

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS**

### Covenant & Conversation

If we were to ask what key word epitomises the society Jews were to make in the Promised Land, several concepts would come to mind: justice, compassion, reverence, respect, holiness, responsibility, dignity, loyalty. Surprisingly, though, another word figures centrally in Moses' speeches in Deuteronomy. It is a word that appears only once in each of the other books of the Torah: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. (Gen. 31:27; Ex. 4:14; Lev. 23:40; Num. 10:10) Yet it appears twelve times in Deuteronomy, seven of them in Parshat Re'eh. The word is simcha, joy.

It is an unexpected word. The story of the Israelites thus far has not been a joyous one. It has been marked by suffering on the one hand, rebellion and dissension on the other. Yet Moses makes it eminently clear that joy is what the life of faith in the land of promise is about. Here are the seven instances in this parsha, and their contexts:

1. The central Sanctuary, initially Shilo: "There in the presence of the Lord your God you and your families shall eat and rejoice in everything you have put your hand to, because the Lord your God has blessed you" (Deut. 12:7).

2. Jerusalem and the Temple: "And there you shall rejoice before the Lord your God, you, your sons and daughters, your menservants and maidservants, and the Levites from your towns" (Deut. 12:12).

3. Sacred food that may be eaten only in Jerusalem: "Eat them in the presence of the Lord your God at the place the Lord your God will choose -- you, your sons and daughters, your menservants and maidservants, and the Levites from your towns -- and you are to rejoice before the Lord your God in everything you put your hand to" (Deut. 12:18).

4. The second tithe: "Use the silver to buy whatever you like: cattle, sheep, wine, or other fermented drink, or anything you wish. Then you and your household shall eat there in the presence of the Lord your God and rejoice" (Deut. 14:26).

5. The festival of Shavuot: "And rejoice before the Lord your God at the place He will choose as a dwelling for His name -- you, your sons and daughters, your menservants and maidservants, the Levites in your towns, and the strangers, the fatherless, and the

widows living among you" (Deut. 16:11).

6. The festival of Succot: "Be joyful at your feast -- you, your sons and daughters, your menservants and maidservants, and the Levites, the strangers, the fatherless, and the widows who live in your towns" (Deut. 16:14).

7. Succot, again. "For seven days, celebrate the feast to the Lord your God at the place the Lord your God will bless you in all your harvest and in all the work of your hands, and your joy will be complete [vehayita ach same'ach]" (Deut. 16:15).

Why does Moses emphasise joy specifically in the book of Deuteronomy? Perhaps because is there, in the speeches Moses delivered in the last month of his life, that he scaled the heights of prophetic vision never reached by anyone else before or since. It is as if, standing on a mountaintop, he sees the whole course of Jewish history unfold below him, and from that dizzying altitude he brings back a message to the people gathered around him: the next generation, the children of those he led out of Egypt, the people who will cross the Jordan he will not cross and enter the land he is only able to see from afar.

What he tells them is unexpected, counter-intuitive. In effect he says this: "You know what your parents suffered. You have heard about their slavery in Egypt. You yourselves have known what it is to wander in the wilderness without a home or shelter or security. You may think those were the greatest trials, but you are wrong. You are about to face a harder trial. The real test is security and contentment."

Absurd though this sounds, it has proved true throughout Jewish history. In the many centuries of dispersion and persecution, from the destruction of the Second Temple to the nineteenth century, no one raised doubts about Jewish continuity. They did not ask, "Will we have Jewish grandchildren?" Only since Jews achieved freedom and equality in the Diaspora and independence and sovereignty in the State of Israel has that question come to be asked. When Jews had little to thank God for, they thanked Him, prayed to Him, and came to the synagogue and the house of study to hear and heed His word. When they had everything to thank Him for, many turned their backs on the synagogue and the house of study.

Moses was giving prophetic expression to the great paradox of faith: It is easy to speak to God in tears. It is hard to serve God in joy. It is the warning he

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delivered as the people came within sight of their destination: the Promised Land. Once there, they were in danger of forgetting that the land was theirs only because of God's promise to them, and only for as long as they remembered their promise to God.

Simcha is usually translated as joy, rejoicing, gladness, happiness, pleasure, or delight. In fact, simcha has a nuance untranslatable into English. Joy, happiness, pleasure, and the like are all states of mind, emotions. They belong to the individual. We can feel them alone. Simcha, by contrast, is not a private emotion. It means happiness shared. It is a social state, a predicate of "we," not "I." There is no such thing as feeling simcha alone.

