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from: **Rabbi Yissocher Frand** <ryfrand@torah.org>

to: ravfrand@torah.org

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subject: Rav Frand - **Three Interpretations of "V'heeseegucha" From Three Chassidic Masters**

Parshas Ki Savo

Three Interpretations of "V'heeseegucha" From Three Chassidic Masters

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi

Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly portion:

#1436 But If We Punish Him, He May Not Remain Frum. Good Shabbos!

One of the classic ideas the meforshim (commentaries) focus on in Parshas Ki Savo are the words of the pasuk "And all these blessings will come upon you, v'heeseegucha (and will reach you) when you listen to the voice of Hashem your G-d." (Devorim 28:2). The meforshim all want to know the meaning of the word "v'heeseegucha." What does this word add to the earlier statement of the pasuk, that the bracha (blessing) will come upon you?

There are a variety of interpretations. I will not share all of them but merely go through a smattering of different meforshim:

The sefer Degel Machane Ephraim (Moshe Chaim Ephraim of Sudilkov (1748-1800), grandson of the Baal Shem Tov) explains it based on a very famous pasuk (Tehillim 23:6) from Dovid Hamelech, which we say in Mizmor l'Dovid Hashem ro'ee lo echsor: "Ach tov v'chessed yirdefooni kol yemei chayai..." (Only good and kindness will chase after me all the days of my life). The question is that kindness and goodness do not necessarily need to "chase after" someone. A person readily accepts kindness and goodness. He doesn't flee from them, such that they need to pursue him.

The explanation that is given is that many times, a person runs away from something that he does not think is good for him – but ultimately it is very good for him. We often don't know what is good for us and what is not good for us. There are certain situations in life – whether it is shiduchim, whether it is partnerships, whether it is business deals, whatever it may be – when we don't think something is good for us. As a result, we run away. This is what Dovid Hamelech is asking: If I am not wise enough to understand that something is good for me, let it chase after me.

A famous story is told about Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev. He once saw a person running down the street and asked him "Where are you running?" The person answered "I am running to make parnassa (a livelihood)." Reb Levi Yitzchak then asked, "How do you know that your parnassa is in this direction, maybe your parnassa is in the opposite direction and you should be running there!" The point is that we don't necessarily know when something is good and when it is not good.

That could, in fact, be the meaning of this pasuk: All the bracha will come upon you and reach you. Even when you run away from something that is a bracha, the bracha will chase after you and catch up with you! This is why we say in Rosh Chodesh benching: May Hashem fulfill the desires of our heart for the good. So often, we don't know what "tova" is. The Ribono shel Olam knows what "tova" is. We pray that Hashem gives us the "tova," regardless of whether or not that is what we have been hoping for.

I saw a second interpretation of this pasuk in the name of Rav Tzadok Hakohen of Lublin (1823-1900), who in turn quotes it in the name of Reb Simcha Bunim of P'shischa (1765-1827). "V'heeseegucha" means that the brachos (blessings) should reach you in the place where you are right now. So many times, wild financial or political success changes a person. He becomes a different person and moves away from the place where he was and the person who he was. The nisayon (test) of wealth, power, prestige and fame sometimes has a deleterious effect on a person. The bracha of "V'heeseegucha" is that the brachos should reach you in the place where you are and that you should remain in that place.

By Yitzchak Avinu the pasuk says, "Vayigdal ha'ish" (and the man grew (wealthy)). I once saw it explained that the pasuk does not say "Vayigdal Yitzchak" (and Yitzchak grew (wealthy)). Why not? This hints at the idea that Yitzchak remained the same person. He didn't change because he now became wealthy.

The third interpretation of this pasuk is an observation from Rav Yisrael (Taub) of Moditz (1849-1920, the first Moditzer Rebbe) that is brought in the sefer Imrei Baruch. The Moditzer Rebbe understands the word "v'heeseegucha" to mean that you should have the ha'sagos (understanding) of what to do with your successes. Many times, people achieve great financial or other types of success and they don't know how to handle it. They don't know what to do with their newly acquired power. They don't know what to do with all that money. This is common by athletes and movie stars. They have all this money and they don't know what to do with it. They buy a car, they buy a boat, they buy jewelry, they buy furs. They don't know what to do with all of it. They get to be 35 years old and they are bankrupt. A person needs to have the right ha'sagos, the right concepts and the right outlook on what to do with their brachos. The bracha of v'heeseegucha is that you have the perspective and hasagos it takes to handle the tremendous brachos that you are given.

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Edited by Dovid Hoffman; 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 listing of the halachic portions for Parshas Ki Savo is provided below ... 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 © 2023 by Torah.org. Torah.org: The Judaism Site Project Genesis, Inc. 2833 Smith Ave., Suite 225 Baltimore, MD 21209 <http://www.torah.org/>

RAV SCHACHTER ON THE PARSHA

Insights and Commentary Based on the Shiurim of Rav Hershel Schachter

Adapted by **Dr. Allan Weissman**

<https://a.co/d/2aj0sJs>

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PARSHAS KI SAVO

THE SECOND BRIS

HE SIFREI in Parshas Re'eh distinguishes between the two parshiyos describing sefiras ha'omer. שבעה שבועות תספר לך. “Seven weeks you shall count for yourself” (Devarim 16:9) describes a mitzvah on the Beis Din HaGadol. A different passuk, Usfarthem lachem ... sheva shabason ... tispiru chamishim yom Leviticus 23:15: וספרתם לכם ... שבוע שבתות ... תמילת תהיינה ... תספרו חמשים יום ... “You shall count for yourselves ... seven weeks ... you shall count fifty days” (Vayikra 23:15-16), describes a count performed by each individual (Menachos 65b).

The basis of the distinction made by the Sifrei is the rule quoted in the name of the Vilna Gaon (Divrei Eliyahu, p. 94): Whenever a mitzvah is repeated in the Torah, once in the singular and once in the plural, the singular form is addressed to Klal Yisrael as a whole while the plural form devolves upon the individual.

The Beis Din HaGadol, which represents Klal Yisrael in totality, discharges the obligation upon Klal Yisrael as a whole when they count the seven weeks from Pesach until Shavuot. The reason this mitzvah falls within the purview of the Sanhedrin is that this count establishes the correct day of the Yom Tov of Shavuot, which is part of the more general mitzvah of kevias haluach (establishment of the calendar). The second aspect of the mitzvah, reflected in its repetition in Parshas Re'eh in the plural form, is directed to each and every individual, who should also engage in such a count. [See Eretz HaTzvi, pp. 9-11.]

The Vilna Gaon generalizes this rule, and it can thus be applied to the two parshiyos of tochechah found in the Torah as well. The tochechah in Bechukosai was proclaimed on the occasion of the bris of Ma'amad Har Sinai, after the Aseres HaDibros: וכן בני ישראל בהר סיני ביד משה אלה החקים והמשפטים והתורה אשר נתן יהוה בינו “These are the decrees, the ordinances, and the teachings that Hashem gave, between Himself and Bnei Yisrael, at Har Sinai” (Vayikra 26:46).

