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NOTE: Devrei Torah presented weekly in Loving Memory of Rabbi Leonard S. Cahan z"l, Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Har Shalom, who started me on my road to learning more than 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his untimely death.

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

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

Moshe continues his message to B'Nai Yisrael by reminding the people of Hashem's rewards for obeying His mitzvot. However, Moshe includes lightly veiled links to earlier episodes and mitzvot in the Torah. "Eikev," an unusual word for "because" and a few other connecting words, appears only five times in the Torah, and each time it connects in some way to Avraham Avinu.

Rabbi David Fohrman and his scholars at alephbeta.org probe the Avraham connection. "Eikev tishma'un," the second and third words in the parsha, "because you listened," has a very close parallel to Bereishis 22:16-18. Hashem promises Avraham that He will give him many descendants and that they will inherit His special land, up to the gates of their enemies, Eikev (because) he listened to Hashem's voice (obeyed his call to the Akeidah). In Eikev, Moshe continues that God will enable B'Nai Yisrael to defeat even much larger and more powerful nations, as He did with Egypt at the Exodus. If we obey Hashem's mitzvot, He will defeat our enemies (through natural means rather than through obvious miracles). We can see this promise in action by studying the wars between Israel and Arab nations in the past eighty years.

The akeidah connection continues, as Moshe reminds B'Nai Yisrael that God tested them many times over their forty years in the Midbar (8:2 ff.) – a lightly veiled reminder that Hashem tested Avraham ten times before making His promises after the akeidah (e.g., Bereishis 22:1). Moshe warns the people that God will test their resolve to obey the mitzvot many more times – if they pass the tests, Hashem will bring the blessings that He had promised to Avraham. If they fail, at some time the land will vomit them out of the land. (8:19-20) This warning is also explicit in the second paragraph of the Shema, part of the sixth aliyah, which comes in this parsha (11:13-21) and which we read at least twice daily.

Hashem's gift of His special land comes with conditions, which Avraham, Yitzhak, and Yaakov understand. The gifts of Hashem's special land and many children are tools to enable our people to embody God's values and teach them to other (evil) nations. Micah summarizes Hashem's mitzvot in three steps. Just do justice: chesed (kindness) and mishpat (fairness). Love kindness (ahavat chesed). Walk humbly (modestly) with Hashem. (These are Rabbi Fohrman's translations.) Micah teaches us that a person who follows these three attributes meets the Torah's description of holiness that can influence people to become better people – the reason Hashem chooses Avraham to be the father of His special nation.

Moshe's message to us in Eikev reminds me of a very special drasha from Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky. Some years ago, a non-religious Jewish family moved next door to Rabbi Kamenetzky's family. The young Rabbi Kamenetzky told his

famous grandfather about the new neighbors and asked him how to relate to them. Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky told his grandson to do nothing – just to interact with them frequently, invite them over for holiday meals and let them experience the joy of living as Torah Jews. After a time, the neighbors started adding mitzvot and internalizing the lessons. When Rabbi Kamenetzky wrote his drasha, it was as they were saying good-bye to their neighbors. After some time, the Kamenetzky neighborhood seemed not religious enough for the former non-religious neighbors – who chose to make aliyah and move to a frum neighborhood in Israel. This story seems to me to embody Hashem's reason for selecting Avraham to be the father of a new nation to inspire other nations to perform teshuvah. God has a very long time horizon. While it takes time to convince evil people to give up their harmful traits, Hashem's view has always been tikkun olam. B'Nai Yisrael should be models to help show others (non-religious Jews and non-Jews) how to become better people and thereby make the world a better place. This path was the way of our ancestors – Avraham, Yitzhak, and Yaakov. This message is inherent in Moshe's message to our people in Eikev.

This Shabbat is the 96th anniversary of the bloody massacre in Hebron in 1929. Arabs in the area attacked and murdered as many of the Jews in and around Hebron as they could find. Saadia Greenberg, who has been compiling and sharing Likuted Divrei Torah for 31 years, repeats the story of his great grandfather, who was the Rabbi of Hebron at the time. He happened to be away that Shabbat and thereby survived. I am sharing this amazing and horrible story by email, and I encourage everyone to read the first hand report, originally shared in Yiddish 96 years ago. May we learn from our history and never forget the bravery of our ancestors in Israel.

My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, and his family have always embodied chesed and mishpat. Our close relationship over fifty years helped teach Hannah and me these values, which hopefully we have shared with our children and shall continue to share with our grandchildren.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah and Alan

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

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Velvel David ben Sarah Rachel; Moshe Aaron ben Leah Beilah (badly wounded in battle in Gaza but slowly recovering), Daniel Yitzchak Meir HaLevy ben Ruth; Avram David ben Zeezl Esther, Avraham Dov ben Blimah; Ariah Ben Sarah, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Miriam Bat Leah; Yehudit Leah bas Hannah Feiga; Miriam bat Esha, Chana bat Sarah; Raizel bat Rut; Rena bat Ilsa, Riva Golda bat Leah, Sharon bat Sarah, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, and all our fellow Jews in danger in and near Israel. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah & Alan

Parshat Ekev: The Second Tablets: Building the Next Step in our Relationship with God

By Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander * © 5782 (2022)
President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone **

Ian and Bernice Charif of Sydney, Australia have dedicated the Devrei Torah from Ohr Torah Stone this week in honour of their grandson Ariel Charif's birthday.

Dedicated in memory of Israel's murdered and fallen, the refuah shlayma of the wounded, the return of those being held hostage in Gaza, and the safety of our brave IDF soldiers.

Relationships of any sort, to be meaningful and effective, must be reciprocal. This is obviously true in a relationship between husband and wife. And it's true in a relationship between parent and children. Parents give so much to their children, and at a certain time in the relationship, the children begin to give back so much to the parents.

Throughout Tanach, we see relationships that fail when there isn't a certain reciprocity.

When Adam and Chava are placed in the Garden of Eden, and they are passive in their relationship with God – they have no requirements – the relationship really fails. Adam and Chava are banished from the Garden of Eden, and only then do they play an active role, a meaningful role, a strong role, in a relationship with God. In fact, we're told on the first Saturday night that Adam and Eve are outside of the Garden of Eden, they actually – with God – they create fire]Pesachim 54a[.

And that is also true about reciprocity in a relationship between God and the Jewish people.

When God gives the Jewish people the first set of Luchot, our Rabbis tell us throughout the Midrashim, that God gives the Jewish people the Written and Oral Law together.]See Drasha 18 of the Beit haLevi, who elaborates on this point[.

The role of the Jewish people is simply to be the receptacle of the Torah, but they really don't play any role in developing the Torah.

And what happens to the first Luchot? What happens to this Torah, for which there is no Oral Tradition at all, and in which everything is written? That relationship fails.

When the Jewish people are passive, when there's no engagement from their side in the relationship with God, that is a relationship that cannot work. And therefore, that set of Luchot are shattered]Exodus 32:19[.

Those Luchot had a purpose. They demonstrate God's interest in creating a covenant with the Jewish people and with all of society. But they fail because they cannot endure if etched within the covenant, the Jewish people are not a partner in the relationship and are not active.

And in this week's Torah portion, Ekev, when we are told about the second Luchot, the Torah is very clear about what happens with the second writing by Moshe:

> *God tells Moshe, 'Write a second set of tablets that are like the first ones…'*]Deuteronomy 10:1[

They're not exactly the same; they're "ka-rishonim." like the first ones. And the text continues:

And what does Moshe communicate?

> *'I wrote on the second set of Tablets the messages that were found on the first Tablets when they were broken.'*

Meaning, when there was a bifurcation between the Oral and the Written Tradition; when there was no longer this idea that God would give the Jewish people both the Oral and Written Torah together.

That the Jewish People would now be responsible for writing part of the Torah, and God would be responsible for writing part of the Torah.

That God would give the Jewish People the Written Torah, and it was the responsibility to communicate the messages of the Oral Tradition from generation to generation.

That every generation would build on the messages of the generation of the past, that now the Jewish People had a role. That is the promise of the second Luchot, of the second Tablets: a new paradigm of the relationship between God and the Jewish people. It highlights the responsibility that each and every one of us has, not only to internalize the messages of the Torah, but to have the courage, and more importantly, the knowledge, to be able to build the next floor on what Torah is all about.

Judaism can only survive, and more importantly, can only thrive and be eternal, when we have the knowledge and the courage to build the next step, the next floor, in our relationship to God, based on Torah principles.

A Judaism and a Torah that engages with modern challenges and makes Torah the eternal book that it continues to be.

* Ohr Torah Stone is a modern Orthodox group of 32 institutions and programs. Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin is the Founding Director, and Rabbi Dr. Brander is President and Rosh HaYeshiva. For more information or to support Ohr Torah Stone, contact ohrtorahstone@otsyny.org or 212-935-8672. Donations to 49 West 45th Street #701, New York, NY 10036.
** Rabbi Brander is away, so I am using an earlier Dvar Torah. https://ots.org.il/parsha-and-purpose-ekev-5782/

Dvar Torah: Parshas Eikev: What Had to Be Said (5767)

By Rabbi Label Lam

> *…lest you eat and be sated, and build good houses and dwell therein, and your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and gold increase, and all that you have increases, and your heart grows haughty, and you forget HASHEM, your G-d, Who has brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage, Who led you through that great and awesome desert,]in which were[snakes, vipers and scorpions, and drought, where there was no water; who brought water for you out of solid rock, Who fed you with manna in the desert, which your forefathers did not know, in order to afflict you and in order to test you, to benefit you in your end, and you will say to yourself,* ***"My strength and the might of my hand that has accumulated this wealth for me."*** *But you must remember the Lord your God, for it is He that gives you strength to make wealth, in order to establish His covenant which He swore to your forefathers, as it is this day. And it will be, if you forget HASHEM your G-d and follow other gods, and worship them, and prostrate yourself before them, I bear witness against you this day, that you will surely perish.*
>)Devarim 8:11-19(

I detect a theme. It's hard to avoid. It's not a hint at all. It's brutal honesty. Moshe is admonishing them and us. It is a severe warning that applies then and now. It lends truth to the statement, *"Nothing fails like success!"* We are cautioned again and again to be on guard when things are going well. The test of wealth may be more challenging than the test of poverty, although most of us would petition, *"Test me!"* A poor person is constantly in need. He is forever prayerful and is grateful for the smallest benefits.

However, when things are going swimmingly, we may become intoxicated with the illusion that we did it, all by our lonesome selves, lending credence to another aphorism, *"Born on third base and thinks he hit a triple!"*

We are warned that if we forget HASHEM and we grow overconfident in our own abilities, there are reminders in the world that graduate from the subtle to the dramatic and even the destructive. We can only hope we are responsive to the wink and the nod and we do not require the rude awakening.

About 16 years ago, we had a newly wedded couple at our Shabbos table. It was a special event, although both of them had joined us many times. We had hosted each of them over the years as singles. It had been an arduous journey to the Chupa for both of them. He had dated for a long time and she had a few near misses)Mrs.(. Now they had arrived at our table as husband and wife. We were overjoyed. I don't recall what got the conversation off the rails but once it went there it was hard to stop. It was beyond awkward. He started recalling episodes from his dating history, referring to places people and events that "pre-dated"his wife.

She was more than uncomfortable with the content of the conversation. Now that he had arrived in the promised land of marriage, he was leisurely reflecting with nostalgia at the "good old days."I was trying to get his attention, even kick him but he was too far away and deeply engrossed. I tried singing but he swerved back again. Things were moving from bad to worse.

Swiftly and mercifully, HASHEM sent an angel. My four year daughter Sara had been studying intently the bride's face with curiosity. She had been at our table a year earlier with a fellow she was seeing "seriously."His name was David. Suddenly, my little daughter, referencing a one year old memory, asked pointedly, *"Where's David!"* She got a shock but he halted his monologue in a hurry and asked, *"Who's David!?"* He got a potent dose of his own medicine, and it worked immediately. No one else could have said then, **what had to be said.**

https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5774-eikev/

Eikev: Birkat HaMazon and the Oral Torah

by Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2018

Sefat Emet teaches that those who were to enter the Land of Israel would be the beginning of the Oral Torah – the taking of the Divine word and interpreting it and applying it to the lived reality of their lives. This process begins already in Sefer Devarim, where they stand on the cusp of entering the land, and where Moshe retells, interprets and applies the stories and the mitzvot of the past. In Sefat Emet's words: *"Mishneh Torah is the passageway connecting the Written and Oral Torah."*

This dynamic of interpretation and application can be seen in a mitzvah that appears in this week's parasha: *birkat ha'mazon,* the mitzvah to make a blessing after one has eaten bread. This is a mitzvah which has not existed until now. In the Wilderness, there was little need to recognize that ones sustenance came from God – the otherworldly manna that fell every day was reminder enough. But once they entered the land, and had to toil to plant and harvest grain, to grind it into flour and to make it into bread, it was quite possible that they will lose sight of God's invisible hand in their success. The Torah explicitly warns against this, immediately after it gives the mitzvah for birkat ha'mazon*: "Guard yourself lest you forget the Lord your God… and you will say in your hearts, 'It is my strength, and the power of my hands, that has made me all this wealth."* (8:11-17). These new circumstances required a new ritual, one that would heighten our awareness of, and appreciation for, God's presence in our daily toil and material success.

The Rabbis, as we know, instituted more blessings – blessings before we eat our food, blessings over natural phenomenon like thunder, lightening or a rainbow; blessings when we hear good tidings or bad tidings; and blessings to appreciate the daily wonders of creation. For being part of the Oral Torah means not just interpreting and applying, but also legislating. By taking their cue from the Torah, the Rabbis expanded the single blessing of the Torah into many blessings, making God that much more of the lived reality in our lives.

This expansion happens with the mitzvah of birakt ha'mazon as well. A close reading of the verse reveals that the mitzvah is not so much to bless God over the sustenance that God has given us, but to bless God for giving us the land: *"For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land… A land of wheat and barely, and vine and figs and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey… And you will eat and be sated, and you shall bless the Lord your God for the good land that He has given you."* (8:7-10). This is about the gift of the land, not the gift of the food!

Now there is a special blessing over the land in birkat ha'mazon. But it is the second, and not defining, blessing. It is the first blessing, *"Blessed are you God, Who sustains all creatures."* that defines it. It is not birkat ha'aretz, a blessing on the land, but birkat ha'mazon, a blessing on our food.

By reading the verses more narrowly, to apply only to the gift of the food and not to the gift of the land which it represents and should evoke, the Rabbis applied its scope much more broadly. Had the halakhic meaning of the verse been limited to its literal meaning, there would only be a Biblical mitzvah to make a brakhah after eating when one was living in the Land of Israel, or at most when one was eating produce that came from Israel. The interpretation of the Oral Torah, however, is that this Biblical mitzvah applies to wherever we are. It is an interpretation that acknowledges certain realities, that Jews will not always be living just in the land of Israel, and reads the verse through that lens.

We see the Oral Torah's expansion of the scope of this blessing also when it comes to the minimum amount that one must eat before he or she should recite birkat ha'mazon. The Gemara (Berakhot 20b) makes the point of the role and power of rabbinic interpretation, in imagining a discussion between God and the ministering angels, who asked God why God shows favor to the Jewish People:

He replied to them: Shall I not show special regard for Israel? For I wrote in the Torah*, "And you shall eat and be sated and bless the Lord thy God,"* and they are particular [to say the Grace] even if the quantity is but the size of an olive or an egg.

The human-Divine partnership that is the Oral Torah is one where we must take responsibility in expanding the scope of Torah and its values. If we do, we are living up to what this relationship expects of us, then we are doing right by God and hence God – according to this Midrash – reciprocates with doing right by us. And perhaps this *"showing regard"* happens naturally; for if we are striving to find God more in our lives, then God will indeed be more found and more present.

There is another aspect of birkat ha'mazon that also exemplifies this dynamic, and that is the question of what defines something to be bread. Although the verse mentions 7 types of produce, not only wheat and barely, but also wine, figs, pomegranates, olive oil, and date honey, the Rabbis determined that the full birkat ha'mazon, constituting of 3, and later 4, blessings, was only required after one ate bread.

The Rabbis focused on bread because it is mentioned explicitly in the verse before birkat ha'mazon*, "A land that you will not eat bread in privation… And you will eat and be sated…"* (8:9-10). And bread is the staple of life, and for much of human history it was the foundation of every meal. So our most weighty brakha is reserved for our eating of bread.

But what about those who cannot eat bread? The mishnah (Menachot 70a) lists five species of grain. Only bread made from these species is considered bread, according to halakhah. But what about people with Celiac disease who are gluten-intolerant? Does this mean that they cannot make hamotzi on Shabbat, that they can never say birkat ha'mazon, that they cannot fulfill the mitzvah of matzah on Pesach?

Let's first see what grains we are talking about. The mishnah lists five: wheat, barley, kusmin, shibolet shual, and shifon. These last three are generally translated as spelt, oats, and rye. Now that's good, because rye does not have gluten, so it provides the perfect solution – just make your bread or matzah out of rye flour! And according to halakha there is even a way you can make it out of a rye flour-rice flour mix.

Rye's inclusion on this list comes from Rashi. Rashi translates shifon as sigala, which refers most likely to secale cereale, or rye There's just one problem. Rye was unknown in the Land of Israel! And if rye does not have gluten, then it does not ferment, and if cannot ferment, then how can it be one of the 5 species of grain? It seems that from an academic perspective, shifon cannot be rye. Indeed, Dr Yehudah Felix, author of *"Flora and Fauna in the Talmud,"* concludes that shifon is not rye, but a type of barely.

Is our gluten-intolerant person in trouble? When science and halakhah collide, which do we follow? The traditional identification, or the one that scholars have concluded is the original and accurate identification?

A wonderful story illustrating this tension, exactly on our topic:

Professor Felix relates that on the basis of his identification, Rav Shlomo Zalman Aurbach, ztz"l, used to make the brakha of shehakol on his morning breakfast of oatmeal. He did this for two years until Rav Shalom Elyashiv yelled at him with the critique that one cannot change what has been the Jewish custom for hundreds of years, going back to the time of the Rishonim, just because of one scholar's findings.

So our gluten-intolerant person is safe. Phew.

This is the power of the Oral Law. It defines our halakhic reality based on how the Rabbis have and continue to interpret and apply the law, how precedent and the works and codes that we have codified define the parameters and limits of interpretation, and how people committed to the halakhah have lived it as a reality.

The Oral tradition is not overridden by the literal meaning of a verse and it is not overridden by certain scientific findings. New information can and is integrated and can often lead to reassessment, but ultimately it will be defined by the Rabbis, guided by tradition and text, operating in the proper parameters, living up to their responsibility to partner with God in interpreting and applying the Torah, in making it a lived reality in our lives.

Shabbat shalom!

From my archives.

Why Didn't the Israelites Pray for Moses? – Thoughts for Parashat Ekev

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

In last week's Torah portion, Va-et-hanan, we read of Moses' plea to the Almighty to let him enter the Promised Land. With consummate humility and piety, Moses prayed that God would allow him the satisfaction of completing his mission as leader of the Israelites. He had devoted forty difficult years in the wilderness, in the hope of bringing the people of Israel into the land of milk and honey. In spite of Moses' heartfelt prayer, the Almighty did not rescind His verdict that Moses was not to enter the Promised Land. God told him to ascend the mountain and look at the land in the distance – that was as close as Moses would get to his goal.

A question arises: why do we hear nothing at all about the Israelites' reaction to God's decree? Why didn't they pray on behalf of their faithful leader? Why didn't they announce to God that they themselves would not enter the Promised Land unless Moses were allowed to enter with them? Why was there no expression of loyalty to or empathy with Moses?

After all that Moses had done for them, it would seem obvious that the people of Israel would have sought God's mercy and kindness to their leader and teacher. But there is no record of their concern at all.

Perhaps this week's Torah portion, Ekev, offers a hint of an answer. Moses reminds the Israelites that during their forty years in the wilderness, God provided them with Manna from heaven; He provided them with clothing that didn't wear out; He protected their feet from swelling. In short, the Israelites did not have to worry about their day to day provisions. In a

certain sense, then, they grew complacent. Their material needs were provided to them miraculously. While this was certainly a good thing for them, it also had a downside. They became so self-satisfied, that their ability to empathize about the needs of others was diminished. A Judeo-Spanish proverb has it that one with a full stomach does not understand the pain of the one who is hungry.

The Israelites had wandered for forty years. They were anxious to get into the Promised Land. Their focus was on their own needs. They didn't think much about the feelings of Moses. After all, if God judged that Moses should not enter the Land, then so be it. They didn't have time or interest to create a stir: they wanted to move forward, with or without Moses didn't really matter very much.

The Torah may be teaching us – by the silence of the Israelites – something very deep (and troubling) about human nature. It wasn't that the Israelites were bad people. No, they were simply "normal" people who wanted to get on with their lives. They "used" Moses as long as he was available. When he could no longer deliver them goods and services, they turned their thoughts to the next leader and to their future journeys. When God told Moses he would not enter the Promised Land, the Israelites offered no resistance, no prayers, no solace to Moses. In their eyes, he had become a "lame duck."

While the behavior of the Israelites was "normal," it nevertheless should raise questions in our own minds. If we were in their situation, would we have shown empathy for Moses? Would we have joined him in praying to God? Would we have made a clear demonstration of loyalty and appreciation?

In our modern society, one of the common complaints is that people are expendable. Loyalty and devotion are made subservient to utilitarian concerns and "market forces." People are used – and then discarded.

The behavior of the Israelites – as so much of modern behavior – is "normal." Yet, our task isn't to be satisfied with being "normal". We need to strive for true righteousness. True righteousness requires us to be sensitive, compassionate, loyal, appreciative.

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, and rabbi emeritus of the historic Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue of New York City.

https://www.jewishideas.org/why-didnt-israelites-pray-moses-thoughts-parashat-ekev

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How Large is a "K'zayit"? Really.

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

(This is a slightly edited version of an article that originally was published some years ago.)

Rashi almost certainly never saw an olive. The same goes for other medieval authorities in Ashk'naz (Germany-Northern France). This little-known but indisputable fact should matter to you. It has everything to do with the following question: Is Halakhic Judaism rational and rooted in reality, or is it a hypothetical construct unconducive to engaging the real world?

It is a simple matter to ascertain, or describe to another, the volume of an average olive, a 'k'zayit'…provided you have olives. But what if you have never seen an olive? How would you understand the concept? How would you describe it to someone unfamiliar with olives?

This was the reality in Ashk'naz in the Middle Ages, and there is no mystery as to why. The olive tree is native to the Mediterranean basin, from Israel in the East to Spain in the west; it does not naturally grow elsewhere. In Roman times, due to the trade routes which crisscrossed the Empire, olives may have made their way to Germany and beyond. The collapse of Rome, however, led to a breakdown of law and order, and therefore trade.

Medieval Ashk'nazim were unfamiliar with olives, a fact confirmed by R. Eliezer b. Yoel's (d. circa 1225) discussion of the minimal amount required for a b'rakha aharona: *"Wherever a k'zayith is required, one needs a sizeable amount of food, because we are unfamiliar with the size of an olive…"* (Ra'avya, B'rakhoth 107).

Some Ashk'nazi authorities concluded that an olive was half the volume of an egg, while others demonstrated, based on Talmudic sources, that it must be less than one third of an egg. How much less they could not say. The truth, of course, is different, as was clearly perceived by one 14th century authority who actually made it to Eretz Yisrael. Responding to the proposition that a person could swallow three k'zaytim at once (which is quite impossible if one assumes a k'zayit to be half of an egg in volume) he wrote: *"As for me, the matter is plain, for I saw olives in Eretz Yisrael and Yerushalayim, and even six were not equal to an egg."* S'pharadi authorities, on the other hand, had no such difficulties. One wrote that an olive is "much less" than a quarter of an egg (Rashba), while another mentions in passing that a dried fig is equal to "several olives" (Rittba). The last three statements, made by sages who saw olives, are entirely accurate.

In present day Halakhic practice, predicated on opinions rooted in the aforementioned lack of knowledge and experience, a k'zayit is often said to be 30 cc, while others say 60 cc. These figures bear no relation to the real world olives of Eretz Yisrael which average 3-5 cc. It is claimed by some that once upon a time olives were much larger. This claim is false. Olives and olive trees have not changed, as evidenced by the fact that there are over 70 olive trees in Israel ranging between 1,700-2000 years old, and 7 are approximately 3000 years old. These trees continue to produce fruit identical to the olives of younger trees. Halakhic responsa from the G'onic period echo these facts, stating plainly that olives do not change. Some would have you believe that there are two kinds of olives: real olives and 'Halakhic' olives. In their view, Halakha need not reflect reality; it exists in an alternate reality of its own. This is a tragedy because it paints Judaism as divorced from reality and irrelevant to a rational person. This is a lie because Torah was intended by Hashem as our handbook for operating in the real world.

The ultimate purpose of Judaism was announced by the Creator before He transmitted the Torah to His people: "And you shall be for My purpose a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:6). The nation of Israel is the priest connecting God and mankind. "I, God, have summoned you for a righteous purpose…. and have assigned you for my covenant with humanity, a light for the nations" (Isaiah 42:6).
The Jewish people, in order to succeed, have to live and lead in the real world. To deal with the challenges facing us as a nation we must think, act and believe rationally. A rational person does not believe in olives 20 times the size of the olives we see with our own eyes. To deal with reality, we have to get real.

[Ed. note: A teaspoon of water is 5 ml, which equals 5 cc of water. 30 cc of water is two tablespoons, or one ounce. As a farmer who must spray his crop (dahlias) regularly, I must be familiar with these measurements – although I would have trouble translating any of them into measures of olives.]

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, and rabbi emeritus of the historic Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue of New York City.

https://www.jewishideas.org/node/3369

Eikev -- Planting With Tears (© 2014)

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine *

Certain phrases in Jewish Scripture are associated with particular connotations in the collective Jewish memory. One example is the word “Eicha.” From the word “Ayecha” -– said to Adam after the first sin, when G-d asked him, “Where are you? What is going to be with you?” –- to the word “Eicha” which the prophet Yirmiya used to begin the book of Lamentations which the Jewish king Yehoyakim burned because he didn’t want to hear the rebuke of the prophet -– the word “Eicha” is associated with negative consequences.

Until this week’s Parsha.

In this week’s portion we read that the Jewish people will declare the question, “Eicha: How will we manage to conquer the enemy.” G-d replies, “Do not worry. All will be well.” It sounds so easy. Still, the word “Eicha” is so deeply associated with fear and worry. How does one manage to achieve the response to “Eicha” that is found in this week’s Parsha, the declaration that all will be well?

There is a well-known passage in the Talmud (Rosh Hashana 16) that states: “Any year that starts in poverty shall end in wealth.” The commentaries explain that if there is a sense of poverty as the year begins, then we pray well for a good year because we feel desperate. When channeled properly, a healthy concern for that which is important to us can produce great blessing.

Similarly, the word “Eicha” implies that a difficult situation is developing. It is up to us to formulate our response. Do we feel inadequate, as Adam did when he responded, “I heard Your voice, but I feared because I am inadequate, so I hid.”? Do we hear “Eicha” and burn it, as Yehoyakim did, because we don’t want to hear its message? Or, do we hear the “Eicha” challenge and mobilize, putting our best foot forward to ultimately be blessed with the words, “Do not fear. All will be well.”

Every person has “Eicha”s in their life. The Tamud is telling us: Don’t burn your “Eicha”s. Think about them. Consider them. Pray regarding them. A year that begins with concern is a year which will produce blessing.

A number of years ago, I had the privilege of officiating at the wedding of a scholarly young man whose parents were unaffiliated. Just before the ceremony, I stood with the groom in a private room preparing him for the momentous occasion. He spent a few moments in deep prayer that his marriage should be a successful one. He donned the traditional kittel, and we placed a small amount of ash upon his head to remember the ruins of Jerusalem. All was well, until I noticed from the corner of my eye that the groom’s mother was becoming noticeably concerned about the state of mind her son was in. Her son was getting married. Shouldn’t he be happy? Why was he taking these observances so seriously?

