

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI DOV KRAMER**

### Taking a Closer Look

One of the commandments described in Parashas Ki Savo is the building of an altar on Mt Aival (Devarim 27:1-8). The Talmud (Sotah 36a) tells us that this mountain and its neighbor, Mt. Grizim, upon which the "blessings" and "curses" were publicly proclaimed (27:12-13 and Yehoshua 8:33-34) were more than 60 mil (a mil is approximately a kilometer) from the Jordan River, inside the Land of Israel. Obviously, then, when this altar was built, the Children of Israel had already entered the Promised Land. Yet, describing the importance of this mitzvah, Moshe tells the nation (27:3) that they should fulfill it "in order that you shall [be able] to enter the land that G-d is giving you," the land that was promised to our forefathers. How can entering the land be dependent on fulfilling a mitzvah that can only be done after we had already entered it?

The wording of this commandment has always been considered puzzling, with several redundancies (telling us twice to write the Torah on the stones and twice to plaster them with lime, as well as referring to us "crossing the Jordan" several times) and much confusion as to what exactly is being commanded. Adding to this confusion is the comment of Rashi (27:2), which seems to contradict the Talmud that he claims is his source.

On the words "and you shall set up for yourself" Rashi comments, "in the Jordan (River), and after that you should take others (i.e. different rocks) and from them build an altar on Mt. Aival. As a result, you [must] say that there were three kinds of stones; 12 in the Jordan and like them (i.e. 12) in Gilgal (where the nation lived after crossing into Israel until it was conquered and settled) and like them at Mt. Aival, as is stated in [Tractate] Sotah." Although the Talmud there (35b) does mention that there were three kinds of stones, it says that the first were put up by Moshe on the eastern side of the Jordan (in the Plains of Moav), the second were those that Yehoshua set up in the Jordan River and the third in Gilgal. How can Rashi have a different set than the Talmud - especially if he indicates that the Talmud was his source? Additionally, the Talmud (36a) says that the very same stones that were set up at Mt. Aival were transported to Gilgal and

set up there. How can Rashi call them two separate sets of stones if they were really the same stones?

This Rashi has baffled commentators for generations, with some (e.g. Chizkuni, Mizrachi and Maharsha) leaving it unanswered and some (e.g. Nachalas Yaakov, Sefer Hazikaron and Yosef Hillel) claiming that our version of Rashi is a misprint (despite the fact that the various "fixed up" versions have their own shortcomings). Nevertheless, by applying concepts suggested by other commentaries (not trying to explain Rashi, but the verses themselves) in a way not necessarily intended by those commentaries, there may be a possible way of answering not only our first two questions, but explaining Rashi as well.

In Yehoshua (4:4-9), the removal of 12 stones from the miraculously dry bed of the Jordan River from under the feet of the kohanim (priests) that were carrying the Holy Ark is described, as well as Yehoshua replacing them with 12 others. It was the 12 stones that were removed from the Jordan that the Talmud says were taken first to Mt. Aival and then to Gilgal. It is assumed by most that the stones placed by Yehoshua in the Jordan were literally under the feet of the kohanim (from where the others were removed), and that these are the 12 stones in the Jordan that the Talmud and Rashi are referring to as one of the three kinds of stones. However, the Torah (Devarim 27:2) and the Navi (Yehoshua 4:9) describe these stones as being made into a structure ("vahakimosa" and "haikim," i.e. something built up), not embedded into the river bed that will be covered by the waters of the Jordan once they start flowing normally again. The Abarbanel (in Yehoshua) explains that these stones weren't literally put under the feet of the kohanim, but built up near where the kohanim were standing, one on top of the other, as a remembrance of the miracle of the Jordan drying up that would be visible above the waters even after they returned to normal. If the set of stones described in 27:2 are these stones (as Rashi says), then it must be on these stones that the Torah commanded us to "plaster with lime" (27:2) and "write on them all the words of this Torah" (27:3), "while you are passing," i.e. while you are still in the process of crossing the Jordan River. Not in all 70 languages, as this one is only "for you" (27:2), so it was only written in the Holy Language (see Netziv). Having a structure of stones with the Torah written on them on the spot where the Children of Israel crossed the Jordan would

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be a constant reminder of the miracle that transpired there, as well as serving as a type of "Mezuzah" at the spot where they entered the land (see Abarbanel on Devarim 27:1-8) that reminded us to keep the Torah. And because it was built prior to actually entering the land, building it could be a precondition for doing so.