The tochechah in Ki Savo represents a second bris: Eleh Divrei Habris Asher Tziva Hashem Es Moshe Lichros Es Bnai Yisrael Bieretz Moav MILVAD HABRIS Asher Karas Itam Bihcorev. אלה דברי הברית אשר צוה ה' את משה לכתר את בני ישראל בארץ מואב מלבד הברית אשר כרת אתם בהר סיני These are the words of the covenant that Hashem commanded Moshe to seal with Bnei Yisrael in the Land of Mo'av, beside the covenant that He sealed with them at Chorev [Har Sinai]. (Devarim 28:69)

There is a noteworthy difference between the two tochechos. In Parshas Bechukosai, the entire tochechah is expressed in the plural form, Im Bichukosai Teileichu “If you follow my decrees” (Vayikra 26:3), whereas in Ki Savo, the blessings and curses appear in the singular, as in, Vihaya Im Shamoah Tishma Bikol Hashem Elokecha האלוקים בשמע בקול ה' “It shall be that if you hearken to the voice of Hashem, your G-d” (Devarim 28:1). We therefore understand that the tochechah in Bechukosai is speaking to the yachid (individual), as opposed to that in Ki Savo, which addresses the tzibbur (congregation).

The passuk at the beginning of Parshas Netzavim explains why another kerisas bris (sealing of the covenant) at Arvos Mo'av was required to obligate Bnei Yisrael in mitzvos: ולא אתכם לבדכם אנכי כרת את הברית הזאת ואת כל אשר יאמרו לא אתה האלה הזאת But with whoever is here, standing with us today before Hashem, our G-d, and with whoever is not here with us today. (29:13-14)

The Gemara in Shavuot (39a) explains that the original bris at Har Sinai was made only with those people alive at that time, not with the future generations. All the neshamos of Bnei Yisrael were present at Har Sinai so that they would be affected by the gilui Shechinah (Divine Revelation), as the passuk teaches, ובעבור תהיה יראתו על פנים “so that awe of Him shall be upon your faces, so that you shall not sin” (Shemos 20:17). An impression was made on the neshamos of the members of the Jewish Nation at Har Sinai. They could be identified as רחמנים ביישנים וגומלי חסדים “those who are merciful, bashful, and who perform acts of kindness” (Yevamos 79a), to the extent that if one is lacking these middos, we must check his ancestry, for he must not have been present at Har Sinai (Shulchan Aruch, Even Ha'ezer 2:2).

Nevertheless, while it is true that all of the neshamos were present, the bris of Har Sinai is not legally binding on a neshamah, only on a person. We, today, would not be obligated to observe the mitzvos were it not for the second bris at Arvos Mo'av. It was this bris which obligated the future generations.

Why is there such a difference in terms of the binding power of the two different brisos? Future generations of Jews can only be bound by an earlier bris if there first exists the concept of Klal Yisrael as a unit. Until Bnei Yisrael entered Eretz Yisrael, they were only yechidim, and the original bris at Har Sinai was therefore a bris with yechidim. This is why the first tochechah is in the plural, lechol echad v'echad. The entity of “Klal Yisrael” was born only once the Jewish Nation entered its land, because only after Bnei Yisrael had a National Homeland could they attain the status of a Nation. Because this second bris, proclaimed in the singular, was a bris with the Jewish Nation as a whole, it remained binding on all the future generations who are part of the tzibbur. When any country makes a treaty, it is understood that the agreement is binding even after a new president is elected and even on citizens born after the treaty was signed, because these people are a continuation of the original nation. The same is true of the bris of Arvos Mo'av.

Rav Soloveitchik understood the process of the second kerisas bris as follows. Hashem wanted the bris to be made by Moshe, as he was the adon hanevi'im. On the other hand, He wanted it to be sealed in Eretz Yisrael, which is the metzaref (coalescer) of Klal Yisrael. Moshe, of course, was not able to enter Eretz Yisrael. Thus, the second bris was begun by Moshe and completed by Yehoshua inside Eretz Yisrael, on the occasion of the berachos and kelalos at Har Gerizim and Har Eival. That way, the bris was made with Bnei Yisrael as a tzibbur, in connection with entry into the land; the bris at Arvos Mo'av and the bris at Har Gerizim and Har Eival are one and the same.

The principle that כל ישראל ערבים זה לזה “All Jews are guarantors for one another,” the shared responsibility regarding another Jew's mitzvah observance, began only with entry of Bnei Yisrael into the land. This principle is derived from the passuk in Parshas Netzavim, which is really an addendum to the parsha of the bris of Arvos Mo'av: הנסתר לה אלקינו והנגלת לנו ולבנינו עד עולם לעשות את כל דברי התורה הזאת Hashem, our G-d, but the revealed [sins] are for us and our children forever, to carry out all the words of this Torah” (Devarim 29:28). The word לעשות has the connotation of “forcing others to observe the mitzvos.” There exists communal responsibility for the aveiros of each individual. Furthermore, the eleven dots above the words לנו ולבנינו עד עולם qualify this teaching; the community became liable for such aveiros only once the nation crossed into Eretz Yisrael and accepted the berachos and kelalos at Har Gerizim and Har Eival (Sanhedrin 43b). Before that point, each Jew was an individual Jew. It was with entry into our National Homeland that we became a tzibbur, in which every Jew is responsible for the actions of his fellow Jew (Avnei Nezer, Orach Chayim 314:4).

Interestingly, Rav Saadyah Gaon counts the episode of Har Gerizim and Har Eival as one of the taryag mitzvos. At first glance, this seems to be very difficult. This was an event that occurred once in the history of the world, similar to Ma'amad Har Sinai. The halachos associated with Ma'amad Har Sinai would be classified as hora'os sha'ah (temporary rulings), not as “mitzvos,” which, by definition, are binding on all future generations; the berachos and kelalos at Har Gerizim and Har Eival should be no different. Rav Yerucham Perlow (Sefer HaMitzvos LeRav Saadyah Gaon, chelek 3, parsha 57) suggests that Rav Saadyah Gaon considers the episode of Har Gerizim and Har Eival to be classified as a mitzvah specifically because of the enduring principle of arvus, which was instituted and established at that time.

In the tochechah of Parshas Bechukosai, we find an exposition on the passuk, וישלו איש באחיו – “Man will stumble over his brother” (Vayikra 26:37), that seems to also convey the concept of arvus: איש בעון אחיו – “Man [will stumble] because of the sins of his brother; this teaches that all [Jews] are

guarantors for one another" (Sanhedrin 27b). How can this concept appear at this point in time, if the rule of arvus did not begin until later?

