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from: Rav Immanuel Bernstein
<ravbernstein@journeysintorah.com> date: Sep 15, 2022,
6:59 AM subject: Dimensions in Ki Savo

No Cause for Shame

Rabbi Immanuel Bernstein

There was an interesting enactment mentioned in the Mishnah[1] that related to the bringing of bikkurim to the Beis Hamikdash. Part of the mitzvah involves reciting a collection of verses which describe briefly the history of the Jewish people, from their humble origins as slaves in Egypt until this special time when they are in their land.[2] However, as the Mishnah recounts, not everyone who brought the fruits was capable of reciting these verses by themselves, for some of them did not know how to read. In response to this, the kohanim were made available for these people so that the kohen would say the

words and the farmer would repeat after him. The Mishnah continues that, after a while, the Sages instituted that everyone should have a kohen say the words before them, regardless of whether or not they could read, so as not to shame those who could not read the words themselves.

The following Mishnah[3] describes the different types of baskets that people used to bring their bikkurim in, for the purpose of beautifying the mitzvah. Those who were of means would bring the fruits in baskets made of silver, while those who could not afford such costly vessels brought them in baskets of straw. The question arises: Why do we not find a parallel follow-up enactment, similar to the one mentioned above, namely, that everyone should bring the fruits in a straw basket so as not to embarrass those who did not have silver ones?

By making an enactment in the first case, but not the second, the Sages were communicating a crucial lesson. In stipulating that everyone should have a kohen read before him, two things were achieved. Firstly, this spared anyone who did not know how to read any shame while reciting this section. Secondly, it let people know that not knowing how to read Hebrew is something that is worth being ashamed about. This is the beauty of the “non-enactment” regarding the materials for the vessels. No one was spared the shame of not bringing their fruits in a silver basket, to teach us that not having silver baskets is no cause for shame.[4]

From Stones to Sefarim

וְהָיָה בַּיּוֹם אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲבְרוּ אֶת הַיַּרְדֵּן... וְהִקְמַתְּ לָהּ אֲבָנִים גְּדֹלוֹת וְשָׂדֶה אֹתָם בְּשִׂיד. וְכָתַבְתָּ עָלֵיהֶן אֵת כָּל דִּבְרֵי הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת.

It shall be on the day that you cross the Jordan... you shall set up large stones and you shall coat them with plaster. You shall inscribe on them all the words of this Torah.[5]

As our verses describe, one of the mitzvos that the Jewish people were commanded to fulfill upon entry into the Land of Israel was the writing of the Torah on a set of stones – an entity which the Abarbanel refers to as “the mezuzah of Eretz Yisrael.” The Talmud[6] records a dispute regarding the order of how this mitzvah was fulfilled. According to R’ Shimon, the stones were first coated with plaster and then the Torah was written on them, while according to R’ Yehuda it was in the reverse:

first the Torah was written on the stones and then they were coated. Now, seemingly, the order of the verses themselves confirms R' Shimon's understanding, as they first mention the coating and then the writing!

Nevertheless, the Gemara explains the basis for R' Yehuda's as coming from verse 8 which states, "וְכָתַבְתָּ עַל הָאֲבָנִים – you shall write on the stones," implying that the writing should take place directly on the stones.

Perhaps we may add that R' Yehuda's approach can be supported from within the earlier verses themselves. The Hebrew word for stone, "אבן", is a feminine noun, as can be seen clearly in verse 2, which uses the feminine adjective "גְּדֹלוֹת" to describe the large stones upon which the Torah is to be written. Likewise, the description of the writing on the stones uses the feminine form "וְכָתַבְתָּ עֲלֵיהֶן" with a nun at the end. However, when it comes to the command to coat the stones, it says, "וְשָׂרַפְתָּ אֹתָם" using the masculine mem! How can we explain this grammatical anomaly? Why would the verse use a masculine suffix for a feminine noun?

Let us suggest that the answer is based on an idea that we discussed in Parshas Shemos, whereby the Torah will sometimes blend different elements into a word in order to reflect a blended or composite quality within the entity it is describing. Here, too, the word "אבן" itself is feminine. Hence, the stones are described as "גְּדֹלוֹת" and the writing on them is described as taking place "עֲלֵיהֶן". However once the Torah has been written on them, these are no longer just stones, for they have now assumed the status of books! The Hebrew word for book, "ספר" is a masculine noun, and hence, having assumed this masculine quality, this essential transition is reflected by the subsequent coating of the stones being described using the masculine form, "וְשָׂרַפְתָּ אֹתָם". All this bears out the order of this mitzvah as understood by R' Yehuda, namely, that the writing preceded the coating.

Life, Mitzvos and the Pursuit of Happiness

תחת אשר לא עבדת את ה' אלקיך בשמחה ובטוב לבב מרב כל
Because you did not serve Hashem, your God, through joy and goodness of heart, from an abundance of everything (28:47)

These words, which appear in the middle of the curses of the Tochachah in our parsha, are the Torah's explanation as to why those curses will come upon the Jewish people.

The common approach to this pasuk is to read the words "you did not serve Hashem, you God, through joy and goodness of heart" as one phrase. In this understanding, the pasuk states although the people are in fact serving Hashem, they are not doing so out of joy; and the message is that even Divine service that is performed, but without joy, is cause for curse and calamity.[7]

However, the Meshech Chochmah takes a different approach. In his understanding, the words "you did not serve Hashem" are a self-contained phrase, and refer to the people actually abandoning Torah and mitzvos. The ensuing words, "through joy and goodness of heart, from an abundance of everything" are stated in explanation as to why they abandoned the mitzvos – their focus on attaining happiness through obtaining as much material blessing as they could diverted their attention from serving Hashem. That is cause for calamity.

In fact, the matter goes further. The full tragedy described in this pasuk is that not only is abandoning the mitzvos for the sake of pursuing happiness morally unacceptable, it is also flawed in its own terms, for it reflects an approach to attaining happiness which cannot succeed. The words "through happiness and goodness of heart from an abundance of everything" reflect the belief that happiness will come through amassing many possessions – an endeavor which then enlists all of a person's time and energy. This is a tragic error, for ultimately, happiness comes not from the quantity of things that a person owns, but from a quality that exists within the person himself – the quality of contentment. As Chazal have stated in Pirkei Avos:[8] "Who is rich? He who is happy with his portion." This, then, is the message of the pasuk: Happiness and goodness of heart do not come from having an abundance of everything. Rather, having an abundance of everything comes from happiness and goodness of heart.

Not only will absorbing this basic truth free a person from the endless and futile exercise of amassing more and more wealth, thereby allowing him to devote the time to mitzvos that they deserve, it will also lead him to greater happiness. For the highest level of happiness is when a person realizes that his needs are provided for by Hashem Himself, as the pasuk states earlier in our Parsha:[9] "וְשִׂמְחַתְּ בְּכֹל הַטּוֹב אֲשֶׁר נָתַן לְךָ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ" – And you shall rejoice in all the good that Hashem, your God, has given

You.” The words “That Hashem, your God, has given you” are not there merely for informational value. Awareness that the good one enjoys was provided by Hashem is itself the cause for joy. When a person attains this understanding, the pursuit of happiness at its truest and most profound level will actually strengthen his involvement in Torah and mitzvos, leading him away from a path of calamity – toward the highest blessing.

[1] Bikkurim 3:7. [2] See Devarim 26:5–10. [3] Ibid. Mishnah 8. [4] Heard from my father, **Rabbi Isaac Bernstein, zt”l**. [5] Devarim 27:2-3. [6] Sotah 36b. [7] See e.g. Rambam, Hilchos Lulav 8:8. [8] 4:1. [9] 26:11.

[Rabbi Immanuel Bernstein Born and raised in London, Rabbi Immanuel Bernstein came to Israel following high school, where he studied for a number of years in Yeshivas Ateres Yisrael in Jerusalem, receiving Rabbinic ordination from Rabbi Chaim Walkin in 2001. Rabbi Bernstein is a distinguished author of both Hebrew and English books, publishing many works on Chumash, Talmud, and Tefillah (prayer). Additionally, Rabbi Bernstein offers weekly lectures that are open to the public on the weekly Torah portion, and other Talmudic topics. Rabbi Bernstein has taught Talmud in Yeshivat Ateres Yisrael, as well as lectured for a number of years at Michlala Jerusalem College for Women. He currently resides in Jerusalem with his family.]

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Gratitude Makes the World Go Round

Rav Frand By Rabbi Yissocher Frand To Dedicate an
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Parshas Ki Savo **Gratitude Makes the World Go
Round print**

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand’s Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly portion: #1304 Erasing a Tatum of the Shem Hashem – Davening for Personal Needs on Rosh Hashana.

The Alschich HaKodesh quotes the Medrash regarding the first pasuk in Chumash (Bereshis Barah Elokim...) that the world was created for the sake of three things which are called Reshis (First): Yisroel, Torah, and

Bikkurim (the mitzvah of bringing First Fruits to the Beis HaMikdash in Yerushalyim). The Alschich notes that it does not seem like hyperbole to say that the world was created for the sake of Yisroel. Nor does it seem surprising to say that the world was created for the sake of Torah. However, what is the emphasis in this statement of the Rabbis that the world was created for the Mitzvah of Bikkurim?

The Alschich answers that Bikkurim is a demonstration of Hakaras HaTov (gratitude). The world was created for the mitzvah of Bikkurim because the attribute of expressing gratitude is so fundamental to being a decent human being. Bikkurim demonstrates to us the importance of Hakaras HaTov.

The Vilna Gaon makes a very interesting comment in Sefer Yehoshua, from which we see the precision with which the Gaon learned a pasuk in Torah. We think of HaKaras HaTov as a very fundamental human attribute – if someone does not possess it, he is fundamentally flawed in his humanity. The Gaon understands the matter as more than just a human attribute—it is literally a Torah obligation!

