

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS Z"L

Covenant & Conversation

Rabbi Sacks zt"l had prepared a full year of Covenant & Conversation for 5781, based on his book Lessons in Leadership. The Office of Rabbi Sacks will continue to distribute these weekly essays, so that people all around the world can keep on learning and finding inspiration in his Torah.

Howard Gardner, professor of education and psychology at Harvard University, is one of the great minds of our time. He is best known for his theory of “multiple intelligences,” the idea that there is not just one thing that can be measured and defined as intelligence but many different facets – which is one dimension of the dignity of difference. He has also written many books on leadership and creativity, including one in particular, *Leading Minds*, that is important in understanding this week’s parsha of Ki Tavo.¹

Gardner’s argument is that what makes a leader is the ability to tell a particular kind of story – one that explains ourselves to ourselves and gives power and resonance to a collective vision. So Churchill told the story of Britain’s indomitable courage in the fight for freedom. Gandhi spoke about the dignity of India and non-violent protest. Margaret Thatcher talked about the importance of the individual against an ever-encroaching State. Martin Luther King Jr. told of how a great nation is colour-blind. Stories give the group a shared identity and sense of purpose.

Philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre has also emphasised the importance of narrative to the moral life. “Man,” he writes, “is in his actions and practice, as well as in his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal.”² It is through narratives that we begin to learn who we are and how we are called on to behave. “Deprive children of stories and you leave them unscripted, anxious stutterers in their actions as in their words.”³ To know who we are is, in large part, to understand the story or stories of which we are a part.

The great questions – “Who are we?” “Why are

we here?” “What is our task?” – are best answered by telling a story. As Barbara Hardy put it: “We dream in narrative, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticise, construct, gossip, learn, hate and love by narrative.”⁴ This is fundamental to understanding why Torah is the kind of book it is: not a theological treatise or a metaphysical system but a series of interlinked stories extended over time, from Abraham and Sarah’s journey from Mesopotamia to Moses’ and the Israelites’ wanderings in the desert. Judaism is less about truth as system than about truth as story. And we are part of that story. That is what it is to be a Jew.

A large part of what Moses is doing in the book of Devarim is retelling that story to the next generation, reminding them of what God had done for their parents and of some of the mistakes their parents had made. Moses, as well as being the great liberator, is the supreme storyteller. Yet what he does in parshat Ki Tavo extends way beyond this.

He tells the people that when they enter, conquer and settle the land, they must bring the first ripened fruits to the central Sanctuary, the Temple, as a way of giving thanks to God. A Mishnah in Bikkurim⁵ describes the joyous scene as people converged on Jerusalem from across the country, bringing their first-fruits to the accompaniment of music and celebration. Merely bringing the fruits, though, was not enough. Each person had to make a declaration. That declaration became one of the best known passages in the Torah because, though it was originally said on Shavuot, the festival of first-fruits, in post-biblical times it became a central element of the Haggadah on Seder night: My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down into Egypt and lived there, few in number, there becoming a great nation, powerful and numerous. But the Egyptians ill-treated us and made us suffer, subjecting us to harsh labour. Then we cried out to the Lord, the God of our ancestors, and the Lord heard our voice and saw our misery, toil and oppression. So the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror and with signs and wonders. (Deut. 26:5-8)

Here for the first time, the retelling of the

¹ Howard Gardner in collaboration with Emma Laskin, *Leading Minds: An Anatomy of Leadership*, New York, Basic Books, 2011.

² Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, University of Notre Dame Press, 1981.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Barbara Hardy, “An Approach Through Narrative,” *Novel: A Forum on Fiction 2* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1968), 5.

⁵ Mishnah Bikkurim 3:3.

nation's history becomes an obligation for every citizen of the nation. In this act, known as vidui bikkurim, "the confession made over first-fruits," Jews were commanded, as it were, to become a nation of storytellers.