Rav Soloveitchik explained that this passuk is a reference to the future destruction of the First Beis HaMikdash, and by that time, Bnei Yisrael would already have entered Eretz Yisrael, and the rule of arvus would be operative. In the aftermath of the rebellion of Korach, Moshe put forth the argument, *הָאִישׁ אֶחָד יִשָּׂא וְעַל כָּל־הָעֵדָה תִּקְצָר׃* (Bamidbar 16:22). This was a valid argument in its time, for arvus did not begin at the time of the tochechah of Bechukosai. Once arvus began with the conclusion of the bris of Arvos Mo'av at Har Gerizim and Har Eival, however, it would not be a valid excuse, for one would be liable for the aveirah of his neighbor.[See essays for Parshas Lech Lecha and Parshas Bo; Divrei HaRav, pp. 314-315.] How does the concept of arvus apply to a Jew in Chutz La'Aretz? The Avnei Nezer (Yoreh De'ah 126:4) explains that the Jews in Chutz La'Aretz who look toward Eretz Yisrael as their National Homeland and subscribe to that ideal, are also, in a certain sense, part of Klal Yisrael. The Reform Jews of Germany, who deleted any mention of Eretz Yisrael from the siddur and who severed their ties to our National Homeland, removed themselves from the entity of Klal Yisrael. However, those who consider themselves to be out of place in galus, outside of Eretz Yisrael, do maintain a share in the institution of Klal Yisrael, even though the full tziruf (combination) of Klal Yisrael refers only to those who actually live in Eretz Yisrael.

from: **TorahWeb** <torahweb@torahweb.org> date: Sep 11, 2025, 9:37 PM
subject: Rabbi Benjamin Yudin - Happiness

Rabbi Benjamin Yudin

Happiness

In Parshas Ki Savo we encounter the phenomenon of happiness three times. I'd like to share with you some of the treasures contained within these verses. The parsha opens with the two Biblical mitzvos of bikkurim – first fruits. First, the farmer was to take of the seven species for which the Land of Israel is praised (Devarim 8:8) and "bring the first of the fruits to the Beis HaMikdash." The second mitzvah is the recitation of a paragraph of thanksgiving, in which the farmer thanks Hashem not only for a bountiful harvest but also for guiding Jewish history and bringing us to Eretz Yisrael. It is striking that the first time the Torah mentions simcha – happiness – is at the conclusion of bikkurim: "V'samachta b'chol hatov - you shall rejoice with all the goodness that Hashem, your G-d, has given you" (26:11). We begin with a handful of grapes, a pomegranate, or a fig, and from there expand our gratitude to Hashem for all that He provides. The phrase "you shall rejoice" functions both as a prophecy and as a charge to the Jewish people. The farmer, realizing that success comes not from his toil alone but from Hashem's blessing, extends that recognition to every dimension of his life. This, I believe, is the essence of tefillas Hallel. The chapters of Hallel (Tehillim 113-118) traverse past, present, and future: beginning with the Exodus, moving through our spiritual growth, praying for the nations to know Hashem, thanking Him for ongoing providence, and culminating in the universal recognition of Hashem with the coming of Moshiach. Rav Soloveitchik zt"l explained: once we begin praising Hashem, "we cannot stop." Hence, v'samachta b'chol hatov – beginning with one bunch of grapes, we are drawn into endless gratitude.

The Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh adds a breathtaking insight on this verse, one made famous in a song by Rabbi Hillel Paley in Eretz Yisrael: if people truly felt the sweetness of Torah, they would "go mad" with joy, realizing that nothing in the world compares to its beauty and worth. They would literally "devour" it. Though the Torah often teaches through extremes, we can all appreciate the depth of the Ohr HaChaim's passion for Torah. All of this is contained in the command: "You shall rejoice with all the good." The second mention of happiness appears in 27:7, on "Opening Day," when the Jewish people entered the Land of Israel. Large stones inscribed with the Torah greeted them, serving as a national mission statement: to live by Torah in the Land. The Torah continues, "You shall offer peace offerings, eat there, and rejoice before Hashem your G-d." Was the joy merely from a celebratory barbecue? Once again, Rav Soloveitchik explained: true rejoicing stems from

the awareness that one is standing in the presence of Hashem. That realization itself is the wellspring of simcha.

The final reference to happiness comes in the middle of the terrifying tochacha: "Because you did not serve Hashem, your G-d, with joy and a good heart, when everything was abundant" (28:47). Rashi reads this as a failure to learn the lesson of bikkurim: beginning with small gifts but extending gratitude to Hashem for everything. Even when all our needs were met, we failed to respond with appreciation.

But perhaps the verse is saying something sharper: it is not merely that we forgot to smile, but that our mitzvos themselves became hollow, performed without passion or joy. Two women can light Shabbos candles. One stands in tears, praying deeply, sensing an intimate encounter with the Creator. Her neighbor lights hurriedly, says the berachah, and moves on. Both fulfilled the mitzvah – but what a difference joy makes. Two men put on tefillin. One kisses the batim automatically, out of rote. The other, as one kisses a child or grandchild, does so with heartfelt awareness of their preciousness. Both wore tefillin – but only one did so b'simcha.

The Tur, in his introduction to the halachos of Rosh Hashanah (Orach Chaim 581), records the astonishment of Chazal. When a person stands trial for his life, he dresses in black, unkempt, and terrified. Yet the Jewish people, facing judgment on Rosh Hashanah, dress in white, bathe, and cut their hair, confident that Hashem will bring salvation. Happiness here is not naïveté but optimism, rooted in faith that "Hashem, the Torah, and the Jewish people are bound together as one" (Zohar). Copyright © 2025 TorahWeb.org. All rights reserved. TorahWeb.org 94 Baker Ave Bergenfield, NJ 07621-3321

<https://jewishlink.news/the-work-of-everyday-decency/>

The Work of Everyday Decency

By Rabbi Moshe Taragin

September 11, 2025

This Motzaei Shabbat, Ashkenazi communities will begin saying Selichot, joining Sephardim who have already been immersed in these prayers since Elul began. With Selichot starting, the lead-up to the Yamim Noraim feels more immediate—you can almost sense the approach of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

Selichot revolve around repeatedly calling out Hashem's 13 attributes of mercy, the 13 Middot. Over the next month, we will return to these words nearly 100 times—they become the heartbeat of our tefillot.

A Divine Mirror

We're not just meant to recite the 13 Middot and move on. Each time we say them, we turn the spotlight back on ourselves. Hashem is merciful—are we showing mercy? He doesn't repay evil with evil—do we hold back and try to give kindness even when it isn't deserved? He is slow to anger—are we working on patience? He is truthful—do we live with honesty? The list isn't only about Him; it is a mirror held up to us.

Repeating these words nearly 100 times is meant to do more than echo—they invite us to grow, gradually shaping our character in the image of Hashem's moral traits. We cannot fully grasp God or define Him in human terms, but we can strive to walk in His ways—showing mercy, patience, kindness and truth.

Human beings possess a native moral spirit, even without religious foundations. Conscience is etched into the heart: a sensitivity to suffering, an urge to relieve it, a basic instinct for fairness. These impulses stir within us even without the cadence of halacha; Hashem Himself engraved them into the human soul.

Yet Jewish morality aspires to more. It is not simply an echo of human instinct but a deliberate effort to model our lives on Hashem's image. For this reason, it cannot be shaped by shifting social norms or fleeting trends. Morality is not a marketplace but a divine charge—unyielding, timeless and demanding.

Through a Moral Maze

Over the next month, as we recite the 13 Middot, we reflect on the place of conscience and moral behavior in our lives. Yet the larger moral landscape

around us is anything but simple—it is tangled, contested and often deeply divisive.

