

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

### Shabbat Shalom

The "mother of all blessings" the very Biblical source for thanking the Almighty for the many worldly gifts He bestows upon us, is to be found in this week's portion, Ekev; "And you shall eat and be satisfied, and bless the Lord your G-d for the good land which he has given you." (Deut. 8:10). And if preparation, consumption and cleaning-up after your meals take a great deal of time and effort, if our tradition mandates so many detailed laws about permitted and prohibited foods, and if the Talmud devotes a complete chapter (the seventh chapter of the Tractate Blessings) to the Grace After Meals - each individual blessing of which likewise derives from Ekev - it ought certainly be of great importance to study in depth this prayer-blessing which many if not most observant Jews recite three times a day every day of their lives.

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 a much more abridged blessing of thanksgiving after their consumption). What is special about bread? In many societies - especially before the exaggerated opulence of the communities in which most of us live - bread was the major component of every meal, the basic mainstay and "filler" of our diet, the very "staff of life;" at the very least, each course was eaten to the accompaniment of bread. Nevertheless, the Sacred Zohar provides the deepest reason: bread symbolizes the partnership between human being and G-d; remember, there are twelve back-breaking and ingenious processes between the acquisition of the grain and the production of the bread. The individual is likely to think that it was due to his efforts alone that the food is to be found on the table; be mindful of G-d, exhorts our Sages, remember to be grateful to the Source of nature who is the ultimate provider of the bread - and then you will share your bounty with others less fortunate and you will use the energy you derive from the food altruistically and not only egoistically.

It is also interesting to note that when three or more eat together we begin with a special additional blessing -invitation or zimun in Hebrew, and when ten or more eat together the name of G-d is added to this

introductory blessing. This addition teaches that the purpose of a meal ought not only be nutritional or pleasurable; it must also be social, fraternal and even communal. Indeed, the word 'companion,' and company, literally means 'with bread,' indicating that a friend is someone with whom you share a meal and, conversely, the person with whom you share a meal becomes your companion. In effect, therefore, food serves for us as a means to human fellowship and sharing. And why should we share with others? Because G-d shares with us!

And so the "invitation" blessing leads into the very first of the Biblical blessings: "Blessed are You, G-d ... who nourishes the entire world in His goodness, with freely giving graciousness, with loving-kindness and with sensitive compassion..." G-d gives whether the recipient deserves it or does not deserve it, whether he/she has earned it or has not earned it - and so must we share with others! And G-d provides the world - not just the Jews!

And there comes the second of the Biblical blessings, a surprise blessing, a "zinger" blessing: "We thank You O Lord our G-d, for having bequeathed to our ancestors a desirable, good and spacious land, as it is written Your Bible, "you shall eat and be satisfied and bless the Lord your G-d for the good land which He has given you..." But the food I am eating comes from New York, from Miami, from London, from Zurich... for close to 2,000 years we lived in exile from Israel - and we still recited this blessing! Why?

We bless G-d for our ancestral land because exile expresses a precarious existence endangering human subsistence. 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 by dint of the largesse of a Gentile owner. . Only when food comes from your own land is the food truly yours.

Our Grace After Meals then directs us toward Jerusalem, the earthly meeting point of G-d's transcendence, the City from which G-d'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 beacon from whence all of humanity will be redeemed.

There is also a fourth blessing, established in Yavneh at the end of the aborted Bar Kochba rebellion in 135 c.e. When the last stronghold of Betar was

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destroyed, hope for the restoration of a Jewish national home was dashed. In the wake of this defeat came the terrible Hadrianic persecutions, the cruel Roman Emperor who mercilessly tortured to death the greatest of our pious sages. During this time the Romans forbade us to bury Jewish corpses; miraculously, the bodies did not putrefy. Thus the fourth Rabbinic blessing records praises to G-d "Who is good, and who does good,"-hatov v'hamaitiv-"Good because the bodies didn't rot, and who does good because they could eventually bury their dead." But why, one wonders, does this historical fact about burial and decomposition find its way into the Grace After Meals?

In tying the tragedy of Betar to the Grace After Meals, to food, the Rabbis are teaching a critical lesson. It's proper to thank G-d 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, recognize that we must appreciate whatever we have, and must learn to give thanks if only to be able to give our dead a proper burial.

