

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**A**nd Hashem did not give you a heart to know or eyes to see or ears to hear until this day” (Devarim 28:3). What occurred on “that day” that changed things, allowing them to “know, see and hear?” Rashi tells us that he heard that this was said on the day that Moshe gave the actual Torah scrolls to the Tribe of Levi. The rest of the nation was upset that it was not given to them too, concerned that it meant - or would be taken in the future to mean- that they had less of a right to it. “And Moshe rejoiced over this, and on this he said that ‘today you have become a nation to Hashem your G-d’ (27:9) - today I understood that you are attached to, and desirous of, G-d.” Seeing the nation fight for its right to share in the Torah made Moshe realize how much they really wanted it.

However, even if that was the day that Moshe finally realized that they were fully committed to G-d and His Torah, that doesn’t mean that it was actually the day they committed to it! Their demanding that Moshe give them Torah scrolls too may have been what made it *known* that they were so committed, but the commitment was probably there even before they were forced to show how strongly they felt about it! Why does Moshe equate his *realizing* that they were “attached to and desirous of G-d” with their *actually* being attached to Him?

One possibility might have been that the need to fight for their share in the Torah was the catalyst for creating, or at least increasing, their commitment to it. But if that were the case, Rashi would not have paraphrased Moshe as saying that “today I understood” how attached you are, but that today you actually became (more) attached via your reaction to the Torah scrolls being initially given to just the one Tribe. How did Moshe’s *realization* affect the *actual* level of commitment?

Moshe and the nation had been through a lot together, from the glory of Hashem’s miracles to the disappointments surrounding their mistakes. One of the lowlights was at “mei merivah,” where Moshe hit the

rock instead of talking to it. But that situation was unique in that it was Moshe who disappointed, while the nation was not blamed for what happened. Rabbeinu Yaakov from Lisa (the “Nesivos,” in Nachalas Yaakov) explains that Moshe’s mistake was in his underestimating the spiritual level the nation was on. (In a nutshell, Moshe knew that if they were worthy he should talk to the rock to bring out spiritual water similar to the spiritual bread -the mun - that they were eating, but if they were not worthy he should hit the rock to bring out regular water. He thought they were unworthy, so hit the rock, when in fact they were ready to attain the higher levels the spiritual water would have provided had he spoken to it instead.) His underestimating where they were not only cost him his chance to enter the Promised Land, but also prevented the nation from reaching even higher levels.

Sefer Devarim is primarily the last speeches that Moshe gave to the nation before his death - his final words of encouragement, direction and advice about how they should, and must, proceed. The words he used, the ideas he shared, were based on how he perceived they would best be received. Therefore, after realizing how strong the nation’s commitment *really* was towards G-d and His Torah, Moshe was able to tailor his message to this even-holier-than-he-thought people. Seeing them fight for their share in the Torah was the catalyst for Moshe’s helping bring them even higher, so it was specifically on “this day,” when Moshe finally understood how attached to G-d they really were, that he was able to bring them to the level of really “knowing, seeing and hearing” G-d’s presence among them.

The same is true for all leadership. An organization cannot be set up to help people properly if it over- or under-estimates those it is trying to serve. A teacher that talks above the students’ heads ends up teaching them very little, while missing the chance to give over much more if the lesson is kept too simple.

As we move through Elul towards Rosh Hashanah, our task is to both look back at what we’ve done (so that we can improve upon it) and to look ahead to see what we can do to get the most out of the coming year. If a certain kind of program (whether a learning program, a lecture series, or a program to help those in need) would be beneficial to our spiritual growth, we can’t expect it to just appear so that we can take part in it. Speak to the leadership, so that after realizing that the interest is there they can organize such a program.

This issue of **Toras Aish** is dedicated to
“Inigo” and “Wesley”
 on the occasion of their marriage
“We love you and we’re very proud of you!”

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Our spiritual success in the coming year is very dependent on how well our leaders understand what we want to accomplish, and how much we want to accomplish it. We must communicate these desires to them, so that they can help us "know, see and hear" more in 5766 than we did in 5765. © 2005 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Get With the Times

When a tree bears its first fruits, the Torah tells us this week to bring them to Jerusalem. They are presented to the Kohen (priest) whom the Torah describes as "the Kohen who will be there in those days." (Deuteronomy 26:3) Rashi is bothered by that description. After all, he asks, should you bring it to a Kohen from fifty years ago?

