



The Marcos and Adina Katz YUTORAH IN PRINT

Eikev 5774

The Levites and All Others who Wish to Become Close to God

Rabbi David Horwitz

Deuteronomy 10:8-9 states:
At that time the L-RD set apart the tribe of Levi to carry the Ark of the L-RD's covenant, to stand in attendance upon the L-RD, and to bless in His name, as is still the case. That is why the Levites have received no hereditary share along with their kinsmen: the L-RD is their portion, as the L-RD your God spoke concerning them (JPS translation).

Rambam, in his Mishneh Torah, at the end of the Book of Zera'im, at the conclusion of Hilkhoh Shemittah ve-Yovel (13:13), makes the point that the Torah's aim regarding the tribe of Levi need not be confined to the Levites themselves:

Not only the tribe of Levi but every single individual from among the world's inhabitants whose spirit moved him and whose intelligence gave him the understanding to withdraws from the world in order to stand before God to serve and minister to Him, to know God, and he walked upright in the manner in which God made him, shaking off from his neck the yoke of the manifold contrivances which men seek-behold, this person has been totally consecrated and God will be his portion and inheritance forever and ever. God will acquire for him sufficient goods in this world just as He did for the priests and Levites. Behold, David, may he rest in peace, says: L-RD, the portion of my inheritance and my cup, You maintain my lot (Psalms 16:5) (translation found in Professor Yitzhak (Isadore) Twersky, A Maimonides Reader [West Orange, New Jersey, 1972], p. 139).

Why did the Rambam see fit to cite the verse in Psalms in this context? I believe the answer is as follows:

In a Hebrew article, "Did Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra Influence the Rambam?" in the volume Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra: Studies in the Writings of a Twelfth Century Jewish Polymath, edited by Isadore Twersky and Jay M.

Harris (Cambridge, 1993), Hebrew section, pp. 21-48, Professor Twersky demonstrated various cases where a Maimonidean idea is already present, in some form or another, in the works of the ibn Ezra. This insight is a key that can unlock further correlations between the two thinkers.

The ibn Ezra lived from 1092-or 1093 until 1164 or so. Rambam's dates are 1138-1205. Pursuing the of connections between the two figures further, and searching for other correlations (if not direct influences), if one looks at the commentary of the ibn Ezra to our verse in Parashat 'Ekev (Deuteronomy 10:9), one finds the following: Commenting upon the phrase the L-RD is their portion, ibn Ezra cites the same verse from Psalms that Rambam does at the end of Hilkhoh Shemittah ve-Yovel, citing King David's affirmation that God is his inheritance! R. Abraham ibn Ezra adds that the (true) service of God consists of understanding His ways.

The verse in Psalms expands the field depicted in the verse in Deuteronomy. R. Abraham ibn Ezra utilized the verse from Psalms (which depicts King David-from the tribe of Judah, not a priest or Levite who had exclusive rights in the bet ha-miqdash) as evidence that anyone (even a non-Jew!) can choose to take God as his "inheritance" and totally consecrate himself to God. This privilege is not limited to priests or Levites. Perhaps Rambam, for his part, used the verse regarding King David, with its suggestive Hebrew word of gorali (my lot, my inheritance) in the same manner as well.

Both Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra and Rabbi Moses Maimonides saw our Parasha's depiction of the consecration of the Levites as expressive of a standard of devotion to god that is, ultimately, within the reach of all.

Greatness and Humility

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

A sequence of verses in this week's sedra gave rise to a beautiful Talmudic passage – one that has found a place in the siddur. It is among the readings we say after the Evening Service on Saturday night as Shabbat comes to an end. Here is the text on which it is based:

“For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, mighty and awe-inspiring God, who shows no favoritism and accepts no bribe. He upholds the cause of the orphan and widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing.” (Deut. 10: 17-18)

The juxtaposition of the two verses – the first about God's supremacy, the second about His care for the low and lonely – could not be more striking. The Power of powers cares for the powerless. The infinitely great shows concern for the small. The Being at the heart of being listens to those at the margins: the orphan, the widow, the stranger, the poor, the outcast, the neglected. On this idea, the third century teacher Rabbi Yochanan built the following homily (Babylonian Talmud, Megillah 31a):