The necessity of sharing G-d'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." © 2007 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

**RABBI DOV KRAMER**

## **Taking a Closer Look**

**P**arashas Aikev begins with Moshe telling the nation that as a result of keeping G-d's laws, they will be rewarded with a healthy and successful life. This seems to contradict the notion that "there is no reward for mitzvos (G-d's commandments) in this world" (Kiddushin 39b), but rather in the next world. This question is posed in "Merapsin Igrai," where two answers are suggested. However, before discussing these answers (as well as several others) let's fully examine the question.

The statement that there is no reward given in this world is attributed to Rabbi Yaakov, with the implication being that there are others who disagree

with him. Nevertheless, Rabbi Yaakov would have to explain how the Torah could describe reward in this world if there is none. And there are other places in the Torah where reward is promised in this world as well, such as the second paragraph of the Shema (Devarim 11:13), where rain and food is promised if we keep the commandments, and the promises made before the curses at the end of Sefer Vayikra (26:3-12). There are numerous places in rabbinical literature where reward in this world is described, but these might be arguing with Rabbi Yaakov's statement. While some commentaries state this to be the case (e.g. Melech Shelomo on Peah 1:1), others do not. Of these, some imply that Rabbi Yaakov is not an isolated opinion (see Tiferes Yisroel there), while others attempt to reconcile his opinion with these statements, without indicating if this is because his opinion is universally accepted, because it is preferable to keep disagreements to a minimum, or because they have to answer the question raised by the biblical verses anyway.

However, there is another Talmudic statement (Avodah Zara 4b), which seems to be universally accepted, based on the last verse in last week's Parasha (Devarim 7:11, see Rashi), which tells us that this world is for "doing the mitzvos" not for "being rewarded for them." The same contradictions would seem to apply, but this statement leaves some wiggle room, as it doesn't say that there is absolutely no reward in this world, implying only that the main reward comes in the next world. It still is a bit awkward that immediately after the verse that teaches us that reward comes in the next world we are told what reward comes in this world. While some of the answers to our first question are aimed at reconciling this verse with the biblical verses that promise reward, it is probably because Rabbi Yaakov said that there is no reward in this world, implying not even secondary reward, that "Merapsin Igrai" uses his statement for the question.

The first answer quoted there differentiates between the reward for fulfilling the basic mitzvah, which is reserved only for the next world, and the additional aspects or extra effort put in when performing it, and/or for doing mitzvos that are not obligatory, for which one can be rewarded in this world. Rashi (Bava Kama 9b d"h mikan va'eilech) applies this to paying more than a third extra to beautify a mitzvah, and the Ramban (Emunah veBitachon 7) explains the statement that "one who is careful about the mitzvah of tzitzis merits having a nice garment" (and similar statements in Shabbos 23b) by saying that one can receive the reward in this world precisely because one can avoid the obligation. This works well to answer our verse, where the word "aikev" was chosen because it means "heel," i.e. the aspects that are usually tread upon (see Rashi) such as those things that are above and beyond the minimum requirement. The Chasam Sofer says it applies to the "extra effort" implied in

"Bechukosay" as well. However, there is no indication that the reward promised in "vahaya im shamo" is for anything besides the actual mitzvah observance.

The second answer brought there is based on the idea that the main function of doing G-d's mitzvos is its inherent testimony of G-d being our king and ruler. Since being paid to testify invalidates the testimony (see C"M 34:18), if we would be rewarded in this world for doing the mitzvah it would invalidate the "testimony" and undermine the mitzvah. However, if before the action occurs (and therefore the requirement to testify doesn't yet exist) one is hired to go see something so that he can subsequently testify about it, his testimony is valid. Therefore, if one does a mitzvah by rote, without thinking about doing it to "unify G-d and His kingdom," being rewarded for it afterwards would invalidate the testimony (so no reward is given, allowing the mitzvah to stand). With the proper intention, though, the reward would not invalidate it. To be honest, I don't really follow the logic, as either way the reward would be promised beforehand, and, if anything, the distinction should be remembering that there is a reward before doing the mitzvah, not how focused one was while doing it (which would have the backwards result of thinking about the reward beforehand making it a more complete mitzvah). Besides, this would mean that the same exact action could sometimes be rewarded in this world and sometimes couldn't, which is difficult to force into Rabbi Yaakov's words. Additionally, why wouldn't being rewarded in the next world also invalidate the "testimony?"

