

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

During our first Coronavirus lockdown, there was one question I was asked more than any other: What about prayer? Just when we needed it the most, we found ourselves unable to participate in tefillah be-tzibbur, public communal prayer. Our most sacred prayers, devarim she-bi-kedushah, are communal. They require a minyan. There was an argument between Rambam and Ramban as to whether, originally and essentially, the command of prayer was directed to individuals or to the community as a whole. But there was no disagreement between them as to the importance and value of praying as part of a community. That is supremely how we, as Jews, come before God, not primarily as "I" but as "We." How then were we to find spiritual strength without this communal dimension?

My answer was, this is indeed a terrible privation. There is no point in minimising the loss. As Yehuda ha-Levi said in the Kuzari, individual prayer is like protecting yourself by building a wall around your house. Collective prayer is like joining with others to maintain the wall around the city. The wall around the city protects everyone, not just me. (Kuzari, III:19) Besides which, when I pray for myself, I may pray selfishly, asking for something that may directly benefit me but might also be harmful for others. If I sell ice-cream, I want the sun to shine, but if I sell umbrellas, I want the rain to fall. Praying together, we seek, not private good but the common good.

Communal prayer is not just an expression of community. It is also a builder of community. Hence the psychological cost of the pandemic lockdown. We are social, not solitary beings. We long, most of us, for company. And even the marvels of Zoom, Skype, YouTube, Facebook Live, WhatsApp and Facetime cannot compensate for the loss of the real thing: face-to-face encounter.

But there was one gain to our praying in

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isolation. Tefillah be-tzibbur involves going at the speed of the congregation. It is hard to slow the pace so as to be able to meditate at length on any of the prayers themselves -- their meaning, music, rhythm and structure. Prayer is essentially a kind of counterpoint between speaking and listening. But communal prayer often involves more speaking than listening. The lockdown meant that we could listen more to the poetry and passion of the prayers themselves. And prayer is about listening, not just speaking.

In one of his essays in Beit Yaakov, Rabbi Yaakov Leiner, son of the Ishbitzer Rebbe (Rabbi Mordechai Leiner), makes a fascinating comment on a phrase in this week's parsha, hasket u-shema Yisrael, "Be silent and listen, Israel. You have now become the people of the Lord your God (Deut. 27:9). There is, he says, a fundamental difference between seeing and listening as to what they communicate. Seeing tells us about the surfaces, the externalities, of things. Listening tells us about internalities, depths (omek kol davar). (Beit Yaakov, vol. 4, Torah u-moadim, Rosh Chodesh Menachem Av, 131)

His comments are echoed by one of the great 20th Century scholars of technologies of communication, Walter J Ong, who spoke about "the unique relationship of sound to interiority when sound is compared to the rest of the senses." He adds, "This relationship is important because of the interiority of human consciousness and of human communication itself." (Orality and Literacy: the technologizing of the word, Routledge, 1982, 71) In other words, it is through sound, especially through speaking and listening, that we are present to one another as subjects rather than objects. By listening, we encounter the depth-dimension of reality.

When we listen, we are personally engaged far beyond the way we participate when we simply watch. Ong regards this as one of the special features of the Hebrew Bible. God creates the universe through words. He reveals Himself to His people in words. He makes a covenant with them in words. The last and culminating book of the Torah is Devarim, "words." Ong notes that the Hebrew for "word," davar, also means an event, a happening, something that generates momentum in history. If the greatest thing God does is speak, then the greatest thing we can do is listen.

There is also a difference, as I pointed out in my translation and commentary on the Siddur, between

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hearing and listening, often concealed by the fact that the Hebrew verb Shema means both. But they are very different. Hearing is passive, listening is active. Hearing needs no special concentration, but listening does. It involves attention, focus, and openness to the other. One of the greatest gifts we can be given is to meet someone who really listens to us. Sadly, it happens all too rarely. We are often so focused on what we are going to say next, that we don't really listen in depth to what the other person is saying.