Rabbi Yochanan said, Wherever you find the greatness of the Holy One, blessed be He, there you find His humility. This is written in the Torah, repeated in the Prophets, and stated a third time in the Writings. It is written in the Torah: “For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, mighty and awe-inspiring God, who shows no favoritism and accepts no bribe.” Immediately afterwards it is written, “He upholds the cause of the orphan and widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing.” It is repeated in the Prophets, as it says: “So says the High and Exalted One, who lives for ever and whose name is Holy: I live in a high and holy place, but also with the contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite.” It is stated a third time in the Writings: “Sing to God, make music for His name, extol Him who rides the clouds – God is His name – and exult before Him.” Immediately afterwards it is written: “Father of the fatherless and judge of widows, is God in His holy habitation.”

It is this passage that found its way into the (Ashkenazi) service at the end of Shabbat. Its presence there is to remind that that, as the day of rest ends and we return to our weekday concerns, we should not be so caught up in our own interests that we forget others less favourably situated. To care only for ourselves and those immediately dependant on us is not “the way of God”.

One of the more unusual aspects of being a Chief Rabbi is that one comes to know people one otherwise might not. These were three moments that made a deep impression on me.

From time to time Elaine and I give dinner parties for people within, and also outside, the Jewish community. Usually, at the end, the guests thank the hosts. Only once, though, did a guest not only thank us but also asked to be allowed to go into the kitchen to thank those who had made and served the meal. It was a fine act of sensitivity. No less interesting was who it was who did so. It was John Major, a British Prime Minister. Greatness is humility.

The oldest synagogue in Britain is Bevis Marks, in the heart of the City of London. Built in 1701, it was the first purpose-built synagogue in London, created by the Spanish and Portuguese Jews who were the first to return to England (or practice their Judaism in public: some had been marranos) after Oliver Cromwell gave permission in 1656 for Jews to return after their expulsion by Edward I in 1290.

Modelled on the Great Synagogue in Amsterdam, it has stayed almost unchanged ever since. Only the addition of electric lights has marked the passing of time – and even so, on special occasions, services are candle-lit as they were in those early days.

For the tercentenary service in 2001, Prince Charles came to the synagogue. There he met members of the community as well as leaders of Anglo-Jewry. What was impressive is that he spent as much time talking to the young men and women who were doing security duty as he did to the great and good of British Jewry. For security reasons, people volunteer to stand guard at communal events – part of the work of one of our finest organizations, the Community Security Trust. Often, people walk past them, hardly noticing their presence. But Prince Charles did notice them, and made them feel as important as anyone else on that glittering occasion. Greatness is humility.

Sarah Levene (not her real name) died tragically young. She and her husband had been blessed by God with great success. They were wealthy; but they did not spend their money on themselves. They gave tzedakah on a massive scale – within and beyond the Jewish community, in Britain, Israel and elsewhere. They were among the greatest philanthropists of our time.

When she died, among those who felt most bereaved

were the waiters and waitresses of a well-known hotel in Israel where they often stayed. It transpired that she had come to know all of them – where they came from, what their family situation was, the difficulties they were going through, the problems they faced. She remembered not only their names but also the names of their spouses and children. Whenever any of them needed help, she made sure it came, quietly, unobtrusively. It was a habit she had wherever she went.

After her death I discovered how she and her husband came to be married. He was older than she was, a friend of her parents. She had some weeks free in the summer before the start of the academic year, and Mr Levene (not his real name) gave her a holiday job. One evening after work they were about to join her parents for a meal. In the street they passed a beggar. Mr Levene, punctilious about the mitzvah of tzedakah, reached into his pocket and gave the man a coin. As they were walking on, Sarah asked him to lend her some money – a fairly large sum, which she promised she would repay at the end of the week when he paid her wages.

He did so. She then ran back to the beggar and gave him the money. “Why did you do that?” he asked, “I had already given him some money.” “What you gave him,” she said, “was enough to help him for today but not enough to make a difference to his life.”

At the end of the week, Mr Levene gave her her wages.

She handed him back most of the money, to repay him for the sum he had lent her. “I will accept the money,” he told her, “because I do not want to rob you of your mitzvah.” But – as he himself told me after her death, “It was then that I decided to ask her to marry me – because her heart was bigger than mine.”

