

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

In two sentences in this week's sedra, the Torah summarises the entire relationship between God and the people of Israel: "You have affirmed [he-emarta] this day that the Lord is your, God, that you will walk in His ways, that you will observe His laws and commandments and rules, and that you will obey Him. And the Lord has affirmed [he-emircha] this day that you are, as He promised you, His treasured people who shall observe all His commandments." (Deut. 26:17-18)

Here, set out with disarming simplicity, is the dual relationship, the reciprocity, at the heart of the covenant. It is an idea made famous in the form of two jingles.

The first, that of William Norman Ewer: "How odd / Of God / To choose / The Jews"

And the second, the Jewish riposte: "Not quite / So odd -- / The Jews / Chose God."

Between God and the people is a mutual bond of love. The Israelites pledge themselves to be faithful to God and His commands. God pledges Himself to cherish the people as His treasure -- for though He is the God of all humanity, He holds a special place in His affection (to speak anthropomorphically) for the descendants of those who first heard and heeded His call. This is the whole of Tanakh, the Hebrew Bible. The rest is commentary.

The English translation, above, is that of the Jewish Publication Society Tanakh. Any translation, however, tends to conceal the difficulty in the key verb in both sentences: le-ha'amir. What is strange is that, on the one hand, it is a form of one the most common of all biblical verbs, lomar, "to say". On the other, the specific form used here -- the hiphil, or causative form -- is unique. Nowhere else does it appear in this form in the Bible, and its meaning is, as a result, obscure.

The JPS translation reads it as "affirmed". Aryeh Kaplan, in *The Living Torah*, reads it as "declared allegiance to". Robert Alter renders it: "proclaimed". Other interpretations include "separated to yourself" (Rashi), "chosen" (Septuagint), "recognised" (Saadia Gaon), "raised" (Radak, Sforno), "betrothed" (Malbim), "given fame to" (Ibn Janach), "exchanged everything else for" (Chizkuni), "accepted the uniqueness of" (Rashi to Chagigah 3a), or "caused God to declare" (Judah Halevi, cited by Ibn Ezra).

Among Christian translations, the King James Version has, "Thou hast avouched the Lord this day to be thy God". The New International Version reads: "You have declared this day that the Lord is your God". The Contemporary English Version has: "In response, you have agreed that the Lord will be your God".

What is the significance of this unique form of the verb "to say"? Why is it used here? The use of language in the Torah is not vague, accidental, approximate, imprecise. In general, in the Mosaic books, style mirrors substance. The way something is said is often connected to what is being said. So it is here. What we have before us is a proposition of far-reaching consequence for the most fundamental question humanity can ask itself: What is the nature of the bond between human beings and God -- or between human beings and one another -- such that we can endow our lives with the charisma of grace? The answer given by the Torah, so profound that we need to stop and meditate on it, lies in language, speech, words. Hence the singling out, in this definitive statement of Jewish faith, of the verb meaning "to say".

We owe to the later work of Wittgenstein, developed further by J. L. Austin (*How to do things with words*) and J. R. Searle (*Speech Acts*), the realisation that language has many functions. Since the days of Socrates, philosophers have tended to concentrate on just one function: the use of language to describe, or state facts. Hence the key questions of philosophy and later science: Is this statement true? Does it correspond to the facts? Is it consistent with other facts? Can I be sure? What evidence do I have? What warrant do I have for believing what I believe? Language is the medium we use to describe what is.

But that is only one use of language, and there are many others. We use it to classify, to divide the world up into particular slices of reality. We also use it to evaluate. "Patriotism" and "jingoism" both denote the same phenomenon -- loyalty to one's country -- but with opposite evaluations: Patriotism = good, jingoism = bad.

We use language to express emotion.



