

Home Weekly Parsha RE'EH
Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

In this week's parsha the Torah continues with the theme that runs through the previous parshiyot of Dvarim, that we are always faced with stark choices in life – either blessings or curses, good or evil. The words of the Torah seemingly offer little option for middle ground on these basic issues of belief and behavior. Yet, we are all aware that the events in life are rarely, if ever, all or nothing, one hundred percent blessing or curse. In fact, Jewish tradition and teachings instruct us that hidden in tragedy there is always a glimmer of hope and goodness, and that all joy and happiness contains within it the taste of the bittersweet.

Jewish philosophy and theology has taught us that evil somehow has a place in God's good and benign world. We are faced with the problem of why the Torah addresses these matters without nuance, in such a harsh way which seemingly brooks no compromise, without a hint of a middle ground. After all, the Torah is not a debating society where one is forced to take an extreme uncompromising stand in order to focus the issue being discussed more sharply and definitively.

Many rabbinic scholars of previous generations have maintained that it is only in our imperfect, post Temple period that we are to search for good in evil and temper our joy with feelings of seriousness and even sadness. But in an idyllic world, where the Divine Spirit is a palpable entity, the choices are really stark and the divisions are 100 percent to zero. Far be it from me to not accept the opinion of these great scholars of Israel. However I wish to interject a somewhat different thought into this matter. This parsha begins with the word re'eih – see. As all of us are well aware, there are stages in life that we can see well only with the aid of corrective lenses. Without that correction, we can easily make grave mistakes trying to read and see what appears before us. If we have to read small print, such as looking up a number in the Jerusalem telephone directly – it is almost impossible without the aid of corrective lenses. Well, this situation is not limited to the physical world, of just our actual eyesight, but it applies equally to our spiritual world of Torah observance and personal morality.

Many times we think we are behaving righteously when we are in fact behaving badly because we are not seeing the matter correctly. We are not wearing our corrective lenses, with the benefit of halacha, history, good common sense and a Jewish value system that should govern our lives. Without this advantage, we see blessings and curses, good and evil, blurry, and undefined before our eyes. The Torah wishes us to see clearly - to instinctively be able to recognize what is the blessing in our life and what is not.

The Torah itself has been kind enough to provide us with the necessary corrective lenses to see clearly and accurately. These lenses consist of observance of Torah and its commandments and loyalty to Jewish values and traditions.

Shabat shalom
Rabbi Berel Wein

The Deep Power of Joy
RE'EH
Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

On 14 October 1663, the famous diarist Samuel Pepys paid a visit to the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue in Creechurch Lane in the city of London. Jews had been exiled from England in 1290 but in 1656, following an intercession by Rabbi Menasseh ben Israel of Amsterdam, Oliver Cromwell concluded that there was in fact no legal barrier to Jews living there. So for the first time since the thirteenth century Jews were able to worship openly.

The first synagogue, the one Pepys visited, was simply a private house belonging to a successful Portuguese Jewish merchant, Antonio Fernandez Carvajal, that had been extended to house the congregation. Pepys had been in the synagogue once before, at the memorial service for Carvajal who died in 1659. That occasion had been sombre and decorous. What he saw on his second visit was something else altogether, a scene of celebration that left him scandalised. This is what he wrote in his diary:

... after dinner my wife and I, by Mr. Rawlinson's conduct, to the Jewish Synagogue: where the men and boys in their vayles (i.e. tallitot), and the women behind a lattice out of sight; and some things stand up, which I believe is their Law, in a press (i.e. the Torah in the Aron) to which all coming in do bow; and at the putting on their vayles do say something, to which others that hear him do cry Amen, and the party do kiss his vayle. Their service all in a singing way, and in Hebrew. And anon their Laws that they take out of the press are carried by several men, four or five several burthens in all, and they do relieve one another; and whether it is that everyone desires to have the carrying of it, I cannot tell, thus they carried it round about the room while such a service is singing ... But, Lord! to see the disorder, laughing, sporting, and no attention, but confusion in all their service, more like brutes than people knowing the true God, would make a man forswear ever seeing them more and indeed I never did see so much, or could have imagined there had been any religion in the whole world so absurdly performed as this.

Poor Pepys. No one told him that the day he chose to come to the synagogue was Simchat Torah, nor had he ever seen in a house of worship anything like the exuberant joy of the day when we dance with the Torah scroll as if the

world was a wedding and the book a bride, with the same abandon as King David when he brought the holy ark into Jerusalem.

Joy is not the first word that naturally comes to mind when we think of the severity of Judaism as a moral code or the tear-stained pages of Jewish history. As Jews we have degrees in misery, postgraduate qualifications in guilt, and gold-medal performances in wailing and lamentation. Someone once summed up the Jewish festivals in three sentences: “They tried to kill us. We survived. Let’s eat.” Yet in truth what shines through so many of the psalms is pure, radiant joy. And joy is one of the keywords of the book of Devarim. The root ‘s-m-ch’ (the root of the word *simcha*, joy) appears once each in Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, but twelve times in Deuteronomy, seven of them in our *parsha*.

What Moses says again and again is that joy is what we should feel in the Land of Israel, the land given to us by God, the place to which the whole of Jewish life since the days of Abraham and Sarah has been a journey. The vast universe with its myriad galaxies and stars is God’s work of art, but within it planet earth, and within that the Land of Israel, and the sacred city of Jerusalem, is where He is closest, where His Presence lingers in the air, where the sky is the blue of heaven and the stones are a golden throne. There, said Moses, in “the place the Lord your God will choose ... to place His Name there for His dwelling” (Deut. 12:5), you will celebrate the love between a small and otherwise insignificant people and the God who, taking them as His own, lifted them to greatness.

It will be there, said Moses, that the entire tangled narrative of Jewish history would become lucid, where a whole people – “you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, and the Levites from your towns, who have no hereditary portion with you” – will sing together, worship together, and celebrate the festivals together, knowing that history is not about empire or conquest, nor society about hierarchy and power, that commoner and king, Israelite and Priest are all equal in the sight of God, all voices in His holy choir, all dancers in the circle at whose centre is the radiance of the Divine. This is what the covenant is about: the transformation of the human condition through what Wordsworth called “the deep power of joy.”[1]

Happiness (in Greek *eudaemonia*), Aristotle said, is the ultimate purpose of human existence. We desire many things, but usually as a means to something else. Only one thing is always desirable in itself and never for the sake of something else, namely happiness.[2]

There is such a sentiment in Judaism. The biblical word for happiness, *ashrei*, is the first word of the book of Psalms and a key word of our daily prayers. But far more often, Tanach speaks about *simchah*, joy – and they are different things. Happiness is something you can feel alone, but joy, in Tanach, is something you share with

others. For the first year of marriage, rules Deuteronomy (24:5) a husband must “stay at home and bring joy to the wife he has married.” Bringing first-fruits to the Temple, “You and the Levite and the stranger living among you shall rejoice in all the good things the Lord your God has given to you and your household” (Deut. 26:11). In one of the most extraordinary lines in the Torah, Moses says that curses will befall the nation not because they served idols or abandoned God but “because you did not serve the Lord your God with joy and gladness out of the abundance of all things” (Deut. 28:47). A failure to rejoice is the first sign of decadence and decay.

There are other differences. Happiness is about a lifetime but joy lives in the moment. Happiness tends to be a cool emotion, but joy makes you want to dance and sing. It’s hard to feel happy in the midst of uncertainty. But you can still feel joy. King David in the Psalms spoke of danger, fear, dejection, sometimes even despair, but his songs usually end in the major key:

For His anger lasts only a moment,
but His favour lasts a lifetime;
weeping may stay for the night,
but rejoicing comes in the morning ...
You turned my wailing into dancing;
You removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy,
that my heart may sing Your praises and not be silent.
Lord my God, I will praise You forever.

Psalm 30:6-13

In Judaism joy is the supreme religious emotion. Here we are, in a world filled with beauty. Every breath we breathe is the spirit of God within us. Around us is the love that moves the sun and all the stars. We are here because someone wanted us to be. The soul that celebrates, sings.

And yes, life is full of grief and disappointments, problems and pains, but beneath it all is the wonder that we are here, in a universe filled with beauty, among people each of whom carries within them a trace of the face of God. Robert Louis Stevenson rightly said: “Find out where joy resides and give it a voice far beyond singing. For to miss the joy is to miss all.”[3]

In Judaism, faith is not a rival to science, an attempt to explain the universe. It’s a sense of wonder, born in a feeling of gratitude. Judaism is about taking life in both hands and making a blessing over it. It is as if God had said to us: I made all this for you. This is My gift. Enjoy it and help others to enjoy it also. Wherever you can, heal some of the pain that people inflict on one another, or the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to. Because pain, sadness, fear, anger, envy, resentment, these are things that cloud your vision and separate you from others and from Me.

Kierkegaard once wrote: “It takes moral courage to grieve. It takes religious courage to rejoice.”[4] I believe that with all my heart. So I am moved by the way Jews, who know what it is to walk through the valley of the

shadow of death, still see joy as the supreme religious emotion. Every day we begin our morning prayers with a litany of thanks, that we are here, with a world to live in, family and friends to love and be loved by, about to start a day full of possibilities, in which, by acts of loving kindness, we allow God's Presence to flow through us into the lives of others. Joy helps heal some of the wounds of our injured, troubled world.

[1] William Wordsworth, "Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, On Revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour. July 13, 1798."

[2] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1097a 30-34.

[3] Robert Louis Stevenson, "The Lantern-Bearers," in *The Lantern-Bearers and Other Essays* (New York: Cooper Square Press, 1999).

[4] Søren Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, 2179.

**Shabbat Shalom: Re'eh (Deuteronomy 11:26-16:17)
By Rabbi Shlomo Riskin**

RSR Head Shot Gershon Ellinson creditEfrat, Israel – "You shall smite, yes smite, all of the inhabitants of that city by the sword... and you shall burn entirely with fire the city and all of it spoils to the Lord your God, and it shall be an everlasting desolation (tel); it shall not be rebuilt again" (Deuteronomy 13:16,17).

The Bible ordains the destruction of an entire city which has been seduced and deceived into practicing idolatry. And, although many sages of the Talmud maintain that such a situation "never was and was never created" (B.T. Sanhedrin), the harsh words nevertheless sear our souls.

