

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

In the early 1990s one of the great medical research exercises of modern times took place. It became known as the Nun Study. Some 700 American nuns, all members of the School Sisters of Notre Dame in the United States, agreed to allow their records to be accessed by a research team investigating the process of ageing and Alzheimer's Disease. At the start of the study the participants were aged between 75 and 102. (See Robert Emmons, *Thanks!: How the New Science of Gratitude Can Make You Happier*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2007.)

What gave this study its unusual longitudinal scope is that in 1930 the nuns, then in their twenties, had been asked by the Mother Superior to write a brief autobiographical account of their life and their reasons for entering the convent. These documents were now analysed by the researchers using a specially devised coding system to register, among other things, positive and negative emotions. By annually assessing the nuns' current state of health, the researchers were able to test whether their emotional state in 1930 had an effect on their health some sixty years later. Because they had all lived a very similar lifestyle during these six decades, they formed an ideal group for testing hypotheses about the relationship between emotional attitudes and health.

The results, published in 2001, were startling. The more positive emotions -- contentment, gratitude, happiness, love and hope -- the nuns expressed in their autobiographical notes, the more likely they were to be alive and well sixty years later. The difference was as much as seven years in life expectancy. So remarkable was this finding that it has led, since then, to a new field of gratitude research, as well as a deepening understanding of the impact of emotions on physical health. (Danner, Deborah D., David A. Snowdon, and Wallace V. Friesen. "Positive Emotions in Early Life and Longevity: Findings from the Nun Study." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 80.5 (2001): 804-13.)

What medicine now knows about individuals, Moses knew about nations. Gratitude -- hakarat ha-tov -- is at the heart of what he has to say about the Israelites and their future in the Promised Land. Gratitude had not been their strong point in the desert.

They complained about lack of food and water, about the manna and the lack of meat and vegetables, about the dangers they faced from the Egyptians as they were leaving and about the inhabitants of the land they were about to enter. They lacked thankfulness during the difficult times. A greater danger still, said Moses, would be a lack of gratitude during the good times. This is what he warned: When you have eaten your fill and have built fine houses and live in them, and when your herds and flocks have multiplied, and your silver and gold is multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied, do not exalt yourself, forgetting the Lord your G-d, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery... Do not say to yourself, 'My power and the might of my own hand have gained me this wealth.' (Deut. 8:11-17)

The worst thing that could happen to them, warned Moses, would be that they forgot how they came to the land, how G-d had promised it to their ancestors, and had taken them from slavery to freedom, sustaining them during the forty years in the wilderness. This was a revolutionary idea: that the nation's history be engraved on people's souls, that it was to be re-enacted in the annual cycle of festivals, and that the nation, as a nation, should never attribute its achievements to itself -- "my power and the might of my own hand" -- but should always ascribe its victories, indeed its very existence, to something higher than itself: to G-d. This is a dominant theme of Deuteronomy, and it echoes throughout the book time and again.

Since the publication of the Nun Study and the flurry of further research it inspired, we now know of the multiple effects of developing an attitude of gratitude. It improves physical health and immunity against disease. Grateful people are more likely to take regular exercise and go for regular medical check-ups. Thankfulness reduces toxic emotions such as resentment, frustration and regret and makes depression less likely. It helps people avoid over-reacting to negative experiences by seeking revenge. It even tends to make people sleep better. It enhances self-respect, making it less likely that you will envy others for their achievements or success. Grateful people tend to have better relationships. Saying "thank you" enhances friendships and elicits better performance from employees. It is also a major factor in strengthening resilience. One study of Vietnam War Veterans found that those with

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higher levels of gratitude suffered lower incidence of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Remembering the many things we have to be thankful for helps us survive painful experiences, from losing a job to bereavement. (Much of the material in this paragraph is to be found in articles published in Greater Good: The Science of a Meaningful Life @ <http://greatergood.berkeley.edu>.)

Jewish prayer is an ongoing seminar in gratitude. Birkot ha-Shachar, 'the Dawn Blessings' said at the start of morning prayers each day, form a litany of thanksgiving for life itself: for the human body, the physical world, land to stand on and eyes to see with. The first words we say each morning -- Modeh/Modah ani, "I thank you" -- mean that we begin each day by giving thanks.