Moses repeatedly labours the point. When you rejoice, he says time and again, it must be "you, your sons and daughters, your menservants and maidservants, and the Levites, the strangers, the fatherless, and the widows in your towns." A key theme of Parshat Re'eh is the idea of a central Sanctuary "in the place the Lord your God will choose." As we know from later Jewish history, during the reign of King David, this place was Jerusalem, where David's son Solomon eventually built the Temple.

What Moses is articulating for the first time is the idea of simcha as communal, social, and national rejoicing. The nation was to be brought together not just by crisis, catastrophe, or impending war, but by collective celebration in the presence of God. The celebration itself was to be deeply moral. Not only was this a religious act of thanksgiving; it was also to be a form of social inclusion. No one was to be left out: not the stranger, or the servant, or the lonely (the orphan and widow). In a remarkable passage in the Mishneh Torah (Hilchot Yom Tov 6:18) Maimonides makes this point in the strongest possible terms: And while one eats and drinks, it is their duty to feed the stranger, the orphan, the widow, and other poor and unfortunate people, for those who lock the doors to their courtyard, eating and drinking with their family, without giving anything to eat and drink to the poor and the bitter in soul -- their meal is not a rejoicing in a Divine commandment, but a rejoicing only in their own stomach. It is of such persons that Scripture says, "Their sacrifices shall be to them as the bread of

mourners, all that eat thereof shall be polluted; for their bread is a disgrace to their own appetite" (Hos. 9:4). Rejoicing of this kind is a disgrace to those who indulge in it, as Scripture says, "And I will spread dung upon your faces, even the dung of your sacrifices" (Mal. 2:3).

Moses' insight remains valid today. The West is more affluent than any previous society has ever been. Our life expectancy is longer, our standards of living higher, and our choices wider than at any time since Homo sapiens first walked on earth. Yet Western societies are not measurably happier. The most telling indices of unhappiness -- drug and alcohol abuse, depressive illness, stress-related syndromes, eating disorders, and the rest -- have risen by between 300 and 1,000 per cent in the space of two generations. Why so?

In 1968 I met the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneersohn, of blessed memory, for the first time. While I was there, the Chassidim told me the following story. A man had written to the Rebbe in roughly these terms: "I am depressed. I am lonely. I feel that life is meaningless. I try to pray, but the words do not come. I keep mitzvot but find no peace of mind. I need the Rebbe's help." The Rebbe sent a brilliant reply without using a single word. He simply circled the first word of every sentence and sent the letter back. The word in each case was "I."

Our contemporary consumer is constructed in the first-person singular: I want, I need, I must have. There are many things we can achieve in the first-person singular but one we cannot, namely, simcha -- because simcha is the joy we share, the joy we have only because we share. That, said Moses before the Israelites entered their land, would be their greatest challenge. Suffering, persecution, a common enemy, unite a people and turn it into a nation. But freedom, affluence, and security turn a nation into a collection of individuals, each pursuing his or her own happiness, often indifferent to the fate of those who have less, the lonely, the marginal, and the excluded. When that happens, societies start to disintegrate. At the height of their good fortune, the long slow process of decline begins.

The only way to avoid it, said Moses, is to share your happiness with others, and, in the midst of that collective, national celebration, serve God.

(The great French sociologist mile Durkheim (whose father, grandfather, and great-grandfather were all rabbis) argued, in *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (trans. Karen E. Fields [New York: Free Press, 1995]), that religion is born in the experience of "collective effervescence," which is closely related to simcha in the biblical sense.)

Blessings are not measured by how much we own or earn or spend or possess but by how much we share. Simcha is the mark of a sacred society. It is a place of collective joy. *Covenant and Conversation*

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**RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## Shabbat Shalom

**"B**ehold [see], I present before you today a blessing and a curse. The blessing, when you internalize [heed] the commandments of the Lord your God... And the curse, if you do not internalize [heed] the commandments of the Lord your God." (Deuteronomy 11:26–28) Two problems face us as we read these verses, one textual and the other existential. The textual issue is based on the lack of parallelism: "the blessing, when (asher) you internalize, the curse if (im) you do not internalize." We would expect to find parallel consistency, either "when...when" or "if you do...if you do not" in both instances!

