

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The word "ki" in Hebrew has a number of meanings. The meaning most often used is "if." However it also means "when" as expressed here in the first word of this week's parsha. But Hebrew is a many layered and many faceted language. Sparse in vocabulary - English has almost ten times as many words as does Hebrew - it is nevertheless very rich in meaning and nuance.

So that the Hebrew word when used in a certain sense still retains certain aspects of its alternate meanings that apply to other forms and grammatical structures. So even though the word "ki" that appears here in our parsha clearly means "when" it nevertheless retains within it a shade of meaning that can be understood as meaning "if."

The Torah means to imply to us that living in the Land of Israel is no sure thing for the Jewish people. In case the nuance of the word "ki" was not sufficient to drive that message home to us, the parsha is distinguished by its long and bitterly detailed "tochacha" which shows us the truly tenuous hold we have on this land.

The Land of Israel is acquired through pain and sacrifice, the rabbis taught us. It is a difficult land to acquire and it is a difficult land to hang on to. The rabbis taught us that Torah knowledge is as difficult to acquire as vessels of gold and is as easy to lose as fragile crystal. The same general idea can be applied to the Land of Israel as far as the Jewish people is concerned.

The parsha makes it clear that the relationship between the people and the Land of Israel is based upon mitzvoth. The first section of the parsha deals with the commandments regarding bikurim - the offerings of the first fruits of the season - and the commandments regarding the tithing of produce and the redemption of it in coins to be brought to and spent in Jerusalem.

All of the laws regarding the Land of Israel and its produce are meant to remind us of the uniqueness of that land and its inherent holiness. If the Jews somehow treat the Land of Israel as just another country or location on face of this earth then their stay in the land will remain questionable and impermanent.

Just as the Jews are not allowed by G-d to see themselves as just plain folks like everyone else so too does He not allow us to see the Land of Israel as a

place on the map just like anywhere else. Zionism learned the hard way that Uganda is not the Promised Land for Jews.

The difficulty in treating the Land of Israel as a unique location lies in the practical tasks of everyday national, governmental and social life. How to try and live a supposedly normal life in a country and location that the Torah defines for us as being abnormal and unique represents the great challenge that faces the Jewish people in today's world. Hopefully we will meet that challenge more successfully than did our earlier ancestors. © 2009 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. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

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

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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. © 2009 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 DOVID SIEGEL

Haftarah

This week's haftarah brings us to the concluding dimensions of Hashem's encompassing efforts to comfort the Jewish people. The prophet Yeshaya shares with us a glimpse of the glorious era of Mashiach and reveals Hashem's unbelievable sensitivity and concern for His chosen nation. Yeshaya begins, "Rise and project your light because the radiance of Hashem shines upon you." (60:1) The prophet's message is that in the days of Mashiach the Jewish people will serve as a reflection of Hashem's

light unto the nations of the world. Yeshaya continues, "Lift your eyes and see them coming; your sons coming from afar and your daughters accompanied by the kings of the world." (60:3-5) The cloud of darkness and confusion which continuously plagues society will finally be lifted and the entire world will flow into Jerusalem in streams to discover the truths of Hashem and His Torah. Instead of the all too familiar scene of the Jewish people flowing out of their homeland into exile, a new flow will occur. Not only will our oppressors permit us to return to Israel, they will even personally escort us back to our homeland. And to complete this picture, nations will display sincere interest in the Jewish people's traditions and will flock to our homeland to discover our Jewish values and systems. The influx will be so overwhelming that we will wonder in amazement if we are merely imagining these sights, or if, in truth, history has made a full turnabout.

The prophet continues, "All the choice sheep of Kedar will gather to you.... to be offered on My altar and accepted with desire." (60: 7) The nations of the world will appreciate in sincerity the value of service to Hashem through sacrifice and will continuously offer Him an abundance of sacrifices. In place of their cruel campaign for thousands of years to destroy and never allow the reconstruction of the Bais Hamikdash they will finally comprehend spiritual values and utilize the Bais Hamikdash to capacity. The prophet adds, "And foreign nations will build your walls and their kings will contribute the funds." (60:10) Even the demolished walls of Israel's cities will be rebuilt by her oppressors, nations who previously acted so harshly toward the Jewish people.