This is not the only instance where the Torah describes a spiritual mentor as one "who will be there in those days." Two weeks earlier, as the Torah discusses the laws of Shoftim (Judges), the same expression is used. Deuteronomy 17:9 "If you will have an argument or quarrel and would like to adjudicate it, than you shall present your case to a judge who will preside in those days." Rashi is also bothered in that instance by the obvious question, "would you expect the litigants to approach a judge who is not alive in those days? What does the Torah mean, 'who will be there in those days?'" Rashi in both instances offers a beautiful explanation. He explains that there are those who say about today's Rabbis-"This is a Rabbi? I remember Rabbis who could quote the entire Rambam in their sleep! I remember the pious and holy sages of previous generations. Today's Rabbi's pale in comparison!" the Torah cautions us that nevertheless one must heed the command of the Rabbis of your generation. You have other judges or Kohens of your time." You must afford them the authority and honor as was given to the judges and priests of the previous generations.

I heard a beautiful insight on a different vein. 1 The Torah is speaking not only to the people, chiding them about attitudes toward their Rabbis, it is also chiding the Rabbis in their attitudes toward congregants. The Torah says that the Kohen and the judge "will be in your day." The Torah is warning the Rabbonim (Rabbis), "you must dwell in the same

generation as your congregations." It may be easy for a Rav to live in the past century, in the delusion that the world is simple and that the temptations of the outside world do not affect his congregation. The Torah says, No. A Rav is one who lives in your day! He is someone who knows the times.

When my grandfather, Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky of blessed memory, was the Rav of Tzitivyan, Lithuania, a younger colleague approached him for advice. His friend was just appointed the Rav of a small town in Hungary. The scholar was not familiar with any of their particular customs and rituals and approached Reb Yaakov, who was known for his broad knowledge of Jewish communal life. Reb Yaakov peered up from the table and with a smile he slowly asked. "Du vaist ve azoi tzu shpillin poker?" (Do you know how to play poker?) The young scholar looked at Rav Yaakov in disbelief. "Poker?" "Yes," answered Reb Yaakov. "In that town the people play weekly poker games. They will come to you with their quarrels and disputes. They will expect a ruling. It is incumbent upon you to know what to answer."

Many times, after raising a certain problem that cannot be resolved, the Gemara concludes with the expression teiku That acronym means that this question is so difficult that only Eliyahu HaNavi (Elijah the Prophet) will decipher it. Reb Levi Yitzchok of Berditchev2 asked, with deference to Eliyahu, are there no greater masters of Jewish Law? Moses? Solomon? Elijah was known for piety not erudition? Reb Levi Yitzchok answers, our Rabbis tell us that Eliyahu never died; instead he lives on in every generation. That being the case, he is the one who can understand because he is part of the twentieth century! He understands the nineties as well as the 1950's and the 1650's. He is the Rav of "your time." He understands the questions in the light of each generation and only he can give us the proper answer. May those answers come soon! © 1995 by Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

This week's portion includes the law of viduy ma'asrot-confession of the tithes.

According to the Torah, tithes are taken from the crops in three year cycles. In each of these two cycles, one-tenth of the produce was given to the Levi who serves in the temple (ma'aser rishon). An additional tenth is consumed in Jerusalem during the first second fourth and fifth years (ma'aser sheni). In the third and sixth year, the second tenth is set aside for the poor (ma'aser ani). After two of these cycles fully take place, the sabbatical year (the seventh year) occurs when no tithe is taken at all.

The law of viduy ma'asrot states that on the last day of Passover, in the fourth and seventh years, the owner of the crops comes forward to declare that during

the previous years he had been faithful to his tithe obligation.

In the words of the Torah; "then you shall say before the Lord your G-d, 'I have removed the holy things from the house (ma'aser sheni) and I also have given it to the Levite (ma'aser rishon), to the proselyte, to the orphan and to the widow (ma'aser ani), according to whatever commandment you have commanded me.'" (Deuteronomy 26:13) Indeed, if the owner has failed to give ma'aser correctly, he has the opportunity to complete the obligation at this time. (Rashi, Deuteronomy 26:13)

Interestingly, although the term viduy, confession, is not found in the Biblical text, these laws are commonly referred to as viduy ma'asrot. What does confession have to do with this practice?

Seforno argues that the confession is not directly linked to the tithe process, but rather with the original sin of the golden calf. Had that event not occurred, the first born rather than the Priest or Levite would have undertaken the mission to perform divine service in one's home. It follows that only because of the golden calf did the need arise to give to the Priest or Levite.

Another thought comes to mind. It is, of course, possible that upon reciting the formula, one honestly forgot to give ma'aser. Or on the conscious level, there was no intent to violate the law. On the subconscious level, if one didn't give ma'aser, it may show a deep reluctance to part with the produce altogether.

Could it be that ma'aser, the giving of one's produce to others, is deemed so difficult that if missed even once it is suspected that the missing was intentional.