After commanding us to build this structure in the Jordan River (27:2-3), the Torah (27:4) commands us to, after we have already "crossed the Jordan" and are in the Promised Land, set up "these stones which I am commanding you today," i.e. the same kind of structure, that will remind us of the miracle (by using the stones removed from the Jordan) and to keep the Torah (by writing it in Hebrew on them after "plaster[ing] them with lime," by Mt. Aival. Then, after commanding us to build an altar there, the Torah alludes to a third structure, one on which the Torah should be written "with a full explanation" (27:8), i.e. in all 70 languages, so that every nation can come and read what the Torah says (see Rashi and Sotah 35b). There would be no need to write the Torah in all 70 languages on the stones at Mt. Aival, since these stones would only be there for a short time before being transported to Gilgal (as the Talmud says in Sotah 36a). Writing them in all 70 languages so that the other nations can read them must therefore refer to writing on these stones after they are set up in Gilgal.

Rashi's comment (on 27:2) is meant to tell us that we shouldn't think that when the Torah uses the word "stones" ("avanim") several times in these verses it is only referring to the set of stones set up at Mt. Aival (which is the simplest reading of the words, and how some commentators explain it). Rather, the word "stones" is used in three different contexts, one (27:2) referring to the structure set up in the Jordan River, the second (27:4) to the structure set up at Mt. Aival, and the third (27:8) to the structure set up in Gilgal (which had the Torah written on it in all 70 languages).

The Talmud (Sotah 35b) was a continuation of the Beraita that was on 35a, which was a continuation of the Beraita on 34a, which was discussing the stones Yehoshua had removed from the Jordan River. It is therefore discussing the stones themselves, telling us that there were three different sets of stones, one set in the Plains of Moav, a second in the Jordan, and a third that was at Mt. Aival before being moved to Gilgal.

Rashi is not discussing the actual stones, but which structure is being referred to by the word "stones." Since the verses are describing three different structures, Rashi must tell us that the three times the Torah uses the word "stones" refer to three different "[structures made of] stones." How does Rashi know that the Torah meant three different structures of stones rather than just the structure at Mt. Aival? From the Talmud in Sotah, which includes the structure in the Jordan River as a separate structure, tells us that the "full explanation" means in all 70 languages so that every nation can read the Torah's words in their native language, and which says that the stones used at Mt. Aival were transported right away to Gilgal. © 2008 Rabbi D. Kramer

### RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

## Shabbat Shalom

“**A**ll these curses shall befall you, pursue you and overtake you until you are destroyed... because you did not serve the Lord your G-d in joy and happiness.” (Deut 28:45, 47)

Since when is Judaism so concerned that we be happy? Yes, we are commanded to rejoice on our Festivals, but in general we are commanded to be holy, not necessarily happy (Kedoshim tih'yu). A number of years ago, a popular inscription on "T" shirts was "Don't worry, be happy." I always thought that the best illustration for this signature phrase would be Elsie the Contented Cow, chewing her cud with a beatific smile on her face, totally oblivious to whatever was going on around her. If my memory serves me, King David sweet psalmist of Israel, declared: "Happy is the person who is constantly fearful." Perhaps we ought change the "T" Shirt inscription to say, "Worry, be happy."

And if indeed the desired goal is to be happy, what does one say to the teen-ager who argues that marijuana is much better than any food or carbonated soft drink because it gives him a perpetual "high" of happiness without causing much damage to his brain cells. Would Judaism justify his argument?

Maimonides, in his unique way of formulating Jewish law, provides the significance of Jewish happiness (simha) from a Biblical and Talmudic perspective. In his Laws of the Festivals (Chapter 6, Law 20), he writes as follows:

"When an individual eats and drinks and rejoices on the Festival, he should not become overly involved in wine and playful laughter and levity... that is not happiness (simha), but is debauchery and foolishness. We were commanded... concerning happiness, which contains the service of the Creator of all things, as it is written, 'all these curses shall befall you because you did not serve the Lord your G-d in joy and happiness.' "

Maimonides goes on to declare (Laws of Lulav, Chapter 8, Law 15),

"The happiness which should cause an individual to be happy in the performance of a commandment and in loving G-d is a great (difficult) act of service."

Rav Nahman of Bretzlav teaches, "It is a great commandment to be happy" (mitzvah gedolah lihyot b'simhah). I believe that Maimonides would alter one word from Rav Nahman's formulation, substituting the word 'avodah' for the word 'mitzvah,' which would result in the following formulation: Avodah gedolah lihyot be'Simhah. ("It is a difficult [Divine] service to be happy.")