Other answers (or statements that can answer our original question) are given which can explain how we can be promised good things in this world for fulfilling mitzvos if the reward for mitzvos is limited to the next world. The Rambam (Hilchos Teshuva 9:1) says that the promises are not reward for the mitzvos, but rather G-d allowing us to focus on doing them, removing all distractions by providing us with plenty of food and keeping us healthy. However, He will only do this if we are keeping the mitzvos, so that we can continue to do them. This approach is widely accepted, but does not cover everything, which is why the Ramban quoted earlier added that we could get rewarded in this world for doing things that are not obligatory. Another exception the Ramban brings is time-based mitzvos, such as pouring water on Succos so that we can be blessed with water, i.e. rain (see Rosh Hashana 16a), where the reward for the mitzvah is still reserved for the next world, but doing it before the rainy season helps because of when it was done. Overall, though, by categorizing the blessings promised as a means to help us continue our spiritual growth rather than as a reward, our original question is answered.

The Sefornu (Devarim 7:12) sidesteps the question by classifying the blessings as a gift from G-d

out of pure kindness, above and beyond the reward received in the next world. Even though this "gift" is dependant on our actions, if the same gift is given to all who are righteous (and is not bigger or smaller depending on how righteous one is) it is easier to call it a gift rather than part of the reward. The Or Hachayim (Vayikra 18:5) suggests that mitzvos done out of fear are only rewarded in the next world (which is what Rabbi Yaakov was referring to), while those done out of love for G-d are rewarded in both worlds (which is what the verses are referring to). He also suggests (Devarim 5:30) that Rabbi Yaakov would agree that one who is completely righteous (with no sins) is rewarded in both worlds; only someone who is righteous, but not completely so, is not rewarded in this world at all. The Maharsha (Kiddushin 39b) says that Rabbi Yaakov only meant that individuals receive no reward in this world. Society as a whole, on the other hand, can, which is what the verses are referring to.

Devarim Rabbah (3:4) makes several statements that can answer our question, such as saying that the goodness we receive in this world is the result of Bilam's blessing while the reward reserved for the next world are attributed to our forefathers (and our connection to them through keeping the Torah). Another possibility it brings (ibid) is that the blessings in this world are not a reward for doing mitzvos but compensation for the suffering we endure. The most generic answer given (3:1) is that the main reward is only received in the next world, but there are collateral benefits ("pairos") that we can enjoy in this world. If we were to suggest that Rabbi Yaakov meant that only the "keren" (principle reward) is not given in this world, but the "pairos" (lit. "fruits") are, the incident he saw that caused him to reach his conclusion must have occurred in a way where none of the possible collateral benefits could have possibly taken affect yet, proving that none of the main reward occurs in this world.

What secondary, or collateral, rewards occur through keeping the Torah? Although the Raibag (in Aikev and Bechukosay) doesn't call them "pairos," he says that the blessings promised are not reward for the performance of the mitzvos, but the automatic result of becoming connected to G-d (which is obviously brought about through doing the mitzvos). While the reward for each individual act is only received in the next world, an individual that reaches the level of "devaykus" is bestowed with much blessing in this world as well.

The Chizkuni (Vayikra 26:3) paraphrases G-d as saying, "if you do what I asked of you, the clouds and the land and the trees which were created for you will do what they are supposed to do." It is unclear which perspective the Chizkuni is coming from; is the "default setting" that the ground will produce, which changes if we do not do what we are supposed to, or is the "default setting" that it won't produce, and only if we

do what we are supposed to does it change. The Rambam comes from the latter perspective, as only after we become connected to G-d do the blessings take affect. The Netziv (ibid) takes the former perspective, saying that G-d set up creation in a way that things are good if we are and turn bad if we do. According to this, the blessings in the Torah are not the reward for keeping the Torah, but the natural result, the "pairos," if you will, of keeping it.