The practice is, therefore, called viduy as each owner comes before G-d, searching out the inner intent of his soul. If a mistake was made, there is concern that even if, on the surface it seemed unintentional-deep down it was intentional.

An appropriate reading just weeks before the introspective days of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur - where we struggle to be honest with ourselves and discern the fine line between sins committed without intention and those committed with malice. © 2000 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA

YESHIVAT BEIT OROT

Orot Haparsha

From the teachings of Rav Dani Isaac, Rosh Hayeshiva

Our parsha presents us with the curses – if, G-d forbid, we do not listen to the voice of Hashem our G-d, to observe and perform all his commandments and statutes (according to Devarim, xxviii, 15) – alongside several mentions of rejoicing. The opening of the parsha deals with the bringing of the bikurim [first fruits] to Jerusalem, stating: "And you shall

rejoice in all the good that Hashem your G-d has given you and your household..."(xxvi, 11). As is well known, the bringing of the bikurim involved a very special and highly emotional ceremony that climaxed with the bringing of the first fruits to the Beit Mikdash. The Rambam (Hilkhos Bikurim, iv, 16) writes: "And at dawn the one in charge says, 'Arise and we will go up to Zion, to the house of Hashem our G-d,' and the ox went before them and its horns were coated with gold and a crown of olives was on its head, to make known that the bikurim come from the seven species, and the flute was played before them until they came close to Jerusalem, and they continued all the way and read, 'I rejoiced when they said to me, let us go to the house of Hashem'...and the flute was played before them until they reached the Temple Mount...and they say, 'praise G-d, praise the Lord in His holiness.'" The Rambam rules (law 13): "Whoever brings bikurim from after the festival of Sukkot until Chanukah, even though he set them aside before the festival, he brings them but does not recite, as it says, 'And you shall rejoice in all the good' – reciting can only be performed at a time of rejoicing, from the festival of Shavuot until after the festival [of Sukkot]." The continuation of the parsha deals with the "confession of tithes" [vidui ma'asrot], in which it states, "I did not eat from it in my mourning" (xxvi, 14) – "from here we learn that it is forbidden to a mourner" (Rashi). "The mourner who is filled with sorrow over the death of his relative, if he is a regular priest he is forbidden to serve or eat holy food, and the same is the case here regarding Ma'aser Sheni [the second tithe] (including the bikurim and the fruit of the fourth year), that they may not be eaten in a state of mourning" (R. Shimshon Hirsch). Later the Torah commands that the people of Israel when they cross the Jordan, "(You) shall set up large stones and plaster them with plaster" (xxvii, 2), and concludes with: "And you shall sacrifice peace-offerings and eat there and you shall rejoice before Hashem your G-d" (7).

In the middle of the curses the Torah says, "Because you did not serve Hashem your G-d with joy and with gladness of heart, from an abundance of everything" (xxviii, 47). The Rambam learns from this pasuk (Hilkhos Lulav, viii, 15): "The joy that a person rejoices in the performance of a mitzvah and in the love of the G-d who commanded them is a great service, but whoever refrains himself from this rejoicing deserves to be punished as it says, 'Because you did not serve Hashem your G-d with joy and with gladness of heart.'"

The parsha opens, "And it shall be when you come to the land that Hashem your G-d is giving to you for an inheritance, and you possess it and dwell in it" (xxvi, 1). The Or Chayim explains: "It says, 'And it shall be' – a term signaling rejoicing – to point out that there should be no rejoicing except in the settling of the land, in the same manner as it states, 'then our mouths shall be filled with laughter.'" The words of the Or Chayim are to be understood according to the Midrash Rabbah:

"Rabbi Shmuel Bar Nachman arrived and said, 'In any place where it says 'And it was [veyehi]' it signals distress; 'And it shall be [vehaya]' [signals] rejoicing.'"

It can be suggested that in our parsha, which features the curses that lead to depression and perhaps despair, G-d forbid, the Torah especially emphasizes rejoicing on a number of occasions, to teach us that if we correct our ways we will be able to live in wholeness, G-d willing, and complete joy will rest on our dwellings. A person is obligated to sanctify himself and raise himself to a status of rejoicing in mitzvot as "rejoicing is the feeling of inner perfection of the upright soul as it senses the integrity of its ways and its goodness" (Rav Kook, Olat Ra'ayah I, p. 29). Therefore when a person repents "a powerful rejoicing should clothe the soul of every man for whom the light of repentance lights up his soul. Yet one must make sure that this true rejoicing and the pleasantness of these holy features does not cancel out fear [of Hashem], G-d forbid, but rather the opposite – it should increase the essential force of the soul's watchfulness and zeal" (Letters of the Ra'ayah, section 8).