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Sometimes we use it simply to establish a relationship. Malinowsky called this phatic communion, where what matters is not what we say but the mere fact that we are talking to one another (Robin Dunbar has recently argued that speech for humans is like "grooming behaviour" among primates). We can also use language to question, command, hypothesise and imagine. There are literary genres like fiction and poetry which use language in complex ways to extend our imaginative engagement with reality. The philosophical-scientific mindset that sees the sole significant function of language as descriptive -- taken to an extreme in the philosophical movement known as "logical positivism" -- is a form of tone-deafness to the rich variety of speech.

The Mosaic books contain a deep set of reflections on the nature and power of language. This has much to do with the fact that the Israelites of Moses' day were in the place where, and the time when, the first alphabet appeared, the proto-semitic script from which all subsequent alphabets are directly or indirectly derived. Judaism marks the world's first transition on a national scale from an oral to a literate culture. Hence the unique significance it attaches to the spoken and written word. We discover this at the very beginning of the Torah. It takes the form of the radical abandonment of myth. God spoke and the world came into being. There is no contest, no struggle, no use of force to subdue rival powers -- as there is in every myth without exception. Instead, the key verb in Genesis 1 is simply leimor, "God said [vayomer], Let there be... and there was." Language creates worlds.

That, of course, is Divine -- not human -- speech. However, J. L. Austin pointed out that there is a human counterpart. There are certain things we can create with words when we use them in a special way. Austin called this use of speech performative utterance (more technically, illocutionary acts). So, for example, when a judge says, "This court is now in session", he is not describing something but doing something. When a groom says to his bride under the wedding canopy, "Behold you are betrothed to me by this ring according to the laws of Moses and Israel", he is not stating a fact but creating a fact.

The most basic type of performative utterance is making a promise. This is the use of language to

create an obligation. Some promises are unilateral (X commits himself to do something for Y), but others are mutual (X and Y make a commitment to one another). Some are highly specific ("I promise to pay you £1,000"), but others are open-ended ("I promise to look after you, come what may"). The supreme example of an open-ended mutual pledge between human beings is marriage. The supreme example of an open-ended mutual pledge between human beings and God is a covenant. That is what our two verses state: that God and the people of Israel pledge themselves to one another by making a covenant, a relationship brought into existence by words, and sustained by honouring those words.

This is the single most radical proposition in the Hebrew Bible. It has no real counterpart in any other religion. What is supremely holy is language, when used to create a moral bond between two parties. This means that the supreme form of relationship is one that does not depend on power, superior force, or dominant-submissive hierarchy. In a covenantal relationship both parties respect the dignity of the other. A covenant exists only in virtue of freely given consent. It also means that between Infinite God and infinitesimal humanity there can be relationship -- because, through language, they can communicate with one another. The key facts of the Torah are that [a] God speaks and [b] God listens. The use of language to create a mutually binding relationship is what links God and humankind. Thus the two verses mean: "Today, by an act of speech, you have made God your God, and God has made you His people". Words, language, an act of saying, have created an open-ended, eternally binding relationship.

Hence the name I have given to my series of Torah commentaries: Covenant and Conversation. Judaism is a covenant, a marriage between God and a people. The Torah is the written record of that covenant. It is Israel's marriage-contract as God's bride. Conversation -- speaking and listening -- is what makes covenant possible. Hence the dual form of Torah: the written Torah, through which God speaks to us and the Oral Torah through which we speak to God by way of interpreting His word. Judaism is the open-ended, mutually binding, conversation between Heaven and earth.

Despite the deep influence of Judaism on two later faiths, Christianity and Islam, neither adopted this idea (to be sure, some Christian theologians speak of covenant, but a different kind of covenant, more unilateral than reciprocal). There are no conversations between God and human beings in either the New Testament or the Koran -- none that echo the dialogues in Tanakh between God and Abraham, Moses, Elijah, Hosea, Jeremiah, Jonah, Habakkuk and Job. Judaism, Christianity and Islam -- the religion of sacred dialogue, the religion of salvation and the religion of submission --

are three different things. The use of language to create a moral bond of love between the Infinite and the finite - through covenant on the one hand, conversation on the other -- is what makes Judaism different. That is what is set out simply in these two verses: Speaking a relationship into being, le-ha'amir, is what makes God our God, and us, His people.