The Rambam (in his commentary on Peah 1:1) differentiates between mitzvos that are only between man and G-d, where the only reward is in the next world, and those between man and man, where the main reward is in the next world, but the "pairos" are enjoyed in this world. The man to G-d aspect is the same; the additional benefit comes from the additional man to man aspect. This concept can also refer to the "automatic" benefit that comes from doing something for others, such as being repaid in kind. The Talmud (Kiddushin 40a) implies that all mitzvos have "pairos," but the Mishnah was only referring to those that have the added man to man benefits (or learning how to accomplish them).

Which "pairos" would the beginning of our Parasha refer to? Aside from the above possibilities, the Ramban points out that the term "mishpatim" used usually refers to setting up a fair and just society, implying that the "pairos" of doing so are the blessings that follow. Since the previous Parasha ended by commanding us to remove all the pagan idols and a warning not to intermarry, it can be suggested that our Parasha continues by telling us that by setting up a society that promotes Torah-observance we will be bestowed with these blessings. The reward for the individual acts necessary to build such a community may only come in the next world, but the spiritual growth that results from such an effort will bring about G-d's blessings in this world as well. © 2007 Rabbi D. Kramer

#### **RABBI LABEL LAM**

### **Dvar Torah**

“**T**ake care lest you forget HASHEM, your G-d, by not observing His commandments, His ordinances, and His decrees, which I command you today., lest you eat and be satisfied, and you build houses and settle, and your cattle and sheep increase, and you increase silver and gold for yourselves, and everything you have will increase- and your heart will become haughty and you will forget HASHEM, your G-d, Who took you out of the land of Egypt from the house of slavery, Who leads you through the great and awesome Wilderness- ...And fed you manna in the Wilderness in order to test you, to do good for you in the end. And you may say in your heart, 'My strength and the might of my hand made me all this wealth!' Then you shall remember HASHEM, your G-d,

that it was He Who gave you strength to make you wealth...." (Devarim 8:11-18) "And now Israel, what does HASHEM your G-d request from you except that you fear HASHEM your G-d..." (Devarim 10:12) Our sages taught that from here we learn, everything is from heaven except for the fear of Heaven. (Rashi)

What does it mean that, "Everything is from Heaven except for the fear of Heaven"? The Sefas Emes explains that this is unlike a flesh and blood king whose primary interest is to impose his fear upon the nation and collect taxes. By The Holy One Blessed Be He, everything is granted and all is within His ability to do but still he gives free will to man so that it becomes necessary for him to install within himself fear HASHEM.

On a tape of a lecture from Rabbi Berel Wein entitled, "Pete Rose and the Jewish Question" Rabbi Wein told of a conversation he had had with his father in-law Rabbi Levin, an old time European Jew who was a Rav in Detroit for many decades. He was in the hospital and Rabbi Wein called to ask how he was doing. Rabbi Levin began to describe all the wires attached to his body and how there was a monitor right next to his bed where his heart could be seen steadily beating.

When he pointed out to a young doctor his wonderment about the image on the monitor it prompted the young doctor to rant, "Oh that's nothing Rabbi Levin in comparison to what's coming next. Soon we won't need any intrusive nodes and the pictures will be in color showing more details and contours..." "I interrupted him in the middle of his diatribe", the Rabbi related with passion "And I told him", "Fool-NAR I'm not talking about the machine! I'm talking about the heart! Look at the heart! It's been beating for more than 90 years uninterrupted. Look at the heart!"

There's that human weakness again, to be disproportionately impressed with our own accomplishments to the point where the abundant goodness of HASHEM is eclipsed. When my kid plugs in the vacuum cleaner and it suddenly roars, he gets excited because he thinks he invented the vacuum cleaner and discovered electricity. How juvenile! Our only job may be to be to live in awe of HASHEM.

From a single cell in 9 months a new born baby is comprised of 2 trillion cooperative cells and an adult 60 trillion. The genetic information in a single human DNA chain if stored electronically equals three trillion bytes. The double helix crams this all efficiently into 375 million computer bytes, more information the Encyclopedia Britanica. Every cell when replicating copies the entire DNA library. Initially there may be the equivalent of one mistake in every five pages but after instant proofreading and correcting the ratio changes to one mistake in every 50 million pages. Every second 8 million blood cells die and are replaced. I have a hard

enough time balancing my check book and being on time for car pool.

