

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS**

### Covenant & Conversation

**A**n interesting phrase appears at the end of last week's parsha and at the beginning of this week's, and they are the only places where it appears in the Torah. The phrase is *ha-brit v'ha-chessed* (Deuteronomy 7:9) or in this week's parsha, *et ha-brit ve-et ha-chessed* (Deut. 7:12).

Know therefore that the Lord your God is God; He is the faithful God, keeping the *brit* and the *chessed* to a thousand generations of those who love Him and keep His commandments. (Deut. 7:9)

If you pay attention to these laws and are careful to follow them, then the Lord your God will keep the *brit* and the *chessed* with you, as He swore to your ancestors. (Deut. 7:12)

The phrase is strange. The relationship between God and Israel is defined by *brit*, covenant. That, essentially, is the content of the Torah. What then is added by the word *chessed*?

The translators have a problem with it. The Jewish Publication Society's translation of the opening verse of our parsha is: "And if you do obey these rules and observe them carefully, the Lord your God will maintain faithfully for you the covenant that He made on oath with your fathers." This translates *chessed* as "faithfully" and takes it as a qualification of the verb "maintain" or "keep". This is a very stretched translation.

A non-Jewish translation, the New International Version, translates *ha-brit v'ha-chessed* as "covenant of love." This is a very Christian translation. The covenant entered into between the Israelites and God was a covenant of law, not just of love.

Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, in *The Living Torah*, got it right when he translated it as "God your Lord will keep the covenant and love with which He made an oath to your fathers." Not "covenant of love" but "covenant and love." But still: what is the covenant, and what is the love that is distinct from the covenant?

This might seem a minor matter were it not for the fact that this phrase, which is rare in Tanach, makes an appearance at key moments of Jewish history. For example, it figures in King Solomon's great prayer at the consecration of the Temple in Jerusalem: "Lord, the God of Israel, there is no God like You in Heaven above or on Earth below—You who keep the

covenant and love with Your servants who continue wholeheartedly in your way." (1 Kings 8:23)

When, after the Babylonian exile, the nation gathered around Ezra and Nehemiah in Jerusalem and renewed the covenant, they said: "Now therefore, our God, the great God, mighty and awesome, who keeps His covenant and love, do not let all this hardship seem trifling in Your eyes—the hardship that has come on us, on our kings and leaders, on our Priests and Prophets, on our ancestors and all Your people, from the days of the kings of Assyria until today. (Neh. 9:32)

At these critical moments, when Moses renewed the covenant on the banks of the Jordan, when Solomon dedicated the Temple, and the people in Ezra and Nehemiah's time rededicated themselves, they took care to define the relationship between God and the people as one of *brit* and *chessed*, covenant and love. It seems that both are necessary, or they would not have used this language on these three defining occasions many centuries apart.

What then is the meaning of *chessed*? Significantly, Maimonides dedicates the penultimate chapter of *The Guide for the Perplexed* to the analysis of three words: *chessed*, *tzedakah* and *mishpat*. On *chessed* he says: In our Commentary on *Pirkei Avot* (5:7) we have explained the expression *chessed* as denoting excess. It is especially used of extraordinary kindness. Loving-kindness is practised in two ways: first, we show kindness to those who have no claim whatever upon us; secondly, we are kind to those to whom it is due, in a greater measure than is due to them ... The very act of creation is an act of God's loving-kindness: "I have said, 'The universe is built in loving-kindness'" (Ps. 89:3)...<sup>1</sup>

The difference between the three terms is that I am legally entitled to *mishpat*. I am morally entitled to *tzedakah*. But to *chessed*, I am not entitled at all. When someone acts toward me in *chessed*, that is an act of pure grace. I have done nothing to deserve it.

Maimonides notes, citing the phrase from Psalms that "The universe is built in lovingkindness," that creation was an act of pure *chessed*. No one ever creates something because it deserves to be created. Creations do not exist before they are created.