Gratitude also lies behind a fascinating feature of the Amidah. When the leader of prayer repeats the Amidah aloud, we are silent other than for the responses of Kedushah, and saying Amen after each blessing, with one exception. When the leader says the words Modim anachnu lakh, "We give thanks to You," the congregation says the a parallel passage known as Modim de-Rabbanan. For every other blessing of the Amidah, it is sufficient to assent to the words of the leader by saying Amen. The one exception is Modim, "We give thanks." Rabbi Elijah Spira (1660 -- 1712) in his work Eliyahu Rabbah, (Orach Chayyim 127:1) explains that when it comes to saying thank you, we cannot delegate this away to someone else to do it on our behalf. Thanks has to come directly from us.

Part of the essence of gratitude is that it recognizes that we are not the sole authors of what is good in our lives. The egoist, says Andre Comte-Sponville, "is ungrateful because he doesn't like to acknowledge his debt to others and gratitude is this acknowledgement." La Rochefoucauld put it more bluntly: "Pride refuses to owe, self-love to pay." Thankfulness has an inner connection with humility. It recognizes that what we are and what we have is due to others, and above all to G-d. Comte-Sponville adds: "Those who are incapable of gratitude live in vain; they can never be satisfied, fulfilled or happy: they do not live, they get ready to live, as Seneca puts it." (Andre Comte-Sponville, A Short Treatise on the Great Virtues: The Uses of Philosophy in Everyday Life. London:

Heinemann, 2002.)

Though you don't have to be religious to be grateful, there is something about belief in G-d as creator of the universe, shaper of history and author of the laws of life that directs and facilitates our gratitude. It is hard to feel grateful to a universe that came into existence for no reason and is blind to us and our fate. It is precisely our faith in a personal G-d that gives force and focus to our thanks.

It is no coincidence that the United States, founded by Puritans -- Calvinists steeped in the Hebrew Bible -- should have a day known as Thanksgiving, recognizing the presence of G-d in American history. On 3 October 1863, at the height of the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln issued a Thanksgiving proclamation, thanking G-d that though the nation was at war with itself, there were still blessings for which both sides could express gratitude: a fruitful harvest, no foreign invasion, and so on. He continued:

No human counsel hath devised nor hath any mortal hand worked out these great things. They are the gracious gifts of the Most High G-d, who, while dealing with us in anger for our sins, hath nevertheless remembered mercy... I do therefore invite my fellow citizens in every part of the United States... to set apart and observe the last Thursday of November next, as a day of Thanksgiving and Praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the Heavens. And I recommend to them that while offering up the ascriptions justly due to Him for such singular deliverances and blessings, they do also, with humble penitence for our national perverseness and disobedience, commend to His tender care all those who have become widows, orphans, mourners or sufferers in the lamentable civil strife in which we are unavoidably engaged, and fervently implore the interposition of the Almighty Hand to heal the wounds of the nation and to restore it as soon as may be consistent with the Divine purposes to the full enjoyment of peace, harmony, tranquillity and Union.

What might such a declaration made today -- in Israel, or the United States, or indeed anywhere -- do to heal the wounds that so divide nations today? Thanksgiving is as important to societies as it is to individuals. It protects us from resentments and the arrogance of power. It reminds us of how dependent we are on others and on a Force greater than ourselves. As with individuals so with nations: thanksgiving is essential to happiness and health. ©2015 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

The biblical source for thanking the Almighty for the our worldly gifts is to be found in this week's portion, Ekev. And if preparation of our meals takes a great deal of time and effort, if our tradition

mandates so many laws about permitted and prohibited foods, and if the Talmud devotes a complete chapter to the Grace after Meals, we should study this blessing in depth.

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

What is special about bread? In many societies, bread is the major component of every meal, the basic mainstay and "filler" of diet, the very "staff of life." Nevertheless, the sacred Zohar provides a deeper reason: Bread symbolizes the partnership between human being and G-d. There are so many back-breaking processes in the production of bread that the individual may think it was due to his efforts alone that food is found on his table. Be mindful, exhort our Sages, to be grateful to the Source of Nature who is the ultimate provider of bread—and then share your bounty with others less fortunate, using the energy you derive from the food to act altruistically and not only egoistically.

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

The second of the biblical blessings thanks G-d, "for having bequeathed to our ancestors a desirable, good and spacious land, as it is written in Your Bible, 'you shall eat and be satisfied and bless the Lord your 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 Krakov... 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 Jewish survival. A stranger to the land and the bread on his table are soon parted. The earth upon which we stand can be pulled out from

under us if we are living on it only by the largesse of the gentile owner. When your food grows on your own land, by contrast, then the food is truly yours.