Throughout their marriage they spent as much time and energy on giving their money to charitable causes as they did on earning it. They were responsible for many of the most outstanding educational, medical and environmental projects of our time. I have had the privilege of knowing other philanthropists – but none who knew the names of the children of the waiters at the hotel where they stayed; none who cared more for those others hardly noticed or who gave help more quietly, more effectively, more humanly. Greatness is humility.

This idea – counter-intuitive, unexpected, life-changing – is one of the great contributions of the Torah to Western civilization and it is set out in the words of our sedra, when Moses told the people about the “God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, mighty and awe-inspiring God” whose greatness lay not just in the fact that He was Creator of the universe and shaper of history, but that “He upholds the cause of the orphan and widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing.” Those who do this are the true men and women of God.

The Unusual Placement of Birkas Ha-Mazon

Rabbi Avraham Gordimer

The mitzvah of Birkas Ha-Mazon (“Grace after Meals”) is derived from the pasuk in this week’s parshah which states, “And you shall eat and be satisfied and you shall bless Hashem your God on the good land that He has given you.” (Devarim 8:10) It is somewhat puzzling that this mitzvah appears in Parshas Eikev rather than in earlier parshiyos of the Torah which feature mitzvos that deal with the consumption of food, or in Parshas Ki Savo, which features the mitzvah of Mikra Bikurim, requiring the farmer to pronounce a detailed statement of gratitude to Hashem for the land and its produce. (Ibid. 26:1-10) Why does the mitzvah of Birkas Ha-Mazon appear in isolation from these other sections of the Torah which would seem to be more appropriate from a contextual perspective?

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the Torah prescribes

Birkas Ha-Mazon as, “...and you shall bless Hashem your God on the good land that He has given you.” Birkas Ha-Mazon is a mitzvah that applies both inside and outside of Eretz Yisroel. As such, why does the Torah specify Eretz Yisroel as the location for the fulfillment of this mitzvah? This question troubled some of the Meforshim (Commentators), and we will endeavor to provide a new answer to it. (Although the Torah’s mention of Eretz Yisroel in conjunction with the mitzvah of Birkas Ha-Mazon is halachically expounded in the Gemara [Berachos 48b] as the basis for the second beracha of Birkas Ha-Mazon, we address here the Torah text’s simple meaning [peshuto shel Mikra], as do several of the Meforshim.)

Parshas Eikev, and in particular the first section of it, in which the mitzvah of Birkas Ha-Mazon is featured, is geared to the inculcation of emunah (faith) in B’nei Yisroel

that they are in Hashem's hands and instructs that they are to rely only on Him: "And you shall remember the entire path in which Hashem led you in the desert these forty years in order to afflict and test you, to know what is in your heart; whether you would heed His commandments or not. And He afflicted you and made you hungry and fed you the Mann (Manna) that you had not previously known, nor did your forefathers, in order to teach you that not on bread alone does man live, but rather on the word of Hashem does man live. Your clothing did not wear out and your feet did not swell these forty years...And you shall observe the commandments of Hashem your God, to go in His ways and to be in awe of Him. For Hashem your God is bringing you to a good land, a land of flowing ravines...A land of wheat and barley, and grapevines and figs and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey. A land in which you shall eat bread without poverty; you shall lack nothing therein...And you shall eat and be satisfied and you shall bless Hashem your God on the good land that He has given you. Be careful lest you forget Hashem your God, neglecting His commandments...Lest you eat and become satisfied and you build good houses and dwell therein. And your herds and flocks multiply, and you have an abundance of silver and gold, and all that you have multiplies. And your heart becomes haughty and you forget Hashem your God who brought you forth from Mitzrayim, from the house of slavery. Who took you through this great and awesome desert...and provided you there with water from flint rock. Who fed you Mann in the desert, which your forefathers did not know, in order to afflict and test you, for your ultimate benefit. And you would (dare) say in your heart, 'My own strength and might are the source of my valor.' And you shall remember Hashem your God, for it is He who gives you strength to achieve valor - in order to establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers as on this very day." (Devarim 8:2-18)

By miraculously providing for the care and sustenance of B'nei Yisroel in the Midbar concomitant with teaching and demonstrating that He alone is to be relied upon and none other, Hashem put B'nei Yisroel through a unique faith training program. The centerpiece of this faith training program was the Mann, which was a daily proclamation of Hashem's constant care and authority, and which was provided with rules and instruction that systematically imbued and reinforced within B'nei Yisroel a crystal clear sense of total trust and exclusive reliance on Hashem. The faith training program of the Midbar, as accentuated by the

Mann, was perpetuated for eternity through the mitzvah of Birkas Ha-Mazon, such that one who eats to satisfaction is immediately humbled in thanksgiving to Hashem for His bounty, rather than crediting oneself for provision of the pleasures and any riches that he has. This is clearly indicated from the pesukim quoted above.

