and deed as being devoted and dedicated to Hashem, as the Ramban stated, but the mitzvah itself on a basic level is in the province of the entire Jewish people.

This understanding of the mitzvah is corroborated by Yehoshua’s final words to the Jewish people, where he exhorts them to continue to cleave to Hashem as they have done until now.[2] The context of this exhortation is the wars that he describes in the preceding verses, which the people had fought with implicit trust that Hashem will assist them in the conquest of the land.[3] That trust is called “cleaving to Hashem,” and Yehoshua exhorts the people to continue to act in accordance with this principle.

The Gemara’s Exposition

Now, it should be noted that the Gemara has an explanation of the concept of cleaving to Hashem which seems to be at odds with that of the Meshech Chochmah. In Maseches Kesubos, it explains that the “cleaving to Hashem” involves one attaching himself to a Torah scholar, for example by having one’s daughter marry a talmid chacham and by doing business on behalf of the talmid chacham.[4] Indeed, the Rambam bases his understanding of our mitzvah on that gemara.[5]

However, the Meshech Chochmah explains that there is no conflict between the explanation given by the gemara (attaching oneself to ta talmid chacham) and the one he is advancing (trusting in Hashem), for the simple reason that each one is addressing a different verse. The Torah mentions this idea of “cleaving to Hashem” in two places: first in our parsha and then again at the end of Parshas Nitzavim.

The Gemara is addressing the command as it appears in Parshas Nitzavim. There, the verse writes “to love Hashem, to heed His voice and to cleave to Him.”[6] Cleaving to Hashem’s voice as expressed in the Torah indeed takes the form of attaching oneself to a talmid chacham in the ways described by the gemara there.

Our verse commands “to fear Hashem... and to cleave to Him.” This is the mitzvah of bitachon, for one who trusts in Hashem fears Him alone and no other power.

Bitachon and Shabbos

With the above in mind, the Meshech Chochmah comes back to explain a matter he has dealt with in an earlier parsha. Keeping Shabbos is a commemoration of Hashem resting from creation on the seventh day. As such, it should be applicable to all nations, yet we know that only the Jewish people were given the Shabbos!

Upon reflection, however, we will appreciate that embracing a day where all productive labor is forbidden can only be done if one trusts in Hashem completely that his livelihood will not suffer as result. Therefore, only the Jewish people, from whom such a level of bitachon is expected, were entrusted with keeping the Shabbos day. This gives us new insight into the idea of Shabbos, as presented in the second set of luchos, being accompanied by a command to remember that we were slaves in Egypt and that Hashem took us out.[7] The idea is that reflection on those events should engender within us an awareness of Hashem’s Divine protection over us, which will then allow us to keep the Shabbos day as it should be kept, with no worry over our livelihood and material wellbeing. Moreover, the first time Shabbos is mentioned to the Jewish people in the verse is in the context of the double portion of manna that fell on Friday, with no manna falling on Shabbos.[8] The entire experience of having their food fall from heaven engendered and embedded within the people a fundamental sense of trust in Hashem as the source of their sustenance; hence, this was a most appropriate juncture to introduce the day of Shabbos which is predicated on that theme.

Indeed, the very first historical act of national trust in Hashem on the part of the Jewish people is intimately bound up with Shabbos. Four days prior to the slaughtering of the korban pesach, the people were told to take a sheep, in full view of the Egyptians who worshipped it as a deity, and tie it to their bedposts in anticipation of slaughtering it as a korban. That day, the tenth of Nissan, fell on that year on the Shabbos, and trust the people demonstrated in Hashem by taking those

animals showed them to be uniquely deserving to receive the Shabbos day – for which reason we celebrate the Shabbos before Pesach every year as Shabbos Hagadol!

