

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

One of the most striking features of the Torah is its emphasis on love of, and vigilance toward, the?ger, the stranger: Do not oppress a stranger; you yourselves know how it feels to be strangers, because you were strangers in Egypt. (Ex. 23:9)

For the Lord your G-d is G-d of gods and Lord of lords, the great G-d, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the?stranger?residing among you, giving them food and clothing. You are to love those who are?strangers, for you yourselves were?strangers?in Egypt. (Deut 10:17-19)

The Sages went so far as to say that the Torah commands us in only one place to love our neighbour but thirty-six times to love the stranger (Baba Metsia 59b).

What is the definition of a stranger? Clearly the reference is to one who is not Jewish by birth. It could mean one of the original inhabitants of the land of Canaan. It could mean one of the “mixed multitude” who left Egypt with the Israelites. It might mean a foreigner who has entered the land seeking safety or a livelihood.

Whatever the case, immense significance is attached to the way the Israelites treat the stranger. This was what they were meant to have learned from their own experience of exile and suffering in Egypt. They were strangers. They were oppressed. Therefore they knew “how it feels to be a stranger.” They were not to inflict on others what was once inflicted on them.

The Sages held that the word?ger might mean one of two things. One was a?ger tzedek, a convert to Judaism who had accepted all its commands and obligations. The other was the?ger toshav, the “resident alien”, who had not adopted the religion of Israel but who lived in the land of Israel.?Behar spells out the rights of such a person. Specifically: If any of your fellow Israelites become poor and are unable to support themselves among you, help them as you would a resident alien, so they can continue to live among you. (Lev. 25:35)

There is, in other words, an obligation to support and sustain a resident alien. Not only does he or she have the right to live in the Holy Land, but they

have the right to share in its welfare provisions. Recall that this is a very ancient law indeed, long before the Sages formulated such principles as “the ways of peace”, obligating Jews to extend charity and care to non-Jews as well as Jews.

What then was a?ger toshav? There are three views in the Talmud. According to Rabbi Meir it was anyone who took it upon himself not to worship idols. According to the Sages, it was anyone who committed himself to keeping the seven Noahide commandments. A third view, more stringent, held that it was someone who had undertaken to keep all the commands of the Torah except one, the prohibition of meat not ritually slaughtered (Avodah Zarah 64b). The law follows the Sages. A?ger toshav?is thus a non-Jew living in Israel who accepts the Noahide laws binding on everyone.

Ger toshav legislation is thus one of the earliest extant forms of minority rights. According to the Rambam there is an obligation on Jews in Israel to establish courts of law for resident aliens to allow them to settle their own disputes – or disputes they have with Jews – according to the provisions of Noahide law. The Rambam adds: “One should act towards resident aliens with the same respect and loving kindness as one would to a fellow Jew” (Hilkhos Melachim 10:12).

The difference between this and later “ways of peace” legislation is that the ways of peace apply to non-Jews without regard to their beliefs or religious practice. They date from a time when Jews were a minority in a predominantly non-Jewish, non-monotheistic environment. “Ways of peace” are essentially pragmatic rules of what today we would call good community relations and active citizenship in a multi-ethnic and multicultural society.?Ger toshav legislation cuts deeper. It is based not on pragmatism but religious principle. According to the Torah you don’t have to be Jewish in a Jewish society and Jewish land to have many of the rights of citizenship. You simply have to be moral.

One biblical vignette portrays this with enormous power. King David has fallen in love and had



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an adulterous relationship with Batsheva, wife of a ger toshav, Uriah the Hittite. She becomes pregnant. Uriah meanwhile has been away from home as a soldier in Israel's army. David, afraid that Uriah will come home, see that his wife is pregnant, realise that she has committed adultery, and come to discover that the king is the guilty party, has Uriah brought home. His pretext is that he wants to know how the battle is going. He then tells Uriah to go home and sleep with his wife before returning, so that he will later assume that he himself is the father of the child. The plan fails. This is what happens: When Uriah came to him, David asked him how Joab was, how the soldiers were and how the war was going. Then David said to Uriah, "Go down to your house and wash your feet." So Uriah left the palace, and a gift from the king was sent after him. But Uriah slept at the entrance to the palace with all his master's servants and did not go down to his house.

David was told, "Uriah did not go home." So he asked Uriah, "Haven't you just come from a military campaign? Why didn't you go home?"

