

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS**

### Covenant & Conversation

In Eikev Moses sets out a political doctrine of such wisdom that it can never become redundant or obsolete. He does it by way of a pointed contrast between the ideal to which Israel is called, and the danger with which it is faced. This is the ideal: "Observe the commands of the Lord your God, walking in His ways and revering Him. For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land -- a land with streams and pools of water, with springs flowing in the valleys and hills; a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey; a land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing; a land where the rocks are iron and you can dig copper out of the hills. When you have eaten and are satisfied, bless the Lord your God for the good land He has given you." (Deut. 8:6-10)

And this is the danger: "Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God, failing to observe His commands, His laws, and His decrees that I am giving you this day. Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.... You may say to yourself, 'My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.' But remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms His covenant, which He swore to your forefathers, as it is today." (Deut. 8:11-17)

The two passages follow directly on from one another. They are linked by the phrase "when you have eaten and are satisfied," and the contrast between them is a fugue between the verbs "to remember" and "to forget."

Good things, says Moses, will happen to you. Everything, however, will depend on how you respond. Either you will eat and be satisfied and bless God, remembering that all things come from Him -- or you will eat and be satisfied and forget to whom you owe all this. You will think it comes entirely from your own efforts: "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me." Although this may seem a small difference, it will, says Moses, make all the

difference. This alone will turn your future as a nation in its own land.

Moses' argument is brilliant and counter-intuitive. You may think, he says, that the hard times are behind you. You have wandered for forty years without a home. There were times when you had no water, no food. You were exposed to the elements. You were attacked by your enemies. You may think this was the test of your strength. It was not. The real challenge is not poverty but affluence, not slavery but freedom, not homelessness but home.

Many nations have been lifted to great heights when they faced difficulty and danger. They fought battles and won. They came through crises -- droughts, plagues, recessions, defeats -- and were toughened by them. When times are hard, people grow. They bury their differences. There is a sense of community and solidarity, of neighbours and strangers pulling together. Many people who have lived through a war know this.

The real test of a nation is not if it can survive a crisis but if it can survive the lack of a crisis. Can it stay strong during times of ease and plenty, power and prestige? That is the challenge that has defeated every civilisation known to history. Let it not, says Moses, defeat you.

Moses' foresight was little less than stunning. The pages of history are littered with the relics of nations that seemed impregnable in their day, but which eventually declined and fell and lapsed into oblivion -- and always for the reason Moses prophetically foresaw. They forgot. Memories fade. People lose sight of the values they once fought for -- justice, equality, independence, freedom. The nation, its early battles over, becomes strong. Some of its members grow rich. They become lax, self-indulgent, over-sophisticated, decadent. They lose their sense of social solidarity. They no longer feel it their duty to care for the poor, the weak, the marginal, the losers. They begin to feel that such wealth and position as they have is theirs by right. The bonds of fraternity and collective responsibility begin to fray. The less well-off feel an acute sense of injustice. The scene is set for either revolution or conquest. Societies succumb to external pressures when they have long been weakened by internal decay. That was the danger Moses foresaw and about which he warned.

His analysis has proved true time and again, and it has been restated by several great analysts of

**TORAS AISH IS A WEEKLY PARSHA  
NEWSLETTER DISTRIBUTED VIA EMAIL  
AND THE WEB AT WWW.AISHDAS.ORG/TA.  
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the human condition. In the fourteenth century, the Islamic scholar Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406) argued that when a civilisation becomes great, its elites get used to luxury and comfort, and the people as a whole lose what he called their *asabiyyah*, their social solidarity. The people then become prey to a conquering enemy, less civilised than they are but more cohesive and driven.

The Italian political philosopher Giambattista Vico (1668-1744) described a similar cycle: People, he said, "first sense what is necessary, then consider what is useful, next attend to comfort, later delight in pleasures, soon grow dissolute in luxury, and finally go mad squandering their estates." Affluence begets decadence.