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RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"You must then make the following declaration before the Lord your God: "I have removed all the sacred portions from my house. I have given the appropriate ones to the Levite and to the orphan and widow, following all the commandments You prescribed to us. And I did not forget" [Deut. 26:13]. Although the Torah commands us regarding a number of commandments "to remember," such as "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy" (Ex. 20:8), we do not find that someone observing the Sabbath must declare that he has not forgotten to fulfill that mitzvah. This makes the abovementioned verse from our portion, Ki Tavo, all the more curious.

Why must the Israelite farmer make this declaration upon fulfilling all of his tithing obligations? It seems superfluous. After all, if he has given his tithes, it is apparent that he has not forgotten to do so!

Rashi suggests that the farmer is affirming that he did not forget to make the appropriate blessing (Deut. 26:13). However, why is this the case only regarding this commandment and not others, some of which may be even more difficult to fulfill? Moreover – notwithstanding the importance of blessings – even if one forgets to recite a blessing, the commandment is nevertheless considered to have been fulfilled. So why did the Torah single out this mitzvah?

Perhaps what Rashi had in mind was the necessity for us to give our charity gladly and full-heartedly, even praising the Almighty for the privilege of being among the donors and not among the recipients. Hence, Rashi highlights the importance of not forgetting the blessing of thanksgiving for giving tithes!

I would like to suggest an additional explanation of the significance of the phrase "I did not forget," which I believe is closely tied to the Biblical words themselves. Recall the closing words of last week's portion: "...obliterate the memory of Amalek...do not forget (lo tishkach)."

Why must Amalek and the philosophy of Amalek-ism must be obliterated? Because they are the antithesis of the morality of the Torah:

"Remember what Amalek did to you on your way out of Egypt, when they encountered you on the

way, and you were tired and exhausted.... They cut off those weak and infirm, lagging to your rear, and they did not fear God.... You must obliterate the memory of Amalek from under the heavens. Do not forget" [ibid., 25:17–19].

Amalek is identified with evil incarnate because he represents that cruel and diabolical force within humanity that takes advantage of and preys upon the weak and the disadvantaged. Over the centuries his name changes, but his motto remains the same: might makes right. He aims his poisonous hate toward the weakest members of society: the stragglers, the lame, the blind, the old, and the sick.

Amalek's attack of the weak represents the very opposite of the message that God has just given the Jewish people. If anything, the moral code of this nation of ex-slaves is to never forget its origins, to never inflict upon others what it once suffered on its own flesh at the hands of its Egyptian taskmasters.

Throughout the Torah, the ethical ideal of the Jewish People is to manifest an exquisite sensitivity to the needs of others, especially the disadvantaged other, a landless Levite, a homeless stranger, a defenseless widow, a bereft orphan; the very people Amalek seeks to exploit.

Indeed, Amalek's attack is not only directed toward a few weak, defenseless stragglers, but is hell-bent upon inflicting the death blow to the people who revere a God of compassion and loving-kindness. Amalek is the quintessence of immorality. Hence the Israelites are commanded not only to wipe out the physical presence of Amalek, but also to obliterate the very memory, or remnant, of his message. Remember what Amalek did to you. "Do not forget."

The true significance of the strange phrase ("I did not forget") in our portion now becomes evident. The sins of Amalek and the tithes to the Levites, the stranger, and the poor are intimately connected. In our portion, when the farmer declares, "I did not forget," the simplest, most straight-forward understanding of this term is that he is referring to the previous command regarding Amalek: he did not forget to give to the widow, to the stranger, to the orphan, to the Levite. After all, if he did not "forget" to help these underprivileged, he did indeed remember to destroy Amalek.