Uriah said to David, "The Ark and Israel and Judah are staying in tents, and my commander Joab and my lord's men are camped in the open country. How could I go to my house to eat and drink and make love to my wife? As surely as you live, I will not do such a thing!" (2 Samuel 11:6-11)

Uriah's utter loyalty to the Jewish people, despite the fact that he is not himself Jewish, is contrasted with King David, who has stayed in Jerusalem, not been with the army, and instead had a relationship with another man's wife. The fact that Tanakh can tell such a story in which a resident alien is the moral hero, and David, Israel's greatest king, the wrongdoer, tells us much about the morality of Judaism.

Minority rights are the best test of a free and just society. Since the days of Moses they have been central to the vision of the kind of society G-d wants us to create in the land of Israel. How vital, therefore, that we take them seriously today. *Covenant and Conversation 5777 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l ©2017 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"I am the Lord your G-d who brought you forth from the land of Egypt to give you the land of Canaan to be your G-d." [Lev. 25:38]

Citing the verse above from this week's Torah reading, our Sages make the striking declaration that only one who lives in the Land of Israel has a G-d, while one living outside the Land of Israel is comparable to someone without a G-d [Babylonian Talmud, Ketubot 110b].

Rashi, in his commentary, offers a slightly different formulation: "Whoever lives in the Land of Israel, I am G-d to him; whoever goes out of Israel is as one who serves idols." Here, too, the text equates the exile (or Diaspora) with idolatry, but the transgression of idolatry is specifically assigned to someone who lived in Israel and left, rather than on one who was born in the Diaspora and remained there.

Nevertheless, how are we to understand that to have or not to have a G-d depends on the stamp in your passport? Do people outside of Israel not also believe in G-d? Is G-d only to be found in Israel?

Rabbi Yaakov Yehoshua Falk, best known by the name of his Talmudic commentary Penei Yehoshua, suggests that the Land of Israel is qualitatively different from any other land in the world in that what happens to the Jewish People within it is a direct result of Divine activity and intervention. Elsewhere, the major influence comes from G-d's messengers, so to speak, such as the natural forces of sun, wind, rain and rivers, the stars of the zodiac, and the astrological movements of the heavens. In Israel, G-d Himself directs the destiny of its inhabitants.

Rabbi Shlomo Efraim Luntchitz, author of Kli Yakar, notes that a person could imagine that after allowing the land to lie fallow during the Sabbatical year—and in the event of the Jubilee year, the land would lie fallow for two whole years—the Jews would not have enough to eat during the following year. The fact that they did, demonstrated to them—as well as to the rest of the world—that Israel and her people were directly guided by the Divine, and not by the usual laws of nature, climate and agriculture.

Rabbi Yitzhak Arama, in his Biblical commentary Akedat Yitzhak, sees in the Sabbatical-Jubilee cycle an allegory to ultimate world redemption: six years of work and one year of rest are intended to invoke the messianic era that will begin at the end of the sixth millennium when the world as we know it, and the work we do in it, will also come to a halt. At that time, one thousand years of the Sabbath, or the messianic millennium, will commence.

These unique years, as well as ultimate salvation, are inextricably bound up with the Land of Israel, both in terms of the fact that they are laws that

apply exclusively to the Holy Land and that all our prophets insist that the acceptance of ethical monotheism and peaceful harmony by all nations of the world will be the result of Torah emanating from Jerusalem against the backdrop of a secure Israel.

I would like to add a more prosaic view to these fascinating interpretations. The Biblical phrase, "a Sabbath unto G-d" with regard to the Sabbatical year summarizes exactly how our land is different from all other lands: Jews in all lands are commanded to keep the Sabbath, but there is only one place in the world where even the land must keep the Sabbath (six years of work and one of rest)—here in Israel!

The significance of the land keeping the Sabbath is that in the very essence of Israel's soil lies an expression of the Divine will. In Israel, even the land is literally commanded to obey G-d's laws! G-d thereby becomes intimately involved in the very soil of the Land of Israel, something which does not happen anywhere else.

I would also suggest that every other country in the world distinguishes the religious from the civic, the ritual from the cultural. Only in Israel does there exist an opportunity for the Jew to express his culture and the culture of his environment in religious and G-dly terms. Only in Israel can the Jew lead a life not of synthesis but of wholeness, not as a Jew at home and a cultural, national gentleman in the marketplace, but as an indivisible child of G-d and descendant of Abraham and Sarah. Here we have a unique opportunity to express our spiritual ideals in Mahane Yehuda as well as in the synagogue, in the theater as well as in the study hall.

