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PARSHA WEEKLY

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WORLD MIZRACHI Picture of the Week

The Mizrachi community in São Paulo, Brazil, under the leadership of Rabbi Aharon Kindi was honored and privileged to be able to consult with and receive guidance from Rabbi Yaakov Shapira, Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Merkaz HaRav on his recent visit to the community.

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Based in Jerusalem and with branches across the globe, Mizrachi – an acronym for *merkaz ruchani* (spiritual center) – was founded in 1902 by Rabbi Yitzchak Yaakov Reines, and is led today by Rabbi Doron Perez. Mizrachi's role was then and remains with vigor today, to be a proactive partner and to take personal responsibility in contributing to the collective destiny of *Klal Yisrael* through a commitment to Torah, the Land of Israel and the People of Israel.

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PARSHA WEEKLY

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'As a Man Thinketh'

The Power of a Positive Mindset



Rabbi Doron Perez

Executive Chairman, World Mizrachi

One of the most beautifully written and stirring books that I have read is that of the brilliant author and philosophical writer, James Allen in his book, "As a Man Thinketh."

Written at the turn of the 20th century, it became one of the inspirational classics in the realm of personal growth. It focuses on arguably the greatest asset that we have as human beings – the transformative power of our thoughts. Allen argues so articulately and persuasively that nothing impacts on our lives and shapes our personal destiny, more than our thoughts – how we see ourselves and how we see the world.

Of the many beautiful paragraphs in the book, I shall quote but one.

"Man is made or unmade by himself; in the armory of thought he forges the weapons by which he destroys himself; he also fashions the tools with which he builds for himself heavenly mansions of joy and strength and peace. By the right choice and true applications of thought, man ascends to Divine Perfection; by the abuse and wrong application of thought, he descends below the level of the beast. Between these two extremes are all the grades of character, and man is their maker and master."

With these words, Allen echoes the profound insight of arguably the greatest American psychologist, Professor William James. He said that if he was to sum up his key learning after 50 years of experience in the realm of the human psyche,

he would say this – "people by and large become what they think of themselves."

Our attitude to life and our perceptions of our experiences creates our own reality; just as "seeing is believing," so too "believing is seeing." What we believe about ourselves and the world we live in, becomes reality itself.

The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy

Our perceptions indeed greatly influence our behaviors, decisions, and interactions with the world. One of the key mechanisms through which thoughts shape reality is the fascinating psychological phenomenon of the self-fulfilling prophecy. This phenomenon occurs when an individual holds a certain belief or expectation about a situation, which in turn leads them to behave in ways that ultimately bring about their predicted outcome. For example, if someone believes they are going to fail at a certain task, their negative thoughts about the task at hand often lead them to be less motivated to succeed, therefore putting in less effort and resulting in a higher likelihood of failure. On the other hand, a person with a positive "can do" attitude will approach the same task with greater enthusiasm and determination, significantly increasing their chances of success.

Moreover, the relationship between thoughts and emotions is integral to understanding how thoughts create reality. Our thoughts can trigger emotional responses, which in turn influence our behavior and the way we perceive events. For instance, if someone consistently

dwells on negative thoughts patterns, they are more likely to experience feelings of frustration and anxiety; sadness and anger, which then colors their perception of the world around them. Conversely, cultivating positive thoughts leads to a more optimistic outlook and a greater sense of positivity and hopefulness.

Neuroplasticity and King Solomon

Neuroscience has shown considerable evidence on the connection between our thoughts and our reality. Neuroplasticity, the brain's ability to reorganize itself by forming new neural connections, suggests that repeated patterns of thought can physically alter the structure of the brain over time. This means that consistently focusing on positive or negative thoughts can create neural pathways that influence how we perceive and respond to the world. In essence, our brains become wired to reinforce the reality that aligns with our predominant thoughts.

The ideas developed in Allen's book, "As a Man Thinketh" seem to be inspired by the wisest of all men, King Solomon in his book *Mishlei* – Proverbs – where he states:

"Do not eat the food of a stingy begrudging host and do not desire his delicacies. For **as he thinks in his heart, so is he.** 'Eat and drink,' he says to you but his heart is not with you." (*Mishlei* 23:6-7).

These verses clearly state that indeed what a person thinks is indeed their reality. If a host does not really want you to eat and is offering you food begrudgingly and even spitefully, this may very well have impacted how they have prepared the food and it is better to refrain from partaking.

If You Think You Live in a World of Curse – You Do!

One of the most clear and compelling examples of both the remarkable power of thought as well as its decisive spiritual value is an incredible verse in this week's

parasha. In the middle of the horrific תוכחה – the lengthy rebuke and curses if *Bnei Yisrael* don't keep the Torah, there emerges a critical verse as to the source of the curses – a total game changer in terms of the real root of the curses.

"And all these curses will befall you, and will pursue you and overtake you until they destroy you because you did not obey the Lord your G-d, to keep his commandments and his statutes which He commanded you. And they shall be for you as a sign and a wonder, and upon your seed forever. Because you did not serve the Lord your G-d with happiness and with gladness of heart, when you had an abundance of everything." (*Devarim* 28:45-48)

It would have made more sense to have a **full stop** after the words "Because you did not serve the Lord, your G-d." After all, the opening verse to the curses clearly states that the reason the curses transpire is when we don't serve G-d - not obeying the Torah and not observing the commandments (*Devarim* 28:15). Yet the verse here clearly adds another component as to the reason the curses happen – only if we do not serve G-d with an attitude of happiness and a feeling of abundant blessing!

This changes everything.

It is not the lack of fulfilling the mitzvot alone which is the root of the curses. It turns out that serving G-d devoid of **any** feeling of happiness and hope, joy and blessing is indeed not really service of G-d according to Judaism. It is foreign to the DNA of Torah Judaism and Jewish life.

To put it differently – if we think that we live in a world of curse, then we do. No amount of objective blessing in our lives can convince a person with a mindset of curse that indeed they are blessed. If they view the world through a lens of curse, עין רעה – a negative and critical eye, all they will see is a mirror reflection of what they believe. On the other hand, if one views the world and people through a prism of an עין טובה, a positive

perspective, they will have an attitude of gratitude, see graciousness around them and constantly judge others favorably. If we believe we are blessed, then we truly are. If we believe that we live in a world of blessing, then we do.

This requires great mindfulness and self-awareness. It requires paying great attention to our thought patterns, mental conditioning and the subconscious voices in our head. We need to carefully think about the way we think and ought to analyze our emotional default positions, childhood wounds, and defense mechanisms. This can only happen through deep self reflection and proactively choosing to engage in constructive and wholesome thought analysis. Meditative prayer, seeking mentorship, cognitive therapy and gratitude practices can all contribute to rewiring our thought patterns and subsequently influencing our reality.

Conclusion

In short, our thoughts significantly create our reality through our mental attitudes, beliefs and perceptions. Whether through the self-fulfilling prophecy, the interplay between thoughts and emotions, or the neural plasticity of the brain, it is clear that our thoughts have tangible effects on our lives. While this transformative idea is not a magical formula for controlling external events, it highlights the absolute free choice we have, as challenging as it is, to choose our thoughts and cultivate a positive and constructive mindset to navigate challenges and lead a more fulfilling life.

This critical verse at the heart of the blessings and the curses couldn't be clearer – whether we live in a world of blessing or curse, depends first and foremost on what type of world we think we live in.

ESSENTIALS OF JUDAISM/PERSONAL GROWTH

Consumed By Negativity



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רבי יהושע אומר, עין הרע, ויצר הרע, ושינאת הבריות, מוציאים את האדם מן העולם (אבות ב:יא).

As we have seen, *Pirkei Avot's* first listing of factors that “take a person out of this world” centers on negativity. This list includes three elements: *ayin hara* (a negative outlook),¹ *yetzer hara* (evil inclination),² and *sinat ha'beriyot* (hatred of Hashem's creations).³

Yetzer Hara

Although Hashem created the world as entirely good, He endowed humanity with free will, which includes the capacity to make bad choices.

Human beings are the first creation not described as inherently good. In fact, humanity is the first entity characterized as “not good.”⁴ This distinction results from the presence of the *yetzer hara*, the inclination that can lead individuals to make poor choices.

The *yetzer hara*, or evil inclination, leads us to sin and deviate from our intended path in life. In addition to resulting in punishment in the next world, choices influenced by the *yetzer hara* also “take a person out of this world” by preventing us from fulfilling our true potential and leading us to undesirable outcomes.

Hashem conveyed this message to Adam HaRishon following the first transgression. When Hashem called out, “Where are you?” it was not a question of physical location but an invitation for Adam to reflect on the consequences of his actions.⁵ Before the sin, Adam existed in Gan Eden without shame or fear. Afterward, he experienced embarrassment and sought to conceal himself.

The initial sin “removed Adam from his world” not only through physical exile

from Gan Eden but also by fundamentally altering his self-perception and confidence.

Ayin Hara

The *yetzer hara* also shapes our perception of the world around us. The *ayin hara* is intrinsically connected to the *yetzer hara* listed after it in the *Mishnah*. Our heart influences what our eyes choose to focus on and how we interpret what we see.

Such perception shapes our overall outlook on life. An *ayin ra*, influenced by the *yetzer hara*, can remove us “from this world” by fostering misery and dissatisfaction because we struggle to thrive in a reality we perceive as fundamentally negative.

Pirkei Avot's fifth chapter makes this point by contrasting the disciples of Bil'am with those of Avraham. The *Mishnah*⁶ identifies only three distinguishing traits, the first being *ayin ra* versus *ayin tova*. Notably, our perspective on reality is *one of only three factors* determining alignment with either Bil'am or Avraham.

The *Mishnah* further delineates the destinies of each group, addressing both this world and the next. The disciples of Avraham Avinu “eat in this world and have a portion in the next,” whereas those of Bil'am “inherit *gehenom* and [then] descend to damnation.”

Drawing on this contrast, the Netivot Shalom infers that the disciples of Bil'am “inherit *gehenom*” in this world as well as in the next. The *ayin hara* not only results in punishment in the afterlife but also transforms life in this world into *gehenom* as well.

Ayin hara is contagious; once we adopt a negative perspective, it can permeate our entire worldview and influence others as well. The journey of the Jewish people through the desert exemplifies this phenomenon. Prior to departing from *Har Sinai*, Moshe Rabbeinu expressed unwavering optimism, referencing anticipated goodness five times in his invitations to his father-in-law to join the nation.⁷

However, when the journey began, the Jewish people immediately began to complain.⁸ Despite being surrounded by heavenly clouds that cleared the road and being fed with *man*, they chose to focus on perceived deficiencies. Their persistent negativity even influenced Moshe's outlook.⁹ After their complaints, Moshe himself expressed distress to Hashem, stating: “Why have you been bad to me... Kill me if You desire, so I do not see my bad.”¹⁰

This pervasive negativity initiated a cycle of complaints and transgressions that ultimately condemned that generation to perish in the desert. The culminating event was the sin of the *Meraglim*, which occurred shortly thereafter and was similarly rooted in negativity – directed toward the land of Israel, Hashem, and even themselves.

The episode began with the spies' report, which misrepresented the land of Israel as a “land that devours its inhabitants.”¹¹ On Tisha B'Av, the people despaired, believing that Hashem despised them and intended their destruction. They had no doubt in Hashem's ability to conquer the land; they just felt that He hated them and, therefore, intended to deliver them into the hands of the Emori.¹²

The Jewish people's negativity affected not only how they viewed the land and

Hashem, but also how they saw themselves. The *Meraglim* described themselves as “grasshoppers in our [own] eyes,”¹³ perceiving themselves as insignificant and unworthy. Ultimately, our perception of reality and of Hashem’s relationship with us parallels how we view ourselves.

Sinat Ha’Beriyot

This principle also applies to perceptions of others and all of Hashem’s creations. While the mourning of Tisha B’Av originated in negativity toward Hashem and *Eretz Yisrael*, it later came to also commemorate the destruction caused by *sinat chinam* (baseless hatred).¹⁴ The *Kli Yakar*¹⁵ explains that the way we view other people flows from how we see Hashem’s relationship with us. If we assume that Hashem hates us, we assume that that is how we are meant to relate to others.

