

Home Weekly Parsha KI TAVO

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

Throughout this final oration of Moshe, he constantly emphasizes that when the Jewish people finally cross the Jordan and enter the land of Israel there are additional commandments and behavior patterns that will be demanded of them. He reiterates that the land of Israel is bountiful and beautiful, blessed and holy but he warns them that this is a venue that makes demands upon its inhabitants.

The rabbis of the Talmud reinforce this idea by stating that the land of Israel inflicts growing pains upon those that come to live there. It will always be a place of challenges and problems, of difficulties and situations that will have to be overcome. But it is also the land where the eyes of the Lord so to speak are upon it throughout the year and that living in such a land is replete with great opportunities and a sense of mission and holiness.

Neither its topography nor weather patterns, its agricultural bounty and prosperity are to be deemed as ordinary and natural. It is the ultimate land of unpredictability, for its well-being and blessings are wholly dependent on the behavior of its inhabitants and, naturally, on the will of God.

As such, the land is always subject to the behavior and attitudes of its human inhabitants. It is the land of ultimate free will and freedom of choice that the Lord has endowed human beings with. Moshe constantly reminds the generation that is about to enter the land of Israel of their obligations and duties to God and to Torah. This will be the key to their success and longevity in the land of Israel.

We are now participating in the third major effort of Jewish society to live in the land of Israel. Throughout our long exile we have always aspired to return here and to build a Jewish society in the holy land worthy of our ancestors and the great prophets of Israel. Many of the reasons why our first two attempts to establish such a permanent Jewish society here failed are unfortunately still present.

Many past ills such as idolatry and the lack of national pride no longer really govern our thoughts or tempt our behavior. It is difficult to imagine that we would have learned nothing from history and would, God forbid, repeat all the past errors of first and second Temple times. Yet, we all realize that the challenges that face us are great and that the road we traverse is still difficult and dangerous.

There are many distractions and obstacles that face us in trying to create a Jewish state that Moshe envisioned centuries ago. Yet, if we look back at how far we have come, against all odds and many enemies, we should be able to realize that it is within our grasp to fulfill the words of Moshe as they appear in this week's Torah reading. It is clear that we live in a special place and in special times. As such, we have to rise to the occasion and be a special people.

Shabbat shalom
Rabbi Berel Wein

The Story We Tell (Ki Tavo 5778)

Covenant & Conversation Judaism & Torah

Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

The setting: Jerusalem some twenty centuries ago. The occasion: bringing first fruits to the Temple. Here is the scene as the Mishnah describes it. Throughout Israel, villagers would gather in the nearest of 24 regional centres. There, overnight, they would sleep in the open air. The next morning, the leader would summon the people with words from the book of Jeremiah (31:5): "Arise and let us go up to Zion, to the House of the Lord our God."

Those who lived near Jerusalem would bring fresh figs and grapes. Those who lived far away would bring dried figs and raisins. An ox would walk ahead of them, its horns plated with gold and its head decorated with an olive wreath. Someone would play a flute. When they came close to Jerusalem they would send a messenger ahead to

announce their arrival and they would start to adorn their first-fruits. Governors and officials of the city would come out to greet them and the artisans would stop their work and call out, "Our brothers from such-and-such a place: come in peace!"

The flute would continue playing until the procession reached the Temple Mount. There, they would each place their basket of fruit on their shoulder – the Mishnah says that even King Agrippa would do so – and carry it to the Temple forecourt. There the Levites would sing (Psalm 30:2), "I will praise you, God, for you have raised me up and not let my enemies rejoice over me."

The scene, as groups converged on the Temple from all parts of Israel, must have been vivid and unforgettable. However, the most important part of the ceremony lay in what happened next. With the baskets still on their shoulders the arrivals would say, "I declare today to the Lord your God that I have come to the land that the Lord swore to our ancestors to give us." Each would then hold their basket by the rim, the Cohen would place his hand under it and ceremoniously wave it, and the bringer of the fruit would say the following passage, whose text is set out in our parsha:

"My ancestor was a wandering Aramean. He went down into Egypt and lived there as a stranger, few in number, and there became a great nation, strong and numerous. The Egyptians mistreated us and made us suffer, subjecting us to harsh labour. We cried out to the Lord, God of our ancestors. The Lord heard our voice and saw our suffering, our toil and our oppression. The Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with terrifying power and signs and wonders. He brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. And now I am bringing the first fruit of the soil that you, O Lord, have given me." (Deut. 26:5-10)

This passage is familiar to us because we expound part of it, the first four verses, in the Haggadah on Seder night. But this was no mere ritual. As Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi explained in his *Zakhor: Jewish History and Memory*, it constituted one of the most revolutionary of all Judaism's contributions to world civilisation.[2]

What was original was not the celebration of first fruits. Many cultures have such ceremonies. What was unique about the ritual in our parsha, and the biblical world-view from which it derives, is that our ancestors saw God in history rather than nature. Normally what people would celebrate by bringing first-fruits would be nature itself: the seasons, the soil, the rain, the fertility of the ground and what Dylan Thomas called "the force that through the green fuse drives the flower." The biblical first-fruits ceremony is quite different. It is not about nature but about the shape of history, the birth of Israel as a nation, and the redemptive power of God who liberated our ancestors from slavery.

This is what was new about this worldview:

[1] Jews were, as Yerushalmi points out, the first to see God in history.

[2] They were the first to see history itself as an extended narrative with an overarching theme. That vision was sustained for the whole of the biblical era, as the events of a thousand years were interpreted by the prophets and recorded by the biblical historians.

[3] The theme of biblical history is redemption. It begins with suffering, has an extended middle section about the interactive drama between God and the people, and ends with homecoming and blessing.

[4] The narrative is to be internalised: this is the transition from history to memory, and this is what the first-fruits declaration was about. Those who stood in the Temple saying those words were declaring: this is my story. In bringing these fruits from this land, I and my family are part of it.

[5] Most importantly: the story was the basis of identity. Indeed, that is the difference between history and memory. History is an answer to the question, "What happened?" Memory is an answer to the question, "Who am I?" In Alzheimer's Disease, when you lose your memory, you lose your identity. The same is true of a nation as a whole.[3] When we tell the story of our people's past, we renew our identity. We have a context in which we can understand who we are in the present and what we must do to hand on our identity to the future.

It is difficult to grasp how significant this was and is. Western modernity has been marked by two quite different attempts to escape from identity. The first, in the eighteenth century, was the European Enlightenment. This focused on two universalisms: science and philosophy. Science aims at discovering laws that are universally true. Philosophy aims at disclosing universal structures of thought.

Identity is about groups, about Us and Them. But groups conflict. Therefore the Enlightenment sought a world without identities, in which we are all just human beings. But people can't live without identities, and identity is never universal. It is always and essentially particular. What makes us the unique person we are is what makes us different from people in general. Therefore, no intellectual discipline that aims at universality will ever fully grasp the meaning and significance of identity.

This was the Enlightenment's blind spot. Identity came roaring back in the nineteenth century, based on one of three factors: nation, race or class. In the twentieth century, nationalism led to two World Wars. Racism led to the Holocaust. Marxist class warfare led eventually to Stalin, the Gulag and the KGB.

Since the 1960s, the West has been embarked on a second attempt to escape from identity, in favour not of the universal but the individual, in the belief that identity is something each of us freely creates for him- or herself. But identity is never created this way. It is always about membership in a group. Identity, like language, is essentially social.[4] Just as happened after the Enlightenment, identity has come roaring back to the West, this time in the form of identity politics (based on gender, ethnicity or sexual orientation). This will, if allowed to flourish, lead to yet more historical disasters. It is a major threat to the future of liberal democracy.

What was happening in Jerusalem when people brought their first-fruits was of immense consequence. It meant that that they regularly told the story of who they were and why. No nation has ever given greater significance to retelling its collective story than Judaism, which is why Jewish identity is the strongest the world has ever known, the only one to have survived for twenty centuries with none of the normal bases of identity: political power, shared territory or a shared language of everyday speech.

Clearly, not all identities are the same. Characteristic of Jewish identities and others inspired by the Hebrew Bible are what Dan McAdams calls "the redemptive self." [5] People with this kind of identity, he says, "shape their lives into a narrative about how a gifted hero encounters the suffering of others as a child, develops strong moral convictions as an adolescent, and moves steadily upward and onward in the adult years, confident that negative experiences will ultimately be redeemed." More than other kinds of life story, the redemptive self embodies the "belief that bad things can be overcome and affirms the narrator's commitment to building a better world."