We can define this in human terms more precisely. The book of Ruth is known as the work, par

<sup>1</sup> The Guide for the Perplexed, III:53.

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excellence, of chessed: "Rabbi Zeira said, 'This book does not have anything in it concerned with impurity or purity, forbidden or permitted. Why then was it written? To teach us the greatness of the reward for acts of chessed.'<sup>2</sup>

There are two key scenes in the book. The first occurs when Naomi, bereaved of her husband and two sons, decides to return to Israel. She says to her two daughters-in-law, "Go back, each of you, to your mother's home. May the Lord show you kindness, as you have shown kindness to your dead husbands and to me..." She was telling them that they had no further obligations toward her. They had been married to her sons, but now they are widows. Naomi has no other sons. Being Moabite women, they will be strangers in Israel: they have no reason to go there. You owe me nothing, she is saying. You have been kind, you have been good daughters-in-law, but now we must go our separate ways.

The second speech occurs when Ruth has gone to gather grain in the field of Boaz, who treats her with great care and consideration. She asks him: "Why have I found such recognition in your eyes that you notice me—a foreigner?" The two key words here are "recognition" and "foreigner." "Recognition" means that you have behaved toward me as if you had obligations to me. But "I am a foreigner." The word used here is not "stranger," i.e. a resident alien to whom certain duties are owed. It means, a complete outsider. Ruth is saying to Boaz, you do not owe me anything.

That is what makes Ruth the supreme book of chessed, that is, of good done to another who has no claim whatsoever upon you. What Ruth does for Naomi, and what Boaz does for Ruth, are not mishpat or tzedakah. They are pure chessed.

Now let us return to the question with which we began. Why did Moses, and Solomon, and Nehemiah define the relationship between the Jewish people and God not in terms of a single concept, covenant, but added to it a second idea, namely chessed, meaning an act of love.

Covenant is essentially reciprocal. Two people or entities pledge themselves to one another, each committing to a responsibility. This is how it was defined by God at Mount Sinai: "Now if you obey me

fully and keep My covenant, then out of all nations you will be My treasured possession, for all the earth is Mine" (Exodus 19:5). If you are My people, I will be your God. If you serve me, I will bless you. Every covenant has an if-then quality to it. Therefore, every covenant is inherently vulnerable. That is what Moses emphasised throughout Devarim. Don't take the land or its blessings for granted. If you do well, things will go well, but if you do badly, great dangers lie in store.

That is covenant. Chessed, in contrast, has no if-then quality. It is given out of the goodness of the giver, regardless of the worth of the recipient. When Moses, Solomon and Nehemiah referred to chessed in addition to the covenant, they were making an implicit request of God of the most fundamental significance. Even if we fail to honour the covenant, please God be gracious to us, for You are good even when we are not, and You do good even when we do not deserve it, when we have no claim on You whatsoever – ki le-olam chasdo, for His chessed is eternal.

The verses in our parsha sound conditional: "If you pay attention to these laws ... then the Lord your God will keep the brit and the chessed ..." This suggests that we will be shown chessed if we deserve it, but if not, not. But it isn't so. At the end of the curses in Bechukotai, God says: "Yet in spite of this, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them or abhor them so as to destroy them completely, breaking my covenant with them: I am the Lord their God."

God will never break the covenant, even if we do, because of His chessed. Tanach describes the relationship between God and Israel in two primary ways: like a husband and wife, and like a parent and a child. Between husband and wife there can be a divorce. Between parent and child there cannot be. They may be estranged, but the parent is still their parent and the child is still their child. Marriage is a covenant; parenthood is not. Do not forsake us, we say to God, because whatever we have done, You are our parent and we are Your children. Chessed is the kind of love a parent has for a child, whether they deserve it or not. Chessed is unconditional grace.