This assumption is fundamentally flawed. Hashem created a world filled with beauty and diverse creatures, all of which are to be valued and appreciated. Human beings created in the Divine image, as well as even small insects and spiders, should be appreciated.¹⁶

Chazal refer to this imperative as “*ahavat ha’beriyot*.”¹⁷ The use of the term *beriyot* suggests that love should extend even to those in whom no positive qualities are perceived, aside from their creation by Hashem. The very fact of their existence is sufficient reason to seek ways to love them.¹⁸

The *Gemara*¹⁹ further reinforces this point through a story about Rav Elazar B’Rebbi Shimon. After Rav Elazar called someone “ugly,” the individual replied that this observation should be directed to his Creator, Hashem. Rav Elazar then recognized his error and sought forgiveness. This narrative reminds us that even those who may initially appear unattractive or problematic were created by Hashem and are therefore inherently beautiful.

Rav Kook extended this point even further, writing that “the love that naturally resides in the souls of *tzaddikim* includes all creations. It excludes no thing or nation, not even Amalek!”²⁰

Recognizing that others are Hashem’s creations should inspire us not only to appreciate their beauty but also to assist them in their growth. Hillel²¹ viewed *ahavat ha’beriyot* as a motivation for *kiruv*, encouraging emulation of Aharon HaKohen, who brought people closer to Torah out of genuine love for them. His motivation was not solely the importance of Torah or Hashem but a profound love for people and a desire for their spiritual growth. He sought the best for Hashem’s creations, specifically spiritual growth.

Understandably, *Pirkei Avot* appropriately juxtaposes *ahavat ha’beriyot* with *Ahavat Hashem* on two occasions.²² One who loves Hashem will naturally love His creations. This principle is further supported by the Torah’s addition of the words “I am Hashem” to the commandment to “Love your fellow as yourself.”²³ Hashem clarifies that we should love others because “I am Hashem” – the one who created them.

The Rambam²⁴ adds that the relationship is reciprocal: Love of Hashem’s creations fosters love of Hashem. In addition to the love of Hashem inspiring love of His creations, it is also inspired by it.²⁵

Unfortunately, many people separate these two forms of love: they seek to love Hashem but do not appreciate (and sometimes even dislike) Hashem’s creations, including other people. This perspective takes one “out of this world” by preventing proper engagement with it. Instead of enjoying Hashem’s truly beautiful world, it is viewed as negative and problematic.

The Mishnah’s Warning

The *Mishnah*’s warning, therefore, concerns more than just the avoidance of three particular character flaws. The *yetzer hara* can lead us away from the good, the *ayin hara* can lead us to see the world as lacking, and *sinat ha’beriyot* can lead us to reject those around us. In each case, negativity narrows our world and distances us from the goodness that Hashem has placed within it. These traits “take man out of this world”: they do not merely yield punishment after this world; they also prevent us from properly experiencing and engaging with this one.

The antidote is to cultivate the opposite perspective: to recognize the good within ourselves, to appreciate the blessings of the world around us, and to love the people – and indeed all of Hashem’s creations – with whom we share it.

Our next piece will, *iy”H*, explain how to do so.

1. This translation is based upon *Avot D'Rebbe Natan* 16:1. See also explanations in the commentaries of the Rambam, Rabbeinu Yonah, and the Bartenura to the *Mishnah*.
2. See Rambam (as quoted by *Tosafot Yom Tov*, *Avot* 2:11), who sees the *mishnah*’s reference to *yetzer hara* as relating to unmitigated physical desire. See Rabbeinu Bechaye, who understands the reference more broadly.
3. *Avot* 2:11.
4. *Bereishit* 2:18. See *Sefer Ha'Ikarim* 3:2, who points out that the Torah does not describe Hashem as “seeing” man as good.
5. *Bereishit* 3:9 as explained by the Gra and Rav Hirsch, ad loc.
6. *Avot* 5:21.
7. *Bamidbar* 10:31.
8. *Ibid.*, 11:1.
9. *Ibid.*, 11:10.
10. *Ibid.*, 11:11-15. Regarding *pasuk* 15, see the interpretations of Rashi and the Ibn Ezra.
11. *Ibid.*, 13:32.
12. *Devarim* 1:27 as explained by Seforno, ad loc.
13. *Bamidbar* 13:33. See also *Bamidbar Rabbah* 16:11 and *Sefat Emet* 5640.
14. *Yoma* 9b.
15. *Devarim* 1:1.
16. *Medrash Rabbah*, *Bamidbar* 18:22 and *Otzer Medrashim*, Aleph-Bet of Ben Sira, page 47.
17. *Avot* 1:12 and 6:1, 6. See also *Avot* 2:11, where Chazal decry “*sinat ha’beriyot*.”
18. *Sefer HaTanya* 1:32.
19. *Ta'anit* 20a.
20. *Middot HaRe'iyah*, Ahava 6.
21. *Avot* 1:12.
22. *Avot* 6:1, 6:6.
23. *Vayikra* 19:18.
24. *Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah* 2:2.
25. See Maharal (*Sefer Netivot Olam*, *Netiv Ahavas Reia* 1:1), who summarizes the two directions.

“Telu'im”: Our Suspended Life



Rabbanit Shani Taragin

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As the calendar moves toward *Yamim Noraim*, we encounter one of the Torah's most searing passages: the *tochachah*, the catalogue of curses that concludes the covenant in *Sefer Devarim*. The *pesukim* of rebuke are relentless, each one darker than the last, until they culminate in a haunting description of human existence:

וְהָיָה חַיִּיךָ תְּלֵאִים לְךָ מִנָּגֶד וּפְחָדָה לְלִילָה וְיוֹמָם...

“And your life shall hang suspended before you; you shall fear night and day, and have no assurance of your life.” (*Devarim* 28:66)

The punishment described here is not simply danger. It is **suspension**. Life hangs in the balance, unmoored and unsettled, with no sense of what tomorrow will bring. Yet the Ba'al HaTurim discovers within this terrifying image an extraordinary allusion to the very season in which we read it.

The *Gemara* in *Masechet Megillah* (31b) teaches that Ezra instituted the reading of the *tochachah* of *Sefer Devarim* before Rosh Hashanah: כְּדִי שֶׁתִּכְלֶה הַשָּׁנָה וְתִקְלָחָהּ – “So that the year may conclude together with its curses.” The *tochachah* is therefore read at the threshold of a new year, as though we are deliberately placing the curses behind us before beginning again.

But the Ba'al HaTurim hears something deeper in the word תְּלֵאִים – “suspended.” He points to its only other appearance in *Tanach*, in the words of Hoshea:

וְעַמִּי תְּלֵאִים לְמִשְׁוֹבְתִּי וְאֶל-עַל יִקְרָאָהּ יַחַד...

“My people are suspended in their turning back to Me; and though they call to the Most High together, none rises up.” (*Hoshea* 11:7)

Suddenly, the word that seemed to convey only terror acquires another dimension.

In *Devarim*, תְּלֵאִים describes a person whose life hangs precariously before him. In *Hoshea*, it describes *Am Yisrael* suspended in their relationship with Hashem – wavering, struggling, not yet fully turned back, but not abandoned either.

The Ba'al HaTurim then makes the connection explicit. He links Hoshea's “וְעַמִּי תְּלֵאִים” to the famous teaching of Chazal concerning the *Yamim Noraim*. The *Gemara* in *Rosh Hashanah* (16b) teaches:

בֵּינוֹנִים תְּלֵוִיִּים וְעוֹמְדִין מֵרָאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה וְעַד יוֹם הַכַּפּוּרִים; זָכוּ – נִכְתָּבִין לְחַיִּים, לֹא זָכוּ – נִכְתָּבִין לְמֵיתָה

“The intermediate ones remain suspended and standing from Rosh Hashanah until Yom Kippur; if they merit, they are inscribed for life; if not, they are inscribed for death.”

The Ba'al HaTurim concludes:

הוּא וְעַמִּי תְּלֵוִיִּים

“And this is the meaning of ‘My people are suspended.’”

The *beinoni* is **talui** – suspended, standing in the space between one possibility and another, awaiting the outcome of *teshuvah*. With this single allusion, the Ba'al HaTurim transforms our understanding of the terrifying verse in the *tochachah*.

What initially appears to be a sentence of hopeless uncertainty becomes an image of the spiritual condition of the *Yamim Noraim*. To be תְּלֵוִיִּים is not necessarily to be lost; it is to be unfinished. It is to stand in that extraordinary interval in which the verdict has not yet been sealed, the future has not yet been determined, and transformation remains possible.

Perhaps this is why the Torah's *tochachah* is read specifically at this moment of the year. We might expect the curses to be read far from Rosh Hashanah, when there would be sufficient distance from their frightening imagery. Instead, Chazal deliberately place them on the threshold of the *Yamim Noraim*. We hear of a life that hangs suspended precisely when we are about to enter the days in which our own lives are described as *telu'im*.

The frightening word becomes an invitation. Your life hangs in the balance. Therefore, you can still change its direction. There is a profound difference between something that is broken and something that is suspended. What is broken may seem beyond repair. What is suspended, however, has not yet settled. It can still be moved, redirected and transformed.

This may be one of the most profound messages of the *beinoni*. We sometimes imagine the *beinoni* as the person of mediocrity – the one who has failed to become fully righteous and therefore remains trapped somewhere in the middle. But Chazal's (and the Ba'al HaTanya's) language suggests something far more dynamic. The *beinoni* is not defined by where he has been; he is defined by the fact that

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Elul Homecoming: A Season of Return



Sivan Rahav Meir
World Mizrahi Scholar-in-Residence

After forty-four years, Yehuda Katz, who had been missing since the First Lebanon War, was finally laid to rest in Israel. That is a sentence worth reading twice.

And in the very week when Yehuda, the last missing soldier from the Battle of Sultan Yacoub, was brought to burial, the Torah portion spoke about the *mitzvah of hashavat aveidah*, returning a lost object. Our commentators explain that the basic obligation is to return something that has been lost to its owner. But there is a broader idea here as well: to restore what is missing to its proper place – in the body, in the soul, in our people. To bring back what has been lost, in every sense.

The Torah expresses this in three profound words: “*Lo tuchal lehit'alem* – You may not ignore it.” And indeed, the Jewish people did not look away. Even when decades have passed, even when the search is difficult, we do not say: “It’s lost. There’s no hope.”

This is also an opportunity to thank the many unsung heroes who made that possible.

The Torah continues: “And so shall you do with anything your brother loses.”

Last week, quite literally, a lost brother came home, to be buried in the soil of the Land of Israel. That moving commitment to those who are missing should shape the way we approach every area of life.

May we continue to notice what is missing, to search, to restore, and never to give up on what has been lost. And may we be instrumental in returning everything to its rightful place.



It took me a few seconds to realize who was standing beside me.

I was in the women’s section on the balcony overlooking the Kotel plaza, watching the enormous crowd that had come for *Selichot*. Next to me stood Noa Argamani,

who was rescued from captivity in Gaza in Operation Arnon, and Ziv Abud, who survived the Nova festival massacre and was married last week to Eliya Cohen, himself a returned hostage.

Both women were deeply absorbed in the *Selichot* prayers, and I didn’t want to disturb them.

I looked across at the men’s section. There was Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz, Rabbi of the Kotel and the *mekomot hakedoshim*, leading the service. Around him stood Eliya Cohen, Omer Shem Tov, Itay Regev and Bar Kupershtein. All of them had been held in Hamas tunnels. And now all of them were here, *siddurim* in hand, reciting *Selichot* with great emotion.

“*Aneinu*.” “*Adon HaSelichot*.” Every word suddenly carried another layer of meaning. Then the *chazan* cried out: “Our G-d in Heaven, redeem us from the hands of all our enemies!”

And I looked at them – men and women who had actually been redeemed from the hands of our enemies. That, I thought, was the message of this extraordinary evening: sometimes you can actually see prayers being answered before your eyes. I remembered all the mass prayer gatherings held for them, here and around the world. I remembered their names being recited through tears.

But the story doesn’t end there.

Suli Eliav, director of the Kotel Heritage Foundation, happened to pass by us. He opened his *siddur* and showed me the words that come a little later: “Our G-d in Heaven, bring the redemption near! Our G-d in Heaven, bring the day of salvation near!”

“This is the goal,” he told me. “*Geulah, yeshuah*. I think we all need to dream bigger.

“Look around you. There are 50,000 people here, most of them young. And young people are filling *shuls* all over the country. The Jewish people suffered a

terrible blow. We paid a high price. But something else is happening too: we are rising to another level. We are finding our way back to ourselves.

