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A Sense of History

Britain's Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

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Ki Tavo begins with the ceremony of bringing firstfruits to the Temple. The Mishnah (Bikkurim 3) gives a detailed account of what happened: Those that were near to Jerusalem brought fresh figs and grapes, and those that were far away brought dried figs and raisins. Before them went the ox, its horns overlaid with gold, and with a wreath of olive leaves on its head.

The flute was played before them until they came near Jerusalem. When they were near to Jerusalem, they sent messengers before them and bedecked their first fruits. The rulers and the prefects and the treasurers of the Temple went forth to meet them. According to the honour due to them that came in, they used to go forth. All the craftsmen in Jerusalem used to rise up the for them and greet them, saying, "Brothers, men of such-and-such a place, you are welcome."

The flute was played before them until they reached the Temple Mount. When they reached the Temple Mount, even King Agrippa would take his basket on his shoulder and enter in as far as the Temple Court . . .

It was a magnificent ceremony. In historical context, however, its most significant aspect was the declaration each individual had to make: "My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down into Egypt with a few people and lived there and became a great nation, powerful and numerous . . . Then the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror and with miraculous signs and wonders." (Deut. 26: 5-10)

This passage is well-known. It became the text expounded as part of the Haggadah on seder night on Pesach. Its familiarity, though, should not blind us to its revolutionary character. Listening to these words, we are

in the presence of one of the greatest revolutions in the history of thought.

The ancients saw the gods in nature, never more so than in thinking about the harvest and all that accompanied it. Nature does not change. Natural time is cyclical – the seasons of the year, the revolution of the planets, the cycle of birth, death and new life. When the ancients thought about the past, it was not the historical but a mythical/metaphysical/cosmological past – the primeval time-before-time when the world was formed out of the struggle between the elements.

That is precisely what did not happen in ancient Israel. It might have been otherwise. Had Judaism been a different kind of religion, the people bringing firstfruits might have recited a song of praise to G-d as the author of creation and sustainer of life. We find several such songs in the Book of Psalms: Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving; make music to our God on the harp. He covers the sky with clouds; he supplies the earth with rain and makes grass grow on the hills. and bread that sustains his heart. (Ps. 147: 7-8)

The significance of the firstfruits declaration is that it is not about nature but about history: a thumbnail sketch of the sequence of events from the days of the patriarchs to the exodus and then conquest of the land. Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi gave the best analysis of the intellectual transformation this involved: It was ancient Israel that first assigned a decisive significance to history and thus forged a new world-view . . . Suddenly, as it were, the crucial encounter between man and the divine shifted away from the realm of nature and the cosmos to the plane of history, conceived now in terms of divine challenge and human response . . . Rituals and festivals in ancient Israel are themselves no longer primarily repetitions of mythic archetypes meant to annihilate historical time. Where they evoke the past, it is not the primeval but the historical past, in which the great and critical moments of Israel's history were fulfilled . . . Only in Israel and nowhere else is the injunction to remember felt as a religious imperative to an entire people. (Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory, p.8-9) This history was not academic, the province of scholars or a literary elite. It belonged to everyone. The declaration was recited by everyone. Knowing the story of one's people was an essential part of citizenship in the community of faith. Not only that, but it was also said in the first person: "My father . . . Then the Lord brought us out of Egypt . . . He brought us to this place". It is this internalization of history that led the rabbis to say: "In each generation, every person should see himself as if he personally came out of Egypt" (Mishnah Pesachim 10: 5). This is history transformed into memory.

To be a Jew is to be part of a story that extends across forty centuries and almost every land on the face of the earth. As Isaiah Berlin put it: All Jews who are at all conscious of their identity as Jews are steeped in history. They have longer memories, they are aware of a longer continuity as a community than any other which has survived . . . Whatever other factors may have entered into the unique amalgam which, if not always Jews themselves, at any rate the rest of the world instantly recognizes as the Jewish people, historical consciousness – sense of continuity with the past – is among the most powerful. (Against the Current, p. 252)

Despite Judaism's emphasis on the individual, it has a distinctive sense of what an individual is. We are not alone. There is no sense in Judaism of the atomic individual – the self in and for itself – we encounter in Western philosophy from Hobbes onwards. Instead, our identity is bound up horizontally with other individuals: our parents, spouse, children, neighbours, members of the community, fellow citizens, fellow Jews. We are also joined vertically to those who came before us, whose story we make our own. To be a Jew is to be a link in the chain of the generations, a character in a drama that began long before we were born and will continue long after our death.

Memory is essential to identity – so Judaism insists. We did not come from nowhere; nor does our story end with us. We are leaves on an ancient tree, chapters in a long and still-being-written story, a letter in the scroll of the book of the people of the Book.

There is something momentous about this historical sense. It reflects the fact – itself one of the great themes of the Bible – that it takes time for human beings to learn, to grow, to rise beyond our often dysfunctional and destructive instincts, to reach moral and spiritual maturity and create a society of dignity and generosity. That is why the covenant is extended over time and why – according to the sages – the only adequate guarantors of the covenant at Mount Sinai were the children yet to be born.

That is as near as we get to immortality on earth: to know that we are the guardians of the hopes of our ancestors, and the trustees of the covenant for the sake of the future. That is what happened in Temple times when people brought their firstfruits to Jerusalem and, instead of celebrating nature, celebrated the history of their people from the days when “My father was a wandering Aramean” to the present. As Moses said in some of his last words to posterity: Remember the days of old; consider the generations long past. Ask your father and he will tell you, your elders, and they will explain to you. (Deut. 32: 7)

To be a Jew is to know that the history of our people lives on in us.

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Rabbi Benjamin Yudin
Be Basket-Like

Rabbi Yitzchak Zilberstein shlita"h (V'haarev Nah, vol. 3, p. 450) addresses an interesting sensitive question regarding a group of about 10 men who study Talmud together. When it comes to a new mesechta - tractate, they rotate as to who purchases the gemaras for the group. With the great variety of gemaras available, including those with more features, the more affluent members purchased more costly texts, and the more economically strapped purchased more basic texts. The question was: should the magid shiur, instructor of the group, make a policy that only one type of gemara should be bought, to protect the dignity of the poorer members?

The mishna (Bikurim 3:8) teaches that poor farmers gave the kohein both their bikurim fruits and the simple myrtle baskets in which they brought the bikurim, while the affluent farmers took back their baskets of gold and silver. Rabbi Zilberstein, discussing the above issue of gemara purchases, cites the following question of the Tosfos Yom Tov on this mishna: just as the mishna (Taanis 26b) teaches that girls borrowed dresses on Tu B'av and Yom Kippur in order to not embarrass the poor girls, why not legislate here that everyone should bring Bikurim in simple baskets? Tosfos Yom Tov answers that the honor of the Beis Hamikdash and allowing the wealthy farmers to enrich their mitzvah and beautify it, thus fulfilling ze Keili v'anveihu, overrode the concern of sensitivity to the poor.

Rabbi Zilberstein brings an exciting Malbim (26:4) who teaches that there is a significant difference between the baskets of the rich and the poor. The poor man, he postulates, wove the basket out of myrtle leaves specifically for this purpose. Since it is a labor of love, reflecting his personal mesiras nefesh for the mitzvah, the basket thus becomes an integral part of the mitzvah. It is not simply a means to an end, enabling the farmer to give the fruit to the kohein, but rather it assumes the status of the mitzvah itself; the poor man who toiled and gave of himself in making the basket elevates the basket to become part and parcel of the

mitzvah. It is for this reason that we honor the poor and the kohein keeps the basket in recognition of his noble efforts.

I believe this insight of the Malbim is extremely significant and poignant. The Torah is teaching that when one invests in something, it becomes an integral part of oneself. The Talmud (Bava Metzia 38a) teaches that a person prefers a kav of his own produce more than nine kavs of his fellow's produce which could be purchased with the proceeds from a timely sale of his produce. Rashi explains this is the case because that which one toils to produce is most precious to him. What is true in the physical and materialistic realm is equally true in the spiritual realm. Avos D'rabi Nason (3:6) teaches that one mitzvah observed with tza'ar - difficulties and challenge - is more dear to Hashem than one hundred performed with ease.

Dovid Hamelech in his opening chapter of Tehilim praises the one "whose desire is in the Torah of Hashem, and in His Torah he meditates day and night" (1:2). At first it is called the Torah of Hashem, but once an individual has studied it and mastered it, it is called "his Torah", namely that of the scholar (Kiddushin 32b.)