I believe that chessed is the highest achievement of the moral life. It is what Ruth did for Naomi, and Boaz for Ruth, and from that kindness came David, Israel's greatest king. Reciprocal altruism – I do this for you, and you do this for me – is universal among social animals. Chessed is not. In chessed God created the universe. In chessed we create moments of moral beauty that bring joy and hope where there was darkness and despair. *Covenant and Conversation 5780 is kindly supported by the*

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<sup>2</sup> Ruth Rabbah 2:14.

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

## Shabbat Shalom

**T**he biblical source for thanking the Almighty for the our worldly gifts is to be found in this week's portion, Ekev. And if preparation of our meals takes a great deal of time and effort, if our tradition mandates so many laws about permitted and prohibited foods, and if the Talmud devotes a complete chapter to the Grace after Meals, we should study this blessing in depth.

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

What is special about bread? In many societies, bread is the major component of every meal, the basic mainstay and “filler” of diet, the very “staff of life.” Nevertheless, the sacred Zohar provides a deeper reason: Bread symbolizes the partnership between human being and God. There are eleven difficult physical processes in the production of bread, an important advance in civilization developed in ancient Egypt. Despite this human input, be mindful, exhort our Sages, to be grateful to the Source of Nature who is the ultimate provider of bread—and then share your bounty with others less fortunate, using the energy you derive from the food to act altruistically and not only egoistically. Moreover, on Shabbat there is a custom that the head of the family place both hands on the challah before making the “motzi” blessing in order to emphasize the God-human partnership in bread manufacture!

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

The second of the biblical blessings thanks God, “for having bequeathed to our ancestors a

desirable, good and spacious land, as it is written in Your Bible, ‘you shall eat and be satisfied and bless the Lord your God for the good land which He has given you.’” But the food I am eating comes from New York, from Miami, from London, from Cracow... for close to 2,000 years we lived in exile from Israel—and we still recited this blessing: Why? We bless God for our ancestral land because exile expresses a precarious existence endangering Jewish survival. A stranger to the land and the bread on his table are soon parted. The earth upon which we stand can be pulled out from under us if we are living on it only by the largesse of the gentile owner. When your food grows on your own land, by contrast, then the food is truly yours.

The third blessing of our Grace after Meals directs us toward Jerusalem, the earthly meeting point of God's transcendence, the City from which God's message of peace and tranquility will spread to the entire world.

Jerusalem is the home of Divine Presence, the vision of our national mission, the place where, according to our holy Prophets, all of humanity will gather and be redeemed. Moreover, does anyone believe that during our 2000 year exile we would still have longed for Israel and Jerusalem were it not for our realization at every meal that homeland and bread express the normal situation for a nation state, and that our situation in exile was truly precarious!

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

Why does this historical miracle about burial and decomposition find its way into the Grace after Meals? In tying the tragedy of Betar to the Grace after Meals, the rabbis are teaching a critical lesson. It's proper to thank God for great miracles, but it's important not to forget to thank Him for simple necessities. We must, even in the face of political and national defeat, appreciate whatever we have, and give thanks even if only to be able to give our dead a proper burial.

The necessity of sharing God's bounty, the yearning for Israel, the spiritual goal of Jerusalem and the need to appreciate whatever we have are all expressed in our majestic Grace after Meals. Fortunate is our generation which can add to the last blessing: “May the All-Merciful-One bless our reborn State of

Israel, the beginning of the sprouting of our Redemption." ©2020 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

#### **RABBI BEREL WEIN**

### **Wein Online**

**T**he word that this week's Torah reading derives its name from is Ekev. There are many subtle nuances that exist within this short three letter Hebrew word. Our teacher Rashi uses a midrashic interpretation that connects the word to the Hebrew noun which refers to the heel of a person. He indicates that there are important considerations in Torah and life that people somehow step upon with their heel without understanding the importance and ramification of so doing.