“So yes, we are grateful. We are moved. But we can’t stop there. We need to dream big – the biggest dreams of all. We need to believe, to aspire, to pray and to act. “May we merit to see all our prayers come true before our eyes.”



Since the beginning of the month of Elul, hundreds of thousands of people have been gathering every night to recite the *Selichot* prayers. At the heart of *Selichot* is the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy. People pray, cry out, sing, and declare again and again these words that describe the way G-d governs the world: how He has mercy and gives sinners second chances, how He treats us with compassion. These words were first introduced after the sin of the Golden Calf when we expressed remorse for our sin and merited forgiveness.

When our Sages discuss G-d’s Thirteen Attributes of Mercy they emphasize a different point: We recite these words not only to declare how much G-d is compassionate and gracious and how much He forgives and pardons us, but so that we should learn to imitate His ways. G-d is teaching us to emulate Him – to do acts of lovingkindness and to be more accepting of others. The way you judge others is the way you will be judged by G-d; G-d mirrors your behavior.

Therefore, it is important that we not only recite the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy, but that we strive to emulate them in our own lives.

May we learn to forgive others and thus merit our own forgiveness.

● Translated by Yehoshua Siskin and Janine Muller Sherr

Halachic Q&A



Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon

Nasi, World Mizrahi | Rabbi of the Gush Etzion Regional Council

Rosh Yeshivah, Jerusalem College of Technology | Founder and Chairman, Sulamot and La'Ofek

For someone who makes early Shabbos on Rosh Chodesh, should they say “Ya’aleh V’yavo,” “Retzei,” or both?

At Mincha – say “Ya’aleh V’yavo.” At Maariv, do not say it. At the meal – even if you finished the meal before sunset, you do not say “Ya’aleh V’yavo” (see *Mishnah Berurah* 188:32). In any case, one should eat at least some of the meal after nightfall, and not say “Ya’aleh V’yavo.”

Be’ezrat Hashem, my family and I are making Aliyah next week. Is there a “Mi Sheberach” or a special prayer that is customarily recited upon making Aliyah? Should one say the blessing of “shehechianu” on the day they arrive? Additionally, some have the custom of marking their Aliyah anniversary as a personal holiday. How should this be properly and appropriately done?

Wear a new article of clothing and recite “shehechianu” on it upon entering the Land of Israel. On the day of arrival, eat bread and while reciting *Birkat Hamazon*, have in mind the *mitzvah* of making Aliyah when saying: “נודה לך...ארץ חמדה טובה ורחבה.” Additionally, recite the prayer of “*Nishmat kol chai*” until “*Yishtabach*.” And if possible, read of the following verses in *Sefer Devarim*: 8:6-10

Be’ezrat Hashem may you merit to establish yourselves successfully in the Holy Land!

Someone solicited donations in his community to help fund his trip to Uman. One individual gave him a \$180 donation. The donor later learned that the recipient’s entire trip had already been fully funded. The recipient told

the donor, “Instead, please take the \$180 and give it to another charity.” The donor responded, “I never intended to give the money to another charity. I gave the \$180 specifically to fund your trip to Uman.”

The question is: Since the trip has already been fully funded, is the donor still obligated to give the recipient the \$180?

Obviously, assuming that giving money to fund a flight to Uman as a Chassidic practice is considered *tzedakah*, it would seem appropriate to apply the ruling of the *Mishnah* (*Shekalim* 2:5), “*The surplus of a poor person belongs to that poor person.*” The Rambam rules similarly (*Matanot Aniym* 9:18): “*If money was collected for a poor person to complete what he lacks, and more was collected than what he needs, the surplus belongs to him.*” This is also the ruling of the *Shulchan Aruch* (*Yoreh De’ah* 253:6): “*If money was collected for a poor person to provide him with what he lacks, and more was collected than what he needs, the surplus belongs to him.*” Accordingly, the money that was collected should remain with the person for whom it was collected, even though he has already purchased the ticket. However, all of this applies only when the money has already been given to the person for whom it was collected. If the donor merely made a vow or commitment to give money, and it subsequently became clear that there was no longer a need because, for example, the poor person became wealthy, the money returns to the donor. This is implied by the words of the *Rosh* (*Responsa of the Rosh*, *Klal* 32, *Siman* 6), and the *Shulchan Aruch* (*Yoreh De’ah* 253:7) appears to follow the position of the *Rosh*. In our case, it appears that the money has not yet reached the recipient (or was returned to the donor with the approval of

those collecting the money). Therefore, the money belongs to the donor, rather than the recipient. It appears that the donor is not required to give the money to another charity, following the opinion of Rabbeinu Simcha, which the *Chatam Sofer* ruled in accordance with, as cited in the *Or Zarua* (Part I, *Siman* 7). Therefore, since the donor gave the money for a specific purpose and did not make a general pledge to give charity, and since the money was returned to him, he is not obligated to give it to another charity, according to the opinion of Rabbeinu Simcha, with whom the *Chatam Sofer* agrees. However, according to the *Or Zarua*, it is possible that the donor would still be required to give the money to another charity. The *Chatam Sofer* therefore suggested that the donor perform *Hatarat Nedarim* (annulment of vows) in order to satisfy the opinion of the *Or Zarua*. All of this assumes that donating money for an Uman ticket is considered *tzedakah*, as discussed above. All the more so, if we do not define it as *tzedakah* but rather as a gift, then the money returns to the giver and he is certainly not obligated to give it for another purpose.

In conclusion, since the money was never in the recipient’s possession and remained with the donor, once the purpose for which it was collected has been fulfilled, the donor may use the money as he wishes. He is not obligated to give it either to the recipient or to another charitable cause. Nevertheless, it is proper for him to perform *Hatarat Nedarim* regarding his original intention to give the money.

● *Compiled and Translated by Elan Finkelstein.*

הפטרת פרשת כי תבא "קומי אורי" (ישעיהו פרק ס)

הרבנית שרון רימון
Tanach teacher and author



"דאמר רבי אלעזר אור שברא הקדוש ברוך הוא ביום ראשון אדם צופה בו מסוף העולם ועד סופו. כיון שנסתכל הקדוש ברוך הוא בדור המבול ובדור הפלגה וראה שמעשיהם מקולקלים עמד וגנזו מהן שנאמר וימנע מרשעים אורם, ולמי גנזו לצדיקים לעתיד לבא שנאמר וירא אלהים את האור כי טוב ואין טוב אלא צדיק שנאמר אמרו צדיק כי טוב, כיון שראה אור שגנזו לצדיקים שמח שנאמר אור צדיקים ישמח" (חגיגה י"ב).

בתחילת הבריאה מתברר שיש פער בין האור הא-לקי הרוחני לבין העולם החומרי. העולם הזה איננו מסוגל לחיבור כה נשגב של נוכחות שכינה. אך האור המיוחד הזה לא נעלם ולא נכבה אלא נגנז לעתיד לבא - יום יבוא והעולם יגיע למצבו המתוקן והשלם, ואז אור ה' יוכל להופיע בו במלואו.

רעיון זה לקוח כנראה מדברי ישעיהו בנבואה זו. האור הזורח על ישראל איננו אור השמש אלא כבוד ה'. כאשר כבוד ה' מתגלה, מאיר וזורח, האור עצמתי ומאיר את העולם כולו בלי אפשרות להתנגד לו או להשאיר פינות נסתרות וחשוכות.

תפקידו של עם ישראל הוא לאפשר את הבאת האור הזה לעולם, להיות שותפים פעילים בחיבור בין העולם הרוחני לעולם החומרי. עם ישראל הם ה"צדיקים", שמביאים את הגאולה במו ידיהם, בהם ה' מתפאר, בעזרתם הוא יכול להתגלות בעולם: "וְעַמָּה כְּלָם צְדִיקִים... נִצָּר מִשְׁעֵי מַעֲשֵׂה יְדֵי לְהִתְפָּאֵר" (כא).

הגויים יהיו פעילים בגאולה, וידאגו להעלאת עם ישראל לארצו, ברכוש רב, ואף יסייעו בבניית הארץ: "...אֵימִים יָקוּוּ וְאֲנִיּוֹת תִּרְשִׁישׁ בְּרֹאשֶׁנָּה לְהִבְיֹא בְנֵיךָ מִרְחוֹק כְּסָפָם וְזָהָבָם אֲתָם לְשֵׁם ה'... כִּי פֶאֶרְךָ: וְכִנּוּ בְנֵי נֶכֶד חֲמִתֶּיךָ וּמִלְכֵיהֶם יִשְׁתַּנְּנָה..." (ט-י).

זהו חזון מרגש מאד, המציג את היחס של העמים כלפי עם ישראל בצורה אידיאלית - הגויים ירצו בטובתם של ישראל מתוך אהבה ואמונה בה'.

אמנם לצד האידיליה הנביא גם מזכיר אלמנט של הכרח וכניעה: "הַגּוֹי וְהַמַּמְלָכָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא יַעֲבֹדוּךָ יִאֲבֹדוּ... וְהָלְכוּ אֲלֶיךָ שָׁחוֹחַ בְּנֵי מִעֲצֶיךָ וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ עַל פְּפוֹת רַגְלֶיךָ כָּל מִנְאֲצֶיךָ..." (יב-יד), אך מרכז הכובד של הנבואה הוא הכבוד הרב שירחשו הגויים לעם ישראל ולקב"ה: "כְּבוֹד הַלְבָּנוֹן אֲלֶיךָ יָבֹא בְרוֹשׁ תִּדְהָר וּתְאֻשֹּׁר יִחַדוּ לְפָאֵר מְקוֹם מְקֻדָּשִׁי" (יג).

הנבואה מסתיימת באור המיוחד שיהיה בזמן הגאולה: "לֹא יִהְיֶה לָּךְ עוֹד הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ לְאוֹר יוֹמָם וְלַלַּיְתָּה הַיָּרֵחַ... וְהָיָה לָּךְ ה' לְאוֹר עוֹלָם וְאֶלֶיךָ תִּתְפָּאֲרֶתָ... כִּי ה' יִהְיֶה לָּךְ לְאוֹר עוֹלָם וְשָׁלְמוֹ יָמֵי אֲבֶלְךָ" (יט-כ).

הנבואה התחילה באור המיוחד שיזרח על עם ישראל מאת ה' בעת הגאולה, ומסתיימת בתיאור אותו האור הא-לקי שיאיר לעם ישראל ולעולם כולו. הנביא מדגיש שזהו אור אחר ושונה מהאור המוכר לנו. האור לא יגיע מהשמש או הירח (או חשמל) כפי שאנו מכירים. המאורות הטבעיים יוחלפו בהשגחה א-לקית ישירה, בדומה למה שהיה בבריאת העולם, כך שכבוד ה' הוא זה שיזרח עלינו, והוא זה שיאיר את דרכנו.

חז"ל (בגמרא, במדרש רבה ועוד) מתארים את האור הראשוני שנברא בעולם כאור א-לקי עצמתי, המאפשר בהירות מוחלטת והשגה רוחנית, אך העולם אינו יכול לעמוד בו:

הפטרת כי תבא פותחת בציווי לעם ישראל להאיר: "קומי אורי כי בא אורך" וממשיך הפסוק: "כבוד ה' עליך זרח".

כאשר כבוד ה' זורח על עם ישראל, הם אינם יכולים לשמור את האור הגדול לעצמם אלא מצווים להשפיע מן האורה הזאת כלפי חוץ, אל העמים האחרים המצויים בחושך וערפל: "הַחֲשֵׁךְ יִכְסֶּה אֶרֶץ וְעֶרְפֶּל לְאֻמִּים וְעַלְיָךָ יִזְרַח ה' וְכִבְדוּךָ עַלְיָךָ יִרְאֶה" (ב). מחובתו של עם ישראל להפיץ את אור ה' בעולם ולגרום לגויים ללכת בעקבות האור: "וְהָלְכוּ גוֹיִם לְאוֹרְךָ" (ג), או במילים אחרות: להיות אור לגויים, כפי שאומר ישעיהו במקומות נוספים: "וְנִתְתִּיךָ לְאוֹר גוֹיִם לְהָיוֹת יְשׁוּעָתִי עַד קֵצָה הָאֲרָץ" (מ"ט, ו); "וְאֲתִנֶּה לְכָרִית עִם לְאוֹר גוֹיִם" (מ"ב, ו). בחזונו של ישעיהו, נבואות הנחמה אינן מסתכמות בשיבת עם ישראל לארצו ופריחת הארץ, אלא מתרחבות גם אל העמים האחרים, אשר בזמן הגאולה יכירו בגדולת ה' ואף ינהרו אל המקדש כמרכז רוחני משמעותי עבורם: "וְהָיָה בְּאַחֲרִית הַיָּמִים נִכּוֹן יִהְיֶה הַר בֵּית ה'... וְנִהְרָו אֵלָיו כָּל הַגּוֹיִם... וְאָמְרוּ לָכֵן וְנַעֲלָה... אֶל בֵּית אֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב וְיִרְנוּ מִדְּרָכֵינוּ וְנִלְכָּה בְּאַחֲרֵיתֵינוּ כִּי מִצִּיּוֹן תֵּצֵא תוֹרָה וְדִבֶּר ה' מִירוּשָׁלַם" (ב', ב-ג).