What made the biblical story unique was its focus on redemption. In partnership with God, we can change the world. This story is our heritage as Jews and our contribution to the moral horizons of humankind. Hence the life-changing idea: Our lives are shaped by the story we tell about ourselves, so make sure the story you tell is one that speaks to your highest aspirations, and tell it regularly.

Shabbat shalom.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

Ki Tavo: A Different Kind of Viduy Rav Kook Torah

Viduy Ma'aser

There is an unusual mitzvah performed twice every seven years. It is called Viduy Ma'aser - literally, "Tithing Confession." But this is not a confession in the usual sense. The individual ascends to Jerusalem and publicly declares that he has fulfilled all his obligations regarding terumot and ma'aserot - the tithes of agricultural produce that are distributed to kohanim, Levites, and the poor.

We do not find a viduy of this nature for any other mitzvah, where we formally announce that we have discharged our obligation. What is the purpose of this unusual declaration? And why is it performed so infrequently?

Appreciating Our Achievements

If we seek to continually improve ourselves, we need to be aware of the full extent of our moral and spiritual responsibilities, whether this involves helping others, refining our character traits, or performing acts of holiness. Even when we are dedicated to pursuing the path of goodness, we will still be far from completely fulfilling our obligations. This is the attitude of the truly righteous. They see themselves as lacking in good deeds and thoughtfulness. This critical self-image prevents them from becoming pretentious and arrogant, and graces them with a sincere modesty.

However, we must be careful not to be overly self-critical. We should not let this attitude deny us a sense of joy and satisfaction in our accomplishments. For this reason, the Torah teaches that we should rejoice in our good deeds. In the proper measure, this contentment bolsters our resolve to serve God, to perform mitzvot and acts of kindness. It is proper to feel a measure of satisfaction and well-being, and not always regard our actions as flawed and inadequate when we have acted correctly.

In short: we need set times for regular viduy, to admit our mistakes and faults, so that we may refine our character traits and improve our actions. But we also need set times for a positive viduy, to express our awareness that we have discharged our obligations and attained some of our spiritual goals.

This positive declaration, however, should be less frequent than our periodic soul-searching. We must avoid the sense of self-satisfaction that can lead to smugness and complacency. Thus Viduy Ma'aser is performed only twice in seven years.

Balanced Self-Image

Why did the Torah establish this positive viduy specifically with regard to terumot and ma'aserot? The beauty of tithing is that it encompasses all aspects of the Torah's obligations. It contains both positive and negative commands: the obligation to distribute ma'aserot, as well as the prohibition not to eat untithed produce. It involves our responsibilities toward others (gifts to the Levites and the poor) as well as responsibilities toward God (the special holiness of terumah). And it reflects both obligations of the individual (the farmer's obligation to tithe) and society as a whole (our support of the kohanim and their spiritual service for the nation).

Thus, tithing encompasses all of the foundations of our ethical responsibilities. Viduy Ma'aser teaches us that we should not judge ourselves too harshly, but strive for a balanced self-image, with the ability to derive satisfaction from our accomplishments. It allows us to see ourselves more clearly, and it gives us the strength to overcome negative traits and habits. While we are disappointed in our failings, we also take pride in our triumphs.

Despite the importance of this declaration, the Torah sought to impress a measure of modesty. Unlike the loud declaration of Bikkurim (first-fruits), Viduy Ma'aser is recited quietly (Sotah 32b). Furthermore, we demonstrate our reticence at praising ourselves by delaying the viduy until the very last moment - the end of the last day of the Passover holiday.

(Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. II, p. 405)

See also: Ki Tavo: Two Paths of Bikkurim

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פרשת כי תבוא תשע"ח

ובאת אל הכהן אשר יהיה בימים ההם ואמרת אליו הגדתי היום לד' אלקיך כי באתי אל הארץ

You shall come to whoever shall be the Kohen in those days, and you shall say to him, “I declare today to Hashem, your G-d, that I have come to the Land.” (26:3)

The *mitzvah* of bringing *Bikurim*, the first fruits, is paradigmatic of the *middah*, character trait, of *hakoras hatov*, gratitude. This *middah* is one of the most fundamental principles of human and Heavenly relationships. Indeed, one who is *makir tov*, acknowledges his debt of gratitude to Hashem, even in the areas that affect his interpersonal relationships with people (he understands that what he receives is from Hashem, with people serving as His agency) will ultimately achieve *shleimus*, completion/perfection, in his relationship with Hashem. The nature of man is to focus on what he is still missing, rather than on what he has. In order to reach the pinnacle of *hakoras hatov*, it is critical that one focus on what he has and on what he has received from Hashem. We must stop viewing the glass as half-empty, but rather, as half-full – and place our emphasis on the half that is full.

A well-known story about a *chassid* who complained to his *Rebbe* about his difficult lot in life underscores this idea. “*Rebbe*,” the *chassid* cried out, “I cannot take it any longer. Life has become so difficult to navigate.” “What happened?” asked the *Rebbe*. “Well,” the *chassid* began, “on the one hand, I am blessed with a family of fifteen souls. On the other hand, I have a tiny apartment that would be considered small for a family half our size. *Parnassah*, a livelihood, is obviously very challenging with so many mouths to feed.”

The *Rebbe* listened intently and said, “*Mazel Tov!* I was unaware that you had additions to your family, may you derive much *nachas*, satisfaction, and joy from them. I am so happy that you were able to obtain an apartment. You know how difficult they are to find, and you have a job? Wonderful! Fantastic!

“My dear friend, you are truly a fortunate individual. You have been blessed with so many children, when you are obviously aware that there are a number of *chassidim* who have yet to be blessed with progeny. The fact that you have a roof over your head and a source of livelihood makes you one of our more fortunate *chassidim*. Therefore, my advice to you is to begin by expressing your gratitude to Hashem for all of His munificence. Afterwards, Hashem will bless you in the future. Rather than complain about what you do not yet have, appreciate what you do have now.”

The *Chafetz Cham, zl*, would thank Hashem nightly for all that he had the good fortune to receive from Him. He would enumerate everything in detail. Orphaned at a young age, Hashem was with him as he grew up (He is with everyone. The *Chafetz Chaim* acknowledged and appreciated every moment of success as having been orchestrated by the Almighty.) He helped him to study Torah diligently and author a number of Torah classics. He was blessed with sons-in-law who were outstanding *talmidei chachamim*, Torah scholars. This does not mean that his long life was a bed of roses. He, however, ignored the difficulties on which so many others dwell; rather, he focused on his good fortune.

A young man who was *chozeir b'tshuvah*, “returned home” to religious observance, was wont to relate what courses through his mind every morning when he arises and recites *Modeh Ani*, Thank You Hashem! He thinks through the wonderful gifts that he has been fortunate to have since he became *frum*, observant. He has a loving wife, sons and daughters – all committed to the Torah way of life – in-law children that are likewise (on the same page) committed. He and his family have been blessed with good health. All this goes through his mind, and he is filled with an emotion of thankfulness to Hashem for helping him along the way and giving him so much. Perhaps we should all stop for a moment, and, instead of complaining about how short or unrestful our night’s sleep has been, thank Hashem for all that we are fortunate to have.

A new perspective on *hakoras hatov* was taught by *Horav Elya Svei, zl*, to a *talmid*, student, which I take the liberty of sharing. One of the *Rosh Yeshivah*’s married students was blessed with a child after years of praying for what so many take for granted. The child was born prematurely and, as a result, suffered from a number of medical

issues which required a lengthy stay in the neo-natal intensive care unit of the hospital. As the day for leaving the hospital neared, the student turned to his *Rebbe* for advice on how best to show his and his wife’s appreciation to the doctors and nurses who had so ably and lovingly cared for their son. He figured that he would buy something for them. He was surprised when the *Rosh Yeshivah* disagreed.

“Do not buy anything for them,” *Rav Elya* said. When he saw the look of incredulity on his *talmid*’s face, he explained, “When *Shifra* and *Puah* risked their lives to save the lives of the Jewish newborn, Hashem rewarded them, such that they would see an incredible increase in Jewish births. The mere fact that the Jewish midwives saw blessing in their work was their greatest reward. Therefore, instead of flowers and candy, visit the neo-natal unit every year on your son’s birthday. Bring him to visit with the people who so skillfully and devotedly worked with him. This will be the greatest show of gratitude towards them.”