What is even more difficult to understand are the concluding words of the Bible regarding this idolatrous and hapless city: "... [and the Lord] shall give you compassion, and He shall be compassionate towards you, and He shall cause you to increase as he has sworn to your forbearers... This is because you have hearkened to the voice of the Lord your God to observe all of His commandments... to do what is righteous (hayashar) in the eyes of the Lord your God" (13:18,19).

Compassion? Righteousness? Are these fitting words to describe such an extreme punishment? To understand the simple meaning of the Biblical command, it is necessary to explore the actual meaning – and nature of the offense – of idolatry.

The Bible lashes out against idolatry more than any other transgression, and of the 14 verses that comprise the Decalogue, four of them focus on idolatrous worship, its evils constantly reiterated.

Moshe Halbertal and Avishai Margalit, in their penetrating study *Idolatry*, cite various commentaries as to why idolatry is presented as so repulsive in the Bible. For Maimonides the sin of idolatry is theological; for the Meiri it was the number of innocent children sacrificed to Moloch, the eating of flesh cruelly torn from living animals, and the wanton sexual orgies associated with the

Dionysian rites which so incensed the Lord. Indeed, the Bible seems to support the Meiri position; to give but two examples: "You shall not bow down to their gods and you shall not serve them; you shall not act in accordance with their deeds (Exodus 23:24)"... "You shall destroy, yes destroy [the seven indigenous nations of Canaan] lest they teach you to do all the abominations which they do before their gods (Deuteronomy 20:17,18)."

The Bible never understood monotheism in terms of faith alone; from the very beginning of God's election of Abraham who was commanded to convey to subsequent generations not only belief in one God, but rather in a God "...whose path it is to do compassionate righteousness and justice" (Genesis 18:19), belief in ethical monotheism. Moses asks for a glimpse into the Divine (Exodus 32:18). The Almighty, after explaining that no mortal being can ever truly understand the Ineffable and the Infinite, does grant a partial glimpse: "The Lord, the Lord, is a God of Compassion (raham) and freely-giving love, long-suffering, full of lovingkindness, and truth ..." (Exodus 34:6).

Even Maimonides suggests that these descriptions, known as the 13 Attributes of the Divine, are not so much theological as anthropological, to teach us mortals – commanded to imitate God – precisely how to do so: just as He is Compassionate, you humans must be compassionate, just as He gives love freely, so must you humans...

Hence, the essence of Judaism is not proper intellectual understanding of the Divine, (which is impossible), but rather proper human imitation of the Divine traits, acting towards other human beings the way God would have us act, in compassionately righteous and just ways. And so Maimonides concludes his *Guide for the Perplexed*, written at the end of his life, with a citation from Jeremiah:

"Thus says the Lord: But only in this should one glory if he wishes to glory: Learn about and come to know Me. I am the Lord who does lovingkindness, justice and righteous compassion on earth. Only in these do I delight, says the Lord" (Jeremiah 9:22,23).

From this perspective, only a religion which teaches love of every human being, which demands a system of righteousness and morality, and which preaches a world of peace, can take its rightful place as a religion of ethical monotheism. Islam, for example, has enriched the world with architectural and decorative breakthroughs, glorious poetry, mathematical genius, and philosophical writings influenced by Aristotle. And certainly, the Kalami and Sufi interpretations of the Koran, which present jihad as a spiritual struggle, place Islam alongside Judaism and Christianity as a worthy vehicle and noble model for ethical monotheism. Tragically, however, the Jihadism, spawned from Saudi Arabia's brand of Wahhabi Islam, the Al-Qaida culture of homicide-bomber terrorism wreaking worldwide fear and destruction – from Manhattan to Bali –

and threatening anyone who is not a Jihad believing Muslim, is the antithesis of ethical monotheism.

George Weigel, a Catholic theologian and distinguished Senior Fellow at the Ethical and Public Policy Center in Washington D.C., cites a definition of Jihadism in his compelling study, Faith, Reason and the War against Jihadism. "It is the religiously inspired ideology which teaches that it is the moral obligation of Muslims to employ whatever means are necessary to compel the world's submission to Islam." He also analyzes the theology of Sayyid Qutb (d.1966), who stresses the fact that God's oneness demands universal fealty, that the very existence of a non-Muslim constitutes a threat to the success of Islam and therefore of God, and so such an individual must be converted or killed; other religions and modern secularism are not merely mistaken but are evil, "filth to be expunged." The goal is Global Jihad. Such a perverted "theology" only transmutes true Sufi Moslem monotheism into hateful Wahabi mono-Satanism. The enemy of the free world is not Islam; it is Jihadism.

Let me return to our Biblical passage regarding the idolatrous city. An army hell-bent upon the destruction of innocent people, whose only sin is to believe differently than they do, enters the category of "...the one who is coming to kill you must be first killed by you." One cannot love the good without hating the evil, 'good' defined as the protection of the innocent and 'evil' as the destruction of the innocent.

The only justification for taking a life is in order to protect innocent lives – when taking a life is not only permitted but mandatory. Hence the Bible refers to the destruction of the murderous inhabitants of such a city as an act committed for the sake of righteousness. Just imagine the world today if the United States had not committed its forces to help fight Nazi Germany!

But even the most justified of wars wreaks havoc, collateral damage can never be completely prevented, and the soul of one who takes even a guilty human life must become in some way inured to the inestimable value of human life. Hence some of our Sages determine that such a city's destruction had never been decreed, that the Bible is speaking in theory only. Certainly all other possibilities must be exhausted before taking such a final step of destroying a city.

Nevertheless, the Biblical account – well aware of the moral and ethical ambiguities involved – guarantees that those who fight rank evil will not thereby lose their inner sense of compassion for the suffering of innocent individuals or their over-arching reverence for life. To the contrary, he who is compassionate towards those perpetrating cruelty will end up being cruel towards those who are compassionate.

Shabbat Shalom

Let's Talk Turkey – and Prairie Chicken and Muscovy Duck

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question #1: "While camping in Western Canada, we saw thousands of wild, roaming birds called "prairie chicken." They were clearly different from the familiar, common chicken, but appeared so similar that I was tempted to bring one to a shocheit to prepare for us. Halachically, could I have done this?"

Question #2: "Someone told me that a variety of duck, called the Muscovy duck, is raised in Israel for its kosher meat and liver, although the American rabbonim prohibit eating this bird. How could this be?"

Question #3: According to the popular story or legend, Benjamin Franklin advocated that the United States choose the turkey, which is also native American, as its national bird, rather than the bald eagle. He preferred the turkey's midos and felt that it better reflects American values. However, if turkey is indeed indigenous only to North America, how can it have a Jewish tradition that it is kosher?

IDENTIFYING AS KOSHER

Although the Torah identified kosher animal and fish through specific attributes called simanim, it specifically listed the bird species that are non-kosher, implying that all other birds are kosher. Indeed, the Gemara records that someone familiar with all the avian non-kosher varieties may identify all other fowl, even those unfamiliar to him, as kosher, and teach this to others. Since it is not always practical to find someone familiar with all 24 varieties of non-kosher birds, the Mishnah provided four simanim. A bird with all four simanim is definitely kosher, whereas one with some of these simanim may or may not be kosher. Any bird without any of the simanim is certainly non-kosher.

WHAT ARE THE FOUR SIMANIM?

The Mishnah reports that any bird that is doreis is not kosher. There are several different ways to explain the meaning of the word doreis, most meaning that the bird uses its claws in a distinctive way when it preys or eats. The other three simanim describe physical characteristics of the bird, not feeding habits. They are:

- (1) The bird has a crop, an expandable food pouch for storing undigested food.
- (2) The inner lining of its gizzard (the pupek) can be peeled.
- (3) It possesses an "extra claw," a term that is interpreted by different Rishonim in diverse ways.

SIGNS OF DOREIS

We find three distinctive features that demonstrate whether a bird is doreis. The first, recorded by the Mishnah, is that any bird that, when sitting on a rope or stick, places two of its claws on one side of the rope or stick and the other two on the opposite side is definitely doreis and non-kosher. The second is that a bird that swallows its food in mid-

flight is not kosher (Chullin 65a). The third is that any bird that has webbed feet and a wide beak is certainly not doreis (Baal HaMaor). Since this information will become significant as we proceed, allow me to explain these avian characteristics.

SEPARATES ITS CLAWS

The Mishnah teaches, “Rabbi Elazar the son of Rabbi Tzadok says, ‘Any bird that separates its legs is non-kosher’” (Chullin 59a). The Gemara explains that one stretches a length of rope for the bird to walk or rest on: A bird that places two claws of its leg on one side of the rope and two on the opposite side is non-kosher because this indicates that it is doreis. If it places three claws on one side of the rope and one on the other, it is probably kosher (Chullin 65a).

The morning I wrote these words, I visited someone who owns a pet cockatiel, a small Australian parrot, and noted that the bird clenched the stick it stood on in the classic doreis position of two claws fore and two aft. I found this surprising since the cockatiel’s diet of seeds, combined with its owner’s observations of its docile behavior, make it difficult to imagine that this bird is doreis. However, one could explain this Mishnah in the following fashion:

The Mishnah does not clarify how often a bird needs to be doreis to be non-kosher. The Gemara describes a variety of bird called a “marsh chicken” that was assumed to be kosher until the amora, Mareimar, noticed it being doreis (Chullin 62b). Rashi notes that we could observe a bird for quite some time without seeing it being doreis, and only then catch it being doreis! Thus, indeed, the marsh chicken was non-kosher the entire time, although they did not know. For this reason, Rashi concludes that we do not rely on our observation that a bird is not doreis; instead, we do not consume fowl unless we have a mesorah that this variety is not doreis.

Thus, it could be that the cockatiel is indeed a doreis, even though it is doreis so rarely that we may never notice.

WEBBED FEET

As I mentioned earlier, many Rishonim cite a tradition that a bird with webbed feet and a wide beak is definitely not doreis. Following this approach, someone discovering a bird that possesses all of the following body simanim: it has a crop, a gizzard that can be peeled, an “extra claw” (whatever the term means), webbed feet, and a wide beak, can assume that this bird is kosher.

It is noteworthy that while many early authorities quote Rashi’s opinion that we do not rely on our observation to determine that a bird is not doreis, they also quote the tradition that a bird with webbed feet and a wide beak is not doreis (Rosh, Chullin 3:59 and 60; Issur VaHeter 56:18; Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 82:2, 3). Obviously, they understood that we have a mesorah that any bird possessing webbed feet and a wide beak is not doreis, and is kosher if it has the other body simanim -- even though no

one recalls a specific mesorah on this bird. In other words, Rashi did not declare that no birds can be eaten without a mesorah -- he only contended that we do not rely on our observation that a bird is not doreis. This is indeed the Shulchan Aruch’s ruling on this subject, as well as many later halachic authorities, both Ashkenazic and Sefardic (Yam shel Shelomoh; Pri Chodosh; Pleisi, Kuntros Pnei Neshet, located after his commentary to Yoreh Deah 82; Shu”t Sho’eil Umeishiv 5:1:69).