The third blessing of our Grace after Meals directs us toward Jerusalem, the earthly meeting point of 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 place where, according to our holy Prophets, all of humanity will gather and be redeemed.

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

Why does this historical miracle about burial and decomposition find its way into the Grace after Meals? In tying the tragedy of Betar to the Grace after Meals, the rabbis are teaching a critical lesson. It's proper to thank 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, appreciate whatever we have, and give thanks even 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." ©2015 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

"**A**nd the Children of Israel traveled from B'eros B'nay Ya'akan to Moseira; there Aharon died, and he was buried there, and his son Elazar took over as [the High] Priest" (D'varim 10:6). Since this verse was stated by Moshe in the middle of his recounting what had happened at Mt. Sinai during the first year after leaving Egypt -- specifically the sin of the golden calf, his prayers on behalf of the nation, and G-d forgiving us (to the extent that He didn't destroy us, reinstated our covenant with Him, and let us continue on to the Promised Land) -- inserting two verses about

what happened in the 40th year seems out of place. Why did Moshe mention these travels (and the ones in the next verse) smack in the middle of the narrative about the first year? What significance did Aharon's death in the 40th year, and his son taking over as the Kohain Gadol, have for this narrative? Additionally, since he was addressing the nation -- the "Children of Israel" -- when he spoke these words, why did he refer to them in the third person, rather than in the second person (as he had been doing all along, e.g. 10:4 and 10:10)?

Rashi adds two more questions before suggesting any answers. First of all, they didn't travel from B'eros B'nay Ya'akan to Moseira, but from Moseira to B'eros B'nay Ya'akan (see Bamidbar 33:31). Why was the order reversed? Secondly, Aharon didn't die in Moseira, but at Hor Hahor (Bamidbar 20:22-28 and 33:38). Why is Moseira referred to as the place where he died? To answer these two questions, Rashi references the Midrash (Y'rushalmi Yoma 1:1; see also Tanchuma Chukas 18/42 and M'chilta B'shalach Vayasa 1), that after Aharon died and the clouds of glory left, the nation became afraid from the war with the king of Arad and retreated eight stations, the last of which was going to Moseira from B'eros B'nay Ya'akan. At Moseira there was a civil war, with much bloodshed, until everyone agreed to return. (The return trip is alluded to in D'varim 10:7.) Reversing the order of B'eros B'nay Ya'akan and Moseira reflects this retreat, since this was the order in which they traveled during the retreat.

Rashi continues (based on the Y'rushalmi and Pirkay d'Rebbi Eliezer 17) by saying that since Aharon's death led to what had happened, they mourned for him there (in Moseira) before heading back, and it was therefore considered as if he had died there. Bringing it back to why the reference to this incident was inserted here, Rashi (based on the Y'rushalmi and Vayikra Rabah 20:12) says it teaches us that the death of the righteous (in this case, Aharon) is as difficult as the day the Luchos were broken. Since this only explains why Aharon's death is mentioned here, but not why the circumstances surrounding Aharon's death was alluded to, Rashi adds that retreating back to Egypt and away from G-d is as difficult to Him (as it were) as the day the golden calf was made.

It can be suggested that since the eight-station retreat was unsanctioned, it might have been considered as if those who participated because of their personal fears had sinned as individuals, but it was not a "national sin." Therefore Moshe said it was "the Children of Israel" who retreated, i.e. it was a sin on a national level. And since the loss of a righteous person is tragic even if someone else takes over his position, Elazar becoming the Kohain Gadol is mentioned when Aharon's death is compared with the

Luchos being broken. [That two of the stations they retreated to had their own water sources might have been mentioned to teach us that this retreat back towards Egypt was not based on a water shortage.]

Although it's pretty clear that this two-verse insertion is referencing the nation's retreat to Moseira (despite Ibn Ezra's objections), if the reason it was inserted was to compare things to the breaking of the Luchos and to the golden calf, these verses should have been inserted earlier -- before Moshe got to the part of the narrative where he received the second Luchos -- as the second Luchos not only symbolize a level of reparation for the first Luchos being broken, but also represent a level of forgiveness for the sin of the golden calf. Why insert something in order to create a comparison with another thing after the effect of that "other thing" has been mitigated?