Moreover, the Torah in the beginning of the Vayikra speaks of the korban olah which begins with the bringing of an animal, then the bringing of a bird, and finally the bringing of a meal offering. Interestingly, it is just regarding this latter offering that the Torah describes the donor as nefesh ("if a soul will bring a meal offering" Vayikra 2:1.) Rashi cites from the Talmud (Menachos 104b) that since most often it is a poor man that brings a meal offering as his korban olah, Hashem looks upon this act as if he offered his soul.

The lesson of the Malbim is most appropriate as we prepare for Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. Make mitzvos yours. One way, suggests the Chazon Ish (Emunah U'bitchon Chap. 3,5-10) is to study the mitzvos. The more one understands what appears to be the technical aspects of the mitzvos and the philosophical teachings of the mitzvos, the more it becomes part of you. Why do we blow thirty sounds, the tekios d'm'yushov, before the Mussaf prayer on Rosh Hashana? Why do we blow thirty sounds during the shemoneh esrei? Why forty at the end of the mussaf? What is Biblical and what is Rabbinic? Studying the above enables one to make the mitzvah theirs.

Finally, as the basket is upgraded and is reckoned as an integral part of the mitzvah, may we who perform and are about to approach a season of many mitzvos, become basket-like, namely, not just to do good, but to be good.

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from: **Rabbi Yissocher Frand** <ryfrand@torah.org> via capalon-newmail@capalon.com reply-to: do-not-reply@torah.org to: ravfrand@torah.org date: Wed, Aug 21, 2013 at 4:52 AM subject: Rabbi Frand on Parshas Ki Savo

Rabbi Yissocher Frand
Parshas Ki Savo

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: CD #912Shaimos – What Do I Do With All Those Papers? Good Shabbos!

The Connection Between Amalek and the First Fruits

Parshas Ki Savo begins with the mitzvah of bringing the First Fruits of a person's crop to the Kohen in Yerushalayim: "And you shall take from the first of all fruits of the ground that you bring from your land that the L-rd your G-d gives you; and you will place it in a basket and you will walk to the ploace that the L-rd your G-d will choose to cause his Presence to dwell there." [Devorim 26:2] Normally, we try to find a connection between the sequentially juxtaposed portions of the Torah. The question is -- can we find a connection between the mitzvah of bringing the First Fruits at the beginning of Parshas Ki Savo and the

section we read at the end of Parshas Ki Seitzei regarding remembering that which Amalek did to us. At first glance, they seem to be very disparate matters, with no relationship whatsoever. There is another question I would like to analyze. The mitzvah of bringing Bikkurim does not just consist of bringing the first fruits to the Kohen. There is also a specific text that must be read (mikra Bikkurim): The farmer recites a piece of Jewish history. He relates that our Patriarch Yaakov worked for his uncle Lavan, who tried to kill him. The narrative includes mention of the descent to Egypt and the suffering they endured there. The narrative includes praise for the Almighty for taking us out from Egypt with a mighty Hand and an outstretched Arm.

This recounting of Jewish history is itself problematic in that it seems to begin in the middle of the story -- with Yaakov's encounters with Lavan. If the purpose is to recite Jewish history, why not tell the whole story beginning with Avraham, moving on to Yitzchak, and then going into the life of the Patriarch Yaakov? Specifically, what is the significance of highlighting the story of Yaakov's encounter with Lavan when performing the mitzvah of bringing Bikkurim? We have said many times that Mikra Bikkurim is an example of one of the most fundamental obligations the Torah places on Jews: the obligation of recognizing the need to express gratitude (hakaras hatov).

The Alshich in this week's parsha elaborates on the Medrash which interprets the opening words of the Torah (Bereshis Barah Elokim) as meaning homiletically "the world was created for those things which are called 'First' (reishis)". The Medrash goes on to show that Israel, Torah, and Bikkurim are all called Reishis [first] therefore, it may be said that the entire world was created for the sake of Israel, the sake of Torah, and the sake of Bikkurim.

The Alshich questions the emphasis on the mitzvah of bringing the First Fruits (mah kol hacharada hazos?). The Alshich answers that what is implied here is the mitzvah of Hakaras HaTov. We must be grateful to the Almighty when He showers us with His bounty. Recognizing the need to express gratitude is fundamental to being a decent human being. So much so that it may be said -- according to this Medrash -- that the world was created to teach this lesson.

No one is more capable of expressing thanks for having received "tov" than a person who has previously experienced the opposite of "tov". No person is more grateful for his good health than a person who has been sick. We take our good health for granted. All one needs is a bout of a serious illness or a broken bone or a stay in the hospital and then one realizes the blessing of good health. A person who all his life was destitute and did not know where his next meal was coming from and all of a sudden his luck turned around and he became wealthy, this is a person who appreciates what it means to have money! Such a person remembers what it is to not have money.

The section of Mikra Bikkurim is the parsha of Hakaras HaTov (recognizing our debt of gratitude) for finally having a land that we can call our own. Finally, we have entered Eretz Yisrael after being strangers, nomads, slaves for upwards of 400 years. This is a time when we can appreciate the fact that every tribe and every Jew had his own plot and place to call their own in the Land of Israel.

Imagine someone who lived in an apartment his whole life, always moving from place to place. Finally, he gets his own home. Imagine the joy: "It is my house. I do not need to ask permission from the landlord to put up a picture. It is mine!" Multiply this on a national scale -- finally we have a place of our own!

We know what it is to be a stranger in someone else's land. This is the Hakaras HaTov of harvesting our first fruits in Eretz Yisrael. Now we understand why we start with Yaakov Avinu. It was Yaakov who had to leave Eretz Yisrael. He realized what it was to be a stranger in someone else's land. After living for many years in his parents' house in the Land of Israel, he then needs to go into exile and put up with uncle Lavan and all his tricks in Lavan's house in a strange land. He becomes a stranger

and learns what it means to live where he does not have a place to call his own.

The same Yaakov Avinu later must descend to Egypt. Yaakov Avinu is that patriarch who personally feels the pain of homelessness. Avraham Avinu lived in Eretz Yisrael. Yitzchak Avinu never left Eretz Yisrael. But Yaakov Avinu is the nomad. He is the wandering Jew. This is why the parsha of Mikra Bikkurim begins with the words "Arami oved ovi", because Yaakov Avinu knew what it meant not to live in one's own land. This is not just Jewish history in general. It is Jewish History of the wandering Jew.

This is also, the commentaries tell us, the connection between Mikra Bikkurim and "Remember that which Amalek did to you." If it would have been up to Amalek, we would have never arrived in the Land of Israel. The incident with Amalek highlights the trials and tribulations we had to endure to get to Eretz Yisrael. It was fraught with danger and fraught with war.

As Chazal explain, it was because Amalek started up with us that later Sichon and Og felt bold enough to attack us. Amalek's brazenness caused us to need to fight all the battles that were eventually necessary to enter and conquer Eretz Yisrael.

The Ramban writes in this week's parsha that we do not find a required minimum amount of "first fruits" that one must bring. Just as we have a rule by Teruma (on a Biblical level) that a single grain of wheat given as Teruma exempts an entire pile of grain, so too there is no required minimum measure of Bikkurim that must be offered. A single grape suffices to qualify the farmer who brings it as "one who is not an ingrate".

We learn from here a basic idea in gift giving: The most important thing is what one writes in the card. Maybe a person cannot afford the most expensive gift, but if he writes a heartfelt note of good wishes and expresses gratitude to the recipient -- this by itself proves that he is not an ingrate (kafui tova). What is in the box is almost secondary. One can turn the smallest of gifts to an eloquent testimony that the giver is not a kafui tova. One's child can make a project for his parent's birthday that is a worthless little nothing, but he writes a card: "Mommy, I love you." That is enough to melt the parent's heart. This is what we learn from the parsha of Mikra bikurim.

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from: **Rabbi Kaganoff** <ymkaganoff@gmail.com> reply-to: kaganoff-a@googlegroups.com to: kaganoff-a@googlegroups.com date: Sun, Aug 18, 2013 at 7:25 AM subject: i am attaching this week's article on the mitzvah of hagbahas torah

Holding the Torah Upright By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question #1: "I was recently in a shul where they took out the sefer Torah, opened it and carried it all around the shul, showing everyone with a yad where the beginning of the keriah is. I had never seen this before, and was wondering if this is a common practice. Is it mentioned in halachic sources, or does it simply manifest someone's enthusiasm?"

