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Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

Some 20 or so years ago, with the help from the Ashdown Foundation, I initiated a conference at the Hebrew University, Jerusalem, on the future of Jewish peoplehood. I feared the deepening divisions between secular and ultra-orthodox in Israel, between the various denominations in the Diaspora, and between Israel and the Diaspora themselves.

It was a glittering array of Jewry's brightest minds: academics from 16 different countries representing all the shadings of Jewish identity. There were professors from Harvard, Yale and Princeton as well as most of Israel's universities. It was a scintillating success, and at the same time, a total failure.

Halfway through the second day, I turned to my wife Elaine and said, "The speaking is brilliant. The listening is non-existent." Eventually I could bear it no longer. "Let's leave," I said to her. I could not handle yet more skilled presentations from minds that were parti pris, lucid, coherent, but totally closed to ideas that lay outside the radius of their preconceptions. Far from being a set of solutions to the divisions within Jewry, the conference perfectly epitomised the problem.

We decided to travel south to Arad, to meet for the first time the great (and very secular) novelist Amos Oz. I mentioned this to a friend. He winced. "What," he asked, "do you hope to achieve? Do you really want to convert him?" "No," I replied, "I want to do something much more important. I want to listen to him."

And so it was. For two hours we sat in Amos's book-lined basement study at the edge of the desert, and listened. Out of that meeting came, I believe, a genuine friendship. He stayed secular. I stayed religious. But something magical, transformative, happened nonetheless. We listened to one another.

I cannot speak for Amos, but I can for myself. I felt the presence of a deep mind, a feeling intellect, a master of language -- Amos is one of the few people I know incapable of uttering a boring sentence -- and one who has wrestled in his own way with what it means to be a Jew. Since then I have had a public dialogue with him, and another with his daughter Fania Oz-Salzberger. But it began with an act of sustained, focused listening.

Shema is one of the key words of the book of Devarim, where it appears no less than 92 times. It is, in fact, one of the key words of Judaism as a whole. It is central to the two passages that form the first two paragraphs of the prayer we call the Shema, one in last week's parsha, the other in this week's. (Technically, reciting the Shema is not an act of prayer at all. It is a fundamentally different type of action: it is an act of Talmud Torah, of learning Torah (see Menahot 99b). In prayer, we speak to God. In study we listen to God.)

What is more: it is untranslatable. It means many things: to hear, to listen, to pay attention, to understand, to internalise and to respond. It is the closest biblical Hebrew comes to a verb that means "to obey."

In general, when you encounter a word in any language that is untranslatable into your own, you are close to the beating pulse of that culture. To understand an untranslatable word, you have to be prepared to move out of your comfort zone and enter a mindset that is significantly different from yours.

At the most basic level, Shema represents that aspect of Judaism that was most radical in its day: that God cannot be seen. He can only be heard. Time and again Moses warns against making or worshipping any physical representation of the Divine. As he tells the people: It is a theme that runs through the Bible. Moses insistently reminds the people that at Mount Sinai: "The Lord spoke to you out of the fire. You heard the sound of words but saw no form; there was only a voice" (Deut. 4:12). Even when Moses mentions seeing, he is really talking about listening. A classic example occurs in the opening verses of next week's parsha: See [re'eh], I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse -- the blessing if you listen [tishme'u] to the commands of the Lord your God that I am giving you today; the curse if you do not listen [lo tishme'u] to the commands of the Lord your God. (Deut. 11:26-28)

This affects our most basic metaphors of knowing. To this day, in English, virtually all our words for understanding or intellect are governed by the metaphor of sight. We speak of insight, hindsight, foresight, vision and imagination. We speak of people being perceptive, of making an observation, of adopting a perspective. We say, "it appears that." When we understand something, we say, "I see." (See George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, Metaphors We Live By, University of Chicago Press, 1980.) This entire linguistic constellation is the legacy of the philosophers of ancient Greece, the supreme example in all history

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of a visual culture.