The existential issue hits us hard, especially in Israel during these fateful but difficult times. Our cemeteries are filled with children who have been buried by their parents, either soldiers in the line of battle or innocent victims at home, at school, at a bus stop, who were targeted by inhuman suicide bombers. Many if not most of these were our best, our brightest, and our most deserving of reward in accordance with the opening verses of our Torah portion. How then can we possibly explain the many instances of suffering and pain on the part of so many virtuous souls who certainly internalized the commandments of God?

I believe that the precise biblical language reveals a profound truth about Torah commandments and human affairs. After all, the Torah iterates and reiterates that the Almighty gave us His laws "for your good"; proper ethical conduct ensures a well-ordered social structure devoid of aggression and violence. The Sabbaths, festivals, and laws of ritual purity provide for a stable and inter-generational familial nucleus, united by meaningful occasions of joy, study, and song. Hence an immediate blessing always comes together with, and precisely when, we perform the commandment: "the reward for a commandment is the very fulfillment of the commandment" – built-in!

In the instance of transgressions, there is also a built-in punishment; evil bears bitter fruit, the sinner is eventually discovered, unfaithfulness and deception destroy relationships and undermine families. However, unlike the blessing, the "built-in" curse is often not experienced until later on, sometimes not until the last years of the life of the transgressor. Hence the adverb used by the Torah is not when – which connotes immediacy – but is rather "if you do not internalize the commandments," then the curse will come, but not necessarily right away.

Although this is the ultimate truth regarding the

immediate reward of the mitzva and the eventual punishment of the transgression, the accompanying emotion when doing the one or the other may be quite different, even opposite.

The great Hasidic sage known as the Shpolle Zeide explained that the most fundamental lesson of all is the ability to distinguish between good deed and transgression, to overcome the evil impulse by embracing the former and distancing oneself from the latter. He tells how, as a child, he would go to a shvitz (steam bath, the European version – much larger and more vigorous – than our contemporary sauna) with his father, who would pour out a small bucket of freezing water upon him just as he would begin to perspire profusely. "Ooh!" he would inadvertently scream as the cold water contacted his burning-hot flesh; but – after cooling down a bit – he would exclaim happily, "Aah!" (I myself had the exact same experience as a child attending the Tenth Street Baths on the Lower East Side every Thursday evening with my father and grandfather; may their souls rest in peace.) "Remember my child the lesson of the 'ooh' and 'aah,'" the Shpolle would hear from his father. Before (and often even during) the commission of a transgression, you have physical enjoyment – "aah." But afterwards, when you ponder your sin and suffer its consequences – "ooh!" In the case of a mitzva, however, you might cry "ooh" when you have to get up early for prayers or for a lesson of daf yomi, but after the fact and in reflection of your religious accomplishment, you will always exclaim "aah" afterwards. Make sure you conclude your life with an "aah" and not with an "ooh!"

The underlying assumption of this interpretation is that aside from the natural cause and effect of our actions, the Almighty does not extrinsically reward the righteous or punish the sinner in this world; one does not have the right to expect that if one is an honest businessman, one will be guaranteed great profits, or that if one observes the Sabbath, one will live a long and healthy life. This world, according to many of our Talmudic Sages, is a world of freedom of choice for every individual. If the righteous would consistently be rewarded with long life, good health, and a large bank account, and the sinners would die at an early age in poverty, choosing to follow the commandments would be a no-brainer. Free choice precludes extrinsic rewards; free choice also means that an individual can even choose to do something which the Almighty does not desire. This world is largely a result of human action and natural happenstance: "There is no [extrinsic] reward for the commandments in this world" (Kiddushin 39b).

Indeed, the only guarantee that the Almighty makes is the eternity of the Jewish people: Israel will never be destroyed. We are assured of our return to our ancestral homeland no matter how long or arduous the exile, and the eventual perfection of human society.

As far as everything else is concerned, “not on individual merit does the length of one’s life, the number and quality of one’s children, and the extent of one’s sustenance depend, but rather on luck (mazal) do these things depend” (Moed Katan 28a).