Thus, Birkas Ha-Mazon is not mere thanksgiving; rather, Birkas Ha-Mazon is an eternal continuation of the faith training program of the Midbar, perpetuating the faith training of the Mann and Hashem's other miraculous provisions during the forty-year sojourning of B'nei Yisroel in the Desert. One who recites Birkas Ha-Mazon after a meal affirms and acts upon the faith training teachings of the above-quoted text from Parshas Eikev.

It is thus understood why the mitzvah of Birkas Ha-Mazon is featured in Parshas Eikev rather than elsewhere in the Torah, as Birkas Ha-Mazon is a central part of the faith training program presented in Parshas Eikev, as originally manifested by the Mann. Birkas Ha-Mazon perpetuates this program and carries forth the emunah lessons, messages and effects of the Mann for eternity.

We can now answer why the Torah prescribes Birkas Ha-Mazon as, "...and you shall bless Hashem your God on the good land that He has given you." The primary concern in the section of Parshas Eikev quoted above is that of B'nei Yisroel abandoning reliance on Hashem and attributing their success to themselves when they would experience incredible bounty and richness upon settlement in Eretz Yisroel and the reaping of its lush and plentiful provisions; as a continuation of the faith training program of the Midbar and as an antidote to B'nei Yisroel abrogating reliance on Hashem when faced with satiety and pleasure, Hashem commanded that Birkas Ha-Mazon be recited after eating. Since Eretz Yisroel is the projected location for B'nei Yisroel becoming flooded with bounty and sated, and thereupon potentially abandoning reliance on Hashem, Eretz Yisroel is perforce central to the Torah's command to recite Birkas Ha-Mazon, as the goodness and satiety provided by the promised life would be manifested specifically in the Promised Land.

The next time that we recite Birkas Ha-Mazon, let us realize that we are perpetuating the lessons of the Mann and that we are linking into and continuing the faith training program of our ancestors as presented in Parshas Eikev, as we forever affirm our total reliance on Hashem and credit Him in full for the goodness in our lives.

Loving the Stranger

Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

In this week's parasha, parashat Eikev, the Torah boldly pronounces the positive mitzvah of loving the stranger.

In Deuteronomy 10:19, the Torah states, "Va'ah'hav'tem et ha'ger, kee gay'reem heh'yee'tehm b'Eretz Mitzrayim," You shall love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. This verse is one of 36 times in which the Torah admonishes the People of Israel to love and care for the stranger and treat them properly. It is the most oft-repeated mitzvah in the Torah, cited more often than even Shabbat, kashrut, or circumcision.

Xenophobia (fear of strangers) is a hallmark of most close-knit communities, and certainly of most ancient societies. Even the United States of America, whose citizenry is comprised of every conceivable ethnic and racial group, is presently beset by immigration issues. The U.S., built on the back of immigrants, has, throughout its history, frequently cut off immigration to outsiders and strangers.

The Torah admonishes the Jews: You of all people, who were yourselves strangers in Egypt, must be particularly sensitive to the needs of strangers.

Most often, strangers are treated with suspicion because they are different. Sometimes, they do not speak the native language fluently, and, at times, they are resented because they are particularly industrious and enterprising. Immigrants are frequently willing to perform menial jobs for lower compensation than natives or long-term citizens. This often leads to the perception that the immigrants are "stealing jobs" from the natives, and threaten the socioeconomic security of the earlier immigrants.

If attitudes of antipathy and xenophobia are often directed at mere strangers, how much more so to strangers who wish to convert to Judaism, who are neither members of our families, nor of our people. Consequently, the Torah laws regarding the proper treatment of converts are rather extensive and quite detailed.

One who comes under the wings of the Divine Presence to become Jewish is called a Ger Tzedek, a righteous proselyte. A righteous proselyte must accept the entire body of the Jewish faith, belief and practice, including the important mitzvot as well as the seemingly less important ones. A potential convert may not say, "I will accept the entire Torah, with the exception of a single law."