Most commentators interpret the word to mean a causative issue. It indicates that because a person does or does not do certain actions and behaviors, immense consequences flow from that seemingly unimportant decision. We are all aware that the Torah views the events of personal and national life to be one of cause and effect. Nothing happens in a vacuum or at random and it is human behavior that sets the stage for all later events, even events that will occur centuries or millennia down the line. This lends importance to every act or omission of an act that a human being performs. And thus, the interpretation of Rashi falls in line with the general interpretation of the word Ekev.

We are being taught that there is nothing in life that should be considered completely unworthy of contemplation. Every situation, no matter how minor we may deem it to be, or inconsequential is a matter of importance and contains within it ramifications that we are unaware of but are present.

The course of life is always mysterious, surprising, unexpected, and basically inexplicable. No one in our world today would have expected it to look the way it does just six months ago. We had all made plans for our immediate and long-range future. All those plans have been dashed by the dreaded coronavirus and its consequences. And yet, as we stand dazed and confused by what has struck us, deep down we are aware that there is a cause that has activated this situation. I am not speaking about an immediate direct cause – the escape of the virus from the Wuhan Chinese laboratory. That is only a superficial cause that answers little and explains even less.

Rather, there is a deep-seated cause within human society of the early 21st century that has provoked this reaction to the behavior, agendas and thought processes of modern civilization. If the cause is to be searched for in our attitudes and behavior, then that requires contemplation and rational thought instead of preconceived utopian ideas. It requires a sense of humility and a return to the basic values of human life as represented to us by the Torah and taught to us by

Moshe our revered teacher

Human civilization needs a little less hubris, less arrogance, more minimal expectations of life, and a realization that even though man may have many great ideas, it is the will of the Lord so to speak that will eventually prevail one way or another. ©2020 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**his week's portion begins with the statement "And if (ekev) you listen (tishme'un) to these laws"...reward will come. (Deuteronomy 7:12-14) Since the common Biblical term for "if" is "im," many commentators have wondered why the Torah uses the word "ekev."

Rashi notes that the word ekev connotes a human heel. What the text is teaching is the importance of keeping those commandments that seem less important, like the dirt that one kicks up with one's heel. The message is clear: what appears to be less important is of great importance. In fact, reward depends on keeping the ekev – type commandments.

Alternatively, ekev can mean to pursue, like one running on his or her heels to attain a certain goal. True reward comes to an individual who not only keeps the commandment, but does so with eagerness and anticipation. The yearning reflects an excitement that translates into a higher level of commitment to the mitzvot (commandments).

And much like the heel is the extremity of the body, ekev can also refer to the redemptive period that will come at the end of days (acharit ha-yamim). That time of redemption will come when there is a commitment to listen to the words of the Torah which direct us to lead ethical lives in accordance with God's will.

One last thought. Perhaps ekev reminds us of our forefather, Ya'akov (Jacob) who was so named because he was born holding the heel of his brother Esav (Esau). Ya'akov is later given an additional name – Yisrael.

The name Ya'akov refers to our third patriarch as an individual – husband, father, brother, and son. In contrast, whenever the Torah calls him Yisrael, it relates to his being the father of the nation of Israel.

From this perspective, ekev tishme'un is the counterpoint of Shema Yisrael. (Deuteronomy 6:4) Both phrases include the word Shema, and both include the name of our third patriarch, once as Ya'akov (ekev) and once as Yisrael.

Shema Yisrael speaks of our responsibility as part of the nation of Israel to keep the commandments and profess belief in God. Ekev tishme'un serves as a

safeguard to remind us that we not only have communal responsibilities, but each of us as individuals, must explore our personal relationship with God.