ישעיהו מתאר כיצד היחס של העמים לעם ישראל מתהפך בזמן הגאולה. מעם בזוי ונרדף הופך עם ישראל לעם מכובד, המאיר לעולם כולו ומהווה מוקד משיכה תרבותי ורוחני.

העם שהיה מפוזר ומפורד בין העמים הולך ומתקבץ לארצו ובונה אותה, והעמים האחרים שותפים בתהליך זה: "...כִּי יִהְיֶה עַלְיָךְ הַמּוֹן יָם חֵיל גוֹיִם יָבֹאוּ לָּךְ: שְׁפָעַת גְּמִלִים תִּכְסֶּה בְּכָרִי מִדִּין... מִשְׁבָּא יָבֹאוּ וְזָהָב וְלִבְנוֹנָה יִשְׁאוּ וְתִהְיֶה ה' יִבְשֶׁרוּ: כָּל צֶאֱן קֶדֶר יִקְבְּצוּ לָּךְ... יַעֲלוּ עַל רָצוֹן מִזְבְּחֵי וּבֵית תִּפְאָרְתִּי אִפְאֵר..." (ה-ז)

For the Shabbat Table



Rabbi Danny Mirvis

CEO, World Mizrahi

Rabbi of Ohel Moshe Synagogue, Herzliya Pituach

“These are the words of the covenant that Hashem commanded Moshe to establish with the Israelites in the land of Moav, in addition to the covenant that was established with them at Chorev.” (*Devarim* 28:69)

In this week's *parsha*, we learn of a new covenant to be established between Hashem and the Jewish people. As opposed to the Sinai experience where we all stood together as one, on this occasion, six tribes were to stand on one mountain and six tribes on a different mountain, with the *Kohanim* and *Levi'im* in the middle.

Why would this be the required choreography for a covenant between two sides – Hashem and the Jewish people? Why are the people split in this way, as opposed to the great unity of Sinai?

Perhaps in this passage, Moshe is preparing us for life in the Land of Israel. There

will be times of great division when half the nation will stand on one side and half the nation will stand on the other side. Both sides raise their voices to make themselves heard. How should we deal with such a scenario?

Our *parsha* provides us with a model to contend with this situation. Everybody listens to each other and everybody answers, “Amen.” Through listening, each side learns to acknowledge the truth and positivity of the other side, and how their different voices might actually complete each other.

Enabling such complexity to succeed is the role of the leadership, who, like the *Kohanim* and *Levi'im*, need to be a unifying force in the middle of the camp. Torah must also be a unifying force, like the *Aron Brit Hashem* which was also placed between the two mountains.

With such an arrangement, we can enter a covenant with Hashem.

Unfortunately, the image of opposing sides declaring curses and raising their voices does not need much imagination for us today. Yet the division itself is not necessarily a problem. This week's *parsha* provides us with the recipe for successfully navigating such scenarios.

By listening to others, acknowledging others and uniting around the Torah, may we only be deserving of blessings.

Shabbat Shalom!

Parsha Riddle



Reb Leor Broh

Mizrachi Melbourne

There are three partners in the creation of each person. The first of these deals with one partner, the second with the other two partners. Find these in the *parsha*.

See page 25 for the answer to the Parsha Riddle

Serving G-d With a Complete Heart



Chief Rabbi David Lau

Former Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Israel

This week's Torah portion is *Parashat Ki Tavo*, a portion in which we are commanded, first and foremost, to give thanks to Hashem: for the first fruits, for the second tithe (*ma'aser sheni*), and for the abundance and goodness that He gives us. In its second part, the portion speaks of blessings and warnings, that if, Heaven forbid, we do not observe them, the people of Israel may be harmed, as unfortunately, we have seen throughout the generations.

The Torah then teaches us to know and pay attention – to incline the ear and listen. The beginning of everything is, first of all, in the heart: to pay attention. “The Lord has not given you a heart to know, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, until this day” (*Devarim* 29:3). But after forty years, it is time to understand and gain wisdom, and to grasp what HKB”H asks of us.

We are now in days when the Sephardic Jews are already saying *Selichot*, asking for forgiveness. They begin from *Rosh Chodesh Elul*. Soon the *Ashkenazic* Jews will join them, and all of Israel will ask HKB”H for forgiveness for the past and pray for a blessed, peaceful, good, and better year.

I would like to draw attention to one point in the portion, a well-known expression about which the *Sforno* says something special. We come with the tithe and say to the Creator of the World the confession of the tithe. We say that everything we did, we did properly. When the time comes for the declaration of the tithes, “And you shall answer and say,” we speak to HKB”H and say:

“Master of the Universe, I did these things in the best possible way. Heaven forbid, I did not err. I have not eaten of it in my mourning, nor have I removed any of it while unclean, nor have I given any of it for the dead. I have done everything that

You commanded me. Therefore, please look down from Your holy dwelling, from heaven, and bless Your people Israel and the land which You have given us, as You swore to our fathers, a land flowing with milk and honey.”

In other words, I confess that I did everything properly, and then I ask for a blessing.

The commentators wondered: This is called the “confession of the tithe”? A confession means, “We have sinned, we have betrayed” – that I did something wrong. But here I say that I did everything correctly: “I have done everything that You commanded me.” What could be greater than that?

There are many explanations, but I would like to draw attention to the *Sforno*. The *Sforno* says: You are not perfect. If we were perfect, the work in the Temple would not have been performed by the priests, nor would the Levites have served alongside them; rather, it would have been performed by the firstborn. Meaning, even when we do what is written in the Torah, we must know: this is not perfection. We are not there yet. We have not reached the highest level that we are worthy of and need to reach.

The priests receive our offerings and perform the service in the Temple; the Levites sing and assist the priests. All of this is true and correct – but it is still not perfection.

What is perfection? When we turn to the Creator of the World and say that we are doing His complete will. And His complete will was that the firstborn should serve: “Sanctify to Me every firstborn, whatever opens the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and beast, is Mine.” This includes human firstborns – today there is the *mitzvah* of *Pidyon HaBen*,

the redemption of the firstborn. It also includes firstborn animals. Today there are solutions that the Chief Rabbinate of Israel has considered and implemented to enable people to make use of their animals, even when the animal born is a firstborn. And still, this is not perfect. We do the will of G-d and perform His commandments, but not in the perfect form.

And so we essentially say: “Master of the Universe, I prayed throughout the entire year. I put on *tefillin*. I wrapped myself in a tallit. I stood before You in the *Amidah* of eighteen blessings. But did I always pray as I should? Did I always do Your will? Yes, I extended a hand to a friend, but did I also ask him how he was? Did I truly care, or did I merely ask as a matter of lip service? Did it matter to me? Because he is my brother, because he is one of the children of the Creator of the World. To what extent was I perfect?” This is a question a person must ask himself. Therefore, in the confession of the tithe, we confess that we have not yet been perfect, because the firstborn are still not the ones serving; rather, it is the priests.

So let us examine all our deeds: Are they in the proper form? Or is there still room for improvement? We confess and ask HKB”H: “Look down” – see us with a favorable eye. See Your people, Israel, and grant us the merit that we should succeed in serving You and doing Your will. If we do Your will, then we will merit to serve You with a complete heart. If we conclude the year declaring to ourselves that we strive for perfection and truly wish, with a complete heart, to be close to Hashem, we will merit that HKB”H will return us to Him, bring us back to the proper level, and renew our days as of old.

Shabbat Shalom, and may there be good tidings for us and for all of Israel.

A Sense of History



Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks zt"l

Ki Tavo begins with the ceremony of bringing first-fruits to the Temple. The Mishnah gives a detailed account of what happened:

Those that were near to Jerusalem brought fresh figs and grapes, and those that were far away brought dried figs and raisins. Before them went the ox, its horns overlaid with gold, and with a wreath of olive leaves on its head.

The flute was played before them until they approached Jerusalem. When they were near to Jerusalem, they sent messengers before them and bedecked their first-fruits. The rulers and the prefects and the treasurers of the Temple went forth to meet them. According to the honour due to those that came in, they used to go forth in that order. All the craftsmen in Jerusalem used to rise for them, and greet them, saying, "Brothers, men of such-and-such a place, you are welcome."

Bikkurim 3:3

The flute was played before them until they reached the Temple Mount. When they reached the Temple Mount, even King Agrippa would take his basket on his shoulder and enter in as far as the Temple Court. It was a magnificent ceremony. In historical context, however, its most significant aspect was the declaration that each individual had to make:

"My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down into Egypt with a few people and lived there and became a great nation, powerful and numerous... Then the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror and with miraculous signs and wonders."

Deut. 26:5-10

This passage is well-known. It became the text expounded as part of the *Haggadah* on *Seder* night at the beginning of *Pesach*. Its familiarity, though, should not blind us to its revolutionary character. Listening to these words, we are in the presence of one of the greatest revolutions in the history of thought.

The ancients saw the gods in nature, never more so than in thinking about the harvest and all that accompanied it. Nature does not change. Natural time is cyclical – the seasons of the year, the revolution of the planets, the cycle of birth, death, and new life. When the ancients thought about the past, it was not the historical but a mythical/metaphysical/cosmological past – the primeval time-before-time when the world was formed out of the struggle between the elements.

That is precisely what did not happen in Ancient Israel. It might have been otherwise. Had Judaism been a different kind of religion, the people bringing first-fruits might have recited a song of praise to G-d as the Author of creation and Sustainer of life. We find several such songs in the Book of Psalms:

Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving; make music to our G-d on the harp. He covers the sky with clouds; He supplies the earth with rain and makes grass grow on the hills and bread that sustains His heart.

Ps. 147:7-8

The significance of the first-fruits declaration is that it is not about nature but about history: a thumbnail sketch of the sequence of events from the days of the patriarchs to the Exodus and then conquest of the Land. Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi gave the best analysis of the intellectual transformation this involved:

It was Ancient Israel that first as-

signed a decisive significance to history and thus forged a new world-view ... Suddenly, as it were, the crucial encounter between man and the Divine shifted away from the realm of nature and the cosmos to the plane of history, conceived now in terms of Divine challenge and human response ... Rituals and festivals in Ancient Israel are themselves no longer primarily repetitions of mythic archetypes meant to annihilate historical time. Where they evoke the past, it is not the primeval but the historical past, in which the great and critical moments of Israel's history were fulfilled ... Only in Israel and nowhere else is the injunction to remember felt as a religious imperative to an entire people.

Zachor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory, pp. 8-9

This history was not academic, the province of scholars or a literary elite. It belonged to everyone. The declaration was recited by everyone. Knowing the story of one's people was an essential part of citizenship in the community of faith. Not only that, but it was also said in the first person: "My father ... Then the Lord brought us out of Egypt... He brought us to this place". It is this internalisation of history that led the rabbis to say: "In each generation, every person should see himself as if he personally came out of Egypt" (*Mishnah Pesachim 10:5*). This is history transformed into memory.

To be a Jew is to be part of a story that extends across forty centuries and almost every land on the face of the earth. As Isaiah Berlin put it:

All Jews who are at all conscious of their identity as Jews are steeped in history. They have longer memories, they are aware of a longer continuity as a community than any other which has survived ... Whatever other fac-

tors may have entered into the unique amalgam which, if not always Jews themselves, at any rate the rest of the world instantly recognizes as the Jewish People, historical consciousness – sense of continuity with the past – is among the most powerful.