But what exactly would Maimonides mean if this was his formulation? Let us examine the nature of wine which the Torah considered to be both a source of joy, "Wine gladdens the heart of the human being" (Psalms 104:5), as well as a primary expression of sanctity, Kedushah, since they ordain a blessing over wine, Kiddush, as the proper way to inaugurate each Sabbath and Festival day.

Why wine? Perhaps because it produces a feeling of joy, a kind of "high" happiness, but primarily because it is so difficult to produce. Not only must the grapevines be planted, tended to and nurtured, but then the grapes must be harvested, separated from the stems, pressed, and then carefully and precisely fermented to exquisite perfection in order to produce wine. It is because of the difficult work involved in elevating the grape into the higher status of wine that - unlike most other fruits - our Sages command a different blessing over the wine than over the grape; the latter is the merely generic borei p'ri ha'etz (to the Creator of the fruit of the tree), whereas the former is borei p'ri hagafen (to the Creator of the fruit of the vine). And it is precisely because of the exertion, precision, ingenuity and expertise involved in wine production that wine became the consummate expression not only of happiness but also of sanctity.

My revered teacher Rav J.B. Soloveitchik has often taught that sanctity can only come with human input, human service, human commitment. Bread requires three Biblical blessings and one Rabbinical blessing to be recited after it is consumed - unlike fruits, vegetable or meat - because bread cannot be produced without eleven back-breaking and scientifically engineered processes which creates the "staff of life" from the lowly grain of wheat. Mt. Sinai was only sanctified with temporal sanctity - only for as long as the Divine Presence emanated forth the Ten Words, was the mountain holy; once the Divine Presence left, the holiness left, and therefore we are not even sure which mountain it is. Mt. Moriah (the Temple Mount), on the other hand, was sanctified with eternal sanctity, and remains the holiest spot on earth even today. Why is Mt. Moriah on a higher level than Mt. Sinai, the place from which the Bible was Divinely revealed? Once again, because although G-d gave us the Torah on Mt.

Sinai, Abraham was ready to sacrifice his beloved son to G-d on Mt. Moriah. Mt. Moriah expressed human commitment unto the death of our entire future, and therefore only Mt. Moriah is blessed with eternal sanctity.

The grape is worked, pressed trod upon and squeezed out, fermented and perfected, after which it can be held aloft and used in a ritual of hallowed happiness. True holiness and true joy can only come after hard and dedicated work in the service of the Divine. It requires difficult work to serve G-d in happiness.

One memorable Simchat Torah, when I was still a student at Yeshiva University, we were invited to the home of Rav Poleyoff for kiddush. Rav Poleyoff was a venerable Rosh Yeshiva, aged and almost totally blind, who knew many Tractates of the Talmud and their early commentaries by heart, word for word. We arrived after having attended at least six previous kiddushim, a bit shaky on our legs and fuzzy in our minds. The Rosh Yeshiva "sensed" our state of sobriety or the lack thereof, and told us - as his 'dvar Torah' (Torah thought) - the difference between drinking of hallowed happiness and drinking of destructive drunkenness. "If you feel happy, even high, at your accomplishment which fills you with pride and joy, and you wish to express that happiness with wine, that drinking will be sacred; but if you feel empty inside, disappointed in yourself and uncertain as to your abilities and worth, and you are looking to the wine to give you the "happy high," then that drinking can only lead to drunkenness." © 2008 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

#### **RABBI BEREL WEIN**

### **Wein Online**

**T**he parsha of the week is dominated by the two polarities that dominate Jewish life over the ages and especially Jewish life over the past two generations. They are the idea of the entry of the Jewish people into their promised homeland, the Land of Israel, and the awful and awesome description of the troubles, persecution and deaths that will befall the Jewish people - the tochacha. One is a message of hope, vitality and a future of serenity - each person at peace under one's vine and fig tree. The other message is one of tragedy and depression, almost of despair. How are we to reconcile these two seemingly contradictory messages and prophecies?