Redemption will come when not only the nation as a collective connects with God, but when each one of us, like Ya'akov, quietly, modestly, and without fanfare, yearns to keep and observe even the smallest of mitzvot. ©2020 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 DAVID LEVIN**

## To Love Hashem

**P**arashat Eikev contains a very important message to the Jewish people before they return to their land. "Hear, O Israel today you cross the Jordan to come and drive out nations greater and mightier than you, cities great and fortified to the heavens. A great and lofty people, children of giants, that you knew and of whom you have heard, 'who can stand up against the children of the giant?' But you know today that Hashem your Elokim, He is the One Who crosses before you, a consuming fire, He will destroy them, He will subjugate them before you, and you will drive them out and cause them to perish quickly as Hashem spoke to you."

We must keep in mind the purpose of Moshe's message to the people in these, his final days of leadership. Moshe wanted to warn the people even while he gave them this positive picture of their future. When Moshe explained to the people about Hashem's providing them with the rain to grow their crops and the fertile land which would produce an abundance of food, he warned the people about thinking that this food was produced "with my (own) strength and the might of my hand." The same type of warning is given here. "Do not say in your heart when Hashem pushes them away from before you, saying because of my righteousness did Hashem bring me to take possession of this land and because of the wickedness of these nations did Hashem drive them away from before you. Not because of your righteousness and the uprightness of your heart are you coming to take possession of their land, but because of the wickedness of these nations does Hashem, your Elokim drive them away from before you, and in order to establish the word that Hashem swore to your forefathers, to Avraham, to Yitzchak, and to Ya'akov. And you should know that not because of your righteousness does Hashem, your Elokim, give you this good land to take possession of it for you are a stiff-necked people." Rashi explains the contradiction in the verses so that we should understand that it is not a combination of our righteousness and their wickedness that expelled the other nations, but instead their wickedness alone which

pushed them out of the land.

HaRav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch explains that the concern here is the same concern echoed earlier about the success that B'nei Yisrael would have in the future. "The danger to their good fortune was pointed out to them which would arise out of their good fortune if, in it, they forgot the duty which only becomes greater the greater the good fortune becomes: the duty to become more faithful, more richly enabled servitors and accomplishers of the Will of Hashem...." Hirsch explains that they would attribute their good fortune to their own ability to control the forces of Nature "which they wooed and worshipped." They would attribute their possession of the land to their own righteousness and become complacent in that "righteousness". Moshe explains to them that the land of Israel was not theirs because of their righteousness but the righteousness of their forefathers. Moshe explains that the promise made to their forefathers was enough to bring them into the land, but it would not be enough to keep them there and allow them to acquire the land. The B'nei Yisrael would be required to achieve righteousness in the land, for until now they were still "a stiff-necked people".

Moshe had already told the people about the wonderful gifts of the land that Hashem was giving to them. The land of Eretz Yisrael is described to the people as "a land of wheat and barley, vines (grapes), and figs, pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey (dates)." This compact land had a variety of climates and soil conditions and was capable of growing items that require vast differences in temperature, rainfall, and soil. Yet there is one other aspect of this country which was vastly different. It is a land which was created by Hashem with an inherent holiness. The nations that were now in the land had become evil and the holiness of the land spit them out. The land of Israel could produce or withhold rain on its own, so that any rain that fell in Israel was "rain of blessing". Moshe was concerned that unless the B'nei Yisrael improved their level of righteousness, they would not inherit the land and possess it forever.

There is clear evidence from the words that Moshe used that his message was a warning. Moshe was careful to include the adage, "who can stand up against the children of the giant?" Moshe was afraid that the B'nei Yisrael would view themselves as greater morally than their surrounding neighbors. They might believe that Hashem would never throw them out because their level of morality would always be higher than that of others. But the B'nei Yisrael had a different set of demands made upon them simply because they were held responsible for all six hundred thirteen commandments while the other nations were only held responsible for the seven commandments given to Noah after the Flood. Moshe understood that the B'nei Yisrael would be judged by their commitment to these

mitzvot and would stand or fall through them.