Question #2: Is there any halachic basis for the custom on Simchas Torah of reversing the sefer Torah so that the writing faces away from the magbiah?

Answer: The mitzvah of hagbahah is to raise the sefer Torah and show it, so that everyone in the shul can see the writing of the sefer Torah. The prevalent, but not exclusive, tradition among Ashkenazim is that this mitzvah is performed after each sefer Torah is read, whereas the exclusive practice among edot hamizrach (Jews of Middle Eastern and Sefardic descent) is that this mitzvah is performed prior to reading from the Torah. Among the edot hamizrach, some open the sefer Torah and lift it up immediately upon removing it from the Aron Kodesh, whereas others first bring the sefer Torah to the shulchan and then perform hagbahah, prior to calling up the kohen for the first aliyah (Ben Ish Chai II, Tolados #16). Some even perform hagbahah both before and after the reading (ibid.; Kaf HaChayim 134:17) As a matter of curiosity, it is interesting to mention that some Chassidim and Perushim in Eretz Yisrael observe the practice of the Sefardim and perform hagbahah before the Torah is read. As we will soon see, both customs – performing hagbahah before the reading and performing it after the reading -- can be traced back to antiquity.

The earliest description of hagbahah The earliest extant description of the procedure of hagbahah haTorah is found in Masechta Sofrim, as follows: "One must raise the sefer Torah when reciting the words Shema Yisrael... and then raise it again upon reciting Echad Elokeinu gadol Adoneinu Kadosh Shemo... Immediately, [the person performing the mitzvah] opens the sefer Torah to a width of three columns and lifts the sefer Torah -- showing the writing to all the people standing to his right and his left. Then he moves the sefer Torah in a circular motion before him and behind him -- because it is a mitzvah incumbent on all the men and women to see the text of the sefer Torah, to bow, and to say Vezos HaTorah asher sam Moshe lifnei B'nei Yisrael" (Masechta Sofrim 14:11-14).

What are the sources for the divergent customs? As noted by the Beis Yosef and the Gra, the Masechta Sofrim describes performing hagbahah before kerias haTorah. Nevertheless, the venerated practice of the Bnei Ashkenaz is to do hagbahah after we read the Torah (see Darkei Moshe 147:4; the practice is quoted at least as early as the Sefer HaTur, who lived over eight hundred years ago). This custom is based on the Gemara (Megillah 32a) that states, "After ten people read the Torah, the greatest of them should roll up the Torah," which refers to hagbahah and implies that it is performed after the Torah has been read. Similarly, a different passage of Gemara (Sotah 39b) mentions that the person reading the haftarah should be careful not to begin until the rolling of the Torah is complete. This implies that the hagbahah and subsequent rolling closed of the Torah is performed immediately prior to the haftarah, and not before the Torah is read.

Two places in Shulchan Aruch This difference in practice resulted in an anomalous situation. Because the Tur was himself an Ashkenazi, he included the laws of hagbahah haTorah after the reading of the Torah, in Chapter 147 of Orach Chayim. On the other hand, the Shulchan Aruch, who follows Sefardic practice, mentions hagbahah haTorah before the rules of the reading of the Torah in Chapter 134:2, yet he also discusses them where the Tur placed the halachah in Chapter 147. As a result, the halachos of hagbahah haTorah are located in two different places in Shulchan Aruch, with the laws of kerias haTorah sandwiched between. Some details of the laws of hagbahah haTorah are discussed in Chapter 134, others in Chapter 147.

Why do Ashkenazim perform hagbahah afterwards? Logically, it would seem that we should display the text of the sefer Torah prior to reading the Torah, so that people observe the section that is about to be read, as, indeed, the Sefardim do. Why do Ashkenazim delay displaying the words of the Torah until after the reading is concluded? The authorities present the following basis for what seems to be an

anomalous practice: In earlier generations, there were unlettered people who mistakenly assumed that it was more important to see the words of the Torah during the hagbahah than it was to hear the reading of the Torah. As a result, many of these people would leave shul immediately after the hagbahah and miss the reading. Therefore, the practice was introduced to postpone the hagbahah until after the reading was concluded -- which now caused these people to stay in shul and hear the reading of the Torah (Sheyarei Keneses HaGedolah 134:2, quoted by Kaf HaChayim 134:17).

Are there any other ramifications to this dispute? Indeed, there is another interesting ramification that results from the Ashkenazic practice of delaying the hagbahah until after the reading is concluded. Should one notice a p'sul in the sefer Torah that does not require taking out another sefer Torah, but precludes reading from this sefer Torah until it is repaired, one should not recite the words Vezos HaTorah and Toras Hashem temimah when being magbiah the sefer Torah (Kaf HaChayim 134:17, quoting Shu't Adnei Paz #13).

What is the proper way to do hagbahah? A sefer Torah is written on sections of parchment that are stitched together. The person who is performing hagbahah should make sure that the stitching is in front of him before he lifts the Torah, so that if the sefer Torah tears from the stress of the lifting, the stitching, which is easy to repair, will tear and not, G-d forbid, the parchment itself (Megillah 32a, as explained by the Tur; see esp. Aruch HaShulchan 147:13; cf., however, how Rashi explains the Gemara).

"Reading" the Torah When the sefer Torah is raised, each person in shul should try to actually read the letters of the sefer Torah. This causes a bright, spiritual light of the Torah to reach him (Arizal, quoted by Magen Avraham 134:3). Some have the practice of looking for a word in the sefer Torah that begins with the same letter as their name (Ben Ish Chai II, Tolados #16). In most Sefardic communities, someone points to the beginning of the day's reading while the sefer Torah is held aloft for all to see. Some congregations consider this a great honor that is given to the rav or a different scholar (Kaf HaChayim 134:13). This may be the origin of the custom that some people have of pointing at the sefer Torah during hagbahah (cf. Yalkut Me'am Lo'ez, Parshas Ki Savo, 27:26). In order to make sure that everyone sees the text of the sefer Torah, some Sefardic congregations have the magbiah carry the open sefer Torah around the shul to display its holy words to every attendee (Kaf HaChayim 134:13).

In Which Direction is the Torah held? The usual Ashkenazic practice is that the magbiah holds the sefer Torah with its writing facing him. Some congregations have the practice that, on Simchas Torah, the sefer Torah is lifted in the reverse way, so that the writing is away from the magbiah. Most people think this is a "shtick" that is part of the Simchas Torah celebration, but this is not halachically accurate. The Bach (147) contends that the original approach was to hold the sefer Torah with the writing visible to the people -- as we do on Simchas Torah. This is because when the magbiah lifts the sefer Torah the way we usually do, his body blocks the view, and for this reason, the Maharam and other great Torah leaders held the Torah with its text away from them when they performed hagbahah. Presumably, the reason this practice was abandoned is because it is much more difficult to do hagbahah this way, and there is concern that someone might, G-d forbid, drop the sefer Torah while doing it. Nevertheless, in places where the custom is to perform hagbahah this way on Simchas Torah, the reason is to show that on this joyous occasion, we want to perform hagbahah in the optimal way.

The more the merrier! The above-quoted Masechta Sofrim requires that the magbiah open the sefer Torah three columns wide. The authorities dispute whether the magbiah may open the sefer Torah more than three columns. In other words, does Masechta Sofrim mean that one should open the sefer Torah exactly three columns, or does it mean that

one should open it at least three columns, so that everyone can see the words of the Torah, but that someone may open it wider, should he choose? The Magen Avraham (134:3) suggests that one should open it exactly three columns, although he provides no reason why one should not open the sefer Torah more, whereas the Mishnah Berurah says that it depends on the strength of the magbiah -- implying that if he can open it more, it is even better. It is possible that the Magen Avraham was concerned that opening the sefer Torah wider might cause people to show off their prowess and cause the important mitzvah of hagbahah haTorah to become a source of inappropriate pride -- the exact opposite of the humility people should feel when performing mitzvos.