This is a remarkable development. Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi tells us that "only in Israel and nowhere else is the injunction to remember felt as a religious imperative to an entire people."⁶ Time and again throughout Devarim comes the command to remember: "Remember that you were a slave in Egypt." (Deut. 5:15; 15:15; 16:12; 24:18; 24:22); "Remember what Amalek did to you." (Deut. 25:17) "Remember what God did to Miriam." (Deut. 24:9) "Remember the days of old; consider the generations long past. Ask your father and he will tell you, your elders, and they will explain to you." (Deut. 32:7)

The vidui bikkurim, though, is more than this. It is, compressed into the shortest possible space, the entire history of the nation in summary form. In a few short sentences we have here "the patriarchal origins in Mesopotamia, the emergence of the Hebrew nation in the midst of history rather than in mythic prehistory, slavery in Egypt and liberation therefrom, the climactic acquisition of the land of Israel, and throughout – the acknowledgement of God as lord of history."⁷

We should note here an important nuance. Jews were the first people to find God in history. They were the first to think in historical terms – of time as an arena of change as opposed to cyclical time in which the seasons rotate, people are born and die, but nothing really changes. Jews were the first people to write history – many centuries before Herodotus and Thucydides, often wrongly described as the first historians. Yet biblical Hebrew has no word that means "history" (the closest equivalent is *divrei hayamim*, "chronicles"). Instead it uses the root *zachor*, meaning "memory."

There is a fundamental difference between history and memory. History is "his story,"⁸ an account of events that happened sometime else to someone else. Memory is "my story." It is the past internalised and made part of my identity. That is what the Mishnah in Pesachim means when it says, "Each person must see themselves as if they (personally) escaped Egypt." (Mishnah Pesachim 10:5)

Throughout the book of Devarim, Moses warns the people – no less than fourteen times – not to forget. If they forget the past they will lose their identity and sense of direction and disaster will follow. Moreover, not only are the people commanded to remember, they

are also commanded to hand that memory on to their children.

This entire phenomenon represents a remarkable cluster of ideas: about identity as a matter of collective memory; about the ritual retelling of the nation's story; above all about the fact that every one of us is a guardian of that story and memory. It is not the leader alone, or some elite, who are trained to recall the past, but every one of us. This too is an aspect of the devolution and democratisation of leadership that we find throughout Judaism as a way of life. The great leaders tell the story of the group, but the greatest of leaders, Moses, taught the group to become a nation of storytellers.

You can still see the power of this idea today. As I once wrote,⁹ if you visit the Presidential memorials in Washington, you will see that each carries an inscription taken from their words: Jefferson's 'We hold these truths to be self-evident . . .', Roosevelt's 'The only thing we have to fear, is fear itself', Lincoln's Gettysburg Address and his second Inaugural, 'With malice toward none; with charity for all . . .' Each memorial tells a story.

London has no such equivalent. It contains many memorials and statues of historical leaders, each with a brief inscription stating who it represents, but there are no speeches or quotations. There is no story. Even the memorial to Winston Churchill, whose speeches rivalled Lincoln's in power, bears only one word: Churchill.

America has a national story because it is a society based on the idea of covenant. Narrative is at the heart of covenantal politics because it locates national identity in a set of historic events. The memory of those events evokes the values for which those who came before us fought and of which we are the guardians.

A covenantal narrative is always inclusive, the property of all its citizens, newcomers as well as the native-born. It says to everyone, regardless of class or creed: this is who we are. It creates a sense of common identity that transcends other identities. That is why, for example, Martin Luther King Jr. was able to use it to such effect in some of his greatest speeches. He was telling his fellow African Americans to see themselves as an equal part of the nation. At the same time, he was telling white-Americans to honour their commitment to the Declaration of Independence and its statement that 'all men are created equal'.

England does not have the same kind of national narrative because it is based not on covenant but on hierarchy and tradition. England, writes Roger Scruton, "was not a nation or a creed or a language or a state but a home. Things at home don't need an

⁶ Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zachor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory*, Schocken, 1989, 9.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁸ This is a simple reminder, not an etymology. *Historia* is a Greek word meaning inquiry. The same word comes to mean, in Latin, a narrative of past events.