Rashbam and Chizkuni suggest that this insertion was intended to preempt anyone from thinking that Moshe's prayer on behalf of Aharon (D'varim 10:20) didn't work, as even though he died, it wasn't until the 40th year, when the nation traveled from B'eros B'nay Ya'akan to Moseira. However, since this occurred only a few months before Moshe said this to the nation, why would Moshe need to remind them of this? Besides, if this was the reason for the insertion, why was it placed here, rather than immediately after mentioning that he prayed for Aharon?

These two verses were inserted between Moshe telling the nation that he put the second Luchos in the wooden ark that G-d had commanded him to make and Moshe telling them that it was at that time that G-d chose the Tribe of Levi to serve in the Mishkan/Temple. The reason Moshe had been commanded to make a wooden ark was because at that point (before the third set of 40 days), there had not yet been a commandment to build a Mishkan, or the commandment to build a Mishkan had been rescinded due to the sin of the golden calf and had not yet been reinstated. Therefore, there was no gold-plated ark with a gold cover adorned with Cheruvim to put the Luchos into. [Interestingly, there is no mention of an ark to put the first Luchos into; it is only when G-d agreed to give Moshe the second Luchos that he was commanded to make an ark for them. True, there is no mention of an ark for the second Luchos until D'varim (10:1), and just as its omission in Sh'mos (34:1-4) obviously doesn't mean there wasn't one, so too an omission regarding the first Luchos doesn't necessarily mean there wasn't one. Nevertheless, if there was a wooden ark for the first Luchos, unless there wasn't enough room for both the second Luchos and the broken pieces of the first Luchos, or G-d didn't want them to be in the same ark together, it is curious that Moshe had to make a wooden ark specifically for the second Luchos.] Either way, having to put the second Luchos into a wooden

ark was the result of G-d first agreeing to have a Mishkan (or to reinstate it) at the end of that 40-day period (on Yom Kippur) despite already agreeing to giving us a second set of Luchos before those 40 days even started. The part of the narrative Moshe had ended with before the otherwise out-of-place insertion therefore had an inference to the Mishkan being commanded (or reinstated), and the narrative after the insertion was about who would serve in the Mishkan.

Besides the Levi'im taking over the role that had been filled by the first-born causing some consternation (see Bamidbar 17:16-18:7), Aharon being the Kohain Gadol (High Priest) had been challenged as well. And when Moshe recounted the story of the golden calf, Aharon's role in it was referenced too, specifically that G-d was angry with him and that Moshe had to pray on his behalf (besides his prayers on behalf of the rest of the nation). Yet, when the Mishkan was built, Aharon was appointed the Kohain Gadol. In order to preempt any notion that Aharon was not worthy of the position, at the point where the Mishkan entered the narrative Moshe reminded them of how important and worthy Aharon was. After all, after his death, despite his role as Kohain Gadol being aptly filled by his son Elazar, the nation retreated eight stations, and mourned for him so extensively at that eighth station that it was considered as if he died there. There should therefore be no question that despite his role in the golden calf, Aharon was the right choice to be Kohain Gadol.

Because the purpose of the insertion was to remind the nation of Aharon's worthiness, which was done by mentioning what had occurred immediately after he died, it was also important for Moshe to mention that it was the nation -- the Children of Israel -- that had retreated, and not just individuals. By highlighting how adversely Aharon's death had impacted the nation, Moshe underscored how worthy he was to represent them as the Kohain Gadol. ©2015 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Although 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 le-fanai 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. ©2015 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 BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The word with which this week's Torah reading begins literally means 'because of' or 'as a consequence of' one's actions and behavior. However Rashi chooses to define the word 'eikev' in a

more allegorical sense. Rashi traces the word to its root where it means the heel of a person. We find that this is its meaning when the Torah describes our father Jacob holding onto the heel of his brother Eisav.

Rashi comments that there are "light" or "easy" commandments that people readily denigrate and step upon with their heels. We are warned in Avot that one should not treat any commandment lightly. We human beings are unaware of the true value and reward that attaches to the observance of any commandment. In effect, we are being taught that when it comes to Jewish values and behavior, observance of commandments and moral behavior there is nothing that is trivial or inconsequential.

Veins of gold and other valuable metals lie beneath the surface of the earth that we trod upon. If this be true in the physical world that we inhabit how much more so is it true regarding the spiritual - and always mysterious and unpredictable - world in which we exist. We tend to trivialize many important things.