Should you roll it while lifting? Most people who perform the mitzvah of hagbahah roll open the sefer Torah to the requisite width and then lift it, whereas others unroll it while they are lifting it, with the sefer Torah is in the air. Which of these approaches is preferred? The Shaar Efrayim discusses this issue, and implies that there is no preference between the two approaches, whereas the standard wording of Masechta Sofrim is that one should unroll the sefer Torah first.

Reciting Vezos HaTorah When the sefer Torah is elevated, everyone should bow and recite the pasuk Vezos HaTorah asher sam Moshe lifnei Bnei Yisrael (Masechta Sofrim 14:14). Indeed, the Chida cites sources who hold that since Chazal mention saying Vezos HaTorah, it has the status of a davar shebekedushah and can be said even if one is in the middle of birchos kerias shema (Kenesses HaGedolah, quoted by Birkei Yosef 134:4). Subsequently, the Chida wrote a lengthy responsum, in which he concluded that reciting Vezos HaTorah does not have the status of a davar shebekedushah, and therefore should not be said in a place where it interrupts one's davening (Shu't Chayim She'al 1:68). Vezos HaTorah should be said only while facing the words of the sefer Torah (Be'er Heiteiv 134:6, quoting several earlier sources). If one began reciting Vezos HaTorah while facing the writing of the sefer Torah, one may complete the pasuk after the text of the sefer Torah has been rotated away from one's view (Shaar Efrayim). In many siddurim, after the sentence Vezos HaTorah asher sam moshe lifnei Bnei Yisrael is read, five words are added: Al pi Hashem beyad Moshe (Bamidbar 9:23), as if this is a continuation of the verse of the Torah. Many halachic authorities question this practice, since there is no such passage in the Torah (Aruch HaShulchan 134:3). Others are concerned, because these last five words are not an entire verse. Indeed, many old siddurim do not quote this addition, and many halachic authorities do not recite it.

Who should be honored with hagbahah? The Gemara (Megillah 32a) states "Ten people who read the Torah, the greatest of them should roll the Torah," which refers to the mitzvah of hagbahah, since the magbiah rolls the Torah both prior to displaying it, and when he closes it, afterwards. The Baal Hatur quotes two opinions as to whom the "ten people" refers. Does it mean the attendees of the current minyan, comprised of at least ten men, and that the greatest of this group should have the honor of hagbahah. Or does it mean that we give hagbahah to the greatest of the ten people who were involved in that day's reading of the Torah (the seven who had aliyos, the maftir, the baal keriyah, and the person who recited the Targum after each pasuk was read, which was standard procedure at the time of the Gemara). The halachic authorities rule according to the first approach, that one should honor the greatest person in the shul (Gra; Mishnah Berurah 147:6). They also refer to another practice, which was to auction off the mitzvah of hagbahah to the highest bidder (Tur; Shulchan Aruch). However, where the hagbahah is not auctioned, one should provide the honor to the greatest Torah scholar in attendance (Machatzis HaShekel). The prevalent practice of not necessarily offering hagbahah to the greatest scholar is in order to avoid any machlokes (Shaar Efrayim; Mishnah Berurah). Nevertheless, in a situation where no machlokes will develop, one should certainly accord the mitzvah to the greatest talmid chacham who can perform hagbahah properly. Whatever the situation may be, the gabbai is

responsible to give hagbahah only to someone who is both knowledgeable and capable of performing the mitzvah properly.

The importance of performing hagbahah correctly The Ramban, in his commentary on the verse, Cursed be he who does not uphold the words of this Torah (Devarim 27:26), explains that this curse includes someone who, when performing hagbahah, does not raise the sefer Torah in a way that everyone in the shul can see it. Apparently, there were places that did not perform the mitzvah of hagbahah at all, out of concern that people will be cursed for not performing hagbahah properly (Birkei Yosef, Shiyurei Brachah 134:2; Kaf HaChayim 134:15; Encyclopedia Talmudis, quoting Orchos Chayim). Although I certainly do not advocate eliminating the mitzvah of hagbahah, a person who knows that he cannot perform the mitzvah correctly should defer the honor, and the gabbai should offer the honor only to someone who fulfills the mitzvah properly.

from: **Rabbi Berel Wein** <genesis@torah.org> via capalon-newmail.capalon.com to: rabbiwein@torah.org date: Thu, Aug 22, 2013 at 9:12 AM subject: Rabbi Wein - Parshas Ki Savo

Rabbi Berel Wein

Parshas Ki Savo

Returning Home to Our Land

This week's parsha describes the two very different situations in Jewish life that have been present throughout our long history as a people. One situation is when we inhabited and controlled our own land – the Land of Israel. That is clearly indicated in the opening words of the parsha – ki tavo – when you will come into your land. The second much more difficult situation is outlined again in the parsha in the bitter, lengthy and detailed description of the lot of the Jewish people in exile, scattered amongst hostile nations and violent hatreds.

Over the many millennia of the Jewish story, we have been in exile far longer than we were at home in the Land of Israel. It is significant that the recounting of the troubles and persecutions of the exile of Israel from its land occupies greater space (and perhaps even greater notice) in the parsha than does the section relating to our living in the Land of Israel.

The Land of Israel carried with it special commandments and rituals as described in the parsha such as various types of 'maaser' – tithing – and 'bikurim' – the first fruits of the agricultural year. The description of the exile posed problems of demographic extinction and continued tension, fear and a constant state of uncertainty. In the words of the parsha itself, the conditions of the exile were capable of driving people into insanity and fostered hopelessness.

Yet the strange, almost unfathomable result was that the Jewish people survived, created and at times even thrived under the conditions of the exile, while our record as a national entity living in our own country was much spottier. Jews are a special people but our behavior is oftentimes strange and counterproductive. We don't seem to deal too well with success and stability.

By the grace of God we are once again back in our lands. After seeing the words of the parsha, in all of its terror fulfilled, literally, seventy years ago, we have nevertheless restored our national sovereignty, built a wonderful country and an intriguing society, and are engaged in facing great challenges as to our future development here in the Land of Israel.

We would indeed be wise to remember why we failed in the past in our nation building and why, paradoxically, we succeeded in achieving major successes while in exile and under very negative circumstances. Straying from the path of Torah and tradition has always brought us to harm. Adopting foreign cultures and fads that are temporarily popular and extolled is not the way to fulfillment of our national interest and purpose.

Our historical experiences both in the Land of Israel and in the exile have taught us this clear lesson. It would be foolhardy in the extreme to

repeat these errors once more. Coming into our land carries with it the challenges of living in holiness and having a special relationship with our Creator. Our efforts should be concentrated in strengthening and broadening that relationship. It may be wise for us to discard the bath water of the exile now that we have returned home. But we must preserve at all costs the baby - the Torah and its values – that has brought us home to the land that the Lord has promised to us.

Shabat shalom

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From: **Rabbi Yochanan Zweig** <genesis@torah.org> via capalon-newmail.capalon.com reply-to: do-not-reply@torah.org to: rabbizweig@torah.org date: Thu, Aug 22, 2013 at 8:12 AM subject: Rabbi Zweig - Parshas Ki Sa

Parshas Ki Savo

The Root Of Unhappiness

"Because you did not serve Hashem, your G-d, with happiness and goodness of heart, when you had everything in abundance"(28:47)

The Torah attributes all of the horrific curses which will befall Bnei Yisroel to not serving Hashem with happiness. The complaint is not that we will not serve Hashem, rather, although we will serve Him, the stress is upon the fact that it will not be done with happiness. Citing the Zohar, the Ramban teaches that the admonition in this week's parsha refers to the period of the second Beis Hamikdash through its destruction and the subsequent exile.1

The Talmud states that the second Beis Hamikdash was destroyed because of "sinas chinam" - "baseless hatred".2 This would appear to contradict the reason offered by the Torah, that the destruction was precipitated by Bnei Yisroel's not serving Hashem with happiness. How do we reconcile this contradiction?

The Torah attests to the fact that we were unhappy, even though we had everything. This is mirrored by the contemporary phenomena which finds a high percentage of depressed and disenchanted people to be those who enjoy success and high social standing. Why do people who apparently have everything that life has to offer, still exhibit a lack of happiness?

A person can only be truly happy if he appreciates what Hashem has given him. However, if a person is egocentric, considering himself deserved of all that he has, he will not be content by that which is already his; rather, he will be focused on those things which are not yet his, but to which he feels entitled. If a person goes through life with the attitude that everyone owes him, he will constantly be miserable, never satisfied with what he has. Furthermore, since he feels he is entitled to

everything that he desires, a person who has something he desires becomes an immediate threat to him. He begins loathing that person for no reason other than the perception he maintains that that person is withholding from him an object which should rightfully be his. It is this type of loathing that the Talmud defines as baseless hatred.