⁹ Jonathan Sacks, *The Home We Build Together: Recreating Society* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2009).

explanation. They are there because they are there.”¹⁰ England, historically, was a class-based society in which there were ruling elites who governed on behalf of the nation as a whole. America, founded by Puritans who saw themselves as a new Israel bound by covenant, was not a society of rulers and ruled, but rather one of collective responsibility. Hence the phrase, central to American politics but never used in English politics: “We, the people.”¹¹

By making the Israelites a nation of storytellers, Moses helped turn them into a people bound by collective responsibility – to one another, to the past and future, and to God. By framing a narrative that successive generations would make their own and teach to their children, Moses turned Jews into a nation of leaders. *Covenant and Conversation 5781 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z”l ©2021 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks z”l and rabbisacks.org*

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.

¹⁰ Roger Scruton, *England, an Elegy*, Continuum, 2006, 16.

¹¹ See “We, the People”, the *Covenant & Conversation* essay on Behar-Bechukotai, for further discussion on the power of this phrase.

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. ©2021 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The opening words of this week's Torah reading have been repeated often throughout the entire discourse by Moshe with the Jewish people, which constitutes the bulk of this book of Devarim. This two-word phrase, KI TAVO, should be understood as meaning "when you will come into the land of Israel," and not an alternative meaning of "if you will conquer the land of Israel".

There is a certainty in the words of Moshe regarding the Jewish people and the land of Israel. He assures them that they will certainly come into the land, and even though it is temporarily occupied by strong and inimical tribes and nations, the land belongs to the Jewish people by the commitment made to our father Abraham, the founder of Judaism.

One of the outstanding, almost wondrous, characteristics of the Jewish people throughout their long and bitter exile, has been the certainty that resides in their hearts and minds that they would one day return to settle the land of Israel once again. This certainty was inserted into all the prayers of Israel in every generation.

The Jewish people made commitments to Heaven that they would return to the land of Israel, and there they would fulfill their mission of service to the God of Israel. The influence of our teacher Moshe was so strong and lasting, that even thousands of years later, the Jewish people accepted his assurances that they would return to the land of Israel, and always thought of it as being a case of when and not if it would happen.

The question existed only regarding when it would be possible for the Jewish people to return and settle in the land of Israel. We were never told in advance how this would happen, and who would be agents that would facilitate this return. In the imagination of the Jewish people, they dreamed of a miraculous return, accompanied by a renaissance of goodness and spirituality.

The past two centuries of Jewish history have been marked by the unexpected and inexplicable events that have led to the return of the Jewish people to their land, and sovereignty over the land of Israel. The steps in which this occurred were unforeseen by anyone. Many of the leading actors in this drama, who propelled the project forward towards its completion,

certainly by the measurement of Jewish standards, were the most unlikely people to accomplish such an end. Nevertheless, the certainty implanted within us by our teacher Moshe long ago stood the test of time and the vicissitudes of events, so that no matter how unlikely such a return to the land of Israel seemed to be, the masses of the Jewish people believed that it would indeed occur and rallied to help it occur.

Unfortunately, there are Israel deniers that currently exist within the framework of Jewish society. Like the Holocaust deniers, they are anxious to escape from his destiny of the Jewish people. It is tragic in the extreme that in the face of all the wonders and accomplishment of the Jewish people in the land of Israel in our time, there are those that still are deaf to the words of both Moshe and of the certainty of Jewish national existence in the land of Israel. ©2021 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

ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

Eating the First Fruits

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

Parshat Ki Tavo touches on the *mitzvot* of *bikurim* (first fruits) and *ma'aser sheni* (a tithe consumed in Jerusalem). However, the details relevant to eating them are found elsewhere. The mitzva of eating *bikurim* appears in *Devarim* 12:5-6, and the mitzva of eating *ma'aser sheni* is in *Devarim* 14:23.

