

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ZT"L

Covenant & Conversation

In the early 1990s one of the great medical research exercises of modern times took place. It became known as the Nun Study. Some 700 American nuns, all members of the School Sisters of Notre Dame in the United States, agreed to allow their records to be accessed by a research team investigating the process of ageing and Alzheimer's Disease. At the start of the study the participants were aged between 75 and 102. (See Robert Emmons, *Thanks!: How the New Science of Gratitude Can Make You Happier*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2007.)

What gave this study its unusual longitudinal scope is that in 1930 the nuns, then in their twenties, had been asked by the Mother Superior to write a brief autobiographical account of their life and their reasons for entering the convent. These documents were now analysed by the researchers using a specially devised coding system to register, among other things, positive and negative emotions. By annually assessing the nuns' current state of health, the researchers were able to test whether their emotional state in 1930 had an effect on their health some sixty years later. Because they had all lived a very similar lifestyle during these six decades, they formed an ideal group for testing hypotheses about the relationship between emotional attitudes and health.

The results, published in 2001, were startling. The more positive emotions -- contentment, gratitude, happiness, love and hope -- the nuns expressed in their autobiographical notes, the more likely they were to be alive and well sixty years later. The difference was as much as seven years in life expectancy. So remarkable was this finding that it has led, since then, to a new field of gratitude research, as well as a deepening understanding of the impact of emotions on physical health. (Danner, Deborah D., David A. Snowdon, and Wallace V. Friesen. "Positive Emotions in Early Life and Longevity: Findings from the Nun Study." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 80.5 (2001): 804-13.)

What medicine now knows about individuals, Moses knew about nations. Gratitude -- hakarat ha-tov -- is at the heart of what he has to say about the Israelites and their future in the Promised Land. Gratitude had not been their strong point in the desert.

They complained about lack of food and water, about the manna and the lack of meat and vegetables, about the dangers they faced from the Egyptians as they were leaving and about the inhabitants of the land they were about to enter. They lacked thankfulness during the difficult times. A greater danger still, said Moses, would be a lack of gratitude during the good times. This is what he warned: When you have eaten your fill and have built fine houses and live in them, and when your herds and flocks have multiplied, and your silver and gold is multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied, do not exalt yourself, forgetting the Lord your G-d, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery... Do not say to yourself, 'My power and the might of my own hand have gained me this wealth.' (Deut. 8:11-17)

The worst thing that could happen to them, warned Moses, would be that they forgot how they came to the land, how G-d had promised it to their ancestors, and had taken them from slavery to freedom, sustaining them during the forty years in the wilderness. This was a revolutionary idea: that the nation's history be engraved on people's souls, that it was to be re-enacted in the annual cycle of festivals, and that the nation, as a nation, should never attribute its achievements to itself -- "my power and the might of my own hand" -- but should always ascribe its victories, indeed its very existence, to something higher than itself: to G-d. This is a dominant theme of Deuteronomy, and it echoes throughout the book time and again.

Since the publication of the Nun Study and the flurry of further research it inspired, we now know of the multiple effects of developing an attitude of gratitude. It improves physical health and immunity against disease. Grateful people are more likely to take regular exercise and go for regular medical check-ups. Thankfulness reduces toxic emotions such as resentment, frustration and regret and makes depression less likely. It helps people avoid over-reacting to negative experiences by seeking revenge. It even tends to make people sleep better. It enhances self-respect, making it less likely that you will envy others for their achievements or success. Grateful people tend to have better relationships. Saying "thank you" enhances friendships and elicits better performance from employees. It is also a major factor in strengthening resilience. One study of Vietnam War Veterans found that those with

higher levels of gratitude suffered lower incidence of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Remembering the many things we have to be thankful for helps us survive painful experiences, from losing a job to bereavement. (Much of the material in this paragraph is to be found in articles published in Greater Good: The Science of a Meaningful Life @ <http://greatergood.berkeley.edu>.)