Consequently, baseless hatred can be traced back at its inception to our lack of appreciation for what Hashem has done and continues to do for us. Therefore, sinas chinam is not a different reason than the reason offered by the Torah as to what precipitated the destruction of the Temple; it is a manifestation of being unhappy when serving Hashem. 1.28:42 2.Yoma 9b

From: **Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald** <ezbuchwald@njop.org> via njop.ccsend.com reply-to: ezbuchwald@njop.org date: Mon, Aug 19, 2013 at 3:33 PM subject: Weekly Torah Message from Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

Kee Tavo 5773-2013

"Not Rushing to Judgment"

by, Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

In this week's parasha, parashat Kee Tavo, we learn of the Jewish farmer's obligation to bring Bikurim from the first produce of the field, as a gift to G-d, in acknowledgment of the Al-mighty's generosity and beneficence

As we have learned previously (Kee Tavo 5769-2009), Bikurim were given of the seven grains and fruits for which Israel was renowned. When a farmer saw a ripe grain or fruit in the field, he would tie a cord around the stem and declare, "This is Bikurim." The above-noted Torah message also describes how Bikurim were brought to the Temple with great fanfare.

The Torah declares that Bikurim are placed in a basket, and are brought to Jerusalem to be given to the priests. The farmer then announces (Deuteronomy 26:3): "I have come to a land that the L-rd swore to our forefathers to give us."

The Torah, in Deuteronomy 26:4 then states, "V'lah'kach ha'Kohen ha'teh'neh mee'yah'deh'chah, v'hee'nee'cho lif'nay miz'bahch Hashem Eh'loh'heh'cha," The Kohen shall take the basket from your hand, and lay it before the Altar of the L-rd, your G-d. The farmer then recites a brief history of the Jewish people, regarding the people's travails in Egypt, and how G-d mercifully brought His people to the land of Israel, a land flowing with milk and honey.

The Mishna in Bikurim 3:8 states, "The wealthy bring their Bikurim in baskets of silver and gold, and the poor bring them in baskets of peeled willow branches, and the branches and the Bikurim are given to the priest."

The fact that the Torah mentions baskets twice in recalling the mitzvah of Bikurim, and the Mishna goes into great detail regarding the baskets, indicates that the baskets play a significant role.

The commentators of the Mishna explain that the Bikurim may be brought not only in baskets, but in any type of vessel. They also note that the baskets that are brought are not made of pure gold and silver, but rather, plated gold and silver. In fact, the rabbis state that, in G-d's eyes, all metal containers are equal to the valued silver and gold-plated baskets mentioned in the Mishna.

The Mishna at first states that the baskets and the Bikurim are given to the priests, indicating that, along with the Bikurim fruits, they are an integral part of the gift. This, however, is not the Mishna's conclusion. Only the Bikurim fruits themselves are given to the priests to keep, while the expensive baskets are returned to the owners, after the ceremony concludes. The baskets of the poor, however, made of peeled willow branches, are kept by the priests.

The Tosafot Yom Tov explains that the priests keep the baskets of the poor because the amount of Bikurim fruits brought by the poor was very

minimal. They become more significant, when their gifts are supplemented with the baskets. The Vilna Gaon explains that the woven baskets themselves and the efforts exerted in preparing the baskets, become a merit for the poor, as if they are part of the Bikurim gift.

These favorable interpretations explain why the poor would hardly be embarrassed to bring their Bikurim in baskets of peeled willow branches. The baskets of the poor, become, in a very real sense, more significant than the gold and silver baskets brought by the wealthy.

It is interesting to note, that when it comes to food baskets that are brought to mourners, gold and silver may not be used, perhaps because they would fall into the category of “Lo’ehg la’rash,” mocking those who cannot fend for themselves—the dead. It may also be, that since there is no mitzvah to bring food in baskets to the mourners, there is no merit to have baskets.

Others suggest that the reason that the Kohen takes the baskets of the poor, is to amplify the hope that the poor will be in a position to return the following year with baskets of gold and silver. The wealthy keep their baskets, in the hope that they will have another prosperous year, with much gold and silver.

It is important to note, that at the outset, it seems that the Mishna and Jewish law blatantly discriminate against the poor, even embarrass them. The commentators, however, explain that, not only is the ritual not an embarrassment, it may very well be a source of pride for the poor to bring their Bikurim in willow baskets.

The lessons of the willow basket and the varied ways of looking at the ritual underscore the fact that one should always be circumspect about judging others by appearances. After all, in most instances there are usually, at least, two ways of looking at every situation.

For example, there are Jews who pray extremely rapidly, leading others to conclude that they pray with little kavanah (awareness and sincerity), and simply wish to dispense with the prayers as quickly as possible. Like Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev, the legendary “defender” of the People of Israel, there are those who come to support those who pray rapidly, by saying that their rapid prayers reflect, not indifference, but an intense love for G-d, to such a degree, that they can hardly wait to pronounce the prayers from between their lips. It may be a stretch, but it is a beautiful and positive way of looking at the situation.

Another challenging scenario that sheds light on the dangers of judging others too quickly is raised by the question of whether one should give directions to a motorist who asks a Jew on Shabbat for directions on how to get to a particular location. There are those who argue that one should either ignore the callous Shabbat violator, or strongly rebuke the driver, by stating that he is violating the Shabbat. Others, however, conclude that one should gently tell the driver how to reach his destination. Otherwise, if he stops to ask others who do not know the directions, there will be far more violations of Shabbat if he gets lost, than if he had initially been given the correct and most direct directions to his destination.

The obvious lesson is that clearly one should not be too quick to judge. Always look for a mitigating factor or for a possible justification. Give your neighbor the benefit of the doubt.

Especially in these days of Elul, we should always look for merit for our fellows, as we would have G-d seek merit for us. May we always be the beneficiaries of the gift of both Divine and human mercy.

May you be blessed.

from: Yeshivat Har Etzion <office@etzion.org.il> reply-to: Yeshivat Har Etzion <office@etzion.org.il> to: yhe-sichot@etzion.org.il date: Wed, Aug 21, 2013 at 9:33 AM subject: VBM-SICHOT73 -39: Parashat Ki Tavo YESHIVAT HAR ETZION ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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PARASHAT KI TAVO

SICHA OF HARAV YEHUDA AMITAL ZT”L

Kernel and Husk

Summarized by Matan Glidai Translated by Yoseif Bloch

The Gemara (Avoda Zara 5b) notes that only at the end of the Jewish people's forty-year sojourn in the desert does Moshe see fit to mention their ingratitude towards God, as we see throughout the Book of Devarim. Based on this, the Gemara asserts that "No one can know his teacher's mind before forty years' time." What is the significance of this observation? Does it really take four decades to learn a lesson?

To understand this, we need to employ the famous Talmudic analogy (Chagiga 15a) of tokh and kelippa: a core or kernel (tokh) of meaning, value and truth is often surrounded by a shell or husk (kelippa), which can take many forms. Chasidic thought differentiates between a kelippa of desire, which one may penetrate to reveal the truth, and a kelippa of falsehood, which has no tokh at its core. In such a case, the shell is truly empty.

Indeed, this is the challenge of our time, when we confront a new culture of falsehood. A generation ago, behind the Iron Curtain, there was a culture of obvious lies: everyone knew better than to lend credence to anything or rely on anyone. People believed solely in that which could benefit them pragmatically, not in what they were allowed to see. Now it is the mantra of the West which rules, that image is everything, that only kelippa counts. Within this culture of hidden lies, falsehood is attractively packaged and marketed. Whether it is commercial advertisement or political propaganda, modern media present us with enchanting and beautiful externals, the connection between them and the internal value of the product or person being negligible. There are even those who attempt to sell the tokh of Judaism in the same way, by exhibiting all of its ostensibly desirable and appealing elements, instead of delving into its content and depth.