Hashem explains the reason for this unexpected reversal and says, "Because in My time of anger I smote you and in My time of desire for you, I will show you My compassion." (60:10) The Metzudos Dovid explains this passage in the following manner. Needless to say, the experiences of the Jewish people are unparalleled by any other nation. Their extent of shame, persecution and tragedy covers the pages of world history in awesome proportions. This is because they, and only they, are the direct subject of Hashem's disturbance and anger. Unlike the nations of the world who are generally ignored by Hashem the Jewish people are always in His direct focus. Hashem responds to our every turn and reprimands us accordingly with the constant severe beatings we suffer. But all of this is an outgrowth of His unconditional love for us and His determination to keep us on the right path. And when the moment arrives for Hashem to display His kindness to His people it will be done in these very same proportions. Being the direct subject of Hashem's concern and compassion Hashem will shower His love upon His people in a most encompassing way. Hashem pledges to reverse the unpleasant experiences of the Jewish people's past and replace them with a glorious future. He therefore commits Himself to undoing the

darkness of our past with the indescribable brightness of our future.

The Jewish nation finds it quite difficult to forget the pain and shame of their exile and to this Hashem responds in a most magnificent way. Hashem informs them that their return from exile will be through none other than those very same nations who were responsible for the exile. They will personally escort the Jews back to their homeland with dignity and respect and will actually crave to be amongst those who are privileged to reside in the land of Israel. Regarding this, Yeshaya says, "And the sons of your past oppressors shall humbly walk to you and all of your previous scorners shall prostrate themselves before you." (60:14) And as we cited earlier, these very same nations and sovereigns who labored so diligently to tear down the walls of Israel will now personally rebuild them.

The prophet completes the picture and states in the name of Hashem, "In place of copper I will bring gold and in place of steel I will bring silver. I will convert your previous tax collectors into peaceful acquaintances and your oppressors into charitable associates." (60:17) Hashem's compassion for His people knows no bounds and demands that even their financial oppression must be rectified. Therefore in place of the oppressors' unwarranted tax collections from the Jewish people, these same oppressors will offer the Jews an abundance of personal monetary gifts. All the stolen Jewish wealth will be graciously returned ten-fold and in addition these same collectors will generously contribute considerable financial resources to the Jewish people. (see Radak, Malbim, ad loc.)

The sum total of Hashem's restoration plan for the Jewish people is best described in the following words of the prophet. "In place of your previous status, forsaken and despised I shall establish you the majesty of the world, the joy for all generations." (60:15) Oh, if we could only see this now! © 2009 Rabbi D. Siegel and torah.org

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**M**oshe foresaw that the Holy Temple will be destroyed, and [the mitzvah of bringing] the first-fruits will be halted, [so] he established for Israel that they should pray three times every day" (Tanchuma. Ki Savo 1). Although the exact format of our daily prayers (and those for the Sabbath and Holidays) were set by the "Men of the Great Assembly" (see Berachos 33a), this Midrash tells us that the requirement to pray was established by Moshe about a thousand years earlier, and that one of the primary reasons for Moshe doing so was his realization that the mitzvah of "bikurim" (bringing the first-fruits each year to the Temple in Jerusalem) would eventually come to a (temporary) end. The obvious question is why this particular commandment was so important that it

necessitated instituting the requirement to pray thrice daily 850 years before the Temple was destroyed (although it is theoretically possible that he only made sure this requirement would be instituted when this occurred), and what connection there is between bringing "bikurim" and prayer (aside from both requiring that we speak to G-d, see Devarim 26:5-10).

[Whether this Midrash is consistent with the discussion in the Talmud (Berachos 26b) regarding whether the three daily prayers were established by our forefathers, or by the "Men of the Great Assembly" corresponding to the times of day when offerings were brought in the Temple, is a totally separate issue; either way we need to understand why the Midrash connects "bikurim" to prayer. I will just point out that the Talmud may be discussing the establishment of the times for these prayers, with morning being appropriate because we see that Avraham prayed in the morning, afternoon based on Yitzchok doing so in the afternoon, and evening because Yaakov prayed before retiring at night, as well as these being the times of the Temple offerings.]