In the beginning of Sefer Yehoshua, Rachav haZonah hid in her house the Spies that were sent by Yehoshua. When the Canaanite population came searching for them, she protected them and helped them escape capture. Rachav asked the spies to swear to her in G-d’s Name that they would repay the favor to her and her family by sparing them from death when the Jews would conquer the Land. The Gaon points out that when she talks about saving her family she requests “Chessed” (a kindness—over and above what “truth” requires). However, when she asks that her own life be spared, she asks for an “Os Emes” (a sign of “truth”) (Yehoshua 2:12).

The Gaon points out that for Rachav herself, who risked her life to save the spies, their “payback” to her is in the realm of Emes (truth). Returning a favor is not merely a “Chessed”, being nice. Remembering a debt of gratitude for a kindness done to you and paying back the favor at the appropriate time is something that a person needs to do—it is the absolute truth!

A Thought for Rosh HaShanah

Given our proximity to the upcoming Rosh Hashana, I believe it is appropriate to share a thought related to Rosh HaShanah.

In the sefer Orchos Rabbeinu, the author brings a ruling of the Chazon Ish that a person may insert into his Rosh HaShanah prayers any type of personal requests to HaKadosh Baruch Hu. At this auspicious time, a person has license to ask for whatever he needs—be it financial support, matters of health, shidduchim for family members—whatever a person needs! This is the time to pour out our hearts to the Ribono shel Olam.

This ruling is by no means obvious. We have spoken in past years in a Halachic context about whether personal requests are even permitted on Rosh HaShanah. The Vilna Gaon's opinion—based on a Zohar—is that a person is not supposed to ask for any personal needs on Rosh HaShanah. The reason for that—as the text of the Rosh HaShanah liturgy indicates—is that the time is dedicated to asking for the revelation of the Glory of G-d on the entire universe.

If the Ribono shel Olam is the Melech (King), and we are supposed to be devoted servants, there is only one thing that should be our concern—the revelation of the Glory of Heaven (Gilui Kevod Shamayim). We have been in Galus for 2,000 years, most of the world does not recognize the Ribono shel Olam, and the Shechina is in Exile, so to speak. It is a terrible situation. According to the Gaon and the Zohar, Aseres Yemei Teshuva (the Ten Days of Repentance) and Yom Kippur are the time for personal requests. However, Rosh HaShanah is the time for petitioning that G-d's Glory should be recognized throughout the world. So, what is pshat in the Chazon Ish?

The sefer Leket Rishimos by Rav Nosson Wachtfogel, zt"l, quotes the last schmooze that Rav Leib Chassman said in the Chevron Yeshiva the year before he died, on the last Rosh HaShanah of his life. Rav Leib Chassman quoted an idea in the name of the Chofetz Chaim. He gave a parable: The Czar of Russia went out to visit his kingdom. He began his grand tour in what was then the capital city – St. Petersburg. He marched through the streets of St. Petersburg and was given the honor due a monarch. The ceremonies, the pomp and the circumstance were not to be equaled.

He finished his tour of St. Petersburg and he went on to what was then the second most important city in Russia—Moscow. Moscow also put on a very impressive show. It was not as elaborate and extravagant as St. Petersburg,

but it was still very, very impressive. And so it went from province to province and from city to city, town to town, and village to village throughout the country.

The Czar was about to come into one of the smaller villages of the empire in the hinterlands of the country, far away from the capital. It was a town of peasants where they barely knew about the Czar. The people had no grasp of his stature or the aura of his dominion. Think of hillbillies—rednecks from the hills of Appalachia—who were the inhabitants of this town and were now being graced with a visit by the distinguished Head of State.

The custom here was that when a stranger came into town, they threw stones at him. They did not like strangers visiting their village. Before the arrival of the Czar, the mayor of this little village gets up and addresses the people. He tells them, “Listen, the Czar is coming. I must ask of you one thing: Please don't throw any stones! You don't need to bring out a brass band. You don't need to get dressed up in your holiday best, but just don't throw rocks!”

The mayor's request was heeded. The Czar came, he did not get much of a reception, but at least no one threw any stones at him. Tragedy was averted and his visit passed without negative consequences for this little village.

The Chofetz Chaim continued with his parable: When the Ribono shel Olam visits this world on the Day of Judgement, he first visits the Holy Patriarchs. They give Him an ample Kabalas Panim (welcome) because they know who the Ribono shel Olam is. He then goes through the generations—Moshe Rabbeinu, Yehoshua, etc. The reception down through the ages is not as elaborate as with the Avos, but it is certainly very appropriate. The Chazon Ish was in effect saying that we are like those peasants in the last stop on the Czar's grand tour of the country. We are like those subjects of the Czar who had no idea who the Czar was and what he represented.

We don't appreciate who the King of the World is. For us to go ahead and say that our main request in life is “You should rule over the whole world and over all Your creations” is not really sincere. We are not holding at that level. But we need to show the Ribono shel Olam that we believe that everything comes from Him. By directing our pleas for Parnassah and Gezunt and Hatzlacha and Shidduchim and Nachas (and the list goes on...) to Him, we are at least verbalizing our conviction that everything

comes from the Almighty. If we tell that to the Ribono shel Olam and we believe it, that itself is a form of Kavod to the Ribono shel Olam.

He knows that we don't have the proper level of Fear of His Majesty, and Awe and Reverence. Just like those poor farmers in Siberia who do not know who the Czar is or what the Czar is, we are so far removed from Giluy Shechina that we no longer have a proper understanding of the revelation of the Glory of G-d on the entire universe.

For sure, the Zohar is right and the Gaon is right. For sure, in the perfect world, we should be concerned about Hashem alone ruling over all His creations, and everyone knowing that He created them, etc., etc. But we are not holding by that. So how do we show the Ribono shel Olam that He is the King and everything comes from Him?

We do it by saying: Ribono shel Olam I NEED Your Help. I need parnassah. I need a shidduch. I know that everything comes from You. This is an expression of accepting the Yoke of Heaven — that He is in charge and from Him comes all. Therefore, because of our low stature, it is acceptable to place our needs before Him. This is the twenty-first century version of “V'Simloch Ata Levadecha al kol ma'asecha!” (May You alone reign over all your creations!)

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Baltimore, MD dhoffman@torah.org This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit <http://www.yadyechiel.org/> for further information. Rav Frand © 2022 by Torah.org. Torah.org: The Judaism Site Project Genesis, Inc. 2833 Smith Ave., Suite 225 Baltimore, MD 21209 <http://www.torah.org/> learn@torah.org (410) 602-1350

from: The **Rabbi Sacks Legacy Trust** <info@rabbisacks.org>
subject: Covenant and Conversation COVENANT & CONVERSATION Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks zt"l
The Pursuit of Joy KI TAVO **Rabbi Jonathan Sacks**
Happiness, said Aristotle, is the ultimate good at which all humans aim.[1] But in Judaism it is not necessarily so. Happiness is a high value. Ashrei, the closest Hebrew word to

happiness, is the first word of the book of Psalms. We say the prayer known as Ashrei three times each day. We can surely endorse the phrase in the American Declaration of Independence that among the inalienable rights of humankind are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. But Ashrei is not the central value of the Hebrew Bible. Occurring almost ten times as frequently is the word simcha, joy. It is one of the fundamental themes of Deuteronomy as a book. The root s-m-ch appears only once in each of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, but no fewer than twelve times in Deuteronomy. It lies at the heart of the Mosaic vision of life in the Land of Israel. That is where we serve God with joy.

Joy plays a key role in two contexts in this week's parsha. One has to do with the bringing of first-fruits to the Temple in Jerusalem. After describing the ceremony that took place, the Torah concludes as follows:

“Then you will rejoice in all the good things that the Lord your God has given you and your family, along with the Levites and the stranger in your midst.”

Deut. 26:11 The other context is quite different and astonishing. It occurs in the context of the curses. There are two passages of curses in the Torah, one in Leviticus 26, the other here in Deuteronomy 28. The differences are notable. The curses in Leviticus end on a note of hope. Those in Deuteronomy end in bleak despair. The Leviticus curses speak of a total abandonment of Judaism by the people. The people walk bekeri with God, variously translated as “with hostility,” “rebelliously,” or “contemptuously.” But the curses in Deuteronomy are provoked simply “because you did not serve the Lord your God with joy and gladness of heart out of the abundance of all things.” (Deut. 28:47)

Now, joylessness may not be the best way to live, but it is surely not even a sin, let alone one that warrants a litany of curses. What does the Torah mean when it attributes national disaster to a lack of joy? Why does joy seem to matter in Judaism more than happiness? To answer these questions we must first understand the difference between happiness and joy. This is how the first Psalm describes the happy life:

Happy is the man who has not walked in the counsel of the wicked, nor stood in the way of sinners, nor sat where scoffers sit. But his desire is in the Torah of the Lord; on his Torah he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree planted by streams of water, bearing its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither; and in all that he does he prospers.

Ps. 1:1-3 This is a serene and blessed life, granted to one who lives in accordance with the Torah. Like a tree, such a life has roots. It is not blown this way and that by every passing wind or whim. Such people bear fruit, stay firm, survive, and thrive. Yet for all that, happiness is the state of mind of an individual.

Simcha, joy, in the Torah is never about individuals. It is always about something we share. A newly married man does not serve in the army for a year, says the Torah, so that he can stay at home “and bring joy to the wife he has married.” (Deut. 24:5) You shall bring all your offerings to the central sanctuary, says Moses, so that “there, in the presence of the Lord your God, you and your families shall eat and rejoice in all you have put your hand to, because the Lord your God has blessed you.” (Deut. 12:7) The festivals as described in Deuteronomy are days of joy, precisely because they are occasions of collective celebration: “you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, the Levites in your towns, and the strangers, the fatherless and the widows living among you.” (Deut. 16:11) Simcha is joy shared. It is not something we experience in solitude.