And so it is with prayer. Someone once defined prayer as listening to God listening to us.

There are some profound stories about listening in the Torah and Tanach. Take for instance the fraught episode in which Jacob takes his father's blessing, intended for Esau. The story eliminates sight as a dimension: Isaac is old and cannot see. Yet he has persistent doubts as to whether the son in front of him is indeed Esau. He goes through the various senses. He tastes the food his son has brought. He smells his clothes. He touches his hands. He concludes: "The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau" (Gen. 27:22). How much anguish might have been spared had he followed the evidence of his hearing rather than his taste, smell and touch.

The names of Jacob's first three sons were all cries for attention on the part of their mother Leah. She called the first, Reuben, saying, "It is because the Lord has seen my misery. Surely my husband will love me now." The second she called Simon, saying, "Because the Lord heard that I am not loved, He gave me this one too." She called the third Levi, saying, "Now at last my husband will become attached to me, because I have borne him three sons." Was Jacob listening to her cries? We don't know. But the plain sense of the text is that he was not. And we know from Jacob's deathbed blessings that his relationship with these three sons was fractured.

Then there is the strange choice of Moses as the man selected to be the voice of God's word to Israel for all time. Moses kept reminding God that he was not a man of words, he could not speak, he had "uncircumcised lips." The Torah is surely telling us several things, but might one of them have been that, finding it hard to speak, Moses had learned to listen? Certainly Moses heard God better than anyone in

history.

Then there was the drama on Mount Horeb where Elijah went after his spectacular victory over the prophets of Baal, having called down fire from heaven at Mount Carmel. God showed him a powerful wind, an earthquake, and a fire, but God was in none of these things. Instead He was in the kol demamah dakah, the "still, small voice" that I have argued means "a sound you can only hear if you are listening."

There are the stunningly beautiful lines of Psalm 19, that we say on Shabbat mornings that tell us that "the heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands," despite the fact that "There is no speech, there are no words." Creation sings a song to its Creator, which we might hear if we listen attentively enough. I was reminded of this throughout the pandemic, when there was little noise from traffic and none from aeroplanes overhead, and we could hear the birdsong and other sounds of nature more vividly than ever I remember.

Listening is a primary theme of Moses' speeches in Devarim. The root sh-m-a appears no fewer than 92 times in the book, an astonishing number. That is what I hope we gained from this distressing time of isolation: the ability to slow down our prayers and listen to them, letting their poetry penetrate more deeply than at other times.

Rabbi Yaakov Leiner, whose reflections on listening started us on this journey, said about the tragic month of Av that it is a time when it is hard to see the presence of God. We lost two Temples. It seemed to the nations of the world as if God had abandoned His people. But precisely when it is hard to see the Divine presence, we can focus on listening.

(The same idea can be found much earlier in the Sefer Yetzira. See Bnei Yissaschar, Ma'amarei Hodshei Tammuz ve-Av, ma'amar 1,3. I am grateful to Mr David Frei, Registrar of the London Beit Din, for bringing this to my attention.)

I believe that listening is one of the greatest arts. It opens us to God, our fellow humans, and the beauties of nature. For me one of the gifts of this strange, difficult time has been the ability to slow down the prayers so that I am able to listen to them speaking to me. Praying is as much about listening as speaking. And faith itself is the ability to hear the music beneath the noise. *Covenant and Conversation 5780 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l ©2020 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"**C**ursed be the individual who does not carry aloft the words of this Torah." (Deuteronomy 27:26) Although I have been blessed with many magnificent students over my five decades of

teaching, I shall never forget the piercing words penned by one of my most treasured students, who suddenly and inexplicably turned away from a Torah way of life. For a time he refused to answer any of my heartfelt entreaties for a dialogue – before eventually leaving a poem at my home. In part, it read:

Beloved teacher, both of us are often blind; you do not always see how much you taught me and I do not always see how much I learned from you. You think I took the Tablets of Testimony and threw them insolently at your feet. That's not at all what happened. The commandments merely became too heavy in my hands, and they fell to the ground.