This sets the stage for a most profound vision of the Sabbatical and Jubilee years: when the values of the Torah permeate both sacred and mundane, then all forms of slavery can be obliterated, financial hardships resolved, and familial homesteads restored. Only in Israel do we have the potential to fully experience G-d both in the ritual and in the social, political and economic aspects of our lives. Only in Israel do we have the potential of taking our every step in the presence of the Divine. ©2017 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

The Torah states: "Your money you shall not give him for interest" (Leviticus 25:37). Why does the Torah forbid lending money for interest?

Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz, former Rosh Hayeshiva of the Mir Yeshiva, explains: The Torah wants to train us to do acts of kindness for others without any gain at all. Not only is it forbidden to receive money for lending money, but the person who borrowed the money is not allowed to do any special favors for the person who lent him the money. When

you lend someone money, you are doing so only because you want to help this person and you know that you will not be receiving anything material in return.

There is a strong tendency for people to keep asking, "What's in this for me?" When they do not see any personal profit or benefit in what they are doing, they are not frequently motivated to take action. The Torah ideal, however, is that we should develop the attribute of helping others for no ulterior motive. Do kindness for the sake of the kindness itself. This is the Torah's lesson in the commandment to lend others money without any form of personal gain. *Dvar Torah based on Growth Through Torah by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin*
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RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The book of Vayikra, which contains so many detailed commandments and minute details of ritual within it, concludes with a broad view and general description of Jewish faith. It restates the original premise of Bereshith, that the earth and its inhabitants belong to G-d and are free agents as to the limits that G-d has imposed upon them.

The basic premise is that "the earth belongs to Me." All of the various laws of agriculture that apply in the Land of Israel are based on this simple declaration of the sovereignty of G-d over the domain where humans temporarily reside.

We storm about asserting our ownership and build for ourselves palaces as though we will be their eternal tenants. It is this false assessment of the true nature of life that leads to painful disagreements and dysfunction in families, communities and even in the relationship between countries and national entities.

The power of self-grandeur unfortunately knows no bounds in the human psyche. The prophet mocks the Pharaoh of Egypt who evidently thought that he created and controlled the Nile River. Our world is witness to tyrants who made and make themselves gods and ascribe to themselves the power to dominate the lives of millions, and to threaten the destruction of millions of others, who do not bow to their inflated will. The truth is that the closer one is able to come to godliness, so to speak, that person will become more humble and recognize his or her true place and space in this world. And that is the secret of attaining humility and which is ascribed to our great teacher Moshe.,

The Torah also limits the control we have over the lives of others. The Lord informed the Jewish people that they are His servants. People have somehow convinced themselves that they truly are entitled to control the lives of others. Perhaps this arises from the necessity of parents to raise their children to adulthood. Yet the economic system that currently governs our lives allows little room for consideration of the needs of others.

Human lives are unfortunately secondary to the almighty bottom line and this affects the entire balance of society generally. If we realize that we are all only G-d's servants, that humbling effect should make life easier to deal with. The realization of the limits of human power is one of the basic lessons of Judaism. Of course human beings are able to accomplish great things and this is the story of the advancement of human civilization throughout the millennia of history. It is the balance of this aspiration and the human drive for greatness coupled with the humble realization of our limitations, which the Torah wishes us to achieve.

Care and concern for others, an appreciation of G-d's ownership of the earth and a belief in the guardianship of G-d over the land and its people are the key ingredients, in the Torah's view, of the Jewish future. And that is a basic understanding of the lesson that the Torah and this week's pasha teaches us. ©2017 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

One of this week's parshiot clearly states that good people are rewarded while evil people are punished. In the words of the Torah: "If you keep my commandments...then I will give your rains in their season...but if you will not listen to Me...I will bring terror over you." (Leviticus Chapter 26)

Throughout the ages, this principle has raised difficulty. After all, there are countless examples of good people who suffer and evil people who flourish. This is the famous philosophical question of Tzaddik Vera Lo, the righteous who suffer. Doesn't this reality run contrary to what the Torah states in our portion?