Happiness is an attitude to life as a whole, while joy lives in the moment. As J. D. Salinger once said: “Happiness is a solid, joy is a liquid.” Happiness is something you pursue. But joy is not. It discovers you. It has to do with a sense of connection to other people or to God. It comes from a different realm than happiness. It is a social emotion. It is the exhilaration we feel when we merge with others. It is the redemption of solitude. Paradoxically, the biblical book most focused on joy is precisely the one often thought of as the unhappiest of all, Kohelet, Ecclesiastes. Kohelet is notoriously the man who had everything, yet describes it all as hevel, a word he uses almost forty times in the space of the book, and variously translated as “meaningless,” “pointless,” “futile,” “empty,” or as the King James Bible famously rendered it, “vanity.” In fact, though, Kohelet uses the word simcha seventeen times, that is, more than the whole of the Mosaic books together. After every one of his meditations on the pointlessness of life, Kohelet ends with an exhortation to joy:

I know that there is nothing better for people than to rejoice and do good while they live.

Kohelet 3:12 So I saw that there is nothing better for a person than to rejoice in his work, because that is his lot. Kohelet 3:22 So I commend rejoicing in life, because there is nothing better for a person under the sun than to eat and drink and rejoice. Kohelet 8:15 However many years anyone may live, let him rejoice in them all. Kohelet 11:8 I posit in the Koren Succot Machzor that Kohelet can only be understood if we realise that hevel does not mean “pointless,” “empty,” or “futile”. It means “a shallow breath”. Kohelet is a meditation on mortality. However long we live, we know we will one day die. Our lives are a mere microsecond in the history of the universe. The cosmos lasts forever while we living, breathing mortals are a mere fleeting breath.

Kohelet is obsessed by this because it threatens to rob life of any certainty. We will never live to see the long-term results of our endeavours. Moses did not lead the people into the Promised Land. His sons did not follow him to greatness. Even he, the greatest of Prophets, could not foresee that he would be remembered for all time as the greatest leader the Jewish people ever had. Lehavdil, Van Gogh sold only one painting in his lifetime. He could not have known that he would eventually be hailed as one of the greatest painters of modern times. We do not know what our heirs will do with what we leave them. We cannot know how, or if, we will be remembered. How then are we to find meaning in life?

Kohelet eventually finds it not in happiness but in joy – because joy lives not in thoughts of tomorrow, but in the grateful acceptance and celebration of today. We are here; we are alive; we are among others who share our sense of jubilation. We are living in God’s land, enjoying His blessings, eating the produce of His earth, watered by His rain, brought to fruition under His sun, breathing the air He breathed into us, living the life He renews in us each day. And yes, we do not know what tomorrow may bring; and yes, we are surrounded by enemies; and yes, it was never the safe or easy option to be a Jew. But when we focus on the moment, allowing ourselves to dance, sing, and give thanks, when we do things for their own sake not for any other reward, when we let go of our separateness and become a voice in the holy city’s choir, then there is joy.

Kierkegaard once wrote: “It takes moral courage to grieve; it takes religious courage to rejoice.”[2] It is one of the most poignant facts about Judaism and the Jewish people that our history has been shot through with tragedy, yet Jews never lost the capacity to rejoice, to celebrate in the heart of darkness, to sing the Lord’s song even in a strange land.

There are Eastern faiths that promise peace of mind if we can train ourselves into habits of acceptance. Epicurus taught his disciples to avoid risks like marriage or a career in public life. Neither of these approaches is to be negated, yet Judaism is not a religion of acceptance, nor have Jews tended to seek the risk-free life. We can survive the failures and defeats if we never lose the capacity for joy. Every Succot we leave the security and comfort of our houses and live in a shack exposed to the wind, the cold, and the rain. Yet we call it zeman simchatenu, our season of joy. That is no small part of what it is to be a Jew. Hence Moses’ insistence that the capacity for joy is what gives the Jewish people the strength to endure. Without it, we become vulnerable to the multiple disasters set out in the curses in our parsha. Celebrating together binds us as a people: that and the gratitude and humility that come from seeing our achievements not as self-made but as the blessings of God. The

pursuit of happiness can lead, ultimately, to self-regard and indifference to the sufferings of others. It can lead to risk-averse behaviour and a failure to “dare greatly”. Not so joy. Joy connects us to others and to God. Joy is the ability to celebrate life as such, knowing that whatever tomorrow may bring, we are here today, under God’s Heaven, in the universe He made, to which He has invited us as His guests.

Toward the end of his life, having been deaf for twenty years, Beethoven composed one of the greatest pieces of music ever written, his Ninth Symphony. Intuitively he sensed that this work needed the sound of human voices. It became the West’s first choral symphony. The words he set to music were Schiller’s Ode to Joy. I think of Judaism as an ode to joy. Like Beethoven, Jews have known suffering, isolation, hardship, and rejection, yet they never lacked the religious courage to rejoice. A people that can know insecurity and still feel joy is one that can never be defeated, for its spirit can never be broken nor its hope destroyed. As individuals we may aspire to the goodness that leads to happiness, but as part of a moral and spiritual community, even in hard times we find ourselves lifted on the wings of joy.

[1] Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, Book 1. [2] Journals and Papers, vol. 2, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1967, p. 493.

from: **Rabbi YY Jacobson** <rabbiyy@theyeshiva.net> date: Sep 15, 2022, 11:26 PM subject: When G-d Wants You to Compliment Yourself - Essay by Rabbi YY Jacobson

When G-d Wants You to Compliment Yourself Before I Confess My Sins, I Must Confess My Greatness Do I Have to Tell Him?

An old German man was feeling guilty about something he had done, so he decided to go to Confession.

He said, "Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. I feel terrible because during World War II, I hid a Jew in my attic."

The priest said, "But that's not a sin! I wouldn't feel bad about that if I were you."

"But I made him agree to pay me 50 Marks for every week he stayed."

The priest said, "Well, I admit that it wasn't the noblest thing to do, charging the man to save his life, but you did save his life, after all, and that is a good thing. Don't worry about it too much; G-d forgives."

The man said, "Oh thank you, Father, that eases my mind. I have only one more question to ask you: Do I have to tell him the war is over?"

Make a Confession!

I want to achieve an ambitious goal with this essay: I want to bring back confession to Judaism. People attribute confession

to Catholicism; they think it is the job of the priests. I believe it is time to bring it back to our people. I am going to ask of each of my readers that during the following day you should make at least one confession.

Now before you dismiss my plea, allow me to explain myself. Tithing Cycle

This week’s Torah portion, Ki Savo, discusses an interesting law known as “Vidui Maaser,” “the Tithing Confession.”

In the Holy Land, tithes must be taken from one's crops, according to a set three-year cycle. During each of the three years, a portion of the produce (around 2 percent) is given to the Kohanim, the priests, who had no income of their own (due to their Temple service). This is known as terumah. Another portion of the produce (around 10 percent) was given to the Levites, who also had no income of their own, as they also served in the Temple and served as teachers. This was known as maasar reshon, the first tithing. There were other tithes that differed from year to year. Here is a quick glance:

Year 1—in addition to terumah and maser reshon, you separate a portion of the crop, known as maaser sheni. This is taken by the owner to Jerusalem and eaten there. It gave Jews an opportunity to spend time in the Holy City, contribute to its economy, and learn from its masters.

Year 2 – same as year one.

Year 3—in addition to terumah and maser reshon, a portion of the crop was separated and given to the poor, known as maaser ani (this was in addition to many other contributions made to the poor from each farm.)

Year 4 – same as years 1-2.

Year 5 – same as years 1-2, 4.

Year 6 – same as year 3.

Year 7 – This was a sabbatical year, shemita, in which no plowing or planting was permitted, and no tithes were given. That year the field was open to everybody to enjoy.

Now, on the day before Passover of year four and year seven, every owner must make sure that he has delivered all the tithes of the past three years to their proper destination—to the Priests, the Levites, and the poor. Then, on the last day of Passover of the 4th and 7th years, the farmer recites a special declaration found in this week’s portion.

Let us review the text in the Torah:

כי תכלה לעשר את-כל-מעשר תבואתך, בשנה השלישית—שנת המעשר: ונתתה ללוי, לגר ליתום ולאלמנה, ואכלו בשעריך, ושבעו. ואמרת לפני ה' אלקיך בערתי הקדש מן-הבית, וגם נתתיו ללוי ולגר ליתום ולאלמנה, ככל-מצותך, אשר צויתני: לא-עברתי ממצותיך, ולא שכחתי. לא-אכלתי באני ממנו, ולא-בערתי ממנו בטמא, ולא-נתתי ממנו, למת; שמעתי, בקול ה' אלקי--עשיתי, ככל אשר צויתני. השקיפה ממעון קדשך מן-השמים, וברך את-עמך את-ישראל, ואת האדמה, אשר נתת לנו--כאשר נשבעת לאבותינו, ארץ זבת חלב ודבש. [You shall say before G-d your Lord: I have

removed all the sacred portions from my house. I have given the appropriate portions to the Levite, to the convert, to the orphan and to the widow, following all the commandments You prescribed to us. I have not violated your commandments, and have not forgotten anything... I have listened to the voice of the Lord my G-d; I have done everything You commanded me..."

Basically, G-d wants us to verbally declare that we have done everything right. We distributed all the produce we were required to. We tell G-d bluntly that we perfectly implemented all of His commandments on this matter.

This is, no doubt, an interesting mitzvah. G-d wants us to compliment ourselves. He wants us to declare emphatically: G-d! I did it, and I did it well!

But why? He knows we did it. We know we did it. What is the point of making this official verbal declaration?

We have no other precedent for this in Judaism—to literally compliment ourselves before the Almighty!

This Is a Confession?

What is stranger is that this recitation has a name in all of Talmudic literature: Vidui Maaser, "the Tithing Confession." Yet virtually, this recitation is the furthest thing from a confession. A "vidui," a confession, in its classic sense, means that we admit our guilt and ask for forgiveness. We have in Judaism a number of confessional prayers (most of them will be recited on Yom Kippur, the day of confession and atonement), and they all share the same message: Ashamnu, bagadnu, gazalnu, debarnu dofi... "We are guilty; we have dealt treacherously; we have stolen; we spoke falsely, etc." We confess for the sins and errors that we committed in one form or another, we express remorse and we resolve to change in the future.