We also believe in the reality of the human soul, the “portion of God from on high,” which resides within every one of us created in the divine image. Just as God is indestructible, so is the soul indestructible. The physical dimension of our beings may pass away at the end of our lifetimes, but the soul – our spiritual essence which emanates from the Divine – lives eternally. To the extent that we develop our spiritual selves in our lifetimes – in deed and in thought – we prepare for ourselves a continued eternal life in the dimension of the divine. ©2019 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

#### **RABBI BEREL WEIN**

### **Wein Online**

**T**he Torah presents us with a seemingly simple and uncomplicated choice in this week’s reading -- the choice between life and death. And the Torah deems it necessary to instruct us to choose life. It certainly seems at first glance to be a very superfluous instruction, for the instinct to preserve our lives for as long as possible is one of the basic drives of human beings. An equal part of our nature is that we are shortsighted and give in today foolishly against our own interests and our own life force itself.

There is no other explanation for why alcohol, tobacco and recreational drugs should exist in our society, allowing for hundreds of thousands of lives every year to be summarily wasted. Choosing life has many nuances attached to it. People who are determined to enjoy pleasures of the flesh, to satisfy wanton desires, and to pursue temporary pleasures regardless of the long-term costs and consequences also think that they are somehow choosing life and its pleasures. One of the great catchphrases that exist in our current society is quality of life. Like all catchphrases and currently socially acceptable mantras and mottos there is no way to define this term. No one can measure accurately what life means to any individual person and quality of life is certainly not given to measurement by any objective standards.

The whole tragedy of eugenics and biological selection that was so common in the 20th century is based upon the fact that somehow someone with superior intelligence can measure what quality of life means to a given individual. And, if those given individuals do not measure up to those elitist standards, then this becomes preferable to life. The twentieth century is littered with millions of corpses who were victims of such false and murderous thoughts and policies.

To put it bluntly, the Torah is very much pro-life.

It is pro-life before we are born, while we are alive, and after the physical body has returned to the dust from which it was created. That is why the Torah emphasizes that we should choose life and not give in to the specious theories and quality-of-life fictions and conveniences. Our mere existence as human beings presents us with difficult choices at every stage of our lives. It is never quite as easy as the verse in the Torah may indicate at first glance.

Because life is not always convenient or even pleasant, it requires sacrifice, postponement of pleasure and a long view of the consequences of our actions and behavior. As such, choices for life are always made in a gray area and are not generally as black and white as we would wish them to be. The Torah comes to help guide us through this unclear and muddled situation that we call society. It comes to establish the rules by which we would always be wise enough to choose life and avoid the pitfalls of fads, desires and foolishness that can only lead to the loss of life, qualitatively and quantitatively. ©2019 Rabbi Berel Wein - Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com). For more information on these and other products visit [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com)

#### **RABBI AVI WEISS**

### **Shabbat Forshpeis**

**T**he first word in our portion re’eh is one of the most powerful terms found in the Torah. In fact, God is described as a ro’eh on three different levels.

The first time the word is found in the Torah, the Torah states that after creating light or energy, “vayar Elokim ki tov, God saw it was good.” (Genesis 1:4) Obviously an anthropomorphism. Still as God saw, so do we have the power to see.

On a deeper level, re’eh means to see in the sense of empathizing for the other. Note the description just prior to the deluge in the time of Noah. There the Torah states, “and the Lord saw (vayar Hashem) that the wickedness of man was great on the earth.” (Genesis 6:5) This could mean that God saw with the sense of feeling the pain and horror which was unfolding—the wickedness of man whom he had created. As God felt the pain of humankind, so too should all people created in God’s image empathize with the other.

There is yet another understanding – of ra’ah. Ra-ah could have covenantal connotations—that is God seen with an eye on establishing and fulfilling His covenant with His people. Indeed, the first time ra’ah appears after Avraham (Abraham) and Sarah were chosen, the Torah states “and the Lord appeared (veyera) to Avraham and said ‘to your seed I will give this land.’” (Genesis 12:7)

Re’eh as used in our portion seems to echo the covenantal approach. Note that when God

covenantally chooses Avraham, the Torah states, "I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you." (Genesis 12:3) Similarly in our portion, the Torah states—"see (re'eh), I have placed before you a blessing and a curse." (Deuteronomy 11:26)

And just as Avraham first built an altar to God in Shechem—Elon Moreh (Genesis 12:6) and his rendezvous with God reaches a crescendo in Yerushalayim, (Genesis 12:9) so in our parsha is there discussion of how the blessing and curse would be put forth on Har Gerizim and Har Eyval which are in the area of Shechem. (Deuteronomy 11:29) Not coincidentally, the parsha proceeds to discuss our obligations once we enter the land and come to Yerushalayim. (Deuteronomy 12:1-19)

Thus, ra'ah has a threefold meaning. To see, to empathize, to covenantalize. However, when Avraham and Sarah were chosen, ra'ah was in the context of the promised covenant. God was the ro'eh. Here, in our portion, as the Jews prepare to enter Israel, it is in the context of the covenant for the first time soon being realized. Re'eh, therefore, refers to the Jewish people achieving their covenant mission.