We hear a great deal today about the world holding the State of Israel to a different standard than other nations. Israel consistently complains about the UNHRC or the World Court focusing their attention on alleged atrocities committed by Israel but not their neighbors during wars. There is no doubt that there is a double standard that is applied to Israel above all other nations. It is not that double standard that should be the focus of Israel's complaint. The problem is the inaccuracy of the complaints and the outright lies of those who issue the complaints. The double standard by which we are judged is held by Hashem, instead.

Moshe understood human nature. The B'nei Yisrael would become proud of their accomplishments and begin to think that their superiority enabled them to succeed. They might forget Hashem and their responsibilities to His mitzvot. They might forget that the only reason they were to be given this marvelous land was to serve Hashem faithfully on it. Moshe clarifies the problem; Hashem will be harsher with you than he is with the nations because it is He who holds you to that higher standard. We today must remember that same challenge and never fail to realize our true purpose here in Eretz Yisrael. May we rush to do mitzvot, and may we then deserve to be rewarded with this land. © 2020 Rabbi D. Levin

#### ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

## Birkat HaMazon

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

**T**he verse instructs us to "Bless the Lord your G-d for the good land" (*Devarim* 8:10). Our Sages (*Berachot* 48b) extrapolate from here that the Torah requires three blessings to be included in *Birkat HaMazon*. The first blesses G-d for providing food (*Birkat HaZan*), the second blesses G-d for the Land of Israel (*Birkat HaAretz*), and the third blesses G-d for the rebuilding of Jerusalem (*Boneh Yerushalayim*). If they are based on the verse, how can the Talmud also tell us that Moshe instituted the first blessing, Yehoshua the second, and David and Shlomo the third? It must be that while the content was established at Sinai, the precise words that we recite were formulated by Yehoshua, David, and Shlomo.

Since *Birkat HaZan* was instituted by Moshe Rabbeinu, it is surprising that some versions of the blessing include the verse: "You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing" (*Tehillim* 145:16). After all, *Tehillim* was written by King David, who lived much later than Moshe. The likely explanation is that some of the verses of *Tehillim* were formulated at an early stage, and King David wrote them down at a later stage. This is borne out by the language used in *Birkat HaZan* to introduce the verse: "As it is **said**, 'You open your hand,'" and not "As it is **written**, 'You open your hand.'"

As we mentioned, the specific formulation of the blessings was originally different from what we recite today. A person could have fulfilled his obligation (for *Birkat HaZan*) by saying in Aramaic, "Blessed is the merciful One, King, the Creator of this bread." Along the same lines, when someone sings *Tzur MiShelo* – the Shabbat song whose structure is parallel to that of *Birkat HaMazon* and incorporates the same themes – it is possible that he has fulfilled his obligation to recite *Birkat HaMazon*. Accordingly, perhaps a person should have in mind when he sings *Tzur MiShelo* that he does not intend to fulfill his obligation. This way, he ensures that his fulfillment of the mitzva takes place only when he recites the classic *Birkat HaMazon*. © 2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and Encyclopedia Talmudit

#### RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

## Migdal Ohr

**"Y**ou shall consume all the nations... showing them no pity, and you shall not serve their gods for it is a snare for you." (*Devarim* 7:16) One of the hallmarks of a Jew is that he is merciful. It seems at odds with our natures, then, for the Torah to tell us to show no pity to the inhabitants of the land which we are conquering. Surely Hashem is a loving G-d Who cares about all His creations. Why then does He seem to want us to cheapen human life?

The first part of the answer is that we must understand what is at stake. We must realize that the two phrases in this posuk are cause and effect. If you take pity on them, and thus you become close to them, you will chas v'shalom come serve their gods. It is a slippery slope. While we are to dwell with our neighbors in society, we are not to become enmeshed in their culture or personal life, because this will lead to their values becoming ours.

There is a distinction between Jews and all other nations. They don't have the same role in creation as we accepted upon ourselves at Har Sinai. We took on responsibilities and mitzvot that others don't have. Even our relationship with Hashem is different because He has higher expectations from us.