In effect, he is demonstrating to the Almighty that he has internalized the commandment to destroy Amalek and not to forget; in giving his tithes to the disadvantaged he is truly destroying any remnant of the spirit of Amalek. ©2017 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

Moshe describes in horrid detail the ravages of the disaster that will befall the Jewish people towards

the end of their long exile from their homeland. We no longer have to accept the descriptions outlined in the words of Moshe as they appear in this week's Torah reading on faith alone. We have eyewitnesses, testimonies, films, official documented government records, and written memoirs that describe to us in excruciating exactitude the corroboration of Moshe's dire prediction made over three millennia earlier.

So, there are some who somehow contend that the words of Moshe are at best superfluous in our generation. A picture it was once said is worth a thousand words. But such a view is very short sighted. It misses the very points that Moshe wishes to teach us in his awful vision of what will be the fate of the Jewish people before the beginning of our ultimate redemption.

Firstly, as Ramban points out, it is utterly astounding that a human being, prophet though he may be, can accurately describe events and emotions that will occur thousands of years later. We cannot even peer around the corner of time to know what the morrow brings. Simply put, the vindication of the prophecy and words of Moshe themselves are one of the strongest pillars of faith upon which Judaism and the Jewish people rest. It is not for naught that we shout and sing that Moshe is truth incarnate and his Torah is absolute truth. To doubt Moshe is to deny Judaism.

Secondly, if any lesson needs to be constantly repeated to the Jewish people it is that all actions, ideas, and agendas that violate Torah principles and values eventually lead to disastrous consequences. These consequences may not be initially apparent; it may take many years and even generations for them to appear and take hold. As Churchill once said, the wheels of history may grind very slowly but they grind very fine.

Moshe warns us not to repeat past errors and foolishness and to know that the God of justice will always eventually enforce justice even to the end of days. The Jewish people can only ignore this truth at their own great peril. Even a cursory glance at Jewish history will validate this conclusion quickly and impressively.

Finally, Moshe concludes this section of the Torah with a promise of hope and redemption. As Rabbi Akiva pointed out long ago regarding the desolate ruins of the Temple, only those who have witnessed the minute accuracy of the verses of destruction and punishment will then have complete faith in the verses of consolation, redemption and eventual greatness.

The light at the end of the tunnel only appears to those who are experiencing the tunnel itself. Our generation that survived the horrors of the past century should bear witness and bring hope and faith to our view of the future of the Jewish people. Moshe sees our struggles and difficulties and nevertheless promises a

bright and holy future. ©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

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 God, '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 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 God, 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. ©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

DR. ARNOLD LUSTIGER

Vort from the Rav

"Then you shall say before the Lord, your God...." (Devarim 26:12) This formula is known as vidui maaasros, the confession of the tithes. Prima facie, the title "confession" is not fitting for this Parshah. We know what confession stands for: We confess that we have sinned, transgressed, erred. Yom Kippur confession is an act of merciless accusation and self-condemnation. However, in this statement there is no account of sins, but to the contrary: of mitzvos and good deeds. The Jew boasts that he has not violated even one order and that he has fulfilled the mitzvah of maasros to the letter: "according to all Your commandment that You commanded me; I have not transgressed Your commandments, nor have I forgotten [them].... I obeyed the Lord, my God; I did according to all that You commanded me. How, then, have our Sages endowed the recital of the portion with the title of "Confession?" What type of confession is this? How can the praise of man simultaneously be the confession of man?

A basic principle of Jewish thinking regarding repentance and confession is reflected in this nomenclature. Repentance is predicated on two principles:

1) On the power within men to be able to accuse themselves, on their ability to think of themselves as unworthy and inferior. In our declaration on Yom Kippur "And You are justified for all that befalls us, for You have acted correctly and we have acted evilly," emerges the expression of self-accusation.