Unfortunately, there are some who confuse rejoicing, which is spiritual, with pleasure, which is physical. When they are having fun they are sure they are rejoicing, but this is not the case. When the bikurim are brought, "the ox went before them," symbolizing the powerful working tools with which we plough and work the land, "and its horns were coated with gold," teaching us that we do not negate material wealth if it is earned through labor and integrity. Our task, however, does not end there, for "a crown of olives was on its head," the olive oil that signifies the light of Torah and knowledge, like the oil of the Menorah in the Mikdash, implying that the purpose of the ox and gold is wisdom. In this situation all the forces of the world connect to the Divine purpose and as a result "you shall rejoice in all the good."

We have learnt that the service of Hashem should be performed with joy and gladness of heart. One would have thought that the practical fulfillment of the mitzvot is the main thing, why must we also rejoice in this service? (it is interesting that the Rambam, the great "rationalist," demands of us that our service of Hashem should be out of rejoicing, a deeply emotional existence). It can be said, however, that Hashem does not want us to serve Him through the subjugation of our powers, but rather the opposite – the mitzvot are a profound expression of our identity and this constitutes true service, for without this aspect all is fake and superficial. The requirement is a double one, including both joy and gladness of heart. As Rav Kook explains ("The Teaching of your Father," i, 5), it is possible to have joy without gladness of heart, which is undesirable, as well as gladness of heart without joy, which is also undesirable. There are many who understand that Hashem must be served in joy and forced themselves to act in joy (similar to the song's

famous words, 'we must rejoice') but did not develop this quality gradually in their minds so as to reach the proper state of joy in the service of Hashem. Thus, even though the spirit of joy enters his heart, his heart does not feel good to him, for he does not really desire this joy and he is not comfortable with it but discharges it like an obligation. There is another situation in which his heart really feels good in the service of Hashem, as he recognizes that the Master of all is worthy of being served, but he does not recognize that the service of Hashem involves an encounter with the word of Hashem which is actually above his level and yet Hakadosh Baruch Hu allows him to connect to it, and for this one should rejoice. We learn from this that the Torah demands from us a connection from the inside of our hearts to the Divine greatness, and this truly is our self-perfection.

The perfection that brings us true joy results from the unity of all physical and spiritual life-forces in purity, and this perfection can be reached only in Eretz Yisrael, whose unique qualities connect the physical and spiritual, which is why, "there should be no rejoicing except in the settling of the land," as the Or Chayim puts it.

In xxviii, 1 the Torah states: "And it shall be, if you shall surely listen to the voice of Hashem your G-d, to observe and perform all the commandments that I am commanding you today..." Earlier (xi, 13) we already found a similar formulation: "And it shall be, if you shall surely listen to My commandments that I am commanding you today, to love Hashem your G-d." Perhaps we can continue the approach of the Or Chayim and say that we must rejoice in the performance of the mitzvot, since "And it shall be" denotes rejoicing.

In two places the Torah emphasizes the listening that implies an internalizing, an acceptance into our interior lives (as we have explained on a number of occasions), which leads to an identification of life with mitzvot and makes a person truly joyful.

Moreinu VeRabbenu Rav Zvi Yehudah explains that "And it shall be [vehaya]" implies gladness because "haya" is in the past tense whereas "vehaya" is in the future tense (the grammatical rule of the "reversing vav" [vav hahipuch]). The future is perfect and lofty, whereas the past – the actual realization of affairs – is always inferior and deficient, which is why when a person succeeds in providing the past with the greatness of the future it is a subject of very great rejoicing. This why "And it was [vayehi]" implies distress, as "yehi" is in the future tense and "vayehi" is in the past. When the future appears as the lowly and diminutive past it signals great distress. This tension between the great future and reality is necessary, as Rav Kook says: "A gap must exist between the content of the abstract ideal of the purpose of everything and the part of it that is actualized in reality...were it not for this gradual differentiation the form of all activity would be blurred, reality would lose its

character, and statutes and boundaries would not be preserved" (Orot, p. 132).

Our task is to connect future ideals to present reality, to the extent that the world is capable of absorbing them. This is achieved through the fulfillment of mitzvot with an inner, perfect connection, through listening to the word of Hashem.

This path cannot be traversed in one go, but rather gradually, bit by bit. This is why Rashi, in his explanation of pasuk 11, states: "'And it shall be if you shall surely listen' – if you listen to the old, you will listen to the new." In other words, out of a connection to what already exists, additional progress towards something new is possible, and if this results from true listening then "the old will be renewed and the new will be sanctified."