Another problem with the concept of reward and punishment is the directive "not to serve the Master for a reward, but to serve Him with no reward in mind." (Ethics 1:3) This seems to contradict our portion which suggests that good deeds are performed for reward.

One way to approach these questions is to imagine that good people are always rewarded and evil people are automatically punished. In such a world, freedom of choice would be non-existent. If for every ten dollars one gives to charity one would receive twenty dollars -- everyone would give charity. Similarly, if every time one speaks slander one's tongue would cleave to the palate -- no one would speak wrongfully.

Indeed, in a world of precise reward and punishment, humankind would be bereft of freedom of choice. Since freedom of choice is central to the human condition, it follows, that in a world of exact reward and punishment, our very humanity, would be jeopardized.

But how can one explain this week's portion which clearly speaks of reward for good deeds and punishment for misdeeds?

Rav Ahron Soloveitchik of blessed memory suggests that the answer may lie in understanding that there are two types of reward and punishment. There is reward and punishment on an individual level and then there is reward and punishment on a collective level.

On the individual level, as the Talmud states, there is no reward for doing a mitzvah in this world- that comes in the world hereafter. (Kiddushin 39b) A promise of reward in the hereafter will not compel individuals to act properly. Human choice would remain intact.

In this world, however, reward and punishment does operate on a collective level. When one does something positive, the larger community benefits. Similarly, when one does something negative, the community suffers.

Note that in this week's portion when discussing reward and punishment, the text is in the plural. Similarly, in the second portion of the Shema recited morning and night, reward and punishment is in the plural. In fact, when reward is written in the singular it refers to an individual's portion in the world to come. An example is "Honor your father and mother that your days may be long." (Exodus 20:1)

We have come full circle. The good can suffer in this world as there is no exact reward and punishment for individuals. However, when doing the right thing, we do so not necessarily for ourselves, but for the benefit of the community.

In a world that emphasizes the primacy of the self, our portion tells us that fully controlling the destiny of the self is not possible. However, the portion tells us that as a "we," we have tremendous power. We have the ability to wreak destruction on the world, but we also have the power to infuse it with peace and goodness. ©2017 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

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Biur During Shmittah

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

The law to dispose (Biur-once a fruit or vegetable from the field has been consumed on the Shmittah year, one must remove as well all the fruits of that kind from the home) during "Shiv'it" (the seventh year in the cycle where all fields must lie fallow) is derived from the sentence appearing in this week's portion "And for your animal and for the beast that is in your land shall all its crop be to eat" 25; 7. What is the purpose of stating "The animal" which denotes the animal that is in your possession and then to state the beasts of the

field? Certainly if a beast of the field may eat the fruit then the animal that is in your possession may also eat the fruit?

To this our Rabbis (Ramban-who states that this is a Rabbinic law and not from the Torah) state that once there are no fruits left in the field, one also may not eat fruits from the house as well. In other words once the fruits of the fields have vanished or spoiled, people living in their homes must also stop eating them as well and dispose of them ("Biur").

We mentioned above that one had to dispose of the food;How is this accomplished? There are those who state that it must be by fire (Rambam) similar to the way one disposes of the Chametz before Pesach. But the accepted opinion is that one takes out the fruits that are in the home and declares the fruits ownerless (Hefker). Once this is done the owner may re-acquire it and eat it.

The times that our sages designated for declaring certain produce ownerless (Hefker) is Passover eve, Lag Baomer and Shavuot for at those times they deemed that the specific produce had been consumed from the fields. In a similar fashion they designated specific times for other fruits etc.

Parshat B'chukotai-The Mitzva of Confession (Vidui)

The obligation to verbally confess ("Vidui") when an individual regrets his/her sin, applies to a person who repents ("Teshuvah") for a specific transgression, or when one brings a sacrifice required by the Torah, or when one's repentance is satisfied by punishment by the court of law. It also applies to a situation where the person repents ("Teshuva") through the High Priest's prayers on Yom Kippur or by reciting the traditional confessional on Yom Kippur or at specific times in one's life or at the time of one's death.

For any Mitzvah that one transgresses, whether prohibitory ("Lo Taaseh") or positive ("Aseh"), performed willingly or unwillingly, repentance must be sought and one must also recite the "Vidui" before Almighty G-d.