Yet in this case, we encounter a "confession" of a diametrically opposite nature. Imagine you approach your wife and say: My dear, I want to make a confession to you. Your wife's ears perk up to hear what you did this time. You continue:

"I want to confess to you today, that I am a wonderful, accomplished, flawless, magnificent, incredible, sensitive, kind, caring, handsome, and passionate husband and father. I have fulfilled all of my duties; I have been loyal to you with every fiber of my being; I have dutifully always fulfilled all my responsibilities; I forgot nothing, I did not transgress; I have been faithful and dutiful, committed and moral. Alas, I am the perfect man."

Well, call this guy any name you'd like, but for G-d's sake, it is not a confession!...

Yet, astoundingly, this is exactly what we do with the "tithe confession." Listen to the words: "You shall say before G-d your Lord: I have removed all the sacred portions from my house. I have given the appropriate portions to the Levite, to the

convert, to the orphan, and to the widow, following all the commandments You prescribed to us. I have not violated your commandments, and have not forgotten anything... I have listened to the voice of the Lord my G-d; I have done everything You commanded me."[2]

And Judaism calls this a confession, a "vidui"![3]

Perhaps if more Jews would know that this is "confession," we would not leave this art to the Catholics; the synagogue would have long lines every day of Jews coming to confess, telling us that they are absolutely perfect, impeccable, flawless, and faultless.

A Catholic boy and a Jewish boy were talking and the Catholic boy said, "My priest knows more than your rabbi." The Jewish boy said, "Of course he does, you tell him everything."

Poor Christians! They think confession is sharing all the negative stuff. Nonsense! Confession is saying how perfect you are. "I have fulfilled all of your commandments."

I'm Awesome

Yet it is in this very mitzvah of "tithing confession" that we encounter an incredible truth: It is important for people to verbalize, from time to time, how good they are, how beautiful they are, how powerful they are. Not in a generic, meaningless, and foolish way, and certainly not in a haughty way, but rather in a very specific, directed, and focused manner. There is always one area, one aspect of your life in which you are a success story. And you need to be able to see it and verbalize it. In this above law, the Jew specifies that as far as tithing is concerned, he has done a magnificent job.

And this is called "confession." Do you know why? See how the Sages, 1800 years before the development of many psychological schools of healing and therapy, taught us this potent truth: Only when I believe that I am good, I'm capable of regretting my mistakes. If I believe that I am just a dirty old rat, I can't really regret my wrongdoings, because I see them as inevitable. When I appreciate my potential for greatness, I can hold myself accountable for my errors.

Genuine confession requires not only acknowledging and confronting a mistake; it also requires a belief that you are essentially good, that you are capable of being good, and that in some areas you are exceptionally good.

If my garment is raddled with stains, and you pour some orange juice on it, it won't bother me. I may not even notice it. But if I am wearing a fresh, clean, and beautiful suit and you spill the chocolate mousse with vanilla on it, I will take note. If I consider my soul dirty and filthy, I can't even take note of my inappropriate and immoral behaviors, of my hurtful words, of my toxic thoughts; they fit right in with my distorted self. Only when I appreciate my innate dignity, majesty, and purity, can I

begin to notice and feel bad about all that which tarnishes and eclipses such a beautiful life.

Have you ever heard a couple argue in the following manner?
She: Darling, you are making a mistake again.

He: Of course! I am always wrong; you are always right. I am the dumb, stupid, bad, husband, who is always dead wrong. You are the perfect wife. You are never ever wrong.

Well, we all know that no woman is pleased with this acknowledgment. Because it is meaningless and cynical. Whenever anybody says, "I am always wrong," it means "I am never wrong; you are just impossible to please." Whenever anybody says, "you are always right," it means "you are never right."

Sincere confession means that I am sometimes right. But now I am wrong. I am not always wrong; it is now that I am wrong.

There is a verse in the Song of Songs: "I am dark and beautiful."^[4] These are the two interconnected sides necessary for all personal growth: I am dark, I may have succumbed to darkness, but I am inherently beautiful. Hence, 1) I regret what I did. I know that it did not befit me; I am so much better. I want to fix it, because this behavior compromises my inherent beauty.^[5] 2) I acknowledge that I had the power not to do it; it was not inevitable. I was capable of choosing otherwise and I regret my wrongdoing. 3) I know that I possess the power to fix it for the future. I am not a victim. ^[6]

To truly confess a mistake or a sin requires that I can sometimes tell G-d: I am good! I am great! I have done exactly what You wanted. I have not transgressed. And because I am capable of doing things correctly I can sincerely regret my actions when I fail to do so. The tithing declaration is called confession because it enables and gives meaning to all other confessions of repentance.

My Boy, You're Great

This truth is vital for education—in the home and in the classroom.

Your child comes home with a report card; in some subjects, he or she did great, in others—he performed poorly. We instinctively tend to focus on the negative, on what is missing, and try to fix it.

There is a more effective approach. Focus on your child's success and strengths. When you receive the report card and see what he is lacking in, don't say: "My dear angel, I see that you need help with this subject. How can I help you? What is bothering you? You are such a good boy, why are you failing in this area?"

Instead say this: "My dear, I see you are excelling in your reading skills, in science and math. I see you got an A-plus for cleanliness and organization. I see you scored really high on your skill for co-operation with friends and sportsmanship. It is

obvious that when you put your mind to something, you are immensely successful at it. Now how can we apply these lessons to other areas of your education?"

Your child might be lacking in a certain behavior at home. Point out to him all the things he is doing right at home. "I notice how well-mannered you are when you eat; I noticed earlier how considerate you were when your brother asked you for the juice; I noticed how sensitive you were to your baby sister. This shows how much kindness you have in your heart."

What did you accomplish? You made your child feel like a success story. You accentuated what is right with him or her, not what is wrong with them. And you did it not in a patronizing way (you are such an angel; you are a tzaddik; you are the best kid in the world—all this is a lie. Your child is not an angel, he is not a tzaddik, and he is not the best child in the world. And your child knows it is untrue!), but in a specific, genuine and real way.

You showed him what is great about his life. How good and special and capable he or she is. Now, he has a standard for himself that will 1) allow him to appreciate why his past behavior was unbecoming and inspire him to do better. 2) You will make him believe that he is truly capable of doing better.^[7]

Singing My Sins?

Here is a story:

The Baal Shem Tov once visited a town in which the people complained that their cantor behaved strangely. It seems that on Yom Kippur, he would chant the Al Chet, confession of sins, in a merry melody, rather than in a more appropriately somber tune. When questioned by the Baal Shem Tov, the cantor explained:

"Rebbe, a king has many servants who serve him. Some of them prepare the royal meals, others serve the food, while others place the royal crown on the king's head, and yet others are in charge of running the affairs of the country, etc. Each of them rejoices in his work and the privilege he has to serve and to be so close to the king.

"Now the palace also has a janitor, charged with the duty of removing the rubbish and filth from the palace. The janitor looks and deals with filth all day. He approaches it, gathers it, and removes it. Do you think that he should be depressed because he is looking at dirt all day? No! He is happy because he is also serving the king. He is removing the dirt from the king's palace, ensuring that the palace is beautiful! It is not the dirt he is focused on, it is on the King's palace and its beauty that he is occupied with."

"When a Jew sins, he amasses some dirt on his soul. When he is confessing his sins, it is not the sins, the guilt, the darkness, and the negativity, that he is focused on; it is the holiness and

beauty of his soul that he is focused on. He is removing the layers of dirt that are eclipsing the soul; he is allowing his inner light to shine in its full glory. Is that not a reason to sing and rejoice?"

The Baal Shem Tov was deeply moved by this response because it captures one of his essential ideas. While other approaches in Jewish ethics focused often on the negativity of sin and its dire consequences in this world and even more in the next world, the Baal Shem Tov and the teachings of Chassidus focus primarily on the infinite holiness of every soul and heart.

"Just as when you look at the earth you can never estimate how many treasures are hidden beneath its crust, so when you look at a Jew you can never estimate how many treasures lie beneath his or her crust," the Baal Shem Tov once said.

This was one of the most important ideas of the Baal Shem Tov (1698-1760)—whose birthday we celebrate on the 18th of Elul: (18 Elul is the birthday of the two luminaries—the Baal Shem Tov, founder of the Chasidic movement, and Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, the Alter Rebbe, founder of Chabad (1745-1812). It is also the yartzeit of the great Jewish thinker, the Maharal of Prague (in 1609), a great-great-great-grandfather of the Alter Rebbe.)

When you encounter a fellow Jew—and that includes yourself—who may have many a blemish, and committed many a sin and mistake, don't tell him how bad he is; tell him how good he is and how good he can be; how much G-d loves him and needs him, and then he automatically he will want to remove the clouds blacking his inner sunlight.

It is interesting, that till today in most Jewish communities the confession is done with a melody: "Ashamanu, Bagadnu..." "Veal kulam Eloka Selechosh..." Our confession of sins is inspired by our tithe confession.