Isn't He the most merciful being in the Universe? Yes. More compassionate and loving than any human, Hashem nevertheless has rules that may seem cruel to us. But that's because we don't understand everything. There's a bigger picture and He is painting it.

Some suggest that because the nations provide society with many necessary things, we might be tempted not to destroy the nations who had come to live in Canaan and conquered it before us. We might think it a waste to lose that benefit. Therefore, Hashem had to give us a very specific and direct command to ignore our tendencies for mercy and listen instead to His word.

In Mishlei (12:10), Shlomo Hamelech says,

"The wise man knows the needs of his animal, but the mercy of the wicked is cruelty." While it seems that the wicked man is expressing mercy, he is actually creating a great wrong. The Malbim explains that the "animal" in question is our physical nature. The wise person knows to provide its necessities and stop there. The wicked person pursues every pleasure to provide for his "animal" and does inestimable damage.

Were the Jews conquering Canaan to show "mercy" to the inhabitants, this would have fulfilled their humanistic desire to be kind, but would have thwarted their ultimate spiritual goals and put them in grave spiritual danger. Further, having compassion at the wrong time can be deadly. King Shaul left Agag alive and this led to Amalek's remaining a nation and endangering the Jewish People. One who has "mercy" on a terrorist who then goes and kills many others has been cruel and insensitive to those people and their families.

All midos and attributes of behavior must be measured against the Torah's scale, for only then will they be truly good midos. There is no attribute worse than a good one used at the wrong time. We are therefore adjured to override our natural tendencies and follow our minds rather than our hearts, and Hashem's guidance rather than our "guts."

*R' Abba Zalka Gewirtz z"l, was a rabbi in Bradley Beach, NJ and Waterbury, CT. One day, a congregant came to him to discuss schooling for her children. They were getting older and the local day school couldn't accommodate them. He advised her to send them away to Yeshiva.*

*"Rabbi," she cried, "I can't send them away. I'll lose them!" "Shirley," responded R' Abba Zalka with sincere emotion, "If you send them to Yeshiva they will give you nachas for the rest of your life. But if you DON'T send them away, then you will lose them!" Shirley didn't listen.*

*Years later she came back. "Rabbi Gewirtz," she sobbed. "You were right. I didn't send them away... they didn't go to Yeshiva to study Torah... and now I've lost them."* ©2020 Rabbi J. Gewirtz and Migdal Ohr

**RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER**

## Weekly Dvar

**P**arshat Ekev starts with Moshe reminding the people that if they keep G-d's laws, then G-d will keep the covenant that He made to their ancestors by giving them the land of Israel and children (7:12-26). However, Moshe later told the people not to feel like they deserved this land. Rather, it's because other people are so wicked that G-d is giving the Jews their land (9:4-5). What is the point of a covenant if conditions have to be met for the covenant to be honored? Secondly, do we only get land and children because we're not as bad as everyone else, and not

because we were promised it or earned it?

Rabbi David Block ([alephbeta.org](http://alephbeta.org)) suggests that all three reasons are simultaneously accurate. The initial covenant with Avraham (Abraham) was given to positively impact the whole world, not just Avraham and his progeny (Genesis 12:3). Avraham's mission was to build a nation that will change and improve the world, a task that requires land and children to advance and accomplish those objectives. However, the covenant is conditional on our commitment to following the Torah's laws. Therefore, our Parsha begins by reminding us to improve ourselves before we can enhance the world. Don't wait until you're rich to give charity, don't wait until you're happy to smile at someone, and don't wait until you're unemployed or retired to make time to study Torah. Small commitments today will provide us with bigger opportunities tomorrow. ©2020 Rabbi S. Ressler and LeLamed, Inc.