With the establishment of the State of Israel we are all of us a bit closer to the covenant's ultimate fulfillment. The Torah's words concerning re'eh as covenant should be carefully considered. ©2019 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 KALMAN PACKOUZ**

### **Shabbat Shalom Weekly**

**T**he Torah uses some mighty strong language this week that really needs some understanding: "See I am placing before you this day a blessing and a curse. The blessing, if you will listen to the commandments of the Almighty which I am commanding you this day. And the curse, if you do not listen to the Almighty's commandments."

On top of this, the Sforno, a renowned 15th century Italian commentator, adds "There is no middle way. If a person follows the Torah, his life will be a blessed life. If a person fails to live by the commandments, he will live a cursed life."

This seems to be a rather extreme statement. However, if we understand that life is either purposeful and meaningful or not, then we can understand that a life of meaning is a blessed life. And a life without meaning is a life devoid of satisfaction and imbued with a sense that nothing makes a difference when life is over anyway (and what could be a greater curse than that?).

Understanding that there is a God Who created the world, sustains it and supervises it -- gives life intrinsic meaning. One can always create a sense of

meaning in a diversion -- acquiring wealth, following baseball or even in something as noble as helping others. However, unless there is a God and there are absolute responsibilities and values, then there is no inherent meaning to life. It gnaws at one's psyche.

A person needs to have purpose in life, to know that life is meaningful. To be aware of the Creator and to fulfill His will enables a person to experience the greatest of blessings in this world. Each day will be an exciting adventure full of the joy of doing the Almighty's will. The choice is yours to make. Choose life! *Dvar Torah based on Growth Through Torah by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin ©2019 Rabbi K. Packouz*

#### **RABBI DAVID LEVINE**

### **Sensitizing our Actions**

**T**he Torah speaks of the Jewish slave of a Jewish Master. One must understand how this comes about. If a person steals another's portable property (not land), he is required to give the property back and to pay a fine of equal value of the property taken. If the property is an animal and was stolen for food, and the animal has been slaughtered and eaten, then the person cannot return the original property and is charged either four or five times the value of that animal as a fine. Obviously, if the person was so poor that he stole the animal for food for his family, he does not have the additional money to pay the fine. A Jewish court would evaluate the situation and sell the thief to another Jew for a period of six years. A poor man who is destitute yet does not wish to steal can arrange with the court to sell him for six years, even though he did not steal.

The Torah tells us, "If your brother, a Hebrew man or a Hebrew woman, will be sold to you, he shall serve you for six years and on the seventh year you shall send him away from you free. And when you send him away free you shall not send him away empty-handed. Extend, you shall extend (a grant) to him from your flocks, from your threshing floor, and from your wine-press with which Hashem, your Elokim has blessed you, so shall you give him. You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt and Hashem, your Elokim, redeemed you, therefore, I command you regarding this matter today."

One of the most fascinating aspects of a Jewish slave sold to another Jew is the end of his servitude. We must remember that the Jewish slave only became a slave because of his destitute situation. He stole because of a lack of food to feed his family and was sold to pay his fine by the courts, or he chose to sell himself rather than steal to pay his debts. In either case he has worked for six years for his "master" and will now go free. HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin explains that for six years the slave and his family are fed and clothed and housed by the owner. Now at the end of these six years, if the owner will send him out

empty-handed, the slave will have nothing changed in his life and will be destitute. The master must give his slave a gift so that he will not be forced to remain with his master or become destitute again.