Jewish prayer is an ongoing seminar in gratitude. Birkot ha-Shachar, 'the Dawn Blessings' said at the start of morning prayers each day, form a litany of thanksgiving for life itself: for the human body, the physical world, land to stand on and eyes to see with. The first words we say each morning -- Modeh/Modah ani, "I thank you" -- mean that we begin each day by giving thanks.

Gratitude also lies behind a fascinating feature of the Amidah. When the leader of prayer repeats the Amidah aloud, we are silent other than for the responses of Kedushah, and saying Amen after each blessing, with one exception. When the leader says the words Modim anachnu lakh, "We give thanks to You," the congregation says the a parallel passage known as Modim de-Rabbanan. For every other blessing of the Amidah, it is sufficient to assent to the words of the leader by saying Amen. The one exception is Modim, "We give thanks." Rabbi Elijah Spira (1660 -- 1712) in his work Eliyahu Rabbah, (Orach Chayyim 127:1) explains that when it comes to saying thank you, we cannot delegate this away to someone else to do it on our behalf. Thanks has to come directly from us.

Part of the essence of gratitude is that it recognizes that we are not the sole authors of what is good in our lives. The egoist, says Andre Comte-Sponville, "is ungrateful because he doesn't like to acknowledge his debt to others and gratitude is this acknowledgement." La Rochefoucauld put it more bluntly: "Pride refuses to owe, self-love to pay." Thankfulness has an inner connection with humility. It recognizes that what we are and what we have is due to others, and above all to G-d. Comte-Sponville adds: "Those who are incapable of gratitude live in vain; they can never be satisfied, fulfilled or happy: they do not live, they get ready to live, as Seneca puts it." (Andre Comte-Sponville, *A Short Treatise on the Great Virtues: The Uses of Philosophy in Everyday Life*. London: Heinemann, 2002.)

Though you don't have to be religious to be grateful, there is something about belief in G-d as creator of the universe, shaper of history and author of the laws of life that directs and facilitates our gratitude. It is hard to feel grateful to a universe that came into existence for no reason and is blind to us and our fate. It is precisely our faith in a personal G-d that gives force and focus to our thanks.

It is no coincidence that the United States, founded by Puritans -- Calvinists steeped in the Hebrew Bible -- should have a day known as Thanksgiving,

recognizing the presence of G-d in American history. On 3 October 1863, at the height of the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln issued a Thanksgiving proclamation, thanking G-d that though the nation was at war with itself, there were still blessings for which both sides could express gratitude: a fruitful harvest, no foreign invasion, and so on. He continued:

No human counsel hath devised nor hath any mortal hand worked out these great things. They are the gracious gifts of the Most High G-d, who, while dealing with us in anger for our sins, hath nevertheless remembered mercy... I do therefore invite my fellow citizens in every part of the United States... to set apart and observe the last Thursday of November next, as a day of Thanksgiving and Praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the Heavens. And I recommend to them that while offering up the ascriptions justly due to Him for such singular deliverances and blessings, they do also, with humble penitence for our national perverseness and disobedience, commend to His tender care all those who have become widows, orphans, mourners or sufferers in the lamentable civil strife in which we are unavoidably engaged, and fervently implore the interposition of the Almighty Hand to heal the wounds of the nation and to restore it as soon as may be consistent with the Divine purposes to the full enjoyment of peace, harmony, tranquillity and Union.

What might such a declaration made today -- in Israel, or the United States, or indeed anywhere -- do to heal the wounds that so divide nations today? Thanksgiving is as important to societies as it is to individuals. It protects us from resentments and the arrogance of power. It reminds us of how dependent we are on others and on a Force greater than ourselves. As with individuals so with nations: thanksgiving is essential to happiness and health. *Covenant and Conversation is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl zt"l* ©2015 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks z"l and rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"**A**nd it shall come to pass, because you hearken to these laws, safeguarding and keeping them, that the Lord your God shall keep the covenant with you and the mercy that He swore unto your ancestors, and He will love you, and bless you...in the land which He swore to your ancestors to give you" (Deuteronomy 7:12-13). How secure can world Jewry -- and the citizens of Israel -- feel about the future of the Jewish State? Have we returned to Israel for good, or does this "third commonwealth" represent only a possible opportunity, its long-term stability dependent on the moral, ethical, and spiritual commitment of its residents?