In essence the Mitzvah of "Vidui" and "Teshuvah" are inseparable, for only when one regrets one's sins can the "Vidui" be effective, otherwise it is a contradiction in terms ("Tovel Vesheret b'yadav"). Thus the "Vidui" is the completion of "Teshuvah" and though a person who regrets one's sin in one's heart is deemed as righteous, the "Vidui" as the culmination of "Teshuvah" should be recited. In general a person must actively recite the formula of "Vidui" to innumerate one's sins and regret doing them; however as a last resort, should a person say the "Vidui" in one's heart ,it is accepted as well.

In the Torah we find two types of "Vidui". The 'personal one' as demonstrated by the "Vidui" of Cain, King David and Achan, and the 'collective one', as demonstrated by Moshe and Ezra the scribe. (The

formula for the collective one can be recited by the individual on behalf of the entire congregation or by the entire congregation collectively).

Our sages stress that one who is sinful and recites the "Vidui" but continues to sin, is equivalent to immersing in a Mikvah (ritual bath)holding a dead animal in one's hands (Tovel V'sheretz Byado")-essentially a contradiction in terms-and as such his/her repentance is not accepted. ©2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and *Encyclopedia Talmudit*

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Grateful Bread

It is rare to read two Torah portions together, each with nearly the exact verse. This week we read two portions: B'har, which commands the laws of shmita in which the Jewish nation lets its land lie fallow, and B'chukosai, which entails both blessing and curses bestowed upon the Jewish nation in response to its behavior.

But in each portion there is a similar blessing. The Torah tells us, both B'har and in B'chukosai, that if we deserve blessing then "you shall eat to satisfaction and live securely in your land." (Leviticus 25:19 & Leviticus 26:5) Each time the Torah talks about eating to satisfaction, an agricultural issue, it suffixes a security issue. Now there are verses that deal with the curse of war and the blessing of peace. But why mention tranquility with eating?

Yankel was a vagabond. Every Friday he would spend the last of his few zloty at the bathhouse and barber and, well groomed, he would present himself in the synagogue as a respected businessperson from out-of-town. Then he would usually get a sumptuous Shabbos meal at the home of the wealthiest Jew in town. One Friday afternoon he was in the city of Lodz and inquired about the wealthiest Jew. "Velvel, the banker," he was told "is definitely the wealthiest Jew. But he is also the stingiest. You never get a chance to eat the delicious dishes that he serves you!"

"How's that?" asked Yankel.

"Well, as soon as you take you first bite he engages you in conversation. You begin to speak, and as soon as your eyes leave your plate, a waiter comes and snatches your food away!"

With a game plan in mind Yankel posed as a businessman from Warsaw, and got invited to Reb Velvel's magnificent home. The table was set with exquisite china, and the delicious smells wafting from the kitchen made Yankel's hungry mouth water.

After kiddush and challah, the first course was served, a succulent piece of white fish stuffed with gefilte fish. As Yankel speared it with his fork a voice boomed from the head of the table.

"So, Yankel, tell me, how is my cousin Shloime feeling? You must know Shloime, the tailor of Podolska Street in Warsaw?"

Yankel kept his fork embedded in the fish and held tight as he nodded somberly. "He's dead."

"What?" shrieked Reb Velvel, "Shloime is dead? How can that be?" He ran to the kitchen and shouted for his wife, while Yankel managed to finish his fish in comfort. He even got in a few nibbles off an adjoining plate. After the shock wore off, they served the soup.

After the first sip, the banker was quick to his old ways. "You don't happen to know my father's brother Reb Dovid the bookbinder, do you?"

With the waiter poised to pounce, Yankel nodded again. "He died too!"

"What?" cried the stunned host. "How can that be? I just got a letter from him last week!"

He ran next door to tell his brother the terrible news -- while Yankel calmly finished his soup.

The main course, with chicken, kugel and tzimmes also saw the death of more members of the Warsaw community, each tiding throwing the banker into a tizzy. Meanwhile Yankel ate his portion and all the portions of those who were sickened by the terrible news that they had just heard.

By the time dessert came, the banker got hold of the scheme.

"What's going on?" he shouted. "Are you trying to tell me that the entire Warsaw has dropped dead?"

"No," answered Yankel, "what I am trying to tell you is that when I eat, the whole world drops dead!"

The blessing of plenty is worthless without serenity. Peace in your land is not only a blessing for military men. It is a blessing that enhances every aspect of life, from breaking ground to breaking bread. What good are storehouses of plenty or a wonderful economy without the peace and harmony in which to enjoy them?