The *talmid* listened. Every year, he celebrated his son’s birthday with the neo-natal staff. On the boy’s *bar mitzvah*, the father came with invitations for everyone to attend this milestone occasion. A short time later, the director of the department wrote a short note to the parents, “Congratulations! We would like you to know how happy your yearly visits have made us feel. We work day in and day out saving children, without knowing what happens to them once they leave our care. It is nice to know what our devotion has achieved. During the years that you shared your son with us, you made us feel a part of your family and demonstrated your boundless gratitude for our work. Thank you.”

היית ממשש בצהרים כאשר ימשש העור באפלה

You shall grope at noon, as the blind man gropes in the darkness. (28:29)

The *Yalkut* (also *Talmud Megillah* 24b) questions the implication of this curse. Does it matter to the blind person whether it is dark or not? He does not see anyway. Rabbi Yosi explains that he once had an experience which provided an answer for him. It was late one night when he saw a blind man walking down the dark street with a torch in his hand. “I questioned him, ‘What is the torch to you?’ He replied, ‘When the torch is in my hand people see me and prevent me from falling into pits.’”

What a powerful lesson for us to absorb. Some people are blind; they cannot see, but no one is aware of their plight. Some people suffer unimaginable pain, but no one knows. Some people are victims of serious trauma, but no one wants to know about their plight, since it is dark and no one sees them. Our people have suffered immensely throughout the anti-Semitic darkness that has pervaded the millennia. I say darkness, because the world has turned a blind eye and a deaf ear to our anguish. We suffered, but no one wanted to know. It was not in vogue to recognize Jewish pain. Sympathy was out of the question. Oppression became a way of life, and the resulting lack of self-esteem cultivated a generation that was rife for the blandishments of the *Haskalah*/Enlightenment. Why feel like a parasite because no one wants to see you? Assimilate and be like them? When a pogrom, an inquisition, or a holocaust occurs, the world becomes aware of the stark reality: the Jews are suffering! The tragedies serve as the blind man’s torch, letting the world know about our existence.

How sad it is to suffer alone. How laudatory is the individual who shines the spotlight on the plight of the blind man. Anyone who suffers alone – who has experienced a traumatic experience, endured abuse, denigration, humiliation, and either had no one to tell or no one who would listen – is very much like the blind man, only he does not have the comfort and aid of a torch to inform, to scream out to people: “Help me!”

The following letter was submitted a few years ago to one of the weekly *parshah* pamphlets in *Eretz Yisrael*, by a young man, an excellent student in a prominent *yeshivah* – but it was not always like that. His purpose was to shine a spotlight on a failing, a deficiency that could happen to anyone, anytime – but it should not – ever. Do I think his experience was an isolated case? No. Does it happen? Probably. Should it happen? Never. My feeling is: Anyone can err, and, when it does happen, correct it. Apologize and make amends. Not everyone will

be as lucky as the student who wrote the letter. I would like to add that there are many forms of abuse to which our children might be subjected. If we do not shine the spotlight on the darkness, they will continue to suffer alone, and we will have committed the unforgivable, unpardonable act of allowing the blind to grope in the darkness – alone. Now for the letter.

“I was born to a family who had the good fortune of deriving *nachas* from their children. Every report card was worthy of being framed; every *rebbe’s* comment was a testament to an excellent upbringing, replete with *middos tovos*, wonderful character traits, coupled with desire and diligence in learning. At first, it appeared that I was following in the path of my predecessor siblings, until I entered upper elementary and had a *rebbe* who believed that every infraction – even the slightest, even if it was imagined by the *rebbe* – must be judged and punished to the fullest extent of his determination. Every time I acted in a manner which the *rebbe* felt was an infringement on his *kavod*, honor, I was severely punished. The taunting and degradation just egged me on, to the point that I actually deserved the punishment that I received. My parents were upset; I was upset. I just could not take it any longer. So I left school in the middle of the year. The suffering was finally over – or so I thought.

“I had impugned the *rebbe’s* ego. How dare I leave his class and make him appear to be incompetent? He took my leaving school as a personal affront. He wanted vengeance. There was no way that a young *mechutzeif*, insolent student, would tarnish his reputation. He would show him – and he did. When I returned to school the following year, calm, rested, my self-esteem returned, I was confronted with my past.

“I know all about you,” the new *rebbe* said. Apparently, last year’s *rebbe* left a very damaging report in my file. Why the *rebbe* did that I cannot understand; why the *menahel* felt it prudent to keep it, is difficult to understand; why the new *rebbe* felt that he was unable to judge a student on his own, but felt it was necessary to pass judgment based upon the determination of the previous *rebbe’s* bruised ego begs elucidation. Nonetheless, this is how my school year began – and it was downhill from that point.

“The principal was no longer a friend of mine, adding another year of misery to my life. The *rebbeim* were warned, ‘There is something wrong with this boy.’ My parents were ‘counseled’ by the principal to seek out the services of an experienced psychologist. Their son was ‘missing’ something. All of this was based upon the ego of my *rebbe* two years earlier. I suffered through the end of elementary school until it was time to go to *yeshivah*.

“What can I say? Wherever I applied, they checked me out. No one wanted a student who had emotional issues. My life was ruined. Even the third-rate *yeshivah* that finally accepted me treated me like a pariah. My life was worthless. Out of desperation, I was considering the worst exit strategies – from leaving *Yiddishkeit* to ending my life.

“Finally, after four years of bitter anguish and isolation from my friends and family (No respectable parent allowed their son to be my friend. After all, who wants their son to hang around with a ‘loser’ who had emotional issues?), a new *yeshivah* opened up. My parents had never given up on me (although I think they had serious misgivings about me. The *rebbe* and principal left a lot of unanswered questions in their mind), and they now wanted me to try one more time. This *rosh yeshivah* was different. He did not care about anyone’s past. He certainly did not judge a student based upon the word of a *rebbe* who was having a ‘bad year.’ He felt himself capable of making a judgment call ‘all on his own.’ So began seven years of bliss, of recapturing my self-esteem, learning all that I had heretofore missed, and becoming the true *ben Torah* I was destined to be.

“Why did I write this letter and circulate it at the beginning of the school year? I want to scream out to educators: ‘Watch what you say! Guard your words! Do not judge a student based upon the opinion of another person who was probably on an ego trip. I pray that you listen, because the future of your students’ lives depends on it.’”

The letter is my free translation. I altered the style (for effect), and I emphasize that this young man’s case is the exception, not the norm. *Baruch Hashem*, our *mechanchim* today are *bnei Torah* of the highest caliber. They love Torah; they love teaching Torah; they love each and every one of their students; and they are devoted heart and soul to the *mileches ha’kodesh*, holy work, that they do. We are, however, all human beings. Therefore, occasionally someone falls through the cracks of the system. This is not the forum for discussing *chinuch* issues, parent participation, administration support, etc. My purpose is to call attention to those of our community – young and old – who are groping in darkness. Let us look out for them and be their torch.

As we near the end of the year and approach the beginning of the New Year, may this be a merit for all of us to be blessed with a healthy year filled with *nachas* and joy.

בבוקר תאמר מי יתן ערב ובערב תאמר מי יתן בוקר מפחד לבבך

In the morning you will say, “Who can give back last night?” And in the evening you will say, “Who can give back this morning?” for the fright of your heart. (28:67)

Rashi explains this practically, with conditions deteriorating on a daily basis to the point that the anguish of today will be so painful it will make one year for the suffering of yesterday. This can also refer to those who wake up too late to realize that the life which they led yesterday (in the past) was the precursor to the *tzaros*, troubles, which they experience today. Whether it be satisfaction with one’s personal spiritual growth or the lack of *nachas*, satisfaction and pleasure, derived from one’s children – nothing happens in a vacuum. The decisions that we make today will affect us tomorrow. It is tough being different, living a sheltered life when everybody is out there having fun (however that may be interpreted), but the rewards later in life far outshine and overshadow the effort and difficulty leading up to the final achievement.

The *Sifrei Mussar* quote the above *pasuk*, not only for the punishment it implies, but also as an educational guide for each and every one of us. *Boker*, morning, symbolizes the early part of one’s life, his youth, when his senses are working at their maximum, his strength is vigorous, his acuity and inclination are at top form. *Erev*, evening, refers to the twilight of one’s life, when he is getting on in years, his vitals are ebbing, when he no longer has the vim and vigor to do everything that he wants. Moshe *Rabbeinu* teaches us a vital lesson. When a young person is told to follow meticulously in the Torah way, not just to *daven* – but to arise early (as a lion) and pray with the proper *kavanah*, intention and devotion, to take great pain to perform *mitzvos* as they were intended to be performed – his response might be, “Later, when I get older. Now I want to live. The whole world is before me. How can I lock myself in the *bais hamedrash* when there is so much happening?”