In this week's portion of Ekev we find two passages that, at first glance, seem to contradict each other concerning this issue. The first passage, cited above, speaks for itself: our entire relationship to the land depends on our fidelity to the terms of the covenant. In fact, the opening word of the portion, "Ekev," is a conditional term (the desired goal will result "because" – "ekev"), underscoring the theme of qualification.

If the Jewish People were to forsake the covenant, they would have to pay the price of not inheriting the land. If they uphold the covenant, then God will bless them in the land that He promised our ancestors. The observance of the commandments may be compared to mortgage payments; if you default on the mortgage, the property gets taken away.

However, the Torah continues: "Not for your righteousness or for the uprightness of your heart did you go to possess their land; but it was because of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord your God drove them out before you" (ibid., 9:5).

Here the Almighty presents a different approach to our right to the land; it has less to do with our worthiness, and more to do with our neighbors' lack of worthiness. We are being judged in comparison to the nations around us rather than in the absolute terms of our own conduct.

To reconcile these passages, Rabbi Hayyim Ibn Attar ("Or HaHayyim HaKadosh") distinguishes between two stages in the redemptive process: entering the Land of Israel, and remaining there for good.

Our initial entry into the land comes about as a result of the evil of the other nations rather than our own righteousness, as well as God's promise to the Patriarchs. But whether or not we remain on the land, whether a particular "return" will become the anticipated redemption or a mere passing episode, depends solely upon our ethical, moral, and spiritual conduct, as indicated by the initial verse of our Torah reading.

There is also an alternate (and more comforting) way to orchestrate these verses, as Ohr HaHayyim explains. Initially, when the Almighty makes His covenantal guarantee that the descendants of Abraham will inherit the promised land, He stipulates that as soon as the Canaanites demonstrate totally unacceptable moral behavior, "in the fourth generation, they [the Jewish People] will return here" (Genesis 15:16).

Then the Torah outlines the ultimate boundaries of Israel: "On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abraham saying, 'Unto your seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates'" (v. 18).

Hence, Ohr HaHayyim suggests that whether or not we prove ourselves worthy, God promises that He will take us out of Egypt and out of every

enslavement and bring us to our homeland, unconditionally.

But how much of the Promised Land comes into our possession – whether or not we get to inherit the full boundaries from the Nile to the Euphrates – depends upon our actions and morality. And what is clear from the second interpretation of Ohr HaHayyim is that our ability – or worthiness – to remain on Israeli soil is not an "all-or-nothing" situation. If we are partially good, we have a good chance of remaining on a goodly portion of Israel.

This second interpretation is much more optimistic and heartening for us today; but it also teaches us that if we are forced to give up parts of the land, we may be receiving an important message from Above that our behavior is not what it ought to be – especially in terms of how we behave towards each other. It is because of His compassionate righteousness that the Almighty initially chose Abraham (ibid., 18:19) and because of Israel's lack thereof that our Holy Temple was destroyed (Isaiah 1).

Nahmanides explains that after the destruction of the first Temple, God guaranteed that He would effectuate deliverance no matter what. After the second destruction, there would also be a deliverance, but it would be dependent upon our doing teshuva, upon our repentance. According to Maimonides, this act of repentance is not a commandment, but is rather a guarantee. God promises that we will repent and then we will be redeemed. Obviously, the sooner we repent the sooner will come the redemption, but the Almighty guarantees that redemption will arrive! ©2022 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

Moshe's discourse to the children of Israel at the end of his life continues in this week's parsha. I think that it has to be said that Moshe presents a "fair and balanced" review of the events that have befallen Israel during its desert sojourn. The good and the bad, the exalted and the petty are all recorded for us in his words. And his view of the future of his beloved people is also a balanced mixture of woeful warnings and of great reward, of unlimited opportunity and of crushing defeats.

As always, he is forced to leave the choice of behavior and direction to the people of Israel themselves but he attempts surely to guide their choices in the right direction through his words and predictions. This is perhaps the greatest quality of a leader – the ability to clearly outline significant choices in life and society and give guidance to one's people to make wise and beneficial decisions.

Leaders who portray only one side of the coin, the bright one— who promise only utopian lower taxes and yet increased welfare programs, peace without

sacrifice and social systems of equality and blind justice that do not take into account the realities of human nature – only encourage inevitable disappointment, cynicism and apathy in their people and constituents.

On the other hand, leaders who govern by dire threats, terrible predictions, emphasizing all society's ills and generating only drabness and a bleak view of the future, destroy human initiative in a fog of pessimism.

Moshe, the paradigm of the great and wise leader presents, throughout his discourse here in the book of Dvarim, both sides of the coin.

Unfortunately, over the ages, the Jews have not always chosen wisely. People hear what they wish to hear no matter what the speaker really says. We are prone to misquote, misunderstand, repeat phrases out of context and generally ignore what we do not wish to hear and understand.

Moshe's attempt to portray the great achievements of the desert - and especially of Sinai - and balance them with the reminders of the tragedies and wars that also mark Israel's journey through the desert, had only limited influence on the people. Our sages teach us that the Jewish people simply did not believe Moshe's dire predictions would ever really occur.

God simply had too much invested in the Jewish people. It was a forerunner of our modern "too big to fail" philosophy regarding otherwise corrupt financial institutions. So Moshe's darker side of the coin was never really believed by the Jewish people.

They heard only the good – what they wanted to hear – and ignored the rest. There are many Jews today that unfortunately listen to the opposite strains of Jewish life. They despair of our future and our wonderful state. They also only hear what they wish to hear, fueled by a biased and ignorant media and narrow-minded intellectuals. They see no grand future for Israel, the people, the state and the land. A well considered study of Moshe's words and his realistic and balanced message would certainly be in order.

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RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Relative to observance of commandments, the Torah states, "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 here.

Rashi notes that the word ekev connotes a human heel. By using this word, the text teaches the importance of keeping those commandments that seem

less important, like the dirt one kicks up with one's heel (Midrash Tanchuma). 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, as in running on one's heels to attain a certain goal. True reward comes to an individual who not only keeps the commandment but does so eagerly. The yearning reflects an excitement that translates into a higher level of commitment to the mitzvot.

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 (ikveta d'meshicha). That time of redemption will come when we have made the commitment to listen to the words of the Torah that direct us to lead ethical lives in accordance with God's will.

Finally, perhaps ekev reminds us of our forefather Jacob, who was so named because he was born holding the heel of his brother Esau (Genesis 25:26). Jacob is later given an additional name – Israel. The name Jacob refers to our third patriarch as an individual – husband, father, brother, and son. In contrast, whenever the Torah calls him Israel, it refers 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 Jacob (ekev) and once as Israel.

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, individually, must explore our personal relationship with God.

Redemption will come when not only the nation collectively connects with God, but when each one of us, like Jacob, quietly, modestly, and without fanfare, yearns to keep and observe even the smallest of mitzvot. ©2022 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

ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

Grace After Meals

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

The 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 DAVID LEVIN

Message of the Manna

In the beginning of Chapter eight in Parashat Eikev we find Moshe's rather lengthy description of a test through which Hashem prepared the B'nei Yisrael for their reward in the Land of Israel. The test may sound simple and somewhat confusing in its message to the people, but it is a central lesson of our very existence. It is important for everyone, especially those who were not in the desert for forty years, to understand and grasp its full meaning.

Moshe admonished the people to observe and perform all of the mitzvot and to remember all of the miracles that Hashem performed for them in the forty years in the desert. Moshe informs the people that when Hashem led them through the desert, it was to afflict them and test them whether they would observe His commandments or not. "And He afflicted you and starved you then He fed you the manna that you did not know nor did your forefathers know in order to make you know that not by bread alone does man live rather by everything that emanates from the mouth of Hashem does man live." This statement is only a small portion

of the total test. "Your garment did not wear out nor did your foot swell these forty years." Moshe continued by telling the people that Hashem chastised them as a father would chastise his son and that they must follow on the path that Hashem has guided them: "Because Hashem, your Elokim, is bringing you to a good land, a land with streams of water, of springs and underground water coming forth in the valley and mountain. A land of wheat and barley, grape, fig, and pomegranate, a land of olive (oil) and honey (dates). A land where you will eat bread without poverty and you will lack nothing there, a land whose stones are iron and from whose mountains you will mine copper. And you will eat and you will be satisfied and you will bless Hashem, your Elokim, on the good land that He gave to you." Moshe then continued a brief summary of the departure from Egypt and the conclusion of their journey which would culminate in the good land that Hashem had prepared for them. There they would be rewarded with the produce of that land. Moshe repeated the account of the manna and the same words "in order to make you suffer and to test you." Now when you get in the land, "you will say in your heart, 'by my strength and by the might of my hand made me all this wealth.'"

The entirety of the travels in the desert and the forty years of the manna were to be an educational experience for the B'nei Yisrael. HaRav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch explains this forty-year period as a lesson in life. When the B'nei Yisrael left Egypt, it is clear from the Torah that they brought no provisions along with them except for the dough which they baked into matzah. Even if they had traveled directly to Eretz Yisrael, they would have needed some additional food for the journey. Now they were in the desert, a place with neither food nor water. Hashem knew before they began the journey that this would be the case. One must wonder why He did not have them take the time to gather provisions and water for their needs. Yet this was precisely what Hashem did not want to do. He wanted the people to starve so that they would cry out to Him for help. Only then would both food and water be provided in a miraculous fashion. Moshe brought forth water from a rock and Hashem delivered the manna daily to the people from the Heavens. The manna was the antithesis of Man's normal existence. Hirsch points out that "bread is the product of human intelligence mastering Nature and the world." The search for and production of food to feed one's family is the overdriving force of every civilization. Our existence alone must be sustained by our mastery of Nature. As long as we believe that we alone are the providers of our family's bread, the drive to secure that bread overwhelms any other consideration in our lives. This need does not provide for a system of right and wrong, but only one of have or not have. Hashem needed to break us of this attitude.

Hashem chose to deliver the manna daily in

such a fashion that it met the needs of each individual according to his specific needs and desires. No one received more manna than for his needs each day. An adult who needed more food would receive a larger portion than a child who needed less. If a family attempted to take more than their proper share, they would find that when they brought the manna into their tents, they would be left with only the proper amount. Any manna that was left in the fields spoiled in the midday sun. Each of these factors helped to impress upon the B'nei Yisrael that they would need to change their concept of "bread." All of one's food is ultimately provided by Hashem, and that idea requires that there are other consequential actions that must be taken into consideration when one strives to provide for his family. Overcoming Nature and mastering the world is insufficient when we seek to supply food for our needs. We need to place our Trust in Hashem. We must also remember to thank Hashem whenever we partake of His food, or we may forfeit any future supply.

Hashem promised to bring the B'nei Yisrael into a land that was filled with wonderful food. In addition, it promised to be a land of industry as the "iron" and the "copper" indicates. The people would become wealthy, and with wealth comes the smugness that we are personally responsible for all that we have. Moshe warned the people lest they think that "by my strength and the might of my hand" comes their wealth. Just as the food we receive is only through Hashem, so the wealth that we receive is only through Hashem. We must learn to depend on and thank Hashem for all that we have. The Ramban explains this concept further: "Remember, moreover, that in the wilderness where you could not have survived by your own efforts, there He performed for you all your needs. In that case, even this wealth which you have accumulated with your own power is from Him who gave you the power to do so. If you forget Him, your power will vanish and you will perish."

Israel today is a country which proves Hashem's involvement in the world on a daily basis. By sheer numbers alone, Israel should never have survived any of her wars. The very numbers of soldiers and weapons intent on the destruction of Israel is mind-boggling. Without Hashem's daily protection, as He provided that daily protection in the wilderness, Israel could not possibly survive. On a daily basis in Israel, we must acknowledge that everything we have is from Hashem, our Provider and our Protector. ©2022 Rabbi D. Levin

RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

"It shall be if you forget Hashem, your G-d, and follow in the ways of the nations to be like them, I testify today that you will be utterly lost." (Devarim 8:19) Completing a series of verses discussing the

material success we will experience, and in which we are urged to remember that it is Hashem Who gives us the ability to do whatever we do, this posuk tells us what will happen if we forget Hashem. If we begin to be like the nations, Moshe warns we will ultimately be lost.

The Ohr Hachaim delves into this posuk to explain the doubled language of "avod tova'dun," you shall surely be lost. He says that Torah acts as a protection for the Jewish People. Even were the Jews to worship idols but learn Torah, they would be protected. Therefore, Moshe warned us that if we start to think like the nations of the world, then the Torah, our unique gift, will become lost to us. We will forget it and thereby lose its protection. When that happens, then we can be destroyed like any other nation.

Thus, the risk of forgetting that Hashem is the source of everything we do and have, will lead to spiritual and physical ruin. It will send us down the slippery slope of losing our Jewish identities which are bound to the Torah. But it gets worse.

The Ohr Hachaim adds there will be a further step to this destruction. After the desolation and destruction of the Jews like any other nation (and probably more so,) the remnants of the Jewish People will be visited by an even greater destruction. The survivors will be deprived of prophecy and Ruach HaKodesh, Divine Inspiration. This situation will be harsher to deal with than even death.

What does he mean that this deprivation of insight will be worse than physical destruction? In truth, this punishment follows precisely the pattern of our sin. The sin, we are warned, is that we forget Hashem is the source of all, and we begin to think there are other powers in the world. We will begin to think that we have power, and that other human beings have power. We will think there are things that Hashem doesn't control, and when things turn sour, we will not know what to do.

When we have prophets and leaders who have Divine insight, they can guide us through the turbulent times. However, when we diminish Hashem's power in our minds, we deprive these leaders of that insight and they cannot help us. We begin to thrash in uncertainty, fearing what this person or that one will do. We have long forgotten that Hashem guides leaders, even madmen, to do what they do. Without this Ruach HaKodesh, we are rudderless and helpless.

This fear of the unknown is worse than death. The feeling that we are at the mercy of others' whims is terrifying, and destroys even those who physically survive. That is what Moshe was trying to prevent all along - and we foolishly did it to ourselves.

R' Yechezkel Shraga Halberstam zt"l, known to his followers as R' Chatzkele Shinever, asked his students: "When Avraham Avinu saw the three angels coming to his tent, he thought they were Arab merchants who worshiped the dust on their feet, so he offered them water to wash off this dust outside. What

sort of unusual "god" was this, to worship the dust on their feet?"

The students had no answer, so R' Chatzkele explained: "It was not typical idolatry, praying to an inanimate object. Rather, these men believed in themselves. They were convinced that one's success is determined by how hard he works- how many miles he walks - hence the "dust on their feet." Such a belief is heresy!" © 2022 Rabbi J. Gewirtz and Migdal Ohr

RABBI YAAKOV NEUBURGER

Meaning and Resilience

Hundreds of times each year we collectively pronounce words from this week's parsha (Devarim 4:44), "וזאת התורה אשר שם משה לפני בני ישראל -- this is the Torah that Moshe placed before the Jewish people" as we raise the Torah for all to see. What is this seemingly repetitive recitation supposed to evoke or confirm within us? Also intriguing is the placement of this pasuk, sandwiched between the record of Moshe's establishment of the Levite arrei miklat and Moshe's review of the aseres hadibros; our earliest commentaries disagreed as to what it refers to and what it adds to either topic.

To be sure, Hashem reports to us that Moshe has indeed fulfilled His mandate to take the unique position of "Moshe Rabbeinu -- Moshe our teacher". Charged by the unusual phrase for teaching (Shemos 21:1), "these are the laws that you shall place before them", his career has now comes full circle with the same phrase, "this is the Torah that Moshe placed before them". It is precisely that rare description that, according to chazal, refers to master teaching that organizes the material in a way that intrigues, informs, inspires and impresses in a lasting manner (see Rashi ad loc). Yet the questions remain: why does this appear now in this week's parsha? Why repeat it after every public Torah reading?

Rashi sees the pasuk as an introduction to the aseres hadibros (which come at the beginning of the next chapter). If that is the case, perhaps this pasuk needs to be read in conjunction with the five pesukim that follow it which briefly describe the events from the exodus from Egypt until the conquest of the eastern bank of the Yarden. The pasuk would thus be understood to be reminding us how Hashem, through Moshe, taught Torah through the various stages of our national experience: the triumphant and openly miraculous moments of the exodus, the time in the midbar when the miraculous become routine, and then during our transition into a people who had to lift the sword and later the plowshare. Thus the pasuk, read during this week's leining and recited after our reading every other week, affirms our appreciation of the Torah as that which adds meaning, direction, and mindfulness to every stage of our national experience and our personal lives.

Alternatively, the Tur and the Kli Yakar view the pasuk as referring to Moshe's designating the Levite cities, a mitzva he had just taught but whose primary application would not be relevant until well after Moshe leaves this world. Accordingly, Hashem teaches us to marvel at Moshe's deep and incessant love for His mitzvos and his dedication to teach them in every possible manner. After all, Moshe had just categorically lost his final appeal of G-d's judgment and the supreme disappointment of a lifetime was now set in stone. Nevertheless, Moshe had the eternal wellspring of resilience and unabating trust in the Almighty to pick himself up and move on instructing and guiding. This resilience, then, is also the Torah that Moshe taught, of which we can never be reminded too many a time. © 2022 Rabbi Y. Neuburger and TorahWeb.org

SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

Our Parashah begins: "This shall be the reward Eikev tishme'un / if you listen to these ordinances, and you observe and perform them..." Rashi z"l comments on the wording: If you will listen even to the lighter Mitzvot that a person usually treads on with his Eikev / heel. [Until here from Rashi]

R' Ben Zion Rabinowitz shlita (Biala Rebbe in Yerushalayim) asks: What is meant by a "lighter" Mitzvah? Are we not taught in Pirkei Avot to treat all Mitzvot with equal seriousness, as we do not know the reward for any Mitzvah?

He explains: In the marketplace, we find that goods are not priced based on their inherent value, but rather based on supply and demand. Out of season clothing, for example, is hard to sell at full price no matter how high its quality.

Mitzvot, too, seem to have seasons. Teshuvah and prayer with extra concentration are "in season" around Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, but neglected at other times. Torah study is neglected by many, especially the youth, during the summer months. This is not how it should be! We all know deep down that there are no times that are more appropriate or less appropriate for serving Hashem. Nevertheless, we treat different Mitzvot "lightly" at various times.

The Biala Rebbe adds: R' Yitzchak Luria z"l ("The Arizal"; 1534-1572) teaches that, from the time of Creation until the End of Days, no two moments are alike. Each instant was created for a unique purpose, such that Torah study, prayer, or another Mitzvah missed today can never fully be made up. There is no moment when we are not called upon to serve Hashem. (Mevaser Tov: Chiddushei Shabbat, Introduction)



"Your heart will become haughty and you will forget Hashem, your Elokim, Who took you out of the

land of Egypt from the house of slavery... And you might say in your heart, 'My strength and the might of my hand made me all this wealth!' Then you shall remember Hashem, your Elokim--that it was He Who gives you strength to make wealth..." (8:14, 17-18)

R' Nosson Lewin z"l (1857-1926; rabbi of Rzeszw, Poland) writes: The Torah commands us here to remember at all times that Hashem is Good and does good, and that everything that any created being has is from His "Hand." Therefore, all created beings are obligated to thank Hashem for everything He does for them.

He continues: Rambam z"l teaches in his Moreh Nevochim, "The verse (Tehilim 16:8), 'I have set Hashem before me always!' is a major principle of the Torah and an attribute of the Tzaddikim who walk before Hashem. By following this verse's teaching, a person attains Yir'ah / fear, subdues himself before Hashem, and is afraid to sin against Him. [Until here from Rambam]

It follows, continues R' Lewin, that one who forgets Hashem will lose the trait of Yir'ah and its place will be taken by haughtiness. [Ed. Note: R' Lewin appears to be reading our verse to say, "Your heart will become haughty and you will already have forgotten Hashem."] This, writes R' Lewin, is why our Sages say that one who is haughty is considered to have denied G-d. (Bet Nadiv p. 59-60)

"With seventy Nefesh / soul[s] your ancestors descended to Egypt." (10:22)

Midrash Vayikra Rabbah (4:6) observes that Yaakov's family numbered seventy people, yet they are called "Nefesh" / soul (singular). In contrast, even when speaking of a time that Esav's family numbered only six people, the Torah calls them "Nefashot" / souls (plural).

R' Yitzchak Shmelkes z"l (1828-1906; rabbi of Lvov, Galicia) explains: A Rasha / wicked person doesn't want others to be as wicked as he is, for then they might act wickedly toward him. A thief doesn't want others to steal, for then they might steal from him. Thus, the wise king [Shlomo] says (Mishlei 21:10), "The soul of the evildoer desires evil; his companion [in evil] will not find favor in his eyes." Since evildoers can never truly unite, the Torah calls them Nefashot.

In contrast, the ultimate desire of a Tzaddik is that all mankind be righteous, just as he is. This, concludes R' Shmelkes, explains the Gemara (Yevamot 61a) which says that only the Jewish People are called "Adam" -- a word that has no plural form, paralleling the unity of purpose that the righteous desire. (Bet Yitzchak)

"You (plural) shall teach them to your (plural)

children to discuss them, while you (singular) sit in your home, while you (singular) walk on the way, when you (singular) retire and when you (singular) arise." (11:19)

Why does the Torah change plural to singular in the middle of the verse? R' Yitzchak Menachem Weinberg shlita (Tolner Rebbe in Yerushalayim) explains: The Torah is teaching that successful parenting requires a person to work on himself. "You" (singular) means "You alone!" Do not rely on the merits of distinguished ancestors. Do not think that your behavior when you are alone, when no one sees you, does not matter. If a person serves Hashem even when he sits alone at home, when he walks alone on the way, when he retires to bed alone and when he arises alone, then he can teach his children. (Chamin B'Motzai Shabbat: Devarim p.82)

From the Haftarah: "Can a woman forget her nursing, withdraw from feeling compassion for the child of her womb? Even were these to forget, I will not forget you." (Yeshayah 49:15)

Midrash Yalkut Shimoni on this verse records a conversation between the Jewish People and Hashem. The Jewish People said, "Hashem, since You never forget, perhaps You will never forget the sin of the Golden Calf." Hashem replied, "I will forget that!" The Jewish People said, "If You are capable of forgetting, perhaps You will forget the events at Har Sinai." Hashem answered, "I will not forget! In reality, I never forget, but for the good of the Jewish People, I act as if I have forgotten." [Until here from the Midrash]

R' Yerachmiel Shulman z"l Hy"d (Menahel Ruchani of the Bet Yosef-Novardok Yeshiva in Pinsk, Poland; killed in the Holocaust) observes: Human nature is to forget the good others do and to remember only the bad. Even one hurt caused by another person can make someone forget a thousand kindnesses. Hashem's way, however, is the opposite: He "remembers" the good event--the Giving of the Torah--and "forgets" the bad event--the making of the Golden Calf--even though the good event occurred earlier than the bad one. R' Moshe ben Maimon z"l (Rambam; 1135-1204; Spain and Egypt) writes that the Torah calls upon us to emulate this -- for example (Devarim 23:8), "You shall not despise an Egyptian, for you were a sojourner in his land." Although the Egyptians enslaved our ancestors, they first took them in in their time of need (during the famine), and we must remember that.

(Peninei
Ha'shlaimut: Sha'ar
Ha'savlanut 1:7)
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