By the simple review of the past events of the last seventy years of Jewish life, we are able to see clearly how these absolutely irreconcilable and opposite events and moods can exist in simultaneous disharmony. The Holocaust was the complete fulfillment, down to the last horrid detail, of the prophecy foretelling the tochacha. Rashi points out that no one in the world would be ready to accept the Jews

within their homes and borders, even as laborers and servants. Death would be the only acceptable solution to the "Jewish problem." As Moshe will state later in the book of Dvarim "the hidden things are known to G-d our Lord alone" but nevertheless "what is revealed to us that we must persevere and observe the words and commandments of the Torah for us and our descendants." So we can only accept the tochacha as a reality and not attempt tortured explanations and justifications.

However, the idea of the return of the people of Israel to the Land of Israel has also been translated into reality over the past decades. And we read in this week's parsha, a Jew who is privileged to share in the bounty and blessing of the Land of Israel is obligated to make a public acknowledgement of one's gratitude and thanks to the G-d of Israel for living in such a time and place. The Torah teaches us to abhor ingratitude.

Life provides all of us with ample annoyances and problems to cause us discomfort. This is as true in the Land of Israel as anywhere else. I have just returned from the United States where I experienced Israelis who now live there sheepishly tell me that their quality of life is no better if not even somewhat worse in New York than it was in Jerusalem. Most people are distracted by the mundane and eventually unimportant aspects of daily life.

The Torah bids us to view life in a broader perspective and more meaningful fashion. G-d wishes, so to speak, a more sophisticated and wise appreciation of the gifts granted us by Him. In our time, the Land of Israel is one of the greatest gifts granted unto us. We cannot be guilty of treating it with ingratitude and complaint, no matter the frustrations and problems of everyday life here. Balancing the polarities of the messages of the parsha remain a great challenge to us. May we be worthy of that challenge and its solutions. © 2008 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**s the Jews prepare to enter Israel after 40 years of desert migration, Moshe (Moses) reminds them of the miracles they have seen. He then proclaims "But the Lord has not given you a heart to know, and eyes to see, and ears to hear until this day." (Deuteronomy 29:3) What is the meaning of "until this day?" Can it be that prior to that moment, the Jews did not believe?

Rashi quotes the classic Midrash that on that day, Moshe gave the actual scroll of the Torah to the Levites. The rest of the Jewish people felt excluded and

protested. Impressed by their love of the Torah, Moshe proclaims that it was on that day that the Jews showed how deeply they believe.

Other thoughts come to mind related to the upcoming High Holidays.

Perhaps only after living through the miracles of the Egyptian exodus and the desert wanderings, could the Jewish people finally look back and recognize the magnitude of what they had experienced. It often occurs that one can only appreciate a miraculous moment long after it happens. So too, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur teach us all to look back over the year and with the distance of time, recognize what G-d has done for us.

A contrary thought can be suggested. Rather than emphasizing miracles as the key to faith, it is the everyday that leads to true belief. In fact, the test of people is not how they believe when experiencing a supernatural moment, but how they commit themselves when living a normal everyday existence. Only now, after 40 years, when miracles were no longer as overt, would the Jews really show their faith in G-d. One can similarly argue that it is easy to make a commitment on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur when one is experiencing the awesome power of the spirit of the holiday. The test is one's preparedness to follow through; remaining committed even after the dust has settled.

Rabbi Meir Simcha of Dvinsk in his Meshekh Hohmah offers an alternative idea. He suggests that throughout Moshe's life, the Jews may have blurred his role, sensing that Moshe was more than an emissary of G-d - believing perhaps that he was G-d Himself. This is a common mistake made in many other religions-the turning of the lead prophet into a G-d. Only on the day that Moshe died, would the Jews unequivocally declare their absolute belief that no human can be G-d. This, in fact, is a central message of the Days of Awe. Hence, the morning service on Rosh Hashanah begins with the coronation of G-d alone as we emphatically cry out "Ha-Melekh-The King." Yom Kippur brings this thought to a crescendo as we conclude the service with the refrain, "Hashem hu Ha-Elokim - The Lord is The G-d."

Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, much like this week's portion, are a renewal of that final day in the desert, when we reflect on the miracles in our lives, find the Divine in the everyday and assert the rulership of G-d alone. © 2008 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.

#### **RABBI BORUCH LEFF**

### **Kol Yaakov**

**L**ibraries are usually quiet places to allow for contemplation and concentration. Yet, if you walk into a Torah study hall, you may be surprised at

the decibel level and the noise. Why is it that Jews study out loud? Parshat Ki Tavo offers an insight that solves this puzzle.

What truly distinguishes us from the animal kingdom? Many argue that the distinctive quality of the human being is the power of speech and communication. This week's Parsha offers a potent lesson into just how powerful an effect speech has on leading to changes in behavior.