As a Torah educator, I still feel the searing pain of losing students such as this one, in whom I had seen so much potential. It led me to difficult questions of myself: Where had I gone wrong as an educator? To what extent was I responsible for his decision?

These questions bring to mind a verse from this week's Torah portion, Parshat Ki Tavo, which announces blessings for those who observe specific Biblical commands, and curses for those who reject them. The final denunciation, however, "Cursed be the individual who does not hold aloft the words of this Torah" (Deuteronomy 27:26), is difficult to define. To what is this verse referring?

The Talmud Yerushalmi (Sota 7:4) pointedly asks, in rhetorical fashion, "Is there then a Torah that falls down?" Indeed, the answer is, yes, there is, and Rabbi Shimon Ben Halafta specifies the responsible party for this tragedy: the spiritual leaders of the Jewish community!

While spiritual leaders can be measured to a certain extent by whether those in their care are completely observant of the Torah's teachings, their true mettle is tested by how they respond when their students fall short. Moses demonstrates how a teacher should react in such a situation. Upon witnessing the Jews serving the Golden Calf, he realizes that he has not succeeded in holding aloft the Torah, given that a mere forty days after temporarily ascending Mount Sinai, his people had departed from its ways so quickly. Thus, he casts the Tablets of the Covenant to the ground, smashing them.

At that moment, God saw the profound responsibility that Moses took upon himself for the broken tablets, and, according to the Yerushalmi (ibid.) placed within Moses' heart the words of King Josiah: "It is upon me to hold aloft [the words of the Torah]". Hence the Almighty commands Moses to sculpt two tablets just like the earlier two which had been broken (Ex. 34:1).

Fascinatingly enough, this verse is the very source for the Oral Law, specifically unique to the Second Tablets (Midrash Shemot Rabba, ad loc.), and which consists of the input of the Sages in every generation to ensure that the Torah continues to be

held aloft.

The Torah "falls" when the Jewish People do not uphold its laws and values. Once the Oral Law – the application of the Torah in every generation – was placed in the hands of the rabbis and teachers, it becomes these leaders' obligation to make certain that it is a Torah of love and a nourishing source of life.

Indeed, it is the responsibility of the spiritual leaders of every generation to see to it that the Torah becomes, in the eyes of the Jewish People, neither so light – of such little significance that it can be easily discarded – nor so heavy and onerous that it can hardly be borne. Those who teach God's Torah must help every Jew feel and understand the loving embrace of Torah, the profound wisdom of Torah, the timeliness and timelessness of Torah. ©2020 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

I have in earlier years written about the strange requirement that the Torah imposes upon the Jewish farmer in the land of Israel when he brings his first crop of the year to Jerusalem as an offering in the Temple. However, I want to reiterate and expand on the matter once again in this short article because I believe it to be of vital and relevant importance to us in our times.

The Jewish farmer, in a review of Jewish history, recounts as to how he arrived at bringing this offering to the temple. He relates the story of our forefathers, of Abraham and Jacob and of their struggles to survive in a very hostile environment. He explains how the great and essential idea of monotheism, morality, charity, and godliness in human society was propagated. The one bringing the offering then recounts the fact that we have never had an easy road on which to travel. Our forefathers were enslaved in Egypt for centuries and sank to low levels of physical and spiritual standards. Yet, the Lord redeemed us and took us out from the house of bondage through miraculous events under the leadership of Moshe.

We were granted the Torah and we were entrusted with the mission to be a holy nation and a kingdom of priests. We wandered in the desert for 40 years, sustained only by the will of heaven, and finally arrived in the land of Israel, a land promised to us through our forefathers by the God of Israel. And now, as a fulfillment of this drama of Jewish history, the farmer can bring these first crops of the year to Jerusalem, as an offering in the temple.