I excused myself from the groom for a moment, and called his mother aside. I said, “You are probably concerned that your son is so serious right now. That is normal. He is getting married and is praying for success. Just give us a half hour. When you see his smile after the ceremony you will understand.”

That is the meaning of the verse in Tehillim (126:5) which says, “Those who plant with tears shall harvest with joy.” A healthy concern when starting off a new chapter in life is precisely the formula which ensures success. As one master teacher of public speaking expressed it: “I come not to take away the butterflies in your stomach. I come to help you get the butterflies to fly in a constructive formation.”

As we are now less than six weeks from Rosh Hashana, it is worthwhile for us to use these weeks wisely, to identify our concerns and to formulate a strategy which will change the “Eicha”s of our lives into blessing.

We all have concerns. We are just ready to start a new school year. Will the children succeed? How will they interact with their peers…with their teachers?

As we approach the new year and the Day of Judgment, what will the ruling be about our health and that of our loved ones? Will we be blessed with a year of financial serenity?

Many people are tempted to burn the "Eicha"s of their lives (or at least to put them on the "back burner"). This is not because people are wicked, but simply because we sometimes feel helpless. What the Torah is teaching us is that there is a law of opposite results. A person who allows himself to have a healthy amount of concern is a person who prays well and achieves a year of blessing.

In just a few weeks, Jews throughout the world will gather to recite the final prayer of the High Holiday season, the prayer of Neilah. Anyone who achieves a moment of sincere prayer -- even then -- is accepted. When the final sound of the shofar is heard at the end of Yom Kippur, it signifies that finally the "train" has left. But until that moment, even as the train is pulling out, one can still jump on and be a part of this glorious time.

But although it is possible to board the train at the last minute, the wise person seeks to board as early as possible. That way you can choose your seat and make yourself comfortable. You can think about your concerns; contemplate your needs. You can plan for the upcoming meeting properly so that you know in advance what you would like to pray for. This way, when the Conductor comes around and asks, "What can I do for you?" you will have a ready answer.

With best wishes for a wonderful Shabbos.

* Rabbi Mordechai Rhine is a certified mediator and coach with Rabbinic experience of more than 20 years. Based in Maryland, he provides services internationally via Zoom. He is the Director of TEACH613: Building Torah Communities, One family at a Time, and the founder of CARE Mediation, focused on Marriage/ Shalom Bayis and personal coaching. To reach Rabbi Rhine, his websites are www.care-mediation.com and www.teach613.org; his email is RMRhine@gmail.com. **For information or to join any Torah613 classes, contact Rabbi Rhine.**

Rabbi Rhine is on vacation, so I am reprinting a Dvar Torah from his archives:

Eikev – Flexible but Firm

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer * © 2022

As Moshe continues his final speech to the Jewish nation, he reassures us that Hashem's protection will be with us as we enter Israel. Though we will be facing great and mighty nations in the land of Canaan, we need not fear or worry, for G-d will be leading the battle, removing all our enemies from before us.

Moshe cautions us that this could lead us to inappropriate haughtiness. We might feel that it was our righteousness which led Hashem to fight on our behalf. Especially as these nations were known to be evil and immoral, it stands to reason that G-d is removing them and bringing us into His holy land because of our worthiness. Moshe tells us that while these nations would be destroyed for their wickedness, it was only due to the promise Hashem made to our forefathers that He was bringing us to replace these nations in His holy land.

Moshe concludes his warning by saying he has proof that it could not possibly be our own righteousness that would bring us to G-d's holy land. His proof? We are a stiff-necked nation.)Devarim 9:1-6(

The Sforno)Devarim 9:6(explains that the essence of stubbornness is to follow my own will and my own intention even when others provide clear reasons why my intentions are wrong or even detrimental. Stubbornness means failing to properly consider the ideas and thoughts of others. No human being can ever truly understand all sides of an issue on their own. There will always be elements or consequences that one fails to realize. It is only when I am willing to listen to other people, to really hear them out and consider their ideas and thoughts, that I can reach true clarity on an issue. Therefore, one who is stubborn can never attain true righteousness or purity of heart. He will always fall short in his understanding of himself, of the situations he faces and of what it is that G-d truly wants of him in any given situation.

The Sforno gives us a great insight into how we must approach life, in general. In order to achieve greatness, we must look beyond our own ideas. We must open our ears and our minds to what others have to say and incorporate their thoughts suggestions and ideas into our own lives and our own way of thinking.

I believe, though, that there is another lesson here, as well. The Sforno's reason for considering what others have to say is not because my ideas and thoughts are wrong. It is only because other people have perspectives and knowledge that I don't. I do have valuable ideas and thoughts, as well. In fact, the Sforno's lesson applies to them, as well. My own ideas and perspectives are just as critical for them as theirs are for me. I need to open my mind to hear and consider what others say, but I still need to think and decide for myself. My ideas still have bearing, and the correct approach may incorporate both of our thoughts.

A friend of mine was asked an unusual question last week. A congregant came home on Shabbos to find an earthworm crawling along the burning hot asphalt of his driveway. He assumed the earthworm was burning and possibly even dehydrating from the heat, and wanted to know if it was permissible to violate the Rabbinic laws of muktzeh to move the earthworm to the grass, and if there was any comparison to saving a human life.)The laws of muktzeh prohibit handling insects on Shabbos.(

My friend asked a noted Torah scholar who discussed at length whether the laws of muktzeh would be waived here.)Amongst other considerations, it is hard to tell whether or not an earthworm is actually in a state of distress, as one could tell with many other animals.(He, therefore, felt that it would not be allowed to move the earthworm. However, he didn't stop there. He said that his attitude would be to turn to Hashem and say, *"I wish I could get involved and help this earthworm, but there seem to be Halachic reasons why I should not. Hashem, I'm asking You -- the One Who is Merciful on all of His creations-- to step in and see to it that this earthworm will be OK."* Even when there is more to consider, that doesn't mean we are wrong.

* Co-founder of the Rhode Island Torah Network in Providence, RI. Until recently, Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD., and associated with the Savannah Kollel.

The Love of Torah, the Torah of Love, Part 3

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia *

]Ed. note: I ran parts 1 and 2 for Devarim and Vaetchanan[

I would like to open this last installment in the series about the Torah of love with a statement and a suggestion. Our Torah is the Torah of life. Life is infused and energized by love. Therefore, to live my life according to the Torah, I must feel love and joy. If, as an observant person, I perform the Mitzvoth with a sense of duty, mission and commitment, but I do not seem to have a spark of life or happiness while doing so, I should suspect that my understanding of Judaism is misguided. If my kid gets a kick out of any other activity but observing the Mitzvoth, I should know that something went awry. We should feel happy and content – in love with ourselves, our family and the world for being Jewish and observant. It should not be an ignorant love which overlooks problems and pretends that the world is full of rainbows and unicorns, but rather a love for life and for what we can get out of it, which in turn will motivate us to protect the good and fight evil.

This summary, I believe, was the original intention of the Creator in giving us His Law, and this is what Hillel the Elder meant when he said that the whole Torah can be summed up in the phrase: love the other as you love yourself. We have to bring fun back to Judaism. We cannot permit a situation where all that is entertaining, engaging, thrilling and exciting belongs to a realm separated from Jewish life by an impenetrable wall. We have to find ways and, if need be, blaze new trails to revive and revitalize our observance and religious experience so they reverberate for our children and our surroundings and thereby bring us closer to Tikkun Olam. In this way we can improve and perfect the world to bring Mashiach sooner.

I would now like to briefly explain the transition from Biblical to Rabbinical Judaism and offer a practical guide for Jewish improvement.

As demonstrated in the examples from the tanakh and their rabbinical interpretation)Jacob and Rachel; Jacob and Joseph; Ruth and Naomi; The Song of Songs(, the rabbis had an agenda in dealing with verses and passages from the tanakh describing strong emotions and romantic love. We could argue that romantic love is the golden path, the middle road which combines self-interests, care for others, emotional and rewarding involvement and a pragmatic approach. On the two other ends of the spectrum stand the physical, somewhat selfish love, which is often derided as lust and desire, and the pragmatic logical love of attachment, which some hail as true love, not depending on physical attraction or emotions,.
Most voices of the Tannaitic and Midrashic literature reject the middle road. That period was an intense, tumultuous and unforgiving time when any approach that seemed to compromise the spiritual well-being of the Jewish people was ostracized and labeled as doomed to fail. When it came to love, there were many reasons to fear and eschew romantic, emotional love. The two main reasons were fear and rejection of Hellenism and the reaction to the destruction of the Temple. Greek culture was identified with hedonism, a Greek school of philosophy which preached constant indulgence based on a belief that delight was the greatest good. The rabbis denounced the flagrant life style of the Greeks, their pursuit of physical pleasures and their culture of gymnasiums and theaters. Part of the campaign against Hellenism was the description of all joy-generating love not as romantic and emotional but as lustful and animalistic.

The destruction of the Temple and the state of shock in which it left the Jewish world contributed to those sentiments of rejection. How can one be happy when the most treasured relic of his religion and the symbol for his closeness to God is taken away so brutally? The old words of Psalms came back to life: how can we sing the song of HaShem? But it was not only the song of HaShem that was not sung, it was not only the joy of witnessing the Temple in its glory and the priests at their service that has disappeared.

Many rabbis, scholars and zealots called for the abandoning all song and joy. The Talmud tells us of those who decided to abstain completely from wine and meat, and were even willing to give up fruits and grains and sustain themselves with water only)a method also known as the Beverly Hills diet(. Rabbi Yehoshua managed to dissuade them, but those sentiments remained rampant among the population. It is only natural that the response of the rabbis to the destruction, the pessimistic atmosphere and to the feeling of guilt and remorse would be that one should avoid joy, happiness, and laughter in this world until Mashiach comes. The only type of love they permitted and recognized was pragmatic, purpose-driven love. Live your life; marry and have children to hasten the redemption. Put your head down, suffer, and plow through, because when God sees our suffering, He might redeem us sooner rather than later.

As much as this approach was understandable and maybe even necessary in the years immediately following the destruction, it was not supposed to be a long term approach. It has fluctuated over the generations with some communities and some movements allowing themselves a greater freedom to enjoy life, for example during the Golden Age in Spain and by certain schools of Kabbalah and Hassidut. As a whole, however, many rabbis, educators and parents still seem to believe that the best way to maintain and perpetuate Judaism is through guilt, pain and abstinence. They apparently feel that the only way to convince the next generation to keep Torah and Mitzvoth is by reminding them of all the sacrifices of our forefathers and by predicting another catastrophe.

Given the 70 facets of the Torah, educating our children and fellow Jews through guilt and pain is one approach, but I believe that a Judaism full of love, life, and enthusiasm is ultimately a more effective way to attract Jews to Hashem's mitzvoth. There are multiple ways to educate Jews and make them more interested in performing mitzvoth – we are all different and unique. Part of the quest to find how Judaism works for me is to find out how life works for me. This is the secret of Hillel's message to love the other as you love yourself. You must love others, but you have to be able to love, embrace and fulfill yourself first to love and help others. We all have to search, find, and if necessary, invent new methods to revitalize our Jewish life, methods and tools which are already applied successfully in the general world and society. We can teach Torah by using the performing arts. Bring on the music, drama and dance and bring out the talent in our children. Develop the art of storytelling and the written word in all its form, prose, poetry and graphic novels. Make sport activities and scientific research part of the Torah world, and create a generation of well-rounded individuals who understand and engage in all the joyous aspects of modern life without divorcing themselves from the world of the God revering, Mitzvoth observant and Torah learning Judaism.

There is much more to be said and many examples to give, but for now, with Tisha B'Av looming, let me conclude with a blessing and with a nice interpretation I heard from my friend Yehuda Moshe, one of the founders of TheMercava.com a the Midrashic statement:

> *When we will be able to incorporate and appropriate the cultural aspects that people think are reserved only for the theater and the sport arenas, and use them as tools to teach Torah and enhance our prayers, then we will have reached the stage where we deserve to be redeemed, Amen!*]unfortunately Hebrew omitted because of software issues.[

Shabbat Shalom

** Judaic faculty, Ramaz High School, New York; also Torah VeAhava. Until recently, Rabbi, Beth Sholom Sephardic Minyan)Potomac, MD(. Faculty member, AJRCA non-denominational rabbinical school(.

Many Devrei Torah from Rabbi Ovadia this year come from an unpublished draft of his forthcoming book on Tanach, which Rabbi Ovadia has generously shared with our readers. Rabbi Ovadia reserves all copyright protections for this material.

Vaetchanan: Farewell and a New Journey

by Rabbi Moshe Rube*

Thank you to the community for the wonderful celebrations this past Shabbat. I was very touched by everyone's words and the beautiful kiddush. It's always meaningful for me to hear how my stay here has impacted the community. Especially to hear how much the "Eikev" acts mean.

Our Torah portion starts with the word Eikev by telling us to listen to Eikev. The commentators explain that Eikev literally means heel, so the Torah tells us here to listen and take care of the tiny actions that we usually crush with our heels, i.e. deem too small to be significant.

To me, these are the everyday things a Rabbi or really anyone can do. A smile, a kind word, a few minutes to talk with someone. These don't measure up in objective scale to massive community undertakings or events. But they have a power all their own.

When I heard people talk about the various Eikev acts that I've done and how much it meant to them, it reminded me of how much they mean and encourages me to continue seeing the value in even the supposedly small positive actions we do.

May we all merit to multiply our Eikev acts tenfold.

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Rube

* Senior Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation, Remuera)Auckland(, New Zealand. Formerly Rabbi, Congregation Knesseth Israel)Birmingham, AL(. Rabbi Rube will be moving to Australia to lead a new congregation. Once he settles in his new position, we hope to share new insights. I consider it useful to include some insights from congregations in communities with very small Jewish congregations. Note: the next Rabbi in Auckland is a YU trained Rabbi coming from Kenya.

Increased Hate Mail: **The NZ Jewish community has experienced a significant uptick in targeted hate mail. This is being sent to the homes and offices of Jewish and non-Jewish)but Israeli-supporting(people and organisations.**

Rav Kook Torah
Ekev: Animals Served First!

The Torah promises that if we observe the mitzvot and sincerely love God, we will enjoy timely rain and bountiful crops:

"I will give plants in your field for your animals; and you will eat and be satiated.")Deut. 11:15(

Rav Abba Aricha, the celebrated third-century scholar, called attention to the order of the verse: first the animals eat, and only then the people. He learned from here that one should not eat before first placing food before one's animals.

Why is this? Should not people eat first, since they are more important? Are not humans *"the crown of creation"*?

Rav Kook explained that this Talmudic rule of etiquette contains several moral lessons:

Given our central place in the universe, we have a responsibility to look after all creatures.

Our food)and in the case of the farmer, also his livelihood(is supplied by cows, chickens, and so on. We should feed these animals first as an expression of the fundamental gratitude we should feel toward these creatures which provide us with our basic needs.

If we lack food for a short time, we may comfort ourselves with spiritual or intellectual pursuits. This is an integral aspect of the human soul, which is not sustained "by bread alone." Animals, however, have no such alternate outlets when they are pained by hunger. Therefore, it is logical to deal with the animal's hunger first.

In purely physical aspects, animals are superior to humans. Is there a human being who is stronger than a bear, faster than a horse, more agile than a cat? Our superiority over animals lies exclusively in the spiritual realms: in our intelligence and our higher aspirations. Therefore, when it comes to physical sustenance, animals take precedence to humans, and by right are served first.

)Sapphire from the Land of Israel. Adapted from *Ein Eyah* vol. II, p. 180.(

https://ravkooktorah.org/EKEV60.htm

Eikev: Geography and Destiny (5763. 5767)

By Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, z"l, Former Chief Rabbi of the U.K.*

The Torah is a work of wondrous depth and subtlety, so much so that we can easily miss some of its most profound intimations. There is a fine example in this week's sedra. It concerns the character of the land of Israel. Ultimately, however, it is a haunting glimpse into the nature of Jewish destiny itself, then and now.

If we were to ask ourselves what picture we have of the promised land, from the beginning of the exodus until now, the answer is simple. Israel is the land *"flowing with milk and honey."*)Incidentally, the mid-20th century scholar R. Reuven Margoliot, once pointed out that when the land of Israel is praised in the Torah, it is always in terms of its vegetation, never in terms of its animal products. Why then is there an apparent exception in the case of the most famous phrase of all, the land *"flowing with milk and honey"?* The honey referred to, he notes, is not from bees but from the date palm. On that, many commentators concur. Margoliot's radical suggestion relates to *"milk."* We know from many texts that Israel was famed for its grapes and wine. But the biblical yayyin, "wine," standardly refers to red wine. Chalav – the word we translate as "milk" – says Margoliot, means white wine, and is called chalav because of its milky appearance(.

Even the spies, despite their gloomy report, cannot deny its fruitfulness*: "We went into the land to which you sent us, and it does flow with milk and honey! Here is its fruit."* Early in this week's sedra, Moses delivers a magnificent poem to this effect: *"For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land -- a land with streams and pools of water, with springs flowing in the valleys and hills, a land of wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey, a land where bread will not be scarce, and you will lack nothing."* Thus far the promised land conjured up in our imagination is indeed a land of promise, another Eden, an earthly paradise. However, as the lawyers say: always read the small print.

It comes several chapters later and is fateful in its implications. For the first time in forty years, Moses uses a quite different tone when speaking about the land of Israel:

The land you are entering to take over is not like the land of Egypt, from which you have come, where you planted your seed and irrigated it by foot as in a vegetable garden. But the land you are crossing the Jordan to take possession of is a land of mountains and valleys that drinks rain from heaven. It is a land the Lord your God cares for; the eyes of the Lord your God are continually on it from the beginning of the year to its end.

The point is made briefly, almost in passing, yet it makes all the difference. It is indeed a fine land, but . . . It is not like other fine lands. Civilisation began when human beings first turned from hunting and gathering to agriculture and the domestication of animals. This led to the first concentrations of population, the birth of cities, then city states, then nations and empires. The Torah sketches this process in broad outlines. It began in Mesopotamia, in the fertile plain between the Tigris and Euphrates, and then in Egypt, in the Nile delta. These were ideal places for the development of agriculture because water was supplied by rivers, and irrigation was a simple matter of making ditches and channels. Water, on which crops depended, was reliable)the one danger in the low-lying lands of Mesopotamia was of floods – hence the presence of flood narratives, not only in the Torah but in all literatures of that place and time(.

The land of Israel, says Moses, is not like that. It is not a fertile plain. It is a land of hills and valleys. It depends on rain – and rain in the Middle East, then and now, is unpredictable. Suddenly, in this discordant note, we recall a whole series of earlier episodes in the book of Bereishit in which we read the words, *"and there was a famine in the land."* This led, first Abraham, then Isaac, then Jacob and his children, into a series of journeys and exiles)the Book of Ruth begins with another famine, which forces Elimelech and his family to the land of Moab(. Life in Israel will never be as stable, permanent and secure as it is elsewhere. Those who live there are vulnerable, if to nothing else, then to periodic drought. They will exist in a permanent state of insecurity, never knowing in advance whether the seeds they plant will grow or not. Israel is the land of promise, but it will always depend on He-who-promises.

Is geography destiny? Judah Halevi thought so. He writes, in The Kuzari:

> *We do not find in the Bible, "If you keep this law, I will bring you after death into beautiful gardens and great pleasures." On the contrary, it is said, "You shall be my chosen people, and I will be a God unto you, who will guide you . . . You shall remain in the country which forms a stepping-stone to this degree, i.e. the Holy Land. Its fertility or barrenness, its happiness or misfortune, depend upon the divine influence which your conduct will merit, whilst the rest of the world will continue its natural course. For if the Divine Presence is among you, you will perceive by the fertility of your country, by the regularity with which your rainfalls appear in their due seasons, by your victories over your enemies in spite of your inferior numbers, that your affairs are not managed by simple laws of nature, but by the divine will. You will also see that drought, death, and wild beasts pursue*
> *you as a result of disobedience, although the whole world lives in peace. This shows you that your concerns are arranged by a higher power than mere nature."*

Unpacking this in non-mystical terms, we can say that the character of a country – its topography and climate – affects the kind of society people build, and hence the culture and ethos that emerge. In Mesopotamia and Egypt, the most powerful reality was the regularity of nature, the succession of the seasons which seemed to mirror the slow revolution of the stars. The cultures to which both places gave rise was cosmological and their sense of time cyclical. The universe seemed to be ruled by the heavenly bodies whose hierarchy and order was replicated in the hierarchy and order of life on earth. This is the mindset of the world of myth.

Israel, by contrast, was a land without regularities. There was no guarantee that next year would be like this, or this year like last; no certainty that the rain would fall and the earth yield its crops or the trees their fruit. Thus in Israel a new sense of time was born – the time we call historical. Those who lived, or live, in Israel exist in a state of radical contingency. They can never take the future for granted. They depend on something other than nature)even Ben-Gurion knew this. He once said: *"In Israel, in order to be a realist, you must believe in miracles"(.* To put it at its simplest: in Egypt, where the source of life was the Nile, you looked down. In Israel, where the source of life is rain, you had no choice but to look up.

This is a theme we have met before. In the course of the first war the Israelites had to fight for themselves, against Amalek, we read:

As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites prevailed, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites prevailed.

On this, the Mishnah comments:

> *Did the hands of Moses make or break war? Rather, the text implies that whenever the Israelites looked up and dedicated their hearts to their father in heaven, they prevailed, but otherwise they fell.*

Israel – the land *"that drinks rain from heaven"* – is a place whose inhabitants would be ever mindful of their dependence on the fact that *"the eyes of the Lord your God are continually on it from the beginning of the year to its end."* It is the place where you have to look up to survive.

And so it was. Israel's existence as a nation in its land was never secure. Its greatest moment, under King Solomon, did not last. Immediately after his death, the people split into two kingdoms, neither of which could, or did, sustain their independence for long.

Israel is by its very nature a vulnerable place, a strategic location at the meeting point of three continents, always at the mercy of surrounding empires but never the basis of an empire itself. Thus were the terms of the covenant – and the prophetic interpretation of history – set from the outset. Israel would have to depend on exceptional strength on the part of its inhabitants. It was never big enough to sustain a large population. The Prophets knew that the very existence of Israel

as a sovereign nation was predicated on a people lifted to greatness by a sense of mission and high ideals.

Every individual would count. Therefore every individual had to feel part of the whole, respected and given the means of a dignified life. Injustice, gross inequality, or a failure of concern for the weak and marginal, would endanger society at its very roots. There was no margin for error or discontent. Without indomitable courage based on the knowledge that God was with them, they would fall prey to larger powers. When the Prophet Zechariah said*, "Not by strength nor by might but by My spirit, says the Lord,"* he was formulating an axiom of Jewish history. There neither was nor would be a time when Israel could rely on numbers, or vast tracts of territory, or easily defensible borders. So it was then. So it is now.

We do not live in an age of Prophets. Yet Israel exists today in the same circumstances as those which gave birth to the Prophets. As I write these words, the state is 59 years old. But it is also more than three thousand years old. The terms of its existence have not changed. Israel always longed for security but rarely found it. Neither its climate nor its geography were made for an easy life. That is the nature of Jewish faith – not security but the courage to live with insecurity, knowing that life is a battle, but that if we do justice and practice compassion, if we honour great and small, the powerful and the powerless alike, if our eyes do not look down to the earth and its seductions but to heaven and its challenges, this small, vulnerable people is capable of great – even astonishing – achievements.

When Moses told the Israelites the full story about the land, he was telling them – whether or not they understood it at the time – that it was a place where, not just wheat and barley, but the human spirit also, grew. It was the land where people were lifted beyond themselves because, time and again, they would have to believe in something and someone beyond themselves. Not accidentally but essentially, by its climate, topography and location, Israel is the holy land, the place where, merely to survive, the human eye must turn to heaven and the human ear to heaven's call.

https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/eikev/geography-and-destiny/ Note: because Likutei Torah and the Internet Parsha Sheet, both attached by E-mail, normally include the two most recent Devrei Torah by Rabbi Sacks, I have selected an earlier Devar. There are no footnotes or other questions available for this Dvar Torah.

What Makes You Happy and Why?

By Aharon Loschak *

What do you do for fun? If you're looking for a surefire way to cheer up, a silver bullet that almost always works, what is it?

Do you have one?

For those who do, it's a lifesaver. In those moments when things are down, it's been a long day, or the coffee was burned)argh!(, a reliable happy-place is extremely comforting.

But have you thought about the implications of that pick-me-up? What do the things you fall back on for cheer and good feelings say about you?

Are you happy about what you're happy about?

Let's give that a moment's thought.

Recounting the Golden Calf

As is the case with many Torah portions in the book of Deuteronomy, in this week's Torah portion, Moses recounts the events of the previous 40 years in the desert. One of the unfortunate standouts is the sin of the Golden Calf.

Moses admonishes the people, reminding them of how they angered G d to the point where their fate hung in the balance.

He recalls smashing the Tablets and administering punishments to the idolaters, and thereafter trying to set things right between G d and the Jewish people. In his recounting of the events, we discover that Moses was well aware of just how badly the people had sinned, so much so, that he was unsure his efforts to negotiate atonement from G d would meet with success. Take a look at his words:

> *And I fell down before G d as before, forty days and forty nights… For I was frightened of the wrath and the fury that G d was angry with you to destroy you, and G d hearkened to me also at that time*.1

We can appreciate this sentiment. The only problem here is the sequence of events. If you look at the prior verses, Moses tells the people of his fearful state of mind after descending the mountain and breaking the Tablets. To allay his fear that G d might destroy the Jewish people, he went back up the mountain and spent an additional 40 days seeking atonement on their behalf.

But that's not how it happened! Back in the book of Exodus,2 when we read of the events in real time, we find that before he even descended the mountain with the Tablets, Moses already started begging G d for forgiveness. In fact, already on the mountaintop, G d had agreed not to destroy the nation!

So why does Moses now claim that as he came down the mountain, he was gripped with fear?

Moreover, why did Moses suddenly decide to smash the Tablets when he came down the mountain? It's not like he didn't know what was going on down there; after all, G d Himself had informed Moses of the golden calf and of the severity of the situation)including His plans to destroy the Jewish people, G d forbid(.

Moses seems to have remained pretty level-headed about it, and — according to one account in the Talmud3 — even fought with G d to keep the tablets intact. But somehow, not long thereafter, Moses abandons the fight and chooses to smash the tablets instead.

What changed? What did he observe now that he didn't know while still on the mountain?

A New Low

When G d initially informed Moses that the Jewish people had sinned, Moses maintained hope. After all, the Jewish nation comprises regular, imperfect people, and mistakes happen. All he had to do was get the people to sober up a little, let them see what they'd done, and begin to do teshuvah.

That's why he fought with G d for the Tablets. He knew that the current moment, in the immediate aftermath of the golden calf, might not be the right time to present the Jewish people with such a gift. But he couldn't let what he saw as a temporary, fixable problem cause the eternal loss. *"I've got this,"* he said. *"Soon things will calm down, they'll be deserving of the Tablets once more, and we'll put an end to this shameful saga."*

Tablets in hand, Moses made his way down the mountain.

But then he saw something that really made him shiver. As he approached the people, he caught sight of them not simply mulling around the golden calf or even bowing down to it, but dancing. He saw that they were really into this thing.

And that was cause for grave concern.

Transcendental Joy

You see, simchah — real joy or bliss — stems from a very deep place in the soul. A person's ecstasy over any given thing demonstrates that he or she is *"all in."* As explained in Chassidic thought,4 true joy comes from a place so deep and so

potent that it cannot be contained.