Against the Current, p. 252

Despite Judaism's emphasis on the individual, it has a distinctive sense of what an individual is. We are not alone. There is no sense in Judaism of the atomic individual – the self in and for itself – we encounter in Western philosophy from Hobbes onwards. Instead, our identity is bound up horizontally with other individuals: our parents, spouse, children, neighbours, members of the community, fellow citizens, fellow Jews. We are also joined vertically to those who came before us, whose story we make our own. To be a Jew is to be a link in the chain of the generations, a character in a drama that began long before we were born and will continue long after our death.

Memory is essential to identity – so Ju-

daism insists. We did not come from nowhere; nor does our story end with us. We are leaves on an ancient tree, chapters in a long and still-being-written story, a letter in the scroll of the book of the people of the Book.

There is something momentous about this historical sense. It reflects the fact – itself one of the great themes of the Bible – that it takes time for human beings to learn, to grow, to rise beyond our often dysfunctional and destructive instincts, to reach moral and spiritual maturity and create a society of dignity and generosity. That is why the covenant is extended over time and why – according to the Sages – the only adequate guarantors of the covenant at Mount Sinai were the children yet to be born.

That is as near as we get to immortality on earth: to know that we are the guardians of the hopes of our ancestors, and the trustees of the covenant for the sake of the future. That is what happened in Temple times when people brought their first-fruits to Jerusalem and, instead of

celebrating nature, celebrated the history of their people from the days when “My father was a wandering Aramean” to the present. As Moses said in some of his last words to posterity:

Remember the days of old; consider the generations long past. Ask your father and he will tell you, your elders, and they will explain to you.

Deut. 32:7

To be a Jew is to know that the history of our people lives on in us.

AROUND THE SHABBAT TABLE:

- How does knowing where we come from shape who we are and the choices we make today?
- Why might Judaism place such a strong emphasis on remembering the past?
- What does it mean to see yourself as a “link in the chain of the generations” – and what responsibilities might that create?

Continued from page 6

his story is still being written. He is *talui ve'omed* – suspended and standing, still capable of choosing.

That may be the deeper meaning of the Ba'al HaTurim's insightful connection between *Devarim* and *Hoshea*. In the *tochachah*, “וְהָיָה חַיִּיד תְּלֵאִים” describes the anguish of an uncertain life. But in *Hoshea*, “וְעַמִּי תְּלֵאִים” becomes the anguish of a relationship that has not yet been resolved. *Am Yisrael* is suspended in the space between *meshuvah* – turning away, and *teshuvah* – turning back.

This is the gift hidden inside the curse. The word *telu'im* appears twice in *Tanach*, and only twice: once as dread, once as longing. The Ba'al HaTurim binds them so that we cannot read one without the other. When we stand in shul and hear the *tochachah* read aloud in the weeks before Rosh Hashana, we are not merely hearing what we deserve; we are hearing, in the language of the curse itself, the promise that the year and its curses will end, and that the suspended life can

still be gathered up, turned, and brought home. “וְעַמִּי תְּלֵאִים לְמִשְׁבָּחָהּ” – My people hang suspended, and they wait, awake to the possibility that they may change and return.

There is another phrase in the *pasuk* that becomes especially poignant in this light: “וְהָיָה חַיִּיד תְּלֵאִים לְךָ מִנְּגִדָה” – “Your life shall hang suspended **before you**.” *Mi-neged* means before, opposite, in full view. The suspended life is not hidden from us. It is placed before our eyes. Perhaps the Ba'al HaTurim's allusion teaches us to see that a life that is still suspended is a life that is still in front of us – a life whose direction has not yet been irrevocably determined.

That is the paradox of the *Yamim Noraim*: the very uncertainty that frightens us is also what gives us hope. If everything were already sealed, there would be no possibility of *teshuvah*. But because we are *telu'im*, because we are still standing between what we have been and what we might become, the door remains open.

The Torah tells us that a life can become suspended in fear. The Ba'al HaTurim teaches us to hear, within that very word, the possibility of a life suspended for return. As the *shofar* in Elul calls us to attention, perhaps we should not ask only, “What will the coming year bring?” We should ask a more consequential question: What will I do with the fact that my future is still open? The life that hangs before us is not merely a life awaiting judgment; it is a life awaiting direction.

As we hear the *tochachah* in these weeks before Rosh Hashanah, may we hear not only the warning but also the hopeful whisper concealed within it: וְעַמִּי תְּלֵאִים לְמִשְׁבָּחָהּ – we may be suspended, but we are not abandoned. We are still standing, capable of turning and of returning. Sometimes the most frightening thing about a life is that it has not yet been decided – and sometimes that is precisely its greatest blessing.

Ketiva ve'Chatima Tova!

It's In Our Genes



Rabbi Hershel Schachter

Rosh Yeshivah, Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary of Yeshiva University

This coming Shabbos, when we read *Parshas Ki Savo*, we will be fulfilling a double *mitzvah*:

1. We will be reading the *parshas hashavua*.

2. We will be fulfilling the special *takanah* made by Ezra, i.e., to read the *tochacha* of *Ki Savo* soon before Rosh Hashana.

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

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

The answer to this question appears in the *chumash* itself in the opening *pesukim* of *Parshas Nitzavim*. In these *pesukim* Moshe specifically indicates that this covenant entered into between *Bnai Yisrael* and G-d prior to Moshe's death involves not only the Jews currently there, but all future generations: "*Velo itchem levadchem... ki et asher yeshno po imanu omed hayom lifnei Hasham elokeinu, veet asher einenu po imanu hayom*," (29:13-14). This statement

implies that the first covenant, that which took place at *Har Sinai*, was only binding between G-d and those individuals who lived in that generation.

In the text of the *tochacha* in *Parshas Bechukosai*, the Jewish people are referred to in the plural form because that *bris* was made with the many individual members of *Klal Yisrael*. In the *tochacha* in *Ki Savo*, however, the Jewish people are referred to in the singular. This "contract" was made with *Klal Yisrael*, and *Klal Yisrael* is a simple entity which includes all of the Jews who lived throughout all the generations, starting from the trip of Avraham Avinu until *Yemos Hamoshiach*. The fact that all the souls were present at *Maamad Har Sinai* had an effect on all of us in a supernatural way. "*Baavur yishma ho'om bedabri imach vegam becha yaaminu leolam*" (*Shemos* 19:9), "*Uvaavur tihiye yirato al peneichem levitti techetau*," (*Shemos* 20:17).

But this was not enough to make the Torah laws legally binding on all future generations. After the forty years of travelling in the desert we finally became a nation. When the Jews crossed over the Jordan and entered *Eretz Yisrael* they completed this second *bris*. The *bris* began with Moshe Rabeinu at *arvot moav* and completed by his successor Yehoshua ben Nun at *Har Gerizim* and *Har Aival*. According to the talmudic tradition, the principle of, "*kol Yisrael arevim zeh bazeh*," did not begin to function until this *bris* was completed. That is when we became a nation.

In every generation there are individuals who chose not to keep the *mitzvos*. These people want to "be themselves" and "do

their own thing. Truth of the matter is that whether we like it or not we are all part of *Klal Yisrael*. Keeping the *mitzvos* is "the natural thing" to do. When one chooses not to keep *mitzvos*, he is running away from his real self.

Every day in our prayers we mention the words of the prophet: "*Veani zos berisi osam amar Hashem ruchi asher alecha udevarai asher samti beficha lo yamushu mipicha umepi zaracha umepi zera zaracha amar Hashem meata vead olam*," (*Yeshayah* 59:21). G-d has imposed His "*bris*" upon us. The *navi* did not say, "*brisi etach*," My contract with you, but rather "*berisi otach*," i.e., My *bris* is hereby being imposed upon you. You can never run away from the Torah. Even if for a generation or two people leave the Torah, "*umepi zera zaracha meata vead olam*," ultimately the later generations will have to return. It is the natural thing to do. It will have to happen. The Rambam points out that the Torah has already promised us that ultimately the Jewish people will have to do *teshuvah*. All the future generations are part of *Knesses Yisroel* which entered into the second *bris* with Hashem.

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

Take an Oath



Rabbi Yisroel Reisman
Rosh Yeshiva, Yeshiva Torah Vodaas

This week we will discuss an insight from the Steipler on מסכת נדרים, one that ultimately relates to an understanding of the נודע ביהודה from many years earlier on this week's *parsha*. The *Gemara* in מסכת נדרים talks about someone who makes a שבועה in order to fulfill a *mitzvah*. Even though in general we discourage people from swearing, if someone is concerned that he will not fulfill a *mitzvah*, he can take an oath that obligates him to do the *mitzvah*. The *Gemara* asks that seemingly this שבועה has no effect, since we already swore at *Har Sinai* to keep all of the *mitzvot*, and we have a concept that a second oath cannot fall upon a preexisting oath. “והלא מושבע” וְהוּא יְעוּמַד מֵהָרִיב הַשֵּׁנִי הוּא? The *Gemara* concludes the person is nonetheless allowed to swear to fulfill a *mitzvah*, since it has the power to motivate a person to fulfill the *mitzvah*, “לְזוֹרֵזִי נִפְשִׁיָּהּ”, and therefore can carry weight even though we were already obligated to do the *mitzvah* beforehand.

Yet, many commentators question this answer of the *Gemara*, as seemingly it doesn't really solve the problem. If the שבועה does not take effect, since there was already a preexisting שבועה from *Har Sinai*, then how does it have the power

to motivate someone? How can a person be motivated by a שבועה that in fact does not really add anything? The Steipler answers this question with an insight into human nature. Very often, people rationalize different actions, and explain to themselves why certain *mitzvot* don't apply in certain cases. “Perhaps today I should not get up for *davening*, since I will have a better day if I sleep later, and therefore the obligation of *davening* doesn't apply today.” People find all sorts of excuses for the various actions that they do. Therefore, the purpose of taking a שבועה לְזוֹרֵזִי נִפְשִׁיָּהּ is to motivate us even during those situations. Even when we convince ourselves that the שבועה that we took at *Har Sinai* doesn't apply, for whatever the reason, we will be motivated to keep the *mitzvah* because of the additional oath that we took, even if on a technical level it did not add anything. This is the understanding of the *Gemara* in מסכת נדרים.

However, this insight was really said many years before from the נודע ביהודה on this week's *parsha*. At the end of all of the curses, we have one *pasuk* that concludes this section. “אֵלֶּה דְּבָרֵי הַבְּרִית...” לְכָרַת אֶת-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל-בְּאֶרֶץ מוֹאָב: מִלְּבַד הַבְּרִית,

“אֲשֶׁר-כָּרַת אֱתָם בְּחֹרֵב” This was the covenant that Hashem told Moshe to make with the Jewish nation in the Land of Moab, which is besides the covenant which took place many years earlier at *Har Sinai*. The נודע ביהודה asks on this *pasuk*, the same question from the *Gemara* in נדרים, that if, in fact, there was a covenant from *Har Sinai*, why was it necessary for them to make another covenant in the Land of Moab? If a person was going to violate the covenant made at *Har Sinai*, and do זרה עבודה even though the Torah says it is not allowed, then they will violate the covenant made in the Land of Moab as well. What did this second שבועה add?

The נודע ביהודה concludes similarly to the way the Steipler concluded, by explaining that people often rationalize the *mitzvot* in the Torah. There was a concern that people throughout the generations will think that the *mitzvot* in the Torah don't apply, and therefore they needed this oath taken in the Land of Moab to motivate them, at the very least to keep their words. Sometimes, the value of keeping a שבועה that you took has the power to motivate you, even at a time when other forms of obligations cannot.

Rock and Roll



Rabbi Shalom Rosner

Rosh Beit Midrash, Machon Lev International program

וְהָקַמְתָּ לְךָ אֲבָנִים גְּדוֹלוֹת... (דברים כז:ב)

...that you shall set up for yourself huge stones... (Devarim 27:2)

There are several occasions in *Tanach* where stones are to be utilized to build a monument. Rashi, citing a *Gemara* in *Sotah* (35b), claims that stones were used on at least three separate instances: (i) in the Jordan, (ii) Gilgal (*Bnei Yisrael's* first stop in *Eretz Yisrael*, and (iii) at Har Eval. What is the significance of building with stones?

