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The Flame of  
Our Ancestors  
"Educate children  
in the way they  
should go, and even  
when they are old,  
they will not depart  
from it"  
-Proverbs 22:6

Tefillah Gems

Eytan Merkin '18

## Happiness is Underrated

Rabbi Dov Emerson

"Because you did not serve Hashem, your G-d, amid gladness and goodness of heart, when everything was abundant" (Devarim 28:47).

Moshe Rabbeinu, in one of his final addresses to the Jewish people, makes a remarkable claim: The horrific curses that could G-d forbid befall the Jewish people are a result of not serving Hashem with joy. The Ramban teaches that this admonition is in fact a reference to the destruction of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Beit Ha'Mikdash. Yet the Gemara in Yoma famously teaches that the reason why the 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple was destroyed was because of *Sin'at Chinam*, baseless hatred.

We might wonder: which characteristic is responsible for the destruction of the Beit Ha'Mikdash? Is it a lack of joy, or baseless hatred?

The Shem M'Shmuel, Ha'Rav Shmuel Bornsztain, the second Sochatchover rebbe, explains that these two characteristics are really one. An individual who lacks joy is someone who views the world through a lens of pessimism. To such a person, there are no opportunities, only challenges and hardship. A negative person often views himself negatively, and then projects those feelings onto others as well, in the form of hatred. While the Beit Ha'Mikdash was, as the Talmud writes, destroyed due to *Sin'at Chinam*, it started with a lack of joy among the Jewish people, which was then channeled into hate.

Rabbi Yochanan Zweig, Rosh Yeshiva and Rosh Kollel of Talmudic University of Florida in Miami Beach, offers a different perspective in explaining that unhappiness and hatred are really part of the same malady: he notes the fact that the Pasuk states that the Jewish people did not serve Hashem with joy "when everything was abundant." It was not just the notion that the people were unhappy. It was that despite benefiting from so many blessings, they were still lacking joy. Rabbi Zweig explains that a person can only be truly happy if they appreciate what they have, as the Mishna in Avot teaches, "Who is rich? He who is happy with his lot." A person who thinks that they are deserving of everything will not appreciate or be content with what they have. Instead, they will focus on the items that they feel they are lacking. If I am such an individual, the friend who has what I want is now a threat! Why does he have that object, or skill, or characteristic, when I clearly deserve it?! Such a person begins hating others simply because they are in the way of him getting what he wants. In this manner, he arrives at the terrible characteristic of *Sin'at Chinam*.

The truth is, it is hard to change our feelings. It is difficult to train ourselves to be optimistic, to feel joyful, and to appreciate what we have. But Elul is the time for us to make these changes. Hashem's gift to us is that we only have to make the effort to start the process, and He will pull us forward. The Midrash on Shir Ha'Shirim famously states, "Open up to Me an opening of Teshuva the size of a needle's eye, and I will open up an opening so wide the wagons can pass through." Rabbi Efrem Goldberg, Rav of Boca Raton Synagogue, recently taught in the name of Rav Elimelech Bederman that this is the message of the shofar: "We push our breath through a small hole and large sounds come out the other side." Small changes reap tremendous rewards. Let us all make the most of this auspicious time so that we can achieve the goal of Elul, to reconnect with ourselves, and in doing so, reconnect with our Creator.

Three times every day we recite Shema, which begins with the line:

"Ve'ahavta et Hashem Elokeicha bechol levavcha u'vechol nafshecha u'vechol meodecha" (Devarim 6:5)

"And you shall love Hashem your G-d with all of your heart, and all of your soul, and all of your might" (Devarim 6:5)

What does it mean to love Hashem with all of our might? Rav Kook suggests that this pasuk teaches us to have absolute gratitude. One who truly loves G-d unconditionally thanks G-d for everything, both the good and the bad.

Rav Kook's answer leaves us with more questions: How can we possibly thank G-d for tragedy? And why is this related to loving G-d? The answer lies in our perception of the world. A self-centered person whose own interests outweigh his love for G-d will only perceive situations and events as in the context of their effect on his life. From the perspective of such a person, it is impossible to thank G-d for both good and bad, because every event can only be measured in relation to that selfish, narrow-minded viewpoint. In contrast, one who loves and trusts G-d unconditionally understands that every situation affects not just his own interests, but also those of the entire community. Such a person trusts in G-d's plan and understands that private suffering might enable a possible overall effect on the community as a whole.

# Having Proper Intensions

Joshua Partovi '17

When it comes to the mitzvah of *Bikkurim*, every Jew must take his fruit to Yerushalaim to give to the *Kohen*. Strangely, for the rich man that brings his fruit on a nice gold platter, he gets the tray back from the *Kohen*, but for the poor person, the *Kohen* keeps the simple basket that he brings. Why does the rich man stay rich, while the poor man is made poorer?

Regarding the poor farmer, the Torah teaches that when he noticed his fruit beginning to ripen, he was full of joy and happiness; he was looking forward to this *Mitzvah* all year long. Soon, he would have the opportunity to make this holy trip to Yerushalayim to thank Hashem for the prosperous harvest He had granted him. However, he does not have anything to place his *Bikkurim* in and give to the *Kohanim*, so he weaves for himself a simple basket to transport the fruit. Contrastingly, the wealthy farmer has the same obligation as the poor farmer in this *Mitzvah*, but, when he sees his fruits beginning to ripen, he is not inundated with the same joy the poor farmer experiences. Instead, he says to himself, "Come on, is it already time to give up my fruit again? I just brought them last year, but a simple basket will not suffice. Rather, I need a gold platter." He brings the gold platter to show off to his friends.