Our current war is just, fought in defense of a higher moral ideal. The IDF holds itself to a strict code of ethics, and the data show a remarkably low ratio of civilian to soldier casualties. Still, the conflict has raised painful and complicated moral questions. There is ongoing debate about how—or even if—these dilemmas should guide policy.

We find ourselves in a profoundly tangled moral maze, one that no single person or policy can fully chart. It is difficult to know what the “right” path might be—or even whether this moment of survival allows space for moral values to guide our choices.

There is also a deeply human moral conversation about Charedi conscription. Many defend the morality of the Charedi position, reasoning that if the sources allow Torah study as an exemption from service, then that path is morally sound. If this is what the mesorah indicates, they argue, it reflects Hashem’s will and therefore carries moral weight.

Others question this reasoning. Even if the sources were clear, shouldn’t our own moral instincts also guide us? The 13 Middot were revealed after Torah and Halacha, highlighting that moral sensitivity and human decency exist alongside the sources. At a moment that feels decisive for Am Yisrael, these instincts call on each of us to take up our share of the responsibility.

The moral questions surrounding the wider situation—the war and our social divisions—are deeply contested, shaped by many layers of beliefs, assumptions and religious perspectives.

Small, Gentle Acts

Rather than trying to untangle these enormous moral questions, perhaps our focus should be more grounded, quiet and personal. Too often, big moral debates become a substitute for the everyday work of living ethically. There is often a disconnect between loudly asserted moral positions and the quiet practice of decency in daily life. Moral effort is revealed not in the large-scale positions people announce and argue about, but in the small, often unnoticed ways we treat others every day.

Since the wider moral landscape cannot be fully charted, our attention turns to the quiet brushstrokes of daily life, where small acts of decency quietly shape who we are.

Especially in this tense moment of our history, when sharp ideological divides have fostered antagonism and bitterness, there are smaller, quieter moral choices that can help us fortify our own ethical life—even when we cannot influence the broader debates. Here are three pathways through which we become more like Hashem:

Forgiveness

Hashem’s mercy is most evident when He forgives our mistakes and failures. From birth, we are shaped by Divine kindness and care, a presence that guides and sustains us throughout life. Yet His mercy becomes most acute when He forgives the ways we fall short. In our own lives, we encounter Jews whose choices offend us or trouble us deeply. Can we nurture the same generosity of spirit, forgiving them as we hope Hashem will forgive us?

Forgiveness does not mean excusing their missteps; it means finding a way to release the hurt they cause. Just as our own failings bring Hashem sorrow, can we find the patience to forgive those who wound us? If we cannot fully forgive people for the choices or mistakes they have made, perhaps we can at least acknowledge their positive traits.

Spotting the Light

One of Hashem’s merciful qualities is that He sees the good in us (“rav chesed”), rather than focusing only on our flaws. Each of us is a mixture of strengths and weaknesses. We tend to measure ourselves by our potential and virtues, yet judge others harshly for their shortcomings. Can we at least soften our criticism by recognizing how every part of Israeli society and Am Yisrael contributes—spiritually, morally and materially—to our shared life? In this, we can strive to imitate Hashem’s way of seeing the good in others.

Holding the Hurt

Finally, if we cannot yet find the space in our hearts to forgive, and if it feels too difficult to recognize the good because the hurt is too deep, can we at least carry the pain without letting it erupt? One of the final qualities in the

13 Middot describes Hashem as bearing our sins (“nosei avon va’fasha v’chata’ah”). Sometimes that may be all we can ask for—we may not yet merit forgiveness or our own good traits may feel too few to balance our flaws—but we ask Hashem not to express anger, and to be strong enough to carry what we have done. Can we cultivate shoulders strong enough to bear our own pain, or do we too often offload it onto others?

Over the next few weeks, we will spend hours in the Beit HaKnesset, praying and reflecting on Hashem’s attributes, striving to bring them to life in our own actions. Don’t get lost in sweeping moral questions—they can be confusing and overwhelming. Instead, focus on the small, everyday acts of decency, the simple moral choices we are called to make, especially when we feel weighed down by conflict and heated disputes.

The writer is a rabbi at the hesder pre-military Yeshivat Har Etzion/Gush, with YU ordination and an MA in English literature. His books include *To Be Holy but Human: Reflections Upon My Rebbe*, HaRav Yehuda Amital, available at www.mtaraginbooks.com

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When G-d Wants You to Compliment Yourself

Before I Confess My Sins, I Must Confess My Greatness

Rabbi YY Jacobson

רפואת מיגדל נחמיה בת מלכה

When G-d Wants You to Compliment Yourself

Before I Confess My Sins, I Must Confess My Greatness

By: Rabbi YY Jacobson

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, shemittah, 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, ושבועו. ואמרת לפני ה' אלקיך בערתי הקדש מן-הבית, וגם נתתי ללוי ולגר ליתום ולאלמנה, ככל-מצותך, אשר צויתני: לא-עברתי ממצותיך, ולא שקחתי 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, [1] "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 "tithing 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 benefit 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 unbefitting 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 am I not living up to my potential? [8]

[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).

<https://jewishlink.news/freedom-means-telling-the-story/>

Freedom Means Telling the Story

By Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks ZT"l

September 11, 2025

Here's an experiment: Walk around the great monuments of Washington, D.C. There, at the far end, is the figure of Abraham Lincoln, four times life-size. Around him on the walls of the memorial are the texts of two of the greatest speeches of history, the Gettysburg Address and Lincoln's Second Inaugural: "With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right ..."

A little way away is the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial with its quotations from each period of the President's life as leader, most famously: "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself."

Keep walking along the Potomac and you come to the Jefferson Memorial, modelled on the Pantheon at Rome. There too, you will find—around the dome and on the interior walls—quotations from the great man, most famously from the Declaration of Independence: "We hold these truths to be self-evident ..."

Now visit London. You will find many memorials and statues of great people. But you will find no quotations. The base of the statue will tell you who it represents, when they lived and the position they occupied or the work they did, but no narrative, no quotation, no memorable phrases or defining words.

Take the statue of Winston Churchill in Parliament Square. Churchill was one of the greatest orators of all time. His wartime speeches and broadcasts are part of British history. But no words of his are inscribed on the monument, and the same applies to almost everyone else publicly memorialised.

It's a striking difference. One society—the United States of America—tells a story on its monuments, a story woven out of the speeches of its greatest leaders. The other, England, does not. It builds memorials but it doesn't tell a story. This is one of the deep differences between a covenant society and a tradition-based society.

In a tradition-based society like England, things are as they are because that is how they were. "England," writes Roger Scruton, "was not a nation or a creed or a language or a state but a home. Things at home don't need an explanation. They are there because they are there."

Covenant societies are different. They don't worship tradition for tradition's sake. They do not value the past because it's old. They remember the past because it was events in the past that led to the collective determination that moved people to create the society in the first place. The Pilgrim Fathers of America were fleeing religious persecution in search of religious freedom. Their society was born in an act of moral commitment, handed on to successive generations.