MESORAH IS ABSOLUTE

I am unaware of any authority who disagrees with the above conclusion, prior to the time of the Rema (Yoreh Deah 82:3). The Rema, however, records an accepted minhag prohibiting consumption of any bird without a known mesorah that it is kosher. Most authorities assume that, as a result of this ruling, Ashkenazim do not consume any fowl lacking a known mesorah to be kosher, although some contend that no such minhag exists (Yam shel Shelomoh, Chullin 3:115; Pleisi; Shu”t Sho’eil Umeishiv 5:1:69). (It should be noted that the Taz cites Rashi as the source for the Rema’s minhag. Although the obvious interpretation of the Taz’s comment is that he feels that Rashi rejects the approach that webbed feet and wide beak are valid proof that the bird is not doreis [Minchas Yitzchak 2:85], his comments can be interpreted in a different way.)

MUSCOVY DUCK AND THE CIVIL WAR

By definition, a non-migratory bird native to the Americas, Australia, or New Zealand cannot have an ancient mesorah ascertaining that it is a kosher species, since no one resides there who could possess such a mesorah. Does this mean that, according to the Rema, any bird native to the Americas cannot be eaten? Some poskim indeed held this position regarding the Muscovy duck, a bird that, notwithstanding its name, is a Mexican native. (No one is certain why this duck is named after frigid Moscow, when it is indigenous to a much warmer climate.)

A rav in Civil War-era New Orleans, Rabbi Yissachar Dov Illowy, who was extensively involved in kiruv rechokim over a hundred years before the field became popular, discovered that members of his community were raising this duck for food and that the local shochatim were shechting it. Rav Illowy notes that the Muscovy appears to have all the simanim of any common duck, including the webbed feet and wide beak that indicate it is not doreis. Nevertheless, he maintained that since this bird has no mesorah, it cannot be considered kosher. He then sent the shaylah to Rav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch and to Rav Nosson Adler, who agreed with Rav Illowy’s decision.

Notwithstanding this psak, the Muscovy apparently became a popular food in many kosher communities, both in the Union and the Confederacy, and eventually in Europe, also. Later its liver became popular when prepared as foie gras, a delicacy once made exclusively from goose liver. (Nowadays, foie gras is more commonly produced

from the liver of the mullard, a crossbreed of the Muscovy with the pekin, an established kosher variety of duck.) Indeed several prominent later authorities, including the Netziv, Rav Shmuel Salant, and Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank, ruled that the Muscovy duck is indeed kosher, since observant Jews had been consuming it (Shu"t Har Tzvi, Yoreh Deah #75). How could they permit a bird that clearly has no mesorah?

The Netziv ruled that, since observant Jews were already consuming Muscovy, they can be considered kosher for three reasons:

1. They are fairly similar to varieties of duck that possess a mesorah that they are kosher, and could perhaps be considered the same min as far as halacha is concerned. One should note that the halachic definition of a min is highly unclear, although one matter is certain: It has little relationship to any scientific definition of what is considered a species.

2. They will freely breed in the wild with varieties known to be kosher ducks, even when other Muscovies are readily available. This factor is significant because the Gemara rules that two species, one kosher and the other non-kosher, will not reproduce together (Bechoros 7a). Although there is debate over whether this rule applies to birds or only to mammals, several authorities contend that it also applies to birds (Shu"t Chasam Sofer, Yoreh Deah #74; Shu"t Avnei Nezer, Yoreh Deah #75:4 and many others). According to this approach, since a Muscovy readily mates with varieties of known kosher duck, one may assume that it is kosher.

3. The Rema's minhag prohibiting consumption of fowl without a mesorah applies only to a newly discovered bird and not to a variety that observant Jews are already eating (Shu"t Meishiv Davar 2:22).

ANOTHER NATIVE AMERICAN

Of course, this leads to our discussion of the turkey (question #3), also a Native American bird that appears to have found its way to the Jewish pot since its introduction to Europe in the 16th century. The Kenesses HaGedolah, authored in the 17th century, is the earliest source I found discussing the kashrus of the turkey, and it is apparent from his comments that Jews were already eating it. Although one would imagine much discussion on the kashrus issues of this bird, every other teshuvah I have seen discusses not whether the turkey is kosher, but why, and each is written hundreds of years after turkey consumption became commonplace in the kosher world.

For those who question whether the turkey was commonly eaten in this earlier era, I refer them to the comments of the Magen Avraham (79:14), who assumes that a passing reference to a "red chicken" by the Shulchan Aruch refers to the turkey, providing us with fairly clear evidence that in the mid-1600's the turkey was a common item in Jewish menu. The Magen Avraham makes no reference to any controversy regarding the kashrus of this

bird, which was already a well established member of Jewish households.

TURKEY VS. DUCK

From a strictly anatomical perspective, the Muscovy duck can rally better proof to its kosher status than can a turkey. Whereas the Muscovy duck needs to contend only with the ruling of the Rema that it bears no mesorah, it certainly has the wide beak and webbed feet that the Rishonim accept as proof that it is not doreis and seemingly has the other kosher simanim that I mentioned earlier. Thus, according to all authorities prior to the Rema, one could consume Muscovy based on its possessing kosher simanim. Rav Hirsch and the others who prohibit it did so because we have accepted the minhag recorded by Rema not to rely on simanim.

On the other hand, the turkey is faced with more of an uphill battle anatomically.

It does not have webbed feet or a wide beak – thus, to permit it because of simanim we must ascertain that it is not doreis, and Rashi rules that we do not rely on observation to determine that a bird is not doreis. Yet, the common practice of hundreds of years is to consider it kosher!

TALKING TURKEY

I have seen numerous attempts to explain why indeed we consume turkey, of which I will share some. Many authorities thought that the turkey had a mesorah from India as a kosher bird (see Kenesses HaGedolah 82:31 and several others quoted by Darchei Teshuvah 82:26). However, this appears to be based on a factual error -- the Yiddish and Modern Hebrew name for turkey is "Indian chicken," and it is so named in many other languages, based on the same confusion that resulted in the islands of the Caribbean being called the "West Indies." Notwithstanding that these names merely reflect Columbus's impression that he had discovered an area near India, the confusion led some to conclude that the Indian Jews possess an ancient mesorah that the turkey is kosher.

Others contend that the practice of eating turkey predates the Rema's ruling that we consume only birds that have a mesorah. Thus, one could say that it was grandfathered into kosher cuisine.

Still others contend that although we usually do not rely on our observation that a bird is not doreis, since thousands of Jews have raised turkeys and never seen them being doreis, we can be absolutely certain that they do not, and we can therefore assume them to be kosher because of simanim (Darchei Teshuvah 82:26, quoting Arugos HaBosem).

A different approach is that, although the Rema required mesorah to permit the consumption of fowl, once observant Jews have accepted to eat a certain variety of bird, one may continue this practice (if it is not definitely non-kosher). Once Klal Yisroel has accepted a bird that appears to be kosher, we assume that it is kosher even if we do not, and

cannot, have a mesorah on its kashrus (see Taz, Yoreh Deah 82:4). The Netziv justifies the consumption of the Muscovy duck because of the fact that turkey is accepted to be kosher even though it also has no mesorah!

To answer our original question #2, the Muscovy duck has not escaped contemporary controversy: some rabbonim and hechsherim, particularly in Eretz Yisroel, permit it; others forbid it; still others will consider it kosher but not mehadrin. I have been told that the North American hechsherim do not treat it as kosher.

Regarding the prairie chicken (question #1), it is assumed to be non-kosher, or, more accurately, without either a mesorah or acceptance that it is kosher. I am unaware of any place where it is slaughtered as a kosher bird.

TURKEY VS. EAGLE

Did Benjamin Franklin really want the turkey to be the symbol of the United States of America?

In a letter to his daughter, Ben wrote:

“For my own part I wish the eagle had not been chosen the representative of our country. He is a bird of bad moral character. He does not get his living honestly... He is therefore by no means a proper emblem for the brave and honest... The turkey is in comparison a much more respectable bird, and withal a true original native of America... He is... a bird of courage and would not hesitate to attack a grenadier of the British Guards who should presume to invade his farm yard with a red coat.”

To reinforce good old Ben’s argument, we note that whereas the turkey has all four simanim of a kosher bird, the eagle has none (according to Rashi’s opinion). The Ramban explains that the Torah forbade the non-kosher birds because the Torah wants us to avoid the bad midos that they exhibit. One could assume that the kosher species may exhibit admirable traits that the Torah wants us to emulate. Certainly, the courage to observe mitzvos in times of adversity is a tremendous virtue worth thinking about the next time we eat turkey.

Drasha

By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Parshas Reeh

Tough Love

Not only does the Torah teach us what to do and what not to do. It admonishes us before we turn off the proper path. Last week’s portion cautions us not to turn after our eyes or hearts. Exodus 34:11 enjoins us not to socialize with idol worshippers lest we marry a spouse who will lead us away from our faith.

Most often the warnings about sin are succinct and precise. The focus of the Torah is clear: avoid any activity that will lead to straying from the path of Hashem. This week the Torah seems to spend as much effort exhorting us about involvement with bad influences as it does with sin itself.

The Torah discusses two scenarios where people intend to lead Jews astray. The first case is of the false prophet. Deuteronomy 13:2: “If there should stand a prophet or dreamer who will produce a sign or a wonder saying, ‘let us follow gods of other folk,’ do not hearken to him.” The Torah then exhorts us to keep our faith and elucidates how to deal with the bogus seer. The next section deals not with a false prophet but with a kinsman. Deuteronomy 13:7: “If your brother, son of your mother, or your son or daughter or your wife or a friend who is like your soul, secretly entices you saying let us worship other gods, those that you or your forefathers did not know.”

The Torah does more than exhort us not to follow the would-be influencer. It reiterates the admonition in no less than five different expressions. “You shall not accede to him; you shall not hearken to him; your eye shall not take pity on him; you shall not be compassionate toward him; you shall not conceal him.”