It is quite common for the background of the candidate for conversion to be carefully scrutinized, to ensure that

the conversion is being pursued for the proper reasons. Those who come to convert are asked why they wish to convert. At the time of their conversion, they are asked if they are aware that the Jewish people are a hated and persecuted people who endure much suffering. The Talmud in Yevamot 47a and 47b states that candidates for conversion are taught the basics of Judaism—unity of G-d, the prohibition of idolatry, some of the more lenient and more severe laws, and punishment and reward for mitzvot.

The Sefer Ha'Chinuch asserts that since those who enter the Jewish faith often do so at the expense of their familial and former social relationships, they roundly deserve to be accorded our love, acceptance and regard. Maimonides regards the convert with ambivalence. He attributes G-d's greater love for Israel to an inherent superiority of the people of Israel. Even so, Maimonides maintains that a Jew must love the convert to Judaism regardless of any superiority or inferiority that may exist.

The Kli Yakar rejects Maimonides' notion of a superior birthright. He contends that the Al-mighty created the world to serve all of humankind and that being born Jewish is meaningless, unless a Jew's actions also merit G-d's love. Thus, a convert who follows the laws of the Torah must be loved, just as one must love any Jew.

Over the years, I have had the privilege of teaching and guiding many converts to Judaism. Most of them are truly exceptional individuals. Their devotion to Judaism is unquestionably sincere. In fact, it is often embarrassing to witness their extraordinary commitment, especially when compared with naturally born biological Jews, who are often casual about their commitment. The converts' mastery of the fine points of Judaism is often astounding, again shaming the biologically born Jews, who are frequently satisfied with their own limited Jewish knowledge.

Over the last decade, at least in my experience, there has been a small, perceptible increase in the numbers of non-Jews who seek to convert to Judaism. They are often highly accomplished individuals, who have grown disenchanted with the religion into which they were born. They come from all backgrounds, nationalities, races and creeds. They are an inspiration to say the least.

One of the recent converts to Judaism with whom I've had the privilege to study, is a lovely, highly intelligent Chinese woman, whose studies for conversion to Judaism

took almost five years. Although she had been married previously to a Jewish man, she had never converted. Only when she divorced did she formally begin the conversion process. She enjoys pointing out the confluence between many of the Chinese alphabet characters with Judaism and the Bible. So, for instance, the pictogram for a boat in Chinese consists of three symbols, a vessel, a human being and the number eight, reminding us that the first vessel, Noah's Ark, contained eight human beings. Before she converted to Judaism, she would identify herself proudly as a "M-O-T-I-T," Member of the Tribe in Training. After her conversion, a little over a year ago, she announced that she was now an "F-S-T," Frum (religious) Since Tuesday.

Moshe's Perspective

Rabbi Maury Grebenau

Late in this week's parsha, Moshe tries to sum up our mission in life. In one sentence he tells us what it is that Hashem asks of us. It is a laundry list of fear, respect, love etc. for Hashem and to follow all of G-d's many commandments. What the Talmud (Brachos 33b) questions is Moshe's introduction. The pasuk seems to downplay the difficulty of fulfilling our role. "What does Hashem ask of you? Only to ... (Devarim 10:12)" is the way Moshe begins his remarks. The Talmud asks that fear of Heaven is not something to be downplayed. Is it so easy to achieve? The Talmud answers that for Moshe it was indeed a small thing. The comparison is made to a person who is asked to produce an expensive utensil; it is not a difficult task if they own such an item.

The first time I came across this Gemara I was very bothered. It seems to fly in the face of everything we know about Moshe. Moshe was the leader par excellence of the Jewish people. A constant advocate for the Jews, Moshe understood where they were and met them there time and time again. How could he be so out of touch with the people? Could he suggest that fear of Heaven is a simple thing simply because he had attained this level himself?

The Maharsha quickly came to my rescue with his beautiful read of the Gemara. He explains that we are misunderstanding the Gemara's answer. The Gemara is not saying that it was easy for Moshe to fear Hashem so he expected the Jews to have the same strength of character. Instead, the Gemara is saying that the Jews had an awe of

The history of our people has been bountifully enriched by converts, including Shmaya and Avtalyon, the famous teachers of Hillel and Shamai. Both Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Akiva were descendants of converts. The primary translator of the Bible to Aramaic, Onkelos, was a convert. The Talmud tells us that the Babylonian General, Nevuzradan, was a convert, as were the grandchildren of Siserah, Sancherev, Haman and the Roman Emperor, Nero. And, of course, King David descended from Ruth the Moabite.