This is the part of our makeup which allows us to substitute our human judgment for G-d's holy commandments. We say that things are unimportant without realizing where this attitude and the behavior that it engenders will lead us to in the future.

The road of the Jewish people in history is strewn with the debris of commandments discarded and tradition ignored or ridiculed. We should be careful what we step upon and where our heels leave a mark.

Judaism recognizes and allows for changes in societies and circumstances. What it does not allow for is disregarding the commandments of the Torah in favor of current fads and political correctness. Being up-to-date today in behavior, dress and attitude almost guarantees that one will be obsolete tomorrow. There is a tendency in the current Jewish world to somehow separate observance of commandments from Judaism or from Jewish values.

All of our history has shown us that these attempts are futile and eventually lead to assimilation and the complete alienation of millions of Jews from the very same Judaism to which they wish to ascribe. Even though we are always influenced by the general culture which surrounds us and we are inescapably touched by it, true change in the Jewish world always comes from within.

It also will never occur through legislation, coercion or hostile behavior towards others. Those who think and act in such a fashion are really stepping upon the very commandments that they wish to uphold. Stepping upon an object on the road or sidewalk can have devastating physical results. Stepping upon the commandments of the Torah occasions spiritual disasters and eventually national consequences. We should not only guard our thoughts and words but our heels as well. ©2015 Rabbi Berel Wein - Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish

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HARAV SHLOMO WOLBE ZT"L

Bais Hamussar

In Parshas Eikev there is a single pasuk which encapsulates all of what is expected from us in this world. "Now Yisrael, what does Hashem ask of you? Only that you fear Hashem your G-d, to go in all His ways and to love Him..." (Devarim 10:12). While the pasuk seems to be quite straightforward, Chazal explain it homiletically. "Do not read the word "mah" (what) rather "mei'ah" (one hundred). Hashem asks of you one hundred blessings a day. It would seem that fulfilling this dictate of Chazal, answers all of what Hashem asks of a person.

In explaining the significance of every bracha, Rav Wolbe (AleI Shur vol. I p. 112) cites the Radak in Yeshaya who explains words of praise penned by Chizkiyahu Hamelech. Chizkiyahu was deathly ill and after his miraculous recovery he wrote a letter in which he stated "I said with my days cut short I will go to the gates of the grave deprived of the rest of my years. I had said I will not see Hashem" (Yeshayah 38:10, 11). The Radak quotes Rav Saadyah Gaon, who explains that "seeing Hashem" is a reference to giving thanks. The Radak concurs, explaining that "perceiving Hashem means thanking and praising Him and contemplating His ways."

How can one "see" Hashem? We can see Him through recognizing His kindness and thanking Him for it. We are supposed to review over and over again -- a hundred times each day -- the truth that Hashem is the King of the world and it is He Who has given us every pleasure of which we partake. It is He Who gave us our body and our soul, and it is He Who gave us the Torah and the mitzvos. Everything we have is a result of His infinite kindness and we must thank Him for His beneficence. The extent that we will see Hashem on a daily basis is proportionate to the amount of attention we pay to what we are saying.

There is an added dimension to the daily requirement to make one hundred brachos. We don't thank Hashem once and for all for giving us water or giving us clothes. Every day calls for an additional thanks. Every drink calls for a new bracha. Chazal wanted us to appreciate that the world is not to be perceived as an ancient phenomenon. Rather, each and every day, and numerous times throughout the day, Hashem renews His kindness and recreates the world in its entirety. Thus, Chazal instituted daily brachos to thank Him for His constant kindness and never-ending bounty.

A well known gadol was wont to say that the length of a bracha depends on the height of a person. The bracha begins when the food is taken into his hand and the bracha ends just before the food enters his

mouth. Hence, the taller the person the longer the time he has to make a bracha! It's quite humorous, it's often true, and it's very unfortunate. We literally have in our hands the recipe for seeing Hashem, and we let it fly off into the breeze when we mumble the bracha under our breath or have our minds on a conversation with a friend. Choose a single bracha that is going to be "yours," give it the proper frame of mind and this will open your eyes to see Hashem in a way that you never previously experienced! ©2015 Rabbi S. Wolbe zt"l & aishdas.org

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Mordechai Greenberg
Rosh Yeshiva, Kerem B'Yavne

The sin of the Golden Calf is considered as having been the worst sin that ever took place. Even though the early commentators diminished the severity of the sin by explaining that it was not exactly an example of idol worship, in any case we have been taught that the verse, "And on a day of reckoning, I will take retribution" [Shemot 32:34], means that every difficult time in Yisrael includes an element of punishment for the Calf (Rashi). What makes this act so serious?