Not only are these two *mitzvot* mentioned in Ki Tavo in close proximity to each other, but they have many similarities (for example, they are both eaten in Jerusalem in a state of purity). Accordingly, our Sages apply the laws of one to the other. There are some differences, though. For example, *ma'aser sheni* is eaten in Jerusalem by its owners, while *bikurim* are presented to the *Kohanim* when the owners arrive in Jerusalem.

The declaration said when bringing *ma'aser sheni* to Jerusalem includes the phrase: "I have not eaten of it while in mourning" (*Devarim* 26:14). This means a person is required to eat *ma'aser sheni* joyfully. When he is mourning and shrouded in sorrow, he may not eat it. Because we apply the rules of *ma'aser sheni* to *bikurim*, a *Kohen* who is in mourning may not eat *bikurim*. Others derive the latter rule from the verse that states regarding *bikurim* that "You shall enjoy all the bounty" (*Devarim* 26:11). This requirement of joy applies not only to the field owners who bring their fruit to the *Kohen*, but also to the *Kohen* who is privileged to eat the fruit of the Holy Land.

The mitzva of eating *bikurim* is so important that the *Kohen* who eats *bikurim* makes a special blessing (just as he does before reciting the priestly blessing): "*Asher kideshanu be-mitzvotav ve-tzivanu*

le'echol bikurim" ("Who has sanctified us with His commandments, and commanded us to eat *bikurim*").
© 2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and Encyclopedia Talmudit

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

The Torah often describes Jerusalem as "hamakom asher yivchar Hashem" (the place God has chosen; Deuteronomy 26:2). One wonders why Jerusalem is not identified as "the place God made holy." Isn't being "holy" more sublime than being "chosen"?

It has been suggested that the status of Jerusalem as the chosen place does not necessarily mean that it is embraced by people as a holy place. God can declare a place chosen, and that designation remains forever. Whether it is holy in real life depends on human input.

What is true of a place is also true of a nation. Because we are the "chosen people" doesn't mean we are a "holy people." That status must be earned by the nation as a whole.

Hence, in our sentence, God is described as "choosing" Jerusalem, which is His prerogative. Making the city live and breathe holiness, however, is not up to God but up to us.

A holy Jerusalem must reflect the meaning of its name – Yerushalayim. Yeru is Aramaic for city (similar to the word *ir*, city in Hebrew); shalayim has several meanings:

- It may be associated with Shalom, upper case (a name of God). Thus, Jerusalem has the capacity to be a godly city.

- Or it may reflect the word shalem ("whole" or "one"). Thus, Jerusalem has the potential to be a city of unity for all Jews, and for that matter, for all Jews and gentiles.

- Or it may refer to shalom, lower case (peace). Thus, Jerusalem represents a constant yearning and reaching for peace – outer peace, inner peace.

Natan Sharansky, the famed Soviet Prisoner of Zion, expressed this human responsibility for Yerushalayim beautifully. Standing aside his wife Avital in Jerusalem at the wedding of their children (Rachel and Micha), Natan suggested that the symbolism of breaking the glass was now more challenging than under his chuppah in the Soviet Union many years earlier – not long before he was sentenced to the Gulag.

Our aim was so simple and so clear. We had to win the [physical] battle [to return to Jerusalem] and nothing could deter us. Today, on the one hand you have to be builders and guardians of [the physical] Jerusalem, and at the same time guardians of the idea of Jerusalem.... The power of unity and connection to the generations of our people is in heavenly Jerusalem, in Yerushalayim shel ma'ala.

Whether the earthly Jerusalem reflects the values of the heavenly Jerusalem becoming the holy Jerusalem is up to us. © 2021 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 JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

"Hashem will command to you the blessing in your storehouses, and in the work of your hands, and will bless you in the land Hashem, your G-d, gives you." (Devarim 28:8) The posuk seems to be backwards. First it says that you will find blessing in your storehouses, and only later does it say the blessing will be in the land. Normally you need to grow your crops before you harvest them and put them in the storehouse. Why is the posuk worded this way?