When you're happy, that's it. Whatever rational, sensible calculations you had in mind go out the window. It's why you see people writing out huge checks at family weddings, why winning politicians give out absurd gifts, and why you're)generally speaking(just a better person to be around when you're happy — even to those you usually dislike.

It's because a deep part of your soul has been exposed, and that part is expansive, unlimited, and unrestrained by the usual contours of reason.

So when Moses saw the people jumping for joy around their newfound god, he knew that they had passed a point of no return. They had gone all in, and their tablets were no longer salvageable.

And so, he hurled them to the ground.

Pick Your Celebration

Joy is a powerful thing. It is a G d-given tool that enables us to express the deep recesses of the soul. Joy is also crucial to our physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual wellbeing. In fact, joy is considered a must for true mitzvah observance, and we are encouraged to find ways to stay happy.

So make sure you're happy about the right things. If you're excited about your nephew's bar mitzvah, your best friend's wedding, graduating from college, or selling your startup for $300 million, that's great. Just remember this: make it a spiritual experience.

How?

Simple: Be joyful and appreciative of G d's kindness. These wonderful things in your life are a result of His goodness, so channel it in a G dly direction, and dance the night away like you're 16 again.

The Jews dancing for joy in front of the Golden Calf is a cautionary tale: be wary of the frivolity and cheap thrills that surround you. Try your best not to get too caught up in the externals of life. Baseball, politics, and a weekend out with friends are enjoyable and can even be healthy, just make sure you're not making them into a Golden Calf instead of the positive, G dly thing it can be.

When choosing your cultural preferences and the things you do *"for fun,"* remember that what you truly enjoy is very important to who you are, and has a far-reaching impact on the very core of your being. Choose wisely.5

FOOTNOTES:

1. Deuteronomy, 9:18-19.

2. Exodus 32:7-19.

3. Jerusalem Talmud, Shekalim.

4. *Sefer Hamaamarim* 5697, p. 174.

5. This essay is based on Shem Mishmuel, Ekev 5765.

* Writer, editor, rabbi and e ditor of JLI's popular Torah Studies program,

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/5193396/jewish/What-Makes-You-Happy-and-Why.htm

Eikev: Written in Stone

by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky

At the end of 40 days and 40 nights, G-d gave me the two stone tablets, the Tablets of the Covenant.)Deut. 9:11(

The first five commandments were chiseled into the first tablet, and the second five commandments were chiseled into the second tablet. Since there were many more letters in the first five commandments than in the second five, it follows that there were many more letters on the first tablet than there were on the second tablet.

Furthermore, the size of the letters and the space between the letters and lines was the same in both. Nonetheless, the two tablets were miraculously the same size.

Moreover, the letters were engraved straight through the tablets, from one side to the other, yet the words could be read regularly from both sides.

This is why Scripture emphasizes that the tablets were made of stone. The miraculous way that they were written was manifest in the lowest level of physical existence, solid rock. This teaches us that the purpose of the sublime spirituality inherent in the Torah is that it permeate all of physical reality, down to its lowest, most material level.

– From *Daily Wisdom* #3

* An insight by **the Lubavitcher Rebbe** on parshaot Va'etchanan from our *Daily Wisdom #3* by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky.

May G-d grant continued wisdom, strength, victory and peace in the Holy Land.

Gut Shabbos,

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
Kehot Publication Society

Likutei Divrei Torah

Gleanings of Divrei Torah on Parashat Hashavuah via the Internet

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Covenant and Conversation
Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

Why Civilisations Fail

Parshat Eikev poses for us the great question: What is the real challenge of a free society?

And in this week's parsha, Moshe Rabbeinu springs the great surprise.

Let us see his words: "Be careful that you don't forget the Lord your God. Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. If you ever forget the Lord your God, I testify against you today that you will surely be destroyed."

Now what Moshe Rabbeinu is saying - and it is really something very surprising - is he is turning to the new generation and saying: you thought the years in the wilderness were the real trial, and now you're going to enter the Land of Israel and everything will be easy.

He said, Exactly the opposite is the case. The real challenge isn't poverty. The real challenge is affluence. It is when you settle down when you don't have huge challenges, when you grow well off, that is when you are in greatest danger. That is when the spiritual trial will really begin.

Now, what Moshe Rabbeinu is doing here is something very interesting that doesn't happen very often, and it happens only to certain very outstanding historical scholars in the course of civilisation.

One of the first was the great Islamic th century teacher called Ibn Khaldun.

Ibn Khaldun gave an overarching theory of the decline in all of civilisation.

We know that all civilisations or great civilisations begin by military victory by being very powerful or very energetic or very driven.

Then they settle down. Then they become affluent, and then they begin to lose what he called Asaba, which is the Arabic word for what we would call social cohesion.

People begin to get more interested in themselves, and they stop worrying about their neighbours and the good of other people. And they stop worrying about the poor, and that is when they lose social cohesion.

When that happens, they are no longer able to win battles, and they lose their battles to people who are less affluent and more driven.

So that was the first great historian of the decline and fall of civilisations.

The second was the Italian scholar Gian Battista Vico, who wrote in the early th century.

Very, very profound thinker, an absolute one off in Western culture who, in a book of his called The New Science, again drew this picture of the sequence that every civilisation goes through his way of putting it is first people worry about what's necessary.

Then they worry about what's useful. Then they attend to their comfort. Then they start delighting in pleasures. Then they start concentrating on luxuries which leads them to become dissolute, and finally they go mad, squandering their estates. They get into a situation like America and Britain. At that moment, they build up huge levels of personal debt they spend tomorrow and weaken themselves.

Today, the latest person to do so is none other than our Scottish professor of history at Harvard, Niall Ferguson, who in his latest book, Civilisation, says that the West had six killer apps or applications which made their programme work better than anyone else's programme.

They were competition, science, democracy, medicine, consumerism and the work ethic. Those six things made the West beat everyone else.

But today the West is in danger of losing them.

And all of this was said for the first time by Moshe ReNu Millennia before anyone else number one.

If you grow affluent, you may forget where you came from and all the battles you had to fight to get where you are when you forget about your past and you concentrate only on the present, then inequalities grow.

A few people get mega rich and a whole lot of people get mega poor. When that happens, there's a loss of social cohesion. People don't really care about the welfare of other people, and when that happens, society grows weaker, and when that happens, there is eventually defeat and devastation Moshe Rabbeinu is saying the real challenge isn't poverty. The real challenge is affluence.

So how do you defeat what scientists call entropy, which says that all systems lose energy over time?

Can you create a society that is capable of defeating the normal laws of the decline and fall of civilisation? It never happened. Could it happen?

And Moshe Rabbeinu is really spelling out this programme in Devarim of a society that will never grow old.

The first thing you have to do, he says throughout devarim is never forget who you are and where you came from.

You were an ever. You remember the past. We were all once slaves. We shared a fate, so we should care about one another.

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Number two. Create a society where there's justice.

Where's the rule of law, where people feel that everyone is behaving responsibly, where there is genuine provision for people who are poor and where everyone has dignity and thirdly, recognise a power greater than yourself.

Always remember that it is God who led you to where you are, and it is God that you have to serve because in the long run, the only alternative to serving God is serving yourself. And when a society is full of people serving themselves, it ceases to be a society.

So we see that Moshe Rabbeinu is putting forward a thesis which is as new as this year and Neil Ferguson's new book, Civilisation.

Let me just quote to you one little wonderful example from towards the end of Neil Ferguson's book, he says, and this is a most unlikely source, cos don't forget.

China was a radically secular communist regime, and Chairman Mao said years ago we have made China religion free.

Towards the end of his book Civilisation, Niall Ferguson talks about a member of the Chinese Academy of Social Science who said that we were set the problem by the government to find out what made the West beat us in everything (because China was ahead of the West until the 17th century, they invented all sorts of things before the West did.) But somehow, from the 17th century onwards, the West started gaining on China and overtook it.

And the scholars said, "At first we thought the West was one because it had better guns than we did. It had better military, it could shoot better. Then we studied a bit deeper and we said no. The reason the West won is it has a better political system that we have. It has democracy."

And then he said "No. We studied further and we realised that the reason the West was successful is because it had a better economic system than we had. It was the free market that led to democracy that led to better guns," he said. "But for the last years we've realised the real answer. It's your religion." And this in China, the most secular of all states, which is now rapidly becoming religious incidentally, so here it is.

It is actually religion.

Faith in God, belief in a power greater than yourselves. That is the only thing that actually allows nations to defeat the decline and fall that happens to every great society. Or, in simple words, a society is as strong as its faith. That was what Moshe Rabbeinu was telling the Israelites before they entered the land. It still remains true today.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

The biblical source for thanking the Almighty for the our worldly gifts is to be found in this week's portion, Ekev. And if preparation of our meals takes a great deal of time and effort, if our tradition mandates so many laws about permitted and prohibited foods, and if the Talmud devotes a complete chapter to the Grace after Meals, we should study this blessing in depth.

Let us begin with the Talmudic rule that we only recite the full Grace after Meals—three biblical and one rabbinic blessing—after eating a meal with bread (other foods mandate an abridged blessing of thanksgiving after their consumption).

What is special about bread? In many societies, bread is the major component of every meal, the basic mainstay and "filler" of diet, the very "staff of life." Nevertheless, the sacred Zohar provides a deeper reason: Bread symbolizes the partnership between human being and God. There are eleven difficult physical processes in the production of bread, an important advance in civilization developed in ancient Egypt. Despite this human input, be mindful, exhort our Sages, to be grateful to the Source of Nature who is the ultimate provider of bread—and then share your bounty with others less fortunate, using the energy you derive from the food to act altruistically and not only egoistically. Moreover, on Shabbat there is a custom that the head of the family place both hands on the challah before making the "motzi" blessing in order to emphasize the God-human partnership in bread manufacture!

When three or more eat together, we begin Grace after Meals with a special invitation blessing, zimun in Hebrew; when ten or more eat together, the name of God is added to this introductory blessing, teaching us that the purpose of a meal ought not only be nutritional or pleasurable—it must also be social, fraternal and even communal. Indeed, the English words "companion" and "company" literally mean "with bread," indicating that a friend is someone with whom you share a meal and, it is likely that the person with whom you share a meal becomes your companion. In effect, therefore, food serves as a means to fellowship and sharing. And why should we share with others? Because God shares with us! The "invitation" leads into the first of the biblical blessings thanking God: "who nourishes the entire world in His goodness, with graciousness, with loving-kindness and with sensitive compassion." God gives whether the recipient deserves it or not, whether he/she has earned it or not—and so must we share with others. And God provides for the world – not just for the Jews!

The second of the biblical blessings thanks God, "for having bequeathed to our ancestors a desirable, good and spacious land, as it is written in Your Bible, 'you shall eat and be satisfied and bless the Lord your God for the good land which He has given you.'" But the food I am eating comes from New York, from Miami, from London, from Cracow… for close to 2,000 years we lived in exile from Israel—and we still recited this blessing: Why? We bless God for our ancestral land because exile expresses a precarious existence endangering Jewish survival. A stranger to the land and the bread on his table are soon parted. The earth upon which we stand can be pulled out from under us if we are living on it only by the largesse of the gentile owner. When your food grows on your own land, by contrast, then the food is truly yours.

The third blessing of our Grace after Meals directs us toward Jerusalem, the earthly meeting point of God's transcendence, the City from which God's message of peace and tranquility will spread to the entire world.

Jerusalem is the home of Divine Presence, the vision of our national mission, the place where, according to our holy Prophets, all of humanity will gather and be redeemed. Moreover, does anyone believe that during our 2000 year exile we would still have longed for Israel and Jerusalem were it not for our realization at every meal that homeland and bread express the normal situation for a nation state, and that our situation in exile was truly precarious!

There is also a fourth blessing established in Yavne at the end of the aborted Bar Kochba rebellion in 135 CE. When the last stronghold of Betar was destroyed, hope for the restoration of a Jewish national home was dashed. In the wake of this defeat came the terrible Hadrianic persecutions during which the greatest of our pious sages were tortured to death. At this time, the Romans forbade us from burying Jewish corpses; but miraculously, the bodies did not putrefy. Thus the fourth blessing praises God "who is good, and who does good." "Good because the bodies didn't rot, and who does good because they could eventually bury their dead" (BT Brachot 48b).

Why does this historical miracle about burial and decomposition find its way into the Grace after Meals? In tying the tragedy of Betar to the Grace after Meals, the rabbis are teaching a critical lesson. It's proper to thank God for great miracles, but it's important not to forget to thank Him for simple necessities. We must,

even in the face of political and national defeat, appreciate whatever we have, and give thanks even if only to be able to give our dead a proper burial.

The necessity of sharing God's bounty, the yearning for Israel, the spiritual goal of Jerusalem and the need to appreciate whatever we have are all expressed in our majestic Grace after Meals. Fortunate is our generation which can add to the last blessing: "May the All-Merciful-One bless our reborn State of Israel, the beginning of the sprouting of our Redemption."

Dvar Torah: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

What's the best advice you can give to a good person? I'll tell you the answer that the prophet Isaiah gives.

In the Haftarah for Parshat Eikev, he declares 'Shim'u elai rodefei tzedek mevakshei Hashem' – listen to me, all those of you who pursue justice, who love Hashem, all good people, I want to tell you something really important.

What is it? 'Habbitu el-tzur chutzavtem' – look to the rock from which you were hewn.

'Ve'el-makkevet bor nukkartem' – and to the hollow in the pit from which you were dug out.

In a nutshell the prophet is telling us, look to your past, look to your ancestors, look to the people as a result of whose actions you are in this world, derive inspiration from them for the sake of your productive and successful future.

But isn't there some unnecessary repetition here? The rock from which you were hewn, the pit from which you were dug out. Is that not the same thing?

I'd like to suggest as follows: you see with regard to the rock, you chisel from the top downwards.

But when you are digging out of a pit, you're digging upwards – and that's the message of the Prophet.

When we look to our Jewish ancestors, those who guaranteed Jewish survival in the past, there was a combination of looking to Hashem to influence, inspire and save us from above, coupled with our actions from below.

It's that fusion of 'bitachon' and 'hishtadlut', our trust in the Almighty together with our own efforts.

That's the combination that has guaranteed our Jewish survival.

That is exactly what is unfolding within Jewish circles today, in a time of great danger for our people. We're constantly praying to Hashem for his help and salvation and that is coupled with our own proactive efforts to guarantee our survival.

So let's never forget this most outstanding piece of advice, to combine our praying to Hashem with our own great efforts, for the sake of our collective future.

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

Chet Ha-Egel Revisited
Rabbanit Dena Rock

In Parshat Eikev, Moshe reviews what was arguably the most egregious sin in all of Jewish history, Chet HaEgel. The baffling mystery surrounding the Sin of the Golden Calf is: How could the people possibly worship a Golden Calf a mere forty days after seeing God Himself on Mount Sinai and hearing Him explicitly declare, "I am the Lord your God who took you out of Egypt"?

I would suggest that the essence of Chet HaEgel is that Bnei Yisrael are not ready for a covenantal relationship with God that entails rules and self control. Matan Torah is not merely an inspirational sound and light show; it contains binding laws and obligations.[1] At this point in their development, the people are simply not ready for such a monumental commitment. All of Parshat BeShalach, the parsha that serves as the bridge between the Exodus and Matan Torah, consists of test after test[2] that Bnei Yisrael seem to fail. They complain about the lack of water in Marah (Shemot 15:22-26); they grumble again in Midbar Sin about the lack of food (16:1-4); they leave over mann until the morning against explicit instructions (16:19-20); they go out to collect mann on Shabbat (16:25-29); they complain about the lack of water again in Refidim (17:1-7); and they are accused of testing whether God is in their midst (17:7).

Furthermore, as Rabbi Yonatan Grossman points out,[3] Parshat Beshalach is a chiastic structure:[4]

1a) external enemy (the Egyptians at Kriat Yam Suf)
2a) water complaint (Marah)
3) bread and meat complaint (mann and slav)
2b) water complaint (Refidim)
1b) external enemy (Amalek).

At the end of the parsha, Bnei Yisrael are right back where they started from at its beginning. Though the parsha has brought them to the foot of Mount Sinai, they are spiritually no further along than they were immediately after the Exodus from Egypt.[5] They have not inculcated the lessons that the tests of Parshat BeShalach were supposed to have imbued. Nevertheless, God continues with His plan and bestows upon them the Torah.[6]

Within this context, it is clear that Bnei Yisrael do not possess the spiritual maturity necessary for Matan Torah. They are not ready for the obligations that God demands of them on Mount Sinai. Thus, they are in a high state of panic in the aftermath of Matan Torah, overwhelmed by the magnitude of what they have just committed themselves to.[7] It is not surprising, therefore, that they jump at the slightest opportunity to return to their lives of no rules, no obligations, no laws. Upon Moshe's delay, they immediately construct an idol. At first glance, and as we raised at the outset, this seems incomprehensible – how could the nation that experienced God on Mount Sinai worship an idol that they fashioned themselves. However, with the above background in mind, it begins to make sense: the Egel's attraction lay precisely in its being a man-made god. They control it; it does not have power over them. It cannot make demands of them, nor impose rules or laws upon them. Bnei Yisrael cannot possibly believe that the Golden Calf is the God that took them out of Egypt. But they desperately try to convince themselves that it is[8] because this god will not insist upon anything in return. Thus, the answer to the question of how the people could have committed Chet HaEgel so soon after Matan Torah, is that they committed Chet HaEgel precisely because of Matan Torah and the overwhelming obligations it entailed.[9]

Consequently, the essence of Chet HaEgel lies in the people's attempt to return to a rule-free life. This underlying motivation is clearly evidenced in the pesukim that describe the people's worship of the Egel. Over and over again, the Torah emphasizes the spirit of revelry and the lack of self-restraint that characterized the worship.[10] This wanton spirit is captured in the phrase "ויקמו לצחק" – they arose to make merry, to party, to let loose.[11] In fact, when Moshe is first approaching the camp, he declares to Yehoshua that the tumult they hear coming from the camp is "kol anot," which Rashi translates as the noise of defamations and blasphemies. The sounds that assault Moshe's and Yehoshua's ears are those of utter chaos.

Furthermore, immediately before Moshe shatters the luchot, it says in 32:19, "וירא את העגל ומחולות" – it is the dancing that pushes him over the edge. Some commentators[12] explain that what upsets Moshe is the pleasure Bnei Yisrael are taking in worshipping the Egel. But I would argue that the significance of this phrase is that Moshe totally understands what is going on – that the people want to dance wantonly; they crave no rules.

I would even suggest that subconsciously, Bnei Yisrael are trying to sabotage their relationship with God. They are terrified of what they have committed themselves to, but even more terrified of backing out of it themselves. Deep down, they actually want God to get angry with them so that He will be the one to renege on their covenant.

Ultimately, Moshe gives the people exactly what they want. He smashes the luchot, thereby nullifying their covenant with God and the obligations it entailed. The people are now free from the mitzvot and responsibilities that a committed relationship with God demands. But instead of feeling relieved, Bnei Yisrael are shocked into realizing that it isn't what they really want at all. They are filled with remorse and desperately beg God to forgive them. They remove their ornaments from Har Chorev (Shemot 33:4,6) and enter into a mourning period (33:4) during which God dwells outside their camp rather than in it (33:7). They look longingly after Moshe every time he goes out to communicate with God (33:8), something to which they are no longer privy. After much pleading and negotiation on Moshe's part, HaShem agrees to completely forgive Bnei Yisrael and forge yet another covenantal relationship with them. The shock and pain of their first failed relationship has matured them, and when God calls Moshe up to receive the second luchot, the people are finally ready to enter a committed relationship with God – laws, luchot, and all.

In the aftermath of Chet HaEgel, HaShem declares to Moshe, "וביום פקדי ופקדתי עליהם חטאתם" – Nevertheless (though I am ostensibly forgiving the Jewish people), on the day when I take account of them, I shall revisit their sin upon them (Shemot 32:34). Rashi (based on Sanhedrin 102a) explains this as follows:

Now I shall listen to you [and refrain] from destroying them all at once, but always whenever I will punish them for their sins, I will also punish them a little for this sin along with their other sins; no suffering comes upon Israel that does not have along with it a little of the punishment for the sin of the Calf.

I had always assumed that the reason God visits punishment upon us for Chet HaEgel over and over, within every other punishment, is that it was a sin of such staggering magnitude it can never be fully atoned for. However, perhaps the reason we are continuously punished for Chet HaEgel is that there is an element of that sin in every other sin we commit. If the root of Chet HaEgel was Bnei Yisrael's fear of committing themselves fully to God, then perhaps it is that same apprehension, that same holding back of complete faith and commitment that lies at the heart of every other sin as well. As we review this tragic chapter of our nation's history this week, perhaps we should also look within ourselves and examine whether we may be guilty of our own Chet HaEgel. Perhaps when we can overcome this and commit ourselves fully and confidently to God, God will in turn commit Himself fully to us and usher in the final redemption.

[1] This is especially true according to the Ramban's understanding that the detailed laws of Parshat Mishpatim constitute the sefer habrit over which Bnei Yisrael bind themselves to the covenant (see Shemot 24:3-7). Matan Torah consists of them agreeing to abide by many detailed, practical laws that will govern every aspect of their lives.

[2] Note that words containing the root נ.ס.ה., test, appear a surprising number of times throughout the parsha:

15:25 "שם שם לו חק ומשפט ושם נסהו" – There (in Marah) He placed for him a statute and a law and there He tested him.

16:4 "למען אנסנו הילך בתורתי אם לא" – so as to test him, will he follow My laws or not (regarding the mann).

17:2 "מה תריבון עמדי מה תנסון את ה'" – Why are you fighting with Me (Moshe)? Why are you testing God?

17:7 "ויקרא שם המקום מסה ומריבה על ריב בני ישראל ועל נסותם את ה' לאמר היש ה' בקרבנו אם אין" – He called the name of the place Masah U'Merivah because of the fight of Bnei Yisrael and because of their testing of God saying, 'Is HaShem in our midst or not?'

17:15 "ויבן משה מזבח ויקרא שמו ה' נסי" – Moshe constructed an alter and called his name 'HaShem nisi – 'God is my banner, my miracle, my tester.

[3] "The Manna and the Paschal Sacrifice" found at http://www.vbm-torah.org/parsha.59/16besha.htm

[4] In a chiastic structure, the topics in the text appear in the order ABCBA, so that the first topic also appears last, the second appears again second to last, etc. This structure can be used to emphasize the topic in the middle which serves as the focal point. It also creates the impression that there is progression at first but then regression back to the beginning.

[5] Rashi famously comments on the use of the singular, "ויחן שם ישראל נגד ההר" (19:2), that at Mount Sinai, Bnei Yisrael were unified כאיש אחד בלב אחד. This might have seemed to indicate that Rashi thinks the people have made tremendous progress. However, that very Rashi continues by pointing out that all the other encampments were filled with resentment and dissention.

[6] Why God continues with His plan despite all of Bnei Yisrael's shortcomings and failed tests is an interesting question. Perhaps because He had promised Moshe at the Burning Bush (Shemot 3:12)?

[7] This approach fits nicely with the "כפה עליהם הר כגיגית" midrashim (Rashi to Shemot 19:17; Shabbat 88a). God had to coerce them to accept the Torah because they were not ready to do so themselves.

[8] "אלה אלהיך ישראל אשר העלוך מארץ מצרים" (Shemot 32:4)

[9] See Rabbi Chanoch Waxman's article, "The Jewelry and the Tent" (http://www.vbm-torah.org/parsha.59/21kitis.htm), in which he suggests that Chet HaEgel is the "anti-covenant." In worshipping it, Bnei Yisrael do everything from Shemot Perek 24 (the perek in which they forge their covenant with God as part of Matan Torah), but instead of performing these actions as part of a brit with HaShem, they are doing them to celebrate around the Egel.

[10] For example, the atmosphere of anarchy is highlighted by 32:25, which states," וירא משה את העם כי פרע הוא כי פרעה אהרון לשמצה בקמיהם" – Moshe saw the nation, that it was in disorder, for Aharon had made them disorderly to be a disgrace among their enemies. This pasuk focuses on the wild unruliness of the people. In addition, it is significant that the word chosen to describe their lack of control is "פרע." This is an obvious allusion to Pharaoh, who represents the life they claim to still want, in which there are no Divine demands made upon them.

[11] Shemot 32:6

[12] See the Alshich, Seforno, and Rav Hirsch (all are cited in Nehama Leibowitz, p.603-4)

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Daniel Stein

Living Beyond the Letter of the Law

The Gemara (Berachos 35b) raises an apparent contradiction between two pesukim. On the one hand, the pasuk states "And you shall gather your grain" (Devarim 11:14), which ostensibly commands personal engagement with the natural order and the expending of effort to procure a livelihood. While at the same time we are instructed, "This Torah shall not depart from your mouths and you shall contemplate in it day and night" (Yehoshua 1:8). Rabbi Yishmael resolves to blend the two pesukim and endorses a balanced and integrated approach, "in the way of the world." Each person should set aside some time for working and other times for Torah study. Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai passionately disagrees and argues, "is it possible that a person plows in the plowing season and sows in the sowing season and harvests in the harvest season and threshes in the threshing season and winnows in the windy season." If he is constantly busy and preoccupied with his job "what will become of the Torah?" Rather, in his view, Torah learning demands total dedication and a singular focus, to the exclusion of all other endeavors.

According to Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai, the pasuk "And you shall gather your grain" is referring specifically to a time when the Jewish people are "ain osin ratzono shel makom - not doing the will of Hashem." Only then, will they be required to support themselves manually. But if they act appropriately and meet Hashem's expectations, their physical work will be delegated to others, as it states, "And strangers will stand and feed your flocks and foreigners will be your plowmen and your vinedressers" (Yeshayahu 61:5), providing them the freedom to study Torah continuously "and contemplate in it day and night."

However, the Maharsha (Berachos ad loc) and Nefesh Hachaim (1:8) note that Rabbi Shimon's reading of the pasuk, "And you shall gather your grain", does not seem to jibe with its broader context. This clause is found immediately following the words, "And it will be, if you obey the commandments that I

enjoin upon you this day, loving Hashem your God and serving Him with all your heart and soul, I will grant the rain for your land in its season" (Devarim 11:13-14). If the Torah is discussing the consequences and blessings that will follow if the Jewish people adhere properly to the mitzvos, how can Rabbi Shimon claim that the conclusion of the pasuk addresses the scenario of "ain osin ratzono shel makom - not doing the will of Hashem." Rav Eliyahu Baruch Finkel deduces that it is possible to be in technical compliance with all the mitzvos but still be "ain osin ratzono shel makom - not doing the will of Hashem." If the Jewish people are fastidiously obsessed with the letter of the law but ignore the larger question of, "what ultimately is the will of Hashem," they are still in a perilous and inadequate space.

Not every behavior or attitude that a Jew must embrace is articulated explicitly. Some are intuited or inferred meta-halachic principles. Rav Elchanan Wasserman (Kuntrus Divrei Sofrim 1:22-23) classifies this set of mitzvos as "ratzon haTorah - the will of the Torah", a designation which is explored and expanded upon further by Rav Asher Weiss (Minchas Asher, Devarim 75).[1] For example, while the specific fulfillment of mitzvos by children is only mandated rabbinically, it is untenable to suggest that the general notion of educating and training children to live a life of Torah and mitzvos once they reach maturity is not of Biblical origin, despite the absence of any definitive directive. After all, Avraham Avinu was only chosen as the progenitor of the Jewish people because he was trusted to "instruct his children and his posterity to keep the way of Hashem by doing what is just and right" (Breishis 18:19). Ironically, it is quite possible that the relative paucity of overt source material regarding certain foundational issues only highlights their overarching nature further. Some things are so fundamental they simply cannot be contained or limited to one verse, jot, or tittle.