When it refers to our own misdoing or those of a false prophet the Torah simply warns us, “do not listen” or “do not follow your heart.” Yet when referring to kin the Torah offers a litany of variations on a theme of disregard.

Shouldn’t our own feelings need more and stronger admonitions than ideas suggested by a friend or relative? Surely a prophet who conjures awesome miracles should warrant five or six expressions of caution. In that case, all the Torah says is, “do not listen to him for Hashem is testing you.” There is no talk of mercy, compassion, or concealment, as there is when the Torah talks about kin. Why?

Robert A. Rockaway, a well-known author on Jewish American history, decided to publish a work on a less glorified Jewish persona, the Jewish gangster. In his research he interviewed old-time Jewish mobsters, their families and friends. A native of Detroit, Michigan, he actually interviewed his own mother who knew some of the notorious families that he was writing about.

In discussing some of the nefarious deeds of one of the local thugs, his mother stopped him abruptly. “That all may be true, but he was good to his mother!”

The Torah understands the intimate affinity our people have towards relatives.

It only needs one or two words of warning for us not to listen to the false prophet who comes with miraculous signs and mesmerizing oratory. It only tells us, “don’t listen to him.” Even when discussing our own desires and infatuations it simply warns us, “do not turn after your heart.”

However, when referring to kin, brothers, sisters and relatives, the Torah has a difficult mission. We tend to excuse wrongdoing, cover up for misdeeds, and harmonize with our loved ones — although the results may be terribly destructive. There are countless stories of parents who did not have the heart to restrict their children’s late-night activities. Too many tales are told of the man who was

ensnared by his brother-in-law's misdoing because he had not the heart to refuse his overtures to evil.

The Torah expresses its warning in five different ways. You must love your kin to a point, but way before the point of no return.

Good Shabbos

Dedicated by the Martz Family in memory of Nettie Martz & Florence Martz

But — He was Good To His Mother, The Lives and Crimes of Jewish Gangsters, by Robert A. Rockaway, (c) 1993 Gefen Publishing Ltd.

Parsha Insights

By Rabbi Yisroel Ciner

Parshas Reeh

Exchanging Gold for Copper

Parshas "R'ay" begins with the Moshe saying: "R'ay anochi nosain lifnaichem ha'yom b'racha u'klalah – See that I place before you today a blessing and a curse(11:26)." Moshe lays out very clearly the choice that we have in life.

The Ohr HaChaim explains an added meaning of Moshe saying "r'ay anochi – see I". Moshe is trying to convince them to choose the eternal pleasures of the next world, rejecting the fleeting pleasures of this world. Only one who has a clear picture of the pleasures of both worlds can effectively convince others what to choose. Without clarity of the next world, one doesn't truly know what to offer. Without firsthand knowledge of the pleasures of this world, others will respond that if he'd known what this world really had to offer, he'd be singing a different tune.

To this Moshe said "r'ay anochi"– look at me! I am one of the wealthiest people with a clear picture of what this world has to offer, and I ascended Har Sinai, entered the heavenly realm and clearly saw what the next world has to offer. I, of all people, can tell you what is bracha (blessing) and what is klalah (curse). Choose wisely!

I'm often challenged by students who claim that, being that we only know the physical and not the spiritual pleasures, how can we discuss and work toward something that we are totally removed from?! I counter with a simple question. Which of the following pleasures would you choose? On one hand, all you can eat of your favorite food. A purely physical pleasure. On the other hand, speaking and connecting to a person who is feeling depressed and really helping that person. After the conversation, the person looks at you and says, "Thank you, I can't begin to tell you how much you've helped me." A pleasure which, even if we'll say is not spiritual, is certainly removed from the realm of the physical.

Any honest individual would clearly pick the second pleasure. If, when we are encloded in our physical bodies, living in this physical world, we recognize the depth of the spiritual and the shallowness of the physical, how much more so when we'll shed the physical!

The Kli Yakar has a different approach. He notes that the word "r'ay" is in the singular, addressing a single person, yet, the word "lifnaichem", is in the plural, before y'all. Why does the pasuk make this switch?

The gemara (Kiddushin 40:) teaches that a person should always view the world as hanging in perfect balance between merits and sins. Your performing a single mitzva will tilt the scale of the entire world towards merit and the credit is all yours. A single sin will tip the scale of the entire world to that side, and the responsibility is all yours. 'R'ay!' – you, the individual, you must realize, that it is in your hands to determine the fate of the entire world. "Lifnaychem" – before them. If bracha or klalah will be before them, before the whole world that is hanging in balance, is dependent on you.

Our parsha also discusses giving one tenth (ma'aser) of one's earnings to charity. "A'ser t'aser – you should tithe (14:22)." Chaza"l explain, "aser k'day she'tisasher", give one tenth in order to become rich. Giving to others is the way to guarantee that you'll have a plentiful amount. The gemara (Kesuvos 66.) states "melech mamone chaser". The salt, meaning the preservative, for money is to make sure that some is missing (chaser). Share what you have!

The Chofetz Chaim illustrates this with a parable. A farmer would bring his produce to sell to a merchant at a price of a gold coin per bagful. The agreed upon procedure was that a mark was made on the wall each time the bag was filled. Afterwards, the marks were counted, thereby determining the amount delivered, and the number of gold coins to be paid.

The farmer began to get suspicious about this procedure, being that the merchant could possibly erase some of the marks, thereby cheating the farmer out of his due payment. He suggested to the merchant an alternative method. For every bagful measured, the merchant would place a copper coin on a plate. They would then tally the amount of coins, thereby determining the quantity delivered and the amount of gold coins owed by the merchant.

They instituted this method and it ran smoothly for a while. However, the farmer had a hard time controlling himself. When the merchant wasn't looking he would reach forth and steal some of these copper coins!

The Chofetz Chaim would compare a person who felt he'd gain by either working on Shabbos or by withholding charity, to this farmer. A blessing is promised to those who don't work on Shabbos and to those who give ma'aser. A person who tries to make some extra money by neglecting either of these mitzvos is gaining copper coins at the expense of gold ones!

Our parsha also teaches the Jewish attitude toward death. "Banim atem laHashem Elokaichem, lo tisgoddu! (14:1)" The gentiles, upon hearing of the death of a loved one, would scratch and cut themselves in agony. We are told, "You are sons of Hashem, do not maul yourselves!". The connection between our being sons of Hashem and the

prohibition against this cutting display of anguish is explained in different ways.

The Ba'alei Tosafos explain that a person, upon losing a close relative, is comforted by the realization that he still has close relatives. "Banim atem laHashem Elokaichem!" You are not an orphan! You are the sons of Hashem! Your eternal father is still alive! Sadness is in order, anguish is not. The story is told of a woman who watched the Nazis yshv"z murder her only child. She looked heavenward and cried out, "Master of the Universe! Until now I have divided my love between You and my child. My love for You is now undivided!"

Though this is a level that is far beyond us, there is much to be learned from it.

The Ohr HaChaim takes a different approach, offering a parable which I'll embellish. A father sent a son to a far-away land in order to procure some items that weren't available locally. The son lived there for an extended period of time and built many close relationships. Finally, the long awaited letter from his father arrived, requesting him to come back home. On the day of his departure, those who loved him come to the port to bid their farewell. There was much sadness and tears, but not agony or anguish. The thought of someone tearing himself up would have seemed preposterous. Why? Because the child was returning to the parent. The time had come to take the return journey back to his true home. The friends cried tears of sadness, realizing that they will no longer see him, but that his existence continues. Tears expressing the personal loss of not being able to maintain and build a relationship are proper and justified. Bitter anguish is not. "Banim atem laHashem Elokaichem!"

May we all remember, when we deal with lifes inevitable tragedies and whenever we deal with others, "Banim atem laHashem Elokaichem!"

Good Shabbos.

Yisroel Ciner

TORAH SHORTS: Reeh

by Rabbi Ben-Tzion Spitz

Commentary based on the Bat Ayin

The Curse of Lottery Winnings (Reeh)

We must do our business faithfully, without trouble or disquiet, recalling our mind to God mildly, and with tranquility, as often as we find it wandering from him. - Brother Lawrence

Statistics indicate that over seventy percent of lottery winners become broke within five years of winning the lottery. That means they become WORSE off than before they won millions of dollars.

Related to the above perhaps counterintuitive expectation, the Bat Ayin on Deuteronomy 11:26 ponders the very purpose of material wealth and rewards in this world. If indeed the purpose of the journey of our souls in this world is for the eternal spiritual rewards of the next

world, then why should we be concerned with bounty in this world, why should we pray for it and why should God promise it to us if we follow His laws?

The Bat Ayin explains that material wealth in this world is merely a means to an end. The objective of God's physical blessings during our mortal existence is for one purpose – to better serve Him. Having a roof over our heads, decent clothing, nutritious food, effective transportation, and the income to support all our needs is solely to allow us to carry out our divine obligations. The tangible rewards we receive are a means to serve God with greater tranquility. The greater our economic stability, the more capable and tranquil we should be in our service of God.

However, the Bat Ayin adds that God also knows that money and wealth can corrupt. He knows the corrosive impact that material plenty can have on a soul. Therefore, in some cases, God withholds the bounty for our own good. Not only does He not want us to be among those seventy percent of lottery winners who lose their money, but He also doesn't want us to be among the well-off who lose their souls.

May we remember what our divine blessings are for.

Shabbat Shalom,

Ben-Tzion

Dedication

To the Aliyah of our niece and nephew, Leora and Sammy Landesman. Mazal Tov!

Parashat Re'eh

by Rabbi Nachman Kahana

Consideration, Emancipation & Fulfillment

The Torah has a way of condensing complex issues with countless details into a few words; for example, how Jews should relate to each other, with the short phrase:

וְאָהַבְתָּ לְרֵעֶךָ כְּמוֹךָ אֲנִי ה'

Love your fellow Jew as you love yourself, I am HaShem.

I take it one step forward and reduce it to one word – consideration (for your fellow Jew).

The Torah contains many verses that instruct us to be HaShem's chosen nation in Eretz Yisrael.

I reduce it to one word – emancipation (freedom for the neshama and the body).

Moshe descended from Har Sinai with a message from HaShem to Am YIsrael:

וְאַתֶּם תְּהִיוּ לִי מַמְלַכְת כֹּהֲנִים וְגוֹי קָדוֹשׁ

And you shall be for me a Kingdom of Kohanim and a holy nation.

Or in one word HaShem granted us – infinity.