An Exercise

So I return to my original plea: I want each of you to make a confession today. Tell someone—your rabbi, your friend, your spouse—something very positive about yourself. One positive thing about your soul and your life. Something you are proud of. Not in an arrogant way, but as a "confession." Because when you realize how good and capable you are, you might ask yourself the question, why I'm I not living up to my potential? [8]

FN [1] Deuteronomy 26:12-15 [2] Deuteronomy 26:13-14 [3] The Sforno (the Italian Rabbi, physician, and philosopher Rabbi Ovadya Sforno, 1470-1550) in his commentary on this verse explains, that the ceremony is called "vidui" because there is an implicit tragedy that hovers over the entire ritual. We testify to the fact that "I have removed the sacred portions from my house." Why is this entire house cleaning necessary? Who should really be receiving these portions? Before the Jews

made the Golden Calf, the Divine service was the duty of the firstborn in each family. As a result of the sin of the Golden Calf, the privilege went to the tribe of Levi. If we would have not sinned, then, the tithe could remain in our own home, given to the oldest of the family. Now, however, our homes cannot accept the holiness. We have to remove it from our home. This fits well with what the Sforno writes elsewhere, that if not for the Golden Calf, there would be no Holy Temple; for every home would be a Temple, an abode for the Divine presence. Now, there is a need for a spiritual epicenter in lieu of our homes. For this, we confess. The Sforno uses this concept to explain why the word used here in the subsequent prayer is "Hashkifa" [look down] which denotes a negative gaze (as in Genesis 19:28 and Exodus 14:24). Why are we invoking this term in our prayer? It is because we are confessing the sin of the Golden Calf. [4] Song of Songs 1:5. Cf. Likkutei Torah Shir Hashirim on this verse [5] For an elaboration of this point, see Sichas 18 Elul 5712 (1952). [6] For an elaboration of these last two points, see Likkutei Sichos vol. 30 Miketz. [7] Rabbi Dr. Abraham Twersky in his book of Chassidic tales relates a story about his grandfather, the Alter Rebbe, "The Rusty Penny," which expresses this same idea. [8] The idea about "vidui maaser" is based on a sermon presented by Rabbi Josef B. Soloveitchik ("Bris Avos," published in his book "Chamash Derashos.") The second half of the sermon on an address I heard from the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Shabbos Parshas Acharei 5748 (1988).

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Pruzbul Q & A from The Gerald & Karin Feldhamer OU

[by Rabbi Yaakov Luban and Rabbi Eli Gersten]

Kosher Halacha Yomis

What is a Pruzbul?

We are now in the midst of a shemita year. Shemita has a number of aspects, and one is known as shemitas kesafim, the abrogation of loans, at the conclusion of the shemita year. The Torah (Devarim 15:1-2) instructs "at the end of seven years...every creditor should release his authority over what he lent his friend." As such, loans that are not collected before this coming Rosh Hashana, may not be collected afterwards. The Gemara (Gittin 36a) relates that Hillel saw that people were reluctant to lend money as the shemita year was drawing near its conclusion, out of concern that their loan might be canceled. The Torah (Devarim 15:9) forbids withholding loans because of such considerations. To address this problem, Hillel established a special Rabbinic contract known as a Pruzbul,

which provides a legal loophole that allows a loan to be collected even after the conclusion of the shemita year. Pruzbul benefited both the wealthy and the poor. The wealthy continued to lend and did not violate the prohibition against withholding loans in a shemita year, and the poor were able to borrow needed funds.

How does Pruzbul protect the loan? The Pruzbul contract transfers the loan to a beis din (Jewish court). The abrogation of loans by shemita only applies to loans held by people and not by a beis din. At the end of the shemita year the loan remains in force, and beis din authorizes the creditor to collect the loan on their behalf.

Why was it necessary for Hillel to institute Pruzbul, if shemitas kesofim does not apply to a beis din? The Sm"̄a (CM 67:22) explains that if one actually handed the loan contract to a beis din before Rosh Hashana, a Pruzbul would be unnecessary. However, this was not always practical, and Hillel's innovation was that a Pruzbul can be executed without handing the actual loan contract to beis din.

Why is a Pruzbul only effective if the borrower owns land? The Mishnah (Shevi'is 10:6) states that one of the conditions for a Pruzbul is that the borrower must own land. Rashi and Tosafos explain that most loans are made with borrowers who own land which serves as collateral, and Pruzbul was enacted only for common loans. Even if the borrower owns a small piece of land that is less valuable than the loan, it is sufficient. If the borrower does not own land, the lender may gift him a piece of land by asking a friend to acquire it behalf of the debtor. This can be done even if the borrower is completely unaware of the gift.

Above, it was noted that a Pruzbul is only effective if the borrower owns land. What types of ownership of land qualify? Shulchan Aruch (CM 67:22-23) writes that if the borrower owns any amount of a property, is sufficient to write a Pruzbul. Even owning a potted plant with a hole on the bottom, which halachically is considered attached to the ground, is adequate. Rental of property (e.g., apartment) or borrowing any amount of land is also sufficient. Shulchan Aruch writes that even if one lends the debtor a place in a house to store utensils, that too is satisfactory. Furthermore, even if the borrower does not own land, but others who own property borrowed money from the debtor, a Pruzbul may be written. If one suspects that none of the above applies to the borrower, the lender may lend the borrower a tiny corner of his yard for the day in order to write the Pruzbul.

In some Pruzbul contracts, a clause is added to the effect that the creditor lends the debtor a small parcel of land. In practice, it is very rare that a borrower does not own, lease, or have permission to use land (CF. Pischai Teshuva, Choshen Mishpat

67:4). Perhaps for that reason, the issue of land ownership is generally not addressed in a Pruzbul contract.

Who is qualified to serve on a beis din to sign a Pruzbul?

Since a Pruzbul is a transfer of the loan to a beis din, the beis din must be identified in the Pruzbul contract. The Rishonim (poskim from the 11th to 15th century) debate what type of beis din is qualified for the purpose of Pruzbul. The Rambam and others maintain that it must be a beis din choshuv (distinguished), while the Ramban, Rashba and Rosh maintain that any group of three people who are familiar with the halochos of Pruzbul can serve on a beis din for Pruzbul. Rav Yosef Cairo rules in the Shulchan Aruch (CM 67:18) like the Rambam, and he writes that a Pruzbul can only be executed by a beis din of prominent talmidai chachomim who are proficient in Jewish law and were appointed to serve as judges of the city. Sefardim follow this position. The Rema follows the lenient opinion that any group of three people who are knowledgeable can serve as a beis din. The Sm"̄a (57:36) explains that Shulchan Aruch requires a prominent beis din because a Pruzbul is based on the concept of "hefker beis din hefker" (a beis din has the authority to declare property ownerless), which can only be done by a prominent beis din. However, the Rema is lenient, since the concept of Pruzbul is Rabbinic, and therefore the Rabbis allowed any beis din. Jews of Ashkenazic descent generally follow the Rema's leniency, although some people choose to be stringent and follow the Shulchan Aruch. Minchas Yitzchok (10:140) writes that according to the Rema there is basis to allow judges who are related to each other or the lender, to serve on the beis din, though they would be disqualified to adjudicate a standard din Torah. Nonetheless, lichatchila, the judges should not be related to the lender, the borrower or to each other.

Must the lender execute the Pruzbul in the presence of a beis din?

This is a matter of dispute. According to the Mordechai, the lender need not appear before the beis din. For example, if the lender is in Rome and the loan contracts are in NY, he may execute a Pruzbul that transfers the loan to a beis din in Jerusalem. The Pruzbul must state the location of the beis din and should be signed by two witnesses. The Ran and Rashba disagree and require that the creditor appear before the beis din. Both the Shulchan Aruch (CM 67:21) and the Rema (ibid. 20) concur with the Mordechai that one need not appear before the beis din, and that is common practice.

As noted above, Sefardim require a beis din choshuv for Pruzbul, while the Ashkenazim do not. What would happen if an Ashkenazic Jew lent money to a Sefardic Jew. Following Ashkenazic tradition, the Pruzbul was signed by three neighbors (not a prominent beis din). The Sefardic Jew claims

that he is not bound by this Pruzbul? Does the Sefardic Jew have a valid claim?

This question is discussed in Beis Aharon V'Yisreol (vol. 55 pg. 93) who rules that the Sefardi is required to repay the loan. Since it was known that Ashkenazim rely on this type of Pruzbul, it is as though the loan was made on condition that the Pruzbul would be accepted. If the Sefardi will not accept the Pruzbul, the loan will be invalid, and the money would have to be returned in any event. Furthermore, the creditor may make a "tenai" (stipulation) at the time of the loan, "I am lending the money on condition that shemita will not cancel the loan". Though not explicitly stated, it can be assumed that the Ashkenazi lent the money with the understanding that shemita would not annul the loan, either because of the Pruzbul, or because of a tenai. I forgot to write a Pruzbul, but my neighbor who owes me

money insists on paying me back. Is this permitted?

Shulchan Aruch (CM 67:36) writes that the lender must tell the borrower, "the loan is canceled, and you do not owe me anything". If the borrower responds, "even so, I insist that you take the money", it is permitted to accept the money. However, the debtor may not say, "I am giving you the money as payment", but rather he must say, "the money is a gift". If the borrower will not say that the money is a gift, the lender may not accept the money. In a fascinating departure from the position followed by most Poskim, Rav Moshe Feinstein, zt"l (Igros Moshe, Choshen Mishpat 2:15) writes that if the creditor forgot to write a Pruzbul, he may demand payment from the debtor. His psak is based on a major debate between the poskim whether shemitas kesafim (the abrogation of loans) applies in our times. Rabbeinu Asher (1250-1327) writes that when he fled from Germany to Spain, he was amazed to discover that loans were collected after shemita, even if a Pruzbul was not written. Though Rabbeinu Asher strongly objected to this position, he nonetheless did not attempt to change the custom in Spain. Later poskim such as the Terumas Hadeshen and the Maharil justified the position of the Spanish poskim. The Remah makes note of this debate, and Rav Moshe contends that the primary minhag in Europe was to not require a Pruzbul. Rav Moshe goes one step further and says that if the lender demands payment even though a Pruzbul was not executed, and the borrower refuses to pay because he subscribes to the more traditional opinion that shemitas kesofim is still in effect, the lender is entitled to call the borrower to a din Torah to extract the funds. If the lender cannot find a beis din that will adjudicate the case (because the botei din follow the opinion that without a Pruzbul a loan is cancelled), the creditor can take the case to a secular court, since (in Rav Moshe's opinion) the botei din are acting

improperly. Because of the complexity of this matter, rabbinic direction is recommended.