The opening passage of Parshat Ki Tavo describes the commandment for a farmer in Israel to bring his first fruits to the Temple and say, "I declare today before G-d that I have come to the land that G-d swore to our forefathers to give us" (Devarim 26:3). The farmer then continues to recite a special formulation thanking G-d for His goodness. We understand the special formulation and offering of thanks but why must the farmer preface with stating clearly exactly why he is there? Rashi explains that the purpose of this declaration is to show that the farmer is not unappreciative for the land of Israel. But isn't the farmer's very coming display his gratitude? Why must he actually say it?

We derive from here an important lesson for Jewish living. Speech is a much more forceful and explosive force than we usually consider it. Expressing gratitude through speech is very different than merely feeling or thinking it. This is because although what we think about shapes who we are to a certain extent, what we say forms our identities much more. The concept of vows, and the consequences for breaking them displays this.

Vows are discussed in Bamidbar 30:3:

"If a man takes a vow to G-d or swears an oath to prohibit a prohibition on himself, he shall not PROFANE his word, he shall keep all words that have come out of his mouth."

The language employed here for the prohibition is not of the usual kind. The Torah could have said "lo yaavor"-do not violate your word; instead it uses "lo yachel"-do not profane. There is clearly a message conveyed with the more dramatic choice of "do not profane" your words, making them unholy. In addition, the second half of the statement also stresses speech more than is necessary when it states, "keeping words that have come out of the mouth" and not simply "keep your promises." Why?

The Torah uses the language of "do not profane" your words. Don't cheapen them because a word is a reality. The problem with breaking a vow is not simply that one is being dishonest. It is much more than that. You destroy the reality you have created when you violate your vow.

Saying something out loud has a deep and profound effect upon the human personality. It is not as we think, that speech is only significant when speaking one's mind in public as opposed to in private, because

a vow is as obligatory stated in private as in public. Rather, the strength of bringing thoughts from the mind into the realm of speech applies even in privacy. We may think that cursing at someone or using foul language in private is harmless. While it is preferable to cursing in public, it still does considerable damage to one's spirituality because when thoughts become speech, a more powerful transformation has been effected. Speech creates a new reality and has a strong impact upon the people who speak them.

If we have thoughts that we shouldn't have, we should dare not say them. Lusts and desires spoken achieve a force that words left unspoken do not have. The same is true for positive growth. If I think thoughts of improvement I do not attain much growth. But saying that I want to learn more, love G-d, pray, love my parents more, love my spouse more, is already more than just an undertaking; it is already in the physical realm to an extent and is somewhat as if I have carried out my words. And if I do have thoughts that I should not have, saying aloud that I wish I would not have them is a great benefit for removing them (although there's no reason to say that too loud).

An example of this involves Jacob. There are times when we are allowed to falsify facts and mislead for 'the sake of peace'. This is derived from G-d Himself who did this in order to maintain peace between Abraham and Sarah (See Rashi, Bereishit 18:13. This concept cannot be universally exercised and one should consult a halachic authority for specific questions as to its application.) The case involving Jacob is when he deceptively diverted Isaac's blessing from Esau to himself. The Torah approves of Jacob's behavior (as does Isaac when he discovers what had occurred-see Bereishit 27:33) and considers this episode a justified event for the proper development of the Jewish people.

When Jacob walks into Isaac's room, posing as Esau, Isaac asks him, "Are you my son, Esau?" and Jacob replies, "I am Esau, your firstborn" (see Bereishit 27:18, 24). Rashi ( Bereishit 27:19) cites a Midrash stating that Jacob really was saying, "I am I, Esau is your firstborn." What is the Midrash trying to say? Are we playing games? We know that Jacob wanted Isaac to think he is Esau. So why does he say it in this way and why does it matter what his intent was when he said it? The statement itself misled Isaac anyway. Why is it significant that it could have been understood in a truthful manner with the comma in between "I" and "Esau"? Is it less of a lie this way?

A lie is a lie. This is true. But the Midrash is telling us that there is an enormous difference between a lie where the words themselves are false, and a lie where the words are true but the intention is for a lie. This Midrash is teaching us the tremendous power of words and the care that we must take when using

words. This is why Jacob was concerned that at least his words could be construed as truthful.

A word that is unrefined or rough has an effect upon us and taints us. A spoken word changes us. We must carefully consider our words and not haphazardly state our opinion. We must make sure our message is properly articulated. We must be careful how we speak to others and the way we convey our thoughts.