It is written, "He came to the nations where they went, and they desecrated My holy name, saying, can this be the nation of G-d, who were expelled from His land?" [Yechezkel 36:19]. Why is it that when the nations say that Yisrael sinned and G-d punished them with exile, this is considered a desecration of the holy name? After all, in this week's Torah portion, it is written, "And the nations will say: 'Why did G-d do this to this land?' And they will say, 'It is because they abandoned the covenant with their G-d.'" [Devarim 29:23].

The sages noted that the first word in the verse by Yechezkel is in the singular, as opposed to all the rest of this chapter, which is plural. This means that the Holy One, Blessed be He, came to the place where Bnei Yisrael were in exile, and that is the place where He hears the reaction of the other nations. They say, "If these people are the nation of G-d, why were they expelled from their land?" If you are the Chosen People, why did G-d throw you out of the land? That is, they do not conclude that G-d has punished them for their sins, rather that the nation has lost its status as the Chosen People, and that a new covenant has been formed. The exile is the foundation of the Christian doctrine of "replacement theology" -- and this is a terrible desecration of the holy name. The Holy One, Blessed be He, must react to this doctrine, and He therefore declares that in order to sanctify His name He will gather the exiles of Yisrael from all the corners of the earth, even though they have not yet repented. "And the nations will know that I am G-d" [Yechezkel

36:23], and that G-d did not abandon Yisrael in spite of everything.

As far as the Christians are concerned, the breaking point was the sin of the Golden Calf, and the shattering of the Tablets symbolized the end of the covenant with G-d. The serious problem with the sin of the Calf is that it gave the nations of the world an excuse to postulate that G-d broke the covenant with Yisrael and chose a different people. "... for Aharon let them be disgraced in front of those who rose up against them" [Shemot 32:25].

"If not for the sin of the Golden Calf, the nations who lived in Eretz Yisrael would have surrendered to Yisrael and given in to them, because the name of G-d by which Yisrael were called would have awakened in them a feeling of awe. No war would have been fought, and the influence of G-d would have been distributed in peaceful ways, as will happen in the days of the Mashiach." [Rav Kook, Orot].

About a hundred years ago, Herzl asked the head of the church to support the return of the Jews to their homeland. He replied, "How can we declare that we agree that the Jews should take over as owners of the Holy Land without giving up our most exalted principles?"

In the fourth century, one of the leaders of the church wrote, "The revenge will be for all eternity. They will never have a state of their own, and certainly not a Temple. It is G-d who dispersed them, He hates the Jews and He always has."

Who will remove the dust from the eyes of these people so that they can see that all of the prophecies of redemption have been fulfilled through the nation of Yisrael and not through those who follow the New Testament? Recently the Pope visited Israel and put a wreath Herzl's grave -- as if to say, you were right and we were wrong. ©2015 Machon Zomet. Translated by Moshe Goldberg

RABBI YITZCHOK ADLERSTEIN

Be'eros

"Hashem became very angry with Aharon to destroy him, so I prayed also for Aharon at that time." Be'er Yosef: "Rashi understands the term 'to destroy him' in the sense of wiping out his progeny. All of Aharon's sons were put at risk for the sin of the Golden Calf. Moshe's prayer was only partially effective. Two sons died; two were spared. R Eliyahu Mizrachi (the Re'em), the great explicator of Rashi, has a hard time harmonizing this view with a different one cited by Rashi at the end of Mishpatim. (Shemos 24:11) While Rashi here is rather straightforward about Nadav and Avihu dying as punishment to Aharon for his role in the eigel, Rashi there has Nadav and Avihu deserving to die for inappropriate behavior at the giving of the Torah at Sinai. (In Vayikra 10:12 Rashi explains that in order not to disturb the joy of mata n Torah, their

sentence was suspended until they brought a foreign flame to the altar at the time of the inauguration of the Mishkan.) We must conclude, says the Re'em, that both sins contributed to the handing down of a Heavenly death sentence against them."