In the twentieth century few said it better than Bertrand Russell in his *History of Western Philosophy*. He believed that the two great peaks of civilisation were reached in ancient Greece and Renaissance Italy, but he was honest enough to see that the very features that made them great contained the seeds of their own demise: "What had happened in the great age of Greece happened again in Renaissance Italy: traditional moral restraints disappeared, because they were seen to be associated with superstition; the liberation from fetters made individuals energetic and creative, producing a rare fluorescence of genius; but the anarchy and treachery which inevitably resulted from the decay of morals made Italians collectively impotent, and they fell, like the Greeks, under the domination of nations less civilised than themselves but not so destitute of social cohesion."

Moses, however, did more than prophesy and warn. He also taught how the danger could be avoided, and here too his insight is as relevant now as it was then. He spoke of the vital significance of memory for the moral health of a society.

Throughout history there have been many attempts to ground ethics in universal attributes of humanity. Some, like Immanuel Kant, based it on reason. Others based it on duty. Bentham rooted it in consequences ("the greatest happiness for the greatest number"). David Hume attributed it to certain basic emotions: sympathy, empathy, compassion. Adam Smith predicated it on the capacity to stand back from

situations and judge them with detachment ("the impartial spectator"). Each of these has its virtues, but none has proved fail-safe.

Judaism took, and takes, a different view. The guardian of conscience is memory. Time and again the verb *zachor*, "remember," resonates through Moses' speeches in Deuteronomy: "Remember that you were slaves in Egypt...therefore the Lord your God has commanded you to observe the Shabbat day." (Deut. 5:15) "Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years..." (Deut. 8:2) "Remember this and never forget how you provoked the Lord your God to anger in the desert..." (Deut. 9:7) "Remember what the Lord your God did to Miriam along the way after you came out of Egypt." (Deut. 24:9) "Remember what the Amalekites did to you along the way when you came out of Egypt." (Deut. 25:17) "Remember the days of old, consider the years of ages past." (Deut. 32:7)

As Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi notes in his great treatise, *Zachor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory*, "Only in Israel and nowhere else is the injunction to remember felt as a religious imperative to an entire people." Civilisations begin to die when they forget. Israel was commanded never to forget.

In an eloquent passage, the American scholar Jacob Neusner once wrote: "Civilisation hangs suspended, from generation to generation, by the gossamer strand of memory. If only one cohort of mothers and fathers fails to convey to its children what it has learned from its parents, then the great chain of learning and wisdom snaps. If the guardians of human knowledge stumble only one time, in their fall collapses the whole edifice of knowledge and understanding."

The politics of free societies depends on the handing on of memory. That was Moses' insight, and it speaks to us with undiminished power today. *Covenant and Conversation 5779 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l ©2019 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org*

**RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## Shabbat Shalom

"Not by bread alone does a human being live, but rather by that which comes forth from the Lord's mouth does a human being live." (Deuteronomy 8:3) How does the Bible view "life," that span of time that every individual desperately wishes to preserve and to lengthen, but which is rarely properly utilized? The sad truth is that no one is quite certain how best to use whatever time he/she may be given or to what purpose to dedicate it. How best to "spend" one's life is the question of questions, and one who lives without asking and answering that question runs the risk of leaving this world without ever having lived at all.

Apparently the Almighty came to the conclusion that the newly freed Israelites were not yet ready to enter the Promised Land; they required an educational “training” period of forty years – a complete generation – in the desert no-man’s-land. They were to experience a kind of “trial by heat and by cold,” with lessons to be learned by a strange mixture of divine bounty mixed together with human uncertainty: You shall remember the entire journey on which the Lord your God led you these forty years in the desert in order to afflict you, to test you to know that which is in your heart; will you keep His commandments or not? He will afflict you and He will make you hungry; He will provide you with the manna to eat which neither you nor your ancestors experienced previously in order to teach you that not by bread alone does a human being live but rather by that which comes forth from the Lord’s mouth does the human being live. (Deut. 8:1–3)

This major desert experience of the manna was a kind of “timeout” from the Garden of Eden punishment that “by the sweat of your brow shall you eat bread.” On the one hand, God was the beneficent Provider of food, a food which the Israelites only had to gather rather than to manufacture, with every individual receiving precisely what he needed each day; on the other hand, the Israelites had neither the discomfiture nor the exhilaration which is derived from the competition, the ingenuity, the sickness unto death of failure and the dizzying satisfaction of success, which accompany the backbreaking tension-producing dedication to the market place or the agricultural farm. What was the significance of the manna? Which lesson did it convey?