When, with sober eyes we studiously observe the proportion of what's being done for us on a constant basis, in comparison to our feeble foible-filled activities we may become overawed. It is this overpowering sense of the grand reality of realities and all that then flows forth from it which inspires the heart of hearts.  
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### RABBI BEREL WEIN

## Wein Online

**T**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, he does so not for the purpose of narrative but rather to teach an important moral lesson for all ages. That stark lesson is that after all of the miracles that G-d 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 - shall humans live, but rather by the word of G-d, 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 G-d 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 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 into major decisions and sometimes even have irreversible consequences. The question always before us is do our actions measure up to the standards of G-d's word, so to speak. We live not "by bread alone" or by miracles alone, but by our own choices and our very own 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. It was, in fact, my negligence of not exiting correctly from the highway originally that forced the necessity of of this "miracle." 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. © 2007 Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com). For more information on these and other products visit [www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory](http://www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory).

### RABBI AVI WEISS

## Shabbat Forshpeis

**A**lthough we may live lives dedicated to following the commandments of the Torah, the core question of "What does G-d ask of us?" is posed in the Torah portion this week. It offers the following answer; "Only," to "fear" and "love Him"...and to "observe the commandment of the Lord." (Deuteronomy 10:12, 13)

The fact that the Torah uses the word "only" seems to imply that following the commandments is a minimal request. Yet, keeping 613 commandments is far from a small demand, it is, indeed, a major commitment that requires all of the self.

Some suggest that these words, offered as they were by Moshe (Moses), were said from his perspective. For him, it was a minimal request because for Moshe, the prophet of prophets, keeping all of the mitzvot (commandments) came naturally.

This is a bit troubling for it seems that by using the term "only," Moshe, who was a master teacher was making a grievous error by not speaking on the level of the people. He was not speaking in the "language" they could understand. The key to understanding the use of "only" may lie in resolving the larger question of why G-d gives the commandments at all. Are they primarily given for His sake, or for ours? One could look at the mitzvot as G-d's way of expressing rulership over us. When we keep His laws we profess allegiance and commitment to Him. There is, however, an alternative approach. The mitzvot are not haphazard laws given by a G-d who wants "only" to rule us just for the sake of ruling us. Instead, the commandments express what G-d feels is best for His people. They are for our sake. It's G-d's way of saying, I've created a beautiful world - follow these laws and you will find inner happiness. In the words of G-d to Avraham (Abraham), "hithalekh lefanai veyei tamim, walk before Me, and you will find fulfillment." (Genesis 17:1) Note the similarity between hithalekh and halakha. G-d tells Avraham, follow the commandments, follow the halakha-and you will find inner peace and inner meaning.

By focusing on three major Jewish rituals, family purity, the dietary laws and Shabbat, we can better understand that the mitzvot are for our sake. These rituals correspond to the three basic human drives. Family purity corresponds to the sexual encounter, the dietary laws to eating, and Shabbat to the human quest for power. Since Judaism views human passions as G-d's gifts to us, the halakha is meant in part as a mechanism to sanctify these passions, allowing us to better appreciate and find greater meaning in life itself.

Many have felt that a G-d of love would never have initiated commandments which seem to limit and restrict human beings. Yet, this week's parsha tells us while these "limits" and "restrictions" are complex and sometimes difficult to follow, they are the key to living a life of meaning and holiness. When Moshe tells us what G-d wants, he uses the word "only" - a minimalistic request - teaching that G-d gives the laws out of his great concern for our welfare, for what is best for us. © 2007 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.

#### THE AISHDAS SOCIETY

## Aspaqlaria

by Rabbi Micha Berger

In this week's parashah Moshe describes Hashem as "... haKel haGadol haGibor vihaNorah—the G-d, the Great, the Almighty, and the Awesome ...". These words were incorporated by the Anshei Knesses Hagedolah into the opening of the Shemoneh Esrei.

The same phrase is also found at the conclusion of the poem "Nishmas". There, the poet goes even further and gives each one an explanatory phrase. This yields the strange result that the very same poem that says that "even if our mouths were filled of poetry like the sea, and our tongues - joy, like the many waves, and our lips - praise like the expanses of sky ... we would still not be sufficient to praise you", this same poem then praises G-d in four words!