The mitzvah that is enumerated in this week's parasha, of loving the proselyte, cannot be overemphasized. These "strangers" surely deserve our warm welcome and heartfelt love.

Moshe. When Moshe came down from Har Sinai with his face aglow from his encounter with the divine, it was easy to be in awe of his visage. Moshe, the consummate educator that he was, showed the people that the difficult goal of awe of Hashem had already been achieved. Moshe told the people that if they could so easily have awe of a simple human being, shouldn't it be easy to be in awe of Hashem.

The Maharsha further explains that this is the comparison the Gemara was making. Being in awe is difficult. It seems like a major undertaking, like asking someone to produce an expensive vessel. However, if a person already possesses the vessel then producing it is no great feat. The Jewish people were already in awe, all they had to do was redirect their awe. With the Maharsha's insight this Gemara comes into perfect consonance with what we know of Moshe's character.

The Torah is very skimpy on the details of Moshe's younger life. We are told of only a few incidents and are left to wonder why Moshe is chosen by Hashem to be the leader of the Jews. The Midrash fills in some of the gap by telling the story of Moshe the shepherd chasing after a sheep which has strayed from the herd. Moshe's strength as a leader was his concern for each individual person. This is a necessary quality in leadership. Here Moshe reveals a second vital quality. Moshe is able to see things from the people's perspective. He is, of course, on an extremely high spiritual level and yet he is able to give practical advice for those who are lower on the spiritual ladder. This is necessary

in parenting, leadership and education in general. The advice offered must be in sync with where the recipient is at that moment. Sometimes the packaging is almost as important as the product. The same lesson can be boring or fascinating, relevant or foreign, all depending on how it is relayed to

Resilient Until the Very End

Rabbi Shlomo Einhorn

Dr. Robert Brooks, in his highly practical and psychological book entitled *Raising Resilient Children*, sets out to lay the groundwork to raising a resilient child, a child who has the ability to recover readily. He understands resilience as: The ability of a child to deal more effectively with stress and pressure, to cope with everyday challenges, to balance back from disappointments, adversity, and trauma, to develop clear and realistic goals, to solve problems, to relate comfortably with others, and to treat oneself and others with respect.

Our tradition teaches us that the resilient soul knows that there is really only one important day on the practicing calendar. R. Nachman of Breslov, in his moral fable *The Lost Princess*, notes that the efforts of the hero to save the princess, on his first try, fell flat simply because he didn't put up his best fight "on the last day." The last day

Haftarat Ekev

Rabbi Gidon Rothstein

This week's haftarah, the second of the seven of comfort, spends its first section stressing the repopulation of Yerushalayim as a vital part of her rejuvenation. Zion thinks of herself as abandoned, which the Prophet vigorously disputes by telling us that our connection to Hashem is stronger than a mother's to her child or nursing infant, that Zion is inscribed on God's "palms", her walls before Him constantly.

That connection will show itself in the return of Zion's children from all over, turning a desolate city into one where people complain of a lack of room to live, astonishing the city itself. Repopulation's centrality to assuaging the wounds of destruction suggests that a significant aspect of Yerushalayim's role in the world—its status as a city of God—can be fulfilled even before we have a return of a

the audience. The only way to package properly is to truly understand the people you are trying to reach. It was this quality which defined Moshe's leadership and this quality which made him the greatest leader we have ever known.

in any endeavor has the potential to recoup setbacks set into motion from the beginning. The last day can also spoil wonderfully great work of an entire year.

Rebbe Simcha Bunim of Peshicha (Parshas Toldos in Kol Simchah) says that this is the translation of the beginning of this week's Torah portion – Ekev. "והיה עקב" – these few words have caused some debate as to their translation. R. Simcha Bunim understands it to mean – the words we truly hear, the message that really becomes part of us is the one that is still standing in the end, on the last day. עקב is a heel. The heel being the last spot on our body if one is counting from top down. In a sense, the battles that we wage until the very last day result in the landmark victories that define our lives. Resilience means standing our ground and seeing a project through to completion.