**MACHON ZOMET**

## Shabbat B'Shabbato

*by Rabbi Mordechai Greenberg*

*Rosh Yeshiva, Kerem B'Yavne*

**I**n His first contact with Avraham, the Holy One, Blessed be He, marked out the path for his household and indicated the ultimate goal of the nation of Yisrael. "Go for yourself from your land and from your birthplace to the land I will show you, and I will make you into a great nation... and all the families of the earth will be blessed through you." [Bereishit 12:1-3].

Four separate stages are described. (1) "Go for yourself" -- for your own benefit, in order to build up your specific personality. (2) "And I will make you into a great nation" -- After each individual develops himself or herself, the basis is established for nationality, and this takes place in Eretz Yisrael. (3) "I will make you into a great nation" -- after the physical "body" of the nation is established, the spiritual form of the nation will appear. As the sages wrote, "I will create from you the nation about which it is written, 'For what great nation has G-d so close to it... and what great nation has laws and regulations that are so just' [Devarim 4:7]." [Bereishit Rabba 39:11]. And then comes the final objective: (4) "And all the families of the earth will be blessed through you." You will serve as a model for all humanity, leading them all to say, "Come, let us rise up to the Mountain of G-d... And He will teach us of His ways, and we will learn of His paths, for Torah will emanate from Zion..." [Yeshayahu 2:3]. And with this, the nation of Yisrael will have achieved its goal.

Rav Avraham Yitzchak Kook wrote similar ideas with respect to the Grace after Meals that appears in this week's Torah portion. The Talmud teaches us, "Moshe set up for Yisrael the first blessing ("He who feeds His world") when the manna fell. Yehoshua added the blessing about the land (the



second blessing) when they entered the land. David established the blessing 'about Your nation Yisrael and about Your city Jerusalem,' and Shlomo added the blessing about the great and holy Temple." [Berachot 48b].

The structure of the Grace after Meals is an outline of the way to build up the nation of Yisrael. It starts with the individual, and the first element is to maintain the existence of the private and physical individual. This is followed by the more comprehensive building of the body in general. What follows is the building of the spiritual image of the nation, and then the spiritual makeup of all humanity.

Moshe established the first blessing when the manna fell, in order to take care of the personal physical needs. Yehoshua added the blessing of the land when they entered it and were involved in building up the national body. Then the time came to take care of the spiritual form of the nation. David then wrote the blessing, "for Your nation Yisrael," since Jerusalem turns all of the Jews into "Chaverim," people who join together at a high level. And after the spiritual national objective was accomplished, Shlomo took care of the general spiritual goal, as he said in his prayer, "...So that all the nations of the world will know that G-d is the deity" [I Melachim 8:60].

Why was all this linked to the Grace after Meals? At no other time is a person so intimately involved with his own personal interests than when he or she is eating. This is a time when "a person might sink to the level of coarse feelings and personal animal pleasures." The sages taught us how to combine the involvement with building up the personal body and the glorious objective of building up the more general goal, and in the end building up humanity as a whole. A person should be aware that he is not eating just to satisfy his own selfish need, but that after he provides strength to his body he passes this ability on to building up the community as a whole. In this way, the Grace after Meals provides us with "a ladder standing on the ground with its top in the sky, so that we can rise up from the lowly stage of the individual to the glorious heights of humanity as a whole." ©2013 Rabbi A. Bazak and Machon Zomet. Translated by Moshe Goldberg

#### **HARAV SHLOMO WOLBE ZT"L**

### **Bais Hamussar**

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

Hashem asks of a person.

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

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

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

A well known gadol was wont to say that the length of a bracha depends on the height of a person. The bracha begins when the food is taken into his hand and the bracha ends just before the food enters his mouth. Hence, the taller the person the longer the time he has to make a bracha! It's quite humorous, it's often true, and it's very unfortunate. We literally have in our hands the recipe for seeing Hashem, and we let it fly off into the breeze when we mumble the bracha under our breath or have our minds on a conversation with a friend. Choose a single bracha that is going to be "yours," give it the proper frame of mind and this will open your eyes to see Hashem in a way that you never previously experienced!

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