When we merit a return to Eretz Yisrael we are commanded to continue to raise the Torah through inner service and through joy, and then we will merit, Be'ezrat Hashem, the fulfillment of "And all the peoples of the earth shall see that the name of the Lord is called upon you, and they shall be afraid of you" (xxviii, 10).

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RABBI MORDECAI KORNFELD

Parasha Page

Rebbi Shimon ben Elazar said: Ezra [the scribe] instituted for the nation of Yisroel, the public reading of the curses pronounced against sinners in Torat Cohanim [Vayikra 26:14-43] before Shavuot, and those of Mishne Torah [Devarim 28:15-68] before Rosh Hashana. Why is that? Abaye- or perhaps Resh Lakish-said: In order that the past year finish along with all of the curses associated with it... Is Shavuot, then, a New Year's day? Yes, it is, as the Mishna (Rosh Hashana 16a) states, "[There are four periods when the world is judged; on Pesach it is judged regarding crops that are sown], on Shavuot regarding fruits of trees, [on Rosh Hashana all creatures pass before Him... and on Succot, judgement is passed regarding the world's water supply]." (Gemara Megilla 31b)

Our custom is to read on the Shabbat before Rosh Hashana a Parsha that doesn't mention curses [and to read the curses *two* weeks before Shavuot and Rosh Hashana,] in order not to read the curses immediately before Rosh Hashana. (Tosefot ad loc., "K'lalot")

Why does the reading of curses before Rosh Hashana symbolize a blessed new year? If anything, it would seem as if we are "ushering in" curses, rather than "ushering them out". Doesn't Tosefot give the one week "break" from curses before Rosh Hashana for this reason?

An answer to this question may be deduced from a more thorough examination of the Gemara in Megilla. A number of obvious questions on this Gemara present themselves.

First- why read specifically the *Vayikra* set of curses before Shavuot, and the *Devarim* set before Rosh Hashana? Second- if there are actually four Rosh Hashanas in the Mishna, why did Ezra institute only for two of the Rosh Hashanas to "end the year and its curses", while ignoring the other two? Third- as Maharitz Chayot points out, the Jews of Israel once had a custom to read only one third of each of our Torah portions each week. It would take them three years to finish the entire Torah, as opposed to our present custom of completing the Torah yearly. (Megilla 29b). How would those Jews keep Ezra's institution of reading the curses before Rosh Hashana? They only read from each set of curses once in three years!

All of these questions may point to a new understanding of Ezra's institution. Ezra may not have ruled to go out of our way and read curses when Rosh Hashana approaches. Rather, he ruled that in the course of our weekly readings, we shouldn't read the curses shortly *after* the start of a new year, as starting a year with curses would be a "bad omen". What he proposed was that when the reading of the curses in the weekly reading coincides with a New Year's holiday, we should be careful to advance the reading of the curses to the Shabbat *before* the New Year.

This explains why the curses of Vayikra are associated with Shavuot, and those of Devarim with Rosh Hashana. The yearly cycle of readings naturally causes those Parshiot to be read near those holidays. For the same reason, there is no need to mention Succot or Pesach in Ezra's institution. The curses wouldn't normally be read after those holidays in either case. Finally, those who read the Torah in a three year cycle, could also keep Ezra's institution. If the curses would fall in a weekly reading shortly after a Rosh Hashana, they would read them earlier, before the Rosh Hashana. However, if they didn't, there was no institution bidding them to *arrange* to read the curses before Shavuot or Rosh Hashana, so they weren't transgressing Ezra's institution!

Getting back to our original question, it is now understandable that reading the curses before the holiday is a sign of blessings for the New Year. In either case the curses must be read near the holiday, due to the yearly Torah reading cycle. Therefore, reading them before the holiday as opposed to after it, saves us from "starting the year with curses". This indeed is a way to usher in a year of blessing!

This explanation provides at least a superficial appreciation of Ezra's institution. A more in-depth understanding, though, can be gleaned from the following Midrash: When the Bnai Yisroel heard the 100-less-two curses of [this week's Parsha] aside from the 49 of Torat Cohanim, their faces blanched and they exclaimed, "Who can survive all of these!". Moshe Rabbeinu calmed them, saying, "...You've already sinned terribly [in the desert], yet you see that you haven't been destroyed! "

Why, then, were the gentiles destroyed, if we weren't? Because when the gentiles are punished, they don't turn to Hashem. Instead, they rebel due to their suffering. When the Jews are punished, however, they humble themselves and pray to Hashem... [It may therefore be said that] the curses preserve their spiritual integrity. (Midrash Tanchuma, beg. of Nitzavim. See also Rashi ad loc.)