We could offer a different explanation. Our attempts at justice are always incomplete. They can never take into account all that Hashem can. When we find a person guilty of a capital crime, we execute him. We do not -- we cannot -- take into account the pain and sorrow this will cause his family and friends who may be entirely free of any and all sin. HKBH, on the other hand, most definitely weighs all factors before punishing anyone, including the consequences of the death of the guilty on those he leaves behind. (This is what is meant by, "The judgments of Hashem are true, righteous together." (Tehillim 19:10) Those judgments are righteous not only to the one who is being judged, but to all people together, i.e. those who are impacted when a sentence is implemented.)

This, then, is what happened to Nadav and Avihu. They were judged to be guilty by Hashem's court at the time of the giving of the Torah. Aharon, at the time, was guiltless and did not deserve the agony of having children snatched away from him. Nadav and Avihu were not stricken dead at the time. Once Aharon played a central role in the tragic episode of the eigel, his sorrow over the potential loss of two children was no longer sufficient cause to block their punishment. The suspended sentence could be implemented -- and was, at the first opportunity they provided through their misstep at the inauguration of the mishkan.

Our pasuk clearly finds fault with Aharon for his role in the eigel. How do we then understand the position of the gemara (Sanhedrin 7a) that finds Aharon's behavior not only beyond cavil, but even heroic? Having witnessed the death of Chur who protested the actions of the crowd, Aharon feared that he would be the next victim if he tried to prevent the manufacture of the eigel. He worried not so much for his own life, but for the stain on the record of the people if in one day they "killed in Hashem's mikdash prophet and priest." (Eichah 2:20) Instead, he sacrificed his spiritual well-being in the interests of the people, seemingly going along with the construction plan. In fact, his intention was simply to buy time through stalling as much as he could, expecting Moshe's imminent return.

We see in this another difference between Divine and human justice. Human courts make binary decisions: innocent/ guilty, good/ bad, exempt/ liable. Hashem, however, can balance many variables at one "moment" of time. His judgment is more nuanced and textured. From one action, He can tease apart strands of good and strands of bad, and address each one separately. Neither need prevail. He rewards the good, and punishes the bad.

Often, the two reside together. This was the case in regard to Aharon's role in the eigel. He displayed self-sacrifice for the benefit of the nation. He acted with ingenuity -- first stalling, then calling for a holiday dedicated to Hashem, rather than the eigel. For all this he was rewarded. But Hashem's justice does not overlook anything, large or small, neither good nor bad. Aharon did play a role in the readying of a national disaster that eventually involved the idolatrous service of thousands of Jews. For this, Aharon was held accountable. (Tanchuma, Balak)

We find this principle applied in several other areas. Chazal's treatment of Lot's daughters seems inconsistent -- until you apply this thinking. One passage (Bava Kama 38b) speaks of the righteous souls that would emerge from each of the two peoples that were founded incestuously by the two women consorting with their father. The gemara observes that these paragons of virtue did not appear at the same time, but were separated by a large passage of time. Because the older daughter was the first to jump at the "mitzvah" of securing the continuity of civilization by conceiving a child -- even if incestuously -- a righteous soul emerged from the line of her descendents four generations before a tzadeikes was born to her sister's family. On the other hand, elsewhere (Tanchuma Balak) the older daughter is faulted for having been the first, and punished by a less-delicate memorializing of the event relative to her sibling. (The nation of the older daughter is Moav, which directly points to her having a child through her own father; the younger daughter's nation is Amon, which disguises the fact.)

Following our approach, we can say that her intentions were proper in saving the human race (in her mind) from complete annihilation. Yet, the incident impacted negatively on the morals and mores of the time, which had previously included strong social barriers against gilui arayos. She is praised for the good, while still held accountable for the bad.

Similarly, we find (Sotah 35a) that Dovid HaMelech was punished for saying that "Your statutes to me are as zemiros/ songs." Chazal apparently object to trivializing Torah by using as light-hearted a term as "songs." Torah represents the Wisdom of HKBH, and cannot be equated with entertainment. Yet, the very same gemara praises Dovid for constantly finding delight in Torah -- even at times of adversity -- as shown by his referring to them as songs!

We can use the same approach to resolve the conflict. Dovid's passion and delight for Torah were praiseworthy. He still may have been punished, however, for failing to modify the expression. Rather than refer to Torah directly as songs, he could perhaps have said, "With song, in song, I delved into Your Torah." (Based on Be'er Yosef, Devarim 9:20) ©2015 Rabbi Y. Adlerstein & torah.org