A student who lead the congregation as Chazan before the tanna Rabbi Chanina once embellished on these four simple adjectives. After he was finished, Rabbi Chanina corrected him, "Have you finished all possible praise of your Master?" No list of complements could completely describe Hashem. Had Moshe not spoken these words, and Hashem not told him to write them into the Torah, we would not have the chutzpah to use these four. (Brachos 33b)

According to the Vilna Gaon, "haKel haGadol haGibor vihaNorah" was not only included in the first brachah of the Shemoneh Esrei, but it is the basis for the structure of the rest of the brachah too. To the Vilna Gaon, these four names of G-d form a progression. They summarise how man approaches G-d. Kel means

not only G-d but judge or legislator. To be HaKel, THE Legislator, means that Hashem rules over the entire universe, His authority is all-inclusive.

Rabbi Yochanan (Megilah 31a) said, "Where ever you find G-d's greatness, that is where you find His humility". Perhaps we can understand this apparent paradox by comparing G-d's properties to those of humans. Schools have a problem of overcrowding. There are just so many students a teacher can adequately pay attention to. As the number of students grows, each one can only get less and less attention. Not so Hashem. His infinity is not just that He is a "Kel", G-d over all, but also "Gadol", great enough to give personal attention to each person.

HaGibor. We said already that Hashem Legislates to all, and that He is not limited to looking only at the universal picture, but can pay attention to each and every one of us. The combination of these two facts yields "HaGibor". G-d has the power and uses it to guide each of us in our daily lives.

VihaNorah. There are two types of Divine intervention, the behind-the-scenes subtle activity, that the non-believer dismisses as mere luck, and the flashy miracle that defies the law of nature. While the former is more common, it is the miracle that inspires awe.

These thoughts are elaborated twice in the brachah, once before the quote of the pasuk, and once after. Baruch. Chazal write often that "'brachah' is a term of increase". To call G-d "blessed" means that He is limitless. This is HaKel. Ata. It is incredible that man has the gall to talk to G-d, to refer to the Creator as "You". What grants us that power? HaGadol, He is big enough to attend to each of us. Elokeinu. The Vilna Gaon teaches that this corresponds to "HaGibor". Elokeinu, our G-d, is different than HaKel, The G-d. There is a possessiveness, this might and authority of HaKel doesn't only apply to the big picture, but he guides each of us, our fates and destinies. Elokei Avoseinu. In our lives, Hashem's intervention is subtle. However, for our forefathers He performed miracles. Whereas Elokeinu, our G-d, refers to Hashem's constant guiding of history, Elokei Avoseinu, G-d of our Fathers, asserts that the same One can work outside of the laws of nature. In order to work toward the day when we too will merit an age of miracles, we next recall each forefather, Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, by name, to recall and resolve to emulate their character strengths.

Next we repeat the four names of Hashem from this week's parashah, and then elaborate on the themes in a different variation. HaKel. This is elaborated as "Kel Elyon", G-d above all. Again, we declare that He commands everything. HaGadol. As we said earlier, this means that He not only looks at the universe as a whole, but pays attention to each and every one of us. This is why "gomel chassadim tovim", Hashem supports us through His kindness. HaGibor.

The consequence of being the G-d above all, and able to relate to the individual is that this means He touches each of our lives. The Vilna Gaon translates "konei" in our context from the root of "litakein", to fix. Konei hakol, Hashem fixes all, heals the sick, raises the downtrodden and the depressed. VihaNorah. "Zocher chasdei avos". Hashem remembers how our fathers went beyond the call of obligation. We are only "bnei bineihem", the children of their children, twice removed from their stature. But whatever of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov we carry, may it be enough that we too merit miraculous intervention, that Hashem bring us our redeemer. © 1995 Rabbi M. Berger & aishdas.org