However, in the light (or darkness) of our "disappointing" history when our nation did not achieve those two goals; except perhaps in the 40 years beginning with the reign of King Shlomo until the reign of his son, Rechav'am when the nation succeeded into Yehuda and Yisrael.

HaShem's message and the ultimate process towards that goal which has turned into 3000 years of unfulfilled struggle, I call in one word – fulfillment.

True, we have returned home – a giant leap towards the goal, however there are deep pitfalls still in front of us.

Like the 400 thousand non-Jews from Eastern Europe who were welcomed here by way of the asinine grandfather clause in the Law of Return, passed by our government many of its members who had no idea what it means to be a Jew or to be a Zionist.

The 2 million plus Moslems and other religions who reside here are a drawback from attaining the goal.

The observant Jews in the galut, are they contributing to the goal of a Kingdom of Kohanim and a holy nation even by their intense spirituality in the Torah centers of Florida and California?

I believe that all world history revolves around HaShem's relationship with the Jewish people, so all history in one way or another are particles of energy driving us towards the goal of being a Kingdom of Kohanim and a holy nation.

Based on this premise, I have over time taken the precarious and sometime ludicrous step of predicting the future based on what I see in the present. These predictions are not necessarily what I hope for, some are even distasteful – but it is what it is. Among them:

1- The US, home to the largest Jewish community in the world, second only to Eretz Yisrael, will soon be forced to restore military conscription. The US has not had a draft since 1973 and Congress and the president would have to authorize one in the case of a national emergency. World events such as the war in eastern Europe, an increasing US presence in Poland, and the Iranian threat continue to evolve, but they might not necessarily evoke the draft.

However, the way I view current events, what will force this change will be the very tenuous and fragile social interaction between political, racial, ethnic and socio-economic groups that could suddenly erupt into mass demonstrations and from there into chaos, necessitating strong police and military forces based on conscription.

So, the smart Jews will leave for home now, in contrast to the 80% of Jews who at the time of the Exodus refused to leave the flesh pots of Egypt and are now a mere footnote in our literature.

2. Large numbers of Israeli residents, perhaps even in the millions, will “relocate”. No one is leaving yet, but there are rumblings among certain groups who have decided or are contemplating the possibility -as long as there are places for Jews to “relocate”. Of those, there are also the hundreds of thousands of above-mentioned non-Jews who entered the country by way of the “grandfather” clause in the Law of Return. Their departure will contribute to our metamorphosis into a kingdom of kohanim and a holy nation. The dramatic increase of churches and stores

that sell pig which did not exist previously are the results of these gentile immigrants.

3. Then there are Jews here who are by choice or by upbringing disconnected from Judaism; they feel comfortable in the presence of goyim but are annoyed when a religious Jew passes by – they too are candidates for relocation (yerida).

ALL in all, those who will remain will be the proud and dedicated descendants of proud and dedicated generations of Jews who tenaciously fought to remain Jews.

The next prediction is the collapse of our democratic governmental system and the necessity of the military to replace it. Ours is a democratic parliamentary system with local and national elections.

Question: if this system is so great why isn't it recommended in the Torah for the Jewish nation?

The Torah's social and political system is a four branch Theocracy. Initially twelve tribes each under the leadership of a shofet (judge) like Gidon or a prophet like Shmuel, and when it became necessary for all the tribes to act as one the system changed to four branches: Monarchy, Kohen Gadol (High Priest), Sanhedrin, and the reigning prophet of the time.

There are no national elections in a Torah government. So, the words of Abraham Lincoln, “government, of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth,” that is based on a fundamental trust in the logic and morality of the ‘people’ spoken at Gettysburg, are not stated in the holy Torah.

Perhaps our basic makeup is not fit for democracy, where the loser accepts the outcome and plays along. The Jewish mentality is that any dispute be it even over a minor item like the neighbor's cat crossing into one's yard, becomes a matter of principal (it's not the cat, it's the principle) and principles cannot be compromised. So, the loser never forgets, and the winner never remembers (those who helped him).

In any event the vector of Jewish history in our long and challenging pilgrimage towards the goals set for us by HaShem is pointing upwards. We have returned to Eretz Yisrael and HaShem has returned Yerushalayim to us. The holy atmosphere of Eretz Yisrael has rejuvenated the dry souls of galut and we have today a Kingdom of Torah.

Our parasha begins with HaShem promising the Jewish nation “bracha” if we deserve it, or G-d forbid “Klala” if we deserve to be cursed.

It is apparent that the klala of the galut has run its course. HaShem's blessings can be seen and felt in every corner of this country. If you wish to feel HaShem's presence, go to a yeshiva here, if you want to see HaShem's blessings go the shuk of Machane Yehuda.

Shabbat Shalom
Nachman Kahana

Finding commonality between the Rav and the Satmar Rebbe

Where do we see any nechama after Tisha B'Av? Year after year another Tisha B'Av passes, and we are left bereft of a Third Temple.

Steven Genack

I recently interviewed my uncle, Rabbi Menachem Genack, CEO of OU Kosher. "Serendipitously," I also recently heard a shiur from Rabbi Eli Mansour. Based on the interview and the shiur, I found common ground with regard to Israel between two gedolim: The Rav (Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik zt"l) and the Satmar Rebbe.

The synthesis of both opinions came by way of an existential question that Rabbi Mansour posed. He asked: Where do we see any nechama after Tisha B'Av? Year after year another Tisha B'Av passes, and we are left bereft of a Third Temple.

To answer, Rabbi Mansour discussed a seemingly perplexing midrash (Yalkut Shimoni on Nach 443) to which the Satmar Rebbe shines light upon. The midrash expresses that G-d asked all the Nevi'im throughout history to visit one by one the children of Israel and offer them comfort. One after another, each comes to comfort the Jews and they are utterly rejected.

Even Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov and Moshe are rejected. Then the midrash says, "Immediately, all [of the Nevi'im] walked before the Holy Blessed One and said: Master of the Universe — she does not accept our comfortings, as it is written: "Unhappy, storm-tossed one, un comforted!" (Isaiah 54:11). The Holy Blessed One said: I and you shall walk to comfort her, i.e. "Comfort O comfort my people" — 'Comfort Her, O comfort her, my people.'"

The Satmar Rebbe explains that Bnei Yisroel would take comfort in only one kind of final redemption, one where God "walks" and delivers it.

All previous redeemers took us out of one galut only to lead us into another. We want God only for the last one; that's where our comfort will lie.

Rabbi Mansour notes that the Satmar Rebbe had a great love for Israel. He just wanted it to be redeemed in the purest of ways, through God, as he was concerned that man, in his limitations, like previous redeemers, will fall short.

In the interview with my uncle, we discussed various topics and one of them was how he thinks the Rav would view today's government in Israel. The Rav was known to have more of a moderate approach and believed the establishment of the State of Israel was an expression of sovereignty and triggered yishuv HaAretz.

However, he was also concerned with a government that would be bent towards secularism. My uncle said that the Rav would certainly be concerned today about the divisions in the government.

My mother attended Camp Massad in the Pocono Mountains in Pennsylvania. The camp existed from the early 1940s to the 60s. At that time, there was a built-in love for Israel that all the campers felt. Israel was something to be cherished. My mother told me about my great uncle, Eliyahu-Moshe Genechovsky who served in the first and second Knesset. He had great passion for Israel.

If Israel was cherished as it once was, the Knesset could not possibly become only a civil body. The Satmar Rebbe, who survived the Holocaust, had a great love for Israel, and wanted to see a final redemption without the potential limitations of man. The Rav also had his yearnings and hopes tied to Israel with the hopes of final redemption. Though the Rav saw the importance of sovereignty and the establishment of the State of Israel, he would have concerns about the current schisms taking place in the government. Hoping for an exclusive Godly Redemption is something that both of these gedolim would look forward to as it would be final, complete and not vulnerable to the foibles of man.

On Controversy, Unity, and Tu B'Av Revivim

What characterizes a dispute for Heaven's sake, and why in such a dispute, the position of the opposing party should not be rejected * The right way to reach a compromise that will satisfy the will of both parties * The goal of unity reflected in the events of Tu B'Av * In contrast to Yom Kippur, Tu B'Av remains a day on which weddings and matters of matchmaking abound, and in consequence, brotherly love is increased

A Dispute for the Sake of Heaven

Usually, when a great controversy breaks out, strong feelings of hatred arise, and as a result, many people are shocked that here, once again, we are failing in *sinat chinam* (baseless hatred) which destroyed our Temple, and therefore, we have to increase *ahavat chinam* (loving others freely without judgement). A demand arises for all parties to cancel their opinion, in order to stop the dispute. Some groups hold unity gatherings, while others write and speak about condemning discord, which involves all the prohibitions between man and his fellow neighbor.

However, in practice, despite the good intentions, the demand for *ahavat chinam*, and the shock from *sinat chinam*, do not register. This, because while a dispute is taking place, each side is sure they are in the right, its future depends on it, and if the other side wins, its world will be destroyed. Therefore, even when the fear arises that if they continue the dispute, together, both sides will be destroyed, they continue the dispute, because, even then, each side believes that if the other wins, everything will be destroyed.

Indeed, the Torah does not require people, or groups, to forego their opinion, because standing by their opinion is

of great benefit to the clarification of the truth and the advancement of society, and this is a dispute le'Shem Shamayim (for the sake of Heaven). The prohibition is to engage in a dispute that is not le'Shem Shamayim.

It is worth adding that there is no justice in asking one of the parties to forgo his position, therefore, as long as his claim is not listened to seriously, the sense of justice pulsating in him will not allow him to remain silent. And if in the name of peace they demand one forgo his position, the dispute will worsen, because instead of addressing the substantive claims, they will make the dispute more personal, and dangerous.

The Sign of Controversy for the Sake of Heaven

In a dispute le'Shem Shamayim, one continues to love and respect the other side, while in a dispute that is not le'Shem Shamayim, the other side is hated, and despised. A person who carries on an evil dispute can deceive himself and claim that he loves and respects the other person, however, the test for this is simple: if he loves the other party – he wishes for his good, is unhappy with his failure, and does not wish for his destruction. As a result, he respects the other side, and sees all the good qualities in him, and appreciates them. Out of this, he is also able to present the position of the other side honestly, in such a way that the other side will also be satisfied with the presentation of his position.

On the other hand, in a dispute that is not le'Shem Shamayim, the disputants despise the other side, fail to see the good in it, and are unable to express their position in a fair manner. They interpret every position and action of the other side as being bad, and wish to see their opponents defeated, and suffer.