There is an innate desire within all human beings to know about their past. At one time or another, all of us experience the feeling of *dj vu*, about events and places that we know we have never been to before or have never experienced in this lifetime. It is this sense of history, of the past that imposes itself upon us.

Unfortunately, most Jews in our time are completely unaware of their past. They have no idea as to their ancestry, traditions and the events that have led them to where they are and who they are today. In that ignorance lies the main cause for the alienation and disaffection of so many Jews as to their faith and future.

They are overwhelmed by the present and fearful of the future simply because they are ignorant of their past. This engenders a feeling of panic and uncertainty that gnaws at the very vitals of their existence. This is especially true here in Israel, now almost 75 years after its creation and founding, the state is still taken for granted and has lost some of its luster. It is no longer treasured as it once was and should be. To sanctify the mundane -- to make even the produce of this country into a holy offering -- knowledge and appreciation of the past is necessary. This is an important lesson that this week's reading imparts to us. ©2020 Rabbi Berel Wein - Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

This week's portion includes the law of viduy ma'asrot – confession of the tithes. According to the Torah, tithes are taken from the crops in two three-year cycles. In each of these two cycles, one-tenth of the produce was given to the Levi who serves in the Temple (ma'aser rishon). An additional tenth is consumed in Jerusalem during the first, second, fourth, and fifth years (ma'aser sheni). In the third and sixth year, the second tenth is set aside for the poor (ma'aser ani). After two of these cycles fully take place, the sabbatical year (the seventh year) occurs when no tithe is taken at all.

The law of viduy ma'asrot states that on the last day of Passover, in the fourth and seventh years, the owner of the crops comes forward to declare that during the previous years he had been faithful to his tithe obligation.

In the words of the Torah; “then you shall say before the Lord your God, 'I have removed the holy things from the house (ma'aser sheni) and I also have given it to the Levite (ma'aser rishon), to the proselyte, to the orphan and to the widow (ma'aser ani), according to whatever commandment you have commanded me.” (Deuteronomy 26:13)

One wonders, why is the celebration referred to as a viduy, a confession, when we joyously share that we've given charity properly. What does confession have to do with this practice?

Sforno argues that the confession is not directly linked to the tithe process, but rather with the original sin of the golden calf. Had that event not occurred, the

first born rather than the Priest or Levite would have undertaken the mission to perform divine service. It follows that only when the firstborns were disqualified for participating in making the golden calf, did the need arise to give to the Priest or Levite.

Another thought comes to mind. It is, of course, possible that upon reciting the formula, one may recall forgetting to give ma'aser properly. If so, viduy ma'asrot gives one the opportunity to fix the mistakes and complete the obligation. (Rashi, Deuteronomy 26:13)

But it was left to Rabbi Kook to introduce a novel idea. Perhaps the term “confession” is used to teach that confession can be used for the good as well. And so, the Israelites humbly but joyously share that they got it right.

It is in this spirit that one can consider an added viduy on Yom Kippur. While our viduy listed in Hebrew alphabetical order focuses on our misdeeds – ashamnu, we have sinned; bagadnu, we have acted treacherously; gazalnu, we have robbed; dibarnu dofi, we have spoken slander – why not also single out our accomplishments in Hebrew alphabetical order: ahavnu, we have loved; berachnu, we have blessed; gidalnu, we have grown, dibarnu yofi, we have spoken positively.

Viduy is a multi-layered term. It allows us to self-evaluate, always pushing ourselves to do better. But it also allows us to step back, feel good about ourselves, and declare – we have faithfully followed God's wishes and commands. May we be blessed to continue doing so forever. ©2020 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 DAVID LEVIN

Turning Curse into Blessing

In this week's parasha, Parashat Ki Tavo, we find the lists of names of the tribes who would proceed to Har Gerizim and Har Eival where the nation would be divided between these two mountains and listen to the blessings and the curses which could befall them conditioned on whether they followed the Torah or not. The Torah tells us, “And Moshe commanded the people on that day saying. ‘These will stand upon Mount Gerizim to bless the people when you have crossed the Jordan. Shimon, Levi, Judah, and Issachar, and Joseph, and Benjamin. And these will stand at the curse on Har Eival, Reuben, Gad, and Asher, and Zebulun, Dan and Naftali. And the Leviim will lift up their voices and say to every man of Israel in a loud voice.’” As each blessing or curse was stated, all of the people answered “Amen.”