This insight is the reason why verbal confession before G-d is such an integral part of repentance, which is the major theme of the month of Elul, in our preparations for the High Holidays. Rambam (Laws of Repentance 2:2 paraphrased):

"Repentance means to abandon the sin, remove it from one's heart, and resolve never to repeat it. One must also regret the action. And one must confess WITH HIS LIPS and say all of these things that he has pondered in his heart."

The phrase 'with his lips' is chosen, in similar fashion to the Torah's use of 'all that comes out of his mouth', to emphasize the enormous power that speech has in transforming a person to repent. G-d knows our thoughts so it is obvious that we do not verbally state anything for Him. Rather, the confession must occur for our growth's sake. Thoughts must be released through the lips in order for lasting change to take place. Without verbal confession, without speech, repentance has not been achieved and any thoughts of change will most likely dissipate.

This is also why only thinking about Torah when we study does not have the same power as verbally saying Torah out loud. (Some opinions maintain that no blessing is required when only thinking Torah. See Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 47:4, with Mishna Brura) The information won't be recalled as well either, as the Talmud states: The saying of Torah is of the essence of learning Torah (Eruvin 54a).

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### MACHON ZOMET

## Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak, Yeshivat Har Etzion

**B**nei Yisrael were commanded in this week's Torah portion to set up two piles of stones on Mount Eival when they entered Eretz Yisrael. The passage about these stones is written in an interesting way. First a command is given to arrange one pile of stones with the entire Torah written on them: "And you shall set up large stones and paint them with plaster. And you shall write on them all the words of this Torah." [Devarim 27:2-3]. This is followed by a second command, to arrange the second set of stones as an altar: "And you shall build an altar there for your G-d, an altar of stone. Do not raise iron over them. You shall build the altar of your G-d from whole stones." [27:5-6]. But Moshe immediately follows this with a reminder of

the command to write the Torah on the stones. "And you shall write on the stones all the words of this Torah, explained well" [27:8]. This structure of the text shows that what we see here is one passage, which contains two commandments to make piles of stones that are connected to each other. The question then is: what is the link between the two sets of stones?

Evidently the purpose of the first pile of stones is to show that Bnei Yisrael must fulfill the commands of the Torah as a condition for remaining on the land. For this reason, the command to set up the stones must be performed as soon as the people enter the land—"When you cross over, so that you will enter the land which your G-d gives to you" [27:3]. In that place the people will say, "Cursed is the one who does not maintain the words of this Torah, in order to observe them." [27:26]. It is reasonable to assume that the phrase "the words of this Torah" refers to the words written on the nearby stones. The stones are an expression of the element of fear of G-d, as is shown in detail by the obligations while they live in Eretz Yisrael. The second set of stones, on the other hand, built in the form of an altar, expresses the trait of love and joy before G-d. "And you shall offer Shelamim sacrifices and eat them there, and you shall be happy before G-d." [27:7]. The Shelamim (in addition to the Olah sacrifice, which is an expression of the fear of G-d) shows the link between the Almighty and man, who has the privilege of eating at the Divine table. It also expresses thanks to the Almighty that Yisrael was privileged to take possession of the land. The two piles of stones, standing side by side, are thus symbols of the way that G-d must be served in Eretz Yisrael? through fear and through love.

It may also be that in a symbolic way the Torah purposely describes the two sets of stones differently. The stones on which the Torah is written are called "large stones." Based on other verses, this can be seen to refer to the trait of fear, as is written, "And G-d threw down on them large stones from the sky, until Azeikah, and they died" [Yehoshua 10:11; see also 10:18]. The stones of the altar, on the other hand, are described as "whole stones," linking them to the trait of perfection and peace.

### DR. AVIGDOR BONCHEK

## What's Bothering Rashi?

**T**he parsha begins with the laws of the First Fruits and the blessing one must say when he brings his Fruits to Jerusalem.

"And you will declare before Hashem your G-d, 'I have put away the holy things out of my house and have also given them to the Levite and to the stranger and to the orphan and to the widow, according to all Your commandments which You have commanded me. I have not transgressed Your command, neither have I forgotten.'" (Deuteronomy 26:13)

"Neither have I forgotten"-Rashi: "To bless You on the occasion of giving the tithes."

What would you ask here? A Question: Why does Rashi bring up the issue of a blessing? It would seem that "I have not forgotten" means "I have not forgotten Your commandments."