In other words, a dispute le'Shem Shamayim is a substantive dispute on the subject being argued about, which does not spread beyond the focused area of the argument. Whereas a dispute that is not le'Shem Shamayim becomes a personal dispute against all the positions of the other side. And when the disagreement is colossal, it spreads over the entire outlook and character of the group that expresses the opposite opinion. If they are from the left, the other side claims they hate all the settlers and haredim, despise the mesoratim (traditional Jews), and victimize them. They are alienated from their Jewish identity. They took over the legal system, the economy, academia, and other state resources. Their children serve in army troops that will afford them a springboard for future jobs, and avoid combat service in field units. They are not willing to give up power, and with various legal pretexts, find a way to denigrate the other side's position, and harm it. And if they are from the right, well then they despise the law, hate Arabs, and want to turn the State of Israel into an apartheid state that all countries will hate. And if they are religious as well, then they also hate LGBT people, Reform Jews, members of other religions, and if they only had the power, they would impose harsh religious and modesty

laws on the secular Jews, and harm science, the economy, and the army. The last remaining secular Jews will have to finance the kollel families, and their countless children, with their taxes.

And even though all these claims contain a grain of truth, the exaggeration is a lie, and expresses a dispute that is not le'Shem Shamayim.

A Dispute for the Sake of Heaven Allows for a Good Compromise

When a dispute is conducted properly, the positions are clarified in a beneficial manner, and as a result, a compromise can be reached in which each side achieves half of its ambitions. If, out of a positive outlook, they manage to understand each other better, each side will achieve the majority of its ambitions. In other words, if they delve deeper into what the other side has said, they will be able to agree that each side will receive what is more important to them, and consequently, it will turn out that the majority, or the most important issue of the ambitions of both sides, will be fulfilled.

On the other hand, in an antagonistic dispute, each side usually obtains less than half of its ambitions, since each side sabotages the opposing side, and thus each side achieves at best, some of its ambitions, and in a worst case scenario, is harmed, and achieves nothing.

Tu B'Av

It is appropriate in these days to deal with the subject of Tu B'Av. Our Sages said: "Israel never knew such wonderful holidays as 'Tu B'Av' (the 15th of the Jewish month of Av) and Yom Kippur" (Mishna Ta'anit 4:8). Several reasons were given for this in the Talmud (Ta'anit 30b), and all of them are related to events that took place on this day, three of which are related to events that increased the unity and peace between the Tribes of Israel, and as a result, is a correction of the sin of *sinat chinam*, because of which, the Second Temple was destroyed.

The Three Events Related to Strengthening Unity

The first: on this day, a daughter who had no brothers was permitted to marry a member of another tribe, which until then was forbidden, so that the inheritance she inherited would not pass from the members of her father's tribe to the members of her husband's tribe, and as it was said in relation to the daughters of Zelophehad: "Every daughter among the Israelite tribes who inherits a share must become the wife of someone from a clan of her father's tribe, in order that every Israelite [heir] may keep an ancestral share. Thus no inheritance shall pass over from one tribe to another, but the Israelite tribes shall remain bound each to its portion" (Bamidbar 36: 8-9).

The second: on this day the members of the tribe of Benjamin were allowed to marry women from the daughters of the other tribes. Because following the refusal of the members of the tribe of Benjamin to punish the sinners in the act of the concubine at Gibeah, a terrible civil war broke out in which tens of thousands of Israelites were

killed, and the tribe of Benjamin was almost annihilated. In the framework of the war, and anger with the tribe of Benjamin, the Israelites swore that they would not give their daughters to the sons of the tribe of Benjamin, as it is said: "Now Israel's forces had taken an oath at Mizpah: "None of us must ever give his daughter in marriage to a Benjaminite" (Judges 21:1).

At the end of the war, there were only hundreds of men from Benjamin left, and in order to save the tribe of Benjamin from extinction, they had to find a permit to their oath by which they could marry. It was agreed that the sons of Benjamin would wait in the vineyards for the daughters of Shiloh, while they used to dance and make merry there in preparation for their wedding, and initiate the relationship with the girls without the girls' fathers approving it, thus finding brides for them without the fathers breaking the oath. And as the elders of Israel said to the sons of Benjamin: "As soon as you see the daughters of Shiloh coming out to join in the dances, come out from the vineyards; let each of you seize a wife from among the daughters of Shiloh (with the consent of the girls, but without the permission of the fathers), and be off for the land of Benjamin" (ibid. 21:21).

Our Sages also said (Ta'anit 30b), that after the division of the Kingdom of Israel, Jeroboam ben Nevat placed guards to prevent the ten tribes in his kingdom from ascending to Jerusalem and the Temple in the kingdom of Judah. And on Tu B'Av, after several generations, King Hosea ben Elah canceled the matter, thus allowing all of Israel to return and unite around the Temple, as in the days of Solomon.

Matchmaking and Weddings

In addition to this, the day of Tu B'Av, as well as Yom Kippur, was designated for matchmaking, in which the daughters of Jerusalem would continue the custom of the daughters of Shiloh, and go to the vineyards to find their match, out of joy. And as our Sages said: "There were no days as joyous for the Jewish people as the fifteenth of Av and as Yom Kippur, as on them the daughters of Jerusalem would go out in white clothes, which each woman borrowed from another. Why were they borrowed? They did this so as not to embarrass one who did not have her own white garments... and the daughters of Jerusalem would go out and dance in the vineyards. And what would they say? Young man, please lift up your eyes and see what you choose for yourself for a wife. Do not set your eyes toward beauty, but set your eyes toward a good family, as the verse states: "Grace is deceitful and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised" (Proverbs 31:30), and it further says: "Give her the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates" (Mishna Ta'anit 26:2).

What these two days have in common is that they are days of peace and unity in the world – on Yom Kippur, between God and Israel, and on Tu B'Av, between Jews. On Yom Kippur, Israel repents, and God in His great love

for His people, atones for their transgressions and purifies them, and they return to connect with Him in the holiness of their faith, and unite with Him out of love (Peninei Halakha: Yamim Nora'im 6:1). On Tu B'Av, peace was made amongst the Jews, for the deepest division is between the tribes, and on Tu B'Av, the tribes removed the barriers and divisions between them, and returned to merge in unity.

Out of the general unity of these days, Jews are accustomed to engage in matchmaking, in which every couple who marries with love and joy, expresses on a small scale, the uniqueness between God and Israel and His people, and the unity within Israel, and consequently, the Shechinah (Divine Presence) dwells between them. In the marriage covenant, which includes a commitment to live in total loyalty to one another, there is an expression of the sanctity of the covenant between Israel and God, and as is said in the blessing of the Kiddushin: "Blessed art thou God, who has sanctified His people Israel by chuppah and kiddushin." That is why the relationship between God and Israel is likened to the joy of a bridegroom and a bride, as it is said: "And as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you" (Isaiah 62:5). Also, by marrying, which includes a commitment to love and make each other happy, the couple fulfills in the most complete way the mitzvah which is a major tenet in the Torah, the mitzvah "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18, Sifra ibid). And resultantly, the unity between all the tribes of Israel is revealed, and between Israel and their Father in Heaven, and an abundance of blessing and life is added to the world (Peninei Halakha: Simchat HaBayit U'Birchato 1:1; 5-6).

Since the Temple was destroyed, it is not customary to engage in matchmaking on Yom Kippur, and we suffice with prayers – that single men and women merit to marry, and that couples merit to intensify their love and happiness (Peninei Halakha: Yamim Nora'im 6:12). However, Tu B'Av remains a day on which people often marry, and engage in matchmaking and unity between the different segments of the people of Israel. Therefore, it is considered a Yom Tov, and Tachanun (supplications) is not recited in prayers, and fasting is prohibited.

Rabbi Eliezer Melamed

Office of the Chief Rabbi Mirvis

Re'eh: Three ways to assess character

What are the three ways in which one can assess a person's character?

The Gemara in Masechet Eruvin 65b tells us the answer is,

"Kisoh, kosoh and ka'asoh."

'Kisoh' – ones' pocket. To what degree is a person generous?

'Kosoh' – one's cup. How does a person conduct him or herself when inebriated?

And ‘Ka’asoh’ – one’s anger – when in a rage, when really upset, to what degree can a person control themselves?

It is from here that Rav Shimshon Rafael Hirsch is able to give a beautiful understanding of the very final verse of Parshat Re’eh. The Torah (Devarim 16:16) tells us how, over the three pilgrim festivals,

“Veloh yeirah pnei Hashem reikam,” – “We should not come to Jerusalem, to the presence of Hashem, empty handed.”

“Ish k’matnat yadoh,” – “Every person should give according to the gift that comes from their hands,”

“kevirkat Hashem Elokeicha asher natan lach,” – “according to the blessing that Hashem has given to them.”

Rav Shimshon Rafael Hirsch explains that there is another way to read the seemingly unnecessary words ‘ish k’matnat yadoh’ – ‘every person according to the gift of their hands’. We can read it as follows:

‘Ish’ – how do you tell the character of a person? The answer is, ‘k’matnat yado’ – according to the way that their hands give.

This is an example of ‘kisoh’. Hashem has blessed this individual, so to what degree is this person being generous? Now we can understand the continuation of the verse: ‘kebirkat Hashem Elokeicha asher natan lach’ – if you give to charity, if you give of yourself to others according to the blessings that Hashem has given you, commensurate with what you have, that is the sign of a truly outstanding character.

So therefore, when coming to Jerusalem on the pilgrim festivals, to pray to Hashem and be in the presence of the Almighty, the Torah highlights for us how central generosity to fellow human beings is. Ultimately, one of the key ways to test the true character of a person will depend on how giving they are.

Shabbat shalom.

The Complainer

Rabbi YY Jacobson

When All You Can See Are Carcasses, There is Something Wrong With You

The Raah Bird

This week’s portion Re’eh repeats—for the second time in the Torah[1]—G-d’s “Kosher List,” of mammals, fish and birds, suitable for Jewish consumption. In the category of birds, the Torah enumerates twenty-four species of birds which are not kosher. One of them is called by three names—the Raah, Dayah and Ayah.[2]

The Talmud explains[3] that these are three names for the same bird. The Torah specifies all of them, because if it would mention only one name, then if someone knows the bird by one of its names not mentioned in the Torah, he might have entertained the idea that it was kosher.