It should be noted that the halachos of shemitas kesafim only apply to loans. Shemita does not cancel wages or credit obligations, unless it was agreed upon that these charges should be rewritten as a loan. However, since there is a fine line between credit and loans, and it is very easy for wages or credits to become loans, a rabbi should be consulted. Sign up to get Halacha Yomis sent to your inbox each weekday – go to: <https://oukosher.org/halacha-yomis-email/>

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Pruzbul 5782

With the approach of Rosh Hashanah and the end of the Shmittah year, a lender should complete the Pruzbul process. This must be done to ensure that any outstanding loans are not cancelled by Shmittah and any future collections are made in a halachically permitted manner. There is a widespread practice for all individuals, even those unaware of any outstanding loans, to complete a Pruzbul. The Orthodox Union and Rabbinical Council of America, together with their affiliated beit din, the Beth Din of America, have prepared the following Pruzbul form, which we are pleased to share. The Pruzbul process can be completed by following the instructions at the top of the Pruzbul form or under the guidance of your local rabbi. Please view this Pruzbul Q & A guide from the Gerald & Karin Feldhamer OU Kosher Halacha Yomis. To get Halacha Yomis emails sent to your inbox each weekday, click here.

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<https://ouintranet.org/newsletters/files/Pruzbul-5782.pdf>

Instructions for Pruzbul Forms

At the end of the seventh year of the Sh'mitah cycle (in the current cycle, prior to Rosh Hashana 5783, which will occur at sundown on September 25, 2022), all loans are automatically nullified. One who wishes to collect loans after the Sh'mitah year must make a Pruzbul before the time that the loans are nullified. Typically, this is done during the month of Elul.

1. Attached are two alternative Pruzbul forms in both Hebrew and English.

Form A: The lender asks three individuals to sit as judges on a beit din. (The individuals must be Torah observant men who are not related to one another, to the lender or to the borrower.) The lender declares before them: "I submit to you judges in this place all of the loans that I have outstanding, and I therefore may collect these loans at any time that I desire." The lender then fills in the Pruzbul form

attached as evidence of the Pruzbul, the form is signed, and the lender retains the form.

Form B: The lender asks two individuals to serve as witnesses. (The individuals must be Torah observant men who are not related to one another, to the lender or to the borrower.) The lender declares before them: "You are my witnesses that I am submitting all of the loans that I have outstanding to the Beth Din of America in New York, comprised of Rabbi Mordechai Willig, Rabbi Yona Reiss and Rabbi Shlomo Weissmann, and I therefore may collect these loans at any time that I desire." The lender then fills in the Pruzbul form attached as evidence of the Pruzbul. The form should then be sent to the Beth Din of America to be held in its records, either by mailing it to Beth Din of America, 305 Seventh Avenue, 12th Floor, New York, New York 10001 or e-mailing it to info@bethdin.org.

2. In addition to promissory notes, credit agreements and wage agreements that have been converted to loan agreements are subject to cancellation at the end of the Sh'mitah cycle. The guidelines regarding rental agreements that have been converted to loan agreements are complex, so it is best to make a Pruzbul in such cases.

3. One may make one Pruzbul for all past due loans. Therefore, the name of the borrower is omitted from the Pruzbul forms.

4. The borrower must have ownership of some amount of land on which the Pruzbul can attach a lien, even a small amount of land. If a lender who owns land suspects that the borrower has no land, the lender may "sell" land to the borrower. This is accomplished by one of the judges (or witnesses) handing a handkerchief to the lender by which all of the borrowers acquire a small amount of land from the lender.

5. The date that the Pruzbul is written must be recorded. The Pruzbul is effective for all loans made before that date. If one makes a loan after the date of the Pruzbul, a new Pruzbul must be written for that loan. A lender who suspects that he will not find suitable judges for a new Pruzbul should lend the money and stipulate that he cannot collect the money until the Third of Tishrei, which is after the completion of the seventh year.

6. Both men and women are obligated to perform a Pruzbul. A married woman only needs to perform a Pruzbul if she has made loans with her separate assets.

7. If one writes a Pruzbul and it gets lost, it is not necessary to write a new Pruzbul to replace the lost one

שטר פרוזבול בפני דינים

בפנינו תלתיא בי דינא כחדא הוינא בא לפנינו

מוסרני אני לכם: _____ ואמר לנו

הדינים שבמקום _____, _____ ו
ואנחנו בית דין. שכל חוב שיש לי בין בשטר ובין בעל פה שאגבנו כל זמן שארצה
שמענו דבריו ופינו כחו דלא תשמט לי ויגבה כל חובותי על ידי פרוזבול זה כתקנת
ובאנו על החתום היום _____ תשפ"ב פה ב. הלל וחז"ל
נאום: _____ דיין.
נאום: _____ דיין נאום:
דיין _____

שטר פרוזבול בפני עדים

בפנינו עדים החתומים מטה בא _____ ואמר לנו: היו עלי עדים
שהגני מוסר כל חוב שיש לי לדייני בית דין דאמריקא אשר בעיר נוא יארק הלא הם:

הרב מרדכי וויליג, הרב יונה ריס, והרב שלמה ווייסמאן שאגבנו כל זמן שארצה
ובאנו על החתום היום _____ תשפ"ב פה

נאום: _____
עד נאום: _____

PRUZBUL FORM BEFORE A BET DIN (ENGLISH)

In the presence of the undersigned three judges (dayanim), duly constituting a Bet Din, there appeared before us

_____ who declared before us as follows: "I hereby turn over to you judges [insert names]

_____, _____ and _____, in this place [insert place name]

_____ all of the debts owed to me, whether or not the debts are evidenced in writing, so that I may therefore collect these debts at any time that I desire." We the undersigned Bet Din heard the declaration of the above-described person and have empowered such person to avoid having his or her debts canceled by shmitta and he or she may therefore collect all of his or her debts by virtue of this Pruzbul in accordance with the special enactment of Hillel and Chazal. IN WITNESS WHEREOF, we hereby affix our signatures this _____ day of _____, 5782, here in

_____. Signed:
_____, dayan Signed:
_____, dayan Signed:
_____, dayan

PRUZBUL FORM BEFORE WITNESSES FOR SUBMISSION TO BETH DIN OF AMERICA (English)

In the presence of the undersigned two witnesses there appeared before us _____ who declared before us as follows: "Be my witnesses that I am submitting all of the debts owed to me to the Beth Din of America in New York, comprised of the following judges (dayanim): Rabbi Mordechai Willig, Rabbi Yona Reiss and Rabbi Shlomo Weissmann, so that I may therefore collect these debts at any time that I desire." IN WITNESS WHEREOF, we hereby affix our signatures this _____ day of _____, 5782, here in

_____. Signed:
_____. Signed:

from: **TorahWeb** <torahweb@torahweb.org> date: Sep 15, 2022, 9:43 PM subject: Rabbi Daniel Stein - Heads or Tails
Rabbi Daniel Stein
Heads or Tails

On Rosh Hashanah, upon consuming the head of a fish, the custom is to recite the prayer, "may we be the head and not the tail". This noble aspiration can rightfully be understood as a fulfillment of the blessing, "Hashem will make you the head, not the tail, you will always be at the top and never at the bottom, if only you obey and faithfully observe the commandments of Hashem your God that I enjoin upon you this day" (Devarim 28:13). What is the nature of this request?

Must one always be in charge in order to be satisfied? If Hashem makes everyone Rebbes who will be the Chassidim? Moreover, it is arguably preferable to be the tail as the Mishnah (Avos 4:15) advises, "be a tail unto lions, and not a head unto foxes". This philosophy is rooted in the pasuk, "he who keeps company with the wise becomes wise, but he who consorts with dullards comes to grief" (Mishlei 13:20). In other words, it is better to be an adherent of the wise rather than a leader of the crooked because people tend to be influenced by their surroundings. Indeed, Rav Matisyahu HaYitzhari, in his commentary on the Mishnah, observes that if a fly lands on the head a lion it will bend and curve its tail towards its head in order to chase away the fly, alluding to the followers of the clever who will likely be uplifted by association. Whereas the nature of the fox is to tilt its head towards its tail in order to deal with the nuisance, symbolizing the regressive effects of commanding a bunch of buffoons. Indeed, in Paradise Lost, it is Satan who declares, "better to reign in hell than serve in heaven".

But even if all are pious and good, it is still worthwhile to mingle amongst those who are more righteous and more accomplished than oneself. Working and socializing with those who possess a greater degree of sophistication and achievement than ourselves inspires and engenders additional growth and development. Chazal reject the popular notion that it is better to be a big fish in a small pond rather than a small fish in a big pond. A gifted student might acquire greater self-confidence in an ordinary class, but he will only be pushed to maximize his potential in an environment where he is challenged by his peers. Certainly, in the religious sphere, this is true as well. An accomplished scholar is referred to as a talmid chacham - a wise student, precisely because he needs to be the perpetual student who appreciates the value of role models and possesses the humility to learn from others.

For this reason, Rav Tzadok Hakohen (cited in Mishneh Sachir, Rosh Hashanah) submits that the desire to "be the head and not the tail" is not related to our position within the organizational flow chart of the community, because it is always beneficial to strive and reach for higher ground rather than to gaze downward from an elevated perch. The prayer to "be the head and not the tail" is not a personal wish but a communal expression of hope regarding the individuals we have chosen to exalt and emulate. May they be leaders who are genuinely worthy of our allegiance and support and not tails masquerading as heads.

Alternatively, Rav Shimshon Pincus (Tiferes Shimshon) suggests that "to be the head and not the tail" refers to the capacity for independent thought. The head examines its path and after careful consideration and deliberation steers the body

forward, while the tail mindlessly drags behind. Both will reach the same destination in the end but in very different ways. In order to maximize and deepen our relationship with Hashem, we should seek to keep the mitzvos and learn Torah not because of charismatic speakers, the pull of social pressure, or even the inertia of yesterday, but because we consciously and genuinely concluded to do so ourselves. It is possible for a person to arrive in the heavenly court with knowledge of all of shas and still be told that he is nothing but a tail. If his primary impetus to learn is the yeshiva schedule and the surrounding atmosphere, and not his own personal initiative, then his achievements are tainted and inferior.

It is praiseworthy to be the lion's tail, to shadow tzaddikim and gedolim and learn from their every move and manner, but at the same time a person must also utilize his own head, to think for himself, and not just blindly follow others. The Mishnah (Avos 1:1) teaches that a rebbi should "stand up many disciples". Rav Soloveitchik explains that the language of the Mishnah is precise, because a good rebbi creates talmidim who are self-sufficient, who can stand on their own two feet and use their own head, not who are clones of himself. As we embark upon the new year, we must renew and deepen our commitment to the mitzvos not only by learning from the example of our role models but also by using our heads to think for ourselves, for only in this way can we develop a personal and profound relationship with Hashem.

<https://outorah.org/p/131315>

OU Torah D'rachim B'Parsha With Rabbi Mordechai Appel
Parshas Ki Savo: **Standing Up in Din**
Rabbi Mordechai Appel

עשיתי ככל אשר צויתני השקיפה ממעון קדשך מן השמים וברך את עמך ישראל כ"ו, יד-טז

I have acted according to everything that You commanded me. Gaze down from Your holy abode, from the heavens, and bless Your nation Yisroel. (26:14-15)

Upon completion of the tithing of all of the produce, in the third year of maaser, there is a special element to the mitzvah called viduy maaser. In this mitzvah we are obligated to "confess" that every aspect of the mitzvah was done properly. עשיתי ככל אשר צויתני השקיפה ממעון קדשך מן השמים - I have acted according to everything that You commanded me. Therefore, וברך את השקיפה ממעון קדשך מן השמים, and bless Your nation Yisroel. As Rashi explains, "we have done what You have decreed upon us, now You do what behooves You", by blessing Yisroel.

The Gerrer Rebbe (Beis Yisroel) wonders about this: Chazal tell us that even Avraham Avinu would not be able to stand up in judgement in front of Hashem, and yet each and every

simple Jew had no problem (and perhaps even the chutzpa) to announce "I am good! I did what was asked."

The Rebbe explained that in truth no one can make such a statement, however, part of the mitzvah was to actually say these words. Therefore, I did what You asked, i.e. I even said what You told me to say.

We find a similar idea in birchas Kohanim. At the conclusion the kohen proclaims "I did what You decreed upon me." Is this really a gezeira/decreed? But take for example a thirteen year old Kohen and tell him to give the greatest tzaddik a bracha. If not for Hashem's decree that a Kohen must give a bracha, the child would not have the chutzpa.

A simple answer can be offered here as well. The yid is not saying "I did a perfect job on everything. Of course not; no one can say that. But what he is saying is, "Hashem, I gave it my all, one hundred percent effort." And when we can say that, we are able to say, "I did what You asked."

But what is so special about this mitzvah, so much so that we are now entitled to ask Hashem to give us a bracha in return? Furthermore, we find that a Bas Kol (heavenly voice) would give a bracha, calling out that next year you should merit bringing again. This also raises the question of, "if so, a person would never die because each year brings forth the promise for the year to come."

There are a couple of answers that we will offer. The Sfas Emes suggests that the bracha is only offered in the first year because that year you brought it on your own. However, in year two you brought it as a result of the previous year's bracha. Perforce, the efforts are no longer the same in the subsequent year, thereby removing the Bas Kol in the subsequent year. This also explains why the reward of mitzvah goes to an end. When we "pay" for something in one way or another, it has much more value than something that came for free.

The Chasam Sofer so beautifully offers another answer. If we look at our possuk we realize that the request being made of Hashem for a bracha was never a personal request. השקיפה ממעון ישראל - the request is not that Hashem should bless me, but rather, all of Klal Yisroel. As a result, even if he is no longer alive the next year, year in and year out the bracha is repeated by the Bas Kol and fulfilled for Klal Yisroel. The Chasam Sofer concludes that when a yid davens for others, not only is the tefilla heard but he can even come with this as a demand from Hashem- "I did mine now You do Yours."

As we enter into the Yimei Haratzon let us keep these ideas in mind. We must ask ourselves: "I may not have accomplished

what I set out to but that doesn't matter. Did I give it my all," that is the question. Additionally, was my effort the same on day two and on day one hundred as it was on day one or was I just cruising along on auto pilot? Lastly, am I including others in my davening or is it only about me. These are some of the things that will help us to be zoche in din.

Good Shabbos, מרדכי אפּעל
[R' Mordechai Appel grew up in Miami Beach, Florida, and is a talmid of Telshe Cleveland, Mir Yerushalayim, and Beth Midrash Govohah of Lakewood. R' Mordechai has been a regular maggid shiur in the Toronto community for the last 15 years.

In דרכים בפרשה, R'Mordechai presents a weekly vort on the parsha through many of the different derachim of Klal Yisroel: One dvar Torah features a chassidische vort, another- drush or mussar, and yet another will have a motivational message relevant to our lives. The common denominator is that each vort guarantees the ability to enhance and be shared at any shabbos table.]

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from: Torah in Action /Shema Yisrael

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

Shema Yisrael Torah Network

Peninim on the Torah - Parashas Parashas Ki Savo

פרשת כי תבוא תשפ"ב

וענית ואמרת לפני ד' אלקיך

Then you shall call out and say before Hashem, your G-d. (26:5)

Bikkurim, offering the first fruits to the *Kohen*, symbolizes the Jew dedicating everything in his possession to Hashem. (Incidentally, our greatest possession is "ourselves." Thus, we should keep in mind that we should wholly dedicate to Hashem, all of "ourselves".) As part of the *Bikkurim* ritual, the one who brings the first fruits makes a declaration recording our history and salvation from such ignominious scoundrels as Lavan – who attempted to uproot the very underpinnings of our people by destroying Yaakov *Avinu* – to Pharaoh, the despot who enslaved us for over two centuries. He relates how we prayed, cried, and pleaded with Hashem to redeem us from the bondage – which He did. He recognizes that Hashem brought us to *Eretz Yisrael*, the special Land which is home to the Jewish People. Why is it necessary to make a verbal declaration? As long as the bringer of the fruits has a sense of gratitude in his mind, should it not suffice?

The *Sefer HaChinuch* explains that, by articulating his gratitude, "a man arouses his thoughts and draws out the truth

in his heart with the power of the words of his mouth.” In other words, one must express his gratitude in order for others to perceive his appreciation. By reiterating the many kindnesses that we benefit from Hashem, we develop and nurture a stronger sense of recognition that Hashem is the Source of all the good in our lives. Indeed, *Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita*, notes that he knows a number of *talmidei chachamim*, Torah scholars, who dedicate a few moments daily to verbalizing their acknowledgement of everything Hashem does for them. We must remember that, to thank Hashem, we must do so respectfully, focused on to Whom we are speaking and articulate our true, sincere feelings. We are talking to the Almighty! The least we could do is show that we mean it!

Sadly, we sense the obligation to offer gratitude when an organ in our body is in dire straits. Only then do we realize how much we have benefitted from Hashem. A man in Bnei Brak lost the use of his kidneys. He was fine until, one day, his kidneys stopped functioning. (Apparently, he had not been fine; he had just did not realized or paid attention to its slow descent.) He was compelled to sell his *dirah*, apartment, in order to pay for a kidney transplant to replace his diseased kidney. He sold the apartment which he had put years of toil, blood, sweat and tears into scraping together the funds to purchase. Clearly, the man now understood the value of his other organs. He no longer took everything for granted. The question that presents itself: Why wait until we lose an organ to thank Hashem? Why do we not wake up and acknowledge to Whom we owe everything?

A ninety-three-year-old man in Italy became ill. After he recovered and was about to leave the hospital, he was presented with a bill of 5,000 *lira* for the use of a ventilator for one day (on that day, his lungs were not working properly, and he was unable to breathe on his own.) The old man began to cry. The doctor told him not to be distressed over the bill. The hospital would work things out with him.

“I do not cry over the money I have to pay. I can pay all the money. I cry because I have been breathing G-d’s air for ninety-three years, and I have never had to pay anything for it. For using a ventilator for just one day, however, I have to pay 5,000 *lira*. I realize now how much I owe G-d. I never thanked Him for it before. This is why I cry.”

Rav Zilberstein relates the story of a righteous Jew who took it upon himself to keep a “keepsake” with him at all times to remind him of a challenge that he had encountered in the past that, *baruch Hashem*, was over. He did not want to forget it, because, in order to truly express his gratitude to Hashem, he required a reminder of times past. This man went everywhere with a plastic bottle of mineral water in his hand. He took it to *shul*, to a lecture, to a *simchah*, celebration. Wherever people

saw him, he always had his bottle of water with him. *Rav Zilberstein* asked this man why he did this “strange” thing. People do not usually walk around with a bottle of water.

The man explained, “A number of years ago, it was discovered that Israeli water had become contaminated. We were told not to drink tap water; it was unhealthy. As a result, people were compelled to purchase their drinking water in the *makolet*, grocery store, or wherever water was sold. The price of bottled water skyrocketed. Members of the community who were of little means had nothing to drink. Others spent a small fortune stockpiling water in their homes. The vendors who had earlier warehoused the water were having a field day with the inflated prices. I remember going to the store and paying 150 *shekel* for a bottle of water! *Baruch Hashem*, the problem was resolved, and prices returned to normal. During this short period, the true character of people became evident. Some merchants jumped at the opportunity to fleece their customers. It was supply and demand. They had the supply, and the customer needed the water. Others were decent and caring, knowing that making a profit from the misfortune of others was uncharacteristic of the Jewish people.

“I was able to purchase water. The nadir to which some people plummeted, however, troubled me. I asked myself, ‘Is this the price that we must pay for a bottle of water? Is a bottle of water worth debasing one’s *tzelem Elokim*, Divine Image, in which he was created? Now that water is readily available, I carry a bottle of water with me everywhere that I go, so that I never forget the kindness of Hashem. We take so much for granted until, one day, it is suddenly taken away from us.”

ובאו עליך כל הקללות האלה ... כי לא שמעת בקול ד' אלקיך לשמר מצותיו וחקתיו אשר צוך.

All these curses will come upon you ... because you will not have hearkened to the voice of Hashem, your G-d, to observe His commandments and decrees that He commanded you. (28:45)

תחת אשר לא עבדת את ד' אלקיך בשמחה

Because you did not serve Hashem, your G-d, amid joy. (28:47)

Halfway through the *Tochachah*, Rebuke, in the midst of the frightening curses, the Torah gives us two reasons for this formidable punishment: We did not listen to Hashem (i.e. did not perform His *mitzvos*); we did not serve Him with joy. Understandably, not listening, disregarding Hashem’s command, blatantly not observing His ordinances, is reason for such severe punishment. Should a Jew who serves Hashem without joy, whose observance is lackluster, be held in such contempt as to deserve these curses? Perhaps, we may suggest that the Torah is presenting only one reason: our lack of

observance. The Torah, however, immediately explains what it considers the barometer for measuring observance: joy. One who carries out *mitzvos*, but does so dispassionately, without vitality and joy, is, in effect, not listening to Hashem. Imagine your wife/mother slaves in the kitchen all day to prepare a sumptuous meal into which she put her heart and soul. You then consume this meal as if it was your “last meal” with about as much feeling as one who is about to have life-threatening surgery. Such an attitude is counterintuitive. Likewise, one who serves Hashem with an attitude that is, at best, without feeling undermines the *mitzvah*. Having said this, I cite an analogy applied by the *Melitzer Rebbe, Shlita*, to explain the significance of joy inherent in *mitzvah* performance.

A Jew who was looking for a job was fortunate to locate an opening with a successful businessman who was looking for a manager. He had a warehouse off the dock where ships ferrying all sorts of goods were making deliveries. The job of the manager was to count everything and see to it that it was put in the correct place. The manager did quite well in his new position. The owner was so impressed that he asked if the Jew would be willing to travel to distant countries to purchase the wares that the ships were delivering. The man agreed, and he was told to pack his suitcase. This ship was leaving in the morning.

On the way home, the Jew began to think to himself, “On a regular day, I work a certain amount of hours and receive a set amount per hour, an arrangement to which I am amenable. At the end of a day’s work, I return home, eat dinner and basically do whatever I please with my time. On this trip, however, I will be working all day. My time will not be my time, since I am under obligation to the owner. I am responsible for a large sum of money which he will give me for the purpose of purchasing various wares. Yet, I will be receiving the same salary as before, when I was merely a warehouse manager.”

The Jew was not happy about it, but he accepted the mission without argument. He did, however, maintain a log of everything that occurred during the trip – every storm, every near capsizing, the sleepless nights, the seasickness that he experienced. He dated every occurrence to the hour. The entire trip lasted two months, after which he returned home, exhausted and spent. The owner was very impressed with his purchases – both in quality and price – and he said, “You did well.” It was at that point that the worker read off his laundry list of the hardships that he had endured. He detailed every single occurrence, ending, “To top it all off, I am being paid as a worker who put in his eight hour day and goes home to a warm meal and a decent bed that is on solid ground, not shaking in a boat. I think I deserve better and more.”

“Indeed,” replied the owner as he quadrupled his salary. Two months later, the owner asked the worker if would consider making another trip. “Absolutely! I would be more than happy.” Now that he was being paid accordingly, he was prepared to endure the hardships once again. This time again, he kept a log of every challenge and near disaster that he had experienced. When the worker returned from his second trip, the owner met him at the dock and was impressed with the man’s joyful demeanor. “How come you are so happy this time as opposed to your negative expression and mood when you returned from your last trip?” he asked. “Simple,” the worker replied. “Last time I suffered and had no idea if I would be reimbursed for my troubles. Therefore, I was enervated and depressed by every challenge to the point of anger. This time, I knew I was being reimbursed for my troubles. Suddenly, they were no longer troubles!” End of the story.

In applying the analogy to our lives, Hashem is the Owner, *Klal Yisrael* is the hired worker, and this world is the far-off land where the fellow seeks merchandise. The merchandise? The Torah, of course. To acquire Torah, one must be willing and prepared to toil, to suffer, to overcome challenge and triumph over adversity. When the Jew realizes that he receives unimaginable reward for every word of Torah which he learns, and the reward doubles, triples and quadruples commensurate with the challenge and pain, he will be only too happy to endure the adversity in order to learn. Every word of Torah, every penny that he gives to *tzedakah*, charity, every *pasuk Tehillim*, every favor that he does for someone in need, everything adds up to incredible reward.

When one believes in the value of Torah observance and a Torah lifestyle of complete commitment to Hashem, he is filled with joy. Otherwise, one whose service to Hashem is lackluster and dispassionate demonstrates by his very attitude that the Torah way has little value to him. Why does he observe? He has to, but is not happy about it. One who does not manifest joy indicates that he lacks inner commitment.

fw from hamelaket@gmail.com from: Rabbi Chanan Morrison <chanan@ravkooktorah.org> to: rav-kook-list@googlegroups.com subject: [Rav Kook Torah] Rav Kook Torah Ki Tavo: First Fruits, Led by an Ox and a Flute Rabbi Chanan Morrison

The Mishnah in Bikurim (3:2-3) describes the impressive procession of Jewish farmers as they brought their first-fruits to Jerusalem: “How were the first-fruits brought up to Jerusalem? Farmers from surrounding towns would gather in the district capital and camp out in the main square. In the morning, the officer would call out, “Let us rise and ascend to Zion, to the House of God!” ... An ox walked in front of the procession, its

horns covered with gold and a crown of olive twigs on its head. A flute would be played before them, until they drew near to Jerusalem.” What was the significance of the ox? Why the golden horns and olive-twig crown? And why was the flute chosen for musical accompaniment?

Labor, Prosperity, and Wisdom Most nations understand the value of labor and productivity. They strive to create a social framework for honest, productive living. Progressive nations aspire to two additional goals: national wealth and wisdom. Through their prosperity, they are able to enlighten the world with their wisdom and knowledge. The ox, the classic beast of burden, represents the value that society places on productive labor. The ox walked proudly in front of the farmers who brought their first-fruits - an impressive symbol of their solid, respectable way of life. The ox’s horns were plated with gold, a sign that, while riches may be acquired in many ways, the most honorable route is through honest, productive labor. Why was the ox crowned with olive twigs? Olives and olive oil symbolize enlightenment and wisdom. The only oil used in the Temple Menorah, a symbol of light and wisdom, was refined olive oil. Thus the ox’s olive-twig crown indicates that our aspirations should not be limited to labor and wealth. The crowning goal of our efforts should be wisdom.

Why the flute? Long ago, the flute was played not only at weddings and other happy occasions, but also at funerals. Its mournful notes helped evoke emotions of loss and grief. The ox, with its gold horns and olive-twig crown, was a metaphor for productive labor, prosperity, and wisdom. Yet, these three measures of success may be used for both good and evil. Hard labor can oppress and darken the human spirit. Wealth can lead to overindulgence in physical pleasures, desensitizing the spiritual faculties of the heart. Knowledge too may be misused for destructive and evil purposes. The flute, a symbol of both joy and sorrow, signified the moral ambiguity inherent in these aspirations. Yet, if the procession is leading towards Jerusalem - “God’s word will come from Jerusalem” (Isaiah 2:3) - we are confident that these three assets will be used for elevated goals. Then the flute, which may also accompany unhappy occasions, will ring out in joy before them, “until they draw near to Jerusalem.” (Gold from the Land of Israel (now available in paperback), pp. 334-335. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. II, p. 413) Copyright © 2022 Rav Kook Torah

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Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis Dvar Torah Ki Tavo:
The Legacy of HM The Queen 14 September 2022

Our souls live forever. There is a hint to this at the commencement of Parshat Ki Tavo. There the Torah gives us the mitzvah of bikkurim – of farmers given the imperative to bring their first fruits, the choice products of their yield to the temple in Jerusalem. When was this mitzvah to be performed? The Parsha commences (Devarim 26:1), “Vehaya ki tavo el haaretz,” – “It shall come to pass when you come to the land,” “Asher Hashem Elokeicha notein lecha nachala.” – “a land within which God gives you an everlasting portion.”

The Or HaChaim HaKadosh points out that the term ‘eretz’ – usually translated as land – can also refer to paradise. Therefore he reads a very deep and profound message emerging from this. This is how the Or HaChaim HaKadosh reads it” “Vehaya ki tavo el haaretz,” “And it shall come to pass when your souls reach paradise,” “Asher Hashem Elokeicha notein lecha nachala.” – “A place within which God gives you an everlasting portion of life.” And what will be the first thing required of you when you arrive in paradise? To bring your bikkurim; to display the fruits of your labours; the positive consequences of all of your outstanding deeds on earth. Sadly at this very moment we are mourning the sad loss of our most wonderful, magnificent and beloved Queen Elizabeth II. At this very moment, having gone to her eternal rest, in Heaven she is displaying her bikkurim, the fine choice fruits of her most wonderful labours. The term ‘nachala’ does not only refer to an everlasting portion in paradise. ‘Nachala’ also means ‘inheritance’ for people on earth. It refers to the legacy that a person leaves behind. Therefore we have a responsibility, mindful of the extraordinary role model that the Queen has been for us all, showing us how important it is to be selfless, to be committed, to be dedicated in service of other people. We need to internalize those values and guarantee that everything she stood for will continue to live within us and all of our society. If we achieve that, we will guarantee ‘shetehi zichra baruch’ – that the memory of this most outstanding and extraordinary person will be for an eternal blessing. Shabbat shalom. Rabbi Mirvis is the Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom. He was formerly Chief Rabbi of Ireland.