One approach is the famous explanation of the blessing of Shemita, (which is this-coming year.) The Torah says that if you ask what you will eat, then Hashem will command His blessing and the land will produce in the sixth year enough for the seventh and eighth years as well. The meforshim ask, but what if you don't ask what you will eat? Will you not get the blessing? The answer is that if you trust Hashem enough, you will have the food blessed in your body, and a little bit will satisfy you. If you're not on that level, though, then the land will produce extra but you will have to work hard to harvest and store it away.

Therefore, Hashem is offering to bless the food once it's in your storehouse, so you don't need to do all the extra work entailed by a more abundant crop. Indeed, the Gemara in Taanis discusses a righteous man who bought a bit of grain and put it in his storehouse. When his daughter went to go see what he bought, the door was jammed by the volume of the grain which had multiplied inside.

There is another explanation which is discussed in Taanis (8b). There the Gemara offers two similar explanations of this verse. One is that blessing is only able to attach to that which is "hidden from the eye" while the other is that it can only attach to that "which the eye has not ruled over." The Torah Temima suggest an explanation that the first refers to a large pile of grain which can be estimated, but has not been measured precisely. The second refers to a case where one does not even have the ability to estimate, such as where the grain is not gathered into one place.

The point of the Gemara is that Hashem will instill miraculous blessing when it is not obvious, and in fact the Gemara says that one who prays for a blessing in his harvest after it's been counted is wasting his breath.

Perhaps the perspective we need to have is that Hashem is the source of all our success. Rather than saying we do what we can and then He steps in,

we recognize from the outset that anything we're able to do is only thanks to Him, much as the person who brings Bikkurim acknowledges that the credit belongs to Hashem.

When people desire to show off their success, to make sure people know they have money by flaunting it, Hashem refuses to add bracha to that, especially since it may make others feel bad. Only those who keep their success modestly disguised will merit the added blessing "in their storage houses," i.e. in ways that are not seen. It would appear then, that the "secret to success," is to keep it secret.

Two fine gentlemen of Chelm were talking one day, and lamenting about how hard it is to make a living in this world.

"Ah..." said one of the men to his friend. "If only I had Rothschild's money; I'd be RICHER than Rothschild."

"What do you mean," asked his companion. "How could you be "richer" than Rothschild?"

"It's quite simple," replied the first. "I'm no dummy. I'd be richer than Rothschild because I'd have all of Rothschild's money, plus I'd tutor a little on the side!" © 2021 Rabbi J. Gewirtz and Migdal Ohr

RABBI DAVID LEVIN

Unusual Verb Forms

One could make an argument for the concluding parshiot of the Torah, namely that even though there are very few remaining mitzvot in them, their message is an important lesson for the B'nei Yisrael as well as the other nations of the world. It is incumbent on us, then, to discover the important messages that still needed to be given.

In our parasha we find the words, "This day Hashem your Elokim commands you to perform these statutes and the laws and you shall observe and perform them with all your heart and with all your soul. You have distinguished (he'emarta) Hashem today to be an Elokim for you, and to walk in His ways, and to observe His statutes, His commandments, and His laws, and to listen to His voice. And Hashem has distinguished (he'emircha) you today to be for Him a treasured people, as He spoke to you, and to observe all His commandments. And to make you supreme over all the nations that He made for praise for renown and for splendor and so that you will be a Holy people to Hashem, your Elokim, as He spoke."

HaRav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch draws our attention to the unusual form of the word amar (aleph, mem, resh), he said. In the Torah, only in the two sentences above do we have the form of that root word in the hiph'il, causative or accusative form (he'emarta and he'emircha). Hirsch is not happy with the way these words are translated because he is very particular about the grammatical forms within the text. Rashi also is not satisfied even with his own translation

of the text as he says, "there is no conclusive evidence to the meaning of (these words) in Scripture." Hirsch explains that the hiph'il form should mean "caused to say". He changes the text around in order to give what he feels is a more accurate translation: "Today you have brought it about that one says of Hashem that He must be your G-d and you would walk in His ways and guard His statutes, and His commands and His social regulations and obey His voice. And Hashem has brought it about today that one says of you that you should be a people belonging solely to Him as He promised you, and keep all His commandments."

The Ramban translates he'emarta as "avouched". Hashem has completed all of the mitzvot that are meant for the B'nei Yisrael and He now asks them to observe and practice all of them. Hashem then says, "Since you have accepted the entire Torah upon yourselves with all its interpretations, details, and new promulgations, you have thus magnified Hashem and exalted Him, that He alone will be your Elokim, you will know no other god." Moshe continues by telling the people that since they have accepted upon themselves all of the mitzvot, that they are of equal stature to those who received the Torah at Har Sinai. Hashem avouched you for He did not command any other nation, only the B'nei Yisrael. The K'li Yakar uses as

his reference point the two declarations that are commanded for bikurim (first fruits) and ma'asrot (tithes). These declarations are the he'emarta where the B'nei Yisrael individually declared its acceptance of the idea that everything comes to us from Hashem and our sharing of that produce with others maintains that relationship. Man's wealth and a field's crops depend on Hashem, the Giver. Our acknowledgement of that relationship is what produces the desire to follow all of His commandments. As Hirsch explains, Hashem promises the B'nei Yisrael that as soon as it proves its loyalty to Hashem, He will raise them above all nations. This mutual acknowledgement is the meaning of the two forms of amar in our p'sukim.

HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin approaches these p'sukim from a different angle. There is a concept in the Gemara that "gadol ham'tzueh v'oseh mimi she'eino m'tzueh v'oseh, greater is the one who is commanded and performs the mitzvah that he who is not commanded and does the same deed." There is a natural tendency to be reluctant to give up one's independence. Children are often more than willing to share with their friends until an adult tells them they must share. When our friend is in trouble, we are more than willing to help out. We tend to resent, however, someone insisting that we must lend him money. When a person gives up his own Will to the Will of Hashem, that resentment disappears for he is not only helping his friend, but he is serving Hashem with the same action. Hashem has already given us these mitzvot and now Moshe repeats them so that we will

understand that we are m'tzuveh v'oseh, we are commanded and therefore we act.

HaRav Avigdor Nebenzahl explains that man must reach a level of "clinging to Hashem" that can only be reached through Hashem's assistance. This assistance is the Torah and the mitzvot, which can raise us up to the exalted level of a "treasured people." We must be careful, however, of a distortion of the Torah by forgetfulness. "The Torah is only truth when it is observed in its complete and authentic manner. Any distortion, even of only a small portion of the Torah, detracts from the authenticity of its observance." HaRav Nebenzahl cautions us to not observe the mitzvot by rote. It is important to feel the joy of every mitzvah and to rejoice in the opportunity to serve Hashem.

HaRav Sorotzkin completes the lesson for us. We have just performed two of the final mitzvot of the Torah, the recitations upon bringing the basket of first fruits to the Kohein and the giving of the ma'asrot to the Levi'im and the poor. In both declarations we have acknowledged Hashem's gifts to us. But these are not the only gifts from Hashem for He daily gives us gifts which then require additional mitzvot. "Hashem gives us a house and we affix mezuzot and put a ma'akah, a wall around the roof. Hashem gives us a field and from it we produce gifts which we must give to the Kohein and the Levi'im and the poor. Hashem gives us a son and we are required to fulfill the mitzvah of brit milah and pidyon haben." Ha Rav Sorotzkin admonishes us that observing these laws which were required through Hashem's gifts to us is not enough. We must acknowledge and say that we accept these mitzvot as we accept all mitzvot from Hashem, because He is our G-d. Only after we acknowledge our relationship with Hashem can He acknowledge that we are His am s'gulah, His treasured people. We are not the Chosen People until we first choose Hashem. ©2021 Rabbi D. Levin

RABBI MORDECHAI WILLIG

TorahWeb

"Because you did not serve Hashem, your G-d, with happiness and goodness of heart when you had an abundance of everything." (Devarim 28:47). The horrific punishments of the tochacha are caused by our failure to serve Hashem with happiness.