In one other place within the Torah, the tribes are divided into two groups of six each. The Kohein Gadol (head priest) wore a set of clothes described as the Bigdei Zahav, the Golden Garments. There was a fancy embroidered garment called the ephod which was worn over his tunic and had straps that would fit over his shoulders. These would connect to the breastplate which was worn over his chest with two straps that went over his shoulders. The ephod and the breastplate were connected at the top of his shoulders by two large stones, each stone engraved with six of the names of the tribes. A unique aspect of these stones is that the Torah does not specify which names were to be placed where. This led to a difference of opinion among the Rabbis which can be found in Gemara Sotah (36). Rav Kahana explains that the order on the ephod was the same order that we find here for standing on the two mountains. Others indicate that the words, "like their births", indicate that the names were divided according to the chronological order of their births.

The choice of which tribes would be on Har Gerizim and which would be on Har Eival was not arbitrary. If we examine the names of the tribes who were on Har Gerizim, we find that they were the sons of Leah and the sons of Rachel in chronological order except that the first and last of Leah's sons were not included in the grouping. HaRav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch explains that the sons of the two wives were of a higher stature than the sons of the handmaidens, Bilhah and Zilpah. "Now to avoid any appearance of difference of rank in the two halves, the tribes of the eldest and youngest sons of Leah, R'uvein and Zevulun were to join those of Bilhah and Zilpah." In this way, the division of the B'nei Yisrael appeared to be of equal importance. But there are other reasons for this division which we will touch on later.

HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin deals with the inclusion of the tribe of Levi in the grouping on Har Gerizim. We know that the tribe of Levi was together with the Kohanim in the valley, so how were they also standing on Har Gerizim? HaRav Sorotzkin explains that only the elders of the Leviim were in the valley and the rest of the Leviim were on the mountain. He contends that this was not unusual as we find that the wives, elders, and children of the tribes of R'uvein, Gad, and half the tribe of Menashe were not even present in Eretz Yisrael, as they had remained on the other side of the Jordan as per their request. Those who were of fighting age from those tribes represented their tribes on the mountains.

Hirsch explains that the blessings and curses emanated from the Leviim and Kohanim in the valley who faced towards Har Gerizim for the Blessings and towards Har Eival for the curses, but the blessings and curses were directed to both groups. As we saw earlier, four of the sons of Leah together with the two

sons of Rachel were on Har Gerizim and the four sons of the two handmaidens together with the first and last sons of Leah were on Har Eival. Our Rabbis offer many explanations of why these particular six were on Har Eival for the curses. Each had challenges in their lives. R'uvein was downgraded from his position of leadership in the family as the firstborn of Ya'akov because of the incident with moving the bed after Rachel had died (see Genesis: 35:21, but note the commentaries for the correct understanding of the incident). The four sons of the handmaidens were treated badly by the sons of Leah because they were not from the "chosen" women whom Ya'akov married. HaRav Sorotzkin explains that Zevulun and Issachar were such close brothers that they were treated like twins. Issachar was singularly devoted to the study of Torah whereas his brother, Zevulun was a businessman. The brothers formed a pact whereby Issachar would learn Torah and Zevulun would work. They would then equally share in the profits of their livelihood and in the rewards for their study of Torah. Our Rabbis point out that this did not mean that Issachar never worked and Zevulun never studied Torah, but it is clear that the time devoted to each was minimal at best. HaRav Sorotzkin explains that Hashem's desire was for each son to devote the majority of his time in the study of Torah, and He was therefore not pleased with Zevulun's choice.