When the Sefer Hachinuch (#606) explains the mitzvah of "bikurim" (including the requirement to say the "viduy" over them) he writes the following: "A person's thoughts are awakened and he etches into his heart the truth through the power of the words of his mouth. Therefore, when G-d, blessed is He, is good to him (the farmer bringing his first-fruits), and blesses him and his land to produce fruits, and he merits bringing them to the house of our G-d, it is appropriate for him to awaken his heart through the words of his mouth and to consider [the fact] that everything (i.e. all his produce) was granted to him from the Master of the world." Prayer can be seen in a similar light, as wishing for something is not the same as asking for it. By asking G-d to fulfill our needs, we acknowledge not only our needs, but that it is G-d that fulfills them (see Maharal, Nesiv Ha'avodah 3).

When the Maharai (Rabbeinu Yisroel Isserlin, the Tosafist best known as the author of the "Terumas Ha-deshen") describes the devastation of the 7th plague and why Rashi refers to it as "the plague of the first [or recently ripened] fruits" (Shemos 9:14), he writes that the hail was "a great plague for those who work the land, for the produce was ruined [right] after it had fully ripened, and they were anxiously awaiting [the opportunity] to enjoy them right away." All year long, the farmer (and since Israel was an agricultural society, this included almost everybody) worked the land - plowing, seeding, harvesting, et al - waiting for his crops to be ready. As devastating as it was for the Egyptian farmer to lose his crop right after it had ripened, closely watching to see which fruit was the first to ripen in order to designate it as "bikurim" and bring it as an offering to G-d made the Jewish farmer fully aware that everything comes from G-d.

Knowing that our awareness of G-d is closely tied to our awareness that everything we have comes from Him, Moshe was concerned that when there is no mitzvah of "bikurim" to strengthen this awareness, our connection to G-d could be weakened. He therefore made sure that every day, three times a day, we ask G-d to provide us with all the things we need. This way, by acknowledging that it is G-d who can fulfill our needs, we will always be cognizant of the Source of everything. © 2009 Rabbi D. Kramer

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Yehoshua Shapira, Rosh Yeshivat Ramat Gan; Translated by Moshe Goldberg

The sages do not agree if the source for the obligation to pray is Torah law or a rabbinical decree. However, even those who feel that there is a Torah obligation agree that the mitzva is a general one. The timing and the exact text have been left by the Torah as an individual matter, related to every person's life experience and inclinations. The Torah does not give us a text for the prayers, and only during the time of the Anshei Haknesset Hagedola were the text and the sequence of prayers established.

However, this week's Torah portion describes two situations when a man is commanded to turn to G-d in prayer and even gives the exact text of the prayer. In the recitation of Bikurim, first fruits, it is written, "And you shall declare before your G-d, My father was a lost Aramite..." [Devarim 26:5]. And in the declaration of giving maaser, it is written, "You shall say before your G-d, I have removed the holy material from the house" [26:13]. Why are these cases different from all the other instances of prayer?

The passage of the Bikurim has also been singled out for another special privilege: It is the basis in the Hagadda of Pesach of the description of the bondage and the redemption, superseding the original passages in the book of Shemot, where the actual redemption took place. Why is this so?

It would seem that the two questions that we have asked have the same answer. The Torah concentrates on the declaration of Bikurim as a way of demonstrating the proper way for a creature of G-d to meet the Almighty, teaching us the appropriate viewpoint that is necessary when we turn to G-d. Prayer usually puts us in the position of a pauper standing at the entrance of a home, as if we were lacking something. The result is that the entire spiritual relationship between man and G-d centers on fulfilling a need. However, Bikurim is a completely different kind of experience. A man comes to the gates of the Temple carrying the fruits of his own land, happy with his lot and satisfied by his own efforts, filled with appreciation for all the good that our G-d has given to him. He therefore

approaches the Almighty out of a feeling of song and thanks.