Calm and composure are the greatest blessing. For without them, the bread of plenty can still be bread of affliction. The Torah does not give half-baked blessings. It tells us that we will eat our bread to satisfaction because it guarantees us peace in our land. For we must not only pray for sustenance, but also health, well being, and serenity with which to enjoy it
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RABBI MORDECHAI WOLLENBERG

Weekly Thoughts

The reading this week tells us 'He shall not exchange it nor substitute another for it'. (Leviticus 27:33) Every person was born to a mission in life that is distinctly, uniquely and exclusively their own. No one - not even the greatest of souls - can take his or her place. No person who ever lived or who ever will live can fulfill that particular aspect of G-d's purpose in creation in his stead.

A wealthy businessman and his coachman arrived in a city one Friday afternoon. After the rich

man was settled at the best hotel in town, the coachman went off to his humble lodgings.

Both washed and dressed for Shabbat and then set out for the synagogue for the evening prayers. On his way to shul, the businessman came across a wagon which had swerved off the road and was stuck in the ditch. Rushing to help a fellow in need, he climbed down into the ditch and began pushing and pulling at the wagon together with its hapless driver. But for all his good intentions, the businessman was hopelessly out of his depth. After struggling for an hour in the knee-deep mud, he succeeded only in ruining his best suit of Shabbat clothes and getting the wagon even more hopelessly imbedded in the mud. Finally, he dragged his bruised and aching body to the synagogue, arriving a scant minute before the start of Shabbat.

Meanwhile, the coachman arrived early to the synagogue and sat down to recite a few chapters of Psalms. At the synagogue he found a group of wandering paupers, and being blessed with a most generous nature, invited them all to share his meal. When the synagogue sexton approached the paupers to arrange meal placements the town's householders, as is customary in Jewish communities, he received the same reply from them all: "Thank you, but I have already been invited for the Shabbat meal."

Unfortunately, however, the coachman's means were unequal to his generous heart, and his dozen guests left his table with but a shadow of a meal in their hungry stomachs.

Thus the coachman, with his twenty years of experience in extracting wagons from mudholes, took it upon himself to feed a small army, while the wealthy businessman, whose Shabbat meal leftovers could easily have fed every hungry man within a ten mile radius, floundered about in a ditch.

Every soul is entrusted with a mission unique to her alone, and is granted the specific aptitudes, talents and resources necessary to excel in her ordained role. One must take care not to become one of those 'lost souls' who wander through life trying their hand at every field of endeavor except for what is truly and inherently their own. © 2004 Rabbi M. Wollenberg & torah.org

RABBI YONASON SACKS

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In linking Chag haPesach to Chag haShavuot, the days of sefiras ha'omer underscore the fundamental relationship that exists between yetziyas Mitzrayim and kabbalas haTorah. Indeed, a plethora of Midrashic and Rabbinic writings seem to place particular emphasis on this critical connection. The Ran (Pesachim 28a in Rif), for example, quotes the Midrash, which traces the current practice of sefiras ha'Omer back to the original counting done by Bnei Yisroel in anticipation of kabbalas haTorah as they left Mitzrayim.

Similarly, the Sefer haChinuch (306) posits that the counting of the omer reflects our insatiable yearning for kabbalas haTorah, like a slave counting the days until he is freed. By counting in ascending order from day one to forty nine, we reflect that our "every longing and yearning is to arrive at this day." The Ramban (23:36) also stresses this relationship, explaining that the Torah's reference to Chag haShavuos as "Atzeres" analogizes the days of sefiras ha'omer to chol hamoed, thereby connecting yetzias mitzrayim to kabbalas haTorah. The Ramban adds (Introduction to sefer Shemos) that the redemption from Mitzrayim of Pesach was incomplete until Bnei Yisroel received the Torah on Shavuos, as only kabbalas haTorah could return Bnei Yisroel to the exalted status of their forefathers.

Furthermore, perhaps one could suggest that the connection between Pesach and Shavuos may account for the Torah's omission of any explicit mitzvah of "simcha" on Pesach itself. While the mitzvah of simcha certainly applies to Pesach halachically, the Torah does not particularly specify so. The conspicuous absence of the mitzvah of simcha may suggest that true simcha can only be experienced in the context of complete freedom, which comes from the kabbalas haTorah of Shavuos. As the mishnah (Avos 6:2) states, "There is no free man except one who involves himself in the study of Torah." Thus, the role of sefiras ha'omer in connecting the Yetzias Mitzrayim of Pesach to the kabbalas haTorah of Shavuos cannot be overstated.