The Rambam concludes Hilchos Lulav (8:15) as follows: "The simcha that a person rejoices in the performance of mitzvot, and in the love of Hashem Who commanded them, is a great service. One who prevents himself from this happiness is worthy of punishment, as it says 'Because you did not serve Hashem, your G-d, with happiness and goodness of heart.'"

This formulation indicates that joy is a natural

outgrowth of performing mitzvot out of love of Hashem unless one prevents it. How is it prevented? The Rambam answers: One who is arrogant and accords himself honor is a sinner and a fool. But one who lowers himself is the great and honored one who serves with love. There is no greatness and honor except to rejoice before Hashem.

A prerequisite for serving Hashem with love is humility. One who is full of love for himself, whose arrogance leads him to honor himself, is unable to love Hashem with all his heart. While love of Hashem is not mentioned in the passuk, presumably the Rambam derived it from the need to serve Hashem with goodness of heart, which, in turn, requires wholehearted love of Hashem. A good, and humble, heart leads not only to proper interpersonal relationships (See Avos 2:13) but also allows for the heart to be filled with love of Hashem.

Seeking honor precludes true happiness as well. One who pursues honor, honor escapes him, since he never has enough. Happiness with one's lot is not only true wealth (Avos 4:1), but also reflects love of Hashem Who grants every person his portion. Only by serving Hashem with joy and a good heart can the punishments of the tochacha be avoided.

The Rambam quotes this passuk in Hilchos Yom Tov as well. The Torah mandates rejoicing on yom tov and requires gladdening the disadvantaged as well (Devarim 16:11,14). One who feasts and drinks but does not provide for the poor and embittered does not achieve this mitzva joy but only the joy of his belly (Hilchos Yom Tov 6:18). Intoxication, levity and lightheadedness is not joy; it is frivolity and foolishness. We are commanded to have joy that contains service of the Creator, and proper service of Hashem is with joy, as it says "Because you did not serve Hashem, your G-d, with happiness and goodness of heart" (ibid 6:20). Again, the juxtaposition of joy and goodheartedness appears to be the Rambam's source. Without helping the poor, one cannot experience true joy.

"Gladdening the heart of the poor, orphans, widows and strangers is the greatest and most splendid joy. One who does so resembles Hashem, Who revives the spirit of the lowly and the heart of the crushed" (Hilchos Megilla 2:17). Serving, and resembling, Hashem, the Source of joy (Divrei Hayamim I 16:27), yields the greatest possible happiness.

"I have done all that You have commanded me" (Devarim 26:14) -- this refers to the tithes eaten in Yerushalayim and the tithes given to the Levi and the poor (see Rashi). Rashi concludes: "I have rejoiced and have brought joy to others with it", referring to the aforementioned tithes respectively.

Rashi's formulation indicates that one must be joyous in order to make others happy. While others refer here to the Levi and the poor, earlier (14:26,27) the Torah also commands: "You shall rejoice, you and

your household." This refers specifically to one's wife, without whom a man cannot enjoy true happiness (Yevamos 62b).

"He shall gladden his wife", as Onkelos translates. He who translates 'he shall be glad with his wife' is mistaken" (Rashi, Devarim 24:5). The "mistaken" translation is none other than Yonasan ben Uziel. How do we justify his ungrammatical translation?

Perhaps Targum Yonasan is based on the linkage established by Rashi (26:14) himself, "I have rejoiced and have brought joy to others with it". In order to fulfill the literal sense of gladdening one's wife, one must first be glad with his wife. He should be overjoyed by his marriage, which yields Torah protection, peace, joy, blessing and goodness (Yevamos 62b). In fact, the Rambam (Hilchos Ishus 15:19) teaches that a married man may not be sad. His sadness will undoubtedly affect his wife and preclude his fulfillment of his obligation to gladden her. Targum Yonasan demands that a man be glad with his wife as a prerequisite to the literal requirement to gladden her.