This is the proper and true eternal relationship between man and the Master of the Universe. The Torah teaches us that we do not come to meet G-d out of a feeling of a lack but rather out of a feeling of plenty. Not only at a time of redemption but from the earliest of times G-d has only wanted our own good and has done all manner of good things in the world, and even if our mouths would be filled with an entire sea of words we would not be able to thank Him sufficiently for His good to us. This is the basis of the statement that all sacrifices will be cancelled in the distant future except for the Todah, a sacrifice brought to show our thanks and appreciation, which expresses the truly deep link between man and G-d.

This demonstrates the truly remarkable insight of the author of the Hagadda, showing that even from within the situations of greatest lack we must continue to look from the "full and satisfied" viewpoint of the prayers of Bikurim. We will retell the story of the Exodus from Egypt with the same trembling of joy that we feel when we lift up the basket with our best and first produce. This joy is an expression of the hand of G-d which has been revealed to us, it is the true explanation justifying all the "adventures" that we experienced until we reached the point where we are.

RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

The Torah states: "And you shall rejoice with all the good that the Almighty has given you" (Deuteronomy 26:11). Why does the Torah obligate us with a commandment to rejoice when the natural inclination is to be happy when good things happen to us?

Rabbi Mordechai Gifter, Rosh HaYeshiva of Telse Yeshiva in Cleveland, clarifies with an insight into human nature: "Man's nature is to constantly want more than he presently has. 'He who has one hundred wants two hundred.' Our moments of joy are mixed with sadness over what we lack-and this is destructive both physically and spiritually. Therefore, the Torah commands us to feel a joy that is complete-to focus on and rejoice with what we have."

If you think that you will be happy only when you have more, then you will NEVER be happy. When you finally get what you were hoping for, you will once again focus on getting more and will again feel unhappy. Happiness is dependent upon your state of mind. You can only be happy if you appreciate what you have and what you are presently doing.

In Pirkei Avos (chapter 4, first mishna/"teaching") it states, "Who is the rich person? He who is happy with his portion." Regardless of what you have, you are only wealthy if you have mastered the ability to appreciate what you have. (This includes

appreciating your children, too!) There are many people who are like multi-millionaires who don't know that they are rich because all of their money is sewn into the mattress and they don't know that it is there. Instead, they complain about sleeping on a lumpy mattress! (I think of Aish HaTorah as "poking holes in mattresses" so that Jews everywhere can see the beauty, meaning and values in our heritage.)

One can have eyes, hands, feet, a mind to think with and be depressed- unless he focuses on taking pleasure in these gifts. Imagine if you were blind and suddenly were given the gift of sight. Would you be "flying high"? You would be beyond yourself in happiness! Why wait to appreciate what you have? Make a list of your gifts and for what you are grateful to the Almighty. It is good preparation for Rosh Hashana!
*Based on Growth Through Torah by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin
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RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“**A**nd He brought us to this place and He has given us this land flowing with milk and honey. And now, behold, I have brought the first of the fruits of the land which You, O Lord, has given me.” (Deut 26:1-10).

We often fall into a certain pattern of action or of prayer because of a specific set of circumstances - and even after the circumstances change, and different actions or prayers are called for, we continue to do what we've always done, praying the prayers we've always prayed, not taking into account the new situation, the new reality. For example, Jews in the Diaspora, both at the end of Yom Kippur and at the conclusion of the Passover Seder, continue to cry out in anguished hope: "Next year may we be in Jerusalem." And yet if they truly wished to be in Jerusalem, all they would have to do is make aliyah, or at least regularly visit the Holy City, and not once in every 25 years.

Similarly, Jews in Israel continue to invoke the Nahem prayer on the fast of the Ninth of Av as if Jerusalem had been laid waste by the Roman legions only a short time ago, ignoring the vast number of changes in the city's life - albeit with limitations but nevertheless the qualitative differences in Jerusalem since the Six Day War is enormous. Rav Haim David HaLevi suggests that we at least change the text of the prayer by adding a past tense: "The City which had been laid waste..."