When the twilight years creep up on a person, however, and his body no longer responds the way it did forty years earlier, he laments that it is so difficult to observe the *mitzvos*, to go to *shul*, to learn Torah, to *daven* with vigor. *Oy!* if I could only be young again I would take advantage of my youth and meticulously devote myself to Torah and *mitzvos*. This is all the work of the wily *yetzer hora*, evil inclination, who pushes us off when we are young and tells us to forget about it when we age. In the “morning,” we declare that we will act differently in the “evening” of our life; and, in the “evening,” we lament that we no longer have the strength that we had in the “morning,” during our youth.

In one of his *shmuessen*, ethical discourses, *Horav Eliyahu Lopian, zl*, relates the following story: In a certain city in Lithuania lived a very wealthy Jew who had achieved the blessing of *Torah u’gedulah b’makom echad*, Torah scholarship together with material success. His Torah erudition was a match for his financial portfolio. He was a G-d-fearing Jew who, together with his wife, had raised a beautiful family. In short, he was the dream of every man. There was, however, one deficiency in his demeanor – he was a miser. While he did contribute to *zedakah*, charity, his generosity was limited to the minimum amount that he was obligated to give. Since he was wealthy, his *maaser*, tithe, was considerable; he nonetheless looked for every avenue to refrain from giving. It actually hurt him to be generous with his money. On the other hand, his passion for acquiring wealth knew no bounds.

On the last day of his life, as he lay on his deathbed, in pain but completely lucid, he called his entire family around his bed. He wanted to share a parting lesson with them, something from which they would learn, so that perhaps they would not err in the manner that he did. Apparently, this occurred approximately fifteen minutes before the *Malach Hamaves*, Angel of Death, put an end to his physical pain. “My children, I am at the closing moments of my life. Truthfully, I feel the end to be very near,” he began. His children immediately begged him not to continue speaking. He would be fine. He dismissed them. He knew how he felt – and he did not feel well: “Nothing matters to me now. If someone were to present me with the greatest delicacy, I would refuse it. Honor means nothing to me anymore. Clothes are meaningless. However, if someone were to place a *kopek* (small coin) in my hand, instinctively I would place it under my pillow, so that no one would take it from me! That is how much money means to me!”

“I know that this attitude is insane. What could I possibly do with a *kopek*? I have millions. What can one *kopek* add to my immense wealth? Nonetheless, since I never expunged the ugly desire for hoarding my wealth, I am leaving this world with this deficiency! I have nothing to gain, but, since I never purged this faulty *middah*, character trait, from my psyche – it will accompany me to the grave!”

When we reach the twilight of our lifespan, we regret the alterations that we did not make earlier in life. Sadly, now it is very late in the game. For some, it is impossible to change – as evinced by the above story.

Rav Frand - Parshas Ki Savo
Blessings that Reach / Curses Forever?
Three Interpretations of V’Heeseegucha

Over the years, we have given various interpretations of a certain expression in a pasuk in this week’s parsha: Perek 28 in Devorim begins with the words: “It shall be that if you listen to the voice of Hashem, your G-d, to keep, to perform all of His commandments that I command you this day, then Hashem, your G-d, will make you supreme over all the nations of the earth.” [Devarim 28:1] That is the good news. If we keep the mitzvos, the Master of the Universe will elevate us above all the nations of the world. The next pasuk continues: “All these blessings will come upon you and overtake you (u’ba-oo alecha kol haBrachos ha’eleh v’heeseegucha), if you listen to the voice of Hashem, your G-d.” [Devarim 28:2].

Many times, we have tried to understand exactly what the word “v’heeseegucha” means. The preceding expression that “all these blessings will come upon you” seems to be sufficient. That statement should stand by itself. It is not clear what the extra verb “v’heeseegucha” (literally – they will catch up to you) is trying to add. This year, I would like to offer three interpretations of what that word means.

Interpretation #1: Sforno

The Sforno on this pasuk writes cryptically that the blessings will come upon you “even though you will not attempt to get them.” What does that mean? The Imrei Baruch suggests the following interpretation of the Sforno’s words. Rabbeinu Bachaye on Chumash prefaces each parsha with a pasuk from Proverbs which he somehow ties in with that parsha. He begins Parshas Shlach with the pasuk “The horse is ready for the day of battle, and to Hashem (belongs) salvation.” [Mishlei 21:31] Rabbeinu Bachaye expands on the lesson of this pasuk. Regarding everything in life, it is necessary to make preparations, which, according to the laws of nature, will lead a person to success. If the situation looks like war will be necessary, then people need to prepare for war. In Biblical times, this meant preparing horses and chariots. In other times, it meant preparing swords and spears. In other times, people needed to prepare catapults – whatever represented “state-of-the-art” battle at that given time. Today, this means having a strong air force and navy, which is ready for all contingencies. It is essential to prepare. It is forbidden to just sit back and say “Nu, the Ribono shel Olam will Help.”

However, after all the preparations, a person needs to realize, as Shlomo HaMelech says – “and to Hashem (belongs) salvation.” Salvation does not come from the planes and the tanks, etc. It comes from the Almighty. This is the reality of how He works in this world. Things must appear “natural” but at the end of the day, it is not the planes and the tanks. It is “to Hashem (belongs) salvation.”

Rabbeinu Bachaye then cites another common example. When a person is sick, it is necessary to visit doctors and take the appropriate medications. Treatment needs to be undertaken which will hopefully cure the illness “by natural means.” Healthy foods must be eaten, harmful foods must be avoided. After all the natural procedures and treatments, it is appropriate to believe that the cure will not come because of all these “natural efforts” but rather from the Almighty who cures all flesh. Hashem does not ask us to only pray to Him for cures and that we otherwise do nothing in terms of taking advantage of contemporary medical knowledge. That is not the way this world works. The Almighty does not perform open miracles on a daily basis for everyone.

However, He does perform “hidden miracles” all the time. So we need to set up a camouflage. Get a good surgeon; get a good doctor; get good input. But do not forget who is really the One who cures all flesh and heals with wonders. This could be what the Sforno means when he interprets “and all these blessing will come upon you” – you do all these things that are necessary to achieve the blessings you seek (victory in war, health, wealth, etc.), but ultimately “v’heeseegoocha.” Those blessings are not going to come directly because of your efforts. They are going to “catch up with you” – because the Ribono shel Olam will camouflage His way of getting the blessings to you such that they will appear as if they come through natural means. That is one possible explanation.

Interpretation #2: Degel Machaneh Ephraim

I saw another explanation brought down in the name of the Degel Machaneh Ephraim (a grandson of the Baal Shem Tov). The Degel Machaneh Ephraim also analyzes the meaning of the expression “all these blessings will come upon you v’heeseegoocha.” He references a very famous pasuk in Tehillim [Psalms]. Dovid HaMelech [King David] says, “Only goodness and kindness shall pursue me (yirdefoonee) all the days of my life.” [Tehilim 23:6] The word yirdefoonee means to chase somebody. When I am running away from someone or something bad which is pursuing me, it is appropriate to say about my pursuer yirdefoonee. However, it is odd to use that verb in connection with “tov v’chessed” (goodness and kindness). In what sense can we say about “tov v’chessed” that they are “chasing after me”? I am not going to run away from “tov v’chessed”. If someone wants to offer me a million dollars, I will run after him, not vice versa!

The Degel Machane Ephraim explains that sometimes we do not know from where the “tov” is going to come. Sometimes we try a certain plan or approach but success does not come from that direction. Dovid HaMelech therefore prays to the Almighty “Please, Hashem, if I am running away from that which is eventually going to be good for me, have that ‘good’ chase after me – because I am not going to be wise enough to figure out that this is the direction from which the ‘tov v’chessed’ is really going to come.”

There is a famous Chassidic story of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev who saw a person running and he asked him “To where are you running?” The runner responded, “I am running to a certain place where I know I can make a good business deal.” Rabbi Levi Yitzchak asked him, “How are you so sure that your parnassah [livelihood] is in the place to which you are running, perhaps your parnassah is right here in the place where you already are?” We just do not know from where our livelihood is going to come.