There is a disagreement in the Gemara (Kiddushin, 17a) as to the amount of the gift which is to be given to the slave. The Torah specifies three things from which the gift must be given, namely, "from your flocks, from your threshing floor, and from your winepress..." The first opinion (Rebbi Meir) is that the owner is to give the slave five sela'im from each type of gift for a total of fifteen sela'im. Our Rabbis indicate that should a master not have one of the gifts or not enough of one of the gifts, he may increase the amount he gives from one of the other gifts as long as the total amount is still at least fifteen sela'im. The second opinion is that of Rebbi Yehuda who says that the total amount must be worth thirty sela'im. The third opinion given is that of Rabbi Shimon who says that the total amount must equal fifty sela'im.

The Gemara examines Rebbi Meir's opinion and posits that he bases his decision on the redemption of the firstborn. The principle used here is called a *g'zeira shava*, which means that we compare two sentences based on a common word in each in which one of the sentences has a clear statement of law and it is then applied to the second context. The Redemption of the firstborn is found in the sentence, "You shall redeem all your firstborn sons and they shall not appear before Me empty-handed." The word empty-handed occurs in both our sentence and this one, so we can learn that the cost of redeeming one's firstborn son (five shekalim) can be the basis on which we determine that five sela'im of each gift which must be given. Rebbi Meir sees the idea of redemption as the key in determining the amount of the gift to the slave.

Rebbi Yehuda bases his determination on the value of a slave through damages. If a person owned an ox and that ox damaged or killed another person's Canaanite slave, the owner of the ox would need to pay the owner of the Canaanite slave thirty shekalim. The value of a slave in one situation (the ox goring) should be the same as the value of this slave in determining his gift. Rabbi Shimon accepts Rebbi Yehuda's approach but disagrees on how we should evaluate the person. He disagrees with Rebbi Yehuda because Rebbi Yehuda uses a value of a non-Jewish slave who is not limited by the time which he serves. For that reason, Rabbi Shimon turns to the concept of *eirchin*, a pledge of a person's value as a gift to the Temple. There are different amounts that one may pledge as a gift of one's value based on gender and age. The gift for a male between the ages of twenty and sixty is fifty shekalim, and that becomes the basis for the gift of fifty sela'im for the Jewish slave according to Rabbi Shimon.

The ibn Ezra sees the word "ha'anik, you shall extend a grant" to stem from the word *v'anakim*, chains. That would imply that he is rewarded now for being chained for six years. HaRav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch expands this idea to a form of *tzedakah*, charity. He refers to the gift as an extension of the concept of charity. "This constitutes the duty at the return of freedom of one who has been forcibly deprived of it, when the legal period of his servitude has passed, not to allow him to leave the service empty-handed, but to fit him out with the means of gaining an honest and 'blessed' livelihood." HaRav Sorotzkin explains this gift as a witness to the fact that the slave worked honestly for six years and did not cheat his master by running away. A runaway slave is sent back to his master until the Jubilee Year and is freed then only by the courts who do not issue him a gift. Sorotzkin also views the gift as part of the cost of a slave. The purchase price is like the slave's salary which is given to him prior to his work to pay off his fines from the court and any other debts he might have. Since the thirty shekalim of the purchase price is held back at the time of purchase, this gift is not *tzedakah* but part of his salary.

We are approaching the month of Elul, a month devoted to reflection and resolve to improve. There are many people around us today who are no different than the Jewish slave before his enslavement. We must ask ourselves why we are blind to their needs and specifically how we can change our attitude so they do not reach their breaking point. There are "fringe" people in every community, people who slip through the cracks, people who all but disappear from our view. We must strive to make them more visible to us and include them in our thoughts and in our actions. We no longer have our courts and our law system which can assist them when they fall. We must take the place of these institutions and sensitize our actions to assist them before they fall. May Hashem guide us in this endeavor. ©2019 Rabbi D. Levine

## ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

### Baal Tosif

*Translated for the Encyclopedia Talmudit  
by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss*

**O**ne is forbidden to add on to the Mitzvot whether in relation to time (as in the case of adding an extra day to a holiday), or relating to an object (as in adding a fifth species in the Lulav, or another portion in the Tefillin), or adding any new Mitzvah. The question arises; how can our sages add for example the prohibition of eating chicken with milk when the Torah does not?

Some say that the prohibition of "Baal Tosif" is only if our Rabbis state that this is the law dictated in the Torah. However if they state that the prohibition is derived from the Rabbis it is permitted.

Others state that this law of "Baal Tosif" only

applies to adding positive commandments ("Aseh") but negative commandments ("Lo Taaseh") are permissible for our sages to add. However this reasoning would present the question how our sages were able to enact the positive laws of Purim and Chanukah.