What type of bird is this Raah/Ayah/Dayah creature? Many have translated it as the Vulture or the Hawk. Yet, after all the research, it seems that the most accurate translation for

the Raah bird is the Kite, or in its scientific term—the Milvus. Indeed, in Arabic the Kite is known as the “Chadaa” (חדאא), quite similar to the biblical Dayah.[4]

Three Names

Why three names for the same bird? “Raah” stems from the verb “to see.” “Dayah” is from the verb “to fly, soar, or glide.” “Ayah” is from the verb “to wail, scream, cry.” All these names describe characteristics of this bird. This Kite indeed is scattered all over the Middle East, feeding chiefly on smaller birds, mice, reptiles, and fish. In the capture of fish the Kite is almost as expert as the osprey (the “Shalach” in the biblical language), darting from a great height into the water, and bearing off the fish in its claws. The wings of the Kite are long and powerful, bearing it through the air in a peculiarly graceful flight. That is why it has been called the Glede or the Kite, representing its gliding movements.

The sight of this bird is remarkably keen and piercing. From the vast elevation to which it soars when in search of food, it is able to survey the face of the land beneath, and to detect the partridge, quail, chicken, or other creature that will become its food.

Should the Kite suspect danger near its nest, it escapes by darting rapidly into the air, soaring at a vast height above the trees among which its home is made. From that elevation it can act as a sentinel, due to its incredible eyesight, and will not come down until it is assured of safety.

The Talmud’s Observation

What is remarkable is that seventeen centuries before all of the scientific research, the Talmud described it in a few words: [5]

אמר רב אבהו, ראה זו איה, ולמה נקרא שמה ראה? שרואה ביותר. וכן הוא אומר [6] נתיב לא ידעו עיט, ולא שזפתו עין איה. תנא עומדת בבבל ורואה גבלה בארץ ישראל!

Rabbi Abahu said, the Raah bird is the same as the Ayah. Why is this bird it called "Raah?" Because it sees exceedingly well.

The Talmud proceeds to prove this from a verse in Job:[7]"There is a path which no bird of prey knows; and which the kite’s eye has not seen." The very fact that the biblical verse underscores the fact that the Kite’s eye has not perceived the hidden path indicates that the kite usually possesses piercing vision.

The Talmud continues to illustrate the kite’s keen eyesight:

We have learnt that this bird stands in Babylon, and sees a carcass in the Land of Israel!

Now, that’s impressive, being that the distance between Babylon (present day Iraq) and Israel is some 500 miles.[8]

Three Questions

The obvious question is why the Talmud uses such a strange illustration: “This bird stands in Babylon and sees a carcass in the Land of Israel!” It could have used so many

more examples of what the bird is capable of seeing and where it is capable of seeing it.

Another, more substantial question: The reason some animals are not kosher is because the negative characteristics these animals possess can have a negative impact on their consumer. “You are what you eat” is not only a cliché. It is why we are instructed to abstain from eating certain animals whose traits we would not wish to incorporate into our psyche. Kosher animals, on the other hand, are characterized by peaceful traits that are worth imitating. [9]

But why, then, is this bird not kosher? Surely keen eyesight and perception are worthy traits. Shouldn't this bird then be kosher? [10]

What Do You See?

The Talmud is not only illustrating the keen vision of the Kite, or the Raah; it is also explaining to us why it is not kosher: “This bird stands in Babylon, and sees a carcass in the Land of Israel!” When you gaze at the land of Israel, you can see many things, including many positive and heartwarming items; yet what does this bird see? Corpses! Being a carnivorous bird, which kills, devours and eats the meat of other animals, its eyes gaze at Eretz Yisroel but observe only one thing: the carcasses in the land! [11]

This is what makes it a non-kosher animal—because this quality is prevalent among some people as well, and we do not want to “eat” and incorporate this type of behavior into our psyche.

Helpless Critics

Some people are simply chronic complainers. They will gaze at their wife, children, relatives, and community members and all they will see are flaws, deficiencies, mishaps, and negative attributes.

Some people never stop criticizing everybody and everything. While some see the good in everybody, even in the worst situation or person, these characters manage to somehow see the evil in everybody and in everything. They can always show you how everyone has an “agenda,” and everyone is driven by ulterior motives; there are smelly carcasses everywhere.

Are they right? They may be partially, or even completely correct. Every person has flaws. Even the greatest saint has demons; even a great man usually has some skeleton—a corpse—in his closet. That is why we need a Torah to guide us, and that is why the Torah asks of us to never stop working on ourselves, to challenge our conventions, to scrutinize our motives, to refine our behavior, to make amends of our mistakes. But why is that the only thing you manage to observe?

The “Holy” Preacher

A story:[12]

A renowned Maggid (traveling preacher) arrived one day at the hometown of Reb Shmuel Munkes, a noted disciple of Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, who was a deeply pious man with an incredible sense of humor. After reading his

letter of approbation, lauding him as a tzaddik went to wander from town to town for the sole purpose of inspiring fellow Jews, the townspeople—who were simple, G-d fearing, innocent Jews—invited him to preach.

Throughout his sermon the Maggid berated his fine audience, chastising them for “dreadful sins.” He rebuked them, for being such terrible, lowly and horrendous Jews, evoking G-d’s wrath. He proceeded to describe in vivid detail the severe punishment that awaited them as a result of their evil ways. When finished, the proud orator quickly retired to his room, leaving his crestfallen audience to wail over their horrific moral state and the Divine retribution about to befall them.

No sooner had he made himself comfortable, when a man walked into his room. It was Reb Shmuel himself.

Reb Shmuel took out a long knife and a sharpening stone entered his room. He proceeded to sharpen his knife.

After a few tense and wordless moments, the Maggid broke the silence. “What’s this all about?” he asked with a look of astonishment.

His eyes still trained on the sharpening stone, Rabbi Shmuel Munkes replied in mock sincerity: “As the honorable Maggid knows, we simple folk never had the merit of having a righteous scholar in our midst. Who knows, perhaps it is because of our wanton sins you just described.”

Bemused as to where this was heading, the Maggid replied, “Yes, yes, but what does any of this have to do with the knife you are sharpening?”

“Well,” retorted Reb Shmuel, “We were taught by our parents that before Rosh Hashanah one should pray at the gravesites of the righteous. And sadly, we never had in our cemetery the grave of a righteous man. All of our residents—as you have eloquently described us—have been utterly wicked.”

“Of course, of course, nodded the Maggid. But why the knife!?”

“It’s rather simple,” explained Reb Shmuel calmly. “The nearest burial site of a tzaddik is very far from our town. It is extremely cumbersome for the townsfolk to make the yearly trek. We decided that we finally need to have a righteous man buried in our midst.

“After hearing your speech,” Reb Shmuel continued in a straight face, “I know there is no one more holy and righteous than you in our entire region. So I decided to... slaughter you and bury you right here in our very own cemetery. Finally, before Rosh Hashanah, we will be able to come pray at your sacred grave site.”

As the grim reality began to set in, the Maggid adeptly switched course. “Come to think of it,” he stammered, “I am not all that righteous after all. I have committed some small sins here and there; they were obviously all inadvertent.”

Reb Shmuel dismissed the Maggid’s confession: “Honored Maggid! You are still very righteous and

learned. As for the transgressions? They are so minor; who would even know that these were sins. Your humility is nothing but proof of your exceptional righteousness. Besides, relative to our heinous sins—which you have just described in your sermon—you are, trust me, a complete tzaadik! You are the man we need buried here.”

By now, Reb Shmuel was done with the sharpening of the knife. The “holy preacher” began to panic.

“On second thought,” stuttered the Maggid, “Some of my transgressions were a bit more serious, such as...” He went on to share some immoral things he has done in his life, which disqualified him from being a tzaddik. Rabbi Shmuel quickly dismissed these as well: “To us you are still a great Tzaddik. You are far better than anything we have.”

Finally, the Maggid confessed to some rather ugly and embarrassing transgressions. He admitted that in truth he was far from the great tzaddik that he portrayed himself to be. He was actually a disgraceful low life.

Now, it was Rabbi Shmuel’s turn to preach: “How dare you admonish these beautiful, innocent and pure Jews, when you yourself are a despicable, immoral charlatan! How dare you cause such fine, lovely, well-intended Jews so much anguish. It is you who needs to transform his life; it is you who needs to repent for all of his transgressions.

The Maggid got the message. He left the town in deep inner shame. He never again rebuked his audiences with stern, harsh words.

The Mirror

How did Reb Shmuel know that this guy was really playing a game and that he was far from holy?

The answer is simple: When you are pure and holy, you see innocence and purity in others. When you are in touch with your own soul, you sense the soul in others. When you have a genuine relationship with G-d, and your appreciation of the G-dliness within every person is far more palpable. When you don’t suffer from an inflated ego, or from terrible insecurity, you will truly appreciate the goodness in others.

To be sure, there are corpses, skeletons, demons and ghosts in almost every human person; that is what makes them human. Even the Holy Land has its share of carcasses—physical and psychological. But when that is the only thing you see, it means that you are a non-kosher person. You need your own cleansing.

The Bias Toward Israel Today

This insight of our sages concerning the non-kosher Raah bird is so relevant today when it comes to Israel.

Is Israel a perfect country? We all know the answer. Israel has many challenges and problems. Is the government perfect? Only a fool can think so. Over the last three decades, the Israeli leadership has made some historical errors which might take generations to fix.

But there are those who when they look at Israel see nothing but “corpses.” In our own day and age, with

modern technology, we were all blessed with the eyesight of the Kite. We sit in our homes in Babylon (or US, or Canada, or Europe, Australia, South Africa, or anywhere else in the world), and with the help of CNN or BBC or other news cameras, we can see Israel. But often, all the reporters, journalists, bloggers, academics, and politicians see in Israel are stinky corpses. When they report on Israel, you would think that the country does nothing besides producing Palestinian Children's corpses.

And this is how you know how terribly biased and unfair they are. When someone criticizes Israel—that is legitimate. There is much to comment and argue about. But when one has nothing but criticism for Israel, when there is nothing good to say about Israel, when Israel is portrayed as the most racist country—then you know it has nothing to do with Israel; rather, the person spewing the hate is treif.

At the end of the day, it is all a matter of perspective. Each of us has to choose what we are going to see—in ourselves and in the world around us.

[1] The first time in Leviticus chapter 11, in the portion of Shemini.

[2] Deuteronomy 14:13

[3] Chulin 63b, quoted in Rashi to Deuteronomy ibid.