It is not only the physical torment of Hashem's punishment that can arouse a reaction of humility. The prudent don't have to be punished. The very consideration of the wrath of Hashem humbles them and brings them to turn their hearts and their prayers to their creator.

This may be the message of Ezra's institution. Read the curses, and arouse the Jews to repent, before Rosh Hashana. If they properly repent, they will truly be granted a year of prosperity! We can now appreciate that it is worthwhile to read the curses, as depressing as they may be, before Rosh Hashana. (Our custom is to read the curses two weeks before the holiday, as Tosefot pointed out. Perhaps this is in order to give us time to repent and to overcome the depression associated with the curses.) May we merit to conclude this year with all of its curses, and to start a new year of blessings and joy!

Perhaps we can add to this one more observation. The number of curses in Devarim is, according to the Tanchuma, "100-less-two". This strange count could imply that there aren't simply "98" curses, but 100 curses, two of which are somehow different from the others. The K'li Yakar (beg. of Nitzavim) brilliantly explains that the two different ones are those specified in Devarim 28:61 : "Also any sickness and any punishment that is not written in this Torah, Hashem will bring upon you". The "sickness" and the "punishment" referred to in this Pasuk are at the same time written, and yet left unwritten. They are the two that have been removed from the count of one hundred!

With this in mind, we may suggest that just as Ezra's reading of the curses of Vayikra arouse one to take heed of the 49 curses and do T'shuva, so too, the 49 days counted in the Omer, which culminate in Shavuot, remind us of them. Similarly, just as Ezra's reading of the curses in Ki-Tavo before Rosh Hashana reminds us to take heed of the 100 curses, and to do T'shuva, so too, the 100 blasts of the Shofar heard on Rosh Hashana, remind us of that same theme! © 1994 *Yehsivat Ohr Yerushalayim & Rabbi M. Kornfeld*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

In this week's portion of Ki Tavo we find a surprising—but remarkably edifying—aspect of our nationhood. Just prior to the blessings and the curses heard from Mt. Eval and Mt. Gerizim, the Torah records the

following words spoken by Moses, together with the Levites and Priests, to the nation:

"Take heed and hear O Israel, this day you have become a nation ('am') unto the Lord your G-d." [Deut. 27:9]

What's so special about this day? Weren't they a nation before Moses divides the tribes, six to the blessings of Mt. Gerizim and six to the curses of Mt. Eval? What about the festival of Pesach, when we were freed from Egyptian domination, or the festival of Shevuot, when we received our Constitution from G-d? What is the significance of this vent between the mountains, forty years after, that qualifies it to have become the determining moment of our achievement of nationhood?

After a long, long journey in the desert—and a long, long journey through the Five Books of the Torah—we finally come to the point where we're about to walk through 'customs'; Ki Tavo gives us a step-by-step description of the transition between the former desert way of life and the new Israel way of life: "And it shall be on that day when you shall pass over the Jordan... that you shall set up great stones and...you shall write upon them all the words of this Torah... in mount Eval... And there shall you build an altar to the Lord your G-d...And you shall offer peace offerings..and you shall rejoice before the Lord your G-d." [Deut. 27:2-7]

That these commands are related to the subsequent statement that we've already quoted—"...this day you have become a nation..."—can be seen from the fact that after the peace offerings were to be brought on the altar, the people are commanded to 'rejoice before the Lord your G-d' (ve-samahta lifnai HaShem Elokecha). Why, the reader initially asks, are the people 'rejoicing before the Lord,' an expression generally associated with the three festivals when the nation goes up to Jerusalem to sacrifice offerings at the Temple, where they experience the true meaning of 'joy'? Is the Torah alluding to a festival which will exist in the future but which is never mentioned in the Torah? (In fact, when the Talmud wants to teach that the only true joy a person can know is from the 'meat' of sacrifices offered at the Temple, R. Yehuda ben Betayra cites our verse, "And you shall offer peace offerings, and shall eat, and you shall rejoice before the Lord your G-d," as a prooftext. [B.T. Pesachim 109a])

Thus the subsequent verse regarding our 'becoming a nation' may very well be linked to the joy of the people who will be bringing these peace offerings when they cross over the Jordan. Evidently, the Torah is revealing a special holiday, the celebration of our birth as a nation with all the concomitant joy that such a festival deserves. But what happened at this point that suddenly turned us into a nation?