In the section of the Gemara (Gittin 58a) that deals with the precursors to the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash, the concluding item mentioned is a tragic incident involving a certain carpenter's apprentice who set his eyes upon his master's wife. Once it happened that the master needed to borrow some money, and his apprentice generously suggested, "Send your wife to me and I will lend her the money." He dispatched his wife to him, but the apprentice delayed her for three extra days before granting her leave. The apprentice then hurried back to his master, ahead of his returning wife, whereupon the master questioned him, "Where is my wife whom I sent to you?" The apprentice said to him, "I sent her back immediately, but I heard that she became romantically involved with the youth along the way." The master turned to his trusted apprentice and asked, "What shall I do?" The apprentice responded, "If you listen to my advice, divorce her." The master objected, "But her kesubah is large and I do not have the money to pay it." The apprentice assured him, "I will lend you the money, and you will give her payment of her kesubah." The master accepted his terms and divorced her at once. Not long after, the apprentice went and married her himself. When the due date for the debt arrived, the master did not have the means with which to repay the apprentice. The apprentice offered him, "Come and work off your debt with me." And so it was, the apprentice and his new wife would eat and drink, while he, the woman's first husband, would stand over them and serve them. As the master's tears of humiliation and betrayal dropped from his eyes and fell into their cups, the Jewish people's sentence was sealed for the crime of remaining silent in the face of such an injustice.

What is the parting message of this stirring story? Rav Yaakov Emden claims that perhaps the apprentice did not violate any official prohibition or precept. He graciously lent money twice to his former master and was careful to only marry his wife after she was already divorced. At the same time Hashem is disgusted by his duplicity and hypocrisy in plotting to achieve his desired outcome. His treachery constituted a particularly despised sin precisely because of his perverted halachic machinations. Sometimes because of our intimate knowledge of halacha and advanced learning, we too, paradoxically, fall into a similar trap. Before following rabbinic guidance, many erstwhile yeshiva students will insist upon a written source, whilst forgetting that just because a certain practice is not expressly proscribed by a particular siman or seif in Shulchan Aruch, does not mean it is automatically sanctioned or advised. Indeed, the Netziv (Haamek Davar, Introduction to Breishis) writes that at the time of Second Beis Hamikdash, though they were pious and toiled in Torah study, they were still not upright - yashar - in their societal dealings, and that alone was sufficient grounds for the churban.

In concert with investigating and investing in the legalities of the mitzvos, which is wonderful and admirable, we must also always remember to ask ourselves, "what does Hashem truly want?" Moshe encourages the Jewish people, "And now, Yisrael, what is Hashem, your God, asking of you, other than to fear Hashem, your God, to go in all His ways and to love Him, to serve Hashem your God wholeheartedly and with your whole being" (Devarim 10:12). The Chafetz Chaim (Ahavas Chesed 2:11) interprets the word "now" to mean the universal "now," namely, that one should always stop to consider, "What is Hashem asking of me?" This should be our religious compass and objective throughout life in all that we do. We must be able to transcend the letter of the law and the details of Jewish life to create a unified spiritual existence that is "upright and good in the eyes of Hashem" (Devarim 6:18).

[1] See also Rabbi Yonasan Sacks, Ratzon HaTorah.

Torah.Org Dvar Torah
by Rabbi Label Lam

Important Life Decisions

(V'Haya) And it will be, if you hearken to My commandments that I command you this day to love HASHEM, your G-d, and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul… (Devarim 11:13)

The Talmud tells us that the expression "V'Haya" introduces a matter of SIMCHA, something to rejoice about, anticipation of good news. On the reverse side the Talmud posits the notion that, "VaYehi" is a foreboding, a warning that storm clouds are on the horizon, trouble is coming.

The Vilna Gaon explains why grammatically this makes sense. "Yehi" – "will be" is future tense. The letter VUV at the beginning reverses the tense from future to past, "and it was". The explanation is that there are some matters in life that are on the calendar, sitting there in the future like a dentist appointment, a court date, any invasive medical procedure and we wish it was over. The anticipation of it and the experience itself is so distressing that we would like it to be history. So, there it is, in the future tense, hauntingly present and we are looking forward to the time when it will have passed already.

"Haya" – "it was" is past tense and with a VUV in the beginning it is converted to the future, "and it will be". There are other types of experiences in life that are so pleasant and dear to us that long after they are over, we wish we could carry them forever into the future. That is why people hire photographers and videographers to a wedding or a Bar Mitzvah or any other happy occasion, so that we can bottle and hold on to some part of that delightful experience. That is why we don't hire a photographer to memorialize a root canal. We wish we could forget the extreme discomfort of one while the other we desire to cherish in perpetuity.

Now, these are not just two ways of describing the situations and circumstances of our lives. They are really two choices and two distinct ways of living our lives. Stephen Covey explains something in his classic time management model that I have found this to be helpful and wonderfully true. It is possible to put everything we do into one of four categories.

1) Matters that are Important and Urgent: This can include all predicaments that suddenly rush to the head of the priority line, like medical emergencies, crises in personal relationships, notification of utilities being shut off, and anything else that must be taken care of immediately.

2) Matters that are Important but not Urgent: This involves studying Torah, exercising, paying bills, spending quality time with those near and dear and anything that, even though it is not pressing and necessary to be done right now, remains a positive and productive habit of doing, and builds and creates a life of accomplishment.

3) Matters Not important but Urgent: This is perhaps more common than we think. It may be prompted by getting a phone call in the middle of dinner, only to find out it's a telemarketer. Life is filled with and a day is often punctuated by untimely interruptions from people and things that add little import or value to our lives.

4) Matters not Important and not Urgent: How much time is spent or lost on silly games and mindless videos and in incessant prattle that only leave us feeling empty in the end, like eating a giant glob of cotton candy or drinking zero soda.

In which of these four is it most worthwhile to invest the time of our lives? I think every healthy minded individual can agree that number two is the place to be. The more time that is spent in three and four on matters not important, the more one is inviting the experience of number one where suddenly the important things become emergencies – "Vayehi".

How does one decide what is important? Begin with the end in mind, The last act is the first thought! That is how HASHEM made the world and that is how we shape our priorities. We imagine how we would like to be ultimately thought of and then that informs the values and actions we engage in when living our life.

It's been said, "Some people make things happen, some watch things happen, and some ask "What happened?"" "V'Haya" is the happier way of making important life decisions.

Rabbi Dr. Norman J. Lamm's Derashot Ledorot

How a Spark Becomes a Flame

1. The entire book of Devarim, when compared with the first four books of the Torah, is found to have a unique character, a personality all its own. Whereas in the other books the laws of Judaism are expressed in more or less legal form, and where the accompanying narrative is factual in nature, this fifth book of Moses is noted for its sweeping sentimentality, for its appeal to the heart and to the soul. The words lev and nefesh appear more often here than in all the other books combined. We are charged to uplift our hearts and souls, to give of ourselves emotionally, to experience Torah ecstatically, to feel it personally and intimately.

2. In fact, the one word most characteristic of the book of Devarim is ahava– love. We are to do more than obey G-d and follow Him. We must also love Him; we must experience His presence with our deepest emotions. We read this morning, V e'ahavta es Hashem Elokecha, thou shalt love the Lord thy G-d. Further, ve'ata Yisrael mah Hashem Elokecha doresh me'imach ki im… l'ahavah oso, G-d asks of us to love Him. And again in the book of Devarim, though not in this morning's Sidra, the clarion calls of the Shema: v'ahavta… b'chol lvavcha…

3. But lest anyone here this morning believe that this is merely gaudy sentimentalism, a sort of fatherly advice, let him be corrected quickly. The Halachah insists that ahavas Hashem is a mitzvah, a commandment. And as such it is a guiding principle of Jewish life. We are commanded to love G-d.

4. And yet, this very idea, the idea that we are commanded to love, is a most perplexing notion. Maimonides and other Jewish philosophers were puzzled by it. They ask a simple, but a pointed question: how can you possibly "command" someone to love? Love is an emotion, a deep emotion, and as such is above, independent of and detached from volition or will. Y ou can command me to do or give or act or walk, and I can obey; but you cannot possibly command me to love or hate and expect me to obey, no matter how much I want to. I either love or I do not love. Many a parent has learnt that lesson the hard way! How, therefore, do you account for terming the love of G-d a mitzvah, a commandment?

5. Perhaps one of the most beautiful answers given to this question is the one offered by the author of the Sfas Emmes, the renowned Gerer Rebbe. It is an answer which bespeaks ahavas Yisrael, and which gives us a key to understanding the entire Sefer Devarim. The Gerer maintains that the question itself offers a clue to the answer. Since you cannot command love where it does not already exist, he says, and since the Torah does command such love, then the only logical conclusion is that there is ingrained in every Jewish heart a deep and abiding love for G-d and for Torah. There exists in every Jewish heart, as he calls it, a nekudah, a "dot" or spark of love for things Jewish. But sometimes that nekudah is too small to be of value, it is covered up with superficial rust, it is hidden by material desires and pursuits – but it's there. And the V e'ahavta is the command to each and every one of us to be conscious of it, to develop that nekudah, to nurture it, to fan the spark until it becomes a flame, to magnify it to bring it out and express it. But the initial spark, the nekudah, is already there. Every Jew has it, whether he knows it or not. It is just that sometimes we must get rid of the dross and the drapes to be able to see it and appreciate it.

6. The story is told of the famous sculptor, Michelangelo, who was at work on his great statue of Moses. As he was working, someone who was observing him was moved to remark, "How wonderful to watch a master at work. Here you take a mere slab of stone and make a Moses of it." But the artist turned to him and said: "Y ou're mistaken. What happens is that I see Moses inside that stone and I merely chip away the unnecessary parts of the stone so that you can see clearly what I saw in there before." So it is with the nekudah of Love for Torah – it already exists in every Jewish heart. But we must strive to chip the hard rock that so frequently encases it. For the love of G-d we must do it.

7. Our modern thinkers have come to adopt the same technique. Educators no longer browbeat a child into learning something for which he has almost no natural aptitude. Instead they look for his possibilities, for his capacities, for his nekudah, and work on that, try to develop it and give it direction and expression. They don't beat it into him; they pull it out of him. Psychology, too, under the influence of Freud and psychoanalysis, speaks of a nekudah, of basic desire in every human being which reaches out in love. They call it the libido. That is the desire for love and affection which exists in every human being. In a child it is expressed as love for parents, then as love for playmates, and finally as love for a life-long mate. Judaism merely goes one step further and maintains that in addition to this libido, with its physical and sexual ramifications, there is also a Spiritual Libido - the nekudah of ahavas Hashem and ahavas haTorah.

8. With this in mind we need never despair of the future of Torah Judaism either here or in Israel. Prophets of gloom have forecast the demise of Torah Judaism as much as two thousand years ago when the Pharisees were regarded as "done for." Assimilation was then supposed to win the field. Then Reform and other deviationist sects. Now we are told that we are all done for, and that "Canaanism," a primitive form of Near East jingoism, which has caught the fancy of some unhappy young sabras, will replace Judaism and Torah altogether. *

Perhaps from a superficial analysis they are right. But so were the Sadducees right two thousand years ago, from a superficial analysis. The trouble is that they fail to reckon with the nekudah. It's only a dot, that bit of love for Torah – but can it grow! How often have we seen people seemingly infinitely far from Torah, return with a love and devotion that are amazing. Who knows when the nekudah will break out, when the spark will be fanned into great flames of ahavas Hashem and ahavas haTorah. The Nekudah is unpredictable – but it's always there. No wonder we so often resort to the Yiddish expression: men ken nisht up 'shatzen die yiddishe neshama ["one cannot underestimate the Jewish soul"].

9. But having gone this far and ascertained that in every Jewish heart there exists this nekudah of ahavas Hashem, let us proceed joyfully to the next happy thought. And that is, that no matter how stern G-d is with us, no matter how strict and

demanding He may seem at different times in history, He – so to speak – always has His nekudah– and that nekudah is: ahavas Yisrael. G-d loves Israel, and shall someday prove it even more obviously, even as Israel loves G-d. For does not legend relate that just as Jews put on the tefillin, in which it is written shma yisrael ...echad, so does G-d, figuratively speaking, put on Divine tefillin, in which is written, shma Hashem, Yisrael amcha Yisrael echad.

10. Y es, there is a nekudah in G-d too. And insofar as we develop the nekudah of love for Torah within us, does G-d develop the nekudah of love for Israel within Him. But whatever may be – the spark is there. And it is that which ensures our survival.

11. Nowhere can we find this lofty idea more beautifully expressed than in the inspiring words of Isaiah, with which we began today's Haftorah: vatomer tzion azavani Hashem va'Hashem she'che'chani. Israel despairs of ever gaining G-d's love and says, "the Lord has forsaken me, G-d has forgotten me." But Zion has forgotten the nekudah. For it is an eternal "dot," and it is the nekudah of G-d's guardianship over and love for Israel. ha 'sishkach isha ulah mei'racheim ben bitnah, gam eilla sishkachna ve'anochi lo eshkacheich. "No more than a mother can forget her child, the fruit of her womb, can G-d forget Israel; for even if these be forgotten, I will remember you."

12. For as long as Israel lives there will burn in every Jewish heart and soul the Nekudah of love for G-d. And for as long as there exists for G-d the nekudah of love for Israel will Israel live. And may that be forever.

* Canaanism was a cultural and ideological movement founded in 1939, reaching its peak among the Jews of Mandatory Palestine during the 1940s. It has had a significant effect on the course of Israeli art, literature, and spiritual and political thought. Its adherents were called Canaanites (Hebrew: כנענים). Its members believed that much of the Middle East had been a Hebrew-speaking civilization in antiquity. They hoped to revive this civilization, creating a "Hebrew" nation disconnected from the Jewish past. The political influence of the Canaanites was limited, but their influence on literary and intellectual life in Israel was great. https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canaanism

[CS Late-breaking dvar torah
Parashah Rabbi Yissocher Frand
THE CHALLENGE OF HAVING IT ALL
Rabbi Frand on the Parashah
המאכלך מן במדבר אשר לא ידעון אבתיך למען ענתך ולמען נסתך להיטבך באחריתך
The One Who feeds you manna in the desert... in order to test you (Devarim 8:16)
Everyone knows that life is a test. We struggle to make a living, to raise our children, to build up our communities. Nothing comes easy, and our test is to deal with the hardships and frustrations in the best way possible.
But what if our livelihood were served up to us on a silver platter? How wonderful that would be! No more worries about how to pay for the children's tuition or the new roof. What if everything we needed came to us like manna from heaven? Would we consider this a test? Hardly. We would consider it a blessing. The To- rah, however, seems to say otherwise.
No sooner had the Jewish people come forth from Egypt that they complained (Shemos 16:3), "If only we had died by the hand of God in the land of Egypt when we were sitting beside the fleshpots, when we ate our fill of bread; now you have brought us out into the desert to let the entire congre-gation starve to death."
"Behold, I will rain down bread from the heav ens on you," Hashem replied (ibid. 16:4). "The peo- ple shall go out to collect their daily portion every day, in order to test whether or not they will follow My Torah."
The commentators wonder what kind of test this is. What could be better than having everything you need delivered to your doorstep every day? This is a test? This is a blessing! Rashi explains that Hash-
em was referring to the lawsthat govern the manna. One could not store away any manna for the next day. One had to collect a double portion on Friday. And so forth. This was the test Would the Jewish people observe the laws of the manna scru- pulously?
This test is also mentioned in Parashas Eikev, "The One Who feeds you manna in the desert... in order to test you." Sforno explains that the test is to see if the Jews would still follow the Torah when they do not have to worry about their livelihood.
Yes, there is a great test in "bread rain- ing down from heaven." Affluence with- out effort is a dangerous thing. It comes with a great amount of leisure time and freedom of action. What do we do with that leisure time and that freedom of action? Do we use our leisure time and free- dom of action to taste the forbidden? This is the great test of the manna.
We are all aware of the test of poverty. We are all aware of the trials and tribulations of being poor. However, says Sforno, affluence also comes with great temptations. It puts a tremendous responsibility on a person. This is the test of the manna, and it is the test for many Jews in these affluent times.

[CS Late breaking addition:
from: RIETS Kollel Elyon from RIETS Bella and Harry Wexner Kollel Elyon Substack <riets@substack.com>
date: Aug 14, 2025, 8:10 AM
subject: **Ekev: The Beginning of Blessing**
Rabbi Daniel Z. Feldman
The first blessing of the Birkat HaMazon is known as Birkat HaZan. As the Arukh HaShulchan (Orach Chaim 187:2) points out, it is a multi-faceted prayer, praising the Source of both life-sustaining necessities and life-enhancing luxuries, and praying as well that His kindness will continue. The Talmud (Berakhot 48b)attributes its authorship to Moses himself, who instituted the prayer upon witnessing the gift of the manna. Rishonim (see Chiddushei HaRashba and Shittah Mekubetzet to Berakhot; see also Hasagot HaRamban L'Sefer HaMitzvot, shoresh 1) note that this poses no contradiction to the biblical origin of Birkat HaMazon; while the obligation is indeed d'orayta, the actual format of the berakhot was developed later, beginning with Moses' formulation of Birkat HaZan (See Beit Yosef, Orach Chaim 187; note also R. Baruch Hass, Mishnat Baruch, Berakhot 16a). The Mabit (Beit Elokim, sha'ar ha-yesodot ch. 61) contends that there is every reason to assume that Moses' berakhah was identical to that recited today; even verses that appear in Psalms could just as easily have been revealed to Moses before they were to King David. (See Prishah, 187:2, Rosh, Ber. 7:22 and Ma'adanei Yom Yov #70, and Chazon Ish, Orach Chaim 28:8.)
It is readily understood that Moses wished to lend specific form to the biblical imperative of reciting a berakhah upon completing a meal; the particular timing, however, has invited some commentary. Certainly the Jewish people had eaten many times before, and the Divine source of that sustenance could not have escaped Moses' notice. In fact, the manna seems an inappropriate choice to motivate this berakhah, in that it itself apparently fell short of the standards required for Birkat HaMazon, not being one of the five types of grain (although the Torah does use the word lechem; see Chiddushei HaRitva, Kiddushin 37b. See, however, R. Yosef Engel, Gilyonei HaShas to Berakhot, based on R. Chaim Yosef David Azulai, Nachal Kedumim, Ex. 40:23. See also R. Yochanan Shteif, Chadashim Gam Yeshanim to Berakhot, citing Nachmanides).
As such, a debate exists as to the proper preceding berakhah for the manna. R. Chaim Chizkiyahu Medini (S'dei Chemed, ma'arekhet ha-khaf, klal 100; see also B'nei Yisaschar, ma'amarei shabbat ma'amar 3) felt that no berakhah was made on manna. R. Avraham Danzig (Chayyei Adam) was convinced that if any berakhah at all was made, it was certainly not the standard "ha-motzi". The Rama of Panu (ma'amar shabatot #5) writes that the proper berakhah was "ha-motzi lechem min ha-shamayyim". R. Yehudah HaChasid (Sefer Chasidim #1640) suggests"ha-notein lechem min ha-shamayyim", while the Resp. Torah L'Shmah (#63) has "ha-mamtir lechem min ha-shamayyim". (See also R. Meir Blumenfeld, Resp. Perach Shoshanah #35;. R. Shimon Pollack, Resp. Shem MiShimon II, 202; Piskei Teshuvah #280, quoting Siftei Tzadik, Parshat Beshalach; R. Shalom Krausz, Shut Divrei Shalom V, 9; R. Shlomo Zalman Braun, She'arim Metzuyyanim B'Halakhah to Berakhot; R. David Yoel Weiss, Megadim Chadashim to Berakhot at length; Gilyonei HaShas, Berakhot; R. Eliezer Yehudah Waldenberg, Resp. Tzitz Eliezer XII, 1; Tzintzenet HaMan (in R. Aryeh Mordechai Rabinowitz's Sha'arei Aryeh) #45; Ta'amei Minhagim, inyanei Shabbat p. 144, citing Mirkevet HaMishnah to Mekhilta, Beshalach p. 66a; R. Menashe Zilber, Marpei L'Nefesh, Berakhot 48b; and R. Aharon David Gross, V'Darashta V'Chakarta to Beshalach, p. 143.)
What, then, distinguished the falling of the manna in such a manner as to prompt Moses to compose this text? The Mabit suggests that the overtly miraculous nature of this event gave rise to a fear in Moses' heart that the Jewish people were to be sustained only through Moses' personal merit; and upon his passing, such miracles would cease, leaving the nation of Israel to go hungry. He thus responded to this concern by instituting a prayer that beseeches God to continually provide for His creations.
R. Nachum Meir Bronznick (Birkat HaMazon V'Nuschah: Iyyunim V'Peirushim, p. 9) suggests another relevance to Moses' timing. The prayer's composition came on the heels of another enactment of Moses. The Talmud (Yoma 75a) states that initially, the behavior of the Jewish people in the desert was like that of a chicken searching around in the garbage; their eating was purely life-sustaining, lacking any sense of order or system (k'viyut). At the time of the manna, Moses instituted that meals should have set times. Part of the defining element of a meal that warrants Birkat HaMazon is that it not be a snack, lacking in importance or dignity, but a set meal, a seudat k'viyut. Prior to the period of the manna, this ingredient was lacking; only when k'viyut was established was Birkat HaZan truly relevant.

Indeed, the connection between k'viyut and Birkat HaZan is more clearly emphasized when it is considered that this berakhah is, more than any of the other berakhot, closely intertwined with the process of zimmun, which itself typifies k'viyut. The Talmud relates a dispute as to the boundaries of zimmun; according to one opinion, the entire Birkat HaZan is included. This concept plays a role practically in a number of ways. When one wishes to participate in a zimmun but to continue eating, he is obligated to pause first and listen to the zimmun. According to the Shulchan Arukh (Orach Chaim 200:2) he need only wait until HaZan begins; the Rama, however requires listening to the entire berakhah before proceding. [This dispute stems from an earlier argument in Berakhot46a; note, though, Bayit Chadash and Beit Yosef, who suggest that the pause is to display involvement in the zimmun and the question is how much is necessary in order to clearly indicate this.] Further, even when all involved are bentching together, Birkat HaZan figures prominently in the zimmun. The Mishneh Berurah (Orach Chaim 183:28) requires that all participants listen to the leader's recitation of the first berakhah, pronouncing the words along with him; the Magen Avraham prefers the position of the Tashbetz, who instructs the participants to be silent for this berakhah and fulfill their obligations by listening to the leader (shomea k'oneh). In either case, both views place Birkat HaZan prominently within the zimmun process, and many authorities take up the question of why more care is not taken that zimmun is always performed in this manner. (See R. Yitzchak Leibes, Resp. Beit Avi II, 6; R. Ya'akov Yechiel Traube, Resp. Avnei Ya'akov 31:1; R. Eliezer Yehudah Waldenberg, Resp. Tzitz Eliezer XVI, 1; R. Yisrael Avraham Alter Landau, Resp. Beit Yisrael #29; and R. Ovadiah Yosef, Resp. Yabbia Omer I, 11:6-10.)

R. Ze'ev Nachum Borenstein (Resp. Agudat Ezov57:2) offers another perspective on the connection between man and this berakhah. Moses felt that the basic sustenance enjoyed by humans until then warranted no special berakhah; the God who would create a world and populate it must keep that population alive for the creation to have any purpose. The manna, however, is representative of a higher level of Divine involvement in the lives of the Jewish people. Indeed, the Talmud states that the manna was given in no more than daily portions so that the relationship with God would be constantly felt and desired, rather than the detachment that would come from a longer-lasting supply. It is this holy relationship, rather than the basic gift of food, that is actually commemorated by this berakhah.

With this approach, R. Borenstein offers an interpretation of a puzzling comment of Rashi. In interpreting a statement in the Talmud, Rashi appears to rule that an individual (without a mezuman) should not recite Birkat HaZan (Berakhot 46a; see Tosafot, s.v. u'l'man.) If indeed this berakhah is focused on the Divine connection, perhaps this comment can be understood. In the Mishnah (Avot 3:4), R. Shimon states that three who eat, and have words of Torah among them, are as if they ate from "the table of God". According to R. Ovadiah of Bartenura, the "words of Torah" are the words of Birkat HaMazon. Thus, the Birkat HaMazon of three takes upon an especially Divine aspect, and it is to that that the Birkat HaZan is particularly attuned.

In explaining the biblical origin of Birkat HaMazon, the Talmud (Berakhot 48b) derives two concepts in dealing with the verse, v'achalta v'savata u'beirakhta et Hashem Elokekha, "and you shall eat, and be satisfied, and bless Hashem your God." The opening phrase, v'achalta v'savata u'beirakhta, is the source for Birkat HaZan, while the closing phrase, et Hashem Elokekha, refers to the concept of zimmun. The authors of the Tosafot (Berakhot 46a, s.v. ad; see also Hagahot HaGra to 48b), however, relate the reverse text, with the first half of the verse mandating zimmun, and the phrase et Hashem Elokekha referring to Birkat Hazan (Note R. Yechezkel Landau, Tzlach to Berakhot, and, at length, R. Ya'akov Grendash, Shoshanat Ya'akov to Berakhot.) R. Chaim Tzvi Brida (Otzar Chaim to Berakhot) comments on the appropriateness of such a derivation. The essence of Birkat HaZan is not merely the appreciation of the food, but a focus upon the Source of that food, and an understanding and valuing of the Divine-human relationship.

The focus upon God directly is evident as well from an alternative text allowed by the Talmud (Berakhot 40b; see Orach Chaim 187:1 and Resp. Rav Poalim III, 7.): "Brikh Rachmana Malka, Mareih d'hai pita - Blessed is God the King, Master of this bread." A dispute exists as to whether or not it is necessary to conclude with the phrase"Brikh Rachmana d'zan kulah - Blessed is God who feeds all." (See Shulchan Arukh ibid, as well as R. Shalom Mordechai Schwadron, Da'at Torah to Orach Chaim, and R. Yitzchak Harari, Resp. Zekhor L'Yitzchak #51.)

Many commentators note that this berakhah refers to God in lashon nistar, in third person, while later berakhot involve a direct second person address (lashon nokhach) such as Nodeh Likha. An explanation commonly offered (see Otzar HaTefillot; Haggadat Beit Ya'akov; and R. Tzadok HaKohen, Tzidkat haTzaddik p. 247) is that the first berakhah, composed before entry to the Land of Israel, was farther removed from the Divine presence and thus not privileged to address God directly; while later berakhot benefit from holiness of the Land of Israel and do have this opportunity. Such a detail would seem to place the first berakhah at a disadvantage when compared with other berakhot. Further, one might assume that the second berakhah, expressing gratitude for the Land, should precede that which mentions the food that comes from the Land. Nonetheless, writes the Bayit Chadash, Birkat HaZan is given precedence in light of its authorship, i.e. Moses as opposed to his student Joshua (who composed the second berakhah, Birkat HaAretz) [As to whether or not one who inverts the order of the berakhot fulfills his obligation, see R. Shmuel Abuhab, Resp. D'var Shmuel #147; R. Shlomo Kluger, Resp. U'Bacharta BaChaim #52; and R. Eliezer Yehudah Waldenberg, Resp. Tzitz Eliezer XIII, 15.] .

However, in light of the above, it is perhaps possible to suggest an additional element. Birkat HaZan, in essence, is not discussing food in itself, but is focusing our attention on the relationship that exists between the Provider of all food and His creations. This berakhah, which we have seen transcends mere sustenance in favor of k'viyut, of an established, ongoing relationship of permanence, of importance and dignity, directs our attention to the reality that all that we benefit from in this world is colored and granted significance by the nature of He who bestows it. Before we mention the Land of Israel, before Brit, Torah, and the Kingdom of David, this primary introduction is indispensable. The eloquent words of Moses masterfully set the stage for the rest of Birkat HaMazon, indeed for all berakhot and their subjects.