Covenant societies exist not because they have been there a long time, nor because of some act of conquest, nor for the sake of some economic or military advantage. They exist to honour a pledge, a moral bond, an ethical undertaking. That is why telling the story is essential to a covenant society. It reminds all citizens of why they are there.

The classic example of telling the story occurs in this week's parsha, in the context of bringing first-fruits to Jerusalem: "The priest shall take the basket from your hands and set it down in front of the altar of the Lord, your God. Then you shall declare before the Lord, your God: "My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down into Egypt with a few people and lived there and became a great nation, powerful and numerous ... So the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror and with signs and wonders. He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey; and now I bring the first-fruits of the soil that You, Lord, have given me," (Deuteronomy 26:4-10).

We all know the passage. Instead of saying it on Shavuot when bringing first-fruits, we now say it on Pesach as the central part of the Haggadah. What remains remarkable is that—even in biblical times—every member of the nation was expected to know the story of the nation, and recite it annually and make it part of his or her personal memory and identity—"My father ... so the Lord brought us out."

A covenant is more than a myth of origin—like the Roman story of Romulus and Remus or the English story of King Arthur and his knights. Unlike a

myth, which merely claims to say what happened, a covenant always contains a specific set of undertakings that bind its citizens in the present and into the future.

Here for example is Lyndon Baines Johnson talking about the American covenant: "They came here—the exile and the stranger ... They made a covenant with this land. Conceived in justice, written in liberty, bound in union, it was meant one day to inspire the hopes of all mankind; and it binds us still. If we keep its terms, we shall flourish."

Covenant societies—of which the United States of America is the supreme contemporary example—are moral societies, meaning not that their members are more righteous than others but that they see themselves as publicly accountable to certain moral standards that are part of the text and texture of their national identity. They are honouring the obligations imposed upon them by the founders.

Indeed, as the Johnson quotation makes clear, covenant societies see their very fate as tied up with the way they meet or fail to meet those obligations. "If we keep its terms, we shall flourish,"—implying that if we don't, we won't. This is a way of thinking the West owes entirely to the book of Devarim, most famously in the second paragraph of the Shema:

"If you faithfully obey the commands I am giving you today ... then I will send rain on your land in its season ... I will provide grass in the fields for your cattle, and you will eat and be satisfied."

"Be careful, lest you are enticed to turn away and worship other gods and bow down to them. Then the Lord's anger will burn against you, and He will shut up the heavens so that it will not rain and the ground will yield no produce, and you will soon perish from the good land the Lord is giving you," (Deuteronomy 11:13-17).

Covenant societies are not ethnic nations bound by common racial origin. They make room for outsiders—immigrants, asylum seekers, resident aliens—who become part of the society by taking its story and making it their own, as Ruth did in the biblical book that bears her name ("Your people will be my people, and your God, my God,") or as successive waves of immigrants did when they came to the United States. Indeed, conversion in Judaism is best understood not on the model of conversion to another religion—such as Christianity or Islam—but as the acquisition of citizenship in a nation like the United States of America.

It is utterly astonishing that the mere act of telling the story regularly, as a religious duty, sustained Jewish identity across the centuries, even in the absence of all the normal accompaniments of nationhood—land, geographical proximity, independence, self-determination—and never allowed the people to forget its ideals, its aspirations, its collective project of building a society that would be the opposite of Egypt, a place of freedom and justice and human dignity, in which no human being is sovereign; in which God alone is King.

One of the most profound truths about the politics of covenant—the message of the first-fruits' declaration in this week's parsha—is: "If you want to sustain freedom, never stop telling the story."

RIETS Kollel Elyon from RIETS Bella and Harry Wexner Kollel Elyon
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Confessions of a Tzaddik

RIETS Kollel Elyon

Rabbi Daniel Z. Feldman

I have to confess, I'm great.

Certainly an unusual sentence, but no more jarring than the phrase the Rabbis use to describe the ceremony near the beginning of this week's Torah reading. When offering ma'aser, a special formula is to be recited; this recitation is referred to in the Talmud with the term 'vidui ma'aser' (see Sotah 32b; Megilah 20b), literally, the "confession of tithes". This phrase seems out of place. Vidui is conventionally translated as confession, which in turn is commonly defined as "acknowledging sin or negative information". However, from a reading of the verses, the sense that emerges is anything but: "I have removed the holy things from the house, and I have also given it to the Levite, to the proselyte, to the orphan, and to the widow,

according to whatever commandment You commanded me; I have not transgressed any of your commandments, and I have not forgotten; I have not eaten of it in my intense mourning, I did not consume it in a state of contamination, and I did not give of it for the needs of the dead; I have hearkened to the voice of Hashem, my God; I have acted according to everything You commanded me” (Deut. 26:13-14). Is the word vidui, then, meant to be ironic, sarcasm from the Rabbis?

Some interpret viduy here not as a confession of wrongdoing but as an acknowledgment or expression of gratitude (hoda'ah). The Sforno suggests that it contains a hidden confession of the sin of the golden calf, which led to the first-borns ceding their status to the tribe of Levi; while the Minchat Chinukh (#607) believes the confession is for not having given the tithes earlier.

An additional explanation, cited by the Pardes Yosef HaChadash in the name of the Ziditchover Rebbe and the Sefat Emet, is that the viduy is a confession for pride itself. The very act of declaring one's perfection and boasting about one's good deeds can lead to ga'avah (arrogance), which is a serious sin. The paradoxical Viduy Ma'aser forces a person to confront this hubris, making the declaration a vehicle for repentance.

The Netziv adds a layer to this, explaining that while a person may strive for perfection, they cannot avoid minor transgressions like "the dust of lashon hara" (indirect negative speech), of which the Talmud says everyone is guilty. The viduy serves as an acknowledgment of this subtle, almost inescapable flaw.

A further interpretation is offered by R. Natan Gestetner in his writings, who suggests that the Viduy Ma'aser is essentially a checklist. By going over the list of positive deeds one has done, it forces one to be honest with himself about his accomplishments. If he claims to have done something he hasn't, this self-misrepresentation will force him to correct his behavior, thus becoming a process of teshuvah. This is similar to a point made by the Oznayim LaTorah, who notes that exaggerating one's accomplishments creates a greater sense of responsibility to ensure that one's "resume" is accurate, as it would be dangerous to claim things that are not true.