HaRav Sorotzkin explains that these six sons were chosen for Har Eival because they were the sons who had undergone difficulties in their lives which could have caused them to turn from Hashem, but instead they grew closer to Hashem. They were not on the mountain of the curses because they deserved them more, but because they were the best examples of how to overcome those curses. The Kli Yakar explains that it is Man's duty to take these curses and to turn them into blessings. This is the real purpose of Har Eival. Man is not perfect and sins will come our way through the natural course of our lives as it is affected by our needs and our desires. When a sin is committed, we are faced with a challenge to either grow from that sin or to sink further from Hashem by justifying it. But we can turn that curse into a blessing by growing from that experience and avoiding repeating it in the future.

As we prepare for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, we can be grateful that this is the message we read from the Torah this week. The lesson of Har Gerizim and Har Eival can guide us. We continue to undergo experiences which can depress us, discourage us, and condemn us to sulk in our difficulties and distrust our abilities. We must remember that everything we experience can be turned into a blessing. Hashem always does what is best for us, even when it appears that we are being punished or cursed. Our experiences are often painful and filled with anguish and lead us to believe that Hashem has abandoned us.

Yet we can grow stronger by learning to deal with those experiences. That growth is the blessing which Hashem wishes us to have. May we learn to understand Hashem's gifts, and may we come to realize the blessings with which we are blessed. © 2020 Rabbi D. Levin

ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

Eating the First Fruits

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

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

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

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

The mitzva of eating *bikurim* is so important that the *Kohen* who eats *bikurim* makes a special blessing (just as he does before reciting the priestly blessing): "*Asher kideshanu be-mitzvotav ve-tzivanu le'echol bikurim*" ("Who has sanctified us with His commandments, and commanded us to eat *bikurim*"). © 2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and *Encyclopedia Talmudit*

RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

"And you shall write on the stones all the words of the Torah well-clarified." (*Devarim* 27:8) What does the Torah mean by "well-clarified"?

Rashi teaches us, based on the Gemara in Sotah, that the Torah was written on the stones in all seventy languages of the world. Either they were extremely large stones, or the words were written miraculously. A miraculous occurrence seems required since according to some, the entire Torah, from Beraishis until "to the

eyes of all Israel" at the end of *Devarim*, in all seventy languages and scripts, was written on these stones, all in a single day.

The question seems obvious: Why write the Torah in all languages? The Jews had kept their language from Canaan, *Lashon Kodesh*. Perhaps they knew Egyptian, or a few other languages. Though the Sanhedrin would need to know all seventy languages, the Jews at that time did not.

The Rav (R' Ovadiah Mi'Bartenura) in his commentary says simply, "Let all who wish, come and learn. Thus, the nations would have no opportunity to say, "We had no place from whence to learn [how we should behave.]" In other words, this was done so the nations of the world would not be able to claim ignorance of Hashem's Torah. However, if that were true, why make it available here, on these stones? Why not set these stones up in Yerushalayim, the international city where all nations would come to visit? Why not print books that could be disseminated around the world to educate them?

We'd like to suggest that the primary purpose for writing the Torah in all languages was not for the nations of the world, but for the Jews themselves, to whom the Torah was uniquely given. While a person of any nationality could trek to Gilgal to see the stones with the entire Torah on it, the motivation for providing the Torah in any language was for the Jews.

True, at this time they would not understand all those languages, and because they understood the Torah in *Lashon Kodesh*, they didn't need to understand them all. However, over the course of the Galus, Jews would be cast to the four corners of the Earth. We would become those "nations of the world" who needed to know there was no excuse to be ignorant of Hashem. He speaks to you whether you speak English or French, Spanish or Swahili. The Torah is relevant wherever you are, and whatever language you speak.

They say that New York Harbor, tragically, is the final resting place of thousands of pairs of Tefillin. Many immigrants said, "Judaism is for the old country, not for America, the land of opportunity!" They felt that the laws and traditions they'd been observing no longer applied in this new place. If only they'd taken the lesson from these stones.