[CS Also: YUTorah in Print

The Great Wall of Israel

Rabbi Moshe Taragin

The wall was not built for the builders, but for those who would come after, who might never see it completed. This required faith in a future unknown and patience that stretches beyond a lifetime."—The Great Wall of China, Franz KafkaThe construction of the Great Wall of China stands as one of humanity's most awe-inspiring feats. This project unfolded across centuries, a slow-burning testament to endurance. Launched in the 7th century BCE, it reached completion only in the 17th centuryCE. The heart of this vast endeavor spanned close to three hundred years, from the 14th to the 17th century, weaving together vision and relentless will across generations.

The Wall demanded immense patience and vision. Those who toiled on the Wall spent years separated from their families, laboring on a monument they would never see finished in their lifetimes. As the years stretched on and the Wall remained unfinished, the builders fought against fatigue and the crushing weight of endless labor. As Kafka wrote,"The completion of the wall was less a matter of engineering than of sustaining belief, of preserving a collective will through centuries, against the weariness of time."This was a project not only of stone and mortar, but of human spirit—woven from steadfast hope and the quiet determination to build something beyond their own time. The Great

Wall of China teaches us that grand historical projects demand time, vision, patience, and flexibility. Things built to last are never rushed; they are patiently forged in time.

Carving HistoryOur people now embark on a project greater than the Great Wall of China—not forged from stone and mortar, but carved deep into the fabric of history. We are not masons shaping rock, but craftsmen shaping destiny. This is the greatest enterprise in the story of humankind.

In Parshat Va'etchanan, Moshe highlights one of Hashem's most extraordinary miracles: "Has it ever happened that God took a nation from among another people and transported them en masse to a new land?" The journey of an entire nation from Egypt's depths to a distant land was a living testament to Hashem's steadfast embrace of Jewish destiny.

That relocation from Egypt to Israel unfolded through profound divine intervention—miracles splitting seas and parting heavens. It was meant to transpire in less than a year, yet because of desert rebellions and trials, it stretched over forty years. Still, in the vast sweep of history, forty years is but a brief moment. This relocation was swift and miraculous.Taming the FrontierOnce we arrived at our destination, progress slowed considerably. In Parshat Eikev, Hashemcautions that the land will not be settled all at once, but gradually and deliberately—each small step making way for the next. Had we rushed to settle it quickly, the frontier would have been too dangerous, and we risked being overwhelmed by the wild beasts of the field. By advancing slowly, expanding the frontier bit by bit, we were able to firmly establish our presence.

But it was not only the beasts that threatened us. Building a nation meant confronting tangled rivalries and navigating the unpredictable challenges of settling unfamiliar territory and creating new institutions. Settling the land piece by piece gave the people the time to adapt, unify, and build the essential frameworks—local governance, shared laws, and social cohesion. Had we rushed toclaim the land, these fragile foundations would have collapsed. Settling the land of G-d took time.

The Shadow of the BeastsHistory is repeating itself. Once more, our people are moving from every corner of the globe. Though Hashemhas yet to miraculously gather us all at once, millions have begun the long walk home. Now, as in times past, the process of settling Israel unfolds slowly. We face countless obstacles—challenges that won't be overcome quickly or easily. We are building the great wall of Jewish history and destiny—and it will take time.

As then we face the beasts of the field—hostile enemies who commit grievous and heinous violence in the name of God—they are sworn to our destruction. There will be no immediate decisive victory. It is painfully clear that, short of an act of Hashem, it will take generations to subdue them and quell their hatred of us. In the current political and cultural climate, their hatred shows

no signs of fading. It will require profound cultural change and sustained, robust defense of our nation to stand firm against these beasts of the field.Just the same, many countries that once prowled like wild beasts have now stilled their claws, no longer striking at our borders. We are gradually making headway, convincing our neighbors that we harbor no grand imperialist designs but instead seek their welfare. The frontier is slowly transforming—its wild edges softening into a landscape more tame and inviting. Many of the former beasts no longer snarl at us.

Generations Needed to HealHowever, we aren't just facing external beasts of the field. Inside, stubborn creatures linger—internal challenges that gnaw away at our strength and slow our progress.

Returning after two thousand years—carried across vast stretches of time, continents, climates, and cultures—is no simple feat. We face many internal challenges that demand resolution. Again, unrealistically, we expect it all to unfold overnight, within our own lifetimes. For many of the thorny internal challenges that confront us, clear resolution will likely remain out of reach for generations yet to come.

There are four internal challenges—social, political, and religious—that deeply divide our nation. Firstly, we continue to search for a way to harmonize the religious sector with the non-observant community. This challenge has become easier to manage, as much of the broader Israeli secular population now feels a strong connection to religious and Jewish tradition. Much has changed since the earliest generations of secular Israelis, who were often hostile to religion and aimed to erase any trace of the old galut Jewish identity. While we have made significant progress, many issues remain unresolved.Of course, the most urgent socio-religious challenge today is integrating the Charedi community into the broader fabric of Israel. The deep pain surrounding non-Charedi conscription reflects a broader concern: Will the Charedi see themselves fully as part of the Israeli people, even while preserving firm cultural boundaries? As their population grows, this question takes on existential weight for both Charedi and non-Charedi alike. Resolving it will likely require multiple generations and the influence of social and economic realities larger and stronger than ideology.

The third issue we face is how to balance democracy with a Jewish state. A purely democratic system risks diluting Israel's Jewish character. Preserving Israel as a homeland for the Jewish people is vital to our history and identity. If that means making some compromises to democracy, it is a necessary and worthwhile exchange.Finally, we are striving to establish a fairer and more equitable balance of power, ensuring that no branch of government holds excessive control or leverage. The recent social unrestsurrounding judicial reform revealed just how unbalanced our political system is—and how many deep ethnic tensions simmer beneath the surface of this political debate.There will be no swift or final victories on these fronts. Instead, like the Great Wall, our progress will come in layers—walls upon walls—built patiently over time. This is a project that spans generations, demanding endurance, faith, and steady hands.The writer is a rabbi at the hesder pre-military Yeshivat Har Etzion/Gush, with YU ordination and an MA in English literature. His books include To Be Holy but Human: Reflections Upon My Rebbe, HaRav Yehuda Amital, available at mtaraginbooks.com]

Ekev

by Rabbi Berel Wein

Even though Moshe in his review of the life of the Jewish people in the desert of Sinai over the past forty years recounts all of the miracles that occurred to them, he does so not for the purpose of narrative but rather to teach an important moral lesson for all ages. And that stark lesson is that after all of the miracles that God may perform on our behalf, our fate is in great measure in our hands. And the lesson of all of Jewish history is summed up in the verse "For not by bread alone – even miraculous bread such as the manna itself – shall humans live by but rather by the word of God, so to speak, - the values, commandments and strictures of Torah shall Jews live." All attempts to avoid this lesson, to substitute other words, ideas and ideologies for the words of Torah have turned into dismal failures. But reliance upon miracles is just as dangerous a path. My teachers in the yeshiva would say to us then pious young men that prayer helps one to become a scholar in Torah. But they emphasized that sitting and studying Torah for a protracted time with concentration and effort may help even more in the quest for true Torah scholarship. Moshe uses the constant miracles of the desert to drive home the point that much of the responsibilities of life are in our hands and our decision making processes. In essence the clear conclusion from his oration is that God helps those who help themselves.

In our post –Tisha B'Av mood and run-up to Elul and the High Holy Days it is important to remember how much of our fate truly lies in our own hands and actions. The small choices that we make in our everyday lives add up to our life's achievements and accomplishments. That is what Rashi means when he states that "these are the commandments that one grinds under with one's heel – ekev!" The small things that we think to be unimportant at the moment often translate themselves into major decisions and sometimes even irreversible consequences. The question always before us is do our actions measure up to the standards of God's word, so to speak. We live not "by bread alone" or by miracles alone, but by our own choices and our own very behavior and deeds. While recently driving on a New York City highway – an exercise in patience and utter futility – I missed the exit that I was supposed to turn off on.

Miles and a quarter of an hour later I was able somehow to retrace my journey and exit at the proper place. I felt that it was a miracle that I was able to do so. In fact, however it was my negligent choice of not exiting correctly from the highway originally that forced the necessity of the occurrence of this "miracle" upon me. Moshe teaches us that this is truly a daily occurrence in our lives. His message to us is as clear and cogent today as it was to our forbearers in the desert of Sinai long ago.

Shabat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

The Morality of Love

Eikev

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

Something implicit in the Torah from the very beginning becomes explicit in the book of Devarim. God is the God of love. More than we love Him, He loves us. Here, for instance, is the beginning of this week's Parsha:

If you pay attention to these laws and are careful to follow them, then the Lord your God will keep His covenant of love [et ha-brit ve-et ha-chessed] with you, as He swore to your ancestors. He will love you and bless you and increase your numbers.

Deut. 7:12-13

Again in the Parsha we read:

To the Lord your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it. Yet the Lord set His affection on your ancestors and loved them, and He chose you, their descendants, above all the nations - as it is today.

Deut. 10:14-15

And here is a verse from last week's:

Because He loved your ancestors and chose their descendants after them, He brought you out of Egypt by His Presence and His great strength.

Deut. 4:37

The book of Deuteronomy is saturated with the language of love. The root a-h-v appears in Shemot twice, in Vayikra twice (both in Leviticus 19), in Bamidbar not at all, but in Sefer Devarim 23 times. Devarim is a book about societal beatitude and the transformative power of love.

Nothing could be more misleading and invidious than the Christian contrast between Christianity as a religion of love and forgiveness and Judaism as a religion of law and retribution. As I pointed out in my earlier Covenant & Conversation for Vayigash, forgiveness is born (as David Konstan notes in Before Forgiveness) in Judaism. Interpersonal forgiveness begins when Joseph forgives his brothers for selling him into slavery. Divine forgiveness starts with the institution of Yom Kippur as the supreme day of Divine pardon following the sin of the Golden Calf.

Similarly with love: when the New Testament speaks of love it does so by direct quotation from Leviticus ("You shall love your neighbour as yourself") and Deuteronomy ("You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul and all your might"). As philosopher Simon May puts it in his splendid book, Love: A History:

"The widespread belief that the Hebrew Bible is all about vengeance and 'an eye for an eye,' while the Gospels supposedly invent love as an unconditional and universal value, must therefore count as one of the most extraordinary misunderstandings in all of Western history. For the Hebrew Bible is the source not just of the two love commandments but of a larger moral vision inspired by wonder for love's power."[1]

His judgment is unequivocal:

"If love in the Western world has a founding text, that text is Hebrew."[2]

More than this: in Ethical Life: The Past and Present of Ethical Cultures, philosopher Harry Redner distinguishes four basic visions of the ethical life in the history of civilisations.[3] One he calls civic ethics, the ethics of ancient Greece and Rome. Second is the ethic of duty, which he identifies with Confucianism, Krishnaism and late Stoicism. Third is the ethic of honour, a distinctive combination of courtly and military decorum to be found among Persians, Arabs and Turks as well as in medieval Christianity (the 'chivalrous knight') and Islam.

The fourth, which he calls simply morality, he traces to Leviticus and Deuteronomy. He defines it simply as 'the ethic of love,' and represents what made the West morally unique:

"The biblical 'love of one's neighbour' is a very special form of love, a unique development of the Judaic religion and unlike any to be encountered outside it. It is a supremely altruistic love, for to love one's neighbour as oneself means always to put oneself in his place and to act on his behalf as one would naturally and selfishly act on one's own."[4]

To be sure, Buddhism also makes space for the idea of love, though it is differently inflected, more impersonal and unrelated to a relationship with God.

What is radical about this idea is that, first, the Torah insists, against virtually the whole of the ancient world, that the elements that constitute reality are neither hostile nor indifferent to humankind. We are here because Someone wanted us to be, One who cares about us, watches over us and seeks our wellbeing.

Second, the love with which God created the universe is not just Divine. It is to serve as the model for us in our humanity. We are bidden to love the neighbour and the stranger, to engage in acts of kindness and compassion, and to build a society based on love. Here is how our Parsha puts it:

For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, mighty and awesome God who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing. So you must love the stranger, for you yourselves were strangers in the land of Egypt.

Deut. 10:18-19

In short: God created the world in love and forgiveness and asks us to love and forgive others. I believe that to be the most profound moral idea in human history.

There is however an obvious question. Why is it that love, which plays so great a part in the book of Devarim, is so much less in evidence in the earlier books of Shemot, Vayikra (with the exception of Leviticus 19) and Bamidbar?

The best way of answering that question is to ask another. Why is it that forgiveness plays no part – at least on the surface of the narrative – in the book of Bereishit?[5] God does not forgive Adam and Eve, or Cain (though he mitigates their punishments). Forgiveness does not figure in the stories of the Flood, the Tower of Babel or the destruction of Sodom and the cities of the plain (Abraham's plea is that the cities be spared if they contain fifty or ten righteous people; this is not a plea for forgiveness). Divine forgiveness makes its first appearance in the book of Exodus after Moses' successful plea in the wake of Golden Calf, and is then institutionalised in the form of Yom Kippur (Lev. 16), but not before. Why so?

The simple, radical, answer is: God does not forgive human beings until human beings learn to forgive one another. Genesis ends with Joseph forgiving his brothers. Only thereafter does God forgive human beings.

Turning to love: Genesis contains many references to it. Abraham loves Isaac. Isaac loves Esau. Rebecca loves Jacob. Jacob loves Rachel. He also loves Joseph. There is interpersonal love in plentiful supply. But almost all the loves of Genesis turn out to be divisive. They lead to tension between Jacob and Esau, between Rachel and Leah, and between Joseph and his brothers. Implicit in Genesis is a profound observation missed by most moralists and theologians. Love in and of itself – real love, personal and passionate, the kind of love that suffuses much of the prophetic literature as well as Shir HaShirim, the greatest love song in Tanach, as opposed to the detached, generalised love called agape which we associate with ancient Greece – is not sufficient as a basis for society. It can divide as well as unite.

Hence it does not figure as a major motif until we reach the integrated social-moral-political vision of Deuteronomy which combines love and justice. Tzedek - justice - turns out to be another key word of Deuteronomy, appearing 18 times. It appears only four times in Shemot, not at all in Bamidbar, and in Vayikra only in chapter 19, the only chapter that also contains the word 'love.' In other words, in Judaism love and justice go hand in hand. Again this is noted by Simon May:

[W]hat we must note here, for it is fundamental to the history of Western love, is the remarkable and radical justice that underlies the love commandment of Leviticus. Not a cold justice in which due deserts are mechanically handed out, but the justice that brings the other, as an individual with needs and interests, into a relationship of respect. All our neighbours are to be recognised as equal to ourselves before the law of love. Justice and love therefore become inseparable.[6]

Love without justice leads to rivalry, and eventually to hate. Justice without love is devoid of the humanising forces of compassion and mercy. We need both. This unique ethical vision – the love of God for humans and of humans for God, translated into an ethic of love toward both neighbour and stranger – is the foundation of Western civilisation and its abiding glory.

It is born here in the book of Deuteronomy, the book of law-as-love and love-as-law.

[1] Simon May, Love: A History (Yale University Press, 2011), 19-20.

[2] Ibid., 14.

[3] Harry Redner, Ethical Life: The Past and Present of Ethical Cultures, New York, Rowman and Littlefield, 2001.

[4] Ibid., 50.

[5] I exclude, here, midrashic readings of these texts, some of which do make reference to forgiveness.

[6] Loc. Cit., 17.

Parshat Ekev: Is Judaism an "All or Nothing" Proposition?

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"All the commandment [sic – singular] which I command you this day shall you observe to do them, that you may live, and multiply, and go in and possess the land which the Eternal swore unto your fathers." (Deuteronomy 8:1)

Back in New York when I was rabbi at Lincoln Square Synagogue, the "612 Club" was a sarcastic reference to young and not-so-young singles in the religious community who kept the 613 commandments – except for those pertaining to sexual morality! The truth is that in the modern world, we often find a split down the middle between two groups of Jews: there are those who "major" in ritual law but will find ways to justify cutting corners in ethics, while there are those who would never take an unjustified dime from a customer but will never be caught within shouting distance from a synagogue.

What are we to make of these different approaches to the commandments: those who grab onto the ritual, those who only major in the ethical norms, and those who pick and choose from within each category?

The verse we quoted above from Parashat Ekev provides us with a direction for further study. The holy Or HaChayyim (Rabbi Chayyim Ibn Attar, 1696–1743) insists that this verse cannot merely be a repeat of the opening admonition of the portion wherein we are told to "hearken to these judgments, and keep, and do them, then the Lord your God shall keep with you the covenant" (Deut. 7:12). After all, our biblical portion opens with the word judgments (mishpatim) in the plural, whereas our verse in question is in the singular, "all the commandment." The strange construction of our verse must contain an important message in and of itself.

The Or HaChayyim explains that what the singular word "mitzva" signifies is that every single commandment is intimately connected to the many commandments. The Torah is not a menu of options from which God suggests that we pick and choose. The commandments are interlocked and interdependent.

Further evidence for this idea is demonstrated by the very fact that the Talmudic sages divide the 613 commandments into 248 positive commandments, corresponding to the 248 bodily organs, and 365 negative commandments, corresponding to the 365 bodily sinews. After all, a wise individual understands that he must take proper care of his entire organism if he desires physical well-being. It would make no sense to wash one's hands constantly to guard against infection without similarly guarding what one eats to keep the calorie and cholesterol numbers down. Everyone understands the interconnected relationship of our bodily organs; so too, it borders on spiritual blindness to dramatize one mitzva and then turn around and ignore a commandment that one believes may require too much of a personal sacrifice. And the fact that all commandments are called one command in the verse, and that we are exhorted to observe those "in order that you may live," testifies to the interrelatedness of the commandments and their parallel to the human organism.

From this perspective, the verse is teaching that once we begin to choose between various commands, we are leaving ourselves exposed to certain spiritual viruses which may prove to be lethal to our souls. And the sad truth is that the "supermarket" optional form of Judaism, which characterizes so much of Western culture, has hardly proven itself to be a sufficient barrier against assimilation.

This interlocking theory of the commandments, however, can lead an individual to the conclusion that Judaism is an all-or-nothing "proposition": If I can't keep it all, I might as well keep nothing at all. If I cannot keep the Sabbath, or if I can't begin it on Friday at the right time, then I might as well throw in the towel regarding kosher food and sexual morality as well. After all, I don't want to be a hypocrite!

Let it be clearly understood that hypocrisy does not apply to an individual who keeps some rules of morality or some ritual observances, but not all of them all of the time; such a person is merely being inconsistent, and – as Matthew Arnold observed – the only truly consistent person is one who is dead. If one claims to be 100% when one is not, then one is a hypocrite; if one doesn't do everything that one should all of the time, one is merely expressing the frailty of his humanity. And would any logical individual claim that if someone is guilty of an occasional untruth, he might as well forget about truth and morality in all of his interpersonal relationships? Much the opposite: he should continue to strive as much as possible for greater and greater consistency in his actions. And perhaps this is the real meaning of the singular form with which our verse opens: "All the commandment shall you observe to do them" – if you can't keep all of the commands, at least keep one commandment!

And as far as the parallel to the human organism is concerned: if an individual is blind in one eye, does that justify taking out the other? Or, if a person does not have the use of his hands, should he forgo his legs? Each commandment is precious and stands on its own, independent of the others. Indeed, Maimonides teaches (Commentary on Mishna, end of Makkot) that it is sufficient for an individual to observe just one commandment properly and he will merit the world to come!

Postscript

I know a family here in Efrat, completely religious and devoted to the Torah, who grew up in a small town in the Midwest. When I marveled at how a family from such a non-Jewish environment could have grown up with such Jewish commitment (all of the siblings are committed Jews living in Israel), I was told the even stranger fact that their father, who had studied in a Polish yeshiva, had been forced to work on Shabbat in order to keep his job (a not uncommon situation in America of the early twentieth century). Nevertheless, he insisted that the entire family attend synagogue Friday evening, and enjoy a festive meal with Kiddush, zemirot (songs of praise), and Torah interpretations. Saturday morning their father would rise at sunrise to pray alone, and – before leaving for work – would kiss them with tears coursing down his cheeks, blessing them with the wish that they would never have to desecrate the holy Sabbath in their lifetimes. Upon his return, he would share the third Sabbath meal with them, and – as a family – they would chant the Havdala prayer at the conclusion of the holy day. Apparently, his blessing bore sweet fruit. In this case, the sacred tears of a sincere Jew who tried to keep the mitzva of Shabbat as best as he could soared heavenwards to God and inwards to the souls of his children and, happily, his children's children.

Shabbat Shalom

[Rabbi YY Jacobson

The Chips of Your Life Will Make You Rich

Why Would Moshe Make Money from Carving the Second Tablets?
By: Rabbi YY Jacobson
Moses' Wealth
In this week's Torah portion, Eikev, Moses recounts the dramatic tale of how, following the Revelation at Sinai, G-d carved out Two Tablets, engraved them with the Ten Commandments, and presented them to Moses on Mt. Sinai. When Moses descended the mountain, however, he observed that the Israelites had created a Golden Calf as an idol. Moses seized the Tablets and smashed them before their eyes.
After a confrontation with G-d, Moses persuades Him, as it were, to forgive the Jewish people for their betrayal. G-d instructs Moses to carve out a second pair of tablets, to replace the first smashed ones.
In Moses' own words:
עקב י, א-ב: בָּעֵת הַהִוא אָמַר יְהוָה אֵלַי, פְּסָל-לְךָ שְׁנֵי-לוּחֹת אֲבָנִים כָּרִאשֹׁנִים, וַעֲלֵה אֵלַי, הָהָרָה; וְעָשִׂיתָ לְךָ, אֲרוֹן עֵץ. וְאֶכְתֹּב, עַל-הַלֻּחֹת, אֶת-הַדְּבָרִים, אֲשֶׁר הָיוּ עַל-הַלֻּחֹת הָרִאשֹׁנִים אֲשֶׁר שִׁבַּרְתָּ; וְשַׂמְתָּם, בָּאָרוֹן.
At that time, the Lord said to me, "Hew for yourself two stone tablets like the first ones and come up to Me onto the mountain…"[i]
The Sages, always sensitive to nuance, focus on the word "for yourself" ("lecha"), which seems superfluous and even misleading, as though these tablets were being carved for Moses himself. The verse could have stated, "Carve two stone Tablets." What does it mean, "Carve for yourself?"
The Talmud[ii] deduces that Moses was permitted to keep the chips of the second Tablets, hewed from sapphire. As Moses hewed the stone into Two Tablets, all the leftover chips became his. Indeed, the Hebrew word for "hew," pesal, also means the leftover chips, the refuse (pesoles). This, says the Talmud, transformed Moses into a very wealthy man.
נדרים לח, א: אמר רבי חמא ברבי חנינא, לא העשיר משה אלא מפסולתן של לוחות, שנאמר: "פסל לך שני לוחות אבנים כראשונים", פסולתן שלך יהא.
Talmud Nedarim 38a: Moses became wealthy only from the waste remaining from hewing the Tablets of the Covenant, as it is stated: "Hew for you two tablets of stone like the first" (Exodus 34:1). "Hew for you" means that their waste shall be yours. (As the tablets were crafted from valuable gems, their remnants were similarly valuable.)
רש"י תשא לד, א: פסל לך: הראהו מחצב סנפירינון מתוך אהלו, ואמר לו הפסולת יהיה שלך, ומשם נתעשר משה הרבה.
Rashi: G-d showed Moses a sapphire mine from within his tent, and He said to him, "The [sapphire] chips shall be yours," and from there Moses became very wealthy.
This is a strange commentary. What is this, a business deal? Moses, you carve out the second Tablets, and you get a cut! It seems distasteful that Moses is making money from the sacred Tablets containing the Ten Commandments! If G-d wanted Moses to be wealthy, He could have found many a way.
Besides, why did Moses need the money anyway? Living in the desert for his entire life, receiving all of his needs directly from G-d, did he need savings for a rainy day?
I will present two insights from two great spiritual masters. (The first comes from the third Rebbe of Chabad, the Tzemach Tzedek, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson of Lubavitch (1789-1866); the second—from his grandson, the fifth Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Sholom Dov Ber Schneerson (1860-1920), known as the Rebbe Rashab.)
The Refuse, Not the Essence
Torah confers upon a human being a richness and royalty. Some 3,400 years ago, at the foot of a lone mountain, the Jewish people received a gift that transformed their life and destiny for eternity. The Torah imbued Jewish life with the dignity of purpose and the grandeur of the infinite. The Torah saturates every moment with ultimate meaning; it grants the Jewish heart, the Jewish home, and the Jewish community — rich and poor alike — a taste of heaven.
Yet the richness of Torah, the wealth that comes along with a Torah life, is merely the "pesoles," the "refuse" of Torah, the leftover "chips." It does not capture the essence of Torah. What is the essence of Torah and its Mitzvos? They are the expression of the Divine, the voice of ultimate truth, transcending all material and spiritual benefits of this world or the next world, for G-d transcends and precedes all benefits. Torah is our opportunity to touch the Divine in His essence, to reach beyond all our limitations and unite with G-d. What value is there to the richness that Torah confers upon my life—stability, meaning, purpose, consistency, focus, inspiration, discipline, depth, passion, family, faith, conviction, love, etc.—to the truth that Torah allows me to go beyond all of existence and touch the Creator Himself?[iii]
The richness of Torah pales in comparison to the core truth of Torah itself. The richness of Torah is how it benefits me, in this world or the next. But what value does that have relative to Torah itself—the ultimate truth which transcends even the highest actualization and fulfillment of "I."
The Chips of Your Life
We now come to the powerful insight of the Rebbe Rashab.[iv]
The second Tablets differed drastically from the first. As the Torah relates, the first Tablets were created by G-d himself, while the second were hewed by a human being—Moses. He is the one who carved out the stone into Tablets; only then did G-d inscribe on them the Ten Commandments.[v]
This reflected the difference within the Jewish people before and after the creation and worship of the Golden Calf: Initially, the Israelites were heavenly, pristine, and sacred, hence they were capable of receiving Heavenly Tablets, crafted in Heaven. After they tasted sin and endured spiritual failure, they could only receive the second set of Tablets, which were man-made and were inferior to the first. In the process of failure and rehabilitation, we confront our darkness, weakness, and vulnerability. We are no longer a clean slate of heaven; instead, we have much "pesoles," refuse, sediments, and filth to deal with.
Comes the Torah and teaches us a powerful life lesson: It is from the "chips" of the second Tablets that Moses acquired his greatest wealth. The first Tablets had no "chips," no refuse and waste. Heaven knows not the pain of failure, the filth of promiscuity, the misery of anxiety, the abyss of addiction. The Second Tablets, in contrast, had many a chip. They represented our confrontation with addiction, shame, and deception.
Moses was a "wealthy" man. But his true wealth came only from the second Tablets—from the light and truth that is generated when we confront our darkness and we transform it into light. When we gaze at our "chips" and turn them into Divine Tablets. It is from the confrontation with our inner gravel and trauma that we discover our profoundest richness and our deepest truths. It is when we can look at our proclivity to depression, despair, and capitulation, and use it as a springboard for awareness, that we grow to discover an inner wealth not available in the heavenly, pure and holy first Tablets given by G-d himself to pure and innocent people.
Despite the unparalleled richness of Moses' soul, his deepest richness came from dealing with the "pesoles," with the refuse, sediments, and gravel of his people. This is the wisdom and depth that emerges from life's "dirt" and grime, from amid struggle and inner strife.
As growing human beings, we must never run from our inner refuse, and from the refuse we see in others. Like Moses, our truest wealth will come when we discover and extract the sparks hidden in the "chips" of the human
[i] Numbers 10:1.
[ii] Nedarim 38a
[iii] This insight comes from the work Beurei HaZohar (by the Tzemach Tzedek Parshas) Noach p. 19
[iv] In a Chassidic discourse he said in 1908. Maamar Ki Sisa 5668 (1908).
[v] Exodus 32:16. Deuteronomy 10:1. See Yalkut Shimoni Remez 392.]