[1] Yalkut Shimoni Tehillim sec. 719. [2] Yehoshua 23:8. [3] See *ibid.* verses 1-7. [4] Kesubos 111b. [5] See Sefer Hamitzvos, positive mitzvah 6, and Hilchos De'os 6:2. [6] Devarim 30:20. [7] See *ibid.* 5:15. [8] See Shemos 16:22-26. Copyright © 2024 Journeys in Torah, All rights reserved. You're receiving this email either because you signed up on the website or you requested to be added.

<https://aish.com/antisemites-are-attacking-the-talmud/>
Antisemites Are Attacking the Talmud
by **Rabbi Efrem Goldberg**
August 21, 2024

Influencers are shamelessly promoting blood libels and unfounded accusations about the Talmud to an audience eager to hear it. Arm yourself with knowledge.

This week, a Jew hater with 1.6 million Twitter followers posted an image consisting of a collection of supposed passages from the Talmud that paint Jews as disparaging towards and discriminating against non-Jews, seeing them as inferior and treating them with a bias and double standard. The image isn't new but this was likely the biggest audience it had ever been published to.

Some of the quotes don't exist altogether, others are taken out of context, and others are intentionally misrepresented or misquoted. No matter, the post was viewed more than 5.9 million times, liked more than 33,000 times and shared 8,300 times.

I posted the following in response:

Since the Talmud was written it has been misquoted, twisted and used to fuel and justify antisemitism. Those who hosted "disputations" disappeared into oblivion while the Talmud is alive, well and studied more than ever around the world. @DanBilzerian and @RealCandaceO - you don't scare us. You will long be gone and the Talmud will continue to light up the world.

Putting Judaism on trial goes back to our very beginning. Abraham holds a religious debate with Nimrod. The Talmud records stories of disputations between Jews and Roman tormentors. In the Middle Ages, Jews were forced to defend the Talmud against Christians authorities who accused it of containing blasphemy and anti-Christian sentiments. Some famous incidents include Nicholas Donin, a Jewish apostate, disputing R' Yechiel of Paris in 1240 that resulted in the burning of 24 wagonloads of hand-written volumes of Talmud. In 1263, King James I of Spain ordered the Ramban to debate with apostate Pablo Christiani at a disputation in Barcelona. In the 15th century, R' Yosef Albo participated in the disputation of Tortosa. In 1757 in Kamenets, Polish Jewry was tasked with defending Judaism and the Talmud against Jacob Frank that

included the spurious blood libel charge, the false accusation that Jews baked their matzahs with the blood of murdered Christian babies. The list sadly goes on and on.

The more things change, the more they stay the same. Who would believe that in 2024, public personalities with large platforms could continue to shamelessly promote blood libels and unfounded accusations about the Talmud to an audience eager to hear it.

The response to my post was predictable, but it was nonetheless jarring. A torrent of antisemitism, including hundreds of hateful comments, were unleashed in my direction. A small sample of some of the ones I can print here:

- "The only lighting up the Talmud should do is when it's drenched in gasoline and set fire to."
- "Nicholas Donin was a hero"
- "The Talmud is satanic garbage"

An educator named Rabbi Yisrael M. Eliashiv wrote a detailed thread addressing each of the alleged Talmudic statements, finding and posting original sources, and debunking the lies in the offensive image. He

introduced it by saying, "Preface: None of this is new; most of these fake quotes originate from a couple of antisemitic German books that are over a hundred years old and they've been debunked over and over in many places. Sadly, most of them are not so accessible so I'll go over them myself."

Impressively, the response has been viewed 2.1 million times. While it does set the record straight for those who are willing to read it and be open to the truth, sadly, that number is less than half of the number who read the original, hateful post.

Get Informed

The Jewish people are under attack. We are the target of false accusations and distortions of our Torah, of our country, and of our people. Ignorance is not bliss, it is irresponsible. How can we expect others to defend us if we are unaware and unfamiliar with the facts and truths ourselves? We may well encounter a hateful antisemite, or even someone well-intentioned who came across a post that made them question what we believe, who saw something that makes them ask us about our sacred texts. When the moment arises at the watercooler at work, on the checkout line of the supermarket, or with our seatmate on the plane, will we be ready, armed and informed with the facts? Are our children sufficiently literate on the basics of our people, our history, our Torah, and Israel to stand up and defend if they are ever under attack?