Another example of our stubborn refusal not to internalize the changes around us relates to a fascinating declaration at the beginning of this week's Torah portion, and how we deal with it at our Passover sederim. Chapter 26 of the Book of Deuteronomy opens with the command that when we dwell in the land of Israel, its first fruits are to be brought to the Temple in Jerusalem where we declare before the altar a

quintessential summary of Jewish history culminating in Jewish sovereignty and Divine Service: "An Aramean [Laban] sought to destroy my father [Jacob-Israel], and he went down in Egypt.... And the Egyptians dealt ill with us and afflicted us and laid upon us hard bondage... and the Lord took us out of Egypt... And He brought us to this place and He has given us this land flowing with milk and honey. And now, behold, I have brought the first of the fruits of the land which You, O Lord, has given me" (Deut 26:1-10).

The Mishnah clarifies a significant part of the Seder service, how after the second cup of wine and the asking the requisite questions around the table, we "...expound the Biblical text from the words 'An Aramean sought to destroy my father...' until the completion of the entire section...." (Mishnah, Pesachim 10,4).

But we do not expound that entire portion; we stop short, concluding with the exodus from Egypt, (verse 8), but neglecting to continue to state how "G-d has brought us to this land flowing with milk and honey" (verse 9) and how "Now behold I have brought the first of the fruit of the land..." (verse 10). And even if we feel that we cannot in good conscience recite the last verse because, alas, we do not yet have a Holy Temple to which to bring the first fruits, we can - and probably must - recite the next -to-the-last verse, in which we offer our thanks to the Almighty for having returned us (after almost 2000 years!) to this land flowing with milk and honey!

An investigation into the genesis of our Passover Haggadah texts (examining those found in the Cairo Genizah) reveals that apparently there were two main versions of the Haggadah, one emanating from Israel and another emanating from the Exile (Babylon). In Israel, the entire portion of the declaration was read; it was only in Exile that the last two verses were excised. And we in Israel are no longer in exile!

It would also appear that initially five cups of wine were poured during the Seder, the fifth relating to the fifth expression of redemption - "And I will bring you into the land..." (Exodus 6:8) - and to be drunk before the prayers of praise and thanks (hallel hagadah, Hodu LaShem Ki tov). It would seem - at least according to the Rambam (Laws of Hametz and Matzah 8,10) and many of the Geonim (Arvei Pesahim, ad loc) - that if you don't take the fifth cup, you don't recite hallel hagadol for the complete and universal redemption. Nevertheless, even after we've returned to a Jewish State we continue to make our Seder over four cups of wine. And even though the Rambam states that the fifth cup is only voluntary, surely we should demonstrate in some tangible or ritualistic manner that we appreciate the changed reality of our nation's status?

I would only add that our attitude towards the convert and the commitments which converts must make ought likewise undergo some sort of re-thinking in light of the situation in Israel today. Based on its Laws of

Return, Israel offers automatic citizenship to anyone who would have been persecuted as a Jew under Nazi laws - there are more than 300,000 individuals who are presently Israeli citizens living in Israel from the former Soviet Union who are presently Israeli citizens but not halakhically Jews. They serve in the IDF, some even dying for the nation in our wars for survival, and their children go to the same schools as other Israeli children. For the first time in almost 2000 years, Jewish nationality (symbolized by the ritual immersion, national re-birth,) requires a commitment which is different from, and no less exacting than, Jewish religion (symbolized by the acceptance of the commandments).

The time has come for this sea-change in Jewish status ought make a serious difference - at least in terms of our desire to inspire the non-halakhic Jews in our midst to find their place amongst us as completely legitimate children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah! © 2009 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI NAFTALI REICH

Legacy

Joyous enthusiasm is the child of inspiration. It is the emotional elixir that galvanizes, energizes, electrifies our lives. It empowers us to move mountains and make impossible dreams come true. Without joy, we plod mechanically toward our goals, seeking relief rather than fulfillment, but with joy we soar toward glittering mountaintops.

Clearly then, joy is a critical factor in our service of the Creator. It infuses every observance, every prayer, every moment of study with a divine energy that brings us that much closer to our Father in Heaven. One of the Chassidic masters once said, "Joy is not a commandment, but no commandment can accomplish what joy can."