Stones – Stumbling Blocks

Rav Nissan Alpert (*Limudei Nissan*) suggests that stones symbolize stumbling blocks which one encounters that often stand in one's way of achieving a goal. In retrospect, one gains from past experiences, and it is crucial to recall past stumbling blocks so as to avoid tripping over them again.

Overcoming Obstacles Along the Way

At this juncture, as *Bnei Yisrael* are about to enter *Eretz Yisrael*, Moshe builds a

monument with the **desert stones** to highlight to the nation that they were able to overcome the difficulties of travelling through the dry desert. Hashem provided food (*mann*) and water (Miriam's well) for sustenance. Moshe seeks to instill faith in the people that once they enter Israel and are subject to natural law, they will be able to overcome obstacles that they will encounter as well. Another reminder occurs as they cross the Jordan river and again after they conquer the land.

Stones of Iron

The Torah describes *Eretz Yisrael* as אֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֲבָנֶיהָ בְּרִזָּל – a land whose stones are iron (Devarim 8:9). The same stones that symbolize “stumbling blocks” and challenges, are depicted as strong and valuable. **Perhaps the lesson is that we must face challenges and recall our hardships so that we learn and grow from those experiences.**

Acronym of אבן

Additionally, the word אבן is the acronym of אב, בן, נכד. This symbolizes the *mesorah* that is to be transmitted from generation to generation. From father to son and then to grandson – fulfilling the statement from *Shir HaShirim*: וְהָיוּ הַמְּשָׁלָשׁ לֹא בְמִהְרָה יִנָּחֵק – which is interpreted as when Torah is transmitted through three generations it will remain strong within the family.

We all face challenges – when we encounter rocks in our path – we need to learn to roll with the punches, so they strengthen us. May we be able to overcome all obstacles we encounter and properly transmit our Torah knowledge and enthusiasm to future generations so that we solidify our eternal commitment to Torah.



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G-d's Thirteen Middot Ha-Rachamim (Part I)



Rabbi Menachem Leibtag

Tanach Study Center | Yeshivat Har Etzion

Our recitation of the thirteen 'middot ha-rachamim' is certainly the focal point of the 'selichot' prayers and the highlight of 'ne'ila' on Yom Kippur. But how are we to understand this recitation? Is it a 'hokus pokus' type magic formula through which one can achieve automatic atonement?

In our daily lives, we are all familiar with the complexity of relationships; no less so is the nature of our relationship with G-d. In fact, from a certain perspective, we could consider *Chumash* as the story of the development of the special relationship that forges between G-d and the people of Israel.

Gan Eden reflected an ideal (intense) relationship between man and G-d. However, due to man's sin, that relationship became tainted and Adam and Eve were banished from that garden.

Despite this banishment, G-d continued His relationship with mankind, but at a more distant level. Therefore, when Adam's offspring developed into a totally corrupt society, G-d found it necessary to destroy that society with a Flood, saving only Noach and his family.

After the **mabul**, G-d's relationship with mankind entered a new stage, reflected by G-d's covenant with Noach. Note that for the first time, we find a **brit** between G-d and mankind, a concept that will be found later as well in G-d's relationship with *Am Yisrael*.

G-d's hopes for the generation of Noach's offspring were shattered by the events at *Migdal Bavel*. In the aftermath of these various 'failures' of mankind, *Sefer Breishit* shifted its focus to the story of how G-d chose Avraham Avinu to become the forefather of His special nation, whose

goal would be to steer mankind back in the proper direction.

As those events unfold, we find, once again, how this evolving relationship is defined by various **britot** between G-d and Avraham; the classic examples being: - *brit bein ha-btarim* and *brit mila* - or what is commonly referred to as '**brit avot**'.

Sefer Shmot begins as G-d redeems *Bnei Yisrael* from their bondage in Egypt, as He promised Avraham Avinu in *brit bein ha-btarim*. But according to that covenant, *Bnei Yisrael* were also destined to inherit the Land of Israel (after their redemption), thus fulfilling *brit avot*.

However, to enhance the very purpose of *brit avot*, G-d convenes an additional covenant with *Bnei Yisrael* at *Har Sinai*, before they enter the land. According to this covenant, not only will *Bnei Yisrael* become a 'great' nation, they are to become a **holy** nation - a '**goy kadosh**'.

Upon their acceptance of this proposal, the next step will be to receive the laws that will make them a *goy kadosh*. Hence, *Bnei Yisrael* are instructed to prepare themselves for this special occasion, better known as *Ma'amad Har Sinai*, where they will receive the first set of laws, better known as the 'Ten Commandments'.

"I am the Lord your G-d...

You shall have no other G-ds besides Me...

Do not bow down to them or worship them, for I the Lord am a *KEL KANA* - a **ZEALOUS** G-d. *POKED AVON AVOT AL BANIM* - REMEMBERING THE SIN of parents upon their children... [*LE-SON'AI*] - for those who reject Me, but *OSEH CHESED* - SHOWING KINDNESS... for those who love me and

follow my laws - [*LE-OHAVAI u-leshomrei mitzvotai*]"

Note how the second Commandment includes three attributes concerning our relationship with G-d:

1. *KEL KANA* - a zealous G-d
2. *POKED AVON AVOT AL BANIM* - *LE-SON'AI* HARSH punishment for those who reject G-d
3. *O'SEH CHESED LA-ALAFIM* - *LE-OHAVAI* Kindness & reward for those who follow G-d.

Similarly, in the third Commandment, we find yet another *MIDDA* [divine attribute]:

"Do not say in vain the NAME of G-d - *ki LO YENAKEH HASHEM* - for G-d will NOT FORGIVE he who says his Name in vain." (20:7)

Let's add this fourth attribute to the above list:

4. *LO YENAKEH HASHEM* - He will not forgive

How should we consider these four attributes? At first glance, most of them seem to be quite harsh! Even the *MIDDA* of *OSEH CHESED* - Divine kindness - does not necessarily imply **MERCY**. Carefully note in 20:6 that G-d promises this kindness **only** for those who **follow** Him, and hence, not for any others.

Although these **middot** do have their 'down side', for they threaten immediate punishment for those who transgress ('*le-son'a*'), they also have their 'up side', for they assure immediate reward for those who obey (*le-ohavai*). In other words, these **middot** describe a very intense relationship, quite similar [and not by chance] to G-d's relationship with man in *Gan Eden*.

Yet another example of this intense relationship, and yet another attribute, is

Continued on next page

Harnessing Our Innate Creative Drive



Rabbi Eli Mansour

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The Torah in *Parashat Ki-Tavo* presents the *misva* of *Bikkurim*, which obligates a farmer to take the first fruits that ripen, bring them to the *Bet Ha'mikdash*, and give them to the *Kohen*.

The unique importance of this *misva* is expressed by an enigmatic comment of the *Midrash* regarding the very first words of the Torah – “*Bereshit Bara Elokim*” (literally, “In the beginning, G-d created...”). The *Midrash* interprets this phrase to mean that G-d created the world for certain things which are referred to as “*Reshit*” (“the first”). For example, the world was created for the sake of Torah study and observance, as the Torah is referred to as “*Reshit*” (“*Hashem Kanani Reshit Darko*” – *Mishleh* 8:22). Additionally, the *Midrash* remarks, the world was created for *Am Yisrael*, which are likewise called “*Reshit*” (“*Reshit Tebuato*” – *Yirmiyahu* 2:3). More surprisingly, the *Midrash* writes that the world was created for the sake of the *misva* of *Bikkurim*, the first fruits, which are called “*Reshit*” (“*Ve'lakhta Me'reshit Kol Peri Ha'adama*” – *Debarim* 26:2).

What is special about this *misva*, and how does its unique quality relate to the word “*Reshit*”?

A profound answer to this question was offered by Rav Haim of Sanz (1793-1876), in his work *Dibreih Haim*. He notes the approach taken by the Ramban in

interpreting the verse, “*Bereshit Bara Elokim*,” explaining that before the actual creation of the world, G-d created a certain force, the potential for creation. (The Ramban calls this force “*Koah Hiyuli*”). It was through this primal force that G-d then proceeded to create everything in the universe. Rav Haim of Sanz explains that we human beings, too, are endowed with this force, this potential for creativity. This force is the origin of our innate attraction to newness, and why we bore easily. A clear example is the frequency with which people today check their phones for new messages, new updates, and news flashes. In fact, the very word “news” with which the information industry refers to itself was chosen to appeal to this innate drive. We crave new information, new ideas, new experiences, and new achievements. This is because we are endowed with “*Reshit*” – with a force of potentiality, the power to create new things.

This drive, like all human drives, is both critically important, and exceedingly dangerous. It is what motivates people to build, to develop, to arrive at new inventions and new groundbreaking ideas. However, left unchecked, this drive can lead a person to the wrong places. In his search for newness, he will seek forbidden experiences, and come up with woefully misguided ideas. This is an especially vexing problem for our generation, when we all carry a limitless reservoir of information

in our pockets. People searching for something new can find anything on the internet – including new content which they should never be accessing.

The *misva* of *Bikkurim*, Rav Haim of Sanz explains, represents the need to channel this innate creative drive toward the service of Hashem. After working very hard for months on end to produce fruit, the farmer finally sees the first ripened fruits, and craves them. But he is told not to eat them, and to instead reserve them for Hashem, so-to-speak, by bringing them to the *Kohen* in the *Bet Ha'mikdash*. This symbolizes the way we are to harness our power of “*Reshit*,” our drive to experience newness, toward meaningful, spiritual goals.

It is natural to grow bored and restless, and to seek something new. This is a drive which we all have, and which we are all supposed to have. We should never try to suppress it – because it is part of our very beings. Instead, we need to channel this drive the right way. We should always be seeking to expand our horizons within the realm of Torah and *misvot* – initiating and participating in new programs, seeking new opportunities for learning, for *Hesed*, for community involvement, and so on. This is the message of *Bikkurim* – that we are to take the power force of “*Reshit*” which Hashem implanted within us and utilize it to improve ourselves and to contribute to the world.

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found at the conclusion of the unit of laws in *Parshat Mishpatim*. Recall that immediately after the Ten Commandments, Moshe was summoned to *Har Sinai* to receive a special set commandment to relay to *Bnei Yisrael*. At the conclusion of those laws, G-d makes the following promise: “Behold, I am sending an angel

before you to guard you on the way and help bring you into the Promised Land. Be careful of him and obey him, Do not defy him – *ki lo yisa le-fish'eichem, for he shall not pardon your sins* – since My Name is with him...[On the other hand...]”...should you obey Him and do all that I say – **I will help you defeat your enemies..**”.

This *midda* of ‘*lo yisa le-fish'eichem*’ is first presented as that of the *mal'ach* of G-d. However; based on the context of these *psukim*, it seems rather clear that G-d's intention is for this *mal'ach* to be Moshe Rabbeinu – for He will speak to the people on behalf of G-d and lead them to the Land, and G-d's Name is with him.

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Every Man will be a King



Rabbi Moshe Weinberger
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The customs of the Jewish people are very holy, and we say the following *tefillah* over the head of a fish or sheep on Rosh Hashanah night: “May it be Your will that we should be the head and not the tail.” But how we can pray for this when the *Mishna* says in *Avos* (4:15), “Be a tail to lions and not a head to foxes.” This is understood to teach that one should be humble, not always running to be the “head,” the most important role in whatever he involves himself. Indeed, there is tremendous grace and charm in one who makes himself the “tail” by conducting himself in a humble way. As the *pasuk* (*Mishlei* 3:34) says, “[G-d] gives grace to the humble.”

Our *parsha* is filled with blessings. And to the extent some *psukim* in the *parsha* appear to be the opposite of blessings, it is only because we do not know how to read them properly. One *passuk* (*Devarim* 28:13) seems to “side” with the Rosh Hashanah custom: “And Hashem will make you the head and not the tail. You shall be only above and you will not be below when you listen to the *mitzvos* of Hashem your G-d which I command you today, to observe and do.” Targum Yonasan, in his interpretive Aramaic translation of the phrase “the head and not the tail,” renders the phrase: “Hashem will make you kings and not simple people.”

Indeed, the *passuk* (*Shmos* 19:6) says, “You shall be to Me a kingdom of *kohanim* and a holy nation.” But what does it mean that every Jew can be a king? As we will quote below, the Ibn Ezra explains this beautifully in his commentary on *parshas Nasso*.