The most ancient (and I believe, authentic) versions of the rabbinically accepted Aramaic translation of the biblical text, Targum Onkelos, translates the last words of the verse we have just cited: “Not by bread alone does the human being exist but rather by that which comes forth from God’s mouth does a human being live.” Targum differentiates between the bread necessary for human existence, and the word of God essential to human life. “Existence” is physical subsistence; “life” is essence, the word of God, the life of spirit, of intellect, of sensitivity, of love.

For a clearer explanation of Targum’s intent, let us study the second mishna in the seventh chapter of Tractate Shabbat, where the mishna provides us with the list of the thirty-nine prohibited physical activities on the Sabbath (melakhot). The Midrash generally assumes that the source of these prohibited activities is the list of very constructive acts involved in the building of the Tabernacle to God, the Mishkan (Ex. 31:13). Whichever creative acts were involved in the construction of the Tabernacle were prohibited on the Sabbath. However, one of the prohibited activities of this mishna is “baking,” and in the construction of the Mishkan the dye extracts of the plants had to be

“boiled” in order to color the fabrics used to beautify the Sanctuary. So why does the mishna list “baking” rather than “boiling”?

The Talmud explains the discrepancy by saying that the mishna wished to highlight the procedures in bread manufacture; and indeed when looking at the prohibited acts from this perspective, the entire mishna assumes a wholly different focus. First it prohibits bread manufacture, then clothing manufacture, then leather manufacture, and finally acts of building. In effect, the mishna is teaching that the search for food, clothing, and shelter – so central to physical existence and nutritional subsistence – is to be eschewed on the Sabbath day. The days of the week are for physical existence; the Sabbath is for spiritual and intellectual life! And existence and life are the two most crucial elements in our human sojourn in this world.

The truth is that animals, no less than humans, also require food, clothing (protection from the elements), and shelter. What makes the human being uniquely human is that which goes beyond physical existence: the spiritual spark of God within him/her, the soul, the heart, and the mind of the human being, which enables him/her to think, to give, to communicate with the other, to love, to repair, and to create.

Most human beings spend their lives working for their physical existence, amassing commodities and the ultimate commodity (money), and collecting objects and things. In the desert they were freed from this pursuit, with the exception of the little time it would take to gather the manna – and no one could take more than his/her needed portion. They could spend the great majority of their time receiving – and pondering over – God’s words, God’s desire that we share with those less fortunate, God’s gift of family and friendship and community and love. The Sabbath day prohibits physical work but stresses family togetherness, Torah study, communal prayer, time-out for God, meditation, and nature walks; the Sabbath is a day of life, not mere existence!

The desert experience was a kind of eternal Sabbath, a taste of a more perfect world, when we learn to do without material extras but would hopefully begin to understand that the real purpose of human life would be to live by God’s words. And in that more perfect world, we would hopefully learn that the necessities for our existence – just as our existence itself – is fundamentally a gift from God, and that the ultimate purpose of our existence is to link ourselves to life, to God, to His will, and to His eternity. On the Sabbath, we sanctify wine, we bless the halla bread, we use the table of food as a means for songs of praise to God and words of Torah, and we link existence to essence, subsistence to God.

No wonder, then, that the Hebrew word “hayyim” (life) is always in the plural, because there can be no meaningful human life devoid of loving

relationships with others. The two letter “yud’s” (or two yids, Jews) in the center of the word are the shortened form of expressing God’s name, while the outer Hebrew letters “het” and “mem” form the Hebrew word “hom” (warmth); love, sensitivity, and caring are central for meaningful human activity on earth. I have never met an individual on his deathbed who regrets the hours he didn’t spend in the office – but most individuals on their deathbed regret the hours they didn’t spend with family and close friends. People are not remembered for the structures they erected; they are always thought about for the lives they have touched and the human situations they have helped.