2) On the ability of each individual to cleanse himself, to comprehend the boundless hidden spiritual powers, which are found in the human personality and which propel one in the direction of return to the Sovereign of the Universe; on the ability of man to elevate himself to majestic heights even after he has sunk into the abyss of impurity. The second principle is just as important as the first. A man, obviously, cannot

engage in repentance if he does not have the boldness to admit that he has sinned. Without recognition of the sin there can be no regret. On the other hand there can be no commitment for the future if the man has no faith in his ability to rise above the sins he has committed. If he believes that he is helpless and subservient to natural, mechanical forces which pull him downward, if he is not convinced of the freedom of the human creative act then he cannot feel his own guilt and he will not change. If man looks upon himself as an impotent creature then the position of the sinner is helpless.

Every confession expresses itself in the outcry: "I Am Black and I Am Beautiful, O daughters of Jerusalem." (Song 1:5) A Unless we see the "beauty" we are unable to discern the "blackness". The sinner must view himself from two antithetical viewpoints, the nihility of being and the greatness of being. Thus, the praise of man, just as his shame, is a part of confession. "I have hearkened to the voice of the Lord my God, I have done according to all that You have commanded me" is considered a vidui. Man declares through the recital of the portion that he is able to live, in accord with the will of the Sovereign of the Universe, a life of sanctity and purity. If he has manifested his power to fulfill the will of the Holy One Blessed Be He in fulfilling this mitzvah, then God has a right to demand that he demonstrate this strength under all circumstances. (Shiurei Harav Conspectus, pp. 29-30) ©2017 Dr. A. Lustiger & torah.org

RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

The Torah states: "And now I brought the first fruit of the Land which the Almighty gave me, and you shall place it before the Almighty, your God, and you shall bow down before the Almighty, your God" (Deut 26:10).

We do not find the idea of bowing down to the Almighty mentioned with regards to other commandments. Why is it mentioned here in the bringing of the first fruits?

Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz teaches us that the whole concept of bringing the first fruits to the Bait HaMikdosh (the Holy Temple in Jerusalem) is to show gratitude to the Almighty for all that He has given. It is an expression of our awareness that everything we have is a gift from the Almighty. Therefore, the Torah mentions that we bow down to the Almighty, which symbolizes our total submission to His will because all that we have is from Him. This applies to our material as well as our intellectual achievements. Be grateful to the Almighty for all that you understand in Torah and any novel ideas that He has blessed you with.

The greater your awareness that all you have is a gift from the Almighty the more you will appreciate it. As many commentators point out, a small gift from a

very distinguished and important dignitary is a precious possession. The greater the giver the more you treasure what you were given. When you live with the reality that all you have is a gift from the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, you will immensely enjoy everything you have! Dvar Torah based on Growth Through Torah by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin ©2017 Rabbi K. Packouz and aish.com

ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

Eating of the First Fruits

*Translated for the Encyclopedia Talmudit
by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss*

In this week's portion there is reference to the Mitzvah of "Bikurim" (first fruits) and the Mitzvah of "Maaser Sheini" (tithes that one must bring and consume in Yerushalayim). However the Mitzvah of actually eating the "Bikurim" and "Maaser Shani" is found elsewhere. The Mitzvah of eating Bikurim is found in Devarim 12:5,6, and of the eating of "Maaser sheni" in Devarim 14:26.

Since however, both Mitzvot are mentioned in this week's portion and are in close proximity to each other and have many similarities, our sages learn one from the other with the exception that "Maaser Sheni" is eaten in Yerushalayim by its owners, but the "Bikurim" are presented to the "Kohanim" (priests) when the people arrive in Israel with their first fruits.

The declaration when one brings his "Maaser Sheni" to Yerushalayim is "I have not eaten of it in my intense mourning" which we derive that one must be happy when eating of the "Maaser Sheni" when one comes to Yerushalayim. As well, the Kohen who is receiving the "bikurim" must also be happy and not in a state of mourning. Some derive this from the passage "And you should be happy because of all the good".