### MACHON ZOMET

## Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak, Yeshivat Har Etzion

In this week's Torah portion, Moshe gives Bnei Yisrael a warning about three problematic ideas that they might develop as time goes on. First is the following fear: "If you will say in your heart, these nations are more than I am, how can I take possession of their land?" [Devarim 7:17]. Then, Moshe reacts to another possible idea: "And you will say in your heart, my might and the strength of my hand have provided me with this wealth" [8:17]. The last dangerous thought appears in the next chapter: "Do not say in your heart, when G-d chases them away from you, it is because of my righteousness that G-d has brought me to take possession of this land" [9:4]. These three ideas represent problems that are different from each other in essence. The first one is related to the time in the desert, when the people might have a fear of the nations in the land, because of a lack of faith in the Almighty. The second thought, on the other hand, refers to the time when the people are already dwelling in the land, and here the problem is the opposite – an exaggerated self confidence, which might lead them to pride and a lack of recognition that everything man obtains stems from the Almighty. The third thought is also a result of pride, but it represents spiritual satisfaction – claiming that G-d brought Bnei Yisrael to the land because of their great righteousness. This is not the same as physical pride.

What Moshe proposes as a way to struggle against these potential problems is to remember past events, but each with its own proper objective. In the first passage, when the thought is one of fear and a lack of faith, Moshe tells the nation to remember the plagues in Egypt, out of a belief that what happened in the past can be repeated in the future. "Remember what your G-d did to Pharaoh and to all of Egypt... G-d will do the same to all the nations that you fear" [7:18-19]. In the second passage, where the danger is a feeling of exaggerated confidence, Bnei Yisrael are told to remember their difficult moments. "You shall remember the path on which your G-d took you for forty

years in the desert... and you shall remember G-d, for He is the one who gives you the strength to achieve wealth" [8:2,18]. And in the third passage, where the danger is that the people will credit their own high spiritual level with the fact that they obtained the land, Moshe suggests that they remember another point. "Remember, do not forget, how you made G-d angry in the desert. From the day that you left Egypt until you arrived in this place you have rebelled against G-d" [9:7].

It is thus clear that the two main periods of time that Bnei Yisrael had experienced so far – the slavery in Egypt on one hand and the era of the desert on the other hand – contributed significantly to the nation of Yisrael. Remembering these two eras will help Bnei Yisrael struggle against possible mistakes of a lack of faith and exaggerated pride during their life in Eretz Yisrael. Historical memory must be an integral part of dwelling in the land, because otherwise, if the lessons are not learned properly, the result can be that "your will be removed from the good land which G-d has given to you" [11:17].

### RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

## Intergenerational Dialogue

A recurring theme delineated in last week's portion and reiterated in this week's portion is the inherent responsibility of a father to teach Torah to his child. Jews mention both verses that contain these declarations during both, the morning and evening recital of the Shema read at Shacharis and Ma'ariv. One is in the first portion, the other in the second portion. In the first portion of Shema, taken from last week's Torah reading, the Torah tells us, "You shall teach them thoroughly to your children and you shall speak of them while you sit in your home, while you walk on the way, when you retire and when you arise." (Deuteronomy 6:7)

In the second portion of the Shema, taken from Parshas Ekev, the Torah seemingly repeats the theme with a slight variation. "You shall teach them to your children to discuss them while you sit in your home, while you walk on the way, when you retire and when you arise" (Deuteronomy 11:19)

Notice the difference. Last week, in Voeschanan, the Torah tells us to teach our children, then it tells us to speak words of Torah, "while in our homes and on the road, when we retire and when we rise." However, this week, it seems that the Torah is spinning a variation on that theme. It tells us to teach our children to discuss them (Torah) while you sit in your home, while you walk on the way, when you retire and when you arise. It does not say, "teach your children to discuss Torah while they sit in your home, while they walk on the way, when they retire and when they arise." Are we teaching them to discuss Torah while we go about our lives? What does their learning

Torah have to do with our mundane activities? It seems that there is a pedagogical lesson to parents in their Torah-teaching relationships with their children in every aspect of a parent's lives. What is it?

In 1987, Rabbi Yosef Karmel, currently National Director of Peylim/Lev L'Achim, was Director of Camp Agudah of the Midwest, in South Haven Michigan. One weekend he invited two prominent guests to the camp; Rabbi Eliezer Levin, one of America's oldest and most revered rabbis, a student of the Chofetz Chaim, and the Rav of Detroit for nearly fifty years and his son, Rabbi Avraham Chaim Levin, dean and founder of the Telshe Yeshiva of Chicago, a member of the council of Torah Sages, of Agudath Israel, and one of the outstanding and dynamic leaders of American Orthodoxy. It was a rare and extraordinary occasion for the campers, and the atmosphere was spiritually charged. Guests arrived in South Haven to bask in the glow of two generations of Torah giants.