Mezuzah Mystery
By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff
Question: The Pantry Predicament
Several frum families have recently moved to an apartment complex where the residences are virtually identical. Each apartment has a small pantry off the kitchen, and we need to know whether its door requires a

mezuzah, and if so, where to place it. Each family has asked this question from its posek and collectively there have been four completely different answers.

A. Sarah was told that she should place a mezuzah on the righthand side of the door as one enters the pantry from the kitchen.

B. Rivkah was told to place the mezuzah on the opposite side – on the righthand side as one leaves the pantry to reenter the kitchen.

C. Rachel was told that she does not need a mezuzah at all.

D. Leah was told to place two mezuzos, one on each side.

How can there be four different opinions how to place the mezuzah? Furthermore, since we know that one always places the mezuzah on the righthand side entering the room (Yoma 11b), why were Rivkah and Leah told to put mezuzos on the left side?

The "Ten Commandments" of Mezuzah

The laws governing where one places a mezuzah are indeed complicated. The Rambam (Hilchos Mezuzah 6:1) codifies ten necessary requirements that must be fulfilled for a house or room to be obligated to have a mezuzah. The first of his ten rules is that the room must have a minimum area of four amos by four amos (which is about fifty square feet). In the Rambam's opinion, it is not necessary that each side be at least four amos wide – if the room or building's area is at least sixteen square amos one must place a mezuzah on its entrance. Thus, according to the Rambam's opinion, a room that is three amos wide but six amos long requires a mezuzah.

However, the Rosh and others disagree, contending that a room three amos wide and six amos long does not require a mezuzah since it does not have four amos in each dimension. In other words, he contends that a normal living area must be at least four amos per side.

Although the authorities accept the Rambam's position as primary halachic opinion, and therefore one is required to place a mezuzah at the doorway to a room that is sixteen square amos even if it is narrower than four amos (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 286:13), we do not recite a beracha when placing only this mezuzah. Instead, one should recite a beracha prior to placing a mezuzah on a different doorway that all authorities require a mezuzah, and after installing that mezuzah, put up a mezuzah on the door of the room that is narrower than four amos (Shach). (This is the general rule that is applied to any case when there is a safek whether one must install a mezuzah. One does not recite a beracha, but it is optimal to place this mezuzah immediately after putting a mezuzah on another doorway that requires a beracha, thereby including the safek situation with the beracha.)

The Gemara (Sukkah 3a) says that a house smaller than four amos squared is considered too small to qualify for what the Torah calls a house, which affects many laws, including that it does not require a mezuzah (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 286:13). A house this small is not large enough for human habitation.

However, there are several important discussion points:

What if the "house" is not meant for general habitation, but is intended for a specific use, for which it is indeed suited, notwithstanding that it is smaller than four amos squared? There are authorities who contend that an area smaller than four amos squared that is suitable for its intended purpose requires a mezuzah. According to those who accept this latter idea, since a pantry is suitable for human use even when it is smaller than fifty square feet, this pantry area requires a mezuzah (Chamudei Daniel, quoted by Pischei Teshuvah). This explains why Sarah was told that she should place a mezuzah on the righthand side entering the pantry. The rav she asked follows the approach of the Chamudei Daniel (see Chovas Hadar of Rav Yaakov Blau, page 38, who cites several other authorities who accept this approach).

Are you Coming or Going?

At this point, I want to explain the answer Rivkah received, which was that one should place a mezuzah on the right entranceway reentering the kitchen from the pantry. Many authorities do not accept the approach of the Chamudei Daniel, contending that since Chazal ruled that a house smaller than four amos squared does not require a mezuzah, this is an inviolate rule, without exception. However, some authorities maintain that although a room this small never requires a mezuzah in its own right, when it connects to a larger room that requires a mezuzah, the doorway between them requires a mezuzah as an entrance to the larger room (Rabbi Akiva Eiger). They contend that if we were to remove the pantry, the doorway to the pantry would still serve as an entrance to the kitchen, and as such it requires a mezuzah. In this case, the mezuzah should be placed on the righthand side entering the kitchen and not entering the pantry.

No Mezuzah Need Apply

At this point, we will explore a third approach to the above question. Rachel's rav ruled that her pantry doorway requires no mezuzah on either side. This is because he agrees that there is no requirement to place a mezuzah entering the pantry notwithstanding that it is suitable to its purpose, since it is smaller than four amos squared. He also holds that there is no requirement to place a mezuzah entering the kitchen. Whereas Rabbi Akiva Eiger contends that we remove the pantry from the picture and still require a mezuzah because the doorway between the two rooms qualifies as a door entering the kitchen, this third approach understands that the doorway must be viewed exclusively as the entrance to the pantry and not to the kitchen. If the pantry is too small to necessitate a mezuzah, then this doorway does not require a mezuzah at all (Da'as Kedoshim 286:13).

Double Duty

What remains is to explain the answer that Leah received that one must place a mezuzah on both sides. This rabbi appears to be concerned that perhaps the Chamudei Daniel is correct that one must install a mezuzah on the right side entering the pantry, and perhaps Rabbi Akiva Eiger is correct that one must install a mezuzah on the right side entering the kitchen. Although many authorities object to this approach of having mezuzos on both sides (Shu"t Maharam Shik, Yoreh Deah 287), there are authorities who see no problem with having mezuzos on both sides when it is uncertain which side should have the mezuzah (see Shu"t Binyan Tzion 1:100). I would like to note that most authorities object to placing mezuzos on both sides of an entranceway.

Mezuzah Rewards

We touch the mezuzah whenever we enter or exit a building to remind ourselves of Hashem's presence, which is a physical and spiritual protective shield. Whenever passing a mezuzah, we should remind ourselves of Hashem's constant protection.

Chief Rabbi Mirvis

Eikev

A singer or a Rabbi?

Who has an easier time, a singer or a Rabbi?

I've noticed that when singers perform, the audience wants to hear the melodies and the songs that they're familiar with. In fact, if a renowned singer were to miss out from a performance one of their most popular songs, the audience would be angry because they have come to hear what they've heard dozens of times before.

They love it, they love the repetition! But, when a Rabbi is preparing a sermon, a drosha or a shiur, he is under pressure to provide fresh insights, to deliver new ideas. People in his congregation are likely to be disappointed if they hear something that they have heard before. There's a very relevant peirush of Rashi at the commencement of the second paragraph of the Shema which we read in Parshat Eikev.

The Torah says: "vehaya im shamua tishmau" – "and it shall come to pass when you hear what you have heard before". Rashi tells us that when it comes to the teaching of Torah, it's important that we do hear what we have heard before.

Historically there were two different customs with regard to public Torah reading. There was the triennial system – where it took three years to go through the whole Torah and then there was the annual system where parsha after parsha were read within one year, with Simchat Torah at the end – which is what we do to this day. But why did our Rabbis choose the latter over the former?

Shul services would have been quicker with a triennial system because we would only be reading a third of what we read right now from the Torah! But the answer is that repetition is so important. We need to

constantly be aware of Torah and so year after year we read the same portions, we hear the same ideas.
Of course, we should recognise that "shivim panim b' latorah" – "there are seventy angles to the Torah" but whilst we need to gain fresh depths, the material remains the same. Mitzvah number 613 is "ve'ata kitvu lachem et hashira hazot" – "we must write this song". This mitzvah is about writing a Torah but we refer to Torah as a song. Because the song of Torah is such that we should constantly want to hear it again and again.
Therefore, Rabbis have an advantage over singers because we have both repetition and fresh insights! As a result, may we continuously always succeed in uplifting our communities and may the Jewish nation only go from strength to strength. Shabbat Shalom.

Rav Kook Torah
Eikev: What Does God Want of You?
In a famous verse, Moses exhorted the people to acquire reverence for God:
וְעַתָּה יִשְׂרָאֵל — מָה ה' אֱ-לֹהֶיךָ שֹׁאֵל מֵעִמָּךְ?
כִּי אִם לְיִרְאָה אֶת ה' אֱ-לֹהֶיךָ לָלֶכֶת בְּכָל-דְּרָכָיו, וּלְאַהֲבָה אֹתוֹ ...
"And now, Israel, what does the Eternal your God ask of you? Only this: to be in awe of the Eternal your God, to walk in all His ways, and to love Him." (Deut. 10:12)
What is awe of God? And why is it so central to our spiritual life?
Two Forms of Awe
There are two levels of reverence: Yirat Shamayim ("awe of Heaven") and Yirat Cheit ("fear of sin," or, more accurately, repulsion from sin).
They share the same root of reverence, but they differ in focus. Yirat Shamayim is primarily a mindset, an inner orientation born from awareness of God's infinite greatness.
Yirat Cheit, on the other hand, is reverence expressed in deed and action, the practical rejection of anything that defiles or distances us from God. Deep reverence for the Creator awakens an equally deep recoil from sin.
Reverence and Love
Reverence (yirah) and love (ahavah) appear to be opposites: Love draws us toward what is good and holy, while reverence turns us away from what is corrupt and degrading.
In truth, they are intertwined. Our attraction to good heightens our distaste for evil, and our avoidance of evil safeguards our path toward higher yearnings.
The Talmud (Shabbat 31b) relates that when a certain scholar passed by, Rabbi Elazar said, "Let us stand in honor of this God-fearing man." Although the man was a scholar of stature, Rabbi Elazar singled out his reverence of God as the more fundamental trait.
The True Foundation of Wisdom
Rabbi Elazar would say: "The Holy One has only awe of Heaven in His world."
This striking statement leads us to a profound question: What purpose did God have in creating the world? We cannot answer by imagining that creation brought God some gain or improvement. Before creation, His perfection was complete, lacking nothing.
The benefit in creating the world can only be understood in the creation of a limited, finite reality. That which is finite is naturally drawn toward the Infinite. The very limitation of all things in their value and purpose is the highest good the universe receives from its Creator. For the loftiest relationship to God begins with the awe that comes from sensing our own smallness before His boundless greatness.
It is from these feelings of reverence that all positive yearnings and love are born.
When we cultivate such wisdom — contemplating the Infinite in order to awaken awe — a lofty Yirat Shamayim leaves its deep imprint on the soul. When the mind's inner image of reverence expresses itself in the realm of action, it produces Yirat Cheit, a revulsion of sin. And from this foundation of awe springs Ahavah: an intense love for God, a longing to contemplate His light and ways, His mitzvot and His Torah.
This is the precise sequence Moses set before the people:

- "To be in awe of the Eternal your God" — Yirat Shamayim
- "to walk in all His ways " — Yirat Cheit
- "and to love Him" — Ahavah

Rabbi Yochanan Zweig
Ekev
It's the Little Things that Count
Therefore it shall come to pass, if you fulfill these laws, and keep, and do them, then Hashem your God shall keep with you the covenant and the kindness which he swore to your fathers (7:12).
This week's parsha begins with outlining the basis of our relationship with Hashem; if we keep the mitzvos Hashem will keep the covenant and kindnesses promised to our forefathers. Rashi (ad loc), surprisingly, says that the mitzvos that are being referred to here are those that we trample underfoot – in other words, this refers to mitzvos that we feel are insignificant.
Mizrachi (ad loc) wonders why Rashi is limiting the fulfillment in the verse to those types of mitzvos. In fact, it seems contrary to the simple reading of the verse! What compelled Rashi to explain the possuk in this manner?
Imagine for a moment, that you received a call from your neighbor at two in the morning begging you to come over because his wife had unexpectedly gone into labor and they needed someone to come over right away to stay in the house with the other young children. Undoubtedly, you, like most people, would respond in the affirmative and immediately make your way over there.
Now imagine receiving a call at two in the morning from this very same neighbor, but instead he asked you to go to Walgreens to pick up a jar of pickles and then go to 7-Eleven to get some ice cream for his wife who suddenly had an intense craving for pickles and ice cream. In this scenario you would hardly be as accommodating. You might just begin to wonder whether or not your friend had lost his mind, and you would surely question the long term viability of this friendship.
Yet, for some reason, a wife has no qualms about asking her husband to get out of bed at two in the morning and pick up items that would satisfy her cravings. Why? The answer, of course, lies in the nature of the relationship. When you are closely connected to someone you might ask things of them that seem insignificant because they know if the situation were reversed you would do the same for them.
This applies to our relationship with Hashem as well, and particularly in how we fulfill the mitzvos. Obviously it is crucially important to fast on Yom Kippur, but does that really comment on the strength of the bond as it relates to fulfilling all that Hashem desires of us? Not really. In fact, there are many marginally connected Jews who fast on Yom Kippur, but otherwise do very little else that Hashem asks of us throughout the year.
Observing, in particular, the mitzvos that one would tend to see as trivial is the real indicator of the strength of our bond with Hashem. That is why it is the observance of these mitzvos that guarantees that Hashem will fulfill the covenant that he promised our forefathers.
Living for Martyrdom?
And it will come to be, if you diligently listen to my commandments which I command you this day, to love Hashem your God […] (11:13).
Rashi (ad loc), quoting the Sifri, explains that the rewards bestowed upon one who follows all of the mitzvos come as a result of loving Hashem. In other words, one is not supposed to do the mitzvos in order to receive reward, but rather to fulfill the mitzvos out of love for Hashem. Rashi continues, "One should not say 'I will study Torah in order to become rich; I will study in order to be called a Rav; I will study in order to receive reward […]' but rather all that one does should be done out of love." Rashi is clearly articulating that we do the mitzvos because we have a relationship with Hashem, not because of the reward.
This is akin to what Chazal teach in Pirkei Avos (1:3), "Antignos of Socho used to say: 'Do not be as servants who serve the Master to receive reward. Rather, be as servants who serve the Master not to receive reward.'"
The trouble is that Rashi ends his comment on this verse with a very perplexing statement, "and in the end the honor will surely come."

Therefore, even though one isn't supposed to focus on the reward for doing the mitzvos, one shouldn't worry as the reward will surely follow. Rashi is seemingly undoing the lesson that he just taught! It's almost as if we are supposed to do all the mitzvos "altruistically" – wink, wink – knowing all the while that, ultimately, we really are receiving a reward.

If we aren't supposed to do the mitzvos in order to receive the reward, then what's the point of making assurances that in the end you will receive it? Aren't we supposed to grow to a level where we aren't doing the mitzvos for the reward?

The answer lies in understanding why people commit acts of martyrdom and self-sacrifice. Why, to a lesser extent, do so many people practice hero worship, create fan clubs, and walk around dressed as comic book and movie characters? The answer is that they are seeking recognition. There is a gnawing emptiness in their lives that they seek to fill, and being recognized in such a way gives meaning to their lives. True, this meaning is pretty shallow, but it creates a fleeting moment of relevancy for the person.

In an extreme example, one may actually commit self-destructive acts to fill this void. In fact, the more seemingly altruistic and self-sacrificial the act is, the more recognition they receive. Paradoxically, it seems that it is the survival instinct that drives this bizarre behavior. Thus, how does someone become immortal and live forever in the hearts and minds of others? By sacrificing themselves for the cause.

Judaism abhors this behavior (a clear reason why Christianity was a nonstarter alternative). Our whole understanding of why the world was created is based on the bestowal of good on mankind. The highest level of good is an immortal relationship with the Almighty. Therefore, everything that we do is out of love for Hashem, not out of compulsion to achieve recognition for ourselves. The word korban is commonly translated as sacrifice, but this is not really an accurate translation. The word korban comes from the root word "karov – to be close." Meaning, the highest level of service to Hashem was a way to achieve a closer relationship.

How do we know that we are in a relationship with Hashem and that it isn't merely a Master ordering His slaves to be obedient? How do we know that Hashem doesn't want us to act in a self-sacrificing way? Because, as Rashi points out, the motivation for the mitzvos must be our love for Hashem. Still, you might ask, but who's to say that this is a two-way relationship, perhaps it is like idol worship and is entirely one-way? Because Hashem assures us that the reward is going to come in the end. Just like in a healthy marriage we (hopefully) don't act in a quid pro quo manner, that is, we don't expect the wife to make dinner for her husband because he did the shopping and now she feels obligated. We all want our spouses to do things for us out of love, not obligation. That is why Rashi finishes with "in the end the reward will come." Knowing that Hashem is interested in rewarding us tells us that we are in a loving relationship and not in an altruistic, self-sacrificial one.

[CS Also:

Michal Horowitz

Eikev 5785: Eternal Lessons from the Shema

In Parshas Eikev - which is replete with the admonishments, teachings, exhortations, mussar, love, and direction of Moshe Rabbeinu, relayed to the nation in the last month of his life - Moshe reviews a theme he has already taught us in Va'Eschanan.

In last week's parsha, in the Shema, Moshe commands us: וְהָיוּ הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי מְצַוְּךָ הַיּוֹם עַל־לְבָבֶךָ וְשִׁנַּנְתָּם לְבָנֶיךָ וְדִבַּרְתָּ בָּם בְּשִׁבְתְּךָ בְּבֵיתֶךָ וּבְלֶכְתְּךָ בַדֶּרֶךְ וּבְשָׁכְבְּךָ וּבְקוּמֶךָ, and these words that I command you today shall be upon your heart, and you shall teach your children and speak of them, when you sit in your house and when you walk on your way, and when you lay down and when you arise (Devarim 6:6-7).

Here we have the imperative to place the words of Torah upon our own hearts - internalizing them and living by them - and to teach our children and students (see Rashi to 6:7), so that they too learn, live and love Torah.

And then in Eikev, Moshe once again commands us: "And you shall place these words upon your heart and your soul… וְלִמַּדְתֶּם אֹתָם אֶת-בְּנֵיכֶם, לְדַבֵּר בָּם, בְּשִׁבְתְּךָ בְּבֵיתֶךָ וּבְלֶכְתְּךָ בַדֶּרֶךְ, וּבְשָׁכְבְּךָ וּבְקוּמֶךָ, and you shall teach them to your children, to speak of them, when you sit in your house and when you walk on your way, when you lay down and when you arise" (11:19).

Later in Devarim, on the last day of his life, Moshe once again stresses the importance of one generation teaching, and transmitting, the masorah to the next generation.

זְכֹר יְמוֹת עוֹלָם בִּינוּ שְׁנוֹת דֹּר וָדֹר שְׁאַל אָבִיךָ וְיַגֶּדְךָ זְקֵנֶיךָ וְיֹאמְרוּ־לָךְ - Remember the days of old; reflect upon the years of generations. Ask your father, and he will tell you; your elders, and they will say to you (32:7).

Klal Yisrael is commanded to become a nation of teachers, and to ensure that each generation passes on the Torah to the next.

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks z'l writes, "This emphasis on education has given Judaism, from the very beginning, a future orientation that is unusual among the great religions of the world. Jews have always cared about children and placed them as their highest joy. Rather than look back to a vanished past, they have looked forward to a distant but promised future. A people that places children at the apex of its agenda does not grow old. It learns to see the world through the eyes of a child - with hope and wonder and aspiration unsullied by cynicism and despair…

"So it was at virtually every period of Jewish history and almost every place where there was a Jewish community… By 15th century, Spanish Jewry had long passed its Golden Age. The Spanish equivalent of Kristallnacht - synagogues set on fire, Jewish businesses looted, and Jews killed - took place in 1391. From then until their expulsion in 1492, Jews lived under the shadow of persecution. Their civil rights were curtailed. They were constantly urged to convert to Christianity…. At the height of this crisis, a gathering of Jews was convened at Valladolid, Spain, in 1432. It ordained a series of taxes on meat, wine, weddings, and circumcisions, to raise funds for public education:

'We also ordain that every community of fifteen householders [or more] shall be obliged to maintain a qualified elementary teacher to instruct their children in Scripture. They shall provide him with sufficient income for a living in accordance with the number of his dependents. The parents shall be obliged to send their children to that teacher, and each shall pay him in accordance with his means. If this revenue from the parents should prove inadequate, the community shall be obliged to supplement it with an amount necessary for his livelihood in accordance with the time and the place.'

"Until modern times there was no parallel to this Jewish insistence on education as the fundamental right and duty of every person, every child…

"The Mesopotamians built ziggurats, the Egyptians build pyramids, the Greeks built the Parthenon, and the Romans the Coliseum. Jews build schools. That is why we are still here. That is the secret of our immortality" (Covenant & Conversation, Deuteronomy, p.101-104).

I once heard a beautiful insight related by Rabbi Shay Schachter, in the name of the great tzadik, Rav Meir Shapiro of Lublin zt'l. In the Book of Esther, the pasuk tells us:

וַיְסַפֵּר הָמָן לְזֶרֶשׁ אִשְׁתּוֹ וּלְכָל־אֹהֲבָיו אֵת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר קָרָהוּ וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ חֲכָמָיו וְזֶרֶשׁ אִשְׁתּוֹ אִם מִזֶּרַע הַיְּהוּדִים מָרְדֳּכַי אֲשֶׁר הַחִלּוֹתָ לִנְפֹּל לְפָנָיו לֹא־תוּכַל לוֹ כִּי־נָפוֹל תִּפּוֹל לְפָנָיו - And Haman recounted to Zeresh his wife and to all his friends all that had befallen him, and his wise men and Zeresh his wife said to him, "If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, is of the seed of the Jews, you will not overcome him, but you will surely fall before him" (Esther 6:13 - the Divine coordination of the fact that this is verse 6:13 should not be lost to us…).

Rav Meir Shapiro of Lublin explains that the advisors and Zeresh were saying to Haman: אִם מִזֶּרַע הַיְּהוּדִים - if at a time like this - a time of persecution and terror, a time of destruction and fear - the Jews are still teaching their children, if they are investing in the future, the seed of their nation, the זֶרַע הַיְּהוּדִים, then you will never defeat them. Haman's friends and family were saying to him: "The Jews understand that the secret to their survival lies in the future, the seeds whom are the children they plant, and then nurture through education. Hence we are forced to

recognize that they are - and will always remain - an eternal people. Against such a nation your nefarious plans will never succeed."

"And you shall teach your children/students, and you shall speak of them, when you sit in your home and when you walk on the way…" Such is the strength of our people, such is the secret to our survival, and thus we will merit to remain strong and eternal, from generation to generation.

בברכת בשורות טובות ושבת שלום,

לע"נ
יוחנן בן יקותיאל יודא ע"ה
שרה משא בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה
ביילא בת (אריה) לייב ע"ה
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The Hebron Massacre of 1929:
A Recently Revealed Letter of a Survivor

by Meyer Greenberg

The massacre of the Jews of Hebron in 1929 put an end to the ancient Jewish community at the burial site of the patriarchs. The riots which erupted throughout the country were an organized Arab attack against the entire Zionist enterprise with the aim of preventing the eventual establishment of a Jewish state. They were the most violent eruption until that time in the conflict that has been termed “one long war between Arabs and Jews comparable to the Hundred Years War in medieval Europe.”[1]

Unlike other parts of the country, where Jews resisted with force, the Hebron community reflected the mind set of the pre modern Jew, conditioned by almost 2,000 years of Jewish powerlessness. The reaction of the local leadership to the impending attack was to turn to the authorities -- the British appointed governor and the Arab notables -- for protection, which, when it arrived, was much too late.

The events in Hebron and my grandparents' miraculous rescue are vividly described in a letter written by my grandfather nine days later to my mother, Blanche Greenberg.

In 1907, the peak year of Jewish immigration into the United States, my maternal grandfather, Aharon Reuven Bernzweig, his wife Breine Zuch Bernzweig, and their six children left Stanislaw, Galicia (then Austrian Poland), and settled in New York City. Twenty years later, in 1927, after their children were grown and they had accumulated a modest capital, they were in a position to fulfill the dream of many traditional Jews to spend their retirement years in Eretz Hakodesh, the Holy Land.

Late in the spring of 1929, my grandparents travelled to the United States in order to attend my brother's bar mitzvah. Upon their return they decided to escape the heat of a Tel Aviv summer by vacationing in Hebron. Five days later the riots broke out.

Zeide Bernzweig's health was affected by the Hebron ordeal, and he died of a heart attack in 1936. Baba Breine continued to live at 16 Bialik Street in Tel Aviv until her death in 1945. That is where I would visit and spend Shabbat in 1937 38, when I studied at Hebrew University.

Aharon and Breine Bernzweig were buried on the Mount of Olives. In the summer of 1967, after the reunification of Jerusalem, my wife and I found and restored their desecrated graves.

While members of the family knew that Zeide had written a letter about Hebron, we were not familiar with the actual text. I found the original in my parents' papers after their death. The Yiddish is closely written on ten pages and is difficult to read. I am therefore greatly indebted to Helen G. Meyrowitz, who deciphered the text and prepared the initial translation, which I have revised and edited.

While preparing the letter for publication, I found clarifying and corroborating information in the testimonies of other eyewitnesses, preserved in the Central Zionist Archives in Jerusalem. From the survivor documents I was able to identify others who were in the group of 33 who shared the same hiding place, as well as the names of the Arabs who saved their lives.

MEGILLAT HEBRON

With the help of God, Monday, Torah portion Shoftim V'shotrim, 5689 [September 2, 1929], Tel Aviv, may it be built up and firmly established, speedily in our days, Amen.

My dear children, may you live and be well.

Even before I begin writing, my hand is already shaking, my head swims, and every limb is trembling. I am unable to get control of myself, because the cries are still ringing in my ears. It is one week today since we came back from the bitter tragedy. Each day I want to write to you, but when I sit down to write, all my limbs start to quiver and tears pour from my eyes, so I have to stop. Today for the first time I was able to pull myself together, with all my strength, with superhuman effort. I got up at dawn and sat down to write. I hadn't started yet, but even before I could begin, my pen was already soaked with tears. Although it seems that I am writing this letter with ink, you should know that it is not ink, but

tears.

Now, let me get to the point. I don't really know where to start and where to finish, because my blood is still churning inside me. But I will begin my Megillah of Hebron. Children, as you already know from my earlier letter, Mama, may she live and be well, had been feeling very weak, ever since we came back from our trip to America. Moving to a new apartment and all the hard work involved added to it. The apartment wasn't finished and there was endless aggravation because the work was not being done to her liking. On top of everything else, she couldn't bear the terribly hot weather. It was awful; the perspiring was beyond human endurance. She lay in bed all day because she was too weak to walk about. I kept begging Mama, may she live and be well, with tears in my eyes, that we needed a change of climate. It was impossible to convince her because she didn't want to abandon the house and leave it hefker. Finally she realized that she had no choice and she agreed. She did not want to go by herself, only with me. So we left home and went to the country to Hebron.[2]

We arrived on Sunday, August 18th. There we went to a guest house, where we got a very nice room and came to an agreement on the charges. We paid for one month in advance, since we planned to stay for several months, until after all the holidays, when it would be cooler.[3]

From the very beginning, things did not go well. Although the air was very good and the weather cool, and Mama, may she be well, did not perspire any more, she caught a severe cold and had to stay in bed. In addition, there were swarms of biting mosquitoes. We had no choice but to hope that things would get better. Unfortunately, things don't always turn out the way we would like, and no one knows what the future holds.

Ever since we arrived in Hebron, we had heard talk of disturbances in Jerusalem, that Arabs and Jews were fighting. We didn't have any specific details, but there were rumors in the air, so we were not in a happy state of mind. But what could we do about it?

On Friday, the 23rd, we heard that things had gotten worse in Jerusalem. Everyone became very uneasy and walked about without a head. We had forebodings that something terrible was about to happen but what, exactly, we did not know. I was fearful and kept questioning the local people, who had lived there for generations. They assured me that in Hebron there could never be a pogrom, because as many times as there had been trouble elsewhere in Eretz Israel, Hebron had remained quiet. The local population had always lived very peacefully with the Arabs.

But my heart told me that the situation was serious. Hebron alone, without the surrounding villages, has a population of 24,000. Including the villages, there are 60,000 people. Of what significance is the Jewish community there, a mere 100 families?[4] What could we do to protect ourselves? We could only comfort ourselves with the hope that God, blessed be He, would have mercy, and the troubles would run their course quietly.