It must be noted that the Ibn Ezra himself suffered from profound poverty and suffered throughout his life. Nevertheless, he was a great *talmid chacham* and *paytan* and the Rambam even refers to him as a *chassid*, a pious individual. Because of his constant lack of success at anything he attempted to do in order to improve his situation, he once wrote, tongue in cheek, “If I became a candle-maker, the sun would never set and if I began making burial shrouds, people would stop dying.”

The Ibn Ezra explains why the Torah calls one who makes a *Nazir* vow (to refrain from drinking wine or cutting his hair) a *Nazir* – נזיר, which literally means “crown.” The *passuk* makes this explicit when it says (*Bamidbar* 6:7) about the *Nazir*, “for the crown [כִּתְרוֹ] of his G-d is on his head.” He says, “Know that all people are slaves to the desires of the world. But a true king who has the crown of kingship on his head is anyone who is free from these desires.” It is therefore appropriate and fitting to call a Jew who is not a slave to his desires a “king.”

Perhaps that is what Targum Yonasan means when he translates “the head and not the tail” as “kings and not simple people.” In order to be masters of our own destiny and not slaves to our *baser* instincts, we must do as the *passuk* in our *parsha* continues, “to observe [לשמור] and do,” which implies that we must guard (שמירה) ourselves by setting up boundaries to ensure that we do not become enslaved to the illusory pleasures, values and priorities of this world.

We merit to be Hashem’s bride by acting as His betrothed. When He said, “Behold you are betrothed [מְקוּדָּשָׁה] to me,” we recognize that the intimacy of our relationship means that we must be separated like *hekdesch* from the things of this world. By freeing ourselves from being enslaved to our desires, we enable ourselves to connect to G-d as kings, as masters of our own lives. By doing so in advance of Rosh Hashanah, we not only coronate Hashem as King, but we make ourselves kings as well – not simple people. By doing so, we will merit “only above and not below.”

This is what it means to be a Jew. From the time a young man becomes a *bar mitzvah*, he is called a *bachur* – בָּחוּר. The Tosefos Yom Tov in the tenth *perek* of *Nedarim* quotes the Maharal that because the word for *bachur* has the same letters as “one who chooses – בּוֹחֵר,” we know that the essence of being a young man in *Yiddishkeit* is that he must make choices. He must be a master of his own destiny. He must choose to be a king and not a slave to his desires, above and not below, a head and not a tail.

This Rosh Hashanah, may we merit to coronate not only Hashem but also ourselves as kings. By letting Hashem guide our choices so that we are not enslaved by the desires, values, and priorities of this world, may we merit to see the world in which “Hashem will be King over the entire earth; on that day Hashem will be One and His name will be One.” (*Zecharia* 14:9)

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Hence we can consider it an attribute of G-d, by which Moshe – as G-d’s emissary – must relate to the people.

A final example of this **harsh** nature of *brit Sinai* is found in the Torah’s account of the aftermath of *Bnei Yisrael*’s sin with the golden calf [*chet ha-egel*]. Because the

people had agreed to these harsh terms of *brit Sinai*, we find how G-d intends to punish them precisely according to these attributes of **middat ha-din**: “And G-d told Moshe, go down from the mountain for your people has sinned... they made a golden image... and now allow Me, and

I will kindle my anger against them that I may destroy them – **ve-yichar api bahem...**”

Here we find yet another divine attribute – **CHARON AF HASHEM** – G-d’s instant anger.

More on this in next week’s HaMizrachi Parsha Weekly.

Contributing Your Verse to the Play of Life



Rabbi YY Jacobson
TheYeshiva.net

One of the most “green” and organic commandments in the Torah is the *mitzvah* of *Bikurim*, the “First Fruits,” in the opening of this week’s portion (*Ki Savo*). If you lived in the biblical Land of Israel, and your orchard grew any of the special fruits with which the Land was blessed – grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives or dates – you were commanded by the Torah to select the first-ripened fruits, place them in a basket, bring them to the Holy Temple, and present them to the *kohen*, the priest, as a gift.

Today, *Bikurim* are gone with the destruction of the Temple. What is the closest thing we have left? The *Midrash* says: “Moses saw that the Temple would eventually be destroyed, and *Bikurim* aborted; therefore, he established Prayer three times a day.” Just as *Bikurim* are the first and freshest fruit of my harvest, prayer is the first and freshest moment of my day.

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

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

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

The Baal Shem Tov once shared this following allegorical story: Once upon a time, the lion grew furious with all of the other jungle animals. Since the lion is “the king of animal life,” and is most powerful and dominant, his ire evoked deep fright in the hearts of the other animals. “What should we do?” murmured all the animals at an emergency meeting. “If the lion lets out his anger, we are all done.” “No worries,” came the voice of the fox, known as the wiliest of animals. “In the reservoirs of my brain are stored 300 stories, anecdotes and vignettes. When I present them to the lion, his mood will be transformed.” A wave of joy rushed through all the animals as they embarked on a march toward the lion’s home in the jungle, where the fox would placate him and restore the friendly relationship between the lion and his subjects.

During the journey through the jungle pathways, the fox suddenly turns to one of his animal friends and says, “You know, I forgot 100 of my entertaining stories.” Rumors of the fox’s lapse of memory spread immediately. Many animals were overtaken by profound trepidation, but soon came the calming voice of Mr. Bear. “No worries,” he said. “Two hundred vignettes of a brilliant fox are more than enough to get that arrogant lion rolling in laughter and delight. “They will suffice to do the job,” agreed Mr. Wolf. A little while later, as the extraordinarily large entourage of animals was nearing the lion, Mr. Fox suddenly turned to another

colleague. “I have forgotten another 100 of my anecdotes,” lamented the fox. “They simply slipped my mind.” The animals’ fear became stronger, but soon enough came the reassuring voice of Mr. Deer. “No worries,” he proclaimed, “One hundred fox stories will suffice to capture the imagination of our simple king.” “Yes, 100 jokes will assuage the lion,” agreed Mr. Tiger. A few moments later, all of the hundreds of thousands of animals were at the lion’s den. The lion rose to his full might and glory, casting a fierce gaze at all of his subjects, sending a shiver through their veins.

As the moment of truth arrived, all of the animals looked up with beseeching eyes to their bright representative, the fox, to approach the lion and accomplish the great mission of reconciliation. At that very moment, the fox turned to the animals and said, “I am sorry, but I forgot my last 100 stories. I have nothing left to say to the king.” The animals went into hysteria. “You are a vicious liar,” they cried. “You deceived us. What are we to do now?” “My job,” responded the fox calmly, “was to persuade you to take the journey from your own nests to the lion’s nest. I have accomplished my mission. You are here. Now, let each and every single one of you discover his own voice and rehabilitate his own personal relationship with the king.”

This story, concluded the Baal Shem Tov, illustrates a common problem in institutionalized religion. We come to synagogue on *Rosh Hashanah* or *Yom Kippur*, or any other time of the year, and we rely on the “foxes” – the cantors and the rabbis – to serve as our representative to the King of Kings. “The rabbi’s sermon today was unbelievable,” we often proclaim after

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Ki Tavo: Blessings



Rabbi Judah Mischel

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Rebbi Yaaqov Mutzafi, zy'a, was one of the last spiritual leaders of the ancient Jewish community of Iraq. Upon arrival in *Eretz Yisrael*, Rebbi Yaaqov became the leader of the Sefardic *Edah Chareidit*. He would often sit, adorned in his traditional *jalabiya*, in the “*Shemesh Sedaqah*” Beit Kneset on Rechov Haggai in Yerushalayim, teaching Torah, giving guidance and distributing blessings to petitioners of all stripes. He was known for his fiery *drashot* on the importance of *emunah*. In the course of one *drasha*, he shared the following story of a family from his hometown:

A baby born to a sweet and righteous couple was suffering from an extreme case of colic, and cried day and night. None of the doctors or specialists could figure out the cause of the incessant crying and screaming. After exhausting all medical options, the parents consulted with *Chachamim* and holy people and tried various *segulot* and mystically potent remedies, but to no avail. The child continued to scream, and his worn down parents felt helpless.

One day, while walking in the market, the mother found a page of sacred writing laying in the dirt. Though illiterate and unable to identify what it was, she recognized it was a *davar sheb'kedusha*, and quickly picked it up, out of respect. When she got home, the righteous woman cleaned off the page and thought to herself that perhaps Hashem was sending her a healing message for her ailing son. With simple faith, the mother put the crumpled page under her crying baby's pillow and spoke directly to Hashem: “*Rib-bono Shel Olam*... You know very well that I can't read or write. But I do know that this page is holy. Master of the World! In the merit of this holy page, may my son be healed from his suffering!”

That night, for the very first time, the baby slept soundly. This miracle was a complete surprise to the child's father (and neighbors) who had become used to the non-stop screaming. After a few days of peace and quiet, the baby's father reflected on the amazing turn of events and wondered aloud as to what had changed. His wife heard him, went to the crib, pulled out the page from under the pillow and showed her husband, saying, “Is there any *segulah* in the world greater than words of Torah?” The husband grew pale as he scanned the page. Trembling he shouted, “Do you realize what you have done? This is a page of the *Tochacha*, the rebukes and fearful punishments... this is what you put under our child's head!” Smiling, she responded, “My dear husband, you know I can't read... how could I possibly know what's written there? All I know is that it is from the Torah – the sweetest gift that our Father in Heaven has given us as an expression of His love. And look! In the merit of the Torah, Hashem has sent a complete healing to our son!”

When the great maggid of Brooklyn Heights, Reb Yitzhak Buxbaum, zy'a, shared this story of *temimus*, sincerity and simple faith, he added: “How great is the power of faith that turns Hashem's judgment to mercy and turns curses into blessings!”



Our *sedra* lays out the multitude of blessings inherent in living a life of following Hashem's will, including health, happiness and peace of mind:

וְבָאוּ עֲלֶיךָ כָּל-הַבְּרָכוֹת הָאֵלֶּה
'וְהִשִּׁיגְךָ כִּי תִשְׁמַע בְּקוֹל ה'

“And all these blessings will come upon you and *hisigucha* (‘cleave to you’), if you obey the Lord, your G-d.” (*Devarim*, 28:2)

It is interesting to note that parallel language frames the ramifications that will befall us in the *Tochacha* if we turn our backs on Hashem:

אִם-לֹא תִשְׁמַע בְּקוֹל ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשׁמֹר
לְעֲשׂוֹת אֶת-כָּל-מִצְוֹתָיו וְחֻקָּתָיו... וּבָאוּ
עֲלֶיךָ כָּל-הַקְּלָלוֹת הָאֵלֶּה וְהִשִּׁיגְךָ

“And it will be, if you do not obey the Lord, your G-d, to observe to fulfill all His commandments and statutes which I am commanding you this day, that all these curses will **come upon you** and ***hisigucha*** (‘overtake you’).” (*Devarim*, 28:15)

In both passages there are two steps: first the blessings or curses “come upon you,” and then “*hisigucha*” (they “cleave to you” or “overtake you”). The word *hisigucha* is a construction of the verb *להשיג*, meaning “to grasp” or “understand,” and also “to reach” or “acquire.” This alludes to our process of interpretation; first something comes upon us, and then we “acquire” an experience of it according to our *hasagah*, our understanding. The way we “reach” out to and interpret phenomena is the same way we “acquire” and experience them. Whether something is a curse or a blessing depends on our *da'as*, our consciousness. This is illustrated in a story of the Alter Rebbe, Reb Shneur Zalman of Liadi:

The Alter Rebbe was the regular *baal korei* in his *shul*. It happened that one year the Rebbe was away for *Parshas Ki Savo*, and someone else *leined* instead. That week after *kriyas haTorah*, Dov Ber, the Rebbe's twelve year old son, fell ill, and it became clear that the cause had been the stress and heaviness of the reading of the *Tochacha*. The effect upon little Dov Ber was so intense that his father was even hesitant to let him fast on *Yom Kippur* almost a month later. The doctors were astounded at the physiological response, and asked

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His[s]tory

Mrs. Shira Smiles

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The declaration one recites upon bringing his first fruits to the *Beit Hamikdash* is curious. The passages comprise an overview of Jewish history and do not seem related to the *Bikkurim* ceremony. Would it not be sufficient for the farmer to simply acknowledge the gifts of his fruits and his dedication to Hashem? What can we learn from this chapter?