After the Shabbos services, Rabbi Karmel announced that while the campers would attend their regularly scheduled learning classes, Rabbi Avraham Chaim Levin would teach the Daf HaYomi, the daily-apportioned Talmudic folio, studied concurrently by Jews the world over, to the lay guests who had come to vacation that weekend together with the camp and the distinguished visitors.

As everyone dispersed from shul Rabbi Karmel felt a soft tap on his arm. "Where," the elderly Rav of Detroit asked, "is the Daf Hayomi shiur taking place?" Rabbi Karmel understood that Rav Levin, ever the rabbinic gentleman, had somehow figured it to be improper for him not to attend the class along with all the other guests. In his humility, conjectured Rabbi Karmel, this scholar -- who most certainly could spend the time studying Torah on his own lofty level, was about to sacrifice an hour sitting at a class geared lay people, all in the name of good manners."

Reassuringly the camp director told the elderly Rav Levin, "There is no need for you to attend this shiur. It is intended for the Ba'ale Batim (lay people) and no one expects the Rav to attend."

The elderly Rav looked at Rabbi Karmel with incredulity and uttered words, which Rabbi Karmel told me, he will never forget: "What? Do you think I would miss the chance to hear my son teach a blatt of Gemarah?" (Rabbi Karmel added afterwards: "At the time of this story Rav Avrohom Chaim, soon to become a member of the Moetzes Gedolei HaTorah of America, had already served as a Rosh Yeshiva for more than thirty years. The shiur he was to say was not a singular event but rather an example of what he has done so well for many decades. There certainly was no question as to his ability to deliver a brilliant shiur. Yet, to his father it represented an opportunity to be amongst the listeners; a tangible nachas that was more real than all the fame his son had so deservedly accumulated.

We all understand that when our little ones come home from school with their first "Shabbos sheets" that it is pure nachas to listen to them. It is a palpable enjoyment for us and provides unparalleled encouragement for our kids. There is hardly a Jewish father alive who does not make a big deal about every word repeated from those hallowed stencils. Only a Gadol like Rav Leizer Levine could still retain that same undiluted nachas from a son almost sixty years after kvelling over the first recitation of Torah Tziva Lanu Moshe...) Perhaps, on a homiletic level, the Torah is telling us not only to teach children, in a way that they will retain it for themselves, but rather in away that will unite parents and children forever. Teach them to speak Torah, in your house, when you go on your way, when you retire and when you arise! Show them that you cherish their spirituality, whether they are accomplished professionals or preeminent Torah scholars.

Let the Torah of the latter generation penetrate the ears of the former, and let them forever harmonize the music that will bind them forever. © 2001 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & Project Genesis, Inc.

#### **RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER**

### **Weekly Dvar**

**T**his week's Parsha, Ekev, begins by telling us that we should listen to the commandments of the Torah, and it then goes on to list the good things that will happen if we do. The problem with that is that we already accepted the Torah at Sinai! What purpose does the Parsha serve by telling us to accept, listen, and observe the commandments? If we're reading the Torah, we obviously have accepted it already, it would seem...

Rav Goldwasser asks this question, and he explains that the answer lies in the terminology the Torah uses. When it says "And it will be AFTER you will listen to all the commandments..." But in the Hebrew language the word used here to mean 'after' could also mean 'heel', which all the commentaries discuss. The point of using that word is because we are commanded to keep ALL the Mitzvot (commandments), even those that are way on the bottom and toward the back, because just like the heel, they support the rest of the body when you're trying to move forward. In life, we are sometimes faced with opportunities to do good things, and we pass on them, either because we're lazy, or because we think they're not that important. The Parsha is declaring that those "little" Mitzvot people barely notice may be more important than the "big ones", because it shows that we are sensitive to EVERY ONE of our responsibilities as Jews! It's when no one's looking that we can make the greatest impact on ourselves, and create the greatest support for our future. © 2007 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.