To further address this issue, it is worth reexamining the idea of vidui. Maimonides, in beginning his codification of the laws of teshuvah, writes that if one violates any principle of the Torah, when he is ready to repent, it is a mitzvah for him to do "vidui". This formulation troubled many commentators, in that it appears as if Maimonides, who devotes ten chapters of his Mishneh Torah to the laws of teshuvah, does not even recognize teshuvah as a mitzvah. Some indeed assumed this to be the case, that Maimonides understands only vidui to be a mitzvah, but not teshuvah itself (see Minchat Chinukh, 364, and Avodat Melekh). Rav Soloveitchik considered this to be an impossible position; the assumption that teshuvah is an obligation is central to Torah as a whole see Deut. 30:1-2) and especially to the Yamim Noraim period. Maimonides' wording, then, reflects not that teshuvah is not obligatory, but that it is expressed through vidui. This is because teshuvah, in reality, is not an action that one can perform or not perform, but an internal mindset (see the beginning of R. Kook's Orot HaTeshuvah). A mitzvah must be directed at a performable action, not at a personality trait, emotion, or mindset. Vidui, then, as a defined action, is the stand-in for teshuvah, an action that can be commanded; and when it is performed, when one forces himself to confront his own sins and inadequacies, it is hoped that he will then be moved toward the internal change that is in itself teshuvah. With this perspective, it may be possible to revisit the concept of vidui ma'aser. True, the vehicle to teshuvah is very frequently acknowledgment of misdeeds, the antidote to the arrogance, self-satisfaction or self-delusion that often stands in the way of change. However, there is another impediment to growth that can be equally pernicious. Often, we are held back from changing because we believe, quite simply, that we are not capable of any better. Yes, we readily acknowledge our shortcomings; in fact, we are slow to see anything else and recognize no possibility of greater heights. In that circumstance, traditional "confession" does little to move us toward spiritual growth. However, the Rabbis teach us that there is another form of the vehicle known as vidui: one that forces us to

admit that there are times when we do fulfill commandments completely, when we are capable of accomplishing everything set before us; when we can declare "I have hearkened to the voice of Hashem, my God; I have acted according to everything You commanded me". If we are capable then, we are capable other times as well. The excuse that no better can be asked of us loses its strength. We are forced to recognize that the bar can be set higher.

At times, it is this awareness that can be the greatest impetus toward growth; it is this function that vidui ma'aser provides. As we approach Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur, we confess our sins and we hope the awareness of wrongdoing will prevent repeat offenses. But at the same time, we focus on our untapped potential as well, and we use that awareness to push us farther. It is our mission, at this time, to remove the influence of the Satan not only from "behind us", but from "in front of us" as well.

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Potomac Torah Study Center Divrei Torah for Shabbat Ki Tavo 5785
Alan Fisher

BS"D September 12, 2025

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Devrei Torah are now Available for Download (normally by noon on Fridays) at www.PotomacTorah.org. Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah archives.

May Hashem protect Israel and Jews everywhere. May Hashem's protection shine on all of Israel, the IDF, and Jews throughout the world. May the remaining hostages soon come home, and may a new era bring security and rebuilding for both Israel and all others who genuinely seek peace.

Because of travel, the Yom Tovim all coming during the middle of the week (none on Shabbat and Sunday), and numerous commitments, I believe that I shall not have time to prepare Devrei Torah again until after Simchat Torah. I am uncertain about Bereishit; I expect at least to be able to return to print by Noach.

One of the first requirements for our ancestors upon entering the land of Israel is to bring a portion of the first fruits of the seven special crops associated with Israel, put them in a basket, and bring them to a Kohen at the place that God designates (the Mishkan and later the Temple) (26:1-10). Bikurim redeems a vow that Yaakov made when he was leaving Canaan to escape from the anger of Esav. If Hashem favored Yaakov with blessings, then when he returned safe and in peace to Canaan, he would give a tenth of all he had to God. Yaakov did eventually return to Canaan, but he never had peace in his family. His wives were never at peace with each other, and his sons battled continuously. Only at the end of Sefer Devarim do B'Nai Yisrael return to Canaan (Israel) in peace, so it is finally time to redeem Yaakov's vow.

Our ancestors have a second requirement, Vidui Ma'aser, to bring various tithes of the seven species of Israel (wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives (olive oil), and dates (date honey) on the first, second, fourth, and fifth years of each seven-year Shemitta cycle. On years three and six, the tithe becomes Ma'aser Ani, tithe for the poor. Each land owner in Israel is to bring the tithes to Hashem's designated place to consume his portion – and share it with others – in Jerusalem. A landowner unable to bring his tithe to the designated place could convert the produce to cash, add a fifth, and send the funds to the designated place to be used to purchase food to be shared in Jerusalem. Ma'aser Sheni ended after the destruction of the Second Temple (70 CE), with exile of most Jews from Israel, and when it became impossible to go to and consume the tithes in Jerusalem.

Once entering the land, B'Nai Yisrael were to assemble with six tribes each on Mt. Gerizim and Mt. Ebal. Levi would stand in the valley between the mountains and proclaim twelve curses, to which all the people had to respond, "Amen." The curses, which will come when our people sin (do not obey God's mitzvot), include familiar themes: a man's fiancée will be unfaithful. He will build a home but not live there. He will plant a vineyard but not enjoy its fruit. He will fall in love but his fiancée will be taken away.

His oxen will be slaughtered, and he will not even be able to eat any of the meat. His children will be sent into exile. These curses should sound familiar, because the Shotrim (enforcers) send away any potential soldiers who have not lived in their new homes, have not tasted the fruit of their vineyard, become engaged and not yet married his fiancée (20:5-7).

Why does Moshe warn of terrible curses? Moshe reminds us that God wants us to enjoy the good that He has given to us, especially through the great gift of a wonderful land that He watches over constantly. Hashem wants us to obey His mitzvot in joy – to be happy in all the good that He has given to B'Nai Yisrael. What is good, and what is evil? Our Creator defines what is good and what is evil – these decisions are for Hashem to determine. Humans are to accept God's definitions of good and evil – we are not to try to be in the place of creators and make those decisions for ourselves. If we obey Hashem's mitzvot, in joy, God will bring the best of blessings to us (28:1-14). Moshe reminds the people as they are to enter the land that Hashem gives them a choice of good or evil, wonderful blessings or horrible curses.

The tochacha in Vayikra ends with a promise that when B'Nai Yisrael perform teshuvah, Hashem will remember and redeem them (26:44-45). The tochacha in Devarim, however, does not contain a similar promise of redemption. The reason for the absence of a positive ending to Ki Tavo is that the redemption comes in Nitzavim. The primary theme of Nitzavim is that God will not forget His love for B'Nai Yisrael and His promises to our Avot. When the descendants of our exiled Jews return to Hashem and perform true teshuvah, God will accept those who love Hashem with all our hearts and souls. With true teshuvah, Moshe promises that B'Nai Yisrael will return to Israel, that the land will become fertile again, and Israel will flourish for our people. We have seen much of this transformation in the eighty years since Jews have returned to Israel. The country that no other people were able to make flourish for two thousand years is now a leader in agriculture, medicine, technology, and defense. One side effect of October 7 is that various segments of Israeli society have come together for the good of the country – not completely, but more than before. Jews in other countries also seem to be cooperating more than in the recent past. May these trends continue so Israel and Jews elsewhere can all have better lives.

My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, lived through World War II and served as a chaplain for the U.S. Navy for many years. He saw much evil and anti-Semitism during his life – although the experiences of the past two years have been worse than anything since the Nazi period (when he was a child). Ki Tavo brings a message that he would have endorsed – we Jews must work together, especially in Israel and with respect to what we can do for fellow Jews throughout the world. May our children and grandchildren keep to these goals throughout their lives.

Shabbat Shalom. Kativah v'chatima tovah,
Hannah and Alan

Much of the inspiration for my weekly Dvar Torah message comes from the insights of Rabbi David Fohrman and his team of scholars at www.alephbeta.org. Please join me in supporting this wonderful organization, which has increased its scholarly work during and since the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.