The Yerushalmi (Chagiga 2:2) exposes the seriousness of this misconception. It tells us about two righteous men, one of whom died and then appeared to his friend to describe the afterlife. Among other things, he relates to him the fate of a woman by the curious name of Miriam Onion-Leaves, in whose ear the hinge of the gate of Gehinnom revolves. What did she do to earn this punishment? The Yerushalmi attributes it to her supposed piety in fasting, which she took pains to publicize, or, according to another opinion, to exaggerate. Nevertheless, the departed relates, Miriam is scheduled to be relieved of this onus by none other than Shimon ben Shetach, the Nasi (President of the Sanhedrin), who will replace her upon his passing. What was his sin? Before becoming nasi, he promised to use his position to eradicate the scourge of sorcery, but he failed to do so upon attaining his office. Upon hearing this, the friend immediately goes to Shimon ben Shetach, who undertakes to fulfill his campaign promise, while marveling that he had never even expressed it verbally to the public, but merely had resolved in his own heart to do so! What are we to glean from this passage?

This perplexing tale begins with Miriam Onion-Leaves, and it is her name that gives us the clue to unraveling this enigma. There is a striking difference between the onion and other vegetables: other vegetables have a kelippa and a tokh, but the onion has only the former; after each peel comes another peel. The onion is thus the symbol of things which have only an exterior, but no core. The Yerushalmi condemns that which has no inner truth, that which merely consists of a nice package. Miriam Onion-Leaves pretends that her fasting is about a desire to better herself, but the core is a desire for public acclamation; Shimon ben Shetach fools himself into believing that he wants the position of nasi in order to eliminate paganism, but he soon forgets his resolve. It is the message from the next world that reminds the Nasi of the consequences of breaking a promise, even one made in his own mind. Judaism demands that, just as one should not write a check unless he has funds to

cover it in the bank, one must also have "coverage" for all his assertions, promises and even intentions. The Torah despises facades and hypocrisy. We must inspect our actions, making sure that they validate our words and thoughts. Indeed, this explains another detail, namely, that Miriam was punished through her ear. This alludes to the fact that she related to things as they sound, not as they truly are. With this in mind, we can return to the Gemara in Avoda Zara cited above. The template of Moshe in the desert shows us that it is insufficient to memorize and declaim the rabbi's words verbatim, being satisfied with the way they appear at first glance, on a kelippa level. Instead, we must understand them well and plumb their depths, exposing the tokh. This requires a great deal of time, but it is the only way to ensure that at our core, we are people of truth. (This sicha was delivered at se'uda shelishit of Shabbat Parashat Ki Tavo 5756 [1996].)

from: Chanan Morrison <ravkooklist@gmail.com> reply-to: ravkook-list+owners@googlegroups.com to: Rav Kook List <Rav-Kook-List@googlegroups.com> date: Thu, Aug 22, 2013 at 8:12 AM subject: [Rav Kook List] Ki Tavo: How to Serve God in Joy

Ki Tavo: How to Serve God in Joy

"Because you failed to serve the Eternal your God with joy and contentment..." (Deut. 28:47) Rav Kook was once asked: how can we be inspired to serve God with joy and enthusiasm?

In his response, Rav Kook wrote:

It is difficult to properly explain this fundamental aspect of serving God in a letter. The principle method for motivating people is by dedicating time to thorough study of the spiritual [non-legal] parts of the Torah, and not let it be relegated to haphazard reading. Through this study, the soul's inner light shines, and a spirit of happiness and strength invigorates those who sincerely seek out the truth.

Elevating the Universe

Nonetheless, I will share with you one central principle - although this too cannot be fully understood without serious study and reflection. Still, it will provide a 'handle' for your desire to deepen your love of God and experience the light of our holy Torah.

It is clear that if a person was presented with the opportunity to benefit the entire world, even the most self-centered individual would act happily and with all of his strength. Fatigue and weariness are the result of lack of belief in the extent of the good that we perform for all of the universe through our Torah study, mitzvot, Divine service, and refinement of character traits.

For this reason, God enlightened us with the words of the holiest tzaddikim, masters of the Kabbalah. They deepen our understanding of the true significance of our service of God and clarify how it uplifts all of creation. Nonetheless, we need to bring this idea closer to the intellect so that the motivation will be strong and the joy well-founded.

The Collective Soul of the Universe

One attains this awareness by contemplating the spiritual unity of the universe. That is to say, we need to recognize that the light of each individual soul is connected to the collective soul of all existence. All created things draw the light of their perfection from this collective soul. We have the power to increase the light in our souls through Torah study, mitzvot, prayer, and character refinement. We need to be aware that whenever we enlighten our own souls, we are benefiting not just ourselves but the entire universe, bestowing perfection and life to all things.

Through us, the righteous gain greater power in their holy service. The evil of the wicked is mitigated to some degree, and they experience thoughts of penitence. Even the animals are ennobled according to their level. The noble holiness provided by one soul that truly cares about all of existence helps refine and purify even those creatures that tend to damage. And it certainly adds dazzling light to the lofty splendor of the

souls, and throughout the spiritual worlds, boundless in their beauty and sanctity.

All this is proper and valid for any individual belonging to the holy nation of Israel; and is even more appropriate for those who have the privilege of dwelling in the holy land...

(Adapted from Igrot HaRe'iyah vol. I, letter 301 [5670/1910])

from: Shema Yisrael Torah Network <shemalist@shemayisrael.com> to: Peninim <peninim@shemayisrael.com> date: Thu, Aug 22, 2013 at 5:08 AM subject: **Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum - Parshas Ki Savo**

PARSHAS KI SAVO That you shall take of the first of every fruit of the ground... which Hashem, your G-d, gives you. (26:2) The parsha of Bikurim is unique, in presenting the celebration and pomp that accompanies bringing the Bikurim to Yerushalayim. In vivid detail, Chazal relate how everyone was caught up in this mitzvah. Of course, any act of hakoras hatov, gratitude, should be publicized, so that more people will acknowledge the vital role of our benefactor, Hashem, in everything that we do. The Mishnah in Meseches Bikurim describes how the farmer would enter his field and notice a fig tree that had bloomed. He would immediately pick its first fruit and set it aside for Bikurim. The Te'einah, fig tree, is one of the seven species with which Eretz Yisrael is blessed. Two others are mentioned in the Mishnah: the pomegranate and grape; yet the fig, which is not listed first in the sequences of the seven species, is the one which is underscored in the Mishnah. Furthermore, why does the Mishnah include the grape and pomegranate, but exclude the olive?

Horav Menachem Ziemba, zl, quotes the Arizal who posits that the mitzvah of Bikurim is penance for the sin of the meraglim, spies, who rejected Eretz Yisrael. The three fruits which they brought back from their expedition to reconnoiter the land were the fig, grape and pomegranate. Thus, by appropriately focusing on these fruits, we demonstrate our love of the Land and our gratitude to the Almighty for His beneficence. We still must address why the fig is the first fruit mentioned by the Mishnah.

Furthermore, why all the pomp? Imagine that a person whose primary vocation is accounting, yet he has a few fig trees in his backyard. He notices the fruit beginning to ripen, so he must drop everything, take leave of his job and travel to Yerushalayim. He is not alone; an entire country- side of people joins him on his/their journey. What will happen to the grocery store owner, the pharmacist, accountant, lawyer, tailor etc...? Everybody will take a leave of absence for three weeks? All of this because of a few figs? This practical question is asked by none other than the Alshich HaKadosh.

On the Seder night, we begin the Haggadah experience with a recounting of our natural history going back to Lavan Ha'Arami, the uncle of our Patriarch Yaakov Avinu, who made the first attempt to subvert our nation from ever coming into existence. This historical perspective is part of the farmer's declaration upon coming to Yerushalayim with his Bikurim. What relationship exists between Pesach and Bikurim?

In the commentary of the Midrash Rabbah on the beginning of Sefer Bereishis, Chazal say that the world was created in the merit of the mitzvah of Bikurim. The Alshich wonders what about the mitzvah of Bikurim elevates it over such worthy mitzvos as Shabbos and others.

One last question concerning another Yom Tov, Festival, which might seem to be completely out of line with the subject matter, is asked by Horav Moshe Rosenblum, Shlita. It is an accepted custom, cited by the Rama, that one should not sleep on Rosh Hashanah. The source for this custom is a Talmud Yerushalmi which states: "One who sleeps on Rosh Hashanah - his mazel, fortune, for the coming year will also sleep." The question is obvious: Does this mean that for the individual who weeps

on Rosh Hashanah, his mazel will also weep? May one who laughs on Rosh Hashanah look forward to a successful year filled with joy? What about sleeping is so compelling?