The Mitzvah of "Bikurim" and all of its requirements, is not only upon an Israelite who brings his fruit to a Kohen, but also is applicable to the Kohen who receives the "Bikurim" and indeed he is required to recite the blessing "Asher kidishanu b'mitzvotav vtzivanu le'echol Bikurim" (who has commanded one to eat Bikurim) when he receives the "Bikurim". ©2016 Rabbi M. Weiss and Encyclopedia Talmudit

RABBI YITZCHOK ADLERSTEIN

HaMedrash V'HaMaaseh

Moshe summoned all of Yisrael and said to them, "You have seen everything that Hashem did before your eyes in the land of Egypt, to Paroh...the great trials that your eyes beheld, those great signs and wonders...I led you for forty years in the Wilderness, your garment did not wear out...bread you did not eat..." (Devarim 29:1-5)

The Torah tells us (Bereishis 50:15) that after the death of their father, Yosef's brothers grew apprehensive about his attitude towards them. Perhaps

Yosef indeed hated them for their treatment of him, and would now exact vengeance. Chazal (Tanchuma, Vayechi, end) expand upon this. What precipitated their fear, Chazal say, was Yosef's behavior when he came across the pit into which they had cast him before they sold him into slavery. Yosef pronounced the berachah for such occasions: Blessed is the One who performed a miracle for me in this place.

We are perplexed by this. There was nothing remarkable about Yosef's behavior that should have alarmed his brothers. In marking the place with gratitude towards Hashem, Yosef did exactly as halachah requires! Why were they so concerned?

Upon reflection, however, Yosef's berachah was somewhat peculiar. While Yosef's life was spared that day at the pit, it was not the last time Hashem performed a miracle for him. His deliverance from Potiphar's dungeon-pit was perhaps more significant, elevating him to the position of Viceroy over all of Egypt. Halachah (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 218:5) requires a person who was treated to several miracles to acknowledge all of them when he visits the place that any one of them occurred. If Yosef wished to fulfill his obligation as the beneficiary of miraculous assistance, he should have included this other miracle as well in his berachah.

Perhaps Yosef attached little importance to his position of greatness in Egypt. He never ceased longing for the days in which he lived an idyllic Torah life, studying Torah with his father. Perhaps he lived his role so reluctantly that he did not think of it as a miracle at all.

This, however, was the worst fear of his brothers! Looking back with guilt at their mistreatment of Yosef, the shevatim could console themselves (as Yosef in fact told them earlier) that their evil intention had been reversed by Hashem into a great blessing -- for Yosef, and for the family. Listening to Yosef's berachah at the pit, however, they heard that he omitted mention of the miracle of his elevation to greatness. They realized that Yosef did not see it as a great blessing to him. If so, they reasoned, there was nothing to mitigate the evil they had perpetrated against him, and they began fearing for their lives.

The precision of Chazal's choice of words becomes apparent. Yosef's brothers became agitated when they heard him give thanks for the miracle performed for him "in this place," i.e. at that one, single location, in contradistinction to other places, which Yosef disregarded.

From Yosef's response to his brothers' fears we can determine that they did not understand Yosef's mindset. He certainly did regard his rise to power as important and significant. It allowed him, to save the lives of his family in famine-ridden Canaan. He appreciated this miracle, and thanked Hashem for it.

Why, then, did he not mention this later

miraculous intervention when he stood at the site of his sale into slavery, where his life had been spared after his brothers had originally agreed to kill him? Perhaps the difference is in the beneficiary or beneficiaries of the miracle.

Ordinarily, it makes sense for a person to recollect all the miracles performed for him whenever he mentions any single one. Why? Because it is not only the quality and magnitude of a miracle that is impressive, but the number of Divine interventions on a person's behalf. The reason is that every miracle has a price; the way Chazal put it, each miracle results in a reduction of a person's available pool of merit. This means that after a first miraculous deliverance, a person has less spiritual currency to draw on. If he merits a second, or third deliverance, we become even more impressed with Hashem's chesed. The beneficiary has less to "offer" for the special treatment; nonetheless, G-d comes through for him. It follows that when a person thanks Hashem for His intervention at some location, he should mention all other interventions. In doing so, he adds greater dimensions to Hashem's goodness.