Shabbat Shalom and Hodesh Tov,
Hannah & Alan Fisher

Nefesh Shimshon Ki Savo
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Divrei Torah on the weekly parsha and holidays from the teachings of
Rabbeinu Shimshon Dovid Pincus zt"l

כי תבא כח מז תחת אשר לא עבדתך בשמחה ובטוב לבב
The Rambam greatly emphasized the importance of simchah, and wrote:

"The joy that a person has in doing a mitzvah and in loving G-d Who commanded the mitzvos is a great avodah. Anyone who holds himself back from this joy is deserving of punishment, as it says, 'Since you did not serve Hashem your G-d with joy and a good heart'" (Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Sukkah v'Lulav 8:15)

On the other hand, Koheles speaks negatively of joy and deems it empty and worthless (2:2). And this is the truth. Joy is meaningless and empty. So why does the Rambam praise it? There are things that revolutionize a person's life. For instance, teshuvah. It transforms a person from a rasha to a tzaddik. It builds him as an individual this brings him back to Hashem. It works a revolution.

Simchah does not build a person and does not reflect his true state. Simchah is a tool that we need to know how to utilize properly.

Just being happy doesn't change a person at all. It doesn't make him who and what he is. Let's say a person has a lot of money. It is his, whether or not he is happy about it. Being joyous about his wealth does not make him any wealthier.

By contrast, a person might be tremendously rich yet not be happy about it. Maybe he doesn't know he became rich, or maybe he doesn't appreciate its value. In any case, he is rich just the same – but he can't take proper advantage of it. If we see that a person is happy, this is a sign that he recognizes the value of what he has.

People often ask me, "What do I have to be happy about? I know myself, and I am not worth much." Once in the middle of a Simchas Beis Hashoevah, someone came over to me and said into my ear that he doesn't feel like being b'simchah; only true tzaddikim rejoice at Simchas Beis Hashoevah, and since he isn't a tzaddik, what does he have to celebrate about?

This is an example of someone who has tremendous treasures in his possession, since the Torah itself says that he has plenty to be happy about, but he doesn't take advantage of his treasures. This person is like a dark room that the owner didn't bother open the windows and let the sunshine in. Each one of us carries tremendous treasures that we don't recognize and don't even know about at all. We need to get to know them and be truly happy about them.

Harav Hezkyahu Avrom Broide – Rabbi of "Ganei Ayalon"
(Achisomoch, Lod) Dayan and Rosh Kollel Zichron Kelem
FROM CURSE TO BLESSING

(Megillah 31:) Ezra instructed *Am Yisrael* to recite the curses in the *Mishnah Torah* before Rosh Hashanah. What is the point of this? Abaye and Reish Lakish: So that the year and its curses may end ... How does the recitation end the curses? Based on the words of Chazal, the poet founded the wonderful and moving *piyut* recited at the beginning of the New Year, "אחות קטנה תפילותיה" ... May the previous year and its curses end and may a new year with its blessings begin!!!

אלה דברי הברית אשר צוה ה' את משה לכרת את בני ישראל בארץ מואב These are the terms of the covenant which the L-rd commanded Moses to conclude with the Israelites in the land of Moab ... This verse seals the 98 curses written in this *parshah*. What is the covenant? It is an undertaking between two parties. What is the mutual commitment created here?

"ויהי אם שמוע תשמע ... לשמר לעשות את כל מצותיו אשר אנכי מצוין היום ... ובאו עליך כל הברכות והאלה ... ברוך אתה בעיר וברוך אתה בשדה: ... ברוך אתה בבאך וברוך אתה בצאתך ... to observe faithfully all His commandments which I enjoin upon you this day ... All these blessings shall come upon you ... Blessed shall you be in the city and blessed shall you be in the field ... Blessed shall you be in your comings and blessed shall you be in your goings." A list of blessings that encompasses the whole gamut of spiritual life and fulfills all existential needs perfectly. When the condition and commitment is "If you obey ... if you will keep G-d's commandments ... and go in his ways." Meeting the goals and doing the will of G-d is in a constant internal struggle between the natural tendency of "the heart of man is evil from his youth." (Genesis 8) and the desire to ascend and become closer to G-d on the other hand. The human ability to overcome the natural tendency is rooted in and empowered by the recognition that the source of blessings is contained in going in the Torah's ways and that brings curse when unfulfilled. Existence depends and is affected by man's deeds,

which will bring upon him blessing or curse.

תהלים פ"א, - אשרי האיש אשר לא הלך בעצת רשעים ובדרך חסאים לא עמד ובמושב לצים לא ישב: כי אם בתורת ה' חפצו ובתורתו יהגה וילילה: והיה כעץ שתול על פלגי מים אשר פריו יתן בעתו ועלוהו לא יבול וכל אשר יעשה יצליח: לא כן הרשעים כי אם כמץ אשר תדפנו רוח: על כן לא יקמו רשעים במשפט וחסאים בעדת צדיקים: כי יודע ה' דרך צדיקים ודרך רשעים תאבד:

"Happy is the man who has not followed the counsel of the wicked, or taken the path of sinners or joined the company of the insolent; rather, the teaching of the L-rd is his delight, and he studies that teaching day and night. He is like a tree planted beside streams of water, which yields its fruit in season, whose foliage never fades and whatever it produces thrives. Not so the wicked; rather, they are like chaff that wind blows away. Therefore, the wicked will not survive judgment, nor will sinners, in the assembly of the righteous. For the L-rd cherishes the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked is doomed."

Creation presents us with unlimited good and abundance. (*Midrash Koheles*) When *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* created the first human, He took him and led him round all the trees of the Garden of Eden and said to him: "Look at My works, how beautiful and praiseworthy they are! And all that I have created, I created for you. Take great care that you do not corrupt and destroy My world. Man's obligation and life task is to take care not to corrupt. With the knowledge that "it all depends on me." (ע"ז י"ד)

(Berochos 35.) [Rabbi Levi](#) expressed this concept differently. [Rabbi Levi](#) raised a contradiction: It is written: "The earth and all it contains is the L-rd's," and it is written elsewhere: "The heavens are the L-rd's and the earth He has given over to mankind" ([Psalms 115:16](#)). There is clearly a contradiction regarding whom the earth belongs to. He himself resolves the contradiction: This is not difficult. Here, the verse that says that the earth is the L-rd's refers to the situation before making a blessing, here after a blessing was said. Without a blessing, a person has no right or permission to use the world of the Creator. Only after the blessing is permission given. The world is not ours. "ל-ה' הארץ ומלואה תבל ויושבי בה." The earth is the L-rd's and all that it holds, the world and its inhabitants." Rashi says in *Bereishis*, the whole world belongs to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, He created it and gives it to those who he feels are deserving, at His will he gives and at His will He takes it away.

