



# The Marcos and Adina Katz YUTORAH IN PRINT

## Ki Teitzei 5780

### Embracing Our Jewish Identity

Rabbi Dr. Dvir Ginsberg

**T**he case of the ben sorer u'moreh, the wayward and rebellious son, is one of the more challenging aspects of Jewish law. Much attention is paid to the idea of killing this adolescent based on future actions, explained and justified by many commentators. Another aspect of this anomalous law is the simple comprehension what exactly is driving the adolescent. Much of the difficulty emerges from the cryptic presentation of the sins (Devarim 20:18-21):

*“If a man has a wayward (sorer) and rebellious son (moreh), who does not obey his father or his mother, and they chasten him, and [he still] does not listen to them. His father and his mother shall take hold of him and bring him out to the elders of his city, and to the gate of his place. And they shall say to the elders of his city, “This son of ours is wayward and rebellious; he does not obey us; [he is] a glutton and a guzzler.” And all the men of his city shall pelt him to death with stones, and he shall die. So shall you clear out the evil from among you, and all Israel will listen and fear.”*

To provide at least some context, the Sages explain that the “son” is someone just past the age of bar-mitzvah. Thus, the adolescent is obligated in the system of Jewish law (the actual age of liability runs from his birthday to three months later). As well, they fill the chasm left by the vagueness in the written Torah, detailing the specific actions performed that lead to the death of such an individual.

Yet the Ibn Ezra, as he often does, offers his own unique explanation (ibid 18). The term “wayward” refers to the son’s unwillingness to observe the positive commandments. The “rebellious” aspect refers to the adolescent’s violation of the negative commandments. Eventually, this leads to the “glutton” referred to in the verse. The person is someone who desires all that he can in the world of the instinctual. Ultimately, the individual is an apikoros, which the Ibn Ezra understands to mean someone solely and exclusively seeks

out satisfaction of the appetite in this world.

It is fairly clear the Ibn Ezra charts his own course in understanding the sin of the ben sorer u'moreh. However, his explanation is quite challenging to comprehend on any simple level. Yes, the individual committing the sins is technically held accountable for violation of the commandments; but, in truth, he has really just entered the world of Jewish law. Are we to understand this person as being someone who has truly come to some type of philosophical epiphany? While he may be an adult in the eyes of Jewish law, it is unlikely someone of that age has the intellectual maturity to develop a sophisticated reproach to the path of Judaism.

We should also ask why the Torah differentiates, as per the Ibn Ezra, between sorer and moreh.

Why is it necessary to explain that the young man both ceases observance to the positive commandments and violates the negative ones? Of course, it certainly demonstrates a terrible path the individual has chosen. However, one word could have been used to describe a total abandonment of Jewish law.

As noted above, it would be difficult to assume this young individual developed some type of sophisticated philosophical rebuke to Jewish faith. Rather, we are being asked to enter the mindset of a young person at this very moment of transition to Jewish adulthood. Often, an adolescent sees Judaism as a lifestyle in stark contrast to the surrounding world. The demands of Jewish law inevitably bring with them a withdrawal, in many ways, from “normal” behavior.

The Ibn Ezra might be pointing us to a desire of this adolescent to strip himself of his Jewish identity. Many of the positive commandments create an explicit distinction between a Jew and the rest of the world. For example, the

uniqueness of the Jew presents itself with commandments such as tefillin and tzitzit. The negative precepts frequently function as a means of exhibiting control over one's desires, an approach at odds with a world where lack of inhibition is a value. To eat non-kosher food is a prime instance of being "just like everyone else". The adolescent has decided to remove, from his perspective, the shackles of his Jewish self, expressed in his lack of adherence to the commandments.

A commentary via a Midrash (Midrash Tenaim ibid) buttresses this point. The author of the Midrash explains sorer to refer to turning away from the words of his father, while moreh is rebelling against the words of his mother. Often, the target of rebellion by an adolescent is the father. Yet this Midrash considers the rebellion here to be focused against his mother.

A possible explanation could be related to the idea of the adolescent attempting to abandon his identity as a Jew. In Judaism, the father is responsible for perpetuating the system of Jewish law to his son. The ben sorer u'moreh chooses a different path, expressed in no longer abiding by

Jewish law. However, he saves his wrath for this mother. Why he is a Jew is the product of his mother, as per Jewish law. The adolescent wants to wash himself of any vestige of Judaism, and his mother is ultimately the one to "blame" for his status.

The Ibn Ezra, in taking such an approach, presents a very realistic understanding of the mindset of this adolescent. A supreme challenge in Judaism involves our distinguishing ourselves from competing ideologies and cultures, while serving as an example to the world. A