This line of reasoning does not apply to miracles performed for the tzibbur, for the many. Hashem ordinarily delights in heaping much kindness on the community. "Hashem rejoiced over you to benefit you and to multiply you." (Devarim 28:63) He does not "deduct" anything from some corporate account. To the contrary, it is meritorious for the community to be the vehicle for displaying Hashem's chesed on a grand scale.

It follows that in the case of miracles performed for the many, each one can be considered by itself. There is no compelling reason to mention other, unrelated, miracles when focusing upon a single example.

We've arrived at the different positions of Yosef and his brothers. The latter assumed that Yosef was not particularly grateful for his miraculous rise to fame and fortune. He, they thought, would have preferred to do without it.

Yosef, however, corrected them. He certainly did appreciate the material benefits of his position. Why had he failed to make mention of it when he thanked Hashem for his earlier deliverance? Because, he explained, he viewed his position as a benefit not chiefly to himself, but to the many. While they had intended to harm him when they sold him, "G-d intended it for good." (Bereishis 50:20) Hashem saved him that day, and years later, elevated him to a position of prominence, not for his own pleasure, but so "that a vast people be kept alive." The second miracle was performed primarily for the many, and he therefore did not mention it in his berachah for the first.

As far as Yosef's attitude towards his brothers, however, nothing had changed. Yosef indeed valued

his position, and understood that the Hand of G-d had been involved in his sale to Egypt. He had long ago forgiven his brothers for their intentions towards him. Nothing had changed. They had no reason to fear for their lives. (Based on HaMedrash V'HaMaaseh, Ki Savo, by R Yechezkel Libshitz zt"l) ©2017 Rabbi Y. Adlerstein & torah.org

SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

We read in our Parashah that Moshe Rabbeinu told Bnei Yisrael (26:16), "This day, Hashem, your Elokim, commands you to perform these decrees and the statutes, and you shall observe and perform them with all your heart and with all your soul." Rabbeinu Bachya ben Asher z"l (Spain; 1255-1340) writes: At this point, Moshe Rabbeinu had been teaching the Torah for 40 years; how could he say, "This day, Hashem, your Elokim, commands you"? Midrash Tanchuma answers: "The commandments should be beloved to you as if they were given today." Another Midrash, notes Rabbeinu Bachya, derives a similar lesson from another verse: "They should be new in your eyes as if they were given at Sinai today."

Rabbeinu Bachya continues: Both lessons are necessary; they should be "beloved" and "new." Man's nature is that what he can see, he remembers, and what is hidden from sight is forgotten. The signs and wonders [that the generation of the Exodus saw] do not endure forever. Therefore, as the generations pass and man's heart follows the things that his eyes can see, he must be reminded to keep his faith firmly planted in his heart, especially in the exile. We are taught that the words of the Torah are "beloved" so that we will not want to transgress them. And, we are taught to keep them "new" so that the signs and wonders that accompanied the Giving of the Torah will remain fresh in our minds.



"An Aramean tried to destroy my forefather." (26:5)

Many commentaries struggle to find an indication that the Aramean (Lavan) wanted to destroy our forefather Yaakov. R' Yitzchak Arieli z"l (1896-1974; Mashgiach Ruchani of Yeshivat Merkaz Ha'Rav; author of the Talmud commentary Einayim La'mishpat) explains:

Lavan wanted to destroy Yaakov spiritually, not physically. This was his intention in giving Yaakov his two daughters as wives, so that they (he thought) would be negative influences on Yaakov. Lavan also expected his grandchildren to feel loyalty toward him and to undermine Yaakov's faith and teachings. All of this is alluded to in Lavan's statement (Bereishit 31:43), "The daughters are my daughters, the children are my children." He wanted them to be his family, not the family of the Patriarchs Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov.