Ba'air Haitev, well-clarified; the Torah's message to the Jews entering Eretz Yisrael was that whether you're on this hallowed ground, or dwelling in an unholy land into which you must infuse kedusha, the Torah applies from beginning to end.

A wealthy man once approached the Gaon, R' Noach Shimonovich, z"l, then the Rosh Yeshivah of Zichron Yaakov, and suggested that he should move his yeshivah to Rishon Litzion. He added that he was prepared to support the yeshivah entirely if R' Noach would do so.

R' Noach traveled to the Chazon Ish to ask his advice on the man's offer. The Chazon Ish answered, "When a yeshiva exists in a city, the whole city looks different. This may not be apparent immediately, but with the passing of years it's possible to see the positive qualities which the yeshivah lends to the city. If this is so, how is it possible to cause Zichron Yaakov such a heavy loss by removing the yeshiva from its midst?"

Later, the Chazon Ish sent for the wealthy man and told him, "You open a yeshivah in Rishon Letzion, and Rishon Letzion will also gain by having a yeshivah within it." ©2020 Rabbi J. Gewirtz and Migdal Ohr

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Fine Print

There is nothing more disheartening than a curse. And this week the Torah singles out specific violations that are worthy of the epithet, "cursed is he who..." The Torah tells us that the nation was divided into two parts. Six tribes stood on Mount Grizim, and the rest stood on Mount Ebal. The Levites began to specify the sins that the Torah prefaced with the harsh warning, "accursed is one who," and the nation would respond amen. Included among the terrible crimes are one who moves his neighbors' boundary and one who misleads a blind man on the road. The curses also include carnal sins and striking a person covertly (Deuteronomy 27:12-25). In fact, almost each curse is directed toward a sin that entails some degree of surreptitiousness. All except the final curse, "Accursed is the one who does not uphold the words of the Torah to perform them" (Deuteronomy 27:26). Rashi explains the last admonition as a general warning to heed all the laws in the Torah lest one suffer the curses.

The Ramban, however, softens Rashi's severe interpretation. He explains that the curse is not cast on one who actually commits a sin, but rather on those who scoff at the validity of the Torah's laws.

Following his simple explanation, the Ramban writes something startling. "It appears to me that the words 'accursed is the one who does not uphold the words of the Torah' refers to one who is called upon to do the hagbah ceremony in the synagogue and does not stretch out the Torah wide enough for the congregation to see the words."

For years I was terribly disturbed by that explanation. I could not fathom the sense of comparison. How can the Ramban equate one who does a poor hagbah with those who surreptitiously undermine the welfare of their neighbor or create clandestine instability within the family? How can we attribute the harsh words of accursed to one who does not have what it takes to do a proper hagbah?

On a whistle stop tour during his term in office Calvin Coolidge's train stopped in St. Louis where a crowd of nearly 2,500 people gathered to hear him. He

was sleeping in his rail car when the train stopped at the station and Colonel Starling, Coolidge's personal assistant and agent-in-charge, nudged him awake.

"Mr. President," he said while tapping him on the shoulder, "there are almost three thousand people who are waiting to hear you!"

The remarkably restrained Coolidge and the first lady stepped out onto the train's observation platform. The crowd applauded wildly. Then the local master of ceremonies called for silence. "The President is about to speak now!"

The President stood silently with his wide smile. He straightened his jacket and smoothed his hair and appeared very presidential. The crowd waited anxiously for him to begin his speech. The President waited, too. Just then, there was a hiss of air as the brakes were released and the train began pulling away from the station. The President, still smiling, raised his hand, waved, and spoke. He said, "Goodbye."