[4] The bird is mentioned another two times in the Bible: Isaiah 34:15, "There shall the kites [dayos] also be gathered, every one with her mate." In Job 28:7, there is a similar word, ayah. This verse is quoted below in the essay.

[5] Chulin 63b

[6] Job 28:7

[7] Job ibid.

[8] The Maharal of Prague, in his book Beer Hagoleh, explains this in two possible ways: It means literally that this bird has extraordinary vision. Another possible explanation is that this bird in its most perfect state possesses this ability, though practically, the physical bird is always flawed. This is based on the prevalent idea in Jewish philosophy and in the works of the Maharal that every being and object possesses two dimensions: its tzurah and its chomer. The tzurah is the abstract form of this particular object; it is the concept of this object in its most perfect and ideal form. Chomer is the way it is manifested practically in a concrete and flawed universe. This duality is a major theme in the works of the Greek Philosopher Plato.

[9] See Ramban on Leviticus 11:12. See also Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah end of section 81.

[10] This bird is indeed carnivorous, which makes it non-kosher (see references in previous footnote.) Yet the fact that the list of non-kosher birds the Torah titles it as “Raah,” indicates that this quality itself, its keen eyesight, is part of what it makes it non-kosher. Yet, we would think that keen eyesight is a positive quality!

[11] In other words, this bird possesses two negative qualities: it is carnivorous, and it “sees” nothing but the carcasses.

[12] I copied some paragraphs of the story from an article by Rabbi Yosef Kahanov <http://www.crownheights.info/index.php?itemid=23516>

Parshas Re'eh

Rabbi Yochanan Zweig

This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Eliyahu ben Moshe Aron Lefkowitz OBM by the Lefkowitz family.

Getting By Giving

You shall truly tithe [...] (14:22).

The Gemara (Taanis 9a) records a fascinating conversation between R' Yochanan and his young nephew. R' Yochanan asked his nephew, "Recite to me the Bible verse [you have learned today]." The latter replied, "You shall surely tithe." At the same time, his nephew asked, "What are the meaning of these words?" R' Yochanan answered, "Give tithes that you may be enriched."

The boy then asked, "How do you know this?" R' Yochanan replied: "Go test it [for yourself]." The boy thereupon asked, "Is it permissible to test the Holy One, blessed be He? Do we not have a verse (Devarim 6:16) that says, 'You shall not try the Lord?'" R' Yochanan replied, "Thus said R' Oshaia: The case of tithe-giving is excepted [from the prohibition], as it is said (Malachi 3:10), 'Bring the tithes unto the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and with this you may test me.'"

In other words, a person can literally test Hashem's promise to enrich those who give tzedakah. Even though the general rule is that one may not test the Almighty; the mitzvah of giving charity is exempted from this prohibition. Not only is it exempted, but Hashem actually encourages us to test Him by giving charity. Additionally, the Gemara (Pesachim 8a) states that if a person says, "I am giving this money in order that my son shall live," he is a complete tzaddik. Meaning that even though he is giving the money with an ulterior motive, it is a proper act of tzedakah and he is considered righteous.

Why is the mitzvah of tzedakah an exemption to the prohibition of testing Hashem? Furthermore, there is a general rule laid down in Pirkei Avos (1:3) that says, "Do not be as a servant serving his master in order to receive reward." So, why is the mitzvah of tzedakah different?

Rashi (Vayikra 20:17) explains that the word chessed in Aramaic means shame. In prior editions of INSIGHTS it has been explained that Aramaic is the language of understanding another person's perspective. While a person may feel good about sharing his good fortune with others by giving tzedakah, one has to also consider the receiver's perspective. In other words, when a person has to accept chessed from someone there is a devastating feeling of embarrassment that he cannot take care of his own needs.

This is why we ask Hashem in bentsching: "Do not cause us to come to need to rely on gifts or loans from others." It is debilitating to one's psyche to have to rely on the

largesse of others for survival. Yet, we know that giving tzedakah and doing chessed are key components of one's obligation to "follow in His ways." So how do we reconcile this obligation with the pain being caused to the recipient of tzedakah?

This is the reason why Hashem created a system by which the person giving is monetarily enriched by his act of tzedakah. Just as a person would not be embarrassed to be paid for giving someone terrific investment advice, so too a person receiving tzedakah is providing the giver the opportunity to enrich themselves. In fact, it is better than ordinary investment advice; its success is actually guaranteed by the Almighty. Hashem, in his infinite wisdom, is removing the poor person's shame in receiving tzedakah by enabling him to give back to the person giving the tzedakah. Perhaps this is why the word "nassan – to give" in Hebrew is a palindrome – a word that reads the same backwards and forward; because the giving goes in both directions.

The Tipping Point

And when you send him out free from you, you shall not let him go away empty handed. You shall furnish him liberally out of your flock, and out of your threshing floor, and out of your winepress; of that with which Hashem your God has blessed you, you shall give to him (15:13-14).

The Torah charges us with giving a gift to our Jewish servants when they leave our service; the Hebrew word for this is "hanaka." Rashi (ad loc) explains that this comes from the Hebrew word for adornment. Similarly, the word anak is used in scriptures to mean necklace (Shir Hashirim 4:9). In fact, giants are called anakim because they wear the sun around their neck like a necklace (Sotah 34b). Rashi on this verse explains that you have to give the freed slave something that makes it clear that you have given him a gift.

Why are we obligated to give him a gift at all? He had already been paid in advance for all of his years of servitude, why does the Torah place an obligation to bestow him with a parting gift? In addition, this reference to a necklace indicates that he needs to leave our service bejeweled. But what does that really mean? He actually isn't given jewelry – as the verses go on to explain, and further elucidated in the Talmud and Rambam (Hilchos Avadim 3:14) – he receives food and food related items. What is this reference to being bejeweled?

Did you ever wonder why when checking in at a hotel you tip the bell person and chambermaid, but not the person who checked you in? Or when shopping, you tip the person who carries your bags to the car, but not the cashier? When ordering food in a restaurant, you tip the waitress; but if you go to the counter and order, you do not tip the person at the register. Why? When do we instinctively give a tip and when do we not give one? In fact, what is the purpose of giving a tip?

The answer is, we give a tip when someone performs a personal service for us. In other words, these are all situations where we would physically be taking care of ourselves; carrying bags to a car or room, cleaning the room, bringing food to the table, etc. In all of these situations a person has demeaned themselves and acted in our service so that we didn't have to. One could not check himself into a hotel or a flight – the hotel or airline has to check a person in – therefore no tip is warranted.

A tip is given to restore a person's dignity. Giving a tip is a statement that we appreciate that someone else is doing something that we would otherwise do for ourselves. The very giving of the gift means that the person isn't a servant, we have no right to expect the act of them, and we appreciate what they are doing for us.

But perhaps even more important is the lesson in what our attitude toward them should be: If we are obligated to restore someone's dignity for their act of service, how much more so do we have to speak and relate to them in a kindly fashion during their act of service, and ensure that we do not further diminish their dignity.

That is why the Torah describes it as bejeweling a person even though no jewelry is involved. We want to make sure that the Jewish servant who is leaving our service has a measure of his dignity restored. Meaning, by recognizing him as an individual he is now coming back into the community not as a servant, but as a respected member of society.

Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Reeh

You Are Children to Hashem Your G-d

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly portion: #1346 – Minhag Yisroel Torah: The Power of Minhag. Good Shabbos!

The pasuk in Parshas Re'eh says, "You are Children to Hashem your G-d, you shall not cut yourselves and you shall not make a bald spot between your eyes for a dead person." (Devorim 14:1) In the past, there was a custom among non-Jews for people to cut or somehow mutilate themselves as a sign of mourning when a person's relative died. The Torah prohibits this practice. The commentaries all point out the fact that this is the only mitzvah where a negative prohibition is introduced with the statement "You are Children to Hashem your G-d." We don't find such a preamble by the prohibition to eat pig or to wear shatnez or anywhere else! Why do we find this unique introduction to the mitzvah of "Lo sis'godedu" about mutilating oneself?

The Seforno gives a beautiful interpretation. Rashi gives an interpretation. I heard a different interpretation, also very interesting, from a talmid chochom from England, whom I met while touring the Swiss Alps.

The person identified himself as a "Monarchist" meaning he supports and believes in the monarchy of

England. The fellow is a Yeshivishe fellow, he authored a sefer on the Rambam's Ma'aseh HaKorbonos, and is a fine talmid chochom – but he is into the monarchy.

He mentioned that the year at that time (2017) marked the 20th anniversary of the death of Princess Diana. At the time of her death in 1997, her passing generated headline stories throughout the world for quite a long period of time. He said that at the time when Diana died, her two sons, Prince William and Prince Harry were twelve and ten years old.

In England, the protocol is that the coffin is carried by horse, and the mourners march in back of the coffin as it proceeds to the cemetery. The young boys were instructed to march behind their mother's coffin, and they were told that they were not allowed to cry. The boys protested, "We don't want to march, and if we want to cry, we'll cry!" They were told that this was not their option. They were the princes and this is what protocol called for: March in back of the coffin and do not show any emotion. Bnei melachim, children of kings have special duties. Sons of kings need to act in a certain way.

You and I can disagree, and we can say that telling a ten-year-old that he should not cry at his mother's funeral is ridiculous. We are not here to debate that, but this is the royal protocol in England.

However, this monarchist was making the point that a person who is the son of a king is royalty, and needs to act differently than other people. He needs to be in control of his emotions.

Using this background, he offered insight into the pasuk, "You are Children of Hashem your G-d, do not cut yourself..." You are the sons of royalty, not figurative royalty but real royalty – the King of all kings, the Holy One Bless Be He. We are the children of the Ribono shel Olam. The Gemara says many times that "all of Israel are the children of kings" (e.g., Shabbos 67a, 111a, 158a).

I am not suggesting that we don't cry if chas v'shalom we face tragedies in life. Just the opposite is true. We believe in "three days for crying" (Moed Katan 27b). But we do believe in controlling our emotions. The Torah says over here – you may be tempted to mutilate yourself. Perhaps you have experienced so much pain that you feel like you need to inflict more pain upon yourself. Do not do that! Ay, your emotions drive you in that direction... But, no! You are Children of Hashem, your G-d, and you must retain control over your emotions. You are princes. Princes cannot act like everyone else. They must act with dignity. That is why the Torah says "Do not cut yourself and do not make a bald spot between your eyes over death."

לע"נ

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