But what if a person cannot achieve joy? What if a person is overwhelmed by the vicissitudes of life and is unable to free his spirit and let it soar? Surely, he does not deserve to be condemned and chastised for this failure. Surely, he should continue to serve the Creator to the best of his ability even if his efforts are less than inspired.

Let us now look for a moment into this week's Torah portion. The Torah describes the terrible consequences of the disloyalty of the Jewish people to their Father in Heaven. How does the Torah characterize this disloyalty? "Because you did not serve Hashem your Lord with joy." How can this be? How can the Torah deliver such harsh punishment for the failure to achieve a high standard of excellence?

Some commentators resolve this perplexing problem homiletically. They read the verse as follows, "Because you did not serve Hashem your Lord-with joy." It is not the absence of joy which is deserving of punishment but rather the presence of inappropriate joy.

It is one thing to fall short in the service of Hashem, to fall victim to the weakness of the flesh. But it is quite another to revel in sinfulness, to delight in the saccharine juices of forbidden fruit. This is an unconscionable affront to the Creator and it is deserving of the most severe punishment.

Modern psychology has made the eradication of guilt one of its primary objectives. But in the Torah perspective, guilt a very valuable trait, a true blessing. The insistent voice of our conscience reminds us who we are and where our responsibilities lie. Whenever we step over the line, this same little voice berates and chastises us, and more often than not, it robs us of the pleasures of sin. No matter how far we stray, guilt is our lifeline to Hashem.

Should we, however, find unmitigated joy in a sinful life, it would be a clear sign that the inner voice of conscience had been quashed, that our innate guilt had been expunged from our hearts, that our connection to Hashem had been severed, Heaven forbid. In this case, only the most severe afflictions could effect a reconciliation.

A king was angry with his son for neglecting his princely duties. He decided to discipline him by banishing him incognito to a remote village.

When the prince arrived in the village of his banishment, he was mortified. The place was a collection of rude huts without the most basic comforts and refinements of polite society. There were no books or works of art for miles around. The people were vulgar and ignorant. The stench in the streets was overpowering.

A year passed, and the king began to reconsider his decree of banishment against the young prince. But first he sent spies to see how the prince was faring.

The spies arrived in the village, but it was a while before they located the prince sitting among a group of peasants in a barnyard. The once handsome and elegant young prince was filthy and dressed in vermin-infested rags. He was stuffing his face with half raw meat, the red juices running down his chin. Every few minutes, he would roar with laughter at one or another of the coarse peasant stories that were being bandied about. The spies immediately returned to the palace to report on what they had seen.

When the king heard their report, he wept. "If my son is happy among the peasants, he will never be a prince."

In our own lives, we know all too well how difficult it is to avoid occasional missteps and lapses. After all, we are only human. But let us never forget who we are and what is expected of us. If we listen to the little voice of our conscience, if we embrace our guilt and use it as a lifeline to bring us back to Hashem, we will always remain royal princes and princesses and the doors to the palace will always be open to us. © 2009 *Rabbi N. Reich & torah.org*

RABBI YISROEL CINER

Parsha Insights

This week's parsha, Ki Tavo, contains the Tochacha-the terrible curses that will befall Bnei Yisroel {the Children of Israel} if the will of Hashem is not followed. This past century has seen the fulfillment of many of these passukim {verses}. A colleague of mine pointed out a passuk {verse} that chillingly applies to the events of the past months.

"And you will be driven mad by the sight that your eyes will see. [28:34]"

The N'tziv in his classic Haamek Davar explains in the following way: You will be astonished, how can it be that a few gangsters have done so much (to you) and your hand that has been strong has been unable to save you. This is what will drive you mad.

A clearer depiction of the maddening frustration felt during the present situation would be hard to find.

But how are we supposed to view the terror and tragedy that has become the daily fare?

Verber and Wechsler were certainly of the most famous escapees from the Nazi concentration camps. They even managed to take out of Auschwitz papers that documented the horrific killing apparatus that the Nazis had organized.

Auschwitz had an electrified fence that surrounded the inner camp with guard-towers every ten meters. These towers were only manned during the night. During the day, most inmates would work in the area outside the inner camp. This outer area was surrounded by a non-electrified fence and its guard towers were only manned during the day.