Rav Shlomo Goren z"l, former Chief Rabbi of the I.D.F. and then of the State of Israel, alerts us to in a Talmudic passage concerning the confrontation

between Joshua and Akhan which points out the answer. Akhan was a soldier from the tribe of Judah whose misappropriation of gold and silver from the captured peoples, in direct violation of G-d's command that all booty be sanctified and dare not be held by private hands, initially brought about defeat and despair among the Israelites in their move to settle the land. [B.T. Sanhedrin 43b]. All of Israel had to share in the punishment meted out to Akhan.

After the Sages find in the words of the text [Joshua 7:20] proof that this was not the first time Akhan had appropriated gold for himself, they ponder why the nation hadn't suffered earlier as a result of Akhan's thefts. R. Yohanan explains that the nation wasn't punished for the hidden sins of other people until they actually crossed over the Jordan and entered the land. Rashi further explains that what transpired at the Jordan constitutes 'a new dimension in the existential nature of the Jewish people'. "They heard and accepted upon themselves that they became responsible for each other on Mt. Gerizim and Mt. Eval" [Rashi, B.T. Sanhedrin 43b]

Indeed, this concept is made graphically evident by an arbitrary division of the twelve tribes, six receiving the blessings and six the curses. Every tribal member becomes intimately bound up with the destiny of his sibling from another tribe—because we are each co-signers for every other child of Israel.

"All of Israel is responsible (a co-signer) for each other—kol Yisrael arevim zeh ba-zeh."

This notion of responsibility (aravut) can be seen from the 'great stones' upon which the people were commanded to write the Torah when they crossed the Jordan. Indeed, the word "stones" (avanim) is a keyword in this passage, mentioned no less than five times in this rather concise section. "Even" (stone) signifies "av" (father) and "ben" (son), parent and children (avanim -- av-banim). Indeed the relationship between parents towards children and children towards parents is essentially a relationship of responsibility. And throughout the generations this is what we have—the sons of one generation become the fathers of the next, the subsequent generations benefiting from and responsible to their forbears with a Divine charge to continue the golden chain of Jewish history by bequeathing the tradition to the future progeny.

And this responsibility is not only to past and future; it is to contemporary Jews as well! Indeed, a fundamental halakhic principle regarding specific Torah commandments magnificently reveals the inherent closeness merging every Jew with his sibling into an almost unified identity. Jewish law treats the recitation of a blessing in vain with great severity, some legalists even considering it to be an infraction of the Decalogue commandment "Thou shalt not take the name of thy Lord in vain." Nevertheless, the law is that although an individual may have already recited the Sabbath or Festival evening Kiddush for himself and his family, he

may repeat the blessing for another Jew who has not yet heard it and is incapable of reciting it for himself. "Af al pi she-yatza, motzi"—even though he has fulfilled his obligation, he may recite the blessing another. And the commentators explain that if my friend has not performed the commandment of sanctifying the holy day (kiddush), something is lacking in my sanctification. After all, every Jew is responsible for his fellow!

This is precisely how Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch understands the last of the curses in our portion: "Cursed be he who does not maintain all the words of this law" [Deut. 27:26] This great sage of the modern era points that the grammatical structure of the word 'yakim' (fulfill) is in the "hif'il" (causative) form, which would then mean that not only is a person required to keep the Torah himself, but he must see to do it that others keep it as well. According to this last interpretation, a Jew who is only concerned about the Sabbath traffic on Bar-Ilan Road disturbing his prayers, but is totally unconcerned as to why the people are traveling in cars in the first place, as to why so many Israelis have become alienated from Judaism, and does nothing to bring them back to the beauty of the tradition, is not fulfilling the spirit of our Torah or of our nation. And only when we realize that "arev" also means "sweet", and only when every Jew is truly sweet to every other Jew—whatever the nature of his religious commitment, that we will begin to truly take responsibility for each other and become worthy of our nationhood. © 1997 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

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“Since you did not serve Hashem, your G-d with joy and goodness of heart" (28:47)

It was common knowledge that anyone who got to the top of the skyscraper earned a prize of spectacular proportions. The only trouble was that to get there you had to walk. A hundred floors is a long way by elevator—but by foot...

They both started out together. The first ten floors were easy. The second twenty floors were harder. By the time they had reached the fiftieth floor, they were both gasping for breath. Sweat was pouring from them. 56, 57, 58. On and on they climbed. Could this be easier than Hilary and Tenzing scaling Everest? 75, 76, 77... By the 80th floor, they had both stopped walking, now they were crawling on their hands and knees. As they reached the 89th floor, one of them fell back on the cool stone and gasped "That's it! I can't go on—I'm finished!"

"I can't go on either," said the other, "But I'm not giving up!" With every bone in his body aching, he clawed his way up one more floor. He turned the corner

and saw the sign in front of him: "90th Floor." It was then that he saw what was written underneath: "If you get this far—you can take the elevator. Congratulations!"