(Rambam 3: 4) Throughout the entire year, a person should always look at himself as equally balanced between merit and sin and the world as equally balanced between merit and sin. If he performs one sin, he tips the balance and that of the entire world to the side of guilt and brings destruction upon himself. [On the other hand,] if he performs one mitzvah, he tips his balance and that of the entire world to the side of merit and brings deliverance and salvation to himself and others. This is implied by ([Proverbs 10:25](#)) 'A righteous person is the foundation of the world,' i.e., one who acted righteously, tipped the balance of the entire world to merit and saved it. The consciousness and recognition give a person the inner strength and courage to awaken from his slumber and correct his actions and deeds.

The purpose of reading about the curses in the *parashah* is to focus the mind on the duty incumbent on every person not to spoil and destroy. Only the weight of the fear can prevent deterioration and loss of way and control. Studying this *parashah* and its lessons raises us from death to life and from curses to blessing. "העדתי בכם היום את השמים ואת הארץ החיים והמות נתתי לפניך הברכה והקללה ובהרת בחיים למען תחיה אתה וורעך: I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day: I have put before you life and death, blessing and curse. Choose life—so that you and your offspring should live." (Deuteronomy 30:19)

I have set life and death before you – choose life. Before every individual of *Am Yisrael* lies the responsibility for the entire world. (Sanhedrin 37) Therefore, every single person must say, the world was created for me. On my shoulders and responsibility lies the ability to determine to the side of merit!

תכלה שנה וקללותיה תחל שנה וברכותיה.

"May the previous year and its curses end and may a new year with its blessings begin."

Parsha Jewels

Issue 268 9/13/25 20 Elul Parshas Ki-Savo

by **Rabbi Moshe Oelbaum**

Elul – The Power and Present of Elul

"Dirshu Hashem behematzto" – Seek Hashem when He can be found! "Kera'uhu behiyoso karov" – Call out to Him when He is close! Says the gemara, "Seek Hashem when He can be found" – when is that? During aseres yimei teshuva, the ten days of repentance. Says the Panim Yafos, what about the second half of the pasuk, "Call out to Him when He is close"? Says the Panim Yafos, "Seek Hashem when He can be found" is during Aseres Yimei teshuva, but don't wait until then! "Call out to Him when He is close" – that is the month of Elul! We have that opportunity right now – don't let these golden days slip by. It's now chodesh Elul and Hashem is right here. We must use the opportunity to call out, to come close.

It says in Parshas Nitzovim, "Umal Hashem Elokecha es levavcha v'es l'av zarcha" – Hashem will purify your hearts and the hearts of your children. The Baal Haturim

teaches that the words "Es Levavcha V'es L'av Zarcha" are roshei teivos Elul, which teaches us that Elul is a time when Hashem purifies the heart of a yid. That's the avoda of Elul, to remove the "arlas halev" – the impurities of the heart.

The Chidushei Harim says that teshuva overrides Shabbos, even though teshuva has some sadness within it. One of the steps of teshuva is charata, regret, and when one regrets his sins he feels pain and sadness. So why is it permitted to do teshuva on Shabbos?

The answer is that teshuva is an inyan of mila, just like we saw in the pasuk we mentioned previously. And just as mila overrides Shabbos, so too teshuva overrides Shabbos.

The Sfas Emes brings another remez with the roshei teivos of Elul. By Pharaoh, Hashem told Moshe Rabeinu, "Bo el Pharaoh ki ani hichbaditi es libo v'es lev avadav" – come to Pharaoh, since I have hardened his heart and the hearts of his servants. The words "Es Libo V'es Lev" are roshei teivos Elul. This pasuk is referring to hardening a heart, so that a person will not repent.

So here we have two pesukim with hints to Elul. We easily understand how the first pasuk connects to Elul, as the essence of Elul is repentance and removing the impurities of our heart. However, the second pasuk is just the opposite! It's talking about being stubborn, hardening the heart to the point where the person refuses to repent. So how can this pasuk be hinting to the month of Elul?

There is no question that the month of Elul is the opportune time to do teshuva. As the Baal Haturim says, a yid has a lot of siyata di'shmaya then to leave his bad ways and come close to Hashem. And so, the Satan is very afraid of Chodesh Elul. He sees the tremendous power, the incredible potential of this month of Elul. He is aware of the special siyata di'shmaya that we are given to do teshuva. He is afraid, so what does he do? He does what he does best! He works overtime to block our hearts from inspiration, to harden our hearts so that we should not tap into the wondrous power of this month. As Hashem is opening our hearts to make it easier for us to do teshuva, the Satan is working hard to close our hearts so we should not do teshuva! That's why there are two opposing pesukim alluding to Elul, because there are indeed two opposing forces tugging at our hearts during this awesome month. And that's why, sadly enough, so many of us remain uninspired and unafraid during Elul. It's because we are not fighting strongly enough to drive away the force of the Satan who is hardening our hearts.

Rav Yaakov Galinsky once went into Rav Chaim Kanievsky and asked him, "What message should I deliver to the people of Eretz Yisroel about chodesh Elul? Rav Chaim answered, "Tell them that all the tzaros of the world is their fault". Rav Yaakov thought, "How can I say this?" But then he realized there's a gemara in Kiddushin 40 that says that every person has to imagine that the world is hanging on a scale which is exactly balanced; half guilty and half innocent. Your next action is the deciding factor - if you do one mitzva, you tip the scale and save the world, and if you do one aveira, then you tip the scale in the opposite direction.

He says that the Chasam Sofer says this very concept on the pasuk, "Re'eh anochi nosen lifneichem". The question is why does the pasuk begin with lashon yachid, as "re'eh" is singular language, and then continues with lashon rabim, as "lifneichem" is plural? The Chasam Sofer answers based on what the gemara says, that by doing one mitzva a person can tip the scale for the entire world. The world is hanging in the balance, and one individual yid has the power to push it in either direction. So, the pasuk begins with the word "re'eh", see, Hashem is speaking to the individual yid. You, as an individual, "anochi nosen lifneichem", Hashem is giving you the power to tip the entire world through your free choice. You – singular you – give the entire plural of the world either brocha or klala. It's up to you.

The Chofetz Chaim says in Sefer Shmiras Haloshon: who knows how many people became poor because of you, and how many people died because of you. Yes, one person can determine the fate of the entire world. It's a tremendous responsibility that every individual has, a responsibility that we must remember especially during this month.

The Panim Yafos says in Parshas Achrei Mos that there's a tremendous chesed in chodesh Elul – that one hour of chodesh Elul corresponds to one day of a year. If a day has twelve hours, that represents twelve days. A month has thirty days, so 30 x 12 = over 600. That means the hours of Elul can be mesaken the entire year. That's the power and present of Elul.

In the time of Mishna, the eirusin and nissuin of marriage were not done together like today. A besula was given twelve months between the eirusin and nissuin in order to give her time to acquire her needs. Says the Panim Yafos, the mazel of chodesh Elul is besula, a maiden. Hashem gave a gift to chodesh Elul, which is the mazel of besula, a gift of twelve months. This means that in the month of Elul you can fix up an entire year. Just as a kallah needs ornaments and jewelry to adorn herself, we are given the opportunity to adorn ourselves before Hashem. How do we do that? Only through teshuva. Let us use this gift wisely and chose life for ourselves as individuals and for the entire world