Perhaps the Ramban is telling us more. When one displays the parchment of the Torah but does not unfurl the columns, he deprives a congregation of seeing the true essence of Torah. He parades with a Torah scroll with the shiny handles and the traditional parchment. It looks beautiful, and majestic. It even looks very Jewish. And the crowd waits for the real context to be shown and seen. But if those columns are not unfurled for the congregation to read, the stark reality of G-d's command is hidden behind the splendor of the moment. The one who does hagbah is in effect misleading the blind, sneaking a false border and making overt displays of honesty that are rife with deceit. For in reality a serious truth is being underhandedly hidden. And for that, the Ramban links him with the definitive consequences of those who morally deprave Torah ideals. Obviously, one who proudly unfurls the truth and tells the story as it appears, is worthy of the greatest blessings offered in the Torah. For there is no greater blessing than the open honesty and true teaching of Hashem's will. Lifting a Torah, unopened, in front of a waiting audience is nothing more than disappointing an excited crowd who are waiting for a substantive speech. You may be waving enthusiastically, but all you are saying is goodbye. ©2020 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week's haftorah brings us to the final dimensions of the consolation of the Jewish people. The prophet Yeshaya shares with us a glimpse into the glorious era of Mashiach and reveals Hashem's indescribable sensitivity towards His chosen nation. Yeshaya begins, "Rise and project your light, because the radiance of Hashem shines upon you." (60:1) In the days of Mashiach, the Jewish people will be privileged to reflect the light of Hashem unto the

nations of the world. Yeshaya continues, "The nations will walk with your light and the kings to the brilliance of your radiance. Lift your eyes and see all of them coming to you; your sons will come from afar and your daughters will be accompanied by the kings of the world." (60:3-5) The darkness and confusion which continuously plague society will finally be lifted and the entire world, nations included, will come to Jerusalem in streams to discover the truths of Hashem and His Torah. Instead of the all too familiar sight of the Jewish people being forced into exile the tables will now be turned. Not only will the nations release the Jewish people and allow them their return to Israel, they will personally escort the Jewish people back to their homeland. And to complete the process, the nations will display personal interest in the Jewish people's traditions and homeland and will flock to Israel in appreciation for all that the Jewish people represent. The influx will be so overwhelming that the Jewish people will wonder if they are imagining these sights or if, in truth, the world has made a full turnabout.

The prophet continues, "Their multitudes of camels will cover your streets...Everyone will come from Sh'va carrying gold and incense. All the choice sheep of Kedar will gather to you.... to be offered on My altar and accepted with desire." (60: 6, 7) The nations of the world will sincerely appreciate the value of service to Hashem and will continuously approach Him with their abundance of sacrifices. Instead of their ruthless campaign over the past thousands of years to destroy and secure the destruction of the Bais Hamikdash they will finally realize its spiritual significance and will utilize it 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 foreign to the Jewish people.

Hashem explains the reason for this unexpected reversal and says, "For in My anger I smote you and with My desire I will have compassion for you." (60:10) Needless to say, the experiences of the Jewish people are unparalleled by any other nation. Their extent of decline, persecution and tragedy covers the pages of world history with 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 in His constant focus. But this is only the first part of the story. Because, in these very same proportions the Jewish people are, and will be, the direct subject of Hashem's concern and compassion (see Metzudos Dovid). Therefore Hashem pledged to reverse the Jewish people's unpleasant past and replace it with their glorious future. Hashem committed to undo all of His people's negative experiences and to replace them with indescribable

positive ones.

The Jewish nation has not forgotten their pain and shame of exile and this feeling must be rectified. Hashem, therefore, informs them that their return from exile will be through none other than those very same nations who were responsible for the Jewish exile. They will personally escort the Jews back to their homeland with dignity and respect, and will actually anticipate with glee the special opportunity of joining the Jews 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 scorners shall prostrate themselves before you." (60:14) In fact, as we cited earlier, these very same nations and sovereigns who previously 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, 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 tenfold and in addition these same collectors will generously contribute considerable financial resources to the Jewish people. (see Radak, Malbim) The sum total of Hashem's restoration plan for the Jewish people is described by Yeshaya in the following verse, "Instead of your previous status, forsaken and despised I shall establish you the majesty of the world, the joy for all generations." (60:15) © 2020 Rabbi D. Siegel & torah.org