From these antithetical stories, the Torah teaches an important lesson. The poor farmer's basket was presented to the *Kohen* with happiness and willingness, so the *Kohen* can accept the simple basket as well. The wealthy farmer's tray, on the other hand, was brought simply to show off to the spectators, and such a gift has no place in the *Beit HaMikdash*. Rashi says that when the *Bikkurim* were brought, a voice would call out and say, "Just like you presented your *Bikkurim* this year, so, too, you should do the same next year." During the month of *Elul*, we are occupied with reciting extra *Tefillot*, but we must be careful that these prayers emanate from the heart and do not feel like an obligation or simple conformation because of our social standards. With Hashem's help, we will *Daven* with sincerity and from the heart, and Hashem will listen to our prayers and judge us favorably.

## The Challenge of HaKarat HaTov

In *Parashat Ki Tavo*, we read possibly the most terrifying portion of the entire *Tanach* – the *Tochachah*, curses. It is so terrifying that we have the custom of reading it so quietly that it is barely audible. What will provoke Hashem to inflict the horrifying punishments described in the *Tochachah*? It is not murder, or *Sinat Chinam*, or idol worship. Rather, the *Tochachah* speaks of something that hardly sounds like a sin at all. *Bnei Yisrael* would suffer these terrible punishments, "Because you did not serve Hashem with happiness when you had *Rav Kol* – plenty of everything" (*Devarim* 28:47).

As explained by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, Moshe is telling *Bnei Yisrael*, "After forty years of wandering in the desert, you are finally about to enter *Eretz Yisrael*. In Israel, you will build homes, you will grow abundant crops, and your families will be safe and secure. You think this will be the end of all your challenges, but, to the contrary, your very prosperity will be your greatest trial of all – the challenge is that when you have plenty of everything, you will forget where everything came from. When you have the most to thank Hashem for, you will forget to thank Him at all."

But the Torah takes this message one step further. At the beginning of the *Parasha*, the Torah commands the farmer who brings his *Bikkurim* to Yerushalayim: "And you should be happy *B'Kol* – with all the good that Hashem your G-d gave you" (*Devarim* 26:11). Why is the farmer specifically commanded to be happy? He just had a bountiful harvest! How could he not be happy?! Yet, as Rabbi Frand explains, this *Mitzvah* to be happy is necessary. The farmer could come to Yerushalayim with plenty of *Bikkurim* and still look jealously upon his neighbor who had a bigger crop. Therefore, as part of the *Mitzvah* of *Bikkurim*, the Torah commands that we should be appreciative, and have *Ha'Karat Ha'Tov*, even if we could have been more successful, even if our neighbor DID have a better crop. This understanding is the deeper message of the words *Rav Kol* in the *Tochachah*. In *Sefer Bereishit*, when Eisav and Yaakov meet after over 20 years of separation, Eisav tells Yaakov, "Yeish Li *RAV*" – "I have Plenty" (*Bereishit* 33:9), to which Yaakov responds: "Yesh Li *Kol*" – "I Have Everything I need" (*Bereishit* 33:11). The difference between an Eisav and a Yaakov is that however much Eisav possesses, he only sees it as plenty. Yaakov, on the other hand, recognizes that regardless of what he has, he has "Kol," he has everything he needs. Someone who looks upon all the good things that he possesses as only "plenty," as only "adequate," will never be happy. Conversely, the farmer at the *Bikkurim* ceremony who recognizes that whatever Hashem has given him is everything he needs will be *Sameach Be'CHOL Ha'Tov*.

That concept is the message of Moshe *Rabbeinu* in the *Tochachah*. We must always recognize that whatever prosperity we enjoy is a gift from Hashem for which we must always be thankful. However, we must take it one step further. We must also recognize that, like the farmer bringing his *Bikkurim*, whatever may be the "fruits of our labor," even if those fruits are less bountiful than our neighbors', it is exactly what **WE** need. Like Yaakov *Avinu*, we must recognize that our *Rav* is also our *Kol*. And if we do that, Moshe tells us, then we will be truly happy, then we will be able to thank Hashem "Be'Simcha U'Ve'Tov *Leva'ot Me'Rov Kol*."

## HALACHIC ILLUMINATIONS FROM RABBI NACHUM SAUER

The Halachot applying to the Ba'al Koreh for Keriat Hatorah are intriguing. After the Oleh, or person receiving the Aliyah, says the Bracha on the Torah, the Ba'al Koreh should say Amen immediately and not stop to find the place. This is because one should not delay the reciting of Amen after the Bracha. When the Ba'al Koreh reads the Torah, he should be extra careful to read it with the correct wording. This includes many things. Firstly, one should not pause in the middle of a Pasuk, however one also should not slur two Pasukim together. The congregation needs to clearly recognize the end of one Pasuk and the beginning of the next. Also, the Ba'al Koreh should pause in between the empty spaces (Pesuchos or Stumos – Breaks in the lines) inside the Torah, even more than between two Pasukim. However, the Rama holds that one must pause in between the empty spaces in words on Shabbat, but not for the regular weekday reading of the Torah. In order to fulfill all opinions, it is preferable to pause in between spaces whenever one is reading the Torah. Next, the Ba'al Koreh should make sure that he is reading every single word from inside the Torah and not just memorizing it. If the Ba'al Koreh leaves out a word, he must go back to that Pasuk and repeat it. If the Ba'al Koreh makes a mistake in pronunciation that changes the meaning of the word, he also has to go back. There are three different opinions concerning the Ba'al Koreh making a mistake in pronouncing a word. One says the Ba'al Koreh just needs to repeat the word; another says the Ba'al Koreh needs to repeat the phrase, and the third says that he must repeat the entire Pasuk. The accepted opinion is to repeat the phrase. However, if there is no change in the meaning of the word, then he does not have to repeat. If the Ba'al Koreh makes a mistake with the Trope, he does not have to correct his mistake.

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