At the end of the day's work, the inmates would be marched into the inner camp and roll call would be taken. If all were accounted for, the gate of the inner fence would be locked and the guards manning the outer towers would move in to man the towers along the inner fence.

If anyone would be missing, a siren would sound and the search would begin. For the next three days, the outer fence would be manned continuously and hundreds of men-all SS men and their blood-hounds, the Ukrainian workers and the German common criminals who were also incarcerated in Auschwitz-would comb through every possible hiding place in both the inner and outer areas of the camp. If the escapees were not found after three days, a siren would signal the end of the search and the guards would resume their usual schedule, only manning the outer fence during the day.

At that time, Auschwitz was in the process of adding on additional bunkers. Neat and orderly piles of lumber were lined up in the outer area. The underground arranged that their people would be in charge of unloading and arranging the lumber that was delivered and they piled it up in a way that there was a

small crawl space under the top three layers. Verber and Wechsler crawled into that area, had the top layers placed above them and covered themselves with Russian tobacco and kerosene in order to mask their scent from the dogs.

That night at roll call the siren sounded and the search began. The pile of lumber where Verber and Wechsler were hiding was passed tens of times but since the dogs ignored it, so did the searchers. Two and a half days went by and the hungry, frightened, exhausted escapees began to think that they would actually get away.

On the last day with just a few hours left, they heard two Germans approach the lumber pile. "Maybe they are in there?" they heard one say. "Impossible," the other retorted, "the dogs would have sniffed them out." They decided to check anyway. One layer was lifted off and then a second. They were about to begin lifting off the third layer when they heard shouts coming for the camp. Thinking that the escapees had been found, they ran to join the 'festivities,' never to continue their search of the woodpile.

A few hours later, the siren signaled the end of the search. When night fell, Verber and Wechsler began the arduous task of getting out of their hiding place. The three days of hunger, stiffness and terror had taken their toll. The lumber had become so heavy. It took hours to push a few pieces over enough to allow them to crawl out. They then made their way under the unmanned, non-electrified fence to freedom.

Imagine the terror they felt as the first two layers were removed. Imagine the despair of those moments when the freedom that was so close seemed to be suddenly moving out of reach. Imagine how they must have been cursing the moment.

However, that which caused that terror, that torment and that despair was actually their salvation. They never would have had the strength to remove three layers of wood. Their hiding place would have become their burial place were it not for that close call.

Perhaps, that is how the events we're experiencing need to be viewed. Each act of terror, each close call is peeling away layer after layer, bringing the redemption that much closer.

We live in a time of opposites and extremes. I wanted to somewhat balance the difficult time we are going through with a letter I received that shows a very different aspect. As per her wishes, I have left out her name and the country she's from in order to protect her.

Dear Rabbi Ciner,

I found this particular parsha very insightful and made me do some real soul searching. I have written recently to you; I am a believing gentile and Noahide with my two sons aged 25 and 23.

I have been studying in this website and other sites like the Chabad for about 9 years since the Internet came to my country. My sons and I left

Christianity about 13 years ago. My husband is a strong Hindu, but does not interfere with our beliefs.

I have to learn very low profile as ***** has Islam as its national faith and though there are 35% Chinese and 2% Indians of various faiths which is allowed, the hatred for Hashem's Chosen is beyond ones wildest imaginations. All man made faiths are allowed except the True One. HaShem has blessed me with an Artscroll Tanakh Stone Edition which I bought by airmail from Australia. Now, today that's impossible as Taleban activities have started here for the first time through our univ students and life is slowly becoming fearful. So my sons and I are praying for peace for you all as HaShem's Chosen, the eternal physical and spiritual caretakers of the Holy Land which would be a House of Prayer for the whole world. We know salvation would come to us through you all. We have a Noahide site run by a moderator and your articles appear there often. We see the prophecies of Isaiah coming to life as gentiles turn to orthodox rabbis to teach them about HaShem.

G-D protect and bless your Homeland, home and you always,

Amazing times we are living through...© 2009

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RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

First Impressions

This 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. © 2009 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org