With regard to the adding of a day (as in the eighth day of the holiday of Succot) if one was to openly announce that he is not adding this day as an extra day of the holiday, in such a case it would be permitted. Thus Rav Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook states, that if one made a "Heker" ( a specific identification) to exclude it from the laws in the Torah it would be permissible. Thus in the case of Chanukah and Purim , since in each of the two holidays there is a specific identification ("Heker")that separates it from the other holidays, it would be permissible to establish these laws(in the case of Purim there is a differentiation between those who live in a city surrounded by walls from the time of Joshua, and those who not, and with Chanukah there are three distinct ways of lighting the Menorah).

On the other hand, one who performs a Mitzvah numerous times during the day, or a woman who performs Mitzvot that are not obligatory for her to perform, do not transgress the prohibition of "Baal Tosif". However according to one view, if they perform these Mitzvot because they believe it is dictated from the Torah, they would indeed transgress the prohibition of "Baal Tosif". ©2016 Rabbi M. Weiss and Encyclopedia Talmudit

### **RABBI NAFTALI REICH**

## **Legacy**

**T**he goal was nothing less than total destruction on a vast scale. Moses warned the Jewish people that when they crossed into the Promised Land they would encounter all sorts of pagan idols and places of worship. These intolerable abominations were to be immediately eradicated. Pulverize every idol and graven image, he exhorted them. Burn down their asheirah trees. Destroy their altars and temples. Wipe out every trace of the idolatry prevalent in the land. The exhortation concludes, however, with a rather strange directive, "You shall not do so to Hashem!"

Why did Moses find it necessary to tell the people not to mount a campaign of destruction against Hashem? Who would ever dream of wantonly destroying Jewish places of worship?

The commentators explain that human nature has a way of adapting to the most unpleasant circumstances. Sensitive people exposed to violence and mayhem for longer periods of time very often become hardened and thick-skinned. After a while, deeds and spectacles which would have scandalized and revolted them no longer have the same effect. They become different people, cruel, hard, merciless.

When Moses told the Jewish people to attack

the pagan culture with utmost violence, to uproot, pulverize, smash everything in sight, they had good reason to be concerned about how this would affect their character. Would formerly gentle, refined people become brutalized and violent?

There was no need to worry, Moses reassured them. Smashing idols was not an act of destruction, and it would not transform them into violent people. On the contrary, cleansing the land of the pagan abominations was a constructive enterprise of the highest order. Smashing idols would never lead them to acts of wanton and gratuitous violence.

"You shall not do so to Hashem!" Moses told them. This was a promise rather than a command. In other words, do not be afraid to attack the idols with unrelenting ferocity. You shall not become inclined to turn that same destructiveness against Hashem's holy places. You shall remain the same high-minded, refined people that you were before.

Several army officers, one of them a field doctor, went to see a boxing match. As the pugilists stepped into the ring, the crowd greeted them with loud and boisterous cheers.

The match began. Punches and blows flew through the air. Most missed their mark, but some of them landed. After two rounds, both fighters were bleeding profusely from cuts to the face. The crowd loved it and screamed with delight at every new burst of blood.

The army officers were on their feet, lustily cheering on the fighters. Only the army doctor remained seated. He looked pale, and his face was bathed in a cold sweat.

"Hey, what's the matter?" asked one of his comrades. "You look ill."

"I cannot bear to watch," said the doctor. "The sight of blood makes me queasy."

The other officer laughed. "That's a fine joke," he said. "You queasy at the sight of blood? Why, I've seen you amputate a soldier's leg on the battlefield without batting an eyelash. What's a little blood to you? You must be immune to the sight of blood."

"You don't understand," said the doctor. "When I operate in the hospital or out on the battlefield, I am healing my patients. That is not blood of violence. The blood flowing in that ring down there is of a totally different character, and I have no stomach for it."

In our own lives, we often find it necessary to take harsh measures in our relations with our children, family members or business associates. Many people who find themselves in these situations experience feelings of self-doubt. Are they becoming somewhat cold and callous? The answer lies in focusing on the positive results we aim to achieve. If our motivations are constructive, well-advised and devoid of anger and frustration, we can rest assured that we will not suffer any spiritual damage. ©2019 Rabbi N. Reich and torah.org

SHLOMO KATZ

## Hama'ayan

**O**ur parashah opens: "See, I present before you today a blessing and a curse." R' Yosef Shalom Elyashiv z"l (1910-2012; Yerushalayim) asks: Why does the verse say "today"?