There before him were the open doors of an elevator. With a weak tired smile, he crawled in and pushed the golden button. The doors closed and he sped to the top of the building and the grand prize.

Life is about getting to the top. Some people think that "getting to the top" means appearing on a TV talk show or owning a Fortune 500 company. But there's only one "top" that's really important—the top of the spiritual ladder. Climbing the spiritual ladder, however, is not so easy. Sometimes it seems that it's just too much. Why exert yourself to climb and climb? Why not just stay where you are and coast?

Life is like the down escalator. Just to stay where you are, you have to keep walking. If you stand still, you'll go down. To rise, you have to do a lot more than walk—you have to run. In this week's Parsha, we read horrifying predictions of what will happen to the Jewish People if they fail to keep the Torah. But it's not enough just to keep the Torah. The above verse teaches us that the full weight of punishment will result merely if the Jewish People fail to serve G-d with joy and goodness of heart.

This is very difficult to understand. Why should we be punished so severely merely for failing to do the mitzvot with joy?

Our negative inclination is no fool. He doesn't tell us to go and steal. He doesn't tell us to start worshipping idols. He starts us off on the "baby slopes." He starts by suggesting that we do something that doesn't seem to be a sin at all. He makes the mitzvot feel heavy when we do them. He suggests we do them without enthusiasm. And after a steady diet of this, there comes a day when we're under some kind of pressure and he helps us to forget to do the mitzvah altogether. From then on, bit by bit, he encourages us to bigger and bigger things until we find ourselves looking in the face of an idol.

This was exactly what happened in the generation when Jerusalem was destroyed. They didn't start off by worshipping idolatry. They started off by feeling that doing the mitzvot was a burden. Fine. But what do you do if your negative drive has already got you on the "baby slopes?"

What do you do if you have already lost the feeling of joy when you do a mitzvah? What if you already feel apathetic? You can't argue with an emotion. You can't fight feelings with logic. If you feel apathetic, trotting out a list of logical reasons why you should improve isn't going to help. The only way you can fight feeling is with feeling.

Psychology posits a syndrome called "cognitive dissonance." Cognitive dissonance is when we buy a watch at a store for \$200 and later that day we see an advertisement for an almost identical watch for \$130.

We think to ourselves: "My watch must be better." Even though someone could prove to us that the watches are practically identical, we still feel that our watch is better. Why? Because, we invested in it. "It's my watch which belongs to me and I own it."

When we invest in something, we feel it must be good. After all, I invested in it, didn't I?

When we invest tremendous energy into a project, you can't tell me it's valueless. This is the key to dealing with apathy. When we invest our time, our energy, our love, our very selves into something—we value it. With this principle, we can understand how to generate a love of the mitzvot in our hearts. To love the mitzvot we must invest in them. When we do them with all our heart, the cynical voice that tries to knock the gloss off our service of the Creator will find no receptive ear in our psyche. Subconsciously, we will say to it: "You can't tell me these mitzvot are a drag. I put my guts into them. I have invested my love and my life." You can't fight emotion with logic. Only emotion can wield an effective sword against an opposing emotion.

(Sources: *A Present From The Queen - Tiferes Shlomo in Mayana shel Torah* & *Getting To The Top - Ksav Sofer*)

In this, the sixth of the seven Haftoras of Consolation, the Prophet Yeshayahu calls on Jerusalem to arise from the pain of darkness and shadow, and to shine to the world in her full glory. The light of redemption, both physical and spiritual, is being radiated on her. Her long-banished children are returning, and in their wake are the nations of the world who have acknowledged Hashem and that the Jewish People are His emissaries. This redemption, unlike those that have preceded it, will be the final and complete one. "Never again will your sun set, nor your moon be withdrawn, for Hashem shall be unto you an eternal light, and ended will be your days of mourning."

"And your people, they are all righteous, forever shall they inherit the Land, a branch of My planting..." (60:21)

People think that re-incarnation is an Eastern concept. It is. A Middle-Eastern concept. One of Judaism's gift to Eastern thought is reincarnation. If a person doesn't follow the path that G-d indicates in this world, his soul will return until he corrects his character flaws. The above verse alludes to this process: "And your people are all righteous..." The unspoken question arises: "They're all righteous?! I see many people who are a long way from being righteous!" To which the next phrase answers—"a branch of My planting"—those who fail to achieve righteousness will be "re-planted" many times until their good deeds finally come to fruition. Even the least righteous person returns and returns to this world until he eventually becomes virtuous and noble. (*Mahram Mizrahi in Mayana shel Torah*) © 1998 *Ohr Somayach International - All rights reserved.*