This hashkafic role of sefiras ha'omer may bear halachic ramifications as well. Rav Ovadya Yosef (Yechaveh Da'as 1:24) adduces support for his opinion that one may recite a birchas shehechyanu on new items purchased during sefirah from the Ramban's analogy of sefiras ha'omer to chol hamoed. Rav Ovadya explains that although the three weeks between the seventeenth of Tamuz and the ninth of Av mark a time of collective national tragedy accompanied by practices of mourning, the period of sefiras ha'omer is quite different. These days are not considered days of collective misfortune for the entire nation (although isolated practices of mourning are maintained in order to commemorate the tragic deaths of the 24,000 students of Rabbi Akiva).

Rather, the days of sefirah resemble a festive chol hamoed Pesach and Shavuos, and thus birchas shehechyanu may certainly be recited. between The role of sefiras ha'omer as a connection between Pesach and Shavuos may also be halachically significant in explaining the status of sefirah bizman hazeh. Many rishonim assume that in the absence of the Beis HaMikdash, sefiras ha'omer is mandated only mid'rabanan (see Tosafos Menachos 66a s.v. "Zecher," Rosh and Ran at end of maseches Pesachim). Their rationale may be based on the Torah's apparent linkage of the korban omer to the counting of the omer within the same pasuk (Vayikra 23:15): "And you shall count

for yourselves, from the morrow after the Sabbath, from the day you bring the waved omer offering, seven complete weeks." This juxtaposition suggests a relationship between the korban and the counting, implying that if the korban omer can no longer be offered, counting the omer must also be inapplicable Mid'oraisa. The Rambam, however, maintains that sefiras ha'omer always remains a Biblical obligation, unequivocally stating that the mitzvah applies "to every man of Israel, in every place and every time" (Hilchos. Temidin UMusafin 7:22-24). The Aruch HaShulchan (489:3) explains that the Rambam's opinion is rooted in his understanding of the hashkafic Pesach and Shavuos. Even if the korban omer is no longer brought in our times, sefiras ha'omer must still be performed Mid'oraisa in order to symbolize our ardent anticipation of kabbalas haTorah- a sentiment which is as relevant after the churban as it was before. The Aruch HaShulchan adds that the korban omer itself further reflects this relationship. Brought from barley, the fodder of animals, the korban omer symbolizes man's animal-like status when he is without Torah. Only upon receiving the Torah on Shavuos may the wheat flour shteihalechem be brought, thereby symbolizing man's elevated status above the animal world.

The hashkafic significance of sefiras ha'omer may also account for the lack of a birchas shehechyanu on the mitzvah of sefirah. The Ba'al HaMaor (Pesachim 28a in Rif) attributes the absence of shehechyanu to the fact that shehechyanu is recited only on mitzvos which produce some type of benefit or joy. Sefiras ha'omer, however, is a source of distress, calling to mind doleful memories of the destruction of the holy Mikdash. The Meiri (Pesachim 7b) adopts a different approach, explaining that the birchas shehechyanu recited on the first night of Pesach actually covers the mitzvah of sefiras ha'omer. Rabbeinu Yerucham (Nesiv 4, Chelek 5), however, suggests almost the opposite possibility: the birchas shehechyanu of Shavuos retroactively covers the mitzvah of sefiras ha'omer. Perhaps Rabbeinu Yerucham's explanation may relate to the aforementioned relationship between Pesach and Shavuos. While most mitzvos require a birchas shehechyanu prior to the performance of the mitzvah, sefiras ha'omer is quite different. Since the purpose of sefiras ha'omer is to bring Bnei Yisroel from the incomplete redemption of Pesach to the kabbalas haTorah of Shavuos, sefirah does not constitute an end unto itself. Rather, it is a means towards the desired end of Shavuos. Thus the birchas shehechyanu of Shavuos, which marks the culmination and goal of the mitzvah of sefirah, may retroactively apply to the sefirah as well, despite the general preference for reciting a shehechyanu before the performance of a mitzvah.