Friday afternoon the situation worsened. We heard that on the street Arabs had already beaten several Jews with clubs. Next we heard that all the Jewish stores had closed. The atmosphere was explosive. Everybody was afraid to go out into the street, and we locked ourselves in our rooms. Things looked really bad. What should we do? "No one could go out, and no one could come in "[Joshua 6.1]; everybody was fearful. By now the local Jews too were saying that the situation was serious.

Suddenly, just one hour before candle lighting, pandemonium broke loose. Window panes were smashed on all sides. In our building, they broke every window and began throwing large stones inside. We hid ourselves. They were breaking windows in all the Jewish homes. Now we were in deathly fear. As we were blessing the Shabbes candles, we heard that in the Yeshiva one young man had been killed. It was bitter, the beginning of a slaughter.

In the meantime, mounted policemen arrived, and all became still outside. We thought that our salvation had come. All through the night the police patrolled the streets. But it seemed that they were having problems. You can understand that I walked the floor all the night terribly worried, with my heart in my mouth. On Shabbes morning, we saw that the situation was getting worse. Cars kept racing back and forth through the streets. They were filled with Arabs armed with long iron bars, long knives, and axes. The Arabs kept screaming that they were going to Jerusalem to slaughter all the Jews. Soon many Jews gathered in our house. We held a meeting and talked over the situation, but couldn't think of anything we could do to protect ourselves, since none of us had any weapons. Many of the people remained in our house, because by then it was too dangerous to try to go home.

Now let me tell you about the massacre. Right after eight o'clock in the morning we heard screams. Arabs had begun breaking into Jewish homes. The screams pierced the heart of the heavens. We didn't know what to do. Our house

had two floors. We were downstairs and a doctor lived on the second floor.[5] We figured that we would be safe in the doctor's apartment, but how could we get up there? The stairs were on the outside of the building, but it wasn't safe to go out. So we chopped through the ceiling and that way we climbed up to the doctor's house. Well, after being there only a little while, we realized that we were still in danger because by that time the Arabs had almost reached our house. They were going from door to door, slaughtering everyone who was inside. The screams and the moans were terrible. People were crying Help! Help! But what could we do? There were thirty three of us. Soon, soon, all of us would be lost.[6]

Just then, God, blessed be He, in His great mercy, sent us an Arab who lived in back of our house. He insisted that we come down from the doctor's apartment and enter his house through the back door. He took us to his cellar, a large room without windows to the outside. We all went in, while he, together with several Arab women, stood outside near the door.[7] As we lay there on the floor, we heard the screams as Arabs were slaughtering Jews. It was unbearable. As for us, we felt that the danger was so great that we had no chance of coming out alive. Each one of us said his vidui [his confession in anticipation of death]. At any moment we could be slaughtered, for double edged swords were already at out throats. We had not even the slightest hope of remaining alive. We just begged that it should already be done and over.

Five times the Arabs stormed our house with axes, and all the while those wild murderers kept screaming at the Arabs who were standing guard to hand over the Jews. They, in turn, shouted back that they had not hidden any Jews and knew nothing. They begged the attackers not to destroy their homes.

We heard everything. In addition, the little children in our group kept crying. We were in deadly fear that the murderers outside would hear them.[8]

As for me, I was already 99 percent in the next world. All the time that we were in the Arab's house, I lay there on the floor in terrible pain [from a heart attack].[9] It just happened that there were two doctors in the house. They sat near me and they saved my life.[10]

Well, I cannot continue describing the destruction any longer. It took several hours to us it seemed like years until all became quiet outside. We still lay there, waiting for the Angel of Death to finish with us as quickly as possible.

But God heard our prayers. Suddenly, the door opened, and the police walked in. They had been told that we were hidden there. They demanded that we go along with them, and they would take us to a safe place. We were afraid to go, because we thought they themselves might slaughter us. Eventually, they succeeded in convincing us that they had our good in mind. Since we couldn't walk there, they brought automobiles and took us, under police guard, to the police station, which was in a safe location.[11]

When we reached the police station, there was acted out a real life dance of the devils, for the police had brought together those who were still alive, the surviving remnant. During the earlier confusion, naturally, no one could have known what was happening to anyone else, but there in the police station, everyone first discovered whom he had lost. As people told each other about their misfortunes and how many casualties they had suffered, there burst out a terrible cry, everyone shrieking and crying at the same time. It was unbearable. Blessed God, give us strength! It was beyond human endurance. Three women went out of their minds right there.

In short, we were in the police station three days and three nights. We couldn't eat and we couldn't sleep. We lay on the ground in filth, just listening to the crying and the groaning.[12] Finally, God, blessed be He, had mercy on us and [on Monday night] the police again transferred us to Jerusalem. There we stayed in the Nathan Straus Health Center for two days and two nights, and on Wednesday we came back to Tel Aviv.[13]

I am writing you only about our troubles. I don't have the strength to write about the additional troubles of the whole Jewish community. That you will surely read in the American newspapers. It is very tragic, but everything is from God.

Now I will tell you the total number of people who were slaughtered in Hebron. As of today, there are 63 holy martyrs. While we were still there, 58 were buried in a common grave, 51 males and 7 females; up to today, there are 5 more martyrs from among the wounded. Of the wounded, 49 are in serious condition, and 17 slightly wounded. Who knows how many more fatalities there will be? The Yeshiva suffered 23 killed and 17 wounded. Eight of the dead and 14 of the wounded from the Yeshiva are American boys. Gevald! Twenty three living Torah scrolls were burned! May the heavens open and avenge us.

All the houses of study with their Torah scrolls and holy books were burned; everything in them was destroyed. All the homes were plundered; not even a straw was left!

We ourselves were left practically naked and barefoot. Since we had planned to stay there a few months, we had taken along all our clothes. Mama, may she live and be well, was left with only the one dress she was wearing and I, too, had only what I was wearing. They even took my talis and tefilin. Before Shabbes, I gave the money that I had brought along to the innkeeper for safekeeping. The Arabs took that money too, quite a large amount.

To make matters worse, the situation in the entire country is very bad, and no one is paying his debts. I have notes for several thousand dollars. Last week, notes for $750 came due, but no one paid. Who knows what will happen in the future? God forbid that we shouldn't be ruined altogether.[14] We're trying to keep our heads above water while we keep hearing that here things are bad and there things are bad. May God, blessed be He, have mercy and help all the Jews, including us, that we should at least be well and be able to bear up under these trials. We Jews have had enough troubles!

I have no patience to write about family matters because my hand is still trembling.

Just one thing, my dear children, may you live and be well, I ask of you that you put away this letter for the generations. Each year, at an agreed upon day, you should all meet and give thanks and praise to God, blessed be He, who saved your parents from this great catastrophe, and each one of you should make a generous contribution to charity. The miracle took place on Shabbes, Torah portion Ekev, the 18th day of the month of Av, 5689 [August 24, 1929], in Hebron.

Your father, who wishes you the best, writing to you through tears.

Aharon [Aharon Reuven Bernzweig]
[(Wife) Breine Zuch Bernzweig]

APPENDIX 1: STATISTICAL SUMMARY

Total number of Jewish residents in Hebron: 750 800

Jews present in Hebron at the time (including visitors): 550 estimated

Residents not present: 250 300

Yeshiva students and staff away between terms

People visiting or working elsewhere

Killed in the riots: 67

Yeshiva students and staff: 24

Buried in mass grave: 59

Wounded and survived: 53

Survived and uninjured: (assembled in police station after the riots): 430

Saved by Arabs: 280 300

Saved in other ways: (hiding, homes not reached, lay among bodies of dead and wounded): 130 estimated

Arabs who saved Jews: 25 estimated

Arabs who participated in attacks and plunder: thousands

APPENDIX 2

Hadassah's Dr. Kitayin Testifies:

"At about 11:00 A.M. on Friday, while I was at work [in the Health Clinic], the nurse, Shoshana Bat Haim, was told by one of the frequenters of the dispensary, Rashad Sa'ad, 18 years old and a government official, that preparations were being made to kill Jews in Hebron. The nurse called me and reported the matter. I answered, 'Tell him that these days one doesn't ordinarily murder people.'

At the same time an Arab guide named Bakri came into the dispensary. When the nurse requested two piasters for the medicine, he replied that he would put out her eyes that day. The nurse called me and told me what the Arab had said, and I chased him out of the building. After a few minutes another guide came in and begged me to forgive the man. I forgave him and he came in for the medicine."

After 10:00 on Saturday morning, when the slaugher had ceased, Dr. Kitayin was sought out and taken to the Police Station to tend the wounded. Together with them were others who were not wounded but "whose faces and clothes were full of blood. They told me that they had lain near the dead and had been saved by being thought dead." Shortly afterward the wounded and the corpses were moved to the government Health Office. (Kitayin Statement, op. cit., Annex 72.)

There Dr. Kitayin worked without stop for 36 hours until Sunday evening, when ambulances arrived from Hadassah to transport the wounded to Jerusalem. Assisting Kitayin were the local Jewish medical staff, Dr. Elkanah and the Hadassah nurse. Toward evening on Saturday they were joined by a surgeon, Dr. John MacQueen, the Government Medical Officer from Jerusalem, his assistant and two nurses. Together they operated upon and treated about 20 of the 60 wounded. (Letter from Dr. Kitayin to the Palestine Zionist Executive dated September 25, 1929, in C.Z.A., S25/4601, and Oded Avissar, p. 418.)

Notes:

[1] For the significance of the riots see Naomi W. Cohen, The Year after the Riots: American Responses to the Palestine Crisis of 1929-30, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988; and Aaron S. Klieman, ed. The Rise of Israel -- The Turn toward Violence 1920-1929, New York and London: Garland Publishers, 1987, p. 12.

[2] In those days Hebron in the south and Safed in the north were favorite summer vacation sites for the traditional Jewish community. Hebron, 3,000 feet above sea level, is 19 miles south of Jerusalem.

[3] The guest house was called Eshel Avraham, the Tamarisk Tree of Abraham, a classical Jewish symbol of hospitality. It was operated by Haim Shneerson and was one of five or more small family run lodgings for visitors. Students at the Hebron Yeshiva were housed with private families. See Statment of Yehuda Leib Shneerson, son of Haim Shneerson, Central Zionist Archives (hereinafter C.Z.A.), 1929 Riots, Notes on Hebron, File S25/4601, Annex 16. Eshel Avraham was the first hotel in Hebron and was located in one of five buildings constructed by the two grandfathers of Yehuda Leib Shneerson during the period of Turkish rule over Palestine. Hard times forced them to sell the buildings to Arabs. On the main floor there were four rooms and a synagogue. See Yehuda Leib Shneerson, Hoy Hebron, Hebron! (Hebrew), Tel Aviv, Yair Publishers, 1980, p.23.

[4] The entire Jewish community of Hebron numbered between 750 and 800. Included in these figures are about 200 students and staff of Yeshivat Hebron Kenesset Israel. In 1924, Rabbi Moses Mordecai Epstein had transplanted 150 students and faculty en masse from Slobodka in Lithuania to Hebron. Rabbi Epstein was notable also for his interest in the building up of Palestine. While at the Volozhin Yeshiva in the 1880s he encouraged the Hovevei Zion group organized

by the students, and he himself was a member of the Hovevei Zion delegation which purchased the land for the settlement of Hadera in 1891.

A population figure of 20,000 Moslems and 800 Jews in the town of Hebron is given in the memorandum of the Palestine Zionist Executive, prepared by Mordecai Eliash and dated October 14, 1929, for the government Commission of Enquiry into the 1929 Riots, C.Z.A., S25/4601. The census of 1931, however, lists 17,531 Moslems in the urban area and 50,100 in the rural portion of the Hebron sub district.

[5] In his disposition after the riots he identified himself as Dr. Zwi Kitayin, Hadassah physician at Hebron. C.Z.A., S25/4601, Annex 72. Later he changed the spelling of his name to Kitain.

The Hadassah Clinic was housed in a building erected in 1909 by a Bagdadi Jew, Joseph Avraham Shalom, and the Sasson family for the Hesed Le'Avraham Hospital. Subsequently the structure was takan over by the Hadassah organization and called Beit Hadassah.

The clinic in Hebron is listed in the November 1919 report of the American Zionist Medical Unit (A.Z.M.U.), set up in 1918 by Hadassah and the American Zionist Organization. The A.Z.M.U. maintained hospitals in Jerusalem, Jaffa, Safed and Tiberias, as well as clinics in many towns and settlements. In 1921 the name was changed to Hadassah Medical Organization (H.M.O.). C.Z.A., Hadassah 1920 22, S30/2513.

Dr. Kitayin, in his statement, described the atmosphere of threats and danger on the eve of the riots and his work in caring for the wounded in the days that followed. See Appendix 2.

[6] Only five minutes before the mob reached the guest house, the Arab landlord "knocked and said to us: "Come out of here at once and go to my house. There you'll be safer." Statements of Shneerson and Kitayin, op. cit., Annexes 16 and 72.

The number of people who took refuge with him is verified by Dr. Kitayin. op. cit., S25/4601.

The known members of the group are the family of Haim Shneerson and his son Yehuda Leib, Dr. Zwi Kitayin, his wife Rivka and their two children, Gavriel and Elisheva, Dr. Leib Levit and Aharon Reuven and Breine Bernzweig. About half of the 33 were children.

[7] The name of the Arab was Haj Eissa El Kourdieh, who is included prominently in the three lists of Arabs identified shortly after the massacre as those who saved the lives of Jews. He lived in the same courtyard as the guest house and was its landlord. One of the women was his wife, Imm Mahmoud.

The most reliable of the lists, dated January 20, 1930, was attested to by the rabbis of the Ashkenazi and Sephardi communities, Yaacov Yosef Slonim and Meir Franco. It includes 19 rescuers and 270 rescued. Since the list underestimates the number in my grandfather's group by nine, we would estimate the total number of Jews saved by Arabs as 280 to 300. The number of Arab rescuers should also be increased by at least four or six to compensate for the omission of women from the list.

The other lists are unsigned and undated. The shorter of the two, naming 17 Arabs but omitting numbers for Jews, is entitled "Arabs of Hebron who behaved well towards Jews." This is apparently an earlier compilation that is referred to in a letter from Mordecai Eliash to the chairman of the Palestine Zionist Executive, Colonel Frederick H. Kisch, dated November 13, 1929, which states, "I attach a list of Arabs of Hebron who behaved well towards Jews."

The third list, which credits 32 Arabs with saving over 444 Jews, appears exaggerated. Only 430 Jews were alive and whole when assembled to the police station, and that number included a substantial number whose homes were not reached by the attackers, others who hid and were not discovered, and those who were overlooked as they lay among the bodies of the dead and wounded. See C.Z.A., The Riots in Palestine, August 1929, Arabs Who Assisted Jews, S25/3409 and List of Jews Protected by Moslems in Hebron, S25/4472.

[8] Other survivors add details: During the attacks two Arab women sat in front of the door and ground on millstones, whose shrill whine, together with the women's screams, helped to drown out the sounds of the crying children inside. Earlier, Imm Mahmoud handed her 10 year old son to the group as a hostage, to reassure them that she would not give them up. The mother coached the boy. When she would call out to him, "Are there any Jews inside with you?" he was to answer, "No, there are no Jews here. They all ran away."

The people inside heard one of the attackers shout out, "Today is a day that is holy to Mohammed. Anyone who does not kill Jews is a sinner." Dr. Kitayin and Shneerson, op. cit., Annexes 72 and 16. Oral interview wth Mrs. Rivka Kitain Mellor and her daughter, Mrs. Elisheva Greidinger, on August 24, 1989.

Edward Robbin, who went to Hebron three weeks later "with a convoy of refugees returning to their homes to bring the remnants of their possessions to Jerusalem," describes meeting a woman whom we recognize as Imm Mahmoud. "Opposite the Slonim house in front of what had been a hotel, a crowd of Jews had gathered about an Arab woman. To each one that approached they repeated the story of how she had saved twenty three [sic] people by bringing them into her house. People looked at the thin worn face of the Arab woman with awe." The Menorah Journal, XVII, 3 (December 1929), p.304.

[9] I remember hearing at the time that he suffered a heart attack.

[10] The second doctor was Dr. Leib Levit, the government veterinary surgeon in Hebron. Statement of Dr. Levit, C.Z.A., S25/4601, Annex 32.

[11] Eyewitness accounts report that police with rifles controlled the streets on Friday night. On Saturday morning, however, they were sent out armed only with clubs and quickly lost control of the mobs. Only when the police commander R.O. Cafferata himself was attacked did he order the police to be rearmed with rifles. They returned, fired shots into the air and the rioting immediately stopped. Op. cit., S25/4601, Statements of Rabbi Feivel Epstein of the Hebron Yeshiva, Annex 28; Yehoshua Hason, Annex 40; Rabbi Yaacov Yosef Slonim, Annex 6; Kitayin, Annex 72, and Shneerson, Annex 16.

[12] The rescued sat and slept on the floor, soaked with the blood of the wounded who had lain there earlier. For two days the British did not supply them with food. Only on Monday were they able to purchase half burned pitta and grapes. The police made no effort to clean the room until they heard that people were coming from Jerusalem to evacuate the women and children. Oded Avissar, ed., Sefer Hebron (Hebrew), (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1970), p. 419.

The police station was in the Romano House, a spacious building with dozens of rooms that was constructed by a Jew from Istanbul in the 1860's. During World War I the Turkish authorities confiscated the building. When the British took over the country they used the structure as a police station, courthouse and prison.

[13] [On Sunday night] "Crowds gathered at the [Hadassah] Hospital [on Straus Street] and waited for the wounded to be brought from Hebron. The [British] authorities ordered that they be transported in the dead of night when the streets would be empty. The next night the women and children refugees [and the elderly] were transported in buses. They brought them to the new Straus [Health Center] building....(This then would be the opening of the new building)....

As the buses stopped, a muffled hysterical crying, shouting, screaming. Half crazed women leaped from the autos, clutching their children tightly and moaning....

One little old woman had jumped out of the auto and started to run about silently among the crowd searching and whispering, "My children, have you seen my children?" Robbin, op. cit., p. 299.

[14] My grandfrather had invested his capital in mortgages and construction loans, especially in Bnai Brak, which was being developed in those years.

By Bryna & Paul Epstein of Rehovot, Israel, Dvora & Nathan Liebster, and Saadia & Lily Greenberg
in loving memory of Saadia, Bryna,& Dvora's great grandparents, Aharon Reuven and Breine Bernzweig, on the 91st anniversary of their miraculous deliverance, b'Chasdei Hashem, during the Hebron massacre
on Shabbat Parashat Eikev, 18 Menachem Av 5689 (August 24, 1929).

Parshas Eikev: Mosheh's Shiur, Part II

By Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

I. MOSHEH'S "SHIUR" CONTINUES…

As noted in the last two shiurim, Sefer D'varim is made up of three sections:
Chapters 1-11: Historical Recitation and Exhortation
Chapters 12-26: Laws
Chapters 27-33: Covenant and Blessing

In last week's shiur, we discussed the three lessons (and one significant interruption) which comprise the bulk of Parashat Va'et'hanan and form the first half of the "exhortative" component of Mosheh Rabbenu's speech. In that presentation, I argued that those three lessons are an integrated and "spiraling" educational experience, culminating in a description of the ideal relationship with God.
As we will soon discover, the "shiur" (instruction) which commences near the beginning of Parashat Va'et'hanan (D'varim 4:1) does not conclude with the climactic statement "Sh'ma Yisra'el" which "headlines" the final lesson; indeed, the shiur continues until the end of Parashat Ekev (11:21).

In order to understand the rest of Mosheh's "shiur", we will build on last week's presentation. First, a brief recap is in order.

II. A BRIEF RECAP

In last week's discussion, I suggested that each new component of Mosheh's "shiur" is marked by the introductory phrase "Sh'ma Yisra'el" (or "Yisra'el Sh'ma").

This phrase, found (in inverted form) at 4:1, introduces the first lesson: The nature of God and His incorporeality.

The same phrase, at 5:1, introduces the repetition of the Decalogue and, significantly, the story behind Mosheh's assuming the role of lawgiver. These two lessons are intertwined and somewhat interdependent, as each utilizes the national experience at Sinai as the foundation for the lesson.

"Sh'ma Yisra'el" appears a final time (in Va'et'hanan), at 6:4, in introducing our ideal relationship with God – "You shall love Hashem your God…".

In analyzing these three lessons, we noted the strange interruption (4:41-49) of the narrative of Mosheh's designation of the three (not-yet-functional) cities of refuge on the East Bank. I suggested that the basic lesson of the *Arei Miklat* – that intent plays a critical role in the performance of Mitzvot – was a valuable insight into the "inner workings" of the Torah. Mosheh, as the consummate teacher, interrupted his lesson to demonstrate a law which exemplifies the value of intent and attitude as vehicles for moral perfection.
Last week's discussion gave the impression that the "famous" "Sh'ma Yisra'el" (6:4) was the beginning of the final lesson in Mosheh's "shiur". As we will see further on, there are some more lessons that make up this "shiur"- and they take us nearly to the end of Parashat Ekev.

III. THE STRUCTURE OF OUR PARASHA

Parashat Ekev is made up of four distinct sections:

1) 7:12-8:20 – the "Ekev" section (another interruption between lessons)
2) 9:1-10:11 – the fourth lesson
3) 10:12-11:12 – the fifth lesson
4) 11:13-21 is a summary of the lessons (this section, along with the "epilogue" of our Parashah, 11:22-25 will not be addressed in this discussion.)

Although we will devote some space to the fourth and fifth lessons – including an explanation of how these divisions are evidenced in the text – the focus of this presentation will be on the "Ekev" interruption which begins our Parashah.

EVIDENCE FOR THE DIVISIONS

The division charted above could certainly be challenged – it does not break down by chapters or by Parashiot (paragraphs) – what evidence is there for the existence of this structure?

The easiest component to identify is the fourth lesson. Just as the first three lessons (in Parashat Va'Et'hanan) began with "Sh'ma

Yisra'el" (or "Yisra'el Sh'ma"), so does the fourth lesson: "Sh'ma Yisra'el…"

The fifth (and final) lesson in this series is also relatively easy to identify. Recall that the first lesson, beginning in D'varim 4:1, was introduced with the phrase "V'Atah Yisra'el Sh'ma…" – "And now, Yisra'el, pay heed…". The introductory phrase, "V'atah Yisra'el", is only found in two places in the Torah – at the beginning of Chapter 4 in D'varim and at D'varim 10:12. Although the word "Sh'ma" is missing (an omission which will be explained anon), this phrase which is otherwise a hapax legomenon [unmatched phrase in the T'nakh] seems to be a clear indicator of a new lesson being introduced.

IV. LESSONS FOUR AND FIVE

Before demonstrating the rest of the "structure", a word about these two lessons. It isn't merely the introductory phrases which indicate the beginning of a new lesson and, therefore, a separate component in the Parashah. The content and context of each section is independent in such a way as to be a clearly marked-off unit. Let's examine them together:

The unit beginning with 9:1 is a rather long speech (40 verses, several of which are extraordinary long) which is Mosheh's retelling of the sin of the Golden Calf and its aftermath. Although it includes two tangential verses (10:8-9) about the separation and sanctification of the Levi'im (marked off by the introductory "Ba'eit Hahee", compare 10:8 with 10:1), this is a part and parcel of the Golden Calf episode as it is the loyalty of the Levi'im which earned them their holy status (see Sh'mot 32:26).

Why is this unit here; i.e. what is Mosheh's purpose in relating this heinous crime within the context of this "shiur"?

In last week's shiur, I suggested that the entire purpose of Mosheh's shiur was to act as "shadchan" (matchmaker) between the B'nei Yisra'el and HaKadosh Barukh Hu. This is, quintessentially, the job of a Rebbi – to bring his students closer to God. As such, Mosheh began with a lesson about the nature of the Divine, using the Sinai experience to point out what their parents saw and what they did not see (physical images etc.). The second lesson justified Mosheh's role as lawgiver. The third lesson describes the ideal relationship between the people and God (loving God etc.). Consider what's "missing" from the formula: If I am interested in entering into a relationship with someone, be it a business partnership, an educational endeavor or what have you, I need to know several things. I must know as much as possible about the potential partner (lesson #1); I'll need to know the medium of the relationship (lesson #2 – Torah [given via Mosheh] is the medium of our relationship with God) and the ideal of that relationship (lesson #3). There is, of course, one more piece to the puzzle: Who am I? For me to successfully relate to another, I need to know something about my own nature, tendencies, strengths and weaknesses etc.; this knowledge is as critical (if not more so) than my knowledge about the potential partner. Similarly, the people had been informed about God – but needed to be reminded about how they had previously behaved in their relationship with God. Therefore, Mosheh must incorporate the story of the Golden Calf into his "shiur" which is aimed at bringing the B'nei Yisra'el into a full and complete relationship with God.

The final lesson is also a clear and independent unit. Although the opening formula lacks the familiar keyword "Sh'ma", there is good reason for that omission. Unlike the first four lessons, in which Mosheh is instructing them with information which is indispensable for the success of their national mission, the final lesson turns that instruction on its head and puts the B'nei Yisra'el in the "driver's seat". Now, instead of Mosheh telling them what they must do, he is inviting them to move beyond that which is demanded and commanded: "And now, Yisra'el, what does Hashem your God ask of you, but to fear Hashem your God, to walk in all His ways, and to love Him, and to serve Hashem your God with all your heart and with all your soul, To keep the commandments of Hashem, and His statutes, which I command you this day for your good?… Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiffnecked…You shall fear Hashem your God; Him shall you serve, and to Him shall you hold fast, and swear by His Name." (D'varim 10:12-20)

Until now, the B'nei Yisra'el were given prescriptions and proscriptions – commands and limitations. Although there had been allusions to a greater picture, that had never been laid out in such idealistic detail, nor presented as a challenge in place of a command. This fifth lesson is, indeed, a culmination of the "shiur", as it goes beyond the ideal relationship outlined in the third lesson ("Sh'ma…v'Ahavta…"). More than the command to internalize our love for God completely ("…with all of your heart…"), this final lesson invites us to rise above our base natures ("…circumcise the foreskin of your heart…") in terminology that is otherwise reserved for eschatological visions (e.g. D'varim 30:6, Yehezqe'el 36:26).

Although this final lesson includes the three verses about the Land (11:10-12), we will examine these from another perspective at the end of this presentation.

V. THE "EKEV" INTERRUPTION

As noted above, the first part of our Parashah (7:12-8:20) is something of an interruption – and it's identity as an independent and complete section is quite easy to see.

As we have discussed in earlier shiurim, the Torah utilizes all sorts of allusions, complicated structures and literary techniques to impart its messages. It is fundamental to the methodology of our classical interpretive tradition that uncommon words, especially when appearing in significant locations within a given text, have been deliberately placed there by the Author in order to catch our attention. This methodology is particularly helpful when that uncommon word shows up in a seemingly unrelated context – it is often the case that

the Torah is creating an association between the two cases in order to create an "information interface" between the two. In Halakhic exegesis, this methodology is known as "Gezerah Shavah"; however, our Rabbis did not limit its use to that discipline (see e.g. Beresheet Rabbah 44:14, Sh'mot Rabbah 9:7).

The second word (and key word) of our Parashah is an extremely rare one in the Torah. The word Ekev, commonly translated as "on account of" or "since", appears in only five locations in the Humash. Not only does our Parashah begin with an uncommon word – but one of the other four occurences of that word comes at 8:20 – "…Ekev lo Tish'm'un…" Taking into account the common style of "bookending" which the Torah employs (see our discussion on Parashiot Matot-Mas'ei) and the use of this all-too-rare word at both bookends, it is fairly clear that 7:12-8:20 have the potential of being an independent and self-contained unit.