Our rabbis teach: "Rebbe Elazar said: Be diligent in the study of the Torah and know how to answer a heretic" (Ethics of the Fathers, 2:14).

Commentators wonder, why doesn't Rebbe Elazar command us to answer the disputer; why is the instruction "know what to answer"?

If they are looking into the Talmud to discredit it, we must be inspired to look more often and more deeply into our Talmud to be informed, inspired and guided by it.

The greatest response to our enemies and attackers is not necessarily to engage and debate but to be knowledgeable, literate, informed, passionate and practicing. That is why the Mishna begins by telling us to be diligent in studying Torah. How much? Until you are armed with the knowledge, confidence, and clarity to not be threatened or challenged by the heretic and instead to live a passionate, rich Jewish life. Just like the antagonists and disputants who came before, Dan Bilzerian, Candace Owens and the raging antisemites of our time will not be effective and will not be remembered, but our sacred Torah and our timeless Talmud will continue to be learned around the world.

If they are looking into the Talmud to discredit it, we must be inspired to look more often and more deeply into our Talmud to be informed, inspired and guided by it.

We must continue to confront and stop antisemites, but the most important response we can offer is to not only never apologize, be ashamed or defensive of our Talmud or tradition, but to channel their hate into a greater love and commitment for our wisdom and our way of life.

They want us to stop learning and living Torah? The response must be to learn it and live it more.

They want us to abandon our values? Lean into them, hold on to them stronger, tighter.

They want you to hide your yarmulka? Get a bigger one.

We cannot win if we don't know what we are fighting for.

Become a better, bigger, and more practicing and learned Jew.

Someone asked me, if I had \$100 million to fight antisemitism what would I do? I said I wouldn't buy ads on television or hire lobbyists in Congress. I would put every penny into reaching out to our Jewish brothers and sisters to stand taller, prouder, to live more Jewishly. I would send a mezuzah for every Jew and every Jewish student on a college campus to hang on their door. I would send candles for every Jew to light Friday night or for Hanukkah.

We cannot win if we don't know what we are fighting for.

Become a better, bigger, and more practicing and learned Jew.

Rabbi Efrem Goldberg is the rabbi of the Boca Raton Synagogue.

<https://www.isralight.org/small-tastings-of-torah-judaism-and-spirituality-from-rav-binny-freedman-portion-of-ekev-4/>

Small Tastings of Torah, Judaism and Spirituality

from **Rav Binny Freedman** – Portion of Ekev

Some years ago, I received this fascinating story* via e-mail:

* *The story in the email was later found to be a hoax, but it still makes a great story!*

At the turn of the twentieth century, two of the wealthiest and most famous men in America was a pair of Jewish brothers named Nathan and Isidor Straus. Owners of R.H. Macy's Department Store and founders of the A&S (Abraham & Straus) chain, the brothers were

multimillionaires, renowned for their philanthropy and social activism.

In 1912, the brothers and their wives were touring Europe, when Nathan, the more ardent Zionist of the two, impulsively said one day, "Hey, why don't we hop over to Palestine?" Israel wasn't the tourist hotspot then that it is today. Its population was ravaged by disease, famine, and poverty; but the two had a strong sense of solidarity with their less fortunate brethren, and they also wanted to see the health and welfare centers they had endowed with their millions. However, after a week spent touring, Isidor Straus had had enough.

"How many camels, hovels, and yeshivas can you see? It's time to go," Isidor decreed with edgy impatience in his voice. But Nathan refused to heed his brother's imperious command. It wasn't that he was oblivious to the hardships around him; it was precisely because of them that he wanted to stay.