The Degel Machaneh Ephraim explains that this is the interpretation of the pasuk “And all these blessings will come upon you and they will catch up with you (v’heeseegoocha).” Sometimes we run away from the chessed and from the good. It needs to chase after us. It is not sufficient for the blessings to come upon us. When, as often happens, we are headed in the wrong direction, we require that they run after us.

Interpretation #3: Rav Tzadok HaKohen

The third interpretation actually answers another question as well. Rav Tzadok HaKohen of Lublin writes in the name of the Rebbe Reb Bunim of Peshischa that the expression “and the blessings will come upon you v’heeseegoocha” means that the blessings should reach you where you are. This means that the blessings should not change you. The Brochos that you receive will reach you “where you are” and you will not become a different person because of them.

All too often, we see that when someone comes into a lot of success and a lot of money, it changes him. He becomes a different person. Fame and fortune can do that. The promise is – according to Rav Tzadok — that the blessings should reach you and cause you to remain exactly where you were before they arrived.

The reason I prefer this interpretation over the others is because it always bothered me that virtually the same language is used by the curses 13 pesukim later: “And if you do not hearken to the voice of the Hashem your G-d to observe and keep all His commandments and statutes that I command you this day, then all these curses v’heeseegoocha [will overtake you]” [Devarim 28:15]. According to the first two interpretations given above, v’heeseegoocha does not seem to make sense in connection with the curses. However, it makes sense with Rav Tzadok’s approach. Just like good things sometimes change a person, so too bad things (may the Almighty spare us from such) can change a person. If, unfortunately, a person needs to suffer curses, he should not need to change because of that either.

Do Not Read This Pasuk As A Curse For Ever and Ever

The final observation I wish to share is a very interesting comment from the Maharil Diskin on the pasuk “All these curses will come upon you and pursue you and overtake you, until you are destroyed, because you will not have listened to the voice of Hashem, your G-d, to observe His commandments and His decrees that He commanded you.” [Devarim 28:45] The next pasuk continues: “They will be in you as a sign and as a wonder, and in your offspring, for ever and ever.” [ibid. 28:46]

The Maharil Diskin is taken aback by the apparently shocking implication of this curse – a curse which is destined to last “for ever and ever.” The Maharil Diskin gives a novel interpretation of the pasuk and says it is not to be understood as the words seem to literally mean. He interprets the pasuk to mean that the curses will come upon you because you did not keep the commandments and decrees of G-d. However, the curses will come upon you in such a way that they (the commandments) will be in you and your offspring as a sign and wonder forever!

Heaven forbid that the pasuk means that the curses will stay with our offspring forever. The pasuk is not predicting the demise of Klal Yisrael. Rather, it must be read in conjunction with the following pasuk. It means that the curses which come upon us will be due to the fact that we did not keep the Torah in a meaningful way such that the commandments will remain with our offspring forever.

The mitzvos we do are supposed to make an impression on our children. If we see that they are not making a positive impression on our children and wish to know why not, we need to look no further than the next pasuk: It is “because you did not serve Hashem, your G-d, with gladness and with goodness of heart, out of an abundance of everything (b’simcha u’btov lev, m’rov kol).” [ibid. 28:47] Mitzvos need to be performed with joy and enthusiasm. In this way, our children will be caught up in our passion and emotion and realize how important it is for them to make mitzvos part of their own lives as well. When our children see what a Pesach means to us and what a Succos means to us and they see how meaningful they are to our lives, then their observance of the commandments will be “a sign and a wonder forever and ever” as well.

When our mitzvah performance does not make that impression on our children, when we do not worship Hashem, our G-d, in joy at a time when we have an abundance of everything, and when we only “go through the motions” of mitzvah observance, our children will not be impressed. Merely “going through the motions” may suffice to keep a person going, but our children will find it to be an empty experience which will not inspire them to continue in our ways.

That is what this pasuk is saying. If we want mitzvos to make the impression they are supposed to make, they need to be done b’simcha u’btov lev, m’rov kol.

https://www.torahweb.org/torah/2018/moadim/rlop_elul.html

The Purpose of the Excursion

Rabbi Ahron Lopiansky

There is a famous parable for Elul, comparing it to a king strolling in his field, and anyone can approach him. This moshol is quoted as if it were a midrash; but it is not. [There is a midrash that the Tur brings about a group of people preempting the king, by coming to him while he's travelling, but its intent is quite different.]. It is a moshol of the Baal Hatanya [Likutei Torah Reeh].

On the surface of it, the parable seems to not have much content. It is simply a somewhat vague metaphor for having an easier way in with the king. But why would this be so? Why don't we need to make an appointment with the king at his palace like everyone else? What prompted the royal stroll?

Let us take a closer look at his words:

"Why are the yud gimmel middos revealed during Elul, though they are a very high revelation suitable mainly for Yom Kippur? One can compare it to a king who before he arrives in the town, is accessible to everyone and he is friendly with them. When the king goes to the city, they then follow him. And once he is in his palace they need permission to enter..."

I think that the words "they then follow him" are the crucial words. For although one needs special permission to enter the palace, these poor peasants are so far removed from the refinement of the monarchy that they lack any interest to even make an appointment to see the king. What does the king do? He extends himself undeservedly to them, so that they gain some sense of what he is. When their interest is aroused, and their passions are excited, they follow the king to his palace. And now they must deserve to enter.

If you wish, this is actually a passuk in Shir Hashirim. In the fifth perek there is a description of the king's beloved having become tired of the king. He begs her to open the door, and she replies that she is tired and has gone to sleep. He then puts his hand through the keyhole, and she begins yearning for him. But now he is gone, and she must spend the rest of her time pursuing him.

This is the same dynamic. A beloved has lost interest, and unless that interest is aroused again, she/he will never even bother to pursue the king.

The point of the Baal Hatanya's parable is that for the process of din to be meaningful, a desire must first be aroused in the populace to achieve closeness to Hashem. Thus, Elul is a time when Hashem grants us - undeservedly - a rush of spirituality. This is not the real spirituality, for real spirituality comes only by dint of effort. It is meant to draw us out of our beds of comfort, to begin following the king to his palace. And at the palace we must show ourselves deserving.

Rav Shlomo Aviner Shlit"a

Ha-Rav answers hundreds of text message questions a day. Here's a sample:

Kipa in the Army

Q: I am going into the army and bought a large Kipa in order to help me maintain my spiritual state. My parents said that wearing such a large Kipa will prevent people from wanting to connect with me. What should I do?

A: You should certainly wear a large Kipa, since this is the basic Halachah, and the purpose of a Kipa is to instill Yirat Shamayim (Fear of Heaven). People will not connect with you based on your clothing but on your Midot Tovot (positive character traits).

Charedim and the Army

Q: How is it possible to explain that Charedim refuse to serve in Tzahal?

A: Instead of involving oneself in what is difficult to understand about the Charedim, one should learn from them to be punctilious in observing every Mitzvah, even those which seem light, and to dedicate every free moment to learning Torah, etc.

Long Peyot and Honoring Parents

Q: It really bothers my mother that I have long Peyot. She says it embarrasses her. What should I do?

A: Leave them and try to appease her.

Convert from Does Not Observe Mitzvot

Q: What is the status of a convert who does not observe Mitzvot?

A: If from the first moment of the conversion he did not observe the Mitzvot and deceived the Rabbis, there was no conversion. If he did observe the Mitzvot from the beginning, but later regressed, he is a Jew like any other.

Woman Covering Hair at Home

Q: Is it permissible for a woman to be at home without covering her hair?

A: It is permissible on condition that only her immediately family is there. It is preferable, however, to always cover her hair, even in the dark, since Hashem fills the entire world with His honor. Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 3:1.

Reciting Prayer for the State of Israel in Place of Ketubah

Q: I am performing a wedding on Yom Yerushalayim. What is Ha-Rav's opinion regarding reciting the Prayer for the State of Israel in place of reading the Ketubah?