Rabbi Yitzhak of Berdichev once saw a person running to and fro, as if he were “chasing his own tail.” “Where and why are you running?” he asked. “I am running to make a living,” came the reply. “Just make sure that in the process, you don’t lose your life,” remarked the wise rabbi. ©2019 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

#### **RABBI BEREL WEIN**

### **Wein Online**

In this week’s Torah reading Moshe teaches us that he was instructed by heaven to construct an ark made of wood in order to house the two tablets of stone that he received on Sinai. I have written about this subject before and it is one that has been noted heavily by the commentators to the Torah. But I have become aware of an insight that I feel has great relevance to understanding many of the issues that confront us here in Israeli society and the world generally.

Certainly, there was no shortage of gold, silver, bronze or any other type of valuable and special metal in the camp of Israel during their sojourn in the desert of Sinai. We know from the construction of the Temple/Tabernacle that large amounts of gold and silver as well as bronze were used in order to create that structure and the artifacts inside. So why would Moshe be instructed to fashion a simple and plain box of wood to house the most precious artifacts that humans have ever known – the tablets of Sinai?

Is it not almost disrespectful to treat such holiness in a mundane and ordinary fashion? After all, the tradition in all Jewish communities and synagogues is to decorate and beautify Torah coverings, crowns, breastplates and pointers. And here, the two tablets of stone of Sinai are relegated to an undecorated plain wooden box! This fact alone should make us aware that there are great and profound lessons here.

The wooden box that encased the eternal tablets of stone of Sinai represents the fact that the Torah itself requires no outside affirmations or adornments. It stands alone, it means what it says and is not subject to human improvement or editing. The fact that we decorate the appearance of the scrolls in

our synagogues is to enhance our own respect in view of the contents. Over the centuries, and especially over the last few hundred years, there are those that wished to adorn the Torah with strange but temporarily popular crowns and decorations.

There was a period in the 19th and even in the 20th century when there were those that claimed that the Torah was for socialism. Others claimed it was for capitalism or other forms of economic and government systems. Everyone attempted to adorn the Torah with its own brand of covering and decoration. By so exalting the Torah, they in fact cheapened it and made it factually irrelevant. The improvements became detriments and the unique message of Judaism was perverted if not lost completely. We are accustomed to homiletic interpretations of words and ideas of Torah. This is part of the “seventy faces” of Torah. However, we should always remember that the text means what it says. The Torah is carried in a simple unadorned wooden box. To we mere mortals, this is what makes it so meaningful. ©2019 *Rabbi Berel Wein - Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com). For more information on these and other products visit [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com)*

#### **RABBI AVI WEISS**

### **Shabbat Forshpeis**

Although we may live lives dedicated to following the commandments of the Torah, the core question of “What does God ask of us?” is posed in the Torah portion this week. It offers the following answer; “Only,” to “fear” and “love Him”...and to “observe the commandment of the Lord.” (Deuteronomy 10:12, 13)

The fact that the Torah uses the word “only” seems to imply that following the commandments is a minimal request. Yet, keeping 613 commandments is far from a small demand, it is, indeed, a major commitment that requires all of the self.

Some suggest that these words, offered as they were by Moshe (Moses), were said from his perspective. For him, it was a minimal request because for Moshe, the prophet of prophets, keeping all of the mitzvot (commandments) came naturally.

This is a bit troubling for it seems that by using the term “only,” Moshe, who was a master teacher was making a grievous error by not speaking on the level of the people. He was not speaking in the “language” they could understand.

The key to understanding the use of “only” may lie in resolving the larger question of why God gives the commandments at all. Are they primarily given for His sake, or for ours?

One could look at the mitzvot as God’s way of expressing rulership over us. When we keep His laws we profess allegiance and commitment to Him.

There is, however, an alternative approach. The mitzvot are not haphazard laws given by a God who wants “only” to rule us just for the sake of ruling us. Instead, the commandments express what God feels is best for His people. They are for our sake. It’s God’s way of saying, I’ve created a beautiful world – follow these laws and you will find inner happiness. In the words of God to Avraham (Abraham), “hithalekh lefanai veyei tamim, walk before Me, and you will find fulfillment.” (Genesis 17:1) Note the similarity between hithalekh and halakha. God tells Avraham, follow the commandments, follow the halakha-- and you will find inner peace and inner meaning.

