

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI DOV KRAMER**

### Taking a Closer Look

**A**mong the declarations made about having fulfilled all of the tithing requirements is saying, "I did not forget" (Devarim 26:13). What didn't he forget? Rashi tells us that it means he didn't forget "to bless you (G-d) during the separation of the tithes." However, aside from Birchas Hamazon (the blessings said after eating a meal), all blessings, including the blessings said when performing a mitzvah, are of rabbinical origin. How can Rashi explain the verse as referring to the blessing if it is not Biblically mandated? Besides, if the Torah meant affirming that he made the blessing, why not have him say it outright, "bayrachti," I have made the blessing," rather than the vague "I have not forgotten?"

The first question is widely discussed, with two basic approaches being presented. The Mizrahi is one of many who suggest that Rashi doesn't really mean making the actual blessing, but uses the proverbial term "blessing" to mean "give praise." In other words, Rashi really means that the verse is saying "I have not forgotten to praise you when I separated the tithes." Although this certainly answers, or at least sidesteps, the issue of blessings being rabbinical, it raises others in its place. Why would Rashi use a misleading term if he really means "to praise?" Also, why is praise expected more when performing the mitzvah of separating tithes than by other mitzvos? And, as many commentators point out (see Tosfos Yom Tov on Ma'aser Sheini 5:11), Rashi himself, on a parallel Beraisa quoted by the Talmud (Berachos 40b) says explicitly that the "blessing" refers to the actual wording of the blessing made when separating the tithes. It would therefore seem difficult to explain Rashi's intent to mean "giving praise" and not literally "making the blessing."

The Tiferes Yisroel (on the Mishnah) is among the many commentators that explain the Mishnah (and the Talmud and the parallel Sifray), and, by extension, Rashi as well, as using the verse only as an

"asmachta," a tool whereby a rabbinic law is associated with a biblical verse (as a memory aid). In other words, even though Rashi's intent is the actual blessing, he is not saying that this is the real meaning of the verse, but a rabbinic law that is attached to it. One issue this raises is whether Rashi would rely on an "asmachta" when explaining the intent of a verse, since this can't really be it's basic meaning. Although the Ramban (Shemos 12:16) seems to indicate that Rashi would, the Mizrahi there explains that Rashi is not using an "asmachta." This might not be because he thinks that he can't (or wouldn't), but because in that particular case it just isn't. The Gur Aryeh (there) goes out of his way to explain Rashi in way that is not an "asmachta," even though it is a different explanation than the Mechilta, which would normally be Rashi's source, indicating that the Maharal doesn't think using an "asmachta" to explain a verse is likely. Nevertheless, even if Rashi would use an "asmachta" to explain the meaning of a verse, it would make sense that he would only do so if the "asmachta" explains the simple meaning of the words better. In our verse, however, saying a blessing over separating tithes is not its most straightforward meaning, so it would be difficult to say that Rashi must resort to using a rabbinic law to explain the meaning of a Biblical verse. In addition, in the Mishnah in Ma'aser Sheinu, as well as from the Rambam (Hilchos Ma'aser Sheini 11:15), where the requirement to make the blessing is part of a long list of Biblical laws learned from these verses, the context indicates that this blessing would not be just rabbinic in nature. And, in fact, this is how the Taz understands Rashi. The question remains, then, how can it be considered a Biblical requirement if blessings are of rabbinical origin.

The Mishnah (and the Sifray) do not say that making a blessing is the only thing we learn from the verse. Rather, "I have not forgotten" is explained as not forgetting "to bless you and to mention Your name over it." This creates a slight problem in the context of the Talmud, which is trying to prove that every blessing must include G-d's name. Although being only an "asmachta" would not prevent it from proving such, if there are two things that it can be referring to (making a blessing and/or mentioning G-d's name), how can we know that one is included in the other? Maybe the verse teaches us that we must make a blessing, or maybe that we must mention G-d's name. How can it

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prove that we must mention G-d's name in the blessing itself (from which we would learn that all blessings must have G-d's name)? The key may lie in what "mentioning G-d's name," especially vis-?-vis tithing, really means.

"And when you eat from the bread of the land, you shall separate terumah to G-d" (Bamidbar 15:19). The Yerushalmi (Challah 1:6) understands this to mean that when one takes "challah" (and, by extension, all tithing, see Ridbaz) one must mention G-d's name. In other words, there is a Biblical requirement to mention G-d's name when tithing, although not necessarily in the form of a blessing. Because of this requirement, when the Men of the Great Assembly formulated the blessing made before tithing, they included G-d's name in the blessing. The Mishnah (and Sifray) include both because the Biblical requirement is only to mention G-d's name, but it is fulfilled when making the blessing since G-d's name is included. This is how the Talmud proves that blessings include G-d's name, as the blessing was formulated to fulfill the Biblical requirement.