A: In theory, it is a beautiful idea to honor the State of Israel, but one should not change the way our Rabbis acted throughout the generations. The entire purpose of reading the Ketubah is to separate between the Eirusin (Betrothal) and the Nisu'im (Matrimony) (Rama, Even Ha-Ezer 61:9. Therefore, a great Rav in America, Ha-Rav Eliezer Silver, would read the Ketubah very slowly. See "Be-Ikvei Ha-Tzon" of Ha-Rav Herschel Schachter p. 268). In theory, it is even possible to invite a philosopher to read Plato in Greek between them, but we do not make changes (And in America, Ha-Rav Schachter once said that in theory even a monkey could read the Ketubah in order to create a separation. Some people were angered by his remark, mistakenly asserting that he was using an insulting expression towards women. But Ha-Rav was using a halachic expression: "The act of a monkey". For example, the Chatam Sofer writes that it is permissible for a monkey to serve as a messenger to deliver Mishloach Manot.. Chatam Sofer on Gittin 22b. And food prepared by a monkey is still considered Bishul Akum. Shut Shevet Ha-Levi 9:164).

Medical Negligence

Q: Is it permissible to sue a hospital for medical negligence? Perhaps it is ungracious after they tried so hard to help?

A: It is permissible. 1. It is deterrence against it happening again. 2. It is not necessarily the same doctor who was both negligent and effective. 3. The hospital has insurance for such cases.

Mother of Hitler, may his name be blotted out

Q: Is it true that Hitler's mother was Jewish?

A: No. There are those who claim that his father's mother was Jewish, but this has no basis.

Picture of the Rambam

Q: Is the famous picture of the Rambam really the Rambam?

A: No. He doesn't have Peyot at all. It is a later picture of someone who is wearing Turkish clothing.

Difficult Pregnancy

Q: My wife has difficult pregnancies, and nonetheless still wants to have another child. The problem is that I also suffer from this, and it has a damaging effect on our relationship (Shalom Bayit). Is this a reason to not have another child?

A: Just as your wife courageously enters pregnancy to have another child, you should do the same (see Meshech Chochma on Bereshit 9:7). You should therefore be brave, and you will benefit two-fold: having another child, and learning to overcome difficulties.

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Hilchos Chodesh Elul

8055. The minhag of most (not all) Ashkenazic communities is to say the first Selichos on Motza'ei Shabbos after Chatzos because the first Selichos mentions several times, wording that indicates the middle of the night. Piskei Tshuvos 581:2 FN12,15, Igros Moshe OC 2:105

8056. The source is brought in the Leket Yosher in the name of a talmid of the Terumas Hedeshen; to begin on Motza'ei Shabbos whilst still in the Simcha of Shabbos, and wearing Shabbos clothing. Piskei Tshuvos 581:2

8057. The most preferable time to say Selichos is at night after Chatzos, or early in the morning within 3 hours before daybreak. It is also acceptable, but not preferable, to say Selichos after daybreak, and finally, bidieved, all day. Shulchan Aruch w/Mishnah Brurah 581:1, Piskei Tshuvos 581:2, S'U Yechave Daas 1:46

8058. There is a Machlokes HaPoskim whether one may say Selichos at night before Chatzos. The opinion of the Mishnah Berurah and the Birkei Yosef is that one should not say Selichos at that time, while The Mishmeres Sholom holds that one may say Selichos before Chatzos. Shulchan Aruch w/Mishnah Brurah 565:MB12, see Shaarei Tshuvah 581:1

8059. Rav Moshe Feinstein zt'l rules that one should only say Selichos at night before Chatzos in a circumstance of great need or urgency (e.g. If one is afraid to walk at night after Chatzos) and the heter is a "Horoas Sha'ah" - not to be used on a regular, ongoing basis. Igros Moshe OC 2:105

Who Knows Thirteen?

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question: What is the basis for the Selichos we recite before Rosh Hashanah and during the Aseres Yemei Teshuvah?

Answer:

From the beginning of Selichos, continuing with the closing sentences of the haftarah we recite on Shabbos Shuvah, and then again after Maftir Yonah, and climaxing with the Selichos we recite in ne'ilah, we repeatedly enumerate or allude to the thirteen attributes of Hashem's kindness. The words mi keil kamocho also allude to the thirteen attributes of Hashem's kindness.

Why is the recital of the thirteen midos of Hashem's mercy so important? Allow me to quote the relevant Talmudic passage:

Rabbi Yochanan said: "Were it not for the fact that the Torah itself wrote this, it would be impossible to say this. The Torah teaches that Hashem wrapped Himself in a talis like a chazzan and demonstrated to Moshe the order of prayer. Hashem told Moshe: "Whenever the Jews sin, they should perform this order, and I will forgive them" (Rosh Hashanah 17b).

Rabbi Yochanan noted that the anthropomorphism of his own statement is rather shocking, and, without scriptural proof, we would refrain from saying it. Nevertheless, the Torah compelled us to say that Hashem revealed to Moshe a means whereby we can be pardoned for our iniquities. According to the Maharal, Moshe asked Hashem to elucidate, to the extent that a human can comprehend, how Hashem deals with the world in mercy. Hashem did, indeed, enlighten Moshe, and this enabled him to implore that the Jewish people be forgiven and taught him how to lead the Jews in their prayers (Chiddushei Agados, Rosh Hashanah 17b s.v. Melameid).

Source for Selichos

This, then, is the basis for Selichos. Indeed, it is not a takanah, but a custom; yet, who would not avail himself of the opportunity to prepare early for this chance? To quote the Leket Yosher: Someone who goes to daven on the High Holidays and did not say Selichos in preparation can be compared to an individual who desires to approach the king with an urgent request, and manages to acquire the key to the king's inner sanctum, but fails to arrange how he will enter the outer office. All his

efforts are therefore completely in vain, because he failed to prepare himself adequately. This can be compared to someone moving to an unsettled area who installs a modern kitchen, expecting to be able to turn on the tap and produce water, when there are no connecting water pipes!
A Word about Attributes

What, exactly, are the thirteen attributes? For that matter, can we attribute personality characteristics to Hashem?

Humans are not capable of understanding who Hashem is. The Torah requires that we understand that Hashem does not have moods (Rambam, Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah 1:11). When we describe Hashem's different attributes, we are explaining Hashem in a way that we, as human beings, will be able to comprehend Him, since we cannot comprehend Him in any other way (Rambam, Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah 1:9). Thus, providing thirteen different attributes of Hashem's mercy is simply a human way for us to appreciate more specifically and to a greater extent what Hashem does and has done for us, and what is our responsibility to fulfill the mitzvah of being like Hashem, which I will explain shortly.

To quote Rabbeinu Bachyei: Although we no longer know how to beseech nor do we properly understand the power of the thirteen attributes, and how they connect to Hashem's mercy, we still know that the attributes of mercy plead on our behalf, since this is what Hashem promised. Today, when we are without a kohein gadol to atone for our sins and without a mizbei'ach on which to offer korbanos and no Beis Hamikdash in which to pray, we have left only our prayers and these thirteen attributes (Kad Hakemach, Kippurim 2).

Who Knows Thirteen?

To quote the Haggadah, "I know thirteen! Thirteen are the attributes."

What are the thirteen midos?

The Torah says: Hashem, Hashem, Who is a merciful and gracious G-d, slow to anger, and abundant in kindness and truth. He preserves kindness for thousands of generations by forgiving sins, whether they are intentional, rebellious or negligent; and He exonerates (Shemos 34:6-7).

There are many opinions among the commentaries and the halachic authorities exactly how to calculate the thirteen merciful attributes of Hashem. The most commonly quoted approach is that of Rabbeinu Tam, who includes each of the Names of Hashem at the beginning as a separate attribute (Tosafos, Rosh Hashanah 17b).

What do I do?

At this point, I want to return to the above-quoted Talmudic source of the Selichos and note an important point.

Hashem told Moshe: "Whenever the Jews sin, they should perform this order and I will forgive them." The Hebrew word that I have translated as should perform this order is yaasu, which means that the Jews must do something, definitely more than just reciting the words. If all that is required is reading the words, the Gemara should have said simply: They should read these words. Obviously, action, which always speaks louder than words, is required to fulfill these instructions and accomplish atonement. What does the Gemara mean?

Emulate Hashem

To answer this question, we need to realize that the most important of the 613 mitzvos is the commandment to emulate Hashem. To quote the Gemara: Just as Hashem is gracious and merciful, so should you become gracious and merciful (Shabbos 133b). When Hashem told Moshe: Whenever the Jews perform this order, I will forgive them, He meant that when we act towards one another with the same qualities of rachamim that Hashem does, He forgives us. Reciting the thirteen attributes of Hashem's mercy is the first step towards making ourselves merciful people who emulate Hashem's ways. Yaasu means learning to internalize these attributes by doing them, and thereby making ourselves G-dly people. "Doing" the thirteen attributes means not only understanding the absolutely incredible amount of tolerance that Hashem manifests, but includes, also, realizing how accepting we must be of people who annoy and harm us!