Rav Rosenblum responds to the question. The world was created for man. Everything that preceded him was created specifically for the purpose of satisfying man. Why was man created? In order that he should acknowledge his debt of gratitude to the Almighty and not be an ingrate. The Alshich adds that everything was prepared for man, in order that he realize the significance of gratitude and its inextricable connection to serving Hashem. One who is a kafui tov, ingrate, cannot possibly serve Hashem properly.

Bikurim is that mitzvah which imbues man with hakoras hatov. Indeed, gratitude is its sole purpose. Man drops everything - his business, livelihood, family - everything - Why? He is going up to Yerushalayim to say, "Thank you, Hashem." He took us out of Egypt, liberating us from a physical bondage that had lasted over two centuries. We were redeemed amid incredible miracles and wonders, unprecedented and unrepeated throughout the annals of history. We were brought to Eretz Yisrael, the Promised Land, a land flowing with milk and honey. We arise in the morning, and - even before we wash our hands - we recite Modeh Ani - "Thank You Hashem." Why? Because this is the reason that Hashem created man.

Man was created on the sixth day of Creation, which was Rosh Hashanah (considering that the first day of Creation was Elul 25). Man was the purpose of Creation; thus, the goal of Creation is to imbue hakoras hatov. The first day of the year, the day on which man was created for hakoras hatov, is Rosh Hashanah. It, therefore, makes sense that this day should be replete with gratitude, singing Hashem's praises and thanking Him for all that He has given to us.

Now that we acknowledge what should have happened that day, let us focus on what really took place on that fateful day. The Midrash relates the sequence of events, hour by hour, on the day on which Adam HaRishon was created. At the ninth hour of the day, Adam was commanded not to eat of the Eitz HaDaas, Tree of Knowledge. On the tenth hour, he ate the fruit. The eleventh hour was his judgment, and, on the twelfth hour, the verdict of continued life was rendered. Hashem said to Adam, "This shall be a sign for your offspring: as you stood before Me in judgment and were cleared, likewise they, too, will stand before Me on this day (Rosh Hashanah) and be cleared."

What was Adam's sin? Actually, it was two sins in one. First, he ate of the tree's fruit. Second, he blamed it all on Chavah. Essentially, he told Hashem, "It was the woman whom You gave me that put me up to this." Rashi comments: "Here, Adam was ungrateful." Not only did he not thank Hashem for giving him a wife, he pointed the blame for his sins on his wife and laid the blame at Hashem's feet. All this took place on Rosh Hashanah - the day on which hakoras hatov should be intensified. Adam appears to have done just the opposite.

Ingratitude is the root of the problem. Chazal say that ultimately Adam was banished from Gan Eden for his ingratitude. The Jewish People angered Hashem with their ingratitude. This, explains the Sefas Emes, is the reason that the Parshah of Bikurim precedes Rosh Hashanah. Rosh Hashanah is when we coronate Hashem and accept His monarchy over us. Without exhibiting gratitude, one cannot accept the yoke of Heaven. The two go hand in hand.

Now, let us return to our original question and note how everything fits into place. The Maor Va'Shemesh writes that the mitzvah of Bikurim atones for Adam's sin in eating of the Eitz Hadaas. He quotes the Mishnah in Bikurim, "A man goes into his field and sees a fig tree that has bloomed." The Talmud Berachos 40 contends that the forbidden fruit eaten by Adam was - a fig. Indeed, the Torah writes that, following the sin, Adam and Chavah realized that they were unclothed. They wrapped themselves in fig branches. Why? Chazal say that no other tree - other than the one concerning which they sinned - was willing to give them its

branches. Now we understand the significance of the fig tree, which helps man to atone for the sin of ingratitude of primordial Man regarding his wife.

Next, the Noam Elimelech wonders how the serpent was able to interact with Chavah without her husband's awareness. He quotes Chazal, who say that Adam was sleeping! Now we understand why we should not sleep on Rosh Hashanah - the day set aside for hakoras hatov. Imagine, repeating Adam's sin over again. He slept, so, in turn, we must not sleep.

One last question: What about Arami oveid avi, "the Aramean sought to kill my father (Yaakov)"? What is the relationship between the Bikurim declaration and Pesach? Simple. When we say, "Thank you," it must be all encompassing. We must go back to the source, the origin of our debt of gratitude. We were redeemed from Egypt - but did it all start there? No! It began with Lavan. If that rasha would have had his way, there would be no Pesach, no Eretz Yisrael and no Bikurim. Now that we have it all, we must acknowledge its Source and pay our due to Hashem. May this be our merit for the coming year.

You shall come to whomever will be the Kohen... and you shall say to him, "I declare today to Hashem, your G-d." (26:3)

The individual who brings the Bikurim makes a declaration: "I have come to the land that Hashem swore to our forefathers to give to us." Rashi comments concerning the necessity of making a declaration which underscores our gratitude to the Almighty for giving us the land, She'eincha kafui tovah, "That you are not an ingrate." It is a requirement for the landowner to express his gratitude. As a result of human nature, people do not want to be beholden to anyone. They look for any and every opportunity or excuse not to express their gratitude. The mitzvah of Bikurim serves one primary purpose. All of the pomp and publicity, the whole to-do is for one reason: to show that one is not a kafui tov. The Torah reiterates a number of times, "The land that You gave us," in order to emphasize that whatever we have is due to Hashem's beneficence.

Horav Moshe Shmuel Shapiro, zl, explains that, exclusive of the fact that hakoras hatov, appreciation and gratitude, is an exemplary character trait to possess, it also brings one closer to deveikus b'Hashem, clinging/closeness to Hashem. He supports this idea with a pasuk from the end of the parsha, "But Hashem did not give you a heart to know, or eyes to see, or ears to hear until this day" (28:3). It was only after we had experienced all of the wonderful favors and good fortune that we were able to come close to Him. By acknowledging our good fortune, we realize how much we really owe Him, thereby clinging to Him.

Hakoras hatov saves one from falling into the abyss of sin. Sin is a crude and vulgar payback for the good fortune we receive from Hashem. Is there anything more contemptible than a guest who acts miserably towards his host, who has gone out of his way to provide him with a place to eat and sleep in comfort? We respond that we would never do this, but when we stop to consider the way we act, the manner in which we daven, learn, perform mitzvos, we will be forced to concede that, in effect, we are kefuyei tov.

The Rosh Yeshivah posits that one who is makir tov, lives a life of constant gratitude to Hashem, is a much more refined person, a person who is distant from sin and failure, since G-d is so much a part of his life. He supports this idea from Yaakov Avinu, who, upon being questioned by Eisav, Mi eilah? "Who are these (children)?" the Patriarch replied, ha'yiladim asher chanan Elokim es avdecha, "The children whom G-d has graciously given your servant" (Bereishis 33:5). Yaakov acknowledged that everything which he possessed was a gift. If he had children, it was a blessing from Hashem. It was not a "natural occurrence."

In his Aderes Eliyahu, the Gaon, zl, m'Vilna, writes that the path to achieve gratitude to Hashem is attained by referring to everything in the Name of Hashem. When someone asks about your family, you should respond, "I have been blessed by Hashem;" "I Baruch Hashem earn a

living;" "Thank G-d, everyone is healthy;" "Life is good - Baruch Hashem."

What does "thank you" consist of? What must be taken into consideration upon saying, "Thank you"? The Torah answers this question in six pesukim. The Bikurim were brought to the Bais Hamikdash amid great pomp and as an expression of our gratitude to the Almighty for the Land, the produce, the successful yield. The presentation of the Bikurim is accompanied with a six-sentence homily recalling our history: Lavan tried to do us in; we descended to Egypt where we spent a few centuries as slaves to Pharaoh; we cried out to Hashem, Who redeemed us from Egypt; we were not a large nation; after traveling through the wilderness for forty years, we entered the Promised Land, a land flowing with milk and honey; and now, "I am here with my first fruits!"

The verbosity of this expression of gratitude is evident. The question is: Why? What is wrong with a simple, "Thank you"? Or, even a not-so-simple, "Thank you"? Does one have to recite an entire megillah in order to express his gratitude? Yes! The Torah is teaching us that saying, "Thank you," should never be a simple line in a card or a few practiced words. Expressing gratitude articulates one's realization and acknowledgment that, if not for the favor he received, he would be a different person. His feelings of gratitude should reflect the entire history of the kindness received with an appreciation of all that went into it. We must acquiesce and attest to every aspect of gratitude, regardless of how inconsequential it might have been for the benefactor. It is not about him; it is about us.