By focusing on three major Jewish rituals, family purity, the dietary laws and Shabbat, we can better understand that the mitzvot are for our sake. These rituals correspond to the three basic human drives. Family purity corresponds to the sexual encounter, the dietary laws to eating, and Shabbat to the human quest for power. Since Judaism views human passions as God’s gifts to us, the halakha is meant in part as a mechanism to sanctify these passions, allowing us to better appreciate and find greater meaning in life itself.

Many have felt that a God of love would never have initiated commandments which seem to limit and restrict human beings. Yet, this week’s parsha tells us while these “limits” and “restrictions” are complex and sometimes difficult to follow, they are the key to living a life of meaning and holiness. When Moshe tells us what God wants, he uses the word “only” – a minimalistic request – teaching that God gives the laws out of his great concern for our welfare, for what is best for us. © 2019 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale

### **RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ**

## **Shabbat Shalom Weekly**

**T**he Torah states: "And you shall eat and be satisfied and bless the Almighty, your God, for the good land which He gave you. Guard yourself lest you forget the Lord, your God, and do not observe His commandments and His laws and His statutes which I command you this day" (Deut 8:10,11). What lesson for life are we to learn from the juxtaposition of these two verses?

In the blessings we make after eating a meal, in addition to thanking the Almighty for the land of Israel, the Sages have included thanking Him for the Covenant with Him and for the Torah which He gave us. This ensures that we focus on a Higher level, rather just the food and materialism -- which would cause us to forget the Almighty.

Therefore, this is the lesson we learn from the juxtaposition of these two verses: If you will eat and are

satisfied and bless the Almighty for just the land itself -- then (verse 11) you must be on guard not to forget the Almighty and His commandments (Chasam Sofer; Toras Moshe). When you eat in order to live and live in order to do good deeds, then your eating is elevated to a spiritual level! *Dvar Torah based on Growth Through Torah by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin © 2019 Rabbi K. Packouz*

### **RABBI DAVID LEVINE**

## **Fear or Love**

**W**ere the B’nei Yisrael only to hear the rebuke with which Moshe had begun his oration, they would probably have been too discouraged to attempt to conquer this land for they would have believed that they were too unworthy to possess the land. In Parashat Eikev Moshe turns from that rebuke and encourages the people with words of Hashem’s connection to them. His tone changes, much like the father of the people that he is, and he speaks to the people about love of Hashem and the reciprocal love that He will shower on His people.

Moshe speaks to the B’nei Yisrael, “And now, Israel, what does Hashem your Elokim ask of you but to fear Hashem your Elokim, to go in all His ways and to love Him and to serve Hashem your Elokim with all your heart and with all your soul. To keep the commandments of Hashem and His statutes which I command you today for your benefit. Behold to Hashem your Elokim are the heavens and the highest heavens, the earth and everything that is in it. Only your forefathers did Hashem cherish to love them and He chose their offspring after them, you, from among all of the peoples as this day. You shall cut away the barrier of you heart and no longer stiffen your neck. For Hashem your Elokim, He is the Elokim of the powers and the Lord of the lords, the great, mighty, and awesome Hashem who does not show favor and does not take a bribe. Who carries out judgment of orphan and widow and loves the convert to give him bread and garment. You shall love the convert for you were strangers in the Land of Egypt. Hashem your Elokim you shall fear, Him you shall serve, to Him you shall cling, and with His name you shall swear. He is your praise and He is your Elokim who did for you these great and awesome things that your eyes saw.”

HaRav Shmshon Raphael Hirsch explains that the B’nei Yisrael are still concerned about what exactly Hashem expects from them. Hirsch explains that the ideas of “following in His ways and serving Hashem” are part of the general concept which is fear of Hashem. Walking in the paths of Hashem leads us to the love of Hashem. “This developing all our forces in the presence of Hashem to the goals He has set before us in the ways which He has taught us to take, brings us happiness; these goals and these ways run so much in line with our true nature, the paths He indicates are such pleasant ones and the feeling of living under His

Eye and achieving what He meant us to accomplish is such a happy feeling of beatitude that this G-d-fearing treading His paths itself begets the love of Hashem.”