This sounds great in theory. What does it mean in practice?

Here are several examples, all taken from the sefer Tomer Devorah, to help us comprehend what our job is:

1. Whenever someone does something wrong toward Hashem, at that very moment He provides all the needs of the offender. This is a tremendous amount of forbearance that Hashem demonstrates. Our mitzvah is to train ourselves to be accepting, to this great extent, of those who annoy and wrong us.

2. We should appreciate the extent to which Hashem considers the Jews to be His people; we should identify with the needs of each Jew on a corresponding level.

3. Hashem waits with infinite patience for the sinner to do teshuvah, always being confident in this person's ability to repent and change, and continues to provide the sinner with all his needs. Similarly, we should not stand on ceremony to wait for someone who wronged us to apologize.

4. Hashem emphasizes the positive acts that a person does and continues to shower the person with good, while, in the interim, He overlooks the sins a person has performed. Similarly, when I know that someone wronged me, but at the same time I have received chesed from him or her, I should ignore the fact that they wronged me – after all, they have also helped me. The Tomer Devorah emphasizes specifically the chesed that one receives from one's spouse, which should, without question, supplant any criticisms one has of him or her.

5. When a person does teshuvah after sinning, Hashem loves him more than He loved him before he sinned. As the Gemara states: In a place where baalei teshuvah stand, complete tzadikim are unable to stand. The parallel responsibility incumbent on a person to someone who wronged him is that when he sees that the person wants to make amends, he should befriend and accept him at a greater level than he had previously. We see that the recital of the thirteen attributes serves not only to help us appreciate all that Hashem does for us, but also as a training ground to teach how we should constantly treat our fellowman.

Conclusion

My rosh yeshivah, Rav Yaakov Ruderman zt"l asked, Why do Ashkenazim not begin reciting Selichos until at most eight days before Rosh Hashanah? The custom of the Sefardim, who begin reciting selichos at the beginning of Elul, seems to make more sense. After all, the entire month is specially designated for doing teshuvah.

His answer was that proper prayer requires hachanah, proper preparation. We need the beginning of Elul to get prepared for properly reciting the Selichos (Sichos Avodas Halevi pg. 264). Now that we understand how much of a responsibility we are assuming when we recite the thirteen midos of Hashem, we can appreciate better why we need several weeks of preparation before we begin reciting the Selichos.

Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Ki Tetzei

For the week ending 1 September 2018 / 21 Elul 5778

Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com

Insights

Words that Speak as Loudly as Actions

"And you will say to him" (26:3)

What was said at the birthday party:

"What an absolutely fabulous present. I can't begin to tell you how much I adore it. It's just what I wanted. I can see it now on my mantelpiece. You have such divine taste. It must have been so-o-o expensive. You really shouldn't have. I don't know where to begin to thank you!"

What was meant at the birthday party:

"You call this a present? It's the most hideous thing I've ever seen. I've had better gifts out of a cornflake box. I can see it now in my trashcan. Your taste is worse than an Afghan goatherd. This must have cost you all of fifty cents. You really didn't. I don't know where to begin to thank you!"

Because insincerity is a fact of life, it's easy to err on the side of understatement when it comes to saying thank you. However, this week's Torah portion teaches us that we should verbalize our gratitude

fully: There is a mitzvah to bring up the first fruits of the Land of Israel to Jerusalem and present them to the kohen.

The one who does this makes a moving declaration of gratitude to G-d for His eternal role as the Guide of Jewish history. Rashi says that a person makes this declaration "so that he should not be an ingrate."

The question arises: Don't actions speak louder than words? Isn't the gift enough of a demonstration of gratitude to G-d?

The Torah teaches us here that a person should never shirk giving sincere thanks. Even though the currency of verbal gratitude may be debased by insincerity, a Jew has an obligation not just to show his gratitude with actions, but to verbalize and specify the nature of the good for which he is thanking his benefactor, whether it is man or G-d.

Sources: based on Da'at Torah

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OU Torah

Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb Walls Have Ears

We all have our secret lives.

I don't mean to say that each of us has a sinister side, which we wickedly act out in some deep, dark, private world. What I do mean is that we all act differently when we are alone, or with a few close intimates, than we act when we are out in public, among others.

There is no one who is so behaviorally consistent that he is the same person in the privacy of his own home as he is in the workplace or marketplace.

Nor do I suggest that there is anything wrong with the fact that we each are two persons, and perhaps even multiple persons, depending upon the social context in which we find ourselves.

It is problematic, however, when we act hypocritically, presenting a pious and altruistic face to the world, while acting cruelly and crudely in our own homes and with our families.

In this week's Torah portion, Parshat Ki Tavo, there appears a particularly piercing and perceptive verse: "Cursed be he who strikes his fellow in secret—and all the people shall say, Amen."

In no way does the Torah imply that he who strikes his fellow in public is to be blessed. Rather, the Torah recognizes the tendency humans have to reserve the worst side of themselves for their secret social settings, even when they behave meritoriously in their public social worlds. It is the façade, the contrast, between public demonstrations of righteousness and private acts of fiendishness that is cursed.

Sinning in secret is particularly offensive in the religious personality. He or she who believes in a God who is omniscient, and who yet sins in private, is guilty, not merely of hypocrisy, but of heresy. If God knows all, how can you delude yourself into thinking that your secret misdeeds can go undetected?

The Shulchan Aruch, the Jewish code of law, opens with a statement recognizing that a person's behavior, when he is alone at home, is very different from his behavior when he appears before a great king. And it urges the religious person to be aware that he is always in the presence of the great King of Kings, the all-knowing God.

But it is not only from a spiritual perspective that it is wrong to act demeaningly in private. There is a practical aspect as well to the importance of behaving properly even in secret. There always is the very real possibility that our secrets will be "leaked" and that things we were sure would never be known will become embarrassingly exposed.

I know of no place where this is conveyed more cogently than in these words of caution, to be found in Ecclesiastes (10:20):

"Don't revile a king, even in your intimate thoughts.

Don't revile a rich man, even in your bedchamber;

For a bird of the air may carry the utterance,

And a winged creature may report the word."

Indeed, as Rashi says (Berachot 8b), the walls have ears.

The passage in this week's Torah portion that condemns secret violence also gives quite a comprehensive catalog of other sins which tend to be performed behind closed doors. They include elder abuse, criminal business practices, deceiving blind persons, subverting the rights of the helpless, incest and bestiality, and the acceptance of bribery. Quite a list, and one that has certainly not lost its relevance over the centuries.

I am not so naïve as to think that we are required to act in an absolutely identical fashion in our "secret chambers" as we do out in the "real world." To a certain extent, it is necessary and right that we maintain a façade of sorts when we interact in public. We all have, and need, our masks and personas.

But many times, we go too far and indeed split our personalities between the Dr. Jekylls of our external visible behavior and the Mr. Hydes of our inner sancta.

How well advised we would be to set as an objective for ourselves the words of the daily prayer book:

"A person should always be God-fearing,

privately and publicly,

acknowledging the truth and speaking it in his heart."

Drasha Parshas Ki Savo

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Arrival Times

This week's portion begins with a beautiful mitzvah bikurim. When the first fruit blossoms from the tree, one brings it to Jerusalem, to the Bais haMikdash, and presents it to the kohen. It is not a mere gift; it is an entire ritual.

"It will be when you enter the Land that Hashem, your G-d, gives you as an inheritance, and you possess it, and dwell in it. You shall take of the first of every fruit of the ground that you bring in from your Land that Hashem, your G-d, gives you, and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place that Hashem, your G-d, will choose, to make His Name rest there. You shall come to whomever will be the kohen in those days, and you shall say to him, "I declare today to Hashem . . . , that I have come to the Land that Hashem swore to our forefathers to give us" (Deuteronomy 28:1-4).

The patron then recites a brief history of the Jewish People, recounting their humble origins in the home of Lavan, through their ordeal in Egypt, the Exodus, finally their settling in the land of Israel. Yet the preface to the words of gratitude need clarification.

"I declare today to Hashem that I have come to the Land that Hashem swore to our forefathers." True, today is the day you came to Jerusalem, but surely it is not the date you arrived in Israel! In fact, the mitzvah of bikurim did not begin until after the Jews conquered the land and settled it – a period of 14 years. Families who entered the land with toddlers would be about to marry them off! How can one use the expression, "I declare today, that I have arrived in the land of Israel?"