Rav Moshe Shmuel Shapiro, *zt"l*, shares a fundamental lesson. To express true appreciation for the abundant Divine kindness we experience, it is imperative to reiterate the details again and again. When we look at the farmer's proclamation, we notice the constant emphasis on Hashem's unending goodness and mastery of all that exists.

This is a valuable lesson to us, stressing the importance of always expressing our gratitude to Hashem, not only through

tefillah and *brachot*, but throughout our day in every experience. Living with this awareness humbles us and heightens our awareness of Hashem's greatness and the need to voice our indebtedness over and over.

We have here an insight into the human psyche, taught by Rav Zaitchik, *zt"l*, in *Ohr Chadash*. Human nature is such that when blessed with goodness, one tends to become haughty and will often forget the needs of others. By recounting the collective past of our nation, one is reminded of what it feels like to suffer and live with deprivation. Thus, the declaration will inspire others to give to those less fortunate and indeed can rejoice before Hashem.

An alternative approach is found in *Birkat Mordechai* by Rav Mordechai Ezrachi, *zt"l*. He notes that this entire section focuses on the beauty and magnitude of Divine

Providence. From *Yetziat Mizrayim* and beyond, Hashem orchestrates every detail of history that creates every episode and circumstance. Even the exact fruits in the farmer's basket were directly gifted to him by Hashem.

Focusing on Jewish history gives us the opportunity to realize that nothing in this world is random, but an explicit manifestation of Hashem's intense love for every one of us. This then gives rise to the overwhelming joy of the *mitzvah* of *Bikkurim*.

The month of Elul is a most fitting time to integrate these lessons into our lives. It is a time to become more mindful of Hashem's abundant kindness and continuous love. When we personalize this awareness, we will be inspired to concentrate on how we do *mitzvot* and feel that we are each an integral part of Hashem's grand scheme.

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services. "He is really awesome." Or, "That cantor? His vibrato just melted my soul." These clergy all-too-often become the "foxes" who know how to get the job done for us. Yet, sooner or later, we come to realize that the foxes, with all due respect, don't really have what it takes to address the king on behalf of you and me. Each of us must discover his or her own inner voice and inner passion and spirit, and

speak to G-d with a distinct and unique voice.

Cantors and rabbis during the High Holidays (and the rest of the year) ought to view themselves as the Baal Shem Tov's foxes: Their function is to persuade and inspire people to leave their own self-contained domains and embark on a journey toward something far deeper and more

real. But each and every one of us must ultimately enter the space of G-d alone.

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

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the boy, "But don't you hear the *Tochacha* every year?" Dov Ber responded, "When my Father reads the *Tochacha*, you don't hear curses!"

■ ■ ■

The days of Elul revolve around *Teshuva*, the premise of which is our *emunah peshutah*, wholehearted and simple faith in Hashem's promise for forgiveness: "Vayomer Hashem, *Salachti k'devarecha*,

"And Hashem said, 'I have forgiven them in accordance with your word.'" (*Bamidbar*, 14:20). With our own "word," our own compassionate understanding and interpretation of the mistakes that have come upon us, Hashem will forgive us.

Then, when we approach the Compassionate One with *emunah peshutah* in honest *teshuvah*, the words of *Selichos* can turn our *aveiros* into expressions of yearning and even closeness to Hashem. Indeed,

how great is the power of simple faith in Hashem's desire to forgive us, heal us, and draw us close – for it turns curses into blessings!

May we all experience a year of revealed health, blessings, and closeness to Hashem.

■ ■ ■

Excerpt from Baderech: Along the Path of the Torah, forthcoming (Mosaica Press, Elul 5786)

The Selichot Youth



Rabbanit Yemima Mizrahi
Popular Torah teacher and author

Every year, the phenomenon grows: tens of thousands of young women and men pack the Western Wall plaza to recite *Selichot*. This week, in a viral post, one mother described how her daughter and her friends buy special “*Selichot* clothes” (!) – usually in bright white – and go together to the Wall for the *Selichot* prayers. In their eyes, the most masculine man will be the one who sheds a tear and sings melodies passed down from his grandfather during the *Selichot piyyutim*. The mother said how surprised she was by this new trend, and how it touched her deeply...

And on Thursday, on bustling Agripas Street, at the entrance to the kosher steakhouse of chef Assaf Granit, an astonishing sign was displayed: “The pitas are finished, our apologies.” The famous chef, too, understood that he is merely something to eat along the way, and that the young people of this generation prefer a different kind of nourishment – food for the soul – and that they will award their Michelin star to an entirely different place: the prayer plaza at the Western Wall, at midnight.

And unlike everyone else, in this short column I am not asking at all, “What happened to them?” To me, it is as clear as day: after three years of war, everyone is seeking an answer. Everyone has realized that they do not understand – and anyone for whom this is not obvious, I simply cannot understand. But I, as someone who grew up religious, want to ask: What, exactly, is supposed to excite me about this new trend?! Isn’t our collective anthropological fascination with it just a little condescending? After all, we all know that the white clothes will return to the closet at the end of *Selichot*, just as the people who wore them will return home. So what is there to get excited about?

As religious people, we ought to be moved by the most important thing in the world: the joy of repentance.

These young people will get excited, dress up, shed tears, listen, post to their “stories,” and return home very pleased with themselves. “But they are sacrificing so little!” True. But in this week’s Torah portion, too, a person brings only one pomegranate, one fig, and already he is commanded: “And you shall rejoice in all the good!” And joy appears elsewhere in the portion as well – as the reason for all the curses that befall a person, G-d forbid: “And all these curses shall come upon you... because you did not serve the Lord your G-d with joy and with a good heart, out of an abundance of everything.”

What does the phrase “out of an abundance of everything” mean? Hasidism, on its birthday – this week, on the 18th of Elul – will remind us that the source of sadness is “because you want everything.” Rabbi Nachman has a wondrous story about “the righteous man who was overcome by sadness.” In the story, Rabbi Nachman describes a righteous man who is never completely satisfied with his spiritual service and does not understand how even the smallest movement toward joy can completely change his place in the world!

This is a particular curse in the Torah portion, called “*mig'eret*” – and Ibn Ezra explains it as meaning: “that he does not rejoice in the fruit of his labor (*yegi'a*).” In other words, our self-rebuke every time we accomplish something and fail to rejoice in it, because we demand even more good, and then even more good...

But the holy Or HaChaim will say something even more profound: these young people are simply drawing closer, even if only for a single moment, to the kernel that contains all the joy in the world:

the Torah. On the words, “And you shall rejoice in all the good,” he writes his famous words: “There is no good except Torah; and if human beings could feel the sweetness and pleasantness of the Torah, they would go mad... for the Torah encompasses all the good in the world.”

Strangely, the Or HaChaim does not feel the need to say these wondrous words at the giving of the Torah! He says them now, in the portion of *Ki Tavo*, where not everything is good... The portion describes, alongside the blessings, terrible curses with no words of consolation afterward.

Rabbi Chaim ibn Attar, the Eastern Jewish Hasid, beloved by the Baal Shem Tov, knows that a generation will come in which young people will be exposed to curses they never imagined: sons and daughters will be taken captive, handed over to another people; our enemies will suddenly breach our fortified walls. In such a generation, the holy Or HaChaim knows, young people will want to experience Hasidic joy – a joy of “even so,” a joy that knows that “even a little is good.”

They will wear white for just one evening, like a bride beneath her wedding canopy, and we will look at them in astonishment, asking ourselves piercing questions about our own joy in serving G-d: Did we serve Him with joy and with a good heart? Is there nothing we can learn from this passionate thronging to the Wall?

Selichot youth, our apologies.

Hebrew Language in the Parsha



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In *Parashat Ki Tavo*, Moshe commands the people to set up large stones after crossing the Jordan and coat them with lime.

וְהָיָה בַּיּוֹם אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲבֹרוּ אֶת-הַיַּרְדֵּן אֶל-הָאָרֶץ... וְהִקְמַתְּ לָךְ אֲבָנִים גְּדוֹלוֹת וְשָׁדַתְּ אֹתָם בְּשִׂיד

“On the day you have crossed the Jordan into the land that the LORD your G-d is giving you, you shall set up large stones and plaster them with plaster.” (*Devarim* 27:2)

A central word in the verse is **בְּשִׂיד**. In Biblical Hebrew, **שִׂיד** refers to the material itself, lime, and by extension the white coating made from it. The verb **שָׁדַתְּ** means to coat or whitewash with that material. Other biblical uses carry the same meaning. In *Yeshayahu* 33:12, **מִשְׁרִפּוֹת**, **שִׂיד** refers to lime-burning, and in *Amos* 2:1, **לְשִׂיד** uses the word in the context of burning bones into lime, an act of desecration. In Modern Hebrew, **סיד** means lime, quicklime, and whitewash, making

it the closest modern continuation of the word in our *parasha*.

A related term is **טִיחַ**, a broader construction word for plaster, meaning the coating spread on a wall or the finished plaster layer itself. In *Yechezkel* 13:10–15, false prophets are compared to people covering a wall with **טִיחַ תָּפַל**, a coating that conceals weakness without addressing it. There the concern is not any particular mineral but the surface layer as such. That is the key distinction between the two words: **שִׂיד** refers to lime as a specific material, while **טִיחַ** refers to plaster as a type of coating. In Modern Hebrew, **טִיחַ** is the standard word for construction plaster, and the verb **הִטִּיחַ** has come to mean “to whitewash” or “to cover up.”

A later word is **גִּבְסָה**. In Talmudic sources it appears in longer forms, including **גִּבְסָה**, **גִּבְסָס**, and **גִּבְסָסִים**, typically traced to the Greek *gypsos*, the same root behind the English word *gypsum*. The modern

form **גִּבְסָה** developed from those earlier forms and became the standard term for gypsum and plaster of Paris. In Modern Hebrew it has extended further to cover gypsum-based building materials, particularly drywall, and also orthopedic casts.

A similar word is **גִּיר**. Today it usually means chalk, but older sources suggest a wider range. Its one biblical appearance is in *Yeshayahu* 27:9, **כָּאֲבִי-גִיר מְנַפְצוֹת**, where English translations vary among chalk, lime, and limestone. A related Aramaic form, **גִּירָא**, appears in *Daniel* 5:5 in the phrase **עַל-גִּירָא דִּי-כְתָל הִיכְלָא דִּי מַלְכָא**, “upon the plaster of the wall of the king’s palace,” showing that the word could refer to a white wall material as well. All of these terms refer to related white materials such as chalk, lime, and gypsum, and in earlier sources the boundaries between them were not always sharp. In Modern Hebrew, **גִּיר** means chalk, and **אֶבֶן גִּיר** means limestone.

Answer to the Parsha Riddle (from page 10)

Starting at verse 27:15 is a list of eleven sins and curses which were to be recited to the tribes standing on Mt. Grizim and Mt. Eval after they would cross over the Yarden River into *Eretz Yisrael*.

(They were first recited as blessings for those who observe the prohibitions and as to why the Torah only mentions the corresponding curses, see commentaries such as *Gur Aryeh*, *Maskil LeDovid*, et al.)

The first of these is the curse for one who makes a graven image or a molten image and places it in secret (for the purpose of worshipping it).

אָרוּר הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה פֶסֶל וּמַסֶּכֶה תּוֹעֵב וְהָיָה כִּי יִסְתֵּר יְדֵי חֲרָשׁ וְשָׁם בְּסֵתֶר...
אָרוּר מְקַלְהָ אָבִיו וְאִמּוֹ...

This is an offense against the first partner in man’s creation, namely Hashem.

The second of these is the curse for one who degrades his father or mother.

This is an offense against the other two partners in man’s creation, his parents.

Rabbenu Bechaye explains that the sins mentioned begin with that of idolatry, as the gravity of this sin is equal to that of violating the entire Torah. The next sin mentioned is that of degrading the parents, because the Torah wanted to group together the sins

made against the three partners who created him.

He continues to explain that the reason that the Torah selected these eleven sins in particular is because all of them can be committed in secret.

Hence the usage of the words **וְשָׁם בְּסֵתֶר** – and sets it up in secret” in the first sin of the list, idolatry.

May Hashem grant all of *Klal Yisrael* a new year with only *brachot* as mentioned in *Ki Tavo* in 28:1:

וּבָאוּ עָלֶיךָ כָּל-הַבְּרָכוֹת הָאֵלֶּה וְהַשִּׁיגְךָ
כּוֹחַ”



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