The Or HaChaim and the Kli Yakar quote the Gemara B'rachot (33b) which discusses the quality of fear of Hashem. The Gemara recalls a statement of the Rabbis who say, “everything is in the hands of Heaven except the fear of Heaven.” But is fear such a simple thing in Moshe’s mind that he should say that this is all that Hashem asks of you? The Gemara gives a parable. Two men are asked to produce a large pot. One has only a small pot and the other has a large pot. To the one who already possesses a large pot, this task is simple. To the one who only has a small pot, this task appears insurmountable. Moshe already possessed the fear of Heaven, so for him this task was easy; yet Moshe knew that those who did not yet have this fear of Heaven would find this to be difficult indeed. The Or HaChaim explains that there are really two levels of serving Hashem which Moshe describes: (1) the level of fear, and (2) the level of love of Hashem. He explains that fear is the primary level of serving Hashem but that serving Hashem out of fear is the opening of the gate of love. Moshe cautions the B'nei Yisrael to begin serving Him out of fear so they will observe all of the laws that Hashem has placed before them. When they will understand the perfection of the life which Hashem has designed for them, it will bring them to a deep love of Hashem for this tremendous gift. The Kli Yakar understands that Moshe is explaining to the people that their children who have not witnessed Hashem’s miracles will not have as close a relationship with Hashem as this generation. They will not be able to serve Hashem out of love at this time, so they must first be taught fear. Only through serving Hashem out of fear will they be brought to a level of love.

HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin believes that serving Hashem out of fear will not lead to loving Him but only to fear of punishment. He quotes Amos (3), “a lion roars, who will not fear.” He explains that this fear will only work to prevent sins if we will find that reward and punishment are consistently given. Yet we see in the world that there are righteous people who suffer and evil people who are wealthy. The fear that the Torah and Hashem desires from man is a fear based on Faith. Understanding the greatness of Hashem and His power leads us to fear and respect Him, a fear based on awe. It is that respect that leads one to love Hashem. The S'forno explains that Hashem responded to the forefathers who respected and honored Him and even changed the nature of the world for their benefit. The Or HaChaim concurs with the S'forno that it was the forefathers who chose Hashem, and He reciprocated by choosing them and their children.

There is a famous argument between Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig, two Jewish philosophers of the last century. Buber understood that the

relationship between Man and Hashem stemmed from a mutual connection which then led to the performance of mitzvot. Rosenzweig disagreed and said that it is the performance of the mitzvot which leads to the relationship with Hashem. Buber’s ideas are much more in line with Christianity which views belief as an act of Grace which Hashem bestows on Man. Rosenzweig’s view is closer to Judaism as it is Man’s responsibility in performing the mitzvot which leads to an appreciation and love of Hashem.

Hashem has granted us a perfect guideline for our actions and interactions, namely the Torah and its mitzvot. The more we study these laws and perform them, the more we realize just how perfect this guideline is. That realization brings us to love Hashem and His Torah. May we continually strive to reach an even greater love of Hashem. ©2019 Rabbi D. Levine

#### ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

### **Birkat Hamazon**

*Translated for the Encyclopedia Talmudit  
by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss*

**O**ur 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. Similarly if one would sing the song of “Tzur Mishello” on the Shabbat during the meal, one would ostensibly fulfill the obligation of Birkat Hamazon 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. ©2016 Rabbi M. Weiss and Encyclopedia Talmudit

**RABBI YOCHANAN ZWEIG**

## The Spice of Life

**"Y**ou shall place these words of Mine upon your heart..."(11:18) In the second portion of the Krias Shema, we find the instruction to constantly contemplate and internalize the Torah and its precepts. The Talmud interprets the word "vesamtem" -- "you shall place" as "vesam tam" -- "a perfect elixir"; the Torah is the ideal cure for the "yetzer hara" -- "evil inclination". The following analogy is offered by the Talmud: A father educating his child finds it necessary to strike him. The father then instructs his child to place a compress on the inflicted wound, saying to his son "As long as the compress is in place, you may eat and drink what you desire, you may bathe with hot or cold water, and you need not fear that your wounds will become infected. However, if you remove the compress, your health is at risk." Similarly, Hashem says "My son, I created the evil inclination and I created the Torah as its 'tavlin' -- 'antidote'" (Kiddushin 30b)