There is an apocryphal story regarding one of the Countesses of the assimilated House of Rothschild.

She lay in her bedroom off the Champs-Élysées ready to give birth. The doctor came and examined her. After a few minutes, he turned to her husband. "There is plenty of time; let's play cards."

Into the third round of their game, shouts came from the bedroom. "Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu!"

The doctor looked up from the deck at the nervous husband. "Don't worry, it's not time. Deal."

They continued playing for another half hour when the shouts descended to the card parlor, "Oh! My Lord! Oh! My Lord!"

Again the doctor shrugged. "Don't worry. Not yet. Deal."

They continued for another twenty minutes when, once again, shouts from the bedroom interrupted their game. "Ribbono Shel Olam! Gevalt!"

The doctor jumped from his chair. Turning to the Count, he shook his head excitedly. "Now!"

The Torah tells us that after 14 years, when one comes with the fruit of bikurim to Jerusalem, and brings his work to the kohen, and, acknowledging the roots of his heritage and the gratitude he must have for his creator, then he can preface his remarks with the words, "Today I have arrived."

It is possible to inherit a land, construct bridges, and establish factories — but without building a spiritual nature in a country, you are not there! You can plant trees, you can harvest grain, but without recognition that the fruit and the grain of its inhabitants' labors are truly the outcome of Divine guidance and inspiration, you may have come, but you have not arrived. And so, even after one has settled, planted, and reaped, he must come to the kohen and bring the fruit, prefaced by the words that define his acknowledgement of the true status in the Land of Israel.

Today, I come with the fruit of my labor! Today, I acknowledge the hand of Hashem in my labor. Today, I remember my humble roots, and the history I endured. Today, I cry out in the name of the Ribbono Shel Olam. Today, I have arrived! Now is the time!

Dedicated l'zecher nishmas (in loving memory of) Eliezer Yerachmiel ben HaRav Mordechai, Louis Ehrenkranz a"h, on his first Yahrzeit. By his son Gil Ehrenkranz.

In memory of our beloved father and zayde, R' Fishel Yitzchok ben R' Shmuel Zisblatt by his children and grandchildren the Zisblatt Family.

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

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The Times of Israel

The Blogs :: Ben-Tzion Spitz

Ki Tavo: Give, Serve, Joyously

Real joy comes not from ease or riches or from the praise of men, but from doing something worthwhile. - Pierre Conaille

At the beginning of his commentary on this week's Torah reading, Rabbeinu Bechaye enjoins us to adhere to charitable commandments with an unshakable belief that God will pay us back, manifold, in this world. We have an obligation to be charitable with our money, but also with our time and our personal talents. God has given each of us some unique trait, strength, talent, something we're good at or that we enjoy doing. We must make charitable use of those divinely granted gifts for the benefit and well-being of others.

However, this belief that God will "pay us back" in this world may seem counterintuitive to other areas of Jewish faith. God doesn't typically bargain or make deals. There are commands. You follow them, you get rewarded; you don't, you get punished. However, reward or punishment is or may be delayed until the afterlife, which may prove either unsatisfactory or a relief to those of us still very much in this world.

But there seems to be a major exception to the above. Rabbeinu Bechaye on Deuteronomy 26:15 (Ki Tavo) brings our attention to the Temple's first fruit ceremony. In the prescribed liturgy of that rite we call upon God to gaze down upon us, see that we've fulfilled our part of the bargain of bringing the first fruits to the Temple, and now it's God's turn to bless us, in this world.

In all other cases where the Torah uses the term of God "gazing down," it's not good. It's usually because God, in His attribute of Justice, is "examining" the deeds in question (think Sodom) and getting ready to severely punish the wrongdoers.

But there is a particular power to performing the commandments with joy, and specifically the charitable ones, which gives us the ability to convert God's attribute of Justice to the attribute of Mercy. We can have the temerity to call on God to gaze down, examine this particularly good deed, performed with joy, and reward us accordingly or even disproportionately.

He adds (on Deuteronomy 28:47) that the command to perform God's commands joyously is its own separate unique command. Therefore, whoever performs a commandment, but doesn't do so joyously, while he may have performed a command and gets credit for it, violates the separate all-encompassing commandment to do so joyously and in fact has also sinned.

The bottom line is, be charitable, give of yourself, your time and your resources joyously and feel free to then call upon God to pay up. At least in that department, He's ready to make a deal

Shabbat Shalom

Dedication - To Cheyn Shmuel Shmidman on his Bar-Mitzvah celebration and his unbelievably impressive reading of the entire scroll of Isaiah.

Ben-Tzion Spitz is a former Chief Rabbi of Uruguay. He is the author of three books of Biblical Fiction and over 600 articles and stories dealing with biblical themes. Ben-Tzion is a graduate of Yeshiva University and received his Master's in Mechanical Engineering from Columbia University.

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Shabbat Shalom: Parshat Ki Tavo (Deuteronomy 26:1–29:8)

By Shlomo Riskin

Efrat, Israel – "When you come to the land which the Lord your God gives to you as an inheritance and you inherit it.... You shall take from the first of all the fruits of the earth which you shall bring from your land.... And you shall respond and you shall say before the Lord your God: "My father was a wandering Aramean." (Deuteronomy 26:1–26:5)

The Mishna in Bikkurim magnificently describes the drama of the bringing of these first fruits, the massive march to Jerusalem of farmers from all over Israel with the choicest fruit and grain of their labors in their hands, the decorated marketplaces of our Holy City crowned by the magnificent fruits, and the speech-song of each individual farmer as he stood in front of the Temple altar with the offering he handed to the priest. What an impressive demonstration of fealty to the Master of the Universe, who is hereby recognized as the Provider of all produce and the Sustainer of all sustenance.

But God's bounty was not the purpose of bringing the first fruits. The clear emphasis here is the arrival of the Israelites to the Land of Israel – after having

been enslaved and afflicted by the Egyptians, and after the Almighty heard their prayers and took them from Egypt to Israel with great miracles and wonders. Eating the fruits of our own land emphasizes the evils of slavery when we could not produce our own food and the inalienable rights of Jews (as well as all humans) to freedom and the independence to provide for their own needs.

From this perspective I can understand why the first fruits are only to be brought from the seven species which are unique and bring praise to the Land of Israel (Deut. 8), and why only an individual who owns a portion of the Land of Israel and on whose portion the fruits actually grew is obligated to perform the command of the first fruits (Mishna, Bikkurim 1:1–3). This commandment is all about God's gift of the land of Israel to the Jews; that is why we find that in the eleven verses of the first fruits speech-song, the noun "land (eret)," appears no fewer than five times, and the verb "gift (matan)" (by God), no fewer than seven times!

To further cement the inextricable relationship between the first fruits and the Land of Israel, Rabbi Elhanan Samet (in his masterful biblical commentary) cites a comment by Rabbi Menaḥem Ziemba (Hiddushim, siman 50) in the name of the Holy Ari, that the commandment to bring the first fruits is a repair, a tikkun, for the Sin of the Scouts. Perhaps that is why the Mishna links the command of the first fruits specifically to the fig, grape, and pomegranate ("If an individual goes into his field and sees a fig, a grape-cluster and/or a pomegranate which has/have ripened, he must tie them with a cord and state that these are to be first fruits" – Bikkurim 3:1), precisely the three fruits which the scouts took back with them (Num. 13:23).

And the Bible relates to the scouts on their reconnaissance mission with the very same language that God commands the Israelite concerning the first fruits: Moses tells the scouts, "And you shall take from the fruits of the land" (13:20), "We came to the land...and it is even flowing with milk and honey, and this is its fruit" (13:27), and – in remarkably parallel fashion – God commands the Israelites, "And you shall take from the first of all the fruits of the land" (Deut. 26:2), "Because I have come to the land" (26:3), "And He gave to us this land flowing with milk and honey" (26:9). In effect, God is saying that we must bring precisely those first fruits from that very special land which the scouts rejected, or at least lacked the faith to conquer and settle. Fulfilling the command of the first fruits is in effect a gesture of "repentance" for the Sin of the Scouts. And in similar fashion, all of us privileged to return to Israel after 2000 years of exile are similarly repenting for the sin of the Scouts!

Shabbat Shalom

לע"נ

שרה משא בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה