

Weekly Internet Parsha Sheet

KI SAVO 5783

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Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

The explicit descriptions of the disasters, personal and national, that make up a large portion of this week's parsha raise certain issues. Why do Moshe and the Torah paint such a harsh and unforgiving picture of the Jewish future before the people? And if we expect people to glory in their Jewishness, is this the way to sell the product, so to speak? We all support the concept of truth in advertising but isn't this over and above the necessary requirement?

The fact that the description of much of Jewish history and its calamitous events related in this parsha is completely accurate, prophecy fulfilled to the nth degree, only compounds the difficulties mentioned above. But in truth, there is clear reason for these descriptions of the difficulties inherent in being Jewish to be made apparent.

We read in this book of Devarim that God poses the stark choices before the Jewish people – life or death, uniqueness or conformity, holiness or mendacity. Life is made up of choices and most of them are difficult. Sugar coating the consequences of life's choices hardly makes for wisdom. Worse still, it erodes any true belief or sense of commitment in the choice that actually is made.

Without the necessary commitment, the choice itself over time becomes meaningless. The Torah tells us that being a Jew requires courage, commitment, a great sense of vision and eternity, and deep self-worth. So the Torah must spell out the down side, so to speak, of the choice in being Jewish. The folk saying always was: "It is difficult to be a Jew." But, in the long run it is even more difficult and painful, eventually, for a Jew not to be a Jew in practice, thought and commitment.

According to Jewish tradition and Halacha, a potential convert to Judaism is warned by the rabbinic court of the dangers of becoming Jewish. He or she is told that Jews are a small minority, persecuted by many and reviled by others. But the potential convert also sees the vision and grandeur of Judaism, the inheritance of our father Avraham and our mother Sarah and of the sheltering wings of the God of Israel that guarantee our survival. The potential convert is then asked to choose whether he or she is willing to truly commit to the project.

Without that commitment the entire conversion process is a sham and spiritually meaningless. And the commitment is not really valid if the downside, so to speak, of being Jewish is not explained and detailed. Judaism is not for fair weather friends or soldiers on parade. The new phrase in the sporting world is that the players have to "grind it out." Well, that is what being Jewish means – to grind it out, daily, for an entire lifetime. The positive can only outweigh the negative if the negative is known. Those who look for an easy faith, a religion that demands nothing, who commit

to empty phrases but are never willing to pay the price of practice and discipline, will not pass the test of time and survival that being Jewish has always required.

Shabat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

We Are What We Remember

KI TAVO

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

We Are What We Remember

One reason religion has survived in the modern world despite four centuries of secularisation is that it answers the three questions every reflective human being will ask at some time in his or her life: Who am I? Why am I here? How then shall I live?

These cannot be answered by the four great institutions of the modern West: science, technology, the market economy and the liberal democratic state. Science tells us how but not why. Technology gives us power but cannot tell us how to use that power. The market gives us choices but does not tell us which choices to make. The liberal democratic state as a matter of principle holds back from endorsing any particular way of life. The result is that contemporary culture sets before us an almost infinite range of possibilities, but does not tell us who we are, why we are here, and how we should live.

Yet these are fundamental questions. Moses' first question to God in their first encounter at the burning bush was "Who am I?" The plain sense of the verse is that it was a rhetorical question: Who am I to undertake the extraordinary task of leading an entire people to freedom? But beneath the plain sense was a genuine question of identity. Moses had been brought up by an Egyptian princess, the daughter of Pharaoh. When he rescued Jethro's daughters from the local Midianite shepherds, they went back and told their father, "An Egyptian man delivered us." Moses looked and spoke like an Egyptian.

He then married Zipporah, one of Jethro's daughters, and spent decades as a Midianite shepherd. The chronology is not entirely clear but since he was a relatively young man when he went to Midian and was eighty years old when he started leading the Israelites, he spent most of his adult life with his Midianite father-in-law, tending his sheep. So when he asked God, "Who am I?" beneath the surface there was a real question. Am I an Egyptian, a Midianite, or a Jew?

By upbringing he was an Egyptian, by experience he was a Midianite. Yet what proved decisive was his ancestry. He was a descendant of Abraham, the child of Amram and Yocheved. When he asked God his second question, "Who

are you?” God first told him, “I will be what I will be.” But then he gave him a second answer:

Say to the Israelites, ‘The Lord, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.’ This is My name forever, the name you shall call Me from generation to generation.

Here too there is a double sense. On the surface God was telling Moses what to tell the Israelites when they asked, “Who sent you to us?” But at a deeper level the Torah is telling us about the nature of identity. The answer to the question, “Who am I?” is not simply a matter of where I was born, where I spent my childhood or my adult life or of which country I am a citizen. Nor is it answered in terms of what I do for a living, or what are my interests and passions. These things are about where I am and what I am but not who I am.

God’s answer – I am the God of your fathers – suggests some fundamental propositions. First, identity runs through genealogy. It is a matter of who my parents were, who their parents were and so on. This is not always true. There are adopted children. There are children who make a conscious break from their parents. But for most of us, identity lies in uncovering the story of our ancestors, which, in the case of Jews, given the unparalleled dislocations of Jewish life, is almost always a tale of journeys, courage, suffering or escapes from suffering, and sheer endurance.

Second, the genealogy itself tells a story. Immediately after telling Moses to tell the people he had been sent by the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, God continued:

Go, assemble the elders of Israel and say to them, ‘The Lord, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—appeared to me and said: I have watched over you and have seen what has been done to you in Egypt. And I have promised to bring you up out of your misery in Egypt into the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites—a land flowing with milk and honey.’

Ex. 3:16-17

It was not simply that God was the God of their ancestors. He was also the God who made certain promises: that He would bring them from slavery to freedom, from exile to the Promised Land. The Israelites were part of a narrative extended over time. They were part of an unfinished story, and God was about to write the next chapter.

What is more, when God told Moses that He was the God of the Israelites’ ancestors, He added, “This is My eternal name, this is how I am to be recalled [zichri] from generation to generation.” God was here saying that He is beyond time – “This is My eternal name” – but when it comes to human understanding, He lives within time, “from generation to generation.” The way He does this is through the handing on of memory: “This is how I am to be recalled.” Identity is not just a matter of who my parents were. It is also a matter of what they remembered and handed on to me. Personal identity is shaped by individual

memory. Group identity is formed by collective memory.[1]

All of this is by way of prelude to a remarkable law in today’s parsha. It tells us that first-fruits were to be taken to “the place God chooses,” i.e. Jerusalem. They were to be handed to the priest, and each was to make the following declaration:

“My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down into Egypt with a few people and lived there and became a great, powerful and populous nation. The Egyptians mistreated us and made us suffer, subjecting us to harsh labour. Then we cried out to the Lord, the God of our ancestors, and the Lord heard our voice and saw our suffering, our harsh labour and our distress. The Lord then brought us out of Egypt with a strong hand and an outstretched arm, with great fearsomeness and with signs and wonders. He brought us to this place and gave us this land flowing with milk and honey. I am now bringing the first-fruits of the soil that You, Lord, have given me.”

Deut. 26:5-10

We know this passage because, at least since Second Temple times it has been a central part of the Haggadah, the story we tell at the Seder table. But note that it was originally to be said on bringing first-fruits, which was not on Pesach. Usually it was done on Shavuot.

What makes this law remarkable is this: We would expect, when celebrating the soil and its produce, to speak of the God of nature. But this text is not about nature. It is about history. It is about a distant ancestor, a “wandering Aramean”, It is the story of our ancestors. It is a narrative explaining why I am here, and why the people to whom I belong is what it is and where it is. There was nothing remotely like this in the ancient world, and there is nothing quite like it today. As Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi said in his classic book *Zachor*,[2] Jews were the first people to see God in history, the first to see an overarching meaning in history, and the first to make memory a religious duty.

That is why Jewish identity has proven to be the most tenacious the world has ever known: the only identity ever sustained by a minority dispersed throughout the world for two thousand years, one that eventually led Jews back to the land and state of Israel, turning Hebrew, the language of the Bible, into a living speech again after a lapse of many centuries in which it was used only for poetry and prayer. We are what we remember, and the first-fruits declaration was a way of ensuring that Jews would never forget.

In the past few years, a spate of books has appeared in the United States asking whether the American story is still being told, still being taught to children, still framing a story that speaks to all its citizens, reminding successive generations of the battles that had to be fought for there to be a “new birth of freedom”, and the virtues needed for liberty to be sustained.[3] The sense of crisis in each of these works is palpable, and though the authors come from

very different positions in the political spectrum, their thesis is roughly the same: If you forget the story, you will lose your identity. There is such a thing as a national equivalent of Alzheimer's. Who we are depends on what we remember, and in the case of the contemporary West, a failure of collective memory poses a real and present danger to the future of liberty.

Jews have told the story of who we are for longer and more devotedly than any other people on the face of the earth. That is what makes Jewish identity so rich and resonant. In an age in which computer and smartphone memories have grown so fast, from kilobytes to megabytes to gigabytes, while human memories have become so foreshortened, there is an important Jewish message to humanity as a whole. You can't delegate memory to machines. You have to renew it regularly and teach it to the next generation. Winston Churchill said: "The longer you can look back, the further you can see forward." [4] Or to put it slightly differently: Those who tell the story of their past have already begun to build their children's future.

[1] The classic works on group memory and identity are Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, University of Chicago Press, 1992, and Jacques le Goff, *History and Memory*, Columbia University Press, 1992.

[2] Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory*. University of Washington Press, 1982. See also Lionel Kochan, *The Jew and His History*, London, Macmillan, 1977.

[3] Among the most important of these are Charles Murray, *Coming Apart*, Crown, 2013; Robert Putnam, *Our Kids*, Simon and Shuster, 2015; Os Guinness, *A Free People's Suicide*, IVP, 2012; Eric Metaxas, *If You Can Keep It*, Viking, 2016; and Yuval Levin, *The Fractured Republic*, Basic Books, 2016.

[4] Chris Wrigley, *Winston Churchill: a biographical companion*, Santa Barbara, 2002, xxiv.

[It's in Our Genes

By Rav Herschel Schachter

August 31, 2023

<https://jewishlink.news/its-in-our-genes/>

https://www.torahweb.org/torah/2000/parsha/rsch_kisavo.html

Editor's note: This series is reprinted with permission from "Insights & Attitudes: Torah Essays on Fundamental Halachic and Hashkafic Issues," a publication of TorahWeb.org. The book contains multiple articles, organized by parsha, by Rabbi Hershel Schachter and Rabbi Mayer Twersky.

This coming Shabbos, when we read parshas Ki Savo, we will be fulfilling a double mitzvah: (1) We will be reading the parshas hashavua, (2) We will be fulfilling the special takana made by Ezra, i.e., to read the tochacha of Ki Savo soon before Rosh Hashanah (Megillah 31b).

Acharonim point out that it would appear from the Talmud that even when the practice was to have a tri-annual cycle of Torah reading, so that Simchas Torah only occurred once every three years, and parshas Ki Savo did not fall out near Rosh Hashanah, the tochacha would still be read as a special kriah soon before Rosh Hashanah (similar to the reading of parshiyos Zachor and Parah).

In the concluding pasuk of the tochacha (Devarim 28:69), we read that the Jewish people entered into this contract with God in addition to the original agreement (appearing in parshas Bechukosai) that was proclaimed at Har Sinai. The question begs itself: Why was there a need for an additional bris? Why wasn't the first contract binding?

The answer to this question appears in the Chumash itself in the opening pesukim of parshas Nitzavim. In these pesukim, Moshe specifically indicates that this covenant entered into between Bnei Yisrael and God prior to Moshe's death involves not only the Jews currently there, but all future generations:

ולא אתכם לבדכם... כי את אשר ישנו פה עמנו עמד היום לפני ה' אלקינו ואת אשר איננו פה עמנו היום

Not with you alone ... but with whoever is here, standing with us today before Hashem, our God, and with whoever is not here with us today," (Devarim 29:13-14). This statement implies that the first covenant—which took place at Har Sinai—was only binding between God and the individuals who lived in that generation (Shavuos 39a).

In the text of the tochacha in parshas Bechukosai, the Jewish people are referred to in the plural form because that bris was made with the many individual members of Klal Yisrael. In the tochacha in Ki Savo, however, the Jewish people are referred to in the singular. This "contract" was made with Klal Yisrael, and Klal Yisrael is a single entity which includes all of the Jews who lived throughout all generations, starting from the trip of Avraham Avinu until yemos haMashiach.

The fact that all the souls were present at ma'amad Har Sinai had an effect on all of us in a supernatural way. בעבור ובעבור תהיה יראתו על פניכם — "So that the people will hear as I speak to you, and they will also believe in you forever," (Shemos 19:9), ובעבור תהיה יראתו על פניכם — "So that awe of Him shall be upon your faces, so that you shall not sin" (Shemos 20:17).

But this was not enough to make the Torah laws legally binding on all future generations. After 40 years of traveling in the desert, we finally became a nation. When the Jews crossed over the Jordan and entered Eretz Yisrael, they completed this second bris. The bris began with Moshe Rabbeinu at Arvos Moav and was completed by his successor, Yehoshua bin Nun, at Har Gerizim and Har Eival. According to the Talmudic tradition (Sanhedrin 43b), the principle of כל ישראל ערבים זה לזה — "All Jews are responsible for each other" did not begin to function until this bris was completed. That was when we became a nation.

In every generation, there are individuals who choose not to keep the mitzvos. These people want to “be themselves” and “do their own thing.” The truth of the matter is that whether we like it or not, we are all part of Klal Yisrael. Keeping the mitzvos is “the natural thing” to do. When one chooses not to keep mitzvos, he is running away from his real self.

Every day in our prayers, we mention the words of the prophet:

ואני זאת בריתי אותם ה' רוחי אשר עליך ודברי אשר שמת בי פיך
לא ימוש ומפיך ומפי זרעך ומפי זרע זרעך מעתה ועד עולם

“‘And as for Me, this is My covenant with them,’ says Hashem, ‘My spirit which is upon you and My words that I have placed in your mouth will not be withdrawn from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your offspring nor from the mouth of your offspring’s offspring,’ said Hashem, ‘from this moment and forever,’” (Yeshayahu 59:21). God has imposed His “bris” upon us. The Navi did not say, “Brisi itam—My contract with you,” but rather, “Brisi osam—i.e., My bris is hereby being imposed upon you.” You can never run away from the Torah. Even if for a generation or two people leave the Torah, ומפי זרע זרעך מעתה ועד עולם

Ultimately, the later generations will have to return. It is the natural thing to do. It will have to happen. The Rambam (Hilchos Teshuva 7:5) points out that the Torah has already promised us that, ultimately, the Jewish people will have to do teshuva. All the future generations are part of knesses Yisrael which entered into the second bris with Hashem.

Ezra’s enactment, takana, requires that we review this national commitment—as contained in the bris in Ki Savo—every year prior to Rosh Hashanah. Whether we like it or not, this is part of our genetic composition. We are all part of Klal Yisrael, carrying on in that ancient tradition from Avraham Avinu. We must act in accordance with who we really are.

Rabbi Hershel Schachter joined the faculty of Yeshiva University’s Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary in 1967, at the age of 26, the youngest Rosh Yeshiva at RIETS. Since 1971, Rabbi Schachter has been Rosh Kollel in RIETS’ Marcos and Adina Katz Kollel (Institute for Advanced Research in Rabbinics) and also holds the institution’s Nathan and Vivian Fink Distinguished Professorial Chair in Talmud. In addition to his teaching duties, Rabbi Schachter lectures, writes, and serves as a world renowned decisor of Jewish Law.]

Ira Zlotowitz <Iraz@klalgovoah.org> Thu, Aug 31, 2023 at 6:59 PM

Make sure to call your parents, in-laws, grandparents and Rebbe to wish them a good Shabbos. If you didn’t speak to your kids today, make sure to connect with them as well!

Selichos begin on Motzaei Shabbos, September 9th. Rosh Hashanah begins on Friday evening, September 15th.

Tzom Gedaliah is on Monday morning, September 18th. Yom Kippur begins on Sunday evening, September 24th. Succos begins on Friday evening, September 29th.

KI SAVO: Bikkurim • Vidui Ma’aser • Klal Yisrael declares allegiance to Hashem, and Hashem to Klal Yisrael • Instruction regarding crossing the Yarden and the inscribing of the Torah on 12 stones • The covenant of curses and blessings on Mounts Gerizim and Eival • The lengthy rebuke of Sefer Devarim • Moshe begins his final discourse to Klal Yisrael •

See Taryag Weekly for the various mitzvos. Haftarah: The haftarah of Kumi Ori (Yeshaya 60:1-22) continues the theme of nechamah, promising us that along with the final redemption comes the reassurance that there will be no more galus.

Parashas Ki Savo: 122 Pesukim • 3 Obligations • 3 Prohibitions 1) Recite the Parashas Bikkurim when bringing Bikkurim to the Beis HaMikdash. 2) At some point during the fourth and seventh years of the shemittah cycle, recite the Vidui Ma’aser, declaring that one has given terumos and ma’asros properly. 3) Do not eat ma’aser sheini as an onein. 4) Do not eat ma’aser sheini while impure and do not consume ma’aser sheini that became impure. 5) Do not use ma’aser sheini funds to purchase items other than food and drink. 6) Follow in Hashem’s ways. Mitzvah Highlight: The mitzvah of V’halachta Bidrachav, to follow in Hashem’s ways, explains the Chinuch, is to ensure that all of one’s deeds are proper and that our interactions with others are kind and merciful.

“ברוך פרי־בטן־ךָ ופרי־אדמתך־ ופרי־בהמתך־” “Blessed shall be the fruit of your womb, and the fruit of your ground, and the fruit of your animals....” (Devarim 28:4) In describing the berachos granted to one who adheres to the mitzvos, the Torah refers to children as “the fruit of your womb.” Why doesn’t the Torah use a simpler term, such as “children” or “offspring?” Furthermore, the pasuk lists this blessing along with having successful livestock and crops. Surely blessed offspring are far more precious. So why does the Torah juxtapose them? Even the most fertile of fields and hardy livestock cannot thrive on their own. The farmer must be thoroughly involved in nurturing and protecting his assets to ensure their success. Likewise, our most precious “fruit,” our children, need our continuous care to thrive. The Torah is subtly teaching us that just as it takes time and effort to be blessed with material success, our children as well require our time and our effort with Hashem’s blessing, to blossom and grow.

Please reach out to us with any thoughts or comments at: klalgovoah.org Ira Zlotowitz - Founder | iraz@gpagency.com | 917.597.2197 Ahron Dicker - Editor | adicker@klalgovoah.org | 732.581.5830 Instagram Website Forward Copyright © 2022 Klal Govoah, All rights reserved

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

By Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

RSR Head Shot Gershon Ellinson creditEfrat, Israel – “For I have come to the land which the Lord swore to our forebears to give to us.” (Deuteronomy 26:3)

When the individual Jew brings the first fruits of the Land of Israel to the Holy Temple on the Festival of Shavuot, he addresses God as if He represents the entire historic People of Israel: “My father (Jacob) was a wandering Aramean... the Egyptians afflicted us, the Lord took us out of bondage”. And indeed, it is true that each Jew must see himself as the embodiment of his history, must completely identify with the generations which preceded him and feel responsible for the succeeding generations to come.

But what of the convert to Judaism who is not a descendant of generations of past Jews? The Mishna (Bikkurim 1,4) teaches:

“These are the individuals who are responsible to bring [the first fruits], but do not declaim [the entire narrative]: the convert brings but does not declaim, since he cannot refer to “the land which the Lord swore to our forebears to give to us.” If, however, his mother was an Israelite, he does bring and declaim [since the religious status of the child follows the religious status of the mother].

And then the Mishna continues to make a similar point regarding the convert and the language of his prayers:

And when [the convert] prays [the Amida] by himself, he says, “Blessed art thou O Lord, our God and the God of the forefathers of Israel” [rather than “and the God of our forefathers”]; when [the convert] is praying in the synagogue as the cantor [representative of the congregation], he says, “and the God of your forefathers.” And if his mother was an Israelite, he says [with everyone else], “and the God of our fathers!” (Bikkurim 1:4)

Fascinatingly, however, and crucially importantly, normative Jewish law does not follow this Mishna; the convert has the same legal status as the biologically born Jew both with regard to the words of his speech accompanying his bringing of the first fruits, as well as with regards to his specific language in the Amida prayer.

The Jerusalem Talmud (ad loc.) disagrees with the Mishna in the Babylonian Talmud (which only cites the view of R. Meir), citing an alternate baraita which brings the view of R. Yehuda: “The convert himself must bring and declaim! What is the reason? Because God made Abraham the father of a multitude of nations, so that Abraham [metaphysically] becomes the father of everyone in the world who enters under the wings of the Divine Presence.” Every convert is ensouled into the family of Abraham and Sarah!

In the Jerusalem Talmud, R. Yehoshua b. Levi declares that the normative law is to be in accordance with R. Yehuda, and R. Abahu actually ruled in the case of a convert that he bring and declaim in the manner of every biologically born Israelite. Maimonides decides similarly (Mishneh Torah, Laws of First Fruits), and even penned a most poignant responsum to Ovadia the Proselyte (MeKitzei Nirdamim, 293), which includes the ruling that a convert pray to “the God of our forefathers” as well! This is clearly why every convert becomes the son/daughter of Abraham and Sarah, with the ritual immersion at the time of the conversion, signaling their “rebirth” into the Jewish family-nation. (This does not take anything away from the biological parents, who nurtured them and so deserve heartfelt gratitude and sensitive consideration.) Hence, the convert too is considered to have entered Jewish history, and even to have Abrahamic –Sarahic “blood” pulsating through his/her veins. Judaism has nothing to do with race! I would conclude this commentary with one additional point from an opposite direction: the Jew begins his declamation with the words, “My father was a wandering Aramean.” Yes, we have seen from the Mishna in Bikkurim (as well as Kiddushin 3:12) that the religious status of the child is determined by the mother, most probably because the fetus is inextricably intertwined with the mother as long as it is in the mother’s womb. Nevertheless, there is an important DNA contribution of the father which cannot be denied. This gives rise to a special halakhic category for a child who is born to a gentile mother and a Jewish father, known as “zera Yisrael,” Israelite seed.

Such a child is not considered to be a Jew and does require a process of conversion. However, most decisors throughout the generations have felt it to be incumbent upon the Jewish community to encourage conversion for such individuals and to be as lenient as possible in order to effectuate these conversions. An important and even monumental work called Zera Yisrael was published in 2012 by Rabbi Haim Amsalem (former M.K. Shas), in which he documents the relevant responsa, which suggest that “the religious court is duty-bound to convert” the individual with zera Yisrael status (Piskei Uziel, 64:4).

Indeed, in our daily prayer, after the Shema and before the Amida, we praise the Lord whose “words are alive and extant, devolving upon our fathers and upon us, upon our children and upon our future generations, and upon all the generations of the seed of Israel, Your servants...”

What is this reference to “seed of Israel”? Our children and our future generations have already been mentioned? Michael Freund, Director of Shavei Israel, pointed out to me (during an unforgettable trip to India for meetings with the Bnei Menashe) that this must be referring to those who have Jewish DNA from their paternal – but not maternal – side, Zera Yisrael! It is especially incumbent upon us to

reclaim these exiled seeds of Abraham and Sarah and restore them to their land and their Jewish ancestry!
Shabbat Shalom

Ki Tavo

by Rabbi Ben-Tzion Spitz

Remember what Not to Forget (Ki Tavo)

Woe to that nation whose literature is cut short by the intrusion of force. This is not merely interference with freedom of the press but the sealing up of a nation's heart, the excision of its memory. -Alexandr Solzhenitsyn

In the beginning of the Torah reading of Ki Tavo, Moses instructs the nation of Israel regarding the obligation of the future farmers of Israel to bring from their first fruits to the Temple and the ceremony of presenting them to the Kohen. The ceremony recalls Jewish history up to that point in a few concise verses and actually forms the base of the text for the Passover Haggadah.

The Bat Ayin on Deuteronomy 26:2 connects the obligation to bring the first fruits to the very first fruits that God caused to grow at the creation of the world. In discussing creation, he further draws on God stating that He “forms light and creates darkness” (Isaiah 45:7). The word “darkness” in Hebrew, (CHoSHeCH), has the same letters as the word “forgot,” (SHaCHaCH)

The Bat Ayin explains that when God created man, the darkness that He is referring to is man's capacity to forget. That capacity in fact is what gives human beings an aspect of free will. If we had perfect memories and always remembered to follow God's commands, if our pristine faculties of recall didn't allow us to ever veer from the right path, then we would be angels and not human beings. However, the lack of a strong memory doesn't excuse us. Just two verses earlier (Deuteronomy 25:19) in a seemingly paradoxical command, we are told we need to destroy the memory of the nation of Amalek (the nation that ambushed Israel when they exited Egypt and would prove to be a nemesis throughout the biblical account). The command to wipe out the memory of Amalek is punctuated with the phrase “don't forget,” (Lo TiSHKaCH). So, do we have to forget them? Do we have to remember to forget them? Or do we have to forget to remember them? It seems counterintuitive.

The Bat Ayin explains that the attribute of Amalek was to cause Israel to forget God. Amalek caused Israel to focus on the material, causal world and to forget the spiritual and divine world. Amalek would deny the existence and presence of God in our lives. It is that atheism that we need to remove from our minds. It is the darkness that repudiates God that we need to escape. The foundational belief in God is such a fundamental issue that we can't forget the struggle. We can't forget the existence of God. We can't

forget to deny the deniers. It is something we can't afford to forget.

May we always remember the fundamental principles that should guide our lives.

Shabbat Shalom,

Ben-Tzion

Dedication

On the anniversary of the European outlawing of the crossbow in 1146, intended to end war for all time...

<https://www.rallypoint.com/shared-links/the-crossbow-a-medieval-doomsday-device-militaryhistorynow>

Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Ki Savo

A Religion Becomes a Religion When Passed on to the Next Generation

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly portion: #1348 All You Ever Wanted to Know About Hagbah. Good Shabbos!

Among the curses of the tochacha, the pasuk says “All these curses will chase after you and will come upon you and pursue you and overtake you, until you are destroyed, because you will not have listened to the voice of Hashem your G-d, to observe His commandments and His decrees that He commanded you. They will be in you and your children as a sign and a wonder forever.” (Devorim 28:45-46)

The Maharal Diskin points out that if we were to take these pesukim at face value, it would be the worst of curses. This is not like the transient curses that the Jews experienced through the generations. Usually, there is an end to each era of persecution that we encounter. There was an end to the Spanish Inquisition. There was an end to the persecutions of Tac'h v'Ta't (“5408-5409”). There was even an end to the Holocaust. But here the pasuk seems to say that these curses will be with us and our children in perpetuity. Is this pasuk foretelling the doom of Klal Yisrael, its utter destruction? That cannot be.

The Maharal Diskin explains that we need to read the aforementioned pasuk differently. There are two parts to the pasuk. One is “All these curses will come upon you and catch up with you until you are destroyed.” At that point, there is an esnachta in the trop – in effect, marking the end of the sentence. Then the pasuk explains why the Jewish people receive this punishment: “For you will not have listened to the voice of Hashem your G-d, to observe His commandments and His decrees that He commanded you (in a way so that) they will be in you and your children as a sign and a wonder forever.”

In other words, pasuk 46 is referring to the second part of pasuk 45! The criticism of Klal Yisrael and the reason they are being cursed is that they did not keep the

commandments in a way that inspired and made an impression on their children and future generations, so that the future generations would want to likewise keep these signs and wonders forever.

The Tolner Rebbe added to this Maharal Diskin: The reason their mitzvah performance did NOT make an impression on their children is explained in pasuk 47: "Because you did not serve Hashem, your G-d, with gladness and with goodness of heart, out of an abundance of everything." The Jews were chastised for the fact that their fulfillment of mitzvos, as unfortunately is too often the case, was just going through the motions and performing the mitzvos by rote. Our children did not see an excitement and passion in our mitzvah performance. If a person wants his children to follow on the straight trodden path of Torah observance, he needs to motivate them to do so. The only way to do that is for parents to perform the mitzvos with enthusiasm and a sense of simcha (joy). Then, and only then, will their children see and appreciate the fact that this is something meaningful.

As much as we sometimes think that our children are not paying attention, they are paying attention. They see how we daven or how we learn or how we perform the mitzvos of Succos or Pesach, and it makes a difference. If it is just about great meals, then what is religion to them? What does Yiddishkeit mean to the next generation? Without simcha, performance of mitzvos may just seem like a burden to our children.

That is what these pesukim are saying: You are going to experience these curses because you have not kept the mitzvos properly. And what is the meaning of "you have not kept the mitzvos properly?" You have not kept them in a way that they would remain with you and your offspring forever! What does it mean "you have not kept them in a way that they would remain with your offspring?" "You did not serve Hashem your G-d with simcha (i.e. – joy, passion, enthusiasm)."

With this idea, we can better understand the following pesukim at the end of the parsha: "Moshe called all of Israel and said to them, 'You have seen everything that Hashem did before your eyes in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his slaves and to all his land – the great trials that your eyes beheld; those great signs and wonders. But Hashem did not give you a heart to know or eyes to see or ears to hear, until this day...'" (Devarim 29:1-3)

This is the last day or days of Moshe Rabbeinu's life. He has been with them for forty years. He has been with them through Galus Mitzraim (the Egyptian exile) and Yitziyas Mitzraim (the Egyptian Exodus) and the forty years in the desert. Moshe was now approaching his own exit from the world. He told the people: "But Hashem did not give you a heart to know or eyes to see or ears to hear, until this day." After all this time, you still did not get it until today. Finally, I see you got it!

Rashi asks "How did Moshe know that finally they now 'got it?'" Rashi answers that this was the day (the last day of his life) when Moshe Rabbeinu wrote a Sefer Torah for the Tribe of Levi and gave it to the members of that shevet (Devarim 31:9). All of Israel then came before Moshe and said to him "We too stood at Sinai and received the Torah and it was given to us." They protested the fact that Moshe only gave a copy of the Sefer Torah to Bnei Levi, as if that shevet was to monopolize the possession of Torah. The other shevatim expressed the fear that at some future date, the Leviim would claim that only they were given the Torah. They expressed their strong objection on this matter.

Rashi says that Moshe was overjoyed when he heard their reaction. Moshe thought this was a beautiful and appropriate sentiment and remarked "This day you have become a nation." (Devarim 27:9) Now I see that you finally 'got it' and this day you have become a people.

Even on the simple level, Rashi's words here are very powerful. The people complained here that they have not been given a spiritual gift that others were given and they are upset about that. "We want the Torah!" That is well and true, however, Rav Yeruchem Olshin quotes a vort from Rav Nosson Meir Wachtfogel, z"l (1910-1998; Mashgiach of the Lakewood Yeshiva) explaining that it is more than just that.

Rav Nosson Meir Wachtfogel comments "You will say to us tomorrow (machar) 'It was not given to you.'" That word – machar – is a "code word". It evokes other places in Chumash where the Torah uses the word 'machar.' Namely, "when your son will ask you tomorrow (machar)..." (Shemos 13:14; Devarim 6:20). When Rashi uses the word "machar" here, he is referring to the children. This Rashi is saying, "Listen, we know we also received the Torah. If you only want to give the Sefer Torah to Bnei Levi, that is well and fine for us now. But 'tomorrow' (machar) implying: 'our children' – that is going to be a problem. Shevet Levi will possess something to give over to their children; but we won't possess anything to give over to our children."

The rest of the shevatim were not at all concerned that Bnei Levi would deny the fact that the other Jews received the Torah as well. But they were worried about their children. They were afraid that their children would see that only Bnei Levi had Moshe Rabbeinu's Torah. The children would ask, "Hey, does that mean that only Bnei Levi received the Torah?" Their complaint to Moshe was "You have not given us something to give over to our children!" They knew that if they didn't have something to give over to their children, the religion would die. That is what they were worried about. That is why every shevet wanted their own Sefer Torah, something to pass on to the next generation to give the religion continuity from father to son to grandson, etc.

When Moshe Rabbeinu saw that they were worried about “What will be with our children?” he rejoiced: Now I see that this day you have become a nation! Today you showed me that you want Torah and Mitzvos, not only for yourselves, but also for generations to come.

Rav Yeruchem Olshin relates to this idea a very interesting comment by the Mefaresh (in place of “Rashi” there) in Tractate Nedarim (81a). Yirmiyahu the prophet tells the nation that the churban is coming. He predicts that the land will be lost and the people will ask “Why was the land lost? What was the aveira that caused the churban?” The Gemara says that HaKadosh Baruch Hu Himself responded: It was because they abandoned the Torah. Rav Yehudah says in the name of Rav that this means she’lo barchu b’Torah techila (they did not make the preliminary blessing before learning Torah). In other words, as most commentaries interpret, they may have learned Torah but they did not give it the proper respect and treat it as fulfillment of a spiritual charge.

However, the Mefaresh on Maseches Nedarim gives an alternate interpretation: Hashem’s charge and criticism against that generation was that they neglected to say the preparatory blessing before learning Torah, which includes the words “and may we and our children and the children of your nation Israel all be among those who know Your Name and learn Your Torah lishmah.” According to the Mefaresh, they learned Torah and they recited the Birkas haTorah. But they did not invoke the prayer on behalf of their children and the other children of Israel.

They learned Torah, they enjoyed Torah, and they found it intellectually stimulating. But they had no desire to give it over to their children. Because of that, the Land would be lost.

This is exactly what happened over here with the Bnei Levi and the other shevatim. Klal Yisrael said, “Fine, we can live without our own copy of the Sefer Torah. But the problem is that you (Shevet Levi) have something to give over to your children and we do not.” A religion becomes a religion when the older generation is able to give it over to their children. And that is what the aforementioned ‘curse’ is about: You didn’t keep the mitzvos in a fashion that would inspire your children to integrate those mitzvos into their own lives and the lives of their children. You did perform the mitzvos, but you performed them in a way that was devoid of passion and excitement.

Drasha

By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Parshas Ki Savo

Soul of Approval

In this week’s portion, Hashem asks us to follow in His ways and assures us that “He will confirm you as his holy

people – if you uphold His laws and go in His ways. “Then all the people of the earth will see that the name of Hashem is proclaimed over you and they will revere you” (Deuteronomy 28:4-5).

The Torah tells us that our association with Hashem’s name will improve our approval rating. Is it the fact that His blessing will make us successful and the success will bring reverence? Or is it simply stating that if one is righteous then his presence will inspire awe? Or perhaps the promise is greater. Hashem assures us that His guidance and His name, will stand behind our every action. And they will be touched with awe, reverence and immortality.

In 1923, when Rabbi Meir Shapiro was but 37 years old, he had a revolutionary idea. If all Jews were to learn the same folio of the Talmud and follow a set calendar, not only would Jews complete the Talmud after seven years, but world Jewry would have one unifying thread to bind it together. Thus the concept of the Daf Yomi (the daily Talmud page) was formulated.

Selling this idea was not easy. Many rabbinic leaders felt that a two-sided page a day was too quick a pace for complex Talmudic issues. It often took weeks to analyze even one side of a page! However, the idea was received warmly by the great sage and tzaddik, the Chafetz Chaim, who encouraged Rabbi Shapiro to present it at the first Knessiah (World Congress) of Agudath Israel held in Vienna, Austria in 1923.

The Chafetz Chaim also understood that Rabbi Shapiro perhaps would be looked upon as too young to present such a revolutionary idea. He was worried that the relatively young iluy (genius) would not be able to garnish the respect from older, more conservative Rabbis, whose support was needed for his idea to be accepted. But the Chafetz Chaim had a plan.

“I’d like you to introduce your idea at the Knessiah,” he told him. “But walk in to the hall at least one hour late. I’d like you to arrive after the session is already in full swing.” Rabbi Meir did not understand what the Chafetz Chaim had in mind, but agreed to follow his directive.

On the day of the main session, the room was packed. The Chafetz Chaim, as one of the elders of the generation and one of the most revered sages of the century, sat on the dais which faced the huge crowd. As planned, about an hour after the opening remarks, Rabbi Shapiro entered at the back of the hall.

Immediately, the Chafetz Chaim noticed him and leaped to his feet. “Rabbi Shapiro has arrived!” he exclaimed as he rose from his chair in respect. Shocked at the Chafetz Chaim’s actions, the entire dais, too, arose. In a few moments, the entire assembly stood in honor of the man whom the Chafetz Chaim so honored.

With an expression of disbelief, Rabbi Meir, his head bowed with humility and awe was led to the dais.

The Chafetz Chaim turned to him in the presence of the entire assemblage and proclaimed. "Now the Rav will address us with a novel idea." History tells us the rest of the story.

More than seventy years later, on September 28th, 1997, more than 100,000 Jews, world over, will attend the tenth siyum (completion) of the Daf Yomi. They will fill Madison Square Garden, Nassau Coliseum, and assembly halls and convention centers across the globe. Together they will not only celebrate the tenth completion of the entire Talmud by rabbi and layman alike, they will also celebrate the tremendous feat inspired by one man's idea and the almost-divine encouragement of a great sage that stood up to the challenge.

The Torah tells us this week that every idea needs a divine handler. Hashem's blessing assures that the world will appreciate that seemingly mortal ideas are actually His ideas – and they will become eternal. In addition to the blessing of wisdom, Hashem gives the blessing that wise words and advice will be heard and revered. It is not only what you know, but Who you know. And when that someone is G-d Almighty, then the blessing is assured. As the Torah tells us that "the people of the earth will see that the name of Hashem is proclaimed over you – and they shall revere you." Because when G-d's name speaks – people listen.

Dedicated by Ira and Gisele Beer in memory of Gisa & Morris Mayers

L'iloy Nishmas R' Moshe ben R' Eliezer of blessed memory

Gittel bas R' Hersch Mordechai of blessed memory

Good Shabbos!

Rabbi YY Jacobson

Essay Ki Savo

To Hold Eternity in the Palm of Your Hand

Contributing Your Verse to the Play of Life

Rabbi YY Jacobson

September 3, 2015 | 19 Elul 5775

2843 views

To Pascale Shoshana Sasson: You are a great Mother and Eishet Chayil!

From Benjamin, Maya, Leah, Joseph, Tally and David Pisarevsky

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Class Summary:

Imagine the delivery-boy brings the new fruits of the season to the synagogue, places the fruits on his shoulders and begi...

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Peanut Butter

Every day at lunch time Yankel would open his lunch sandwich and utter the same complaint. "Oh no, peanut butter again!"

One day, after seven years, his co-worker finally loses his patience. "Why don't you ask your wife to make you something different, for heaven's sake?"

"That won't help", Yankel replies, "I make the sandwiches myself."

The Green Mitzvah

One of the most "green" and organic commandments in the Torah is the mitzvah of Bikurim, the "First Fruits," in this opening of this week's portion (Ki Savo.)

If you lived in the biblical Land of Israel, and your orchard grew any of the special fruits with which the Land was blessed—grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives or dates—you were commanded by the Torah to select the first-ripened fruits, place them in a basket, bring them to the Holy Temple, and present them to the kohen, the priest, as a gift. A magnificent and exciting ceremony accompanied the performance of this annual tradition. The Mishnah in Tractate Bikkurim[1] provides a graphic depiction of what the scene looked like some twenty centuries ago:

How does one separate Bikurim? A person goes down into his field, and sees a fig that has ripened, a cluster of grapes that have ripened, a pomegranate that has matured; he ties them with a string and declares: These are Bikurim!

How does one bring up his Bikurim? All of the farmers living in surrounding villages would gather together in one village, they would sleep in the streets[2] – [essentially this was a massive outdoor festival] -- and not enter the homes. At sunrise the appointed attendant would call out, "Let us arise, and ascend to Zion, to the Lord our G-d!"

Throughout the entire voyage they would sing the verse[3], "I was joyous when they told me, 'let us go to the house of G-d.'"

Before them went the ox, its horns overlaid with gold, and with a wreath of olive leaves on its head. [You see, even the ox leading the way was part of the celebration.] The flute played before them until they came near Jerusalem (2*).

As they neared Jerusalem, they sent messengers to notify the people of Jerusalem of their arrival, and they bedecked and decorated their fruits. The rulers, prefects and treasurers of the Temple went out to welcome them. When they entered the portals of Jerusalem, they began to sing the verse[4] "our legs stood in your gates Jerusalem."

All the craftsmen in Jerusalem rose up for them and greeted them, saying, "Brothers! People of such-and-such a place! Welcome!"

They would parade in Jerusalem, with the flute playing before them, till they arrived at the Temple Mount. At the Temple mount, each of them would place his basket on his shoulder, even King Agrippa [the last Judean king before

the destruction of the Temple and the Jewish Commonwealth in 68 CE] would place his basket on his shoulder and enter in as far as the Temple Court [Azarah], and the Levites began singing...

Each farmer, with his basket of fruits on his shoulder in the Temple yard, would tell the kohen[5]: "I declare this day to the Lord, your G-d that I have come to the land which the Lord swore to our forefathers to give us."

The Kohen would then lift up the basket of fruits, and the farmer would – in a loud and festive voice – utter a moving declaration[6]:

"My father [Jacob] was a wandering Aramean, and he went down into Egypt with a few people and lived there and became a great nation, powerful and numerous.

"And the Egyptians treated us cruelly and afflicted us, and they imposed hard labor upon us. So we cried out to the Lord, G-d of our fathers, and the Lord heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. Then G-d brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror and with miraculous signs and wonders.

"And He brought us to this place, and He gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey.

"And now, behold, I have brought the first of the fruit of the ground which you, O Lord, have given to me."

Then, the kohen returned the basket to the giver. The farmer placed it near the Temple altar, prostrated himself, and left. He spent the night in Jerusalem and then returned home the next day.

What's the Gevald?

We read this description and we can sense the exhilaration and excitement that slowly grows as the farmers gather, and begin making their voyage to Jerusalem. We sense the ecstasy, the celebration, and the sense of camaraderie in the climactic arrival of the Bikurim at the Holy Temple. The rulers, the dignitaries, and even the King, all took part in the festivities. The music did not stop and the energy was electrifying. They even slept together outside. It was a momentous occasion, a scene to behold.

But was it really?

A poor farmer, a young lad or an old man, is bringing a few fruits in a modest basket to Jerusalem as a gift to the priest who, working in the Temple, does not make a living on his own and is supported by the community. It is a kind gesture and a fine deed. The farmer is not bringing his entire crop; he is donating just one or two or three fruits (maybe more, maybe less). His donation is not unusual in its generosity. His orchard may in fact produce small and impoverished-looking fruits and even the choicest of them may be a far cry from big and delicious fruits. He basically takes a few figs and clusters and brings them to Jerusalem. Things like this happen millions a times a day in the world: farmers deliver their fruits to homes, shops and markets.

What then warranted such an outstanding welcome? Why the ceremonial thrill, the momentous hype? What created

such dramatic excitement? A flute leading them all the way, and the Temple dignitaries coming out to greet them? What is even more astonishing is the fact that each of these farmers did not merely come and deliver his or her[7] gift to the kohen. No! Each of them, entered the Holy Temple, the most sacred space in the world, and made a powerful declaration which retold the story of Jewish history till that point. Imagine if once a year when the delivery boy came to bring the fruits of the new season to the local synagogue to be given to the poor (or to be used for the Kiddush or the sisterhood meeting), he would place the box of fruits on his shoulder and pronounce this following declaration with a voice filled with gusto:

"The year was 1775 when The Thirteen Colonies began a rebellion against British rule and proclaimed their independence. On July 4, 1776, the Second Continental Congress, still meeting in Philadelphia, declared the independence of 'the United States of America' in the 'Declaration of Independence.' In it our Founding Fathers wrote:

"When in the Course of human events it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness..."

"And here I am today – James Smith the Third, in this beautiful city, bringing fruits to this special man..."

A bit strange, no?

And yet this is what occurred with each and every basket of fruit being delivered to the Temple. A simple farmer is presenting a basket of fruits to a kohen, and he begins waxing eloquently about the entire story of Jewish history from our Genesis in Egypt till his farming in the Land of Israel!

I Want You!

Yet it is precisely this experience which offers a glimpse into an essential idea of Judaism. A simple farmer delivering a basket of fruits to the Kohen in Jerusalem is an embodiment of the entire narrative of Jewish history; his or her daily struggles and gifts constitute an indispensable note in the grand symphony of the Jewish people. Our global story is comprised of individual hearts, individual baskets, and individual fruits.

It is not the only the momentous, dramatic and earth-shattering experiences which deserve to be noted from a historical point of view. Rather, when a Jewish farmer works hard all year in his or her field, plowing, sowing, irrigating, supervising, and finally harvesting and reaping;

and then this farmer fills a basket of a few simple fruits to give to G-d in the Temple (presented as a gift to the Divine ambassador in the Temple, the kohen)—this, in the paradigm of Judaism, is a momentous event.

“To see the world in a grain of sand, and infinity in the palm of your hand!” William Blake said. To be able to look at a basket held in the palm of a farmer’s hand and see infinity in this very experience – this is at the essence of Judaism!

True, this basket may contain nothing more than a few simple grapes of the type they serve on airplanes (may G-d preserve us.) But these fruits are his. He grew them with his sweat and tears. And when he brings them to Jerusalem, as a gift to the Almighty, we all participate in the celebration. The farmer is called to enter the Holy Temple and make his personal offering to G-d. And when he makes his declaration, he is enjoined to do it with gusto and fervor, while everybody around – including all of the great sages and priests -- remain silent and listen. Why? Because what matters is not how much you bring, but that it comes from you. It is your heart, your passion, your soul.

“That the powerful play goes on and you may contribute a verse,” Walt Whitman wrote. What matters most is not how long or poetic the verse, but that it is YOUR verse. It contains your individual contribution; your truth, your music, your heartstrings.

What ultimately matters, the Torah is teaching us, is not what you are giving and creating in life. Rather, what truly matters is that what you are creating is truly yours. Put yourself into life. I don’t need you to bring large and fancy baskets. All I want is YOUR basket. We want your distinct voice, your own ballad, your unique heartbeat.

Boring Prayers?

Today, Bikurim are gone with the destruction of Temple. What is the closest thing we have left?

The Midrash says (2): “Moses saw that the Temple would eventually be destroyed, and Bikurim aborted, therefore he established Prayer three times a day.” Just as Bikurim are the first and freshest fruit of my harvest, prayer is the first and freshest moment of my day.

But the comparison runs far deeper. On the surface, there is nothing more routine and potentially more boring than the daily prayers. The same prayers day in and day out, the same words, the same boring congregation, the same monotonous rabbi, and the same people sleeping during the sermon.

Comes the Torah and tells us that we can view it in a very different way. Your prayers may be like the fruit basket of an impoverished farmer or like the fruit basket of the wealthy farmer. That does not matter; what matters is that it is yours. When you are real with G-d, when you speak your heart, your truth, your feelings, when you show up with your voice, then all of the angels in all of the worlds become silent to listen to your daily declaration in the Temple.

What matters most is that you speak it in your authentic voice. And then your prayers too, just like Bikurim, become a momentous opportunity.

An Angry Lion

The Baal Shem Tov, one of the most profound thinkers in the history of Jewish spirituality (1698-1740), whose birthday is celebrated on the 18th of Elul, once shared this following allegorical story.

Once upon a time, says the Baal Shem Tov, the lion grew furious with all of the other jungle animals. Since the lion is "the king of animal life," and is most powerful and dominant, his ire evoked deep fright in the hearts of the other animals.

"What should we do?" murmured all the animals at an emergency meeting. "If the lion lets out his anger, we are all done."

"No worries," came the voice of the fox, known as the wiliest of animals. "In the reservoirs of my brain are stored 300 stories, anecdotes and vignettes. When I present them to the lion, his mood will be transformed."

A wave of joy rushed through all the animals as they embarked on a march toward the lion's home in the jungle, where the fox would placate him and restore the friendly relationship between the lion and his subjects.

The Fox Forgets

During the journey through the jungle pathways, the fox suddenly turns to one of his animal friends and says, "You know, I forgot 100 of my entertaining stories."

Rumors of the fox's lapse of memory spread immediately. Many animals were overtaken by profound trepidation, but soon came the calming voice of Mr. Bear. "No worries," he said. "Two hundred vignettes of a brilliant fox are more than enough to get that arrogant lion rolling in laughter and delight.

"They will suffice to do the job," agreed Mr. Wolf. A little while later, as the extraordinarily large entourage of animals was nearing the lion, Mr. Fox suddenly turned to another colleague. "I have forgotten another 100 of my anecdotes," lamented the fox. "They simply slipped my mind."

The animals' fear became stronger, but soon enough came the reassuring voice of Mr. Deer. "No worries," he proclaimed, "One hundred fox stories will suffice to capture the imagination of our simple king."

"Yes, 100 jokes will assuage the lion," agreed Mr. Tiger. A few moments later, all of the hundreds of thousands of animals were at the lion's den. The lion rose to his full might and glory, casting a fierce gaze at all of his subjects, sending a shiver through their veins.

The Encounter

As the moment of truth arrived, all of the animals looked up with beseeching eyes to their bright representative the fox, to approach the lion and accomplish the great mission of reconciliation. At that very moment, the fox turned to

the animals and said, "I am sorry, but I forgot my last 100 stories. I have nothing left to say to the king."

The animals went into hysteria. "You are a vicious liar," cried they cried. "You deceived us. What are we to do now?"

"My job," responded the fox calmly, "was to persuade you to take the journey from your own nests to the lion's nest. I have accomplished my mission. You are here. Now, let each and every single one of you discover his own voice and rehabilitate his own personal relationship with the king."

Lacking a Personal Relationship

This story, concluded the Baal Shem Tov, illustrates a common problem in institutionalized religion. We come to synagogue on Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur, or any other time of the year, and we rely on the "foxes" -- the cantors and the rabbis—to serve as our representative to the King of Kings.

"The rabbi's sermon today was unbelievable," we often proclaim after services. "He is really awesome." Or, "That cantor? His vibrato just melted my soul."

These clergy all-too-often become the "foxes" who know how to get the job done for us.

Yet, sooner or later, we come to realize that the foxes, with all due respect, don't really have what it takes to address the king on behalf of you and me. Each of us must discover his or her own inner voice and inner passion and spirit, and speak to G-d with a distinct and unique.

Cantors and rabbis during the High Holidays (and the rest of the year) ought to view themselves as the Baal Shem Tov's foxes: Their function is to persuade and inspire people to leave their own self-contained domains and embark on a journey toward something far deeper and more real. But each and every one of us must ultimately enter the space of G-d alone.

This, then is the message we can learn from the fruit basket gifts. This year on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, don't rely on any foxes. Speak to G-d directly. With your own words, with your own soul. Heart to heart, from your truest place to His truest place.[8]

[1] Chapter 3. Quoted and explained in Rabmam laws of Bikurim chapter 4:16-17. In the following paragraphs I added a few details from the Rambam, quoting Yerushalmi Bikurim and Tosefta Bikurim ch. 2.

[2] Not to become defiled by being under the same roof with a corpse, and thus they would not be able to enter the Temple, and also the Bikurim fruits would also become contaminated (Rambam ibid. from Yerushalmi Bikurim ch. 3 and Tosefta Bikurim ch. 2). 2*) There is an amazing interpretation by the Alter Rebbe, which he once said when he went out to greet 1300 Chassidim who came to him for Rosh Hashanah or Shavuos (Reshimos; Sefer Hasichos 5696 p. 337): "Hachaliel Makeh Lefnayhem," that the "Or" in the "Makom Hachalal" was eclipsed (makeh) before them, meaning, that they reached the Or which is beyond

the Or in the Makom Hachalal. This matches perfectly with the insight in the essay about the extraordinary revolution created by the simple but real Avodah of a Jew bringing his basket to Hashem, reaching the Or beyond the tzimtzum.

[3] Psalms 122:1.

[4] Psalms iBid.

[5] Duet. 26:3.

[6] Ibid. 5-10.

[7] A woman who owned a field also brought Bikurim, but she did not utter the declaration (Rambam laws of Bikurim 4:2.)

[8] This essay is based on a talk I heard from the Lubavitcher Rebbe on Shabbos Parshas Ki Savo 5751-1991. (This was his last Ki Savo farbrengen.) I will never forget the emotion with which the Rebbe said this line during the farbrengen (from memory): "All the old Jews with long white beards – 'alte yiden mit lange veise berd' - stood around, silently, listening to the declaration of a young lad. Why? Because it was HIS personal and individual contribution to life, to Hashem." The emotion with which the Rebbe described this scene of Bikurim and the dignity it conferred upon each individual farmer was unforgettable.

Essay Ki Savo

Rabbi Yochanan Zweig

dedicated by the Goldman Family on the yahrtzeit of Mr. Jeffrey Goldman z"l

Tail Wagging the Dog?

And Hashem shall make you the head and not the tail; and you shall be above only, and you shall not be beneath [...] (28:13).

This week's parsha discusses the reward for following the Torah or God forbid the punishment for straying. One of the rewards for following the Torah is the promise that Hashem will make us into "the head and not the tail" – leaders and not followers.

Ramban (ad loc) is bothered by the seemingly unnecessary words "and not the tail." The Torah promises that we would become heads; so it would seem obvious that we would not be the tail. Why then is it necessary to explicitly exclude being the tail?

Ramban answers that often a head is also a tail. How so? A nation can be ranked very highly, making them a "head" over those nations. But if there are nations that are ranked above them, then that nation is both a head and a tail: They are a head to the nations below and a tail to the nations above. Ramban explains that this possuk promises us that if Bnei Yisroel follows the Torah, then we will be ranked at the absolute top, only a head and not a tail to any other nation in the world.

Perhaps we can utilize Ramban's insight in a slightly different application. In the case of leadership, very often people are both the head and the tail. How? There are different types of leaders; a proper leader is one who has a vision for his agenda and implements it. In other words, he sees the proper path, even if it is unpopular, and courageously directs his followers down that path. That is a true leader – the head of his constituency.

Unfortunately, most of the leaders of our generation are of the other type – both a head and a tail. This is because they don't have a vision of what should be done, they merely observe the prevailing sentiment of popular opinion and draw their agenda based on the constituency's clamoring. Obviously, when a leader does that "his" agenda always ends up following the lowest common denominator: "On what can we all agree?"

In this situation, a head is really a tail because his leadership isn't driven by him; it is driven by those who are supposed to be following his lead – the tail. This is a particularly dangerous situation as the nation's agenda and morality will always be driven by the lowest common denominator. Truth and moral values have no place in such a society. Unfortunately, this is our current global situation. Political correctness is obscuring the reality of many situations because no one will stand up and state the truth. Whether it is a religion gone rogue or an ethnicity that lays the blame of its ills at the feet of others without taking real responsibility, virtually no leader will take a stand deemed to be unpopular.

This parsha is telling us that if we follow the Torah we will be true leaders: We will have a real moral compass and a healthy vision for ourselves and the world. But this can only be accomplished if we have an agenda driven by the Torah, and not by the tail of society. When we achieve that we will become the head and not the tail.

Don't Worry, Be Happy

All these curses will come upon you and overtake you [...] because you did not serve Hashem, your God, with joy and a good heart, even though you had an abundance of everything (28:45-47).

This week's parsha contains explicit detail of both the rewards for following Hashem's word and the calamitous repercussions for going against it. The Torah commits over fifty verses to detail the depths to which we will fall and the nearly unimaginable suffering we will endure as a result of this (e.g. financial and societal ruin, horrible diseases, starvation to the point of cannibalism of one's own children – need we go into further detail?).

The Torah then makes a remarkable statement – why did all these bad things befall the Jewish people? "Because you did not serve Hashem, your God, with simcha – joy" (28:45). This is actually quite astounding. Where in the Torah are we commanded to serve Hashem with joy? What exactly is this failure – not serving with joy – that it would lead to such horrible consequences?

It is well known that Hashem created the world in order to bestow good upon mankind. But in order for man to be able to accept this good and appreciate it, Hashem enacted a system of earning it, instead of just gifting the good. Why? Because receiving good without earning it is like receiving charity; the resulting effect of the good is severely diminished.

In other words, no one likes the feeling of owing. Shlomo Hamelech says it very clearly: "A borrower is a servant to the lender" (Mishlei 22:7). The feeling of being in debt to someone is painful to the point of almost feeling that your very identity is lost. A common reaction to receiving a kindness from someone is analyzing what the benefactor has to gain by his action. This is done in order to lessen the feeling of obligation to them.

This is also why when asked how they're doing most people will respond "okay" or "could be worse." You will very seldom hear someone answer "GREAT!" or "Never better!" People respond as such because it is instinctively understood that if everything is great then we must owe someone a deep debt of gratitude and appreciation. Nobody likes the feeling of owing; therefore people will focus on what's negative instead of the overabundance of good in their lives. If one's life is miserable or subpar, then he doesn't owe anything to anyone.

The real sin of Adam Harishon was denying the good that Hashem gave him – he blamed his sin of eating from the Tree of Knowledge on the woman that Hashem gave him (Talmud Bavli – Avodah Zara 5b and Rashi ad loc). In essence, he denied the good that Hashem bestowed him, thereby undermining the whole purpose of creation.

This is why not serving Hashem from simcha is such a critical failing. In fact, the verse says this explicitly: "you had an abundance of everything" – yet you weren't happy. This describes a lack of appreciation for everything Hashem created; that the very foundation of the world – the bestowal of good – was being rejected in order to avoid a feeling of obligation to Hashem.

In comparison, it is similar to a person not appreciating his good health until he no longer has it. Therefore, the only way for Hashem to correct this issue is by going to the opposite extreme; by causing such pain that we realize our lack of appreciation for when we don't have pain, Hashem shows us how to internalize His amazing kindness. Thus, we learn that we may prevent suffering by appreciating, in the first place, all the amazing things that we have already.

Ki Tavo: How do some people justify antisemitism? Chief Rabbi Mirvis

How do some people justify antisemitism?

In Parshat Ki Tavo, we are told how in ancient times farmers would come to the Temple. They would bring their

bikkurim, their first fruits, and there they would recite a passage recalling key moments of Jewish history. In this passage the farmer would say (Devarim 26:6),

“Vayareiu otanu haMitzrim vayaanunu.” – “And the Egyptians were bad to us and they oppressed us.”

In his book Kol Omer Kra, Rabbi Yosef Chaim Karo asks a great question. He says that the words ‘vayareiu otanu haMitzrim’ cannot mean that the Egyptians were bad to us. In that case, the Torah would have said, ‘Vayareiu lanu haMitzrim.’ ‘Vayareiu otanu’ on the other hand means that the Egyptians caused us to appear to be bad.

At our Pesach Seder we read these verses and immediately afterwards we bring a verse from the book of Shemot through which we recall how Pharaoh justified the oppression of the Hebrews in his time. He said (Shemot 1:10)

“Hava nitchachma lo” – “They are clever. We need to be cleverer than them.”

“...vehaya ki tikreina milchama,” – “It will come to pass if our enemies launch a war against us,”

“...venosaf gam hu al soneinu v’nilcham banu...” – The Hebrews won’t be on our side! They don’t see themselves as being an integral part of our nation; they will “join the forces of the enemy and be against us!”

Pharaoh made this claim without any factual basis whatsoever, and the Egyptians swallowed it. Their mindsets were changed and as a result, they considered the Hebrews to be the ‘them’ as opposed to the ‘us’, and it was within their comfort zone to persecute us.

Time and again through history we have seen how aggressors have blamed the victims, with the suggestion the Jews are the cause of Antisemitism but, baruch Hashem, there is one thing that we have on our side.

The farmer in the temple would conclude his comments by saying, “Vanitzak el Hashem Elokeinu,” – “We cried to the Lord our God” “Vayishma Hashem et koleinu,” – “And Hashem heard our voices.” In the same way as Hashem saved the Jews from the Egyptians in those days, so may He always guarantee that ‘am Yisrael chai’ – despite all forms of hatred and persecution the Jewish people will live and will thrive throughout all future times.

Shabbat shalom.

Parshat Ki Tavo

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PARSHA OVERVIEW

When the Jewish People dwell in the Land of Israel, its first fruits are to be taken to the Temple and given to the kohen. This is done in a ceremony that expresses recognition that it is G-d who guides the history of the Jewish People

throughout all ages. This passage forms one of the central parts of the Pesach Haggadah that we read at the Seder.

On the last day of Pesach of the fourth and seventh years of the seven-year shemitta cycle, a person must recite a disclosure stating that he has indeed distributed the tithes to the appropriate people in the prescribed manner. With this mitzvah Moshe concludes the commandments that Hashem has told him to give to the Jewish People. Moshe exhorts them to walk in Hashem’s ways because they are set aside as a treasured people to Him.

When the Jewish People cross the Jordan River they are to make a new commitment to the Torah. Huge stones are to be erected and the Torah is to be written on them in the world’s seventy primary languages, after which they are to be covered over with a thin layer of plaster. Half the tribes are to stand on Mount Gerizim, and half on Mount Eval, and the levi’im will stand in a valley between the two mountains. The levi’im will recite twelve commandments, and all the people will answer "amen" to the blessings and the curses. Moshe then details the blessings that will be bestowed upon the Jewish People, blessings that are both physical and spiritual. However, if the Jewish People do not keep the Torah, Moshe details a chilling picture of destruction, resulting in exile and wandering among the nations.

PARSHA INSIGHTS

The Eyes Have It

“If your brother is not near you and you do not know him, then gather it (the lost object) into your house, and it shall remain with you until your brother inquires after it, and you shall return it to him.” (22:2)

In the early 19th century in Lithuania, Reb Chaim Mi Verlogon once raised a large sum of money to rescue a Jew who was being held to ransom in a neighboring city. The only way to get to this town was through a forest notorious for its bandits.

They had barely entered the forest when the bandits surrounded Reb Chaim and his talmidim. There was no escape. Reb Chaim handed all the money to the bandit chief. “You will now be put to death,” said the chief. Reb Chaim said, “Before you kill us, I ask for a final request.” “What do you want?” asked the bandit chief. “I ask for a few minutes for contemplation.” Reb Chaim sat on the ground, seemingly lost in prayer.

Finally, Reb Chaim said, “I am ready.” The bandit chief raised his axe to kill Reb Chaim. Then he looked down into Reb Chaim’s eyes, threw down the axe and the money and shouted, “Let’s get out of here.” The other bandits fled. The talmidim cried out. “A miracle!” Reb Chaim said, “That was no miracle. When I knew that I was going to die, I thought to myself, the greatest deveikut, the greatest closeness that a person can have with his soul in this world is in the moments just before the soul departs the body. I didn’t want my final moments in this world to be filled with hakpada, with resentment.

And so, I asked for time to try to judge the bandit favorably. Much as I tried, resentment overcame me, time and time again, until I thought to myself, this bandit was once an innocent young boy. He was probably poor and hungry. Probably, one day he stole an apple or a cake and someone caught him, and he got locked up with a bunch of criminals, and when he got out, he turned to a life of crime and one day he killed someone. A young, innocent boy eventually became a killer.

Then I felt I could leave the world without resentment. When he looked into my eyes, he saw that I understood him. That was probably the first time anyone looked at him like that since he was a boy. When we judge people favorably, we can actually change who they are.

“If your brother is not near you and you do not know him, then gather it into your house, and it shall remain with you until your brother inquires after it, and you shall return it to him.”

This verse can be understood homiletically as follows: “If your brother is not near you” — if he has turned his back on his faith and the faith of our forefathers to the extent that ‘you do not know him’ — do not reject him, but rather ‘then gather him into your house.’ Be close to him. ‘And he shall remain with you’ until he finds his true self, and by doing this, ‘you shall return it to him’ — you will have given him the way of return, the way of teshuva.

If we can change the way we look at other people, we can indeed change who they are. If we have children who are struggling in a system that can be very judgmental, if we can look at them and see how good they are, how special they are, who they are and who they could be, we can change the way they look at themselves.

לע"נ

שרה משא בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה
ביילא בת (אריה) לייב ע"ה
אנא מלכה בת ישראל ע"ה