We generally understand that Hashem created the Torah for man to follow, with the yetzer hara as the obstacle which man must overcome in his pursuit of Torah study and adherence. However, from the aforementioned passage in the Talmud, we see that this perception is not entirely correct. The Sages of the Talmud describe the Torah as a "tavlin" -- literally, "condiment" or "spice" used to enhance the flavor of the main course. It would appear that the primary creation is the yetzer hara, with the Torah being the necessary but secondary creation. This notion is substantiated by the parable given in the Talmud; the child's punishment, which is analogous to the yetzer hara, is a necessary facet of his education, while the compress serves as the counterbalance or antidote which prevents the beating from having a negative consequence. How do we understand the idea that the Torah is merely the spice that enhances the yetzer hara's natural flavors?

The Talmud (ibid) states that the yetzer hara threatens to overpower a person every day and kill him. What function of the yetzer hara makes its existence necessary?

Hashem created man with an enormous potential for accomplishment. Man's overwhelming awareness of his capabilities, coupled with the fear that he may not be able to live up to his potential, leads him on a path of self -- destruction. Man indulges in behaviors which either block out the awareness of his capabilities, or demean him to the extent that he can rationalize that the expectations of him are unfounded.

The part within us which makes us aware of our potential is the yetzer hara. Left unharnessed, this awareness develops into man's most destructive force, the destruction he wreaks upon himself. The Torah is

the tool through which we can actualize and develop our potential. Without the yetzer hara making us aware of our potential, the Torah's capacity to actualize and develop that potential would not be utilized. Our Sages therefore confer upon the yetzer hara the significance of being Hashem's primary creation for without the aspirations of what he can become man's potential would be wasted. ©2019 Rabbi Y. Zweig and torah.org

**RABBI YISROEL CINER**

## Parsha Insights

**T**his week's parsha, Aikev, continues with Moshe's exhortations to Klal Yisroel to adhere to the Torah and to maintain that special relationship with Hashem. "V'hayah aikev tishm'un (7:12)". The Targum explains 'aikev' to mean in exchange. In exchange for your observing the laws, Hashem will fulfill the covenant made with the Avos.

Rashi, however, offers a different explanation. 'Aikev' can also mean a heel. If those light/easy mitzvos that a person tramples with his heel will be observed...

Which tread upon mitzvos is Rashi referring to? The Kli Yakar understands it to mean the 'chukim'. Those mitzvos whose understanding was never revealed to us. The nations scorn our observance of these seemingly irrational mitzvos and that causes us to treat them lightly and to trample upon them.

Rav Aharon Kotler, zt"l, explains differently. Our day-to-day encounters offer many opportunities for mitzvos that are often trampled underfoot in our pursuit of the 'big things' in life. No matter how we personally define the 'big things', be it spiritual pursuits or materialistic pursuits, simple kindness and manners are often overlooked. As a pole vaulter who, while focusing on the high bar, overlooks the stone which, by tripping him, never allows him to reach that bar.

He writes that it is actually these seemingly insignificant encounters which ultimately define who this person truly is. Chazal teach us that two of our greatest leaders, Moshe and Dovid HaMelech, were tested as shepherds! If one tends sheep with diligence, concern and honesty, one will also tend a nation in such a fashion. Furthermore, the habits and foundations that one lays down in the 'light' matters carry through to the 'heavier' matters. We recently witnessed how, a person who had never learned self control in his youth, could ruin his future and lose tens of millions of dollars by taking an uninvited bite from an ear!

The small things that we tread upon... A friend of mine once asked his parents for the key to their successful marriage. "We always say please and thank you to each other." We are so careful to be polite with strangers and acquaintances but how are we with our parents/spouses/children? Are we willing to jump to help someone else, but a bit slow to finally take out the garbage? Would a Jew's tears inspire us to do

whatever we can to help, while we kvetch about bringing a drink to a child in the middle of the night? Isn't that also an opportunity to help a person in distress?

The small things that we tread upon... The gemara (Berachos) discusses stealing from a poor person. What can one actually steal from one who has nothing? Not greeting him with a hello! That's all he has and you took it away from him! How much pain do we unknowingly cause?