(Midrash Ariel)

R' Ovadiah Sforno z"l (Italy; 1475-1550) interprets: "My father Yaakov was an Aramean headed for destruction," homeless and unable to found the nation that would inherit the Land. (Be'ur Ha'Sforno)



"You shall be joyous with all the goodness that Hashem, your Elokim, has given you..." (26:11)

R' Moshe Yehoshua Hager z"l (1916-2012; Vizhnitzer Rebbe) explains this verse in the name of his father, R' Chaim Meir Hager z"l (1887-1972; Vizhnitzer Rebbe) as follows: "You will be joyous when you believe that all that comes from Hashem is good."

He continues: Simcha / joy is the key to attaching oneself to Hashem. Without simcha, a person cannot have even the smallest connection to G-d. Service of Hashem without simcha is like a body without a soul.

We read in Tehilim (100:2), "Serve Hashem with simcha." This, explains the Vizhnitzer Rebbe, is not merely good advice; it is a statement that the only way to serve Hashem is with simcha. The psalm continues, "Come before Him with joyous song." The only way to come before Him is with joyous song.

Because simcha is so important, the Yetzer Ha'ra works extra hard to spoil it, notes the Vizhnitzer Rebbe. This includes blurring the line between joy and frivolity as well as between humility, on the one hand, and self-deprecation that leads to depression, on the other hand. Indeed, Chassidic sources teach that the Yetzer Ha'ra derives greater satisfaction from a person's feeling of depression after sinning than from the sin itself.

The Vizhnitzer Rebbe concludes: Serving Hashem and studying Torah require simcha. And, the very fact that a person has the opportunity to serve Hashem should itself be a source of simcha. (Yeshuot Moshe: Ma'adanei Ha'shulchan)



"Your life will hang in the balance, and you will be frightened night and day, and you will not be sure of your livelihood." (28:66)

Rashi z"l comments on the last phrase: "This refers to one who must rely on the baker."

R' Shabtai Bass z"l (1641 -- 1718) elaborates: if he cannot purchase bread one day, he will starve. (Siftey Chachamim)

R' Avraham David Wahrman z"l (1771-1840; rabbi of Buchach, Poland; prolific author) notes that our Sages make seemingly contradictory statements about the degree to which one should try to earn more than his immediate needs in order to save for the future.

On the one hand, the Gemara (Sotah 48b) states: "Do not worry tomorrow's worries. A person who says, 'What will I eat tomorrow?' is lacking faith." Hashem taught us this by having the Mahn fall every

weekday rather than a multi-day supply at one time. Midrash Tanchuma comments: He who created each day also created its sustenance.

On the other hand, Mishlei teaches (6:8; see also 10:5) that one should emulate the ant, which stores food in the summer for the winter. One who must buy his bread every day is living a curse [as Rashi comments on our verse]. Along these lines, the Talmudic Sage Rava told his students, "Do not appear before me in Nissan and Tishrei [the months of planting and harvesting] so that you will not be distracted the rest of the year."

The resolution to this seeming contradiction, writes R' Wahrman, is that one is permitted to behave in the way that is normal in his country and for his occupation. If one lives in an agricultural economy, he must, of course, plant in the planting season and harvest in the harvest season. But, in a society where food is readily available, one should not worry about the future more than is normal. For example, a merchant who makes his living selling seasonal items and who earned enough during the previous season to sustain himself through the off-season should not be worrying about the future. What would be the purpose, since, in any event, he cannot earn more money during the off-season? Therefore, for example, he should not withhold funds that could be used for charity out of fear that next season might be less profitable and he will need to live off his savings. (Kuntreis Chazon La'mo'ed: Drush 1)

R' Mattisyahu Solomon shlita (Mashgiach Ruchani of Beth Medrash Ha'gadol in Lakewood, N.J.) observes: Some people claim that they would like to have Bitachon / trust in Hashem, but that they are incapable of trusting in anyone or anything. Such people are merely fooling themselves, for everyone trusts in something. Some place their trust in their wealth, some in their brains, some in their strength, etc. Everyone trusts in something, so everyone can trust in Hashem. (Matnat Chelko: Sha'ar Ha'bitachon p.5) © 2017 S. Katz & torah.org