True joy is achieved by serving Hashem with humility and love, and by giving and thereby resembling Hashem. The joy of marriage, the metaphor of loving Hashem (Rambam Hilchos Teshuva 10:3), is achieved by giving to and gladdening one's spouse as well. Indeed, a man and wife who merit it, Hashem dwells in their midst (Sota 17a). ©2014 Rabbi M. Willig and The TorahWeb Foundation, Inc.

RAV SHLOMO WOLBE Z"L

Bais Hamussar

A large portion of this week's parsha is dedicated to the tochacha (chastisement). Ninety-eight curses in all are spelled out for those who fail to abide by Hashem's commandments. It is scary to read it and even scarier to know that these prophecies all came true when the curses materialized into a reality during the destruction of the second Bais Hamikdosh (see Ramban to Vayikra 26:16). The severity of middas ha'din is overwhelming and one must stop and ask, "What could possibly be the reason behind all these calamities?"

Rav Wolbe (Daas Shlomo) explains that the world was created with an option for wickedness and iniquity. Our goal is to remain righteous despite the many challenges, temptations and enticements offered by the various evil forces present in the world. When one strays from the proper course, the purpose of middas ha'din is to alert the transgressor that he has veered from the beaten path.

Dovid Hamelech declared, "The judgments of Hashem are true, altogether righteous" (Tehillim 19:10). Rav Wolbe explains that just as this declaration refers to the rulings and penalties found in the Torah, it applies as well to Hashem's judgments manifested through middas ha'din. The numerous persecutions and

expulsions which the Jewish People have suffered over the past two and half millennia are actually the very secret of their survival (Rashi to Devarim 29:12).

Rav Wolbe related a most astounding conversation he once had. He was talking to a man who was in Auschwitz and worked near the gas chambers for two years. This man had the terrible misfortune of witnessing complete transports of Jews being led to their deaths. He related that many of the Jews barely even knew that they were Jewish but every single Jew, without exception, cried out at the last second, "Shema Yisrael!" Jews who, had their lives continued peacefully, would have had no chance of earning a proper portion in the next world, due to middas ha'din earned themselves a ticket to Olam Habba in their last moments of life! While it does not explain all the atrocities that occurred, it gives us a whole new outlook on middas ha'din.

It drives home the reality that we have no way of comprehending the depth of Heavenly calculations.

Although middas ha'din also strikes the other nations of the world, there is a fundamental difference between their punishments and the punishments meted out to the Jewish Nation. Other nations suffer from middas ha'din only after the fact. When they have already failed their purpose in creation and lost their right of survival, Hashem metes out a punishment that obliterates them from the face of the earth. In contrast, the Jewish Nation is castigated and disciplined before things get too out of hand. The result is that we are punished more than once, but this suffering is the key to our continuity.

The Yomim Ha'Noraim were given to us to prompt us to evaluate if we have veered from the proper path and enable us to straighten ourselves out should the need arise.

This yearly occasion prevents the buildup of sin and enables us to start each year with a clean slate. Take a moment to review the various manifestations of middas ha'din this past year: the Har Nof massacre, the Sasson Family tragedy, the Arab hostilities worldwide to mention a few. These jolts might very well have been sent to prompt us to improve our davening, Shabbos observance or our relationships bein adam l'chaveiro.

Chazal tell us (Megillah 31b) that we read the curses in parshas Ki Savo before Rosh Hashana so that "the year and all its curses should end." Our heartfelt tefillah to Hashem is to please put an end to the tragedies -- but allow their message to remain. We have an opportunity to clear the slate and start anew. Let us grab the opportunity and run with it before these holy days are behind us! ©2015 Rav S. Wolbe & The AishDas Society