Mikdash, king, or Sanhedrin, but not without a bustling successful city. Her mourning is not just sadness at her decreased state, but at her ineffectiveness; the return of citizens will allow her to serve at least some of her functions.

The Exodus as the Unbreakable Bond

When the verses refer to Hashem not forgetting us, various Midrashim read God as "remembering" aspects of the time of the Exodus. That time, including the Giving of the Torah at Sinai and the construction and utilization of the Mishkan, are what the Midrash looks back towards as the source of God's indissoluble bond with us. The Exodus and all that came after—up to and including the Conquest of Israel—were signs of our having been chosen by God as agents of His Presence in the world, a choice and connection that will never be broken or forgotten.

Verses 22-23 record Hashem's promise that non-Jews will bring us back to Israel on their arms (does paying for our flights count?), that their kings will raise us, will bow down to us, and lick our dirt. Seeing their obeisance will fully convince us that those who follow Hashem will never be lost or wither away.

We might mistake these verses for joy in giving back to the non-Jews some of the abuse we've taken from them over the years. Sifrei Devarim 314, notes that what the non-Jews will do for us in the future is similar to what Hashem did for us during the Exodus, at least in terms of helping us get to Israel. The point is not so much their subservience, as their agreeing on the importance of enhancing God's Presence in the world.

Rather than envisioning non-Jews as slaves to us, Yeshayahu was prophesying that significant numbers of non-Jews, especially their leaders, will come to appreciate our unique role in the world, and will want to assist us, not out of fear, but out of respect for our status, for our position as representatives of God.

Chapter Fifty, Verses 1-3: Hope is Vital to Sustaining Religious Engagement

The opening verses of chapter fifty go back to the theme of abandonment, with Hashem questioning what bill of divorce He ever offered, since the Jews act as if they have been written out of God's picture. The verses point out that disillusionment is itself dangerous, since it may lead people to cease even trying to secure a better future. Disengagement (not that kind) starts with a lack of hope, a sense of being shut out of Hashem's concerns.

Verses 4-11: Sustaining Hope

The next eight verses might seem to move on to a different topic, Yeshayahu's boasting about his prophetic prowess. He tells of his confidence that Hashem will protect him, notes that Hashem gave him the power to speak in a way that shores up people's energy, to hear and understand Hashem's messages, and says that Hashem gives him new messages every morning. He closes by predicting that his attackers will dry up like moths, so that those sensitive to God's Word should believe in him, join him, and listen to Hashem.

Radak thinks Yeshayahu was telling us that he was born with the power to accomplish the difficult tasks set for

him. That explains how Yeshayahu was not telling us this for his own prestige, but to rouse a discouraged people to recognize that they could seek God and find God's Word from this prophet. That Yeshayahu has daily updates, that he is naturally endowed both with the ability to hear God's messages and to transmit them in an encouraging and invigorating way, would ideally have led the people to refocus their energies on listening to him and adjusting their lives according to what he says they should do.

Incidentally, if Yeshayahu had prophecies every night, but recorded only 66 chapters of navi, what we have before us are his "greatest hits," the highpoints of forty years of daily prophecy.

Chapter 51, Verses 1-2: Avraham and Sarah as Our Sources

The next verses—and maybe its worth noting that this haftarah spans parts of three chapters in the non-Jewish division of Tanach, meaning that we are putting together into one reading what the Christians took to be separate units—urge us to look back to the rock and pit from which we were taken, traditionally read as a reference to Avraham and Sarah.

Part of the comfort in remembering Avraham and Sarah, I believe, is Avraham's legacy as one of the few humans with whom God chose to consult about how to run the world. Avraham became an active partner in running God's world, a legacy we are supposed to find comforting and inspiring, suggesting we could do the same if only we adopted the right motives and strategies.

Summary

This week's comfort—better than last week's, for sure—comes from a return to the Land not just in population but in status as the source of Hashem's Presence. Non-Jews will recognize that and eagerly assist us in accomplishing it (talk about Utopian!!!).

In that time, Yeshayahu's presence could have eased the way for the Jews to accomplish what they needed; with his passing, we need to look to our roots, particularly Avraham and our time in the desert. Remembering all three of them—prophet, Patriarch, and passage—should help us remember the bright future that is available to us whenever we get serious about reaching for it.