He explains: If a person remembered everything that ever happened to him and all of Hashem's kindness to him, he would stop at nothing to be able to devote all of his energies to serving Hashem with all his heart. However, man's nature is that, although when he is first saved from danger he thanks Hashem profusely, he soon returns to his routine and forgets Hashem's kindness.

This, writes R' Elyashiv, is the meaning of the verse (Devarim 32:18), "The Rock gave birth to you, forgetful one, and you forgot Kel Who brought you forth." G-d gave man the ability to forget as an act of kindness; otherwise, life would be unbearable. Without forgetfulness, man would remember at every moment every terrifying experience he had ever had and every mistake he had ever made. Who could bear such a burden? Forgetfulness allows man to put those thoughts behind him. For the same reason, G-d decreed that one's memory of the deceased would diminish with time.

Yet, instead of seeing forgetfulness in this way, man uses that power to forget Hashem. That is why our verse says "today." At all times, one must remember that Hashem has placed before him a choice between receiving a blessing or a curse. Man must remember "today" and every day so that he chooses properly. (Kitvei Ha'GRYS: Avot Vol. II p. 274)

"You shall strike the inhabitants of that city with the sword; lay it waste and everything that is in it, and its animals, with the sword. You shall gather together all its booty to its open square, and you shall burn in fire completely the city and all its booty.... No part of the contraband may adhere to your hand, so that Hashem will turn back from His burning wrath; and He will give you mercy and be merciful to you and multiply you..." (13:16-18)

R' Nosson Lewin z"l (1857-1926; rabbi of Rzesz??w, Poland) writes: The Torah commands here that, if an entire city in Eretz Yisrael turns away from Hashem and worships idols, all of its inhabitants shall be put to death. The Torah further commands that all of the property in that city be destroyed; none of it may be taken as booty.

R' Lewin continues: Besides the literal meaning, there is another message in the command, "No part of the contraband may adhere to your hand." Those who are tasked with carrying out this city's punishment might take something intangible away from

their experience--i.e., feelings of cruelty and vengefulness. Take care that human life not become cheap in your eyes, the Torah warns. To assist you, "[Hashem] will give you mercy and be merciful to you and multiply you." He will have mercy on you, on your family, and on your people. (Bet Nadiv p.185)

"For seven days you shall eat Matzot, Lechem Oni / bread of affliction, for you departed from the land of Egypt in haste..." (16:3) R' Yitzchak Maltzen z"l (1854-1916; Lithuania and Eretz Yisrael) writes that many commentaries explain the Four Questions at the Pesach Seder (i.e., Mah Nishtanah) as only one question: Why are there contradictory symbols at the Seder--Matzah and Maror representing affliction, and reclining and dipping representing freedom?

In fact, observes R' Maltzen, each of the four symbols mentioned in Mah Nishtanah contains contradictory allusions within itself. For example, Matzah represents the hasty Exodus, but it also represents the affliction of the Jewish People. This may be understood, writes R' Maltzen, based on the answer to another famous question: How can Matzah remind us of the hasty Exodus when the command to eat Matzah was given two weeks before the Exodus occurred? The answer is that when Hashem brings salvation, He turns darkness to light, so-to-speak. He did not merely bring about the Exodus; He made the Exodus parallel exactly the suffering that preceded it. For example, just as the Egyptians oppressed Bnei Yisrael and did not permit them to bake bread, so at the time of the Exodus they did not have time to bake bread. This parallelism increases the wonder of the redemption. Of course, this was Hashem's plan all along; therefore, the command to eat Matzah to commemorate the haste of the Exodus could precede that event.

Similarly, Maror / the bitter herb commemorates the bitterness of the exile, but it also commemorates the Exodus, for it was that bitterness that allowed the Exodus to take place 190 years early. (Haggadah Shel Pesach Siach Yitzchak p.8a)

R' Yehuda Halevi z"l (Spain; died 1141, in Eretz Yisrael) writes: Only man-made laws and ideas go through a process of development. That which comes from the Divine is sudden, just as Creation did not exist one moment and did exist the next. (Kuzari I:81) ©2019 S. Katz and torah.org