The Mishna in Avos asks "what is the path that a person should cling to?" One of the answers is shachain tov -- be a good neighbor! The quest was for a path to bring one close to his Creator, to allow him to fulfill the purpose of being sent to this physical world. The answer is to be a good neighbor, Statefarm!?!? Yes!!! A high percentage of our dealings involve our neighbors. If we are careful, helpful and considerate with our neighbors, we train ourselves to be people who are all of the above and in control of ourselves.

That is the path that a person should choose in order to accomplish his lofty purpose in this world. "Aikev!", Moshe warns Bnei Yisroel. Don't trample on the seemingly insignificant, because your relationship with Hashem is based on that!

Moshe continues and warns of the dangers of wealth. "Be careful... you'll build nice houses... have much gold and silver... you'll forget Hashem... and you'll say in your heart, 'my strength and the power of my hand has accumulated all of this prosperity' (8:11-17)."

Rav Dessler zt"l writes that this powerful conviction of our abilities being the prime movers in our lives is both absolutely true and absolutely false. "All is in the hands of heaven besides the fear of heaven." In the spiritual realm, we, and only we, determine who we are and who we will be. In the realm of the physical and the materialistic, it is not our strength that actually accomplishes anything. We are obligated to make the effort, but ultimate success or failure is out of our hands.

It's amazing how common thinking goes completely opposite to this. To spend a year in Yeshiva/Seminary before beginning college is standard. Two years is a bit extreme but still within the bounds of acceptable. After that point, it's time to get back to the real world. You know... the real world. The world of honesty ("read my lips, no new taxes"), the world of morality (anybody turn on the TV recently?), the world of hard work and discipline (how much did Tyson get for the fight?), you know.. the real world!

We devote between 6 and 10 years of our life preparing for that which we don't actually influence. More than two years spent preparing for our eternity is considered far too extreme.

The Ra"n adds on a very interesting point. We've all met



people with impressive abilities whom we predict will be successful in life. It seems clear to us that these people are successful because of these very evident capabilities. Does this contradict these pasukim which taught that we don't affect the outcome in this world?

He writes that there are people who correctly say that my strength, my wisdom, my innovation have accumulated these possessions for me. The next pasuk addresses them. "Remember Hashem, because He is the One who gave you the ability...(8:18)" The Targum explains that He gave you the counsel and advice to amass that wealth. It is interesting to note that the Yiddish word for an idea is an 'einfall'. The idea fell in!

We then must take this a step further and realize why Hashem gave us this ability. All of our strengths and abilities must be harnessed to the spiritual. A person blessed with a charismatic personality must use it to influence and draw others to Hashem. Whether it is done in a professional capacity, at his work-place or as a good neighbor, he must recognize where this gift came from and use it suitably. A person blessed with a knack to pick the right stocks must use the fruits of this ability to help others. Realizing that this is why he was given that talent. Remember, it is He who gave you the ability!

May we actualize the myriad opportunities of growth that surround us, taking care not to trample on them and the people around us. Recognizing where we can make a true difference in this world and where we can't. ©2019 Rabbi Y. Ciner and torah.org

### **RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER**

## **Weekly Dvar**

In Parshat Ekev Moshe reiterates G-d's assurances and perils based on His people doing what's required and expected of them. Moshe declares that "G-d, your G-d is the G-d of gods and Lord of lords, the great mighty and awesome G-d...", and the next Passuk (verse) asserts that "He executes judgment of the orphan and widow, loves the stranger, to give him bread and clothing" (10:17-18). Rabbi Jonathan Sacks wonders why such a grand statement is followed by a very specific statement in seemingly striking contrast.

Rabbi Sacks explains that G-d's greatness is followed by His humility to teach us that these two traits must go hand in hand. You can't be great without being humble, without thinking of those less fortunate or those that are forgotten.

With a careful reading of the Pessukim (verses), one can take this lesson a step further: In order to love, feed and clothe a stranger one is required to not simply be aware of their predicament, but to understand their need, appreciate their situation and empathize with their plight. Greatness requires appreciating the circumstances of strangers among us and even more empathy for the non-strangers in our lives. ©2019 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.