I recently came across an article about one man's pilgrimage of gratitude: A year-long journey spent thanking people, face to face, who had a major impact on his life. When asked from where he got the idea of spending a year thanking people who had contributed to his life, he replied, "My father passed away when I was a teenager. The idea that life is short, precious and quite unpredictable suddenly hit home. I realized that "time was awasting," and, if I were going to express my feelings of gratitude, I had better do it while I was able - and they were still around."

"Why did you make a whole year-long journey out of what could have been achieved with a phone call?" he was asked. "I wanted the pleasure of being with them in person and to have the benefit of a dialogue. I wanted to convey my feelings personally," he replied.

In his Michtav Mei'Eliyahu, Horav Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler, zl, explains that true gratitude is derived from the power of nesinah, "giving," while ingratitude is spawned by the power of taking. One who wants to give feels compelled to express his gratitude from his heart. The individual who is a "taker" expresses gratitude at times, but usually it is only lip service. It is not an expression that comes from the inner recesses of his heart. Horav Eliezer Silver, zl, legendary head of the Agudas HaRabbanim, also served as the Rav of Cincinnati, Ohio. When he saw a notice in the paper of the upcoming marriage in Cleveland, Ohio, of Rav Nochum Zev, son of Rav Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler, he was intent on participating in the event. Rav Dessler was the nephew of his Rebbe muvhak, primary mentor, Horav Chaim Ozer Grodzenski, zl. How could he miss the wedding of his Rebbe's nephew? This was Rav Leizer Silver's understanding of hakoras hatov.

Three years later, Rav Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler visited America to see his son and new daughter-in-law, whose wedding he had missed due to World War II. It was not easy for the elder Rav Dessler to travel to the states, but he yearned to see his children.

While he was in Cleveland, Rav Dessler informed his son that he would like to thank Rav Silver for attending his son's wedding. The younger Rav Dessler obtained the phone number and brought it to his father. "No, no," his father immediately said. "I want to express my gratitude in person."

Apparently, there was no room for discussion; the two would be taking a trip to Cincinnati. Together, father and son took the overnight train trip, arriving in Cincinnati in the pre-dawn hours.

They could not expect Rav Silver to be up so early in the morning, so they waited patiently on the Rav's porch until he left for Shacharis. They accompanied him to shul. Following davening, the Rav invited them for breakfast. "What brings you to Cincinnati, and how can I help you?" he asked. The senior Rav Dessler replied that he had come to thank him for attending his son's wedding. "No, really, why did you come?" Rav Silver asked once again. Rav Dessler reiterated that he had come to express his gratitude. "You could have made a simple phone call," Rav Silver countered. "A phone call is not the same as coming in person," Rav Dessler answered. "You took the time and expended the effort to come to my son's wedding. The least I could do is come to thank you personally."

Be attentive and hear, O' Yisrael: This day you have become a people to Hashem, your G-d. (27:9)

Something seems out of place. We are standing forty years after the Revelation, forty years after Klal Yisrael's resounding acceptance of the Torah amid a resonating declaration of Naase v'Nishma, "We will do and we will listen!" Why does the Torah say that hayom - "this day," you became a nation? Had this not occurred forty years earlier? The Talmud Brachos 63b asks this obvious question. Chazal respond that while the Torah had actually been given forty years earlier, it is so valued and appreciated by those who study it, it is as if they had just received it today. In other words, one should approach his daily Torah study as if he is standing at the foot of Har Sinai about to receive the Torah from Hashem. Indeed, every day is a day of Revelation.

I recently saw an analogy to explain the idea behind the word, hayom, "today". The king of a country asked his defense minister to provide him with the figures for supplying the entire military with provisions for a year. The defense minister was an astute businessman, returning a few days later with a detailed spreadsheet, detailing the best prices presented by a particular supplier who was giving a rock-bottom price in order to get the entire order. The king carefully studied the price list and said that he would soon sign the contract for the purchase order. A few weeks went by, and every time the minister approached the king with the contract, the king demurred. There was always some "reason" for delaying the signing of the contract. Finally, the king called the minister and agreed to sign the contract.

The minister was slightly surprised that it had taken so long for the king to go with this broker. The king was well-known for not wasting his time. When questioned by the minister, the king replied, "You presented me with one price, albeit a very good one, but what about bids from other brokers? As soon as I announce that I am giving the contract to your broker, every wholesaler in the country will clamor that, had they known about my request, they would have come in at a lower price. Therefore, I decided to let the word out and see the results. Once I was satisfied that your broker had it all together with the best prices, I decided to sign the contract."

The same idea applies to Hashem, allowing the nations of the world to submit their bids concerning the Torah. When He offered us the Torah, we replied with a resounding Naase v'Nishma - no questions asked - we are ready and willing to accept the Torah. Nonetheless, Hashem had to give the nations of the world the opportunity to assess the positive commandments, the ethical and moral lessons and values imparted by the Torah. If they were still obstinate enough to continue in their refusal, then it belonged to Klal Yisrael.

Hayom, "this day"! You became a nation. Now, after Moshe Rabbeinu wrote the Torah with full explanation for every nation of the world to understand, they could no longer continue procrastinating. They either would accept it, or would forever hold their peace. They did not - we did. "Today" - it was finally ours. Our bid was accepted.

Cursed is the man who makes a graven or molten image... and sets it up in secret. (27:15)

Hypocrisy is a moral failing, which, upon being added to sinful behavior, makes the act even more repugnant, thus deserving of a curse. The Torah enumerates a group of sins which, as a rule, elude the attention of human courts of justice. These sins, upon which the added curse has been placed, are of a kind that remains covert due to their nature. Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl, observes that the Torah adds the word ba'seisar, in secret, in the beginning and end of the series of curses, to emphasize that it is especially the undisclosed character of these particular offenses which makes them deserving of a curse. Therefore, the curse affects particularly those who practice moral and social abominations beneath the cloak of outward respectability. The hypocrisy added to the actual sin singles out these transgressions for special punitive consideration.

Included in the series of sins is the makeih rei'eihu baseiser, one who strikes down his neighbor in secret. This refers to the baal lashon hora, slanderer, who strikes down his neighbor without the latter being aware of it or knowing from where the blow originates. The slanderer is beyond the reach of human justice, but his foul mouth victimizes people no less. He destroys the happiness, peace of mind and personal dignity of his victim. What is worse is that this offense is habit forming and plays itself out, day and night, without respect for anything. Indeed, lashon hora can even - and often is - spoken within the hallowed sanctuaries of the shul and bais hamedrash.

Rav Hirsch notes that the form of the word used to describe the slanderer is not the verb, which could mean a one-time offense, but rather, makeih, which denotes a "striker," an epithet which would apply to one to whom scandal-mongering has become a way of life, a habit - indeed, part of his character. Thus, the Torah's curse applies, not to the isolated situation in which one loses it and - out of anger - says something inappropriate about his neighbor. No - the Torah refers to the habitual slanderer - the baal lashon hora, the one for whom scandal-mongering and defaming another person's character is for him second nature. Such a person is not cursed by Hashem. In fact, he curses himself. Yes, he is an accursed person.

Va'ani Tefillah U'Bchol Meodecha - and with all your possessions.

In an alternative exposition, Rashi explains that the word meod is related to middah, measurement. The phrase u'bchol meodecha is now interpreted as, "and with all your measures," meaning that one's love for Hashem should not wane, regardless of what "measure," treatment, we receive. This applies both to what we perceive to be good and bad treatment, generously or poorly.

We must manifest our love for the Almighty in times of joy and in times of pain and misfortune. They are both derived from the same Source. To accept the good without the bad would seem to indicate that either we do not believe they are both from the same Source, or that we disagree with the decision that would cause us to have stress and pain. We do not give orders; we take and accept whatever Hashem gives us, with the belief that this too is good.

Chazal say it very simply: "It is incumbent on a man to bless G-d for the evil in the same way as for the good." Whatever comes from Hashem is inherently good, but, due to our limited physical vision, we are unable to see the bigger picture, to realize that in the great scheme of things what appears bad is truly good.

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