One other explanation for the lack of a birchas shehechyanu on the mitzvah of sefirah is suggested by

the Levush. Like the aforementioned rishonim, the Levush (Hilchos Pesach 489) emphasizes sefirah's role as a connector between Pesach and Shavuos. The Levush explains that sefirah is counted "like a man expecting and waiting for a particular day upon which he will receive a great gift or other item which will bring joy to his heart." In expressing one's unbridled anticipation for kabbalas haTorah, one demonstrates that receiving the Torah is of greater value than the physical redemption from Egypt. Hence, argues the Levush, if the entire purpose of sefirah is to direct one's gaze away from the present towards the anticipated ends of kabbalas haTorah, how could one possibly make a blessing on the present zman? Because Bnei Yisroel hope to pass through the period of sefirah as rapidly as possible in order to reach the period of Shavuos, no birchas shehechiyanu is recited.

The physical freedom from Mitzrayim is thus incomplete without the spiritual freedom engendered by kabbalas haTorah. While physical redemption bears the simulacrum of freedom, true redemption can only be attained through Talmud Torah and yiras Shamayim. Yehi ratzon that we should merit to continue to learn and exert ourselves constantly in talmud Torah, so that we will greet Mashiach tzidkeinu bimheira b'yameinu.
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RABBI LIPMAN PODOLSKY

Yeshivat HaKotel

Mommy, I'm hungry!"

"But you just ate two sandwiches, a large helping of french fries, string beans, cole slaw, rice with mushroom sauce, one pulke, three fligelach, a healthy bowl of chicken soup, fruit salad, ice cream and a gezunte wedge of chocolate fudge cake!"

"I know, but I'm still soooooo hungry..."

One of the bountiful blessings recorded in our Parsha-assuming that we carefully read and follow the Instruction Manual for Living-is: "You shall eat your bread to satisfaction (Vayikra 26:5)." Rashi expounds: "You will eat a small amount, and the food will be blessed in your stomach." In other words, it will be unnecessary to consume mass quantities of food; even a modicum will satiate.

A problem arises, though, when we take into account the beginning of the verse: "Your threshing will last until the vintage, and the vintage will last until the sowing (ibid.)." The blessing in the land will be of such potency that we will never have a chance to rest between harvests.

Unlimited wealth will be ours for the taking.

Given the first blessing, of what need is the second? With our silos full to overflowing, what would we do with a "blessing of the stomach"? So I'll eat a little more! What I lack in quality, I'll make up for in quantity!

Answers Rav Yerucham Levovitz zt"l (Daas

Torah Vayikra p. 276): Sometimes, no matter how much a person has, he can find no satisfaction. This phenomenon is so well known that even wealthy, non-Jewish singers (l'havdil) have paid it tribute. "I can't get no, satisfaction..." You may have unlimited affluence, but you feel empty. And you try, and you try, but the vacuum remains.

Two distinct systems operate in parallel in this universe-Yaakov and Esav. Esav was obsessed with abundance (Breishis 33:9). His appetite for large numbers knew no limits. The more he had, the more he craved. Yet, tragically, he placed his faith in numbers. He never discovered the secret to his unceasing hunger; he just kept on trying to satisfy himself without ever succeeding. Like trying to fill a bottomless pit, Esav's goal was doomed from the start.

Yaakov had no need for abundance or extravagance; he had everything (ibid. 33:11). Yaakov existed in the realm of One, of everything.

Yaakov's connection with the Infinite was so absolute, finite numbers-no matter how large- had no significance. For Yaakov, there was only One. Not one followed by two; just One. The Absolute One.

Human beings are deceived by numbers. "ONE HUNDRED AND TWENTY-SEVEN MILLION DOLLARS IN THE TRI-STATE LOTTERY!!"

"ENORMOUS VICTORIAN COLONIAL, 8 BED, 4 BATH, LIKE NEW!!!" Yet without the secret ingredient, these numbers, no matter how colossal, cannot satisfy. This secret has continued to elude Esav and his descendants-and, tragically, many of us as well-to this very day.

Only the Creator can "open His hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing (Tehillim 145:16)."

"Who is wealthy, he who is satisfied with his lot (Avos 4:1)." To achieve satisfaction, one needs nothing more than plain bread-"You will eat your bread to satisfaction." "Hashem should give me bread to eat... (Breishis 28:20)." The secret, satiating ingredient is the legacy of the descendants of Yaakov. "I have everything!!"

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