As he absorbed firsthand the vastness of the challenges his fellow Jews were coping with, he felt the burden of responsibility. "We can't leave now," he protested. "Look how much work has to be done here. We have to help. We have the means to help. We can't turn our backs on our people." "So we'll send more money," his brother snapped back. "I just want to get out of here."

But Nathan felt that money simply wasn't enough. He felt that the Jews who lived under such dire circumstances in Palestine needed the brothers' very presence among them: their initiative, their leadership, and their ideas. Isidor disagreed.

The two argued back and forth, and finally Isidor said, "If you insist, stay here. Ida and I are going back to America where we belong."

The two separated. Isidor and his wife returned to Europe, while Nathan and his spouse stayed in Palestine, traveling the country and contributing huge sums of money to the establishment of education, health, and social welfare programs to benefit the needy. Nathan also financed the creation of a brand-new city on the shores of the Mediterranean. And since his name in Hebrew was Natan, and he was the city's chief donor, the founders named it after him and called it...Natanya.

Meanwhile, back in Europe, Isidor Straus was preparing to sail home to America aboard an ocean liner for which he had also made reservations for his brother, Nathan, and his wife. "You must leave Palestine NOW!" he cabled his brother in an urgent telegram. "I have made reservations for you and if you don't get here soon, you'll miss the boat."

But Nathan delayed. There was so much work to be done that he waited until the last possible moment to make the connection. By the time he reached London, it was April 12 and the liner had already left port in Southampton with Isidor and Ida Straus aboard. Nathan felt disconsolate that he had, as his brother had warned, "missed the boat." For this was no ordinary expedition, no common, everyday cruise that he had forfeited, but the much-ballyhooed maiden voyage of the most famous ship of the century. This was the Titanic.

Nathan Straus, grief-stricken and deeply mourning his brother and sister-in-law could not shake off his sense that he had had a rendezvous with history. The knowledge that he had avoided death permeated his consciousness for the rest of his life, and until his death in 1931, he pursued his philanthropic activities with an intensity that was unrivaled in his time. Truly, his life was a blessing for the Jewish people.

[In reality, Nathan Straus broke his leg on a 1912 visit to Palestine and was unable to join his brother, Isidor, on the RMS Titanic. Isidor

died in the sinking. The Israeli city of Netanya (Hebrew: Natan, for Nathan), founded in 1927, was named in his honor.]

Today, Netanya is a scenic resort city of 200,000 and headquarters to Israel's thriving diamond trade – one of the most important industries in the country. And in almost every part of the city, there is some small reminder of Nathan Straus's largesse, his humanity, and love for his people. His legacy lives on....

What motivates some people to do more than just appreciate the blessings they have in their lives; and to actually be a vehicle for blessing?

This week's portion, Ekev, contains one of the pivotal verses of the entire Torah regarding the concept of blessings:

“Ve'achalta' ve'sava'ta' u'verachta' et Hashem Elokecha al ha'aretz hatovah asher natan lach.”

“And (when) you shall eat and be satisfied and bless G-d your G-d for the good land which He has given you.” (Devarim (Deuteronomy) 8:10)

This verse is actually the biblical basis for the Grace after Meals (known as the Birkat hamazon): the four blessings we say after a meal which includes a satisfying helping of bread. Coming as it does, in the midst of Moshe's speech to the Jewish people (now in its third portion....) and his stern warnings to the generation about to enter the land of Israel lest they forget who they are and why they have been charged by G-d with the challenge of conquering the land of Israel, this verse begs a number of questions.

First of all, how does one bless G-d? Thanking G-d is one thing; after all, it makes sense to be appreciative of all the gifts we are blessed with and the value of being thankful for it all, especially to the source of all good in this world makes a lot of sense. But what does it mean to bless G-d? Why would G-d need our blessings, much less demand them? In fact, what exactly is a blessing?

Furthermore, why is the system for blessings after eating bread (the grace after meals or Birkat hamazon) so much more involved (3-4 blessings) than say, the blessing over fruits?