As mentioned, this "structural analysis" only leaves us with a potentially unified section; we have yet to prove that the content and theme fit that bill.

VI. ANALYZING THE "EKEV" SECTION

Note that the Ekev section is broken up into three "open" paragraphs ("parashiot p'tuhot" – you can see this if you follow with a Tanakh, such as Koren, which breaks up paragraphs where there are "parashah" breaks):

7:12-26 – "v'Haya Ekev Tish'm'un…"

8:1-18 – "Kol haMitzvah…"

8:19-20 – "v'Haya Im Shakhoah Tishkah…"

The final mini-paragraph serves an obvious purpose. All of the blessings which are promised in the first 33 verses of this section will be reversed if the people do the opposite of the stated condition: "v'Haya Ekev Tish'm'un…". If you obey the Mitzvot, God will grant you security in the Land, success in conquest etc. The final two verses leave us without a "pareve" middle ground – if we forget God and do not listen ("…Ekev LO Tish'm'un…") then we will be destroyed.

What are we to make of the first two paragraphs, these 33 verses of condition and blessing?

In order to understand the impact of the "Ekev message" – and the reason it is divided into two separate parashiot – let's take a careful look at the two sections.
Although both 7:12-26 and 8:1-18 promise us a successful entry into the Land and no lack of material bounty if we obey God and remember His kindnesses, the focus is slightly different in each section.

The first section begins with "v'Hayah Ekev Tish'm'un eit haMishpatim ha'Eleh…" – "If you heed these Mishpatim…". However one chooses to translate the various words for Law – "Eduyot", "Hukkim" etc., "Mishpatim" almost certainly belong to the realm of civil law and social interaction (e.g. Sh'mot 21:1).

Conversely, the second section declares its emphasis right away: "Kol haMitzvah…" Although the word "Mitzvah" is usually considered a generic term for all commandments, in the context of the first third of D'varim it seems to take on a unique meaning: Those actions which reflect and enhance our close relationship with God. (See, e.g. D'varim 6:1, 11:22 – see also 30:11)

In the first section, we are told to remember the Exodus – that is, the very fact of our miraculous exit from Egypt.

In the second section, we are also told to remember the Exodus – but here, again, the emphasis shifts. We are told to remember: "Remember the long way that Hashem your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, in order to humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his Mitzvot. He humbled you by letting you hunger, then by feeding you with manna, with which neither you nor your ancestors were acquainted, in order to make you understand that one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of Hashem. The clothes on your back did not wear out and your feet did not swell these forty years…then do not exalt yourself, forgetting Hashem your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, who led you through the great and terrible wilderness, an arid wasteland with poisonous snakes and scorpions. He made water flow for you from flint rock, and fed you in the wilderness with manna that your ancestors did not know, to humble you and to test you, and in the end to do you good." (8:2-16)

As opposed to the actual liberation that we are told to recall in the first section, it is the fact of God sustaining us throughout the desert for forty years which is the topic of remembrance in the second section.

Finally, note how the Land is described in each paragraph.

In the first section, the emphasis is on the conquerability of the Land:

“Moreover, Hashem your God will send the pestilence against them, until even the survivors and the fugitives are destroyed. Have no dread of them, for Hashem your God, who is present with you, is a great and awesome God. Hashem your God will clear away these nations before you little by little; you will not be able to make a quick end of them, otherwise the wild animals would become too numerous for you. But Hashem your God will give them over to you, and throw them into great panic, until they are destroyed. He will hand their kings over to you and you shall blot out their name from under heaven; no one will be able to stand against you, until you have destroyed them.” (7:20-24)

Contradistinctively, the second paragraph ignores the military concerns regarding the Land and instead describes its beauty and bounty: “For Hashem your God is bringing you into a good land, a land with flowing streams, with springs and underground waters welling up in valleys and hills, a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, a land where you may eat bread without scarcity, where you will lack nothing, a land whose stones are iron and from whose hills you may mine copper. You shall eat your fill and bless Hashem your God for the good land that he has given you.” (8:7-10)

The three salient differences between these sections can be summed up in this chart:

Section – Laws – The Land – Remembrance

7:12-26 – Mishpatim – Conquerable – Exodus

8:1-18 – Mitzvot – Beautiful, Sustaining – 40 years in the desert

VII. THE AVRAHAM CONNECTION

As mentioned above, the keyword “Ekev” is extremely rare in the Torah. Understanding the implications of its use here will help us make sense of the entire Ekev section.

Besides the two occurences here and one (which will be discussed below) in Bamidbar, the only two instances of “Ekev” in the Torah are found within the Avraham narratives.

When Avraham demonstrates his complete devotion to God on Mount Moriah, he was given the most complete blessing of his life:
The angel of Hashem called to Avraham a second time from heaven, and said, “By Myself I have sworn, says Hashem: Because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will indeed bless you, and I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of their enemies, and by your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves, because (“Ekev”) you have obeyed My voice.” (B’resheet 22:15-18)

Later on, when Yitzhak considers following in his father’s footsteps and descending to Egypt to escape the famine plaguing K’na’an, we are told:

Now there was a famine in the land, besides the former famine that had occurred in the days of Avraham. And Yitzhak went to Gerar, to King Abimelech of the Philistines. Hashem appeared to Yitzhak and said, “Do not go down to Egypt; settle in the land that I shall show you. Reside in this land as an alien, and I will be with you, and will bless you; for to you and to your descendants I will give all these lands, and I will fulfill the oath that I swore to your father Avraham. I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven, and will give to your offspring all these lands; and all the nations of the earth shall gain blessing for themselves through your offspring, because (“Ekev”) Avraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws.” (B’resheet 26:1-5).
It must certainly be clear to all members of Mosheh Rabbenu’s audience that this rare word, opening and closing this section of his “shiur”, is intended to create an Avraham-assocation for us. But what is that association?
Given these two selections, we would assume that Avraham’s greatness lay chiefly in his total obedience to God and the spiritual heights he achieved. The scene at the Akeda is nothing if not the quintessence of devotional worship.

We are, however, provided another perspective of Avraham’s stature which gives us a broader view of his greatness:

Hashem said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, seeing that Abraham shall become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? No, for I have chosen him, that he may charge his children and his household after him to keep the way of Hashem by doing righteousness and justice; so that Hashem may bring about for Abraham what he has promised him.” (B’resheet 18:17-19)

As much as Avraham is a devotional worshipper, he is (perhaps even more) a man whose very soul speaks of righteousness, whose being is bound up with the pursuit of justice. Witness his negotiations with God regarding the fate of the evil cities of S’dom (ibid. 18:23-32).

The “Ekev” section in our Parashah is placed here to remind us of the dual nature of Avraham’s distinction: Lonely Man of Faith and Civic Man of Justice. (Avraham’s reputation is not only based on his success in both of these areas of moral growth – but also his ability

to synthesize them into one persona.)

Subsequent to teaching us about our ideal relationship with God (at the end of Parashat Va'et'hanan) and prior to reminding us of our potential for infidelity (9:1-10:11), Mosheh Rabbenu interjects a lesson which is grounded in our awareness of our earliest roots and the spiritual and ethical heights which our first Patriarch scaled.

Before addressing the dual messages of the "Ekev" section, we should briefly examine the one remaining occurrence of "Ekev" in the Torah:

"…nevertheless, as I live, and as all the earth shall be filled with the glory of Hashem, none of the people who have seen My glory and the signs that I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and yet have tested Me these ten times and have not obeyed My voice, shall see the land that I swore to give to their ancestors; none of those who despised Me shall see it. But My servant Kalev, because ("Ekev") he has a different spirit and has followed Me wholeheartedly, I will bring into the land into which he went, and his descendants shall possess it." (Bamidbar 14:21-24)

As we see throughout the story of the scouts, Kalev was willing to stand up to their derogation of the Land and publicly face his ten blasphemous colleagues. This is very much in the spirit of Avraham, who is called *Avram ha'Ivri* (B'resheet 14:13). He is given that name specifically within the context of his war against the four kings and our Rabbis explain the meaning as follows: The entire world was one one side (*Ever*) of the river and he was on the other side. (B'resheet Rabbah 42:8 – see also Yehoshua 24:2). In other words, it was Avraham's willingness to stand up against anyone and everyone to defend and promote monotheism and its attendant value system which earned him the title *Ivri*.

This is exactly the spirit which moved Kalev to stand up to the ten detractors of Eretz Yisra'e. The Torah uses the key word "Ekev" in his praise to link him to the valor of Avraham. [Might there be a connection here with Kalev's visit to Hevron and the Rabbinic tradition that he went to pray at Avraham's tomb?]

VIII. MISHPATIM AND MITZVOT

We can now revisit our "Ekev" section and explain the two separate paragraphs and their significant differences.

Perhaps the most telling distinction between "Mishpatim" and "Mitzvot" lies in their very nature. Whereas a Mitzvah (in the context of this part of Sefer D'varim) is an act which is part of a life-long process of spiritual development and sensitivity, a Mishpat is purely utilitarian and designed to promote the common weal.

It is abundantly clear why we must not steal, kill etc. and why we must pay workers on time, return lost items and so on. The extent to which a society is governed by these norms correlates closely to its material, social and spiritual well-being.

On the other hand, a person who engages in diligent Torah study, prays with great focus and generally observes those Mitzvot which fall under the rubric of "Ahavat Hashem" (Love of God), finds that the development of that relationship is a slow, arduous process. Each act of devotion is not an end in and of itself; it is rather a building block towards a closer relationship with haKadosh Barukh Hu.
In much the same spirit, we can distinguish between the two "remembrances" in this section. The matter of the Exodus itself, although performed with great wonders and portents, was essentially a utilitarian act. God desired to bring the people out of slavery and into their own Land – and that is exactly what He did.

Conversely, the Mahn (which is the object of remembrance in the second paragraph) was not a purely pragmatic "gift". The manner in which the B'nei Yisra'el were sustained throughout their desert sojourn was designed to enhance their awareness of the Ribbono Shel Olam on an ongoing basis: "In order to teach you that man does not live on bread alone, but that man may live on anything that Hashem decrees." (D'varim 8:3)

Note that the first paragraph promises us that if we (1) Remember the Exodus and (2) observe the Mishpatim, we will be successful in (3) Conquering the Land. The focus here is purely pragrmatic, following the lead of Avraham's "social-justice" agenda. (Keep in mind that it is within the context of war that Avraham earns his title of *Ivri*).

In the second paragraph, we are told that if we (1a) Remember the Mahn and (2a) observe the Mitzvot, we will (3) enjoy a beautiful and sustaining Land. Here, the focus is on the personal development of a relationship, the ongoing process of becoming more aware of God's role in our lives and the beauty and bounty of His Land.

IX. POSTSCRIPT

After completing his shiur, Mosheh adds three verses which describe the Land in even more glowing terms than those found in the "Ekev" section:
"For the land, which you enter to possess, is not as the land of Egypt, from where you came out, where you sowed your seed, and watered it with your foot, as a garden of vegetables; But the land, which you are going over to possess, is a land of hills and valleys, and

drinks water from the rain of the skies; A land which Hashem your God cares for; the eyes of Hashem your God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year." (11:10-12)

Beyond the pragmatic promise of conquest, beyond even the aesthetic beauty and bounty of the Land, we are given an even more powerful insight into the special place which God has reserved for His people. All of these blessings, including the development of an ideal relationship with God as outlined in Mosheh Rabbenu's "shiur", are only possible in that Land which God always watches, "from the beginning of the year to the end of the year."

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PARSHAT EKEV

Who 'stops' the rain?

According to Parshat Ekev (and what we recite every day in the second 'parshia' of 'kriyat shema'), the answer is God Himself. To better appreciate the Biblical significance of rain ['matar'], this week's shiur discusses the correlation between Divine Providence and the climate of the Land of Israel.

INTRODUCTION

In the beginning of Parshat Ekev, the land of Israel receives what appears to be a very positive assessment:

> "For the Lord your God is bringing you into a **good** land... a land of wheat and barley (...the 7 species) ...a land which lacks nothing..." (8:7-9).

Yet, later in the Parsha, the Torah describes the land of Egypt as much better:

> "For the land which you are about to conquer is **not like the land of Egypt**, from which you have come, where when you planted your field you watered it with your foot... The Land which you are about to conquer, a land of hills and valleys, receives its water from the rains (**matar**) of the heavens" (11:10-11).

So which land is better, and on what do we base this comparison? To answer this question, we take a closer look at various other instances where the Torah compares the Lands of Israel to the Land of Egypt.

THE FIRST 'FAUCET'

We begin our study with the Torah's 'strange' description of how one would water his field in the land of Egypt:

> "For [your] land is **not** like the land of Egypt... where you planted your field and **watered it with your foot**" (see 11:10).

For some reason, Egypt is described as a land that 'you water with your feet'? To appreciate this rather strange depiction, and how it forms the basis of Egypt's comparison to the land of Israel, we must review a few basic facts of world history.

In ancient times, civilizations developed along major rivers, as they provided not only a means of transportation, but also the necessary water for agriculture and consumption.

If was for this reason that Egypt (developing along the Nile) and Mesopotamia (developing along the Tigris and Euphrates) became two of the greatest centers of ancient civilization.

To enhance their agriculture, the Egyptians developed a sophisticated irrigation system by digging ditches from the Nile to their fields. Using this system to water his field, an Egyptian would open his local irrigation ditch by simply kicking away the dirt '**with his foot**'. To 'turn off' the water supply, he would use his foot once again to move the dirt to close the ditch. [Consider this the first 'faucet' system.]

This background explains why the Torah describes Egypt as a land 'watered by your feet' (see 11:10). In contrast, the Torah describes the land of Israel as:

> "The land that you are going now to inherit is a land of **hills & valleys**, which drinks from the **rains of Heaven**" (11:11).

In contrast to Egypt, Israel lacks a mighty river such as the Nile to provide it with a consistent supply of water. Instead, the agriculture in the Land of Israel is totally dependent on **rainfall**. Therefore, when it **does** rain, the fields are watered 'automatically'; however, when it does **not** rain, nothing will grow for the crops will dry out.

> [It should be noted that even though Israel does have a river, the Jordan - but it is located some 300 meters **below** sea level (in the Jordan Valley), and thus not very helpful to waterthe fields. In modern times, Israel has basically 'solved' this problem by pumping up the water from the Kinneret into a national water carrier.]

Hence, even though the land of Israel may have a slight advantage over Egypt when it does rain [see Rashi 11:10], from an agricultural perspective the land of Egypt has a clear advantage [see Ramban 11:10]. Furthermore, any responsible family provider would obviously prefer the 'secure' option - to establish his home in Egypt, instead of opting for the 'risky' Israeli alternative.

So why is the Torah going out of its way to tell us that Egypt is better than Israel, especially in the same Parsha where the Torah first tells us how Israel is a 'great' land, missing nothing! (See 8:9!) Furthermore, why would Moshe Rabbeinu mention this point to Bnei Yisrael specifically at this time, as they prepare to enter their land.

To answer these questions, we must re-examine these psukim in their wider context.

THREE PARSHIOT RELATING TO THE FEAR OF GOD

Using a Tanach Koren (or similar Chumash), take a look at the psukim that we have just quoted (i.e. 11:10-12), noting how these three psukim form their own 'parshia'. Note however how this short 'parshia' begins with the word 'ki' - 'for' or 'because' - which obviously connects it thematically to the previous parshia:10:12-11:9. Therefore, we must first consider the theme of this preceding 'parshia' and then see how it relates to our topic.

Let's begin by taking a quick look at the opening psukim of that 'parshia', noting how it introduces its theme very explicitly:

> "And now, O Israel, what is it that God demands of you? It is to **fear** ('yir'a') the Lord your God, to walk in his ways and to love Him... Keep, therefore, this entire 'mitzva'... that you should conquer the Land..." (see 10:12-14).

As you continue to read this parshia (thru 11:9), you'll also notice how this topic or the 'fear of God' continues, as it is emphasized over and over again.

Hence, the theme of our short 'parshia' (11:10-12), where the Torah compares the land of Israel to Egypt, must somehow be related to the theme of **Yir'at Hashem** (fearing God). But what does the water source of a country have to do with the fear of God?

To answer this question, we must read the Torah's conclusion of this comparison (in the final pasuk of our 'parshia'):

> "It is a land which the Lord your God **looks after** ('doresh otah'), on which Hashem always keeps His eye, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year" (11:12).

This pasuk informs us that God Himself takes direct control over the rain that falls in the Land of Israel! In contrast to Egypt where the water supply from the Nile is basically **constant**, the water supply in Israel is **sporadic,** and hence more clearly a vehicle of God's will. Considering that one's survival in the Land of Israel is dependent on rain, and the rain itself is dependent on God's will, then to survive in the land of Israel,one must depend on God - a dependence which should have a direct affect on one's level of **Yir't Hashem**!

WHO STOPPED THE RAIN?

In this manner, the Land of Israel is not better than Egypt, rather it is **different** - for its agriculture is more clearly dependent on the abundance of rain. A good rainy season will bring plenty, while a lack of rain will yield drought and famine. Hence, living in a land with this type of 'touchy' rainy season, dependent on God's will, should reinforce one's fear of God.

The next 'parshia' [i.e. ve-haya im shamo'a...' (11:13-21), the second parshia of daily 'kriyat shema'] not only supports this theme, it forms its logical conclusion:

> "If you obey the commandments... I will grant the rain (matar) for your land in season... then you shall eat and be satisfied...
> Be careful, lest you be lured after other gods... for Hashem

will be angry ... and He will shut up the skies and there will be no rain (matar)..." (see 11:13-16).

Thus, according to Sefer Devarim, the matar that falls in the land of Israel acts not only as a 'barometer' of Am Yisrael's faithfulness to God, but also serves as a vehicle of divine retribution. God will use this matar to 'communicate' with His nation. Rainfall, at the proper time, becomes a sign that is pleased with our 'national behavior', while drought (i.e. holding back the matar) becomes a sign of divine anger.

So which land **is** better? The answer simply depends on what one is looking for in life. An individual striving for a closer relationship with God would obviously prefer the Land of Israel, while an individual wary of such direct dependence on God would obviously opt for the more secure life in Egypt ['chutz la-aretz'].

To support this interpretation, we will now show how the connection between matar and Divine Providence had already emerged as a Biblical theme back in Sefer Breishit.

BACK TO AVRAHAM AVINU

At the onset of our national history, we find a very similar comparison between the lands of Egypt and Israel.

Recall, that when God first chose Avraham Avinu, commanding him to uproot his family from Mesopotamia and travel to the land of Canaan (see 12:1-3), his nephew Lot was consistently mentioned as Avraham's 'travel partner' (see 12:4-6 & 13:1-2). As Avraham was childless and Lot had lost his father, it would only be logical for Avraham to assume that Lot would become his successor. Nevertheless, after their return from a trip to Egypt, a quarrel broke out between them, which ultimately led to Lot's 'rejection' from Avraham's 'chosen family'.

One could suggest that the Torah's description of these events relates directly to this Biblical theme of matar. To show how, let's begin with the Torah's description of that quarrel:

"And Avraham said to Lot, let there not be a quarrel between us... if you go to the **right** [=south], I'll go to the left [=north] (& vice versa)..." (see Breishit 13:8-9).

[Note that Avraham suggested that Lot choose either North or South (13:8-9), not East or West as is often assumed! See Targum Unkelos which translate right & left as 'south' or 'north' (see also Seforno). Throughout Chumash 'yemin' always refers to the south, kedem - east, etc.]

In other words, Avraham Avinu, standing in Bet El (see 13:3), is offering Lot a choice between the mountain ranges of 'Yehuda' (to the south) or the hills of the 'Shomron' (to the north). To our surprise, Lot chooses neither option! Instead, Lot prefers to divorce himself from Avraham Avinu altogether, choosing the Jordan Valley instead. Note, however, the connection between Lot's decision to 'go east' and his most recent experience in Egypt:

"Then Lot lifted up his eyes and saw the whole plain of Jordan, for it was all well watered (by the Jordan **River**)... just like the Garden of the Lord, **like the land of Egypt**..." (13:10-12).

After his brief visit to Egypt (as described at the end of chapter 12), it seems as though Lot could no longer endure the hard life in the 'hills and valleys' of the Land of Israel. Instead, Lot opts for a more secure lifestyle along the banks of the Jordan River, similar to the secure lifestyle in Egypt by the banks of the Nile River.

[Note especially how the Torah (in the above pasuk) connects between this river valley and the 'Garden of the Lord', i.e. Gan Eden (for it was set along four rivers, see Breishit 2:9-14).]

Lot departs towards Sdom for the 'good life', while Avraham Avinu remains in Bet El, at the heart of the Land of Israel (see 13:14-16, see also previous TSC shiur on Matot / Mas'ei).

Rashi, commenting on Breishit 13:11, quotes a Midrash which arrives at a very similar thematic conclusion:

"Va-yisa Lot mi-kedem... [Lot traveled from kedem] - He traveled **away** from He who began the Creation ('kadmono shel olam'), saying, I can no longer endure being with Avraham nor with his God" ("iy efshi, lo be-Avraham, ve-lo be-Elokav").

As Rashi alludes to, this quarrel between Avraham and Lot stemmed from a conflict between two opposite lifestyles:

* A life striving for a dependence (and hence a relationship) with God (=Avraham Avinu);
* A life where man prefers to be independent of God (=Lot).

The path chosen by Avraham Avinu leads to 'Bet El' - the house of God, while the path chosen by Lot leads to 'Sdom'- the city of corruption (see 13:12-13).

BACK TO THE CREATION

This Biblical theme of matar is so fundamental, that it actually begins at the time of Creation! Recall how the Gan Eden narrative (i.e. Breishit 2:4-3:24) opens with a very peculiar statement in regard to matar:

"These are the generations of Heavens and Earth from their Creation... And no shrub of the field had yet grown in the land and no grains had yet sprouted, because Hashem had not yet sent rain (matar) on the land, nor was there **man** to work the field..." (Breishit 2:4-5).

It is rather amazing how this entire account of Creation begins with a statement that nothing could grow without matar or man!

Furthermore, this very statement is rather odd, for it appears to contradict what was stated earlier (in the first account of Creation [= 'perek aleph'] which implies that water was just about everywhere (see1:2,6,9 etc.).

Finally, this very statement that man is needed for vegetation to grow seems to contradict what we see in nature. As we all know shrubs and trees (and especially weeds) seem to grow very nicely even without man's help. Yet, according to this opening pasuk of the second account of Creation - nothing could grow without this combination of matar and **man**.

Nonetheless, Chumash emphasizes in this opening statement that both man and matar are key factors in the forthcoming story of creation. To appreciate why, we must first very briefly review our conclusions in regard to the comparison between the two accounts in Sefer Breishit.

The first account [perek aleph] focused on God's creation of all 'nature' in seven days. God's Name - 'Elokim' - reflected its key point that all **powers** of nature - that appear to stem from the powers of various gods - are truly the Creation of One God. To remind ourselves of this key point, we are commanded to refrain from all creativity once every seven days. ['olam ha-teva']

In contrast, the second account ['perek bet'] - focused on the special relationship between man and his Creator, as reflected in its special environment - Gan Eden - created by God for man to work and keep. In that environment, man is responsible to follow God's laws, and His Name ['shem Havaya'] reflects His presence and involvement ['olam ha-hitgalut'].

[See TSC shiur on Parshat Breishit.]

Therefore, this opening pasuk - emphasizing the relationship between matar and man - must relate in some manner to the special relationship between man and God.

The Midrash (quoted by Rashi), bothered by this peculiarity, offers a very profound interpretation, explaining this connection:

"Ki lo himtir...' And why had it not yet rained? ... because "adam ayin a'avod et ha-adama", for man had not yet been created to work the field, and thus no one had yet recognized the significance of rain. And when man was created and recognized their importance, **he prayed for rain**. Then the rain fell and the trees and the grass grew..." (see Rashi 2:5).

This interpretation reflects the very same theme that emerged in our discussion of matar in Parshat Ekev. According to this Rashi,

God created man towards the purpose that he recognize God and His Creations. From this perspective, matar emerges as a vehicle to facilitate that recognition.

The reason for this may stem from the very meaning of the word matar. Note that matar does not mean only 'rain'. Rather, the 'shoresh' - 'lehamtir' - relates to anything that falls from heaven to earth. Rain is the classic example; but even 'bread' or 'fire', when they fall from heaven, are described by the Bible as matar.

[In regard to bread, see Breishit 19:24 re: the story of Sedom, "Ve-Hashem **himtir** al Sedom gofrit va-eish min ha-shamayim". In relation to fire coming from heaven, see Shmot 16:4 re: the manna: "hineni **mamtir** lachem lechem min ha-shamayim").]

When man contemplates Creation, there may appear to be an unbridgeable gap between 'heaven' and 'earth'. Man must overcome that gap, raising his goals from the 'earthly' to the 'heavenly'. In this context, matar - a physical proof that something in heaven can come down to earth - may symbolize man's potential (and purpose) to bridge that gap in the opposite direction, i.e. from 'earthly' to 'heavenly'.

Hence, Biblical matar emerges as more than just a type of water, but more so as a symbol of a potential connection between the heavens and earth, and hence between God and man.

In the special spiritual environment created by the climate of the Land of Israel, as described in Parshat Ekev, matar serves as a vehicle by which Am Yisrael can perfect their relationship with God. Even though others lands may carry a better potential for prosperity, the Land of Israel becomes an 'ideal' environment for the growth of this spiritual environment,

shabbat shalom,
menachem

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FOR FURTHER IYUN:

A. Relate the famous Midrash Chazal of 'ein mayim ela Torah' [- the true water is really the Torah] to the above shiur.

B. Note how the word matar appears in relation to the Flood in Breishit 7:4-5. Based on the above shiur and our shiur on 'perek aleph & bet' (on Parshat Breishit), attempt to explain why.

C. In the psukim by Lot, the Nile and Jordan rivers are compared to the rivers of Gan Eden.
1. Does this indicate that there may be a positive aspect to the supply of water by a River?
2. Why should a river be appropriate for Gan Eden, while rain is more appropriate for Eretz Yisrael?
3. Relate this to Zecharaya 14:7-9 & Yechezkel 47:1-12!

D. Throughout the time period of the Shoftim, and even during the time period of the First Monarchy, many Israelites worshipped the 'Ba'al' - the Canaanite rain god.
1. Relate the nature of this transgression to the above shiur.
2. Relate this to the mishnayot of Masechet Ta'anit, which requires national fast days should rain not fall in sufficient quantities early in the rainy season.
3. Relate to Kings I 17:1 & 18:21 and context of perek 18!

E. In last week's shiur we noted that the 'mitzva' section of the main speech includes 'mitzvot' given originally during Ma'amad Har Sinai, as well as 'tochachot' added in the 40th year by Moshe Rabbeinu.
1. Show textually why from 8:1 till 10:11 must be an 'addition' of the 40th year, while 6:4-7:26 is most likely 'original'! Prove your answer. Use Shmot 23:20-33 in your proof!
2. 10:12-11:21. Would you say that these parshiot are also 'additions' or originals, or possibly a combination. Support your answer, and relate it to the above shiur!

F. The story of chet ha-egel is repeated in chap 9.
1. In what context is this story now being brought down.
Relate to 9:4-6, and especially to 'ki am ksheh oref ata' (9:6).
Relate also to 9:7
2. What other examples of this behavior are cited in this perek?
3. Based on this observation, explain why the story about chet ha-egel is broken up in the middle by psukim 9:22-23, and later by 10:6-9.
4. What is the primary theme of this short 'tochacha'?

G. Read 9:25-29 carefully. Is this simply a review of Moshe's request that God invoke His 'midot ha-rachamim" after the incident of chet ha-egel, or do you find a theme from 'chet ha-meraglim' as well? Support your answer by comparing Shmot chapter 34:1-9 and Bamidbar 14:11-25.

Based on the context of chapter 9, can you explain why?