What is bothering him? Can you see anything about the verse that might lead him away from what would seem to be simple p'shat?

An Answer: The latter part of our verse says: "[I have done] according to all Your commandments which You have commanded me. I have not transgressed Your commandments, neither have I forgotten."

After the person proclaims that he has done all that G-d commanded him without transgressing His commands, what need is there to say any more? What can the words "Neither have I forgotten" possibly add?

This is what is bothering Rashi. How does his comment deal with this?

An Answer: One may do all the mitzvot according to the halacha precisely, yet miss the essence of things. We must not lose sight of the ultimate goal of mitzvot. The commandments are from G-d and their spiritual goal is to direct us back to G-d. At times, being preoccupied with the details of a mitzvah, one may forget its essence. In our verse Rashi tells us that this person makes clear that he has not forgotten the essence-he has remembered Who gave him his plentiful harvest and has thanked Him for it.

We find an often unnoticed consistency in the Torah. When the Torah describes the blessings of the Land that are to be found in Israel, immediately afterwards are warnings lest we forget Hashem. See the following examples of this connection: "And you will eat and you will be satisfied, then you shall bless Hashem your G-d, for the good Land which He has given you." (Deut. 8:10)

The very next verse says: "Take heed lest you forget Hashem your G-d etc."

And again: "Lest you will eat and be full and build good houses... and silver and gold will multiply for you... and your pride increases and you forget Hashem your G-d." (Deut. 8:12-14)

Again: "And I will give the rain in its time...and you will gather your crops...and you eat and be satisfied...Take heed that your heart not mislead you and you turn aside etc." (Deut. 11:14-16)

And again: "Since you did not serve Hashem, your G-d, with joy and good heartedness, when you had all the good." (Deut. 28:47)

Again: "And Yeshurun grew fat and kicked (i.e. rebelled against G-d.) etc." (Deut. 32:15)

Clearly, the blessings and their plentitude carry within them the potential risk of forgetting the source of all blessings. Forgetting G-d would seem to be an occupational hazard of receiving His blessings. Therefore, the Torah constantly stresses that once we

have received His blessings we should be mindful not to forget the source of these blessings; not to forget Hashem Who has "given us the strength to make our wealth."

We can now understand, as Rashi did, that the words in our verse "neither have I forgotten" refer to remembering Hashem and thanking Him with a blessing. © 2008 Dr. A. Bonchek & aish.com

### **RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY**

## **First Impressions**

**T**his week's parsha begins by telling us what will occur when the Jews finally conquer and settle the Land of Canaan. "It will be when you enter the Land that Hashem, your G-d, gives you as an inheritance, and you possess it, and dwell in it" (Deuteronomy 26:13). It relates the mitzvah of Bikurim: "You shall take of the first of every fruit of the ground that you bring in from your Land that Hashem, your G-d, gives you, and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place that Hashem, your G-d, will choose, to make His Name rest there (Deuteronomy 26:2). The bikurim are then presented to the kohen. "You shall come to whomever will be the Kohen in those days, and you shall say to him, "I declare today to Hashem, your G-d, that I have come to the Land that Hashem swore to our forefathers to give us" (Deuteronomy 26:3).

What kind of introductory remark is that? Of course, we come to the land! If we had not arrived, we would not be here! Why then do we tell the kohen that "I declare today that I have arrived"?

As a student in the Ponovez Yeshiva, I would spend some summer days in the resort town of Netanya. One day, I spotted what, to an American seemed like an anomaly: a small Yemenite man, long curly peyos dangling from his darkly tanned olive-skinned face, bouncing up and down as he, dressed in a policeman's uniform, was directing traffic. I had never seen an orthodox policeman, let alone one who had dangling side curls. My propensity to talk to fellow Jews and my inherent fascination with curiosities, spurred me to engage him in conversation.

As we talked, he told me about lineage. I mentioned that my name was Kamenetzky, and he froze in disbelief.

"Are you, by any chance, related to the famous Rabbi Kamenetzky of America who recently visited Israel?"

"Do you mean Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky?" I inquired. When he nodded, in excited corroboration, I added, "he is my grandfather." It was as if I had sent a charge of electricity through his body!

He beamed at me. "Do you know that your grandfather, Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky attended my son's bris, right here in Netanya!"