In fact, Moshe mentions these 'fruits' in declaring how wonderful the land of Israel is:

“Ki' Hashem Elokecha' me'viacha' el eretz tovah: eretz nachalei mayim...eretz chittah u'se'orah ve'gefen u'te'enah ve'rimon ,eretz zeit shemen u'dvash.”

“For Hashem your G-d is bringing you to a good land: a land of streams of water... a land of wheat and barley, vines and figs and pomegranates, a land of olive (oil) trees and (date) honey.” (Devarim(Deuteronomy) 8:7-8)

According to Jewish tradition these are seven special 'fruits' known as the seven species which grew in the land of Israel (and were apparently what the spies brought back to the Jewish people in the desert). Yet even though these species include grains, it is only when these grains are utilized to make bread that for some reason, the blessings we make upon eating them are taken to a different level, resulting in three (and later four) blessings instead of the usual one (known as the Al HaMichyah or Bracha achat me'ein shalosh blessing made after eating cakes and fruits...)

Considering how beautiful these fruits are, and how much more appreciative one might expect us to be upon eating fruits, than say, on a simple piece of pita....

All of this is wrapped up in understanding the nature of blessings in the first place.

I recall once, at a Friday night dinner, meeting a fellow who seemed quite prominent in his Synagogue, and who had sponsored the evening in memory of his son who had passed away in a tragic car accident. At the end of dinner thinking it would be appropriate, I asked him if he would honor us by leading the blessings after the meals but he politely declined, saying “I don't do that!”

Given that he appeared quite knowledgeable in Judaism and seemed familiar and even comfortable with Jewish tradition, I was somewhat surprised by his comment and later found the opportunity to ask him what he meant.

“I used to buy it all; the whole nine yards” he explained to me.

“And I still think Judaism is an incredible system with a magnificent community structure. I grew up religious and have never driven on Shabbat nor knowingly placed unkosher food in my mouth, and I never will. I even believe in G-d; who else could be the reason we are all here?”

“But after he took my son, I'll be damned if I'm ever going to bless Him again!”

While at the time, due to the circumstances, I wasn't able to have the long discussion such a comment almost demands (and of course, far be it from me to have the arrogance to judge such a person, given the pain he had obviously been and continued to be going through...) I did manage to ask him what he thought blessings were. After all, if you decide you are not going to bless, you must have a working definition of what a blessing really is, right?

Fascinatingly, he had never really thought about it, but upon reflection realized he considered it to be a form of thanksgiving and recognition (and he felt himself unable to be fully thankful to a G-d who, he perceived, had taken his son. Indeed, his decision to remain an involved Jew on every other level other than blessings was, I imagine his own form of rebellion against a G-d he was not quite ready to forgive.

And yet, blessings are not really about saying thank you. The Hebrew word for 'thanks' is todah, which is very different from the Hebrew word for blessing which is 'bracha'.

In fact, thanksgiving is an entirely different topic, and we do in fact have many blessings that are about thanksgiving such as the 'Modim' prayer (in the silent Amidah) and the 'Nodeh Lecha' blessing after meals.

So, what is the meaning of the word 'brachah' (blessing)?

When Hashem (G-d) blesses Avraham, the verse in Genesis says:

“Va'Hashem Beirach et Avraham Bakol.”

“And G-d blessed Avraham with everything.”

And the commentaries there suggest that Hashem actually blessed Avraham by increasing his wealth as well as his progeny. Rav Soleveitchick suggests that this is indeed the true nature of the word 'bracha': to increase.

When you are blessed, something is increased, whether it is the joy in your life, your sense of fulfillment or even having more children. In fact, when you bless someone that their business should be successful you are really hoping they will earn more money.

So how do we bless Hashem, and why does Hashem need our blessing? Obviously, Hashem doesn't need our blessings; rather, we need to be blessing Hashem. Blessing G-d is, quite simply, the art of increasing Hashem's presence in our lives, and in all that we do.