Why was this requirement placed on tithing? The Torah cautions us (Devarim 8:17-18) to be careful not to attribute our success to ourselves. Rather, "you shall remember Hashem, your G-d, for it is He that gives you the strength to accumulate wealth." This admonition to "remember" G-d is preceded by a warning "not to forget G-d" (8:11) and immediately followed by another warning telling us of the consequences "if we forget G-d" (8:19). Although mentioning G-d before we eat helps us to remember that what we have comes from G-d, instead of waiting till we actually take a bite of the food G-d provided, we are commanded to "mention His name" at an earlier stage, when we separate the tithes. To make sure that these tithes are not seen as a tax placed by the authorities to support the public servants (i.e. the Kohanim and Levi'im), we must mention that it is a tithe "for G-d," i.e. we recognize that it all came from Him, and that He made us the trustee in charge of the produce that goes to His workers. By mentioning G-d's name during the process of tithing, we are assured of "not forgetting" the Source of all of our good.

The Mishnah and Sifray are explaining that by declaring "I did not forget," we are testifying that we

have fulfilled the Biblical requirement to mention G-d's name when we separated the tithes, and therefore "did not forget" that everything we have comes from G-d. Once the blessings were instituted, this requirement is fulfilled by saying, "blessed are You, G-d, King of the universe, who has made us holy through His commandments, and has commanded us to separate tithes." Rashi is therefore fully accurate when he explains the words "I did not forget" to mean "I did not forget to bless you over the separating of the tithes." As the Malbim puts it, "Biblically we are required to mention G-d's name by the separating of the tithes, and now, after they (the sages) have decreed that we must make a blessing, we are fulfilling the obligation of mentioning His name through the blessing." © 2007  
*Rabbi D. Kramer*

### RABBI BEREL WEIN

## Wein Online

One of the most bitter curses that the Torah describes in the tochacha that forms such a major portion of this parsha itself is that one's labor and efforts, even all of one's life struggles and sacrifices, will turn out to be empty, fruitless, of no purpose or benefit. We all work in life to achieve certain goals - financial, personal fulfillment, family serenity, and the wish to be remembered and appreciated. There is therefore perhaps nothing in the tochacha that is as deflating and saddening as the statement that all of our efforts will be for naught, all of our ambitions, ideas and struggles ultimately pointless and of no lasting value.

It is clear to most of us, not particularly blessed with enormous wealth or unique creative genius, that there are relatively few ways that we can make our mark on the world and our lives purposeful. One of those ways however is in building family ties and harmony. People are able to see their accomplishments in the accomplishments of others if those others are their offspring or close relatives.

That is the reason that family relations, especially parent-child relationships, are so delicate and emotional. For even if one feels that one's efforts in life have been successful, we feel that the verdict on our achievements is yet to be rendered and that it depends upon the continuing success of our future generations as well. And therefore the words of the tochacha are truly frightening for it portends that the future generations can undo all previous achievements of their predecessors. We are all too bitterly aware that this is true especially in our generations.

This inconsonance between generations is emphasized further in the tochacha when the Torah describes "that your children shall be given to another nation and that you will be powerless to prevent it." The Torah refers here not only to actual enslavement and imprisonment of one's children but it also implies being

given to a foreign, non-Jewish culture and way of life. The effects of the secularization of the youthful generations of Eastern European Jewry and of American and Israeli Jewry are so serious as to be almost catastrophic.

Our generation and times are left to pay the bill for those previous defections from Jewish life. And, what the appeal of false ideals that overwhelmed the Jewish street then did not destroy, the Holocaust - described in minute detail in the *tochacha* - completed. If it were not for G-d's promise that ends the *tochacha*, that Israel will survive and rejuvenate itself, we would almost be without hope or comfort. But it is the sad fact that the *tochacha*, in all of its awful prophecies and events, has literally taken place before our eyes. And, this paradoxically gives us the hope and promise for the better times that G-d's promise extends to us.

As we contemplate the shambles of the *tochacha* that surround us currently, we may take hope in the future- that the times of peace, spiritual accomplishment and serenity of soul will also be literally fulfilled in the great and good year that is about to dawn upon us and all of Israel. © 2007 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/jewishhistory](http://www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory).

#### **RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

### **Shabbat Shalom**

The following episode, taken from this week's portion, Ki Tavo, raises several questions. On the day that you cross the Jordan to the land which the Lord your G-d gives you, you shall set up great stones and plaster them with lime. And you shall write upon them all the words of this Torah...you shall set up these stones, which I command you this day, in Mount Ebal. There you shall build an altar unto the Lord your G-d, an altar of stones; you shall lift no iron tool upon them. You shall build the altar of the Lord your G-d of unhewn stones; and you shall offer burnt-offerings on it unto the Lord your G-d. And you shall write upon the stones all the words of this law very plainly (Deut. 27:1-6)

Upon crossing the Jordan, why are the Israelites commanded to travel all the way up to Mt. Ebal overlooking Shekhem, 60 parasangs through the heart of enemy territory? After 40 years of wandering in the desert, what's the rush to get to Shekhem? - and especially since they are almost immediately to return back to where they started from (see Rashi, ad loc)! And why is the first order of business to write out the Torah on 12 stones, and especially in Shekhem?

Abraham, we read in Genesis, heeds G-d's commandment to leave his land, his birthplace, and his father's home, taking with him ...his wife Sarai, his nephew, Lot, and all their belongings... When they

came to Canaan, Abraham traveled through the land as far as Shekhem...He built an altar there to G-d who had appeared to him... ((Gen. 12:5-7)

The Gaon of Lutzk, Rabbi Zalman Sorotzkin, (1881-1966) author of *Oznayim l'Torah*, points out that by coming to Shekhem, the Israelites establish the fact they're not newcomers to Israel, that their historical roots go back to Abraham. Egypt was a sojourn, but now they're returning to re-establish Abraham's legacy. The land's fruit trees, vegetation, climate, topography or physical beauty is not what has brought them back to Israel. In addition, Shekhem is one of three locations, along with Hebron and Jerusalem, which was paid for in cash; Jacob, after his long departure from the land with Laban in Aram, returned and bought an open field, Shekhem, for 100 'kesitahs.'

This combination of tradition (Abraham's first stop in the promised land) and law (Jacob's purchase), makes Shekhem unique among Israel's cities. Hence for the émigrés from the desert to first come to Shekhem is like bringing visitors straight from the airport in Lod to the Kotel even before they've unpacked.

But it's not just a history lesson. Past memory becomes future destiny when Jews are commanded to write the Torah on 12 stones plastered with lime, for although the Jewish right to the land may be historic, Jews will not be able to live on the land and hold on to it unless they keep the ethical, moral and ritual commandments of Torah. Plaster, subject to natural deterioration, needs the constant care of the people to prevent its being chipped away into dust. The Torah is the means by which we guarantee that Israel will not be the mere gravesite of our past but will remain the homeland of our future.

Therefore, when they arrive at the Jordan terminal, they are transported (on their two feet) to Shekhem where there is a specific agenda. First, the forefathers and their footsteps; second, when the tour is over the Torah isn't. And third, the Torah is a lot more than a tribal possession to be kept under lock and key.

The verses concerning the Jews setting up these 12 stones ends with the words 'be'er hetev,' which literally means 'explained clearly.' Quoting from the first Mishnah of chapter 7 in Tractate Sotah, Rashi comments that 'be'er hetev' means that the Torah was written "in 70 languages," symbolizing the 70 nations. In other words, the sages understood that a further condition to settling the land was the obligation for the Torah to be extended into the world.

Israel as a nation-state has a specific purpose. The journey of Abraham may have begun with one family and extended to his descendants, but the instructions to the Israelites regarding the 12 stones now reaffirms the mission that Abraham's message is necessary for all of humanity. This is therefore G-d's third covenant with Israel: in the covenant "between the pieces" G-d established Israel, the nation; at Sinai, G-d

established Israel, the religion; and with Shekhem, G-d established Israel, His witnesses to the world!

Commentators raise the natural question as to how it's possible to write the entire Torah on 12 stones, especially in 70 languages? Nahmanides quotes two views. One holds that the 613 commandments were written down, not the whole Torah. And the second view holds that the entire Torah, from the first letter to the last, was recorded- and either the stones were enormous or it was a miraculous scribal feat. The Torah Temimah (Rabbi Boruch HaLevi Epstein) writes that only the 10 commandments were written down. It seems to be most logical that the "curses" which are the universal humanistic commands expressed in the context of this third covenant (Deut 27: 15-26) is what was written on the stones. These laws are mostly parallel to the Seven Noahide laws of morality. And finally, the Ktav VehaKabala, (Rabbi Jacob Zvi Mecklenberg) in the name of his son, writes that the Shema was recorded in stone.

This last interpretation is most striking. After all, the message of the Shema stipulates that our responsibility as a kingdom of priest-teachers is to see to it that G-d, who is now merely the Lord of Israel, be accepted by the entire world. Thus, whether we're inclined toward the miraculous (the entire Torah in 70 languages) or the more rational that key selections such as the ten commandments, the "curses" or the Shema were written on the stones, it is clear that our destiny in this land is linked to that of the nations of the world. We must be a kingdom of priest-teachers, to bring a G-d of morality and peace to the world! Perhaps that is why the promised land is Israel, crossroads of the continents, and not Australia or New Zealand. From the very moment we crossed the Jordan, G-d taught us that we are here not for our sake alone but in order to perfect the world under the kingship of our G-d of love and universal law. © 2007 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

#### **RABBI ABBA WAGENSBERG**

### **Between the Lines**

**T**his week's parsha discusses the mitzvah of "first fruits." A Jew who owns land in Israel and grows produce on it-specifically, the seven species for which the Land of Israel is praised-must gather the first of his crop in a basket and take it to the Temple, where a special ceremony takes place (see Deut. 26:2). This parsha is always read prior to the beginning of Slichot prayers for forgiveness preceding Rosh Hashana. What is the message of this parsha, and how does it help us prepare for Slichot?

The Midrash (Tanchuma 1) states that Moses saw prophetically that the Temple would be destroyed in the future, and that the mitzvah of the first fruits would no longer be able to be fulfilled. In response, Moses instituted three daily prayers to replace this

service. The Midrash's statement is striking, since the Talmud (Brachot 26b) teaches that our three daily prayers were instituted by the Patriarchs. How can we understand this contradiction? Was it Moses or the Patriarchs who established our current system of prayer?

Furthermore, the Torah teaches that a specific statement must be recited by the person bringing the first fruits: "Then you shall answer and say... 'An Aramean destroyed my forefather...'" (Deut. 26:5). Rashi (citing Sotah 32b) explains that the word "you shall answer" refers to calling out in a loud voice. How is this interpretation derived? According to the Siftei Chachamim (9), the literal meaning of "you shall answer" is logical only if another person has previously spoken, necessitating a response. In this instance, however, no one has spoken at all. Therefore, our Sages explained the phrase "you shall answer" to mean that we must say the prescribed statement in a loud voice.

This interpretation raises a difficulty. The Talmud (Brachot 24b) teaches that a person who raises his voice in prayer is considered to have little faith in G-d! Rashi explains that loud prayers imply a lack of belief that G-d can hear a whisper just as clearly. In practice, Jewish law follows this opinion (Orach Chaim 101:2, Mishna Brura 7). If we are not permitted to raise our voice in prayer, how can our Sages specifically require it at the time we bring the first fruits?

The commentator Chanukat HaTorah addresses this issue by stating that there are two categories of prayer. The first category is regular prayer, containing the three standard elements of praise, request and thanks. The second category is prayer that testifies explicitly that G-d hears our thoughts. There is an obvious difference between these two categories. It is forbidden to raise our voices if we are praying according to the first category, because the volume might be misconstrued as a lack of belief. However, if we pray according to the second category, and explicitly state that G-d hears our thoughts, then surely He can also hear our whispers! Thus, it is permitted to raise our voices, because doing so will not lead to any improper assumptions.

This helps us understand a seeming misstatement in the ceremony of the first fruits. The person bringing his produce is required to say, "An Aramean [Lavan] destroyed my forefather [Yaakov]." But historically, this is not true! If Lavan didn't kill Yaakov, why would the Torah command us to say that he did? Rashi explains (Deut. 26:5, based on Sifri and JT Peah 1:1) that Lavan wanted to destroy Yaakov and his entire family. Since, among the non-Jewish nations, evil thoughts have the same status as evil acts, Lavan's desire to kill Yaakov was considered an actual murder. Therefore, a Jew who explicitly states, "An Aramean destroyed my forefather" is effectively stating that G-d

hears a person's thoughts! Therefore, the person falls under the second category of prayer, and is allowed to raise his voice.

Once we are permitted to raise our voice in prayer, it is actually preferable to do so. The Aruch HaShulchan (Orach Chaim 101:8) states that raising our voices in prayer awakens our hearts. Additionally, we can suggest that loud prayer helps free us of our inhibitions, which elevates the words we say.

The concept of two categories of prayer will resolve the problem of who instituted daily prayers as a replacement for the service of first fruits. Based on the Talmud (Eruvin 16b), which teaches "These and those are the words of the living G-d," we can suggest that both Moses AND the Patriarchs established our daily prayer service. The Patriarchs instituted prayer according to the first category, in which it is forbidden to call out loudly. Moses instituted prayer according to the second category, in which we explicitly state G-d's omniscience.

We see that the Amidah, corresponding to the Patriarchs, is said silently. But when do we experience Moses's type of prayer? One example is the Slichot service, in which we ask G-d's forgiveness for not only our improper actions and speech, but even for inappropriate thoughts. Asking forgiveness for improper thoughts is tantamount to acknowledging that G-d is aware of them. Thus, it is permissible to raise our voices. Furthermore, according to some customs, Slichot are said immediately after the Amidah, thereby juxtaposing the Patriarchs (silent prayer) with Moses (heartfelt cries for forgiveness).

At last we see how this week's parsha relates to Slichot. When we read about the prayer spoken over the first fruits, we prepare ourselves to call out to G-d. Slichot, too, are spoken out loud, in order to awaken our emotions. They belong to the second category of prayer-Moses's category-in which we are encouraged to raise our voices to G-d and arouse our hearts to higher levels of connection.

May we all raise our voices in prayer so that, through truly meaning and feeling what we say, we arouse ourselves to become closer to G-d. In this merit may we be completely forgiven, and deserve to hear the loud shofar blast symbolizing the building of the Third Temple, where we'll once again bring the first fruits. © 2007 Rabbi A. Wagensberg & aish.org

**RABBI ZEV LEFF**

## Outlooks & Insights

**“Y**ou shall take of every fruit of the ground produced by the land that the Lord your G-d is giving you. You must place it in a basket, and go to the site that G-d will choose." (Deut. 26:2)

The Torah commands us to take the first fruits and bring them to the Kohen as a thanksgiving offering to G-d. Elsewhere we are enjoined to dedicate all our

"firsts" to G-d-the first shearings of the wool, the first of the dough, the firstborn of man and animal, etc. Why did the Torah not command us to offer the best of our produce and not the first?

The importance of the "first" lies in the fact that it is the root and foundation of all that follows. The foundation of a building must be totally free of imperfections. A hairline crack in the foundation endangers the entire building, whereas that same crack in the fourth floor would not be significant. Similarly, with respect to everything having to do with kedusha, the beginning must be holy and pure if holiness and purity are to emanate from it. Any imperfection in the root will manifest itself a hundredfold in what grows out of it. Therefore, we dedicate all "firsts" to G-d to firmly establish the foundation and root of all that follows.

The Talmud (Yerushalmi-Chagiga) blames Elisha ben Avuya's tragic departure from the path of Torah on an incident that occurred on the day of his brit. The great Sages of Jerusalem were discussing Torah at his brit with such intensity that a fire descended from the heavens and surrounded them. When Elisha's father saw this, he announced that he would devote his son to Torah so that he would also be able to work such wonders.

His father's distorted motivation left its mark on his brilliant son, when later in life Elisha came to distorted conclusions on the basis of various incidents he witnessed. He saw a child fall to his death while fulfilling his father's command to send away the mother bird before taking her eggs. Since the Torah specifically promises length of days for honoring one's parents and sending away the mother bird, he concluded there is neither justice nor a judge. (Rabbi Yaakov, however, saw that reward for mitzvos is not in this world but rather in the next.)

And so, too, from a good beginning comes good. The Talmud (Bava Metzia 85b) relates that when Rebbe Chiya reintroduced Torah in a generation in which it had been forgotten, he began by planting flax. From the flax he made nets to capture deer. Upon the skins of those deer he wrote the Five Books of the Torah. He would then travel from town to town teaching Torah to five boys in each town. With each he learned one book of Chumash. To six older boys he taught one order of Mishnah each. Each then taught the others what he had learned, and in this way, Torah was once again established.

Why was it necessary for Rebbe Chiya to plant the flax and make the nets? Couldn't he have bought these? The answer is that every new beginning is the construction of a foundation. Only if every step is taken with holy and pure intentions will the result be holy and pure.

The same principle answers a question asked with respect to Chanukah: Why was a miracle necessary to insure that the menorah not be lit with

impure oil? The law is that impure oil may be used for a mitzvah incumbent on the community.

[The answer is that] Chanukah was a rededication of the Temple and the Menorah. As such it was a new beginning, and only pure oil was fitting. Only when the holiness has been firmly established can impure oil be used for its maintenance.

The special significance that the Sages attach to the education of young children lies in the fact that we are setting the foundations of their Torah. Similarly, the blessings and curses uttered upon our entrance into the Land of Israel, at Mount Eival and Mount Grizim, emphasize the fact that our first encounter with Israel must set the foundation for our future settlement of the land. That required an intense awareness of our duties and responsibilities.

During the Ten Days of Repentance from Rosh Hashanah to Yom Kippur, it is customary to be extra stringent in one's observance of mitzvot. Thus, even one who is not usually strict about eating kosher bread baked by a non-Jew (pas palter) should nevertheless be strict during that period. At first glance this practice seems difficult to understand, for it applies even to a person who intends to eat pas palter the rest of the year. Are we trying to fool G-d into thinking we are more pious than we actually are in order to secure a favorable judgment?

The significance of this conduct lies in the fact that Rosh Hashanah is not just the beginning of the year, but reishis hashana—the foundation and root of the year. Each of these ten days must be treated as firsts, dedicated to G-d in purity and holiness. Hence the extra stringencies, the more intense prayer and learning, are not merely for show. They are designed to lay the foundation for the entire year. Even if the building of the coming year is not constructed of such quality materials, the foundation will give it strength.

Thus did [King Solomon], the wisest of men say, *tov acharis davar me'resiho* (Ecclesiastes 7:8), which is usually translated as "The end of the matter is greater than the beginning," but can also be understood, "A good end emanates from the beginning." © 2007 Rabbi Z. Leff & aish.org

## **YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**

### **Virtual Beit Medrash**

STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA HARAV YEHUDA AMITAL SHLIT" A

*Summarized by Matan Glidai*

*Translated by Yoseif Bloch*

**T**he Gemara (Avoda Zara 5b) notes that only at the end of the Jewish people's forty-year sojourn in the desert does Moshe see fit to mention their ingratitude towards G-d, as we see throughout the Book of Devarim. Based on this, the Gemara asserts that "No one can know his teacher's mind before forty years' time." What is the significance of this

observation? Does it really take four decades to learn a lesson?

To understand this, we need to employ the famous Talmudic analogy (Chagiga 15a) of tokh and kelippa: a core or kernel (tokh) of meaning, value and truth is often surrounded by a shell or husk (kelippa), which can take many forms. Chasidic thought differentiates between a kelippa of desire, which one may penetrate to reveal the truth, and a kelippa of falsehood, which has no tokh at its core. In such a case, the shell is truly empty.

Indeed, this is the challenge of our time, when we confront a new culture of falsehood. A generation ago, behind the Iron Curtain, there was a culture of obvious lies: everyone knew better than to lend credence to anything or rely on anyone. People believed solely in that which could benefit them pragmatically, not in what they were allowed to see. Now it is the mantra of the West which rules, that image is everything, that only kelippa counts. Within this culture of hidden lies, falsehood is attractively packaged and marketed. Whether it is commercial advertisement or political propaganda, modern media present us with enchanting and beautiful externals, the connection between them and the internal value of the product or person being negligible. There are even those who attempt to sell the tokh of Judaism in the same way, by exhibiting all of its ostensibly desirable and appealing elements, instead of delving into its content and depth.

The Yerushalmi (Chagiga 2:2) exposes the seriousness of this misconception. It tells us about two righteous men, one of whom died and then appeared to his friend to describe the afterlife. Among other things, he relates to him the fate of a woman by the curious name of Miriam Onion-Leaves, in whose ear the hinge of the gate of Gehinnom revolves. What did she do to earn this punishment? The Yerushalmi attributes it to her supposed piety in fasting, which she took pains to publicize, or, according to another opinion, to exaggerate. Nevertheless, the departed relates, Miriam is scheduled to be relieved of this onus by none other than Shimon ben Shetach, the Nasi (President of the Sanhedrin), who will replace her upon his passing. What was his sin? Before becoming nasi, he promised to use his position to eradicate the scourge of sorcery, but he failed to do so upon attaining his office. Upon hearing this, the friend immediately goes to Shimon ben Shetach, who undertakes to fulfill his campaign promise, while marveling that he had never even expressed it verbally to the public, but merely had resolved in his own heart to do so! What are we to glean from this passage?

This perplexing tale begins with Miriam Onion-Leaves, and it is her name that gives us the clue to unraveling this enigma. There is a striking difference between the onion and other vegetables: other

vegetables have a kelippa and a tokh, but the onion has only the former; after each peel comes another peel. The onion is thus the symbol of things which have only an exterior, but no core. The Yerushalmi condemns that which has no inner truth, that which merely consists of a nice package. Miriam Onion-Leaves pretends that her fasting is about a desire to better herself, but the core is a desire for public acclamation; Shimon ben Shetach fools himself into believing that he wants the position of nasi in order to eliminate paganism, but he soon forgets his resolve. It is the message from the next world that reminds the Nasi of the consequences of breaking a promise, even one made in his own mind.

Judaism demands that, just as one should not write a check unless he has funds to cover it in the bank, one must also have "coverage" for all his assertions, promises and even intentions. The Torah despises facades and hypocrisy. We must inspect our actions, making sure that they validate our words and thoughts. Indeed, this explains another detail, namely, that Miriam was punished through her ear. This alludes to the fact that she related to things as they sound, not as they truly are.

With this in mind, we can return to the Gemara in Avoda Zara cited above. The template of Moshe in the desert shows us that it is insufficient to memorize and declaim the rabbi's words verbatim, being satisfied with the way they appear at first glance, on a kelippa level. Instead, we must understand them well and plumb their depths, exposing the tokh. This requires a great deal of time, but it is the only way to ensure that at our core, we are people of truth. (*This sicha was delivered at se'uda shelishit of Shabbat Parashat Ki Tavo 5756 [1996].*)

#### **MACHON ZOMET**

## **Shabbat B'Shabbato**

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak, Yeshivat Har Etzion

**T**he passage of the "Tochacha"-a strong rebuke of Bnei Yisrael-describes many troubles which may happen to the nation if it does not observe the commands of the Torah (Chapter 28 of Devarim). Moshe gives a long list of misfortunes, some natural and others caused by humans. Among the man-made disasters Moshe describes the enemies of the nation. But in this listing there is one very surprising element.

Throughout the passage, as Moshe repeats his description of the enemies several times, it is clear that he is discussing an unfamiliar enemy. First, Moshe notes, "The fruit of your land and everything that you produce will be eaten by a nation that you do not know" [28:33]. He continues, emphasizing again, "G-d will send you and the king you appoint over you to a nation whom you do not know, neither you nor your ancestors" [28:36]. Then another even more unusual nation which will attack Yisrael is described, "G-d will raise up over

you a nation from far away, from the ends of the earth, as the eagle flies, a nation whose language you cannot understand" [28:49]. In the end, the exile among all the far away nations is once again described, "And G-d will disperse you among all the nations, from one end of the earth to the other, and there you will serve other G-ds which you have not known, you or your ancestors, made of wood and stone" [28:64].

And then, after repeated references to unfamiliar nations which will bring misfortune to Yisrael, the rebuke ends with a verse that completely reverses the line of thought: "And G-d will return you to Egypt in ships, along the route about which I told you that you would never again see. And you will offer yourselves for sale as slaves and maidservants to your enemies, but nobody will be willing to buy." [28:68]. Egypt, of course, is not a faraway and unknown nation, and the G-ds of Egypt are not "G-ds which you have not known." What is the meaning of this sudden change, coming as it does at the very end of the Tochacha?

Evidently the main objective of the passage of the rebuke is to describe the difficult conditions of the exile and the many troubles and disasters which may occur. From this point of view, the stranger an enemy nation is to us the more severely we will feel oppressed by them. But in the end, the greatest problem of all is what is described in the last verse. While it is true that a return to Egypt is not unprecedented for Bnei Yisrael, from the spiritual point of view it is a symbol of the worst possible situation: it is a return to the status of Bnei Yisrael before they received the Torah, when the main condition to receive it was the obligation to observe the word of G-d, who took the nation out of Egypt. The exodus from Egypt was considered an irreversible step-"And G-d will return you to Egypt in ships, along the route about which I told you that you would never again see." Thus, the return to Egypt is a very drastic change indeed in the process of exile that Bnei Yisrael have gone through up to this point. This great tragedy appears only at the end, as the worst threat of all. It is the final step which might occur if all the previous tragedies instituted by the other nations will not cause Yisrael to repent.

#### **RABBI DOVID SIEGEL**

## **Haftorah**

**T**his week's haftorah brings us to the concluding dimensions of Hashem's encompassing efforts to comfort the Jewish people. The prophet Yeshaya shares with us a glimpse of the glorious era of Mashiach and reveals Hashem's unbelievable sensitivity and concern for His chosen nation. Yeshaya begins, "Rise and project your light because the radiance of Hashem shines upon you." (60:1) The prophet's message is that in the days of Mashiach the Jewish people will serve as a reflection of Hashem's light unto the nations of the world. Yeshaya continues,

"Lift your eyes and see them coming; your sons coming from afar and your daughters accompanied by the kings of the world." (60:3-5) The cloud of darkness and confusion which continuously plagues society will finally be lifted and the entire world will flow into Jerusalem in streams to discover the truths of Hashem and His Torah. Instead of the all too familiar scene of the Jewish people flowing out of their homeland into exile, a new flow will occur. Not only will our oppressors permit us to return to Israel, they will even personally escort us back to our homeland. And to complete this picture, nations will display sincere interest in the Jewish people's traditions and will flock to our homeland to discover our Jewish values and systems. The influx will be so overwhelming that we will wonder in amazement if we are merely imagining these sights, or if, in truth, history has made a full turnabout.

The prophet continues, "All the choice sheep of Kedar will gather to you.... to be offered on My altar and accepted with desire." (60: 7) The nations of the world will appreciate in sincerity the value of service to Hashem through sacrifice and will continuously offer Him an abundance of sacrifices. In place of their cruel campaign for thousands of years to destroy and never allow the reconstruction of the Bais Hamikdash they will finally comprehend spiritual values and utilize the Bais Hamikdash to capacity. The prophet adds, "And foreign nations will build your walls and their kings will contribute the funds." (60:10) Even the demolished walls of Israel's cities will be rebuilt by her oppressors, nations who previously acted so harshly toward the Jewish people.

Hashem explains the reason for this unexpected reversal and says, "Because in My time of anger I smote you and in My time of desire for you, I will show you My compassion." (60:10) The Metzudos Dovid explains this passage in the following manner. Needless to say, the experiences of the Jewish people are unparalleled by any other nation. Their extent of shame, persecution and tragedy covers the pages of world history in awesome proportions. This is because they, and only they, are the direct subject of Hashem's disturbance and anger. Unlike the nations of the world who are generally ignored by Hashem the Jewish people are always in His direct focus. Hashem responds to our every turn and reprimands us accordingly with the constant severe beatings we suffer. But all of this is an outgrowth of His unconditional love for us and His determination to keep us on the right path. And when the moment arrives for Hashem to display His kindness to His people it will be done in these very same proportions. Being the direct subject of Hashem's concern and compassion Hashem will shower His love upon His people in a most encompassing way. Hashem pledges to reverse the unpleasant experiences of the Jewish people's past and replace them with a glorious future. He therefore

commits Himself to undoing the darkness of our past with the indescribable brightness of our future.

The Jewish nation finds it quite difficult to forget the pain and shame of their exile and to this Hashem responds in a most magnificent way. Hashem informs them that their return from exile will be through none other than those very same nations who were responsible for the exile. They will personally escort the Jews back to their homeland with dignity and respect and will actually crave to be amongst those who are privileged to reside in the land of Israel. Regarding this, Yeshaya says, "And the sons of your past oppressors shall humbly walk to you and all of your previous scornors shall prostrate themselves before you." (60:14) And as we cited earlier, these very same nations and sovereigns who labored so diligently to tear down the walls of Israel will now personally rebuild them.

The prophet completes the picture and states in the name of Hashem, "In place of copper I will bring gold and in place of steel I will bring silver. I will convert your previous tax collectors into peaceful acquaintances and your oppressors into charitable associates." (60:17) Hashem's compassion for His people knows no bounds and demands that even their financial oppression must be rectified. Therefore in place of the oppressors' unwarranted tax collections from the Jewish people, these same oppressors will offer the Jews an abundance of personal monetary gifts. All the stolen Jewish wealth will be graciously returned ten-fold and in addition these same collectors will generously contribute considerable financial resources to the Jewish people. (see Radak, Malbim, ad loc.)

The sum total of Hashem's restoration plan for the Jewish people is best described in the following words of the prophet. "In place of your previous status, forsaken and despised I shall establish you the majesty of the world, the joy for all generations." (60:15) Oh, if we could only see this now! © 2007 Rabbi D. Siegel & Project Genesis, Inc.

### **RABBI SHLOMO KATZ**

## **Hama'ayan**

**T**his day, Hashem, your G-d, commands you la'asot these decrees and the statutes..." (26:16)

Translated simply, "la'asot" in the above verse means, "to do." However, "la'asot" also means, "to make." Thus, says R' Aharon Perlow of Karlin z"l, we can read this verse: "Hashem, your G-d, has commanded you to make this day," i.e., to make it worthwhile and memorable. How? Through "these decrees and the statutes," i.e., through mitzvah observance. (Bet Aharon) © 2000 Rabbi S. Katz & Project Genesis, Inc.