I did a double take and thought, "Yeah Right! Sure. My 89-year-old grandfather came to Netanya for a Yemenite police officer's son's bris." The man registered my apparent skepticism, and proceeded with the following story. At the time, Kiryat Zanz, the community built by the Klausenberg Rebbe, in Netanya, had recently expanded its medical center. The administrators wanted Rabbi Kamenetzky to see the beautiful facility first hand. The revered sage's endorsement would surely boost their fundraising efforts. They picked Rav Yaakov up from his accommodations in Jerusalem, and drove him to Netanya. Entering the city limits, Rav Yaakov asked, "Are we going to the hospital?"

When the administrators and the driver, affirmed that destination, Rav Yaakov said, "No, we are going to the Rav. When one comes to a town, his first stop is to see the Rav. After we greet the Rav, we will see the hospital."

They went to the home of Rabbi Lau, (Israel's current Chief Rabbi) Rav of Netanya, but he was not there.

At that point in the story, the policeman became excited. "Do you know where Rabbi Lau was?" he beamed.

He did not wait for an answer. "Rabbi Lau was at my son's bris! And a few minutes later, your grandfather arrived as well!"

Imagine. It took the Jews fourteen years to settle and conquer the Land of Canaan. Until they settled, there was no mitzvah to bring bikurim, (first fruits). During all those years, no one had formally presented themselves to the Kohen. They may have gone to Jerusalem for the holidays, or for other occasions, but never was there a formal presentation to the kohen.

Thus, when the simple farmer finally presents himself to the kohen, he uses the words, "I declare, today, to Hashem that I have come." Perhaps the Torah is subtly sending a simple message: "Kohen, now that I greet you, I declare that I have arrived." Because until you have greeted the kohen, you may have battled. You may have conquered. You may have sown, and you may have reaped. But you have not arrived. © 2001 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org

#### **RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER**

### **Weekly Dvar**

**T**oday. It's a powerful word. It is used by doctors to define the exact moment their patients are to stop over-indulging, smoking, and drinking. It is used by account receivables to exact when they want their bills paid. Most importantly, it's used by the Torah in describing what it wants from our attitudes.

This week the Torah portion tells us: "Today Hashem commands you to perform these decrees and statutes." (26:16) There is obviously a deeper

connotation. The commandments were not given on the day that Moshe read this week's portion. They were given forty years prior. Also, at the end of the Parsha, Moshe calls the nation together and reminds them of the miraculous events that transpired during the exodus from Egypt. He discusses "the great wonders, signs, and miracles that your eyes beheld." (29:1-3) Then he adds something shocking: "But Hashem did not give you a heart to understand or eyes to see until today." What can the word "today" mean in this context? Did the Jewish nation not have the heart to appreciate the value of splitting the Red Sea forty years back? Did they not revel in the miracle of Manna from its first earthly descent decades previously? How can Moshe say that they did not have eyes to understand until today?

Rabbi M. Kamenetzky explains that perhaps Moshe is telling his nation the secret of eternal inspiration. One may experience miraculous events. He may even have the vision of a lifetime. However he "will not have the heart to understand or the eyes to see" until that vision is today. Unless the inspiration lives with him daily, as it did upon the moment of impact. Whether tragedy or blessing, too often an impact becomes as dull as the movement of time itself. The promises, pledges, and commitments begin to travel slowly, hand-in-hand down a memory lane paved with long-forgotten inspiration. This week Moshe tells us that even after experiencing a most memorable wonder, we still may, "not have the heart to discern nor the eyes to see." Until we add one major ingredient. Today.

Quotation of the Week (thanks to Sora): "One who has one thousands friends has not one friend to spare." © 2008 Rabbi S. Ressler and LeLamed, Inc.

#### **RABBI SHLOMO KATZ**

### **Hama'ayan**

**“Y**ou shall come to whomever will be the kohen in those days ..." (26:3)

Could I possibly go to any kohen other than the one who is my days? Rashi explains: "As he is." [Don't compare him to previous leaders.]

It is told that R' Meir Shapiro z"l (1887-1933) once visited the Chafetz Chaimz"l (1838-1933) for a Shabbat. "Say a dvar Torah," said the Chafetz Chaim.

"I came to listen," answered R' Shapiro.

"But I am ill," said the Chafetz Chaim.

"But the Torah says, 'to whomever will be the kohen in those days' -- as he is," replied R' Shapiro. [The Chafetz Chaim was a kohen.]

Thereupon, the Chafetz Chaim said a dvar Torah. (Otzar Tzaddikei U'Geonei Ha'dorot p.575)

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