Thus, blessing G-d when you are eating an apple is actually a conscious decision to elevate the simple act of eating an apple into an opportunity to appreciate G-d's presence in my life. By making a

blessing over an apple we allow this apple to become a vehicle for increasing Hashem's presence in our life, which of course not only elevates the act of eating an apple, but elevates as well the person eating the apple.

Which leaves us with the question of why the blessing for bread seems so much more involved than for other foods?

In truth, what separates bread from other types of food, is not the food item itself, but rather what we do with it.

Interestingly, in the portion of Shoftim, (Devarim 20: 5-7) which we will read in a couple of weeks, the Torah tells us that there are three instances (aside from being afraid) that allow someone to be exempt from going to battle (if it is a war of expansion or economic security (milchemet reshut), as opposed to a war being fought to save the Jewish people from destruction or milchemet mitzvah).

If someone has built a new home (and has not yet lived there), planted a vineyard (whose vintage he has not yet savored), or betrothed a woman (but has not yet married...), he need not go to such a war. And the Baruch She'amar (Rav Baruch HaLevi Epstein also known as the Torah Temimah) points out that these three instances represent a growing appreciation of the nature of our partnership with G-d. When a person builds a home, he often feels as though he has built it himself, and he revels in the pride of his accomplishment. But when a person plants a vineyard, he is much more aware of how much he is really in partnership with G-d, because without the rains, nothing he planted would have grown, so he is much more aware of Hashem as responsible for all the good he is experiencing. And of course, when marrying and having children, it becomes even clearer that we are just vehicles for G- d's plan. We are, on the one hand, blessed to be in partnership with G-d in bringing life into the world, and yet very much aware of how fragile life truly is, and how much Hashem is really responsible for all the good we have in our lives.

When a person goes to war, he actually has to find the balance between placing himself completely in Hashem's hands while at the same time recognizing that G-d wants us to be partners in making the world a better place.

After all, if we truly believed G-d runs the world then we wouldn't bother bringing our guns to battle because it's all in G-d's hands anyway, right?

And yet Judaism suggests that Hashem very much wants us as partners in building this world, hence its creation as an unfinished project....

And of course, this is not because Hashem needs our help to fight, or to finish planting the field. Rather, this is part of Hashem's gift to us; it is we who gain from the process of being partners in building this world.

All of which brings us back to the wheat growing in the field.

The Talmud (in tractates Berachot and Shabbat 74b) tells us there are ten processes in making bread. (Hence the ten words of the blessing over bread: the 'Hamotzi' ...) We come to an empty field, but if we watch it and wait for it to grow bread it will be a long wait!

We plough and then sow seeds, reap the grain and then thresh and winnow, gather and divide, eventually making and kneading the dough and then baking it into what finally becomes bread. It takes a lot of work to make bread, which is why, according to some commentaries; it was specifically bread (known as the lechem hapanim or show bread) that was put on 'show' in the Temple every week.

Fruit in the fields was essentially a gift from G-d; once the trees are planted all they need is water, and the fruit will arrive. Thus, they represent G-d's gift to us. Bread on the other hand, which takes so much work, represents our gift back to G-d. Bread is all about what we choose to do with the world that G-d gives us.

(Indeed, this is the essence of understanding why the challenge G-d gave Adam after the sin of eating from the tree of knowledge was that we would eat bread 'by the sweat of our brow...'. We did not fully appreciate the gifts (the Garden of Eden) G-d gave us, so now we would need to earn them...)

Bread then, is the ultimate expression of our partnership with G-d, and as such creates a much greater sense of the presence of G-d in our lives.

And the more we are willing to be partners in bringing G-d into our lives and into this world, the higher level the world and us along with it, will reach....

In these times filled with so many challenges, and with so much work needed to create a better society, the daily act of blessing our bread, serves as both a reminder as well as an inspiration of how different the world could be, if only we were all willing to make it so....

Shabbat Shalom from Yerushalayim,
 Rav Binny Freedman