Judaism, by contrast, is a culture of the ear more than the eye. As Rabbi David Cohen, the disciple of Rav Kook known as 'the Nazirite', pointed out in his book, Kol ha-Nevuah, the Babylonian Talmud consistently uses the metaphor of hearing. So when a proof is brought, it says Ta shma, 'Come and hear.' When it speaks of inference it says, Shema mina, 'Hear from this.' When someone disagrees with an argument, it says Lo shemiyah leih, 'he could not hear it.' When it draws a conclusion it says, Mashma, 'from this it can be heard.' Maimonides calls the oral tradition, Mipi hashemua, 'from the mouth of that which was heard.' In Western culture understanding is a form of seeing. In Judaism it is a form of listening.

What Moses is telling us throughout Devarim is that God does not seek blind obedience. The fact that there is no word for 'obedience' in biblical Hebrew, in a religion of 613 commands, is stunning in itself (modern Hebrew had to borrow a verb, letzayet, from Aramaic). He wants us to listen, not just with our ears but with the deepest resources of our minds. If God had simply sought obedience, he would have created robots, not human beings with a will of their own. Indeed if He had simply sought obedience, He would have been content with the company of angels, who constantly sing God's praises and always do His will.

God, in making human beings "in His image," was creating otherness. And the bridge between self and other is conversation: speaking and listening. When we speak, we tell others who and what we are. But when we listen, we allow others to tell us who they are. This is the supremely revelatory moment. And if we can't listen to other people, then we certainly can't listen to God, whose otherness is not relative but absolute.

Hence the urgency behind Moses' double emphasis in this week's parsha, the opening line of the second paragraph of the Shema: "If you indeed heed [shamo'a tishme'u] my commands with which I charge you today, to love the Lord your God and worship Him with all your heart and with all your soul" (Deut. 11:13). A more forceful translation might be: "If you listen -- and I mean really listen."

One can almost imagine the Israelites saying to Moses, "OK. Enough already. We hear you," and Moses replying, "No you don't. You simply don't understand what is happening here. The Creator of the entire universe is taking a personal interest in your welfare and destiny: you, the smallest of all nations and by no means the most righteous. Have you any idea of what that means?" Perhaps we still don't.

Listening to another human being, let alone God, is an act of opening ourselves up to a mind radically other than our own. This takes courage. To listen is to make myself vulnerable. My deepest certainties may be shaken by entering into the mind of one who thinks quite differently about the world. But it is essential to our humanity. It is the antidote to narcissism: the belief that we are the centre of the universe. It is also the antidote to the fundamentalist mindset characterised by the late Professor Bernard Lewis as, "I'm right; you're wrong; go to hell."

Listening is a profoundly spiritual act. It can also be painful. It is comfortable not to have to listen, not to be challenged, not to be moved outside our comfort zone. Nowadays, courtesy of Google filters, Facebook friends, and the precise targeting of individuals made possible by the social media, it is easy to live in an echo-chamber in which we only get to hear the voices of those who share our views. But, as I said in a TED lecture last year, "It's the people not like us who make us grow."

Hence the life-changing idea: Listening is the greatest gift we can give to another human being. To be listened to, to be heard, is to know that someone else takes me seriously. That is a redemptive act.

Twenty years ago I sat in a lecture hall in a university in Jerusalem and listened to a series of great minds not listening to one another. I concluded that the divisions in the Jewish world were not about to heal, and would never heal until we understood the deep spiritual truth in Moses' challenge: "If you listen -- and I mean, really listen." *Covenant and Conversation 5778 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"And now Israel what does the Lord Your G-d ask of you, only to revere the Lord your G-d and to walk in all of His ways, and to love Him and to serve the Lord your G-d with all your heart and with all your soul. To observe the commandments of the Lord and His statutes for your good…" (Deuteronomy 10:11-13) Is that all? In the words of the Sages of the Talmud, "And is that such a small matter to accomplish?" (B.T. Berakhot 33b) How can the Torah express such a difficult request in such an offhand manner?

A significant experience at the beginning of my teaching career intensifies the question. Almost four

decades ago, when teaching Talmud, at the James Striar School of Yeshiva University for those without previous Yeshiva background, the star of the class was a brilliant young man from Montreal who progressed from barely being able to read the words in Aramaic to real proficiency in analyzing a difficult Tosafot (super-commentary). At the end of the year, he decided to leave both Yeshiva University as well his newly found Torah observance!

His explanation has remained imprinted in my consciousness all these years: "As a non-religious Jew, I would get up each morning asking myself how I wished to spend the day; as a religious Jew, I must get up each morning asking myself how G-d wants me to spend the day. The pressure is simply too intense for me to take…"

I was sorely disappointed – but I did understand his tension. Indeed, "he got it". He understood that true religious devotion is more than praying at certain times each day and subscribing to specific do's and don'ts; true religious devotion means dedicating every moment to a higher ideal, to answering a Divine call whose message you can never be certain that you correctly discern. Although it may very well be fulfilling it is also difficult and even pressurizing, to be a sincerely religious Jew. So how can the Bible query "What does the Lord your G-d ask of you but only … to love Him and serve… (Him) with all your heart and with all your soul?" But only?! And how can it be "for your good," Letov lakh?

This question may be linked to a curious comparison made by the text of our Torah reading between the land of Egypt and the land of Israel – within the context of a lyrical exposition of the grandeur of the Holy Land and the luscious quality of its fruit: "For the land which you are coming to inherit is not like the land of Egypt which you left, where you (merely) seeded your seed and watered with your feet a garden of vegetation (the water came naturally from the overflow of the Nile River); the land which you are crossing there to inherit is a land of mountains and valleys, (making you dependent upon) heavenly rains to drink water; it is a land which the Lord your G-d constantly investigates, the eyes of the Lord your G-d being upon it from the beginning of the year until end-year" (Deuteronomy 11:10,11). Is then the fact that Israel does not have a ready and plentiful source of water as has Egypt, that the land of Israel is dependent upon the rains of Divine grace which come as a result of the Jewish people's moral and ethical standing, that agricultural activity is a much more arduous and precarious a task than it is in Egypt, a reason for praising Israel? It seems to me that Egypt is a far better option if we were to be given the choice!

It is fascinating to note that both of the issues we have raised thus far, the Torah, which is the source of our responsibilities towards G-d, and the land of Israel, which is the medium through which our nation will flourish and impart the message of ethical monotheism to the world, are both uniquely called morasha or heritage, by the Bible (Exodus 6:8, Deuteronomy 33:4). Yerusha is the usual term for inheritance; morasha is translated as heritage. The Jerusalem Talmud explains that an inheritance is often received through no expenditure of effort on the part of the recipient; a morasha, on the other hand, implies intense exertion, physical and/or emotional input, commitment and even sacrifice on the part of the recipient.

The verb form of morasha, l'horish, also means to conquer, and conquest implies struggle and even sacrifice. At the same time, the basic verb form around which morasha is built is vavresh shin, almost the very same letters as shin, yud, resh(yud and vav are virtually interchangeable in Hebrew) which spells shir or song. And the Midrashic Sages already noted the linguistic comparison between morasha and m'orasa, fiancee or beloved.

All of this leads us to one inescapable conclusion: those objects, ideals and people for which we have labored intensively and sacrificed unsparingly are the very one we love the most and value above all others. The Mishnah in Avot teaches, "In accordance with the pain is the reward;" my teacher and mentor Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik teaches, "In accordance with the pain is the sanctity;" we learn from the word morasha that "in accordance with the pain is the love." Note the experiences which in retrospect give the most satisfaction and which everyone loves to recount are rarely the days of lazy relaxation we spend on vacation, but more usually the sacrifices during periods of poverty or the battles in time of war. Ask any parent about the special love he/she has for the one child who needed the most care and commitment because of a serious illness or accident and you immediately understand the inextricable connection between conquest and song, commitment and love, intensive effort and emotional gratification. A life without ideals or people for whom one would gladly sacrifice is a life not worth living; a life devoid of emotional commitments is a life which has merely passed one by but which has never been truly lived.

Erich Siegel was wrong when he said that "to love means never to have to say I'm sorry"; but it is correct to say that one who is loved need not say thank-you to the one who has sacrificed, expended effort, on his/her behalf. Jacobs's fourteen years of hard work for Rachel were"as only a few days" because of his great love for her, attests the Bible. A husband who has the privilege of easing the pain of his beloved wife, if but for a few moments, is grateful for the privilege. And our commitment to G-d – with all our heart, soul and might- is a small thing to ask as long as it is an expression of our mutual love. In the final

analysis, it is certainly for our good, because it gives ultimate meaning, purpose and eternity to our finite lives.

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

There is a subdued sense of frustration and even disappointment in the words of Moshe as he speaks to the Jewish people throughout this entire book of Dvarim. This sense of frustration is akin to that of a parent speaking to a recalcitrant teenage child who simply does not understand the ramifications of his/her behavior and the reality of the ways of the world.

Since perhaps many if not most of us have been in such a situation in our lifetime, we, as parents, can all empathize and sympathize with Moshe. His main complaint to the Jewish people, if it can be summed up in a vernacular phrase, is that they just don't get it. By now, after all the miracles that God has wrought for them; the granting of the Torah and making them a special people with an exalted purpose, they still seem to cherish being ordinary and not in any way special or unique.

This attitude of theirs will later be summed up in the books of prophecy of Israel in the statement "…that the House of Israel is just the same as all of the other nations of the world." It is this inability of the Jewish people to appreciate its true role and to understand its Godly mission of eternity that gnaws at Moshe and is reflected, even subliminally, in his words. He feels personally dissatisfied that this central message of Jewish life did not completely register with a large portion of the Jewish community. To him, the message is so clear that it is beyond debate. Nevertheless, he senses that as far as a large portion of the Jewish people is concerned, this is certainly not the case.

This problem has dogged the Jewish community throughout its long and difficult history. In our generation it has pretty much achieved an acute if not even mortal status. If Jews do not feel special, if they do not maintain their internal self identity and self-worth, then eventually all the forces of assimilation will overwhelm them.

There was a time when Jews could rely ruefully on the hatred and discrimination of the nations of the world to keep them Jewish, so to speak. Although this hatred and discrimination has not disappeared completely, it has abated in much of the Western world. It can no longer be relied upon to keep Jews Jewish.

In our time one must want to be Jewish and be willing to make binding commitments to remain part of the Jewish people. There is no doubt in my mind that even in the eternity of the truth of the words of Moshe, he glimpses the problems in the situation of the Jewish people in our time. I hope that we will somehow be able to alleviate his sense of frustration and disappointment and that he will see within us a generation, especially a younger generation, of Jews who are dedicated and loyal and who in their essence really get it.

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Over and over our portion emphasizes the importance of inheriting the land of Israel. (Deuteronomy 8:1, 9:1) Why is Israel so crucial to our covenant with God?

In the end, the goal of the Jewish people is to do our share to redeem the world. This is our mission as the chosen people and this can only be accomplished through committing ourselves to the chosen land, Israel.

In fact, the first eleven chapters of the Torah are universal. God chose humankind over all species. He created. But humankind did not fulfill the chosen role God had assigned to it. The world was destroyed by flood, and soon after all of humanity was spread across the earth in the generation of dispersion.

God then chose Abraham and Sarah to be the father and mother of the Jewish people. Their mandate was not to be insular but to be a blessing for the entire world. It is not that the souls of Abraham and Sarah were superior; it is rather their task which had a higher purpose.

Ultimately, we became a people who are charged to follow halakhah, the pathway to Torah ethicism, which leads to the redemption of the Jewish people, through which the world is to be redeemed. Our task is to function as the catalyst in the generation of the redeemed world. The movement of chosenness is not from the particular to the more particular, but rather from the particular to the more universal. Chosenness is, therefore, not a statement of superiority but of responsibility.

The idea of our chosenness has always been associated with our sovereignty over the chosen land. From this perspective, Israel is important not only as the place that guarantees political refuge; not only as the place where more mitzvot (commandments) can be performed than any other; and not only the place where – given the high rate of assimilation and intermarriage in the exile – our continuation as a Jewish nation is assured. But first and foremost, Israel is the place, the only place, where we have the potential to carry out and fulfill our mandate as the chosen people. In exile, we are not in control of our destiny; we cannot create the ideal society Torah envisions. Only in a Jewish state do we have the political sovereignty and judicial autonomy that we need to be the or lagoyim (light unto the nations) and to establish a just society from which

other nations can learn the basic ethical ideals of Torah.

Of course, Jews living in the Diaspora can make significant individual contributions to the betterment of the world. And there are model Diaspora communities that impact powerfully on Am Yisrael and humankind. But I would insist that the destiny of the Jewish people—that is, the place where we as a nation can realize the divine mandate to Abraham of "in you will be blessed all the peoples of the earth"—can only be played out in the land of Israel.

From this perspective, those living in the chosen land have the greater potential to more fully participate in carrying out the chosen people idea. Only there do we, as a nation, have the possibility to help repair the world—the ultimate challenge of Am Yisrael.

RABBI DAVID S. LEVIN

Their Own Reward

A single word can spark a long discussion among the Rabbis especially if that word has different meanings. Our parasha begins with one such word, "And it will be [eikev] because of (as a consequence of) your listening to these ordinances and your observing and performing them, then Hashem your Elokim will safeguard for you the covenant and the kindness that He swore to your forefathers." Our familiarity with the root of this word (eiyen, kuf, vet) stems from our forefather Ya'akov. Ya'akov received his name because he was holding onto the "heel" of his twin Eisav when they were born: "And after that his brother went out and his hand was holding on the [akeiv] heel of Eisav and he called his name Ya'akov."

The Jastrow Dictionary, a primary source for Biblical and Talmudic volumes, gives several definitions for the word eikev. The primary meaning of the word eikev is "to follow or come at the end". It is easy to see how the word is then related to heel. The Gemara speaks of a person walking into a room whose head enters first and his heel enters last or follows. The word can also mean "a consequence as something which follows from one's actions". It can also mean "an end or, in the future, as that is what follows from now."

Rashi understands this passage as stemming from the meaning of the word as "heel" but not the heel itself. He compares these mitzvot to, "the relatively light commandments that a person tramples with his heels (does not take seriously enough)." People often prioritize a hierarchy of mitzvot. The Gur Aryeh describes these mitzvot as if "they seem light to a person in that their fulfillment does not seem worthy of significant reward." Since Hashem did not rank the mitzvot, one must assume that all mitzvot are important and are all rewarded. (There are only a few mitzvot in the Torah where the reward for the observance of that mitzvah is written.) Rashi suggests that one should give importance even to these "minor" mitzvot since through their observance one will receive the reward of Hashem's covenant.

The Ramban focuses on another meaning for the word eikev, namely "an end or result." He begins with Rashi's premise that people think that the laws that govern us every day must be less important than the laws which pertain to Shabbat or Yom Tov. The laws of commerce are treated lightly since many of them fall under the guise of common practice and logic. The Ramban uses Onkelos to demonstrate that the term eikev is circular. Our actions bring about a reaction from Hashem, thus our following the mitzvot causes Hashem to fulfill the covenant. The Ramban also insists that it would be impossible in a large nation for everyone to fulfill the mitzvot completely, but that is not what is required. This is a community condition and the reward is to the community not the individual. The covenant between Hashem and the people which includes the rewards from Hashem is only a national agreement that is fulfilled by individuals but judged as a nation. The reward is not for personal gain.

HaRav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch emphasizes another meaning of the word eikev, "a natural consequence." All of the different types of mitzvot here are "classed together under the concept mishpatim, nothing but 'legal maxims' with which the most varied conditions and relationships of the spiritual and material life of the individual and state have to be carried out… for which no thanks and no reward can be claimed, are they to be carried out." Hirsch shows us that every mitzvah should be performed without expectation of reward. Performing the mitzvot is our attempt to maintain that harmony of the world by giving of that part of the harmony which is the unique responsibility of man. "That is why all mitzvot without distinction should be performed with equal conscientious faithfulness." Hirsch's emphasis then is the performance of mitzvot as doing our part in the world and not with an eye to what we might receive for that action.

HaRav Zalman Sorotskin, the Aznayim L'Torah, sees eikev as the actual part of the body, the heel. We might think that the rosh, the head, is the part of the body that rules over all other parts. Yet we say, "all of my bones will say to Hashem who is like You." Not just the head but even the heel must serve Hashem. But how can one serve Hashem with his heel? Sorotskin gives several examples: the Tanach informs us "turn from evil and do good," walking to the Beit HaMedrash, house of study, walking to visit a mourner or a person who is ill, attending a simcha or doing an act of kindness for someone, or performing a positive commandment or avoiding a negative commandment.

The Or HaChaim combines his understanding

of the word eikev with another word in the sentence, v'hayah, it will be. Our Rabbis tell us that the word v'hayah is always tied to simcha, joy. This indicates that there will be simcha as a result of our observing and following the mitzvot of Hashem. The Or HaChaim explains that the Gemara also uses the term eikev in its description of the end of days and the coming of the Mashiach. The end of days will be a time of great turmoil and confusion but it will conclude with great joy at the coming of the Mashiach. This is the completeness of Man, the time of simcha, as a time when one realizes the righteousness of his own actions. The reward that he receives is the knowledge that he has done his part in the world as we learn "the reward of a commandment is the commandment itself."

Each meaning of eikev guides us. As Jews we have a responsibility in our covenant with Hashem. The fulfillment of our part in this covenant brings us the ultimate reward of happiness and joy in the performance of our part in the world. As a consequence of our actions, Hashem also fulfills the promises of the land of Yisrael with all of its riches and spiritual rewards that are a natural part of the land. Hashem will cause our efforts to succeed and prosper and He will grant us the ultimate reward of Peace. This is not just the Peace between Yisrael and its neighbors, it is the inner Peace that we will have with ourselves in knowing that our actions on this Earth have made our lives and the lives of others worthwhile. That is the ultimate reward.

ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

Birkat Hamazon

Translated for the Encyclopedia Talmudit
by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

Our Rabbis derived from the words "You should bless Almighty G-d on this good land" that Biblically one must include three blessings when reciting the grace after meals, one for eating ("Birkat Hazan") one for the land ("Birkat Haaretz") and the third to rebuild Jerusalem ("Boneh Yerushalayim").Nevertheless it is an accepted premise as well, that Moses enacted the first blessing and Joshua the second and David and Solomon the third blessing. We would have to conclude therefore, that the blessings were established at Sinai, but Moses, Joshua , David and Solomon drafted the text as it appears in our prayer books.

Since the first blessing was instituted by Moses our teacher, it is puzzling that one would include the phrase from the Book of Psalms "He has opened his hands and feeds all his creatures" (psalms 145;16), a sentence that was written by King David. However we also know there were psalms that were written before King David as well. Thus, when we include the sentence sited we state the word "Ka'amur" (as it was stated) and not the word "Ka'Katuv" (as it was written).

It would seem likewise that the original language ("Nusach") of the blessing was not the same as we have today and that even reciting it in Aramaic would fulfill one's obligation. Similarily if one would sing the song of "Tzur Mishello" on the Shabbat during the meal, one would ostensibly fulfill the obligation of Birkat Hamazone as well, since each of the stanzas have the same theme as the "Birkat Hamazon" (grace after meal). Hence it would seem that if one was to avoid this problem ,one would have to make a conscious effort when singing this song, not to fulfill their obligation of "Birkat Hamazon', so that when one would recite the Birkat Hamazon one will be fulfilling their obligation properly with the "Nusach" of our Sages.

RABBI PINCHAS WINSTON

Perceptions

"If you listen to these judgments and observe and do them, then God, your God, will keep the covenant and kindness with you which He made with your fathers." (Devarim 7:12) Many things in Judaism seem to be a two-edged sword. For instance, it is a relief it is to have the Three Weeks behind us, even though dealing with a mountain of unwashed laundry pales compared to what the Jews of the destruction had to live and die through. People can't help but feel good to get on with the summer without the restrictions of mourning.

On the other hand, the Three Weeks over, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are now in their final stretch. They'll be here, b"H, in just six weeks. Just SIX weeks! Yikes! We have to behave ourselves the rest of the summer. We don't want to add to the list of things to ask forgiveness for, more than we already have!

Relying on good deeds to counterbalance questionable acts is not a good idea either: Rebi Yitzchak further asked: "What is the meaning of the verse, 'He who goes after tzedakah and mercy finds life, righteousness and honor' (Mishlei 21:21). Because a man goes after tzedakah, he finds righteousness? The purpose of the verse, however, is to teach us that if a man is anxious to give charity, the Holy One, Blessed is He, gives him money with which to give it."

Rebi Nachman bar Yitzchak says: "The Holy One, Blessed is He, sends him men who are fitting recipients of charity, so that he may be rewarded for assisting them."

Who are unfit? Those mentioned in the exposition of Rabbah, when he said: "What is the meaning of the verse, 'Let them be made to stumble before You; in the time of Your anger deal with them' (Yirmiyahu 18:23)? Yirmiyahu said to The Holy One, Blessed is He: 'Master of the Universe, even at the time when they overcome their evil inclination and wish to do charity before You, cause them to stumble through men who are not fitting recipients, so that they should

receive no reward for assisting them!'." (Bava Basra 9b)

As Tosfos points out, Yirmiyahu wasn't referring to ALL of the Jewish people, just to the Bnei Anasos. Anasos was the name of one of the Levitical cities given to "the children of Aharon" in the tribe of Binyomin (Yehoshua 21:13-18; Divrei Hayomim 6:54-60). It was also Yirmiyahu's home, and it was the people Anasos who plotted against him. Hence, his request to God.

The point here is how it is possible for a person to think they are doing a mitzvah, and yet not be accomplishing what they think. As they give their tzedakah, they may think they have done something worthy by helping someone truly in need but may be very wrong. It is not only a merit to give tzedakah, but it is a merit to give it to the right person as well.

The same is true of any mitzvah. Each mitzvah has to be done properly with the proper intention. If it isn't, then we can lose the merit to do another mitzvah we want to do the right way. When that happens, then the person not only loses the mitzvah they did not care to do correctly, and the one they did. They end up with NO mitzvos per se, which is a very dangerous thing come Rosh Hashanah.

Now is the time to take stock of where we hold with respect to all mitzvos, and to do each one with care, even if it doesn't speak TO us. This way, when we stand before the King on Rosh Hashanah, all mitzvos will speak FOR us.

HARAV SHLOMO WOLBE ZT"L

Bais Hamussar

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

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

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

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

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

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Mordechai Greenberg
Rosh Yeshiva, Kerem B'Yavne

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

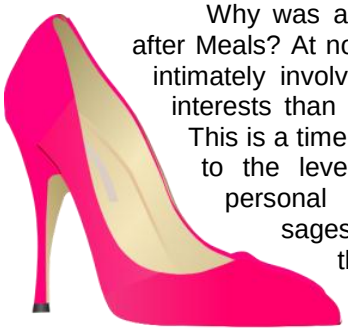
Four separate stages are described. (1) "Go for yourself" -- for your own benefit, in order to build up your specific personality. (2) "And I will make you into a great nation" -- After each individual develops himself or herself, the basis is established for nationality, and

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

Rav Avraham Yitzchak Kook wrote similar ideas with respect to the Grace after Meals that appears in this week's Torah portion. The Talmud teaches us, "Moshe set up for Yisrael the first blessing ("He who feeds His world") when the manna fell. Yehoshua added the blessing about the land (the second blessing) when they entered the land. David established the blessing 'about Your nation Yisrael and about Your city Jerusalem,' and Shlomo added the blessing about the great and holy Temple." [Berachot 48b].

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

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



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

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

Parshat Ekev is where we learn of the benefits and rewards, punishments and consequences, of following and not following the Mitzvot (commandments) set forth for us in the Torah. Among those commandments is a famous one (8:10), which says that "you will eat and you will be satisfied, and bless Hashem, your G-d, for the good land that He gave you." If you just ate food, why are you thanking G-d for land? You should be thanking Him for the food itself. Why be indirect? The answer lies in understanding the true difference between animals and people... What separates us from animals is our ability to choose, and our exercising of that choice. Our nature tells us what we NEED to do, while our mind (and religion) tells us what we SHOULD do. Therefore, the more things we do simply because of habit and without thinking, the less free will we're exercising, which makes us more like animals. Conversely, the more restraint we exercise, the more freedom we're expressing, because we weren't slaves to our nature. What makes being a Jew so special is that we have so many 'choices' of commandments we can perform, and each of those positive choices make us less like animals and more like G-d.

With this in mind, even if we already 'perform' Mitzvot now, if we do it out of habit and without thinking and actively deciding to do them, we're just as guilty of doing it 'naturally'. For Jews, deciding to do something is just as important as doing it, because then we think about why we do it, and the source, reason, and meaning of it all become part of the action. Now we can understand why we thank G-d for the LAND, when we merely eat its bread: We not only thank G-d for the bread we eat, but we also think of the land that it came from, because we've thought it through to its source, instead of taking bread at face value. The lesson of the Parsha is for us to think about what we're doing, why we're doing it, and realize how much control we have. Perhaps we should think of at least one bad habit we have, and use this lesson to push us to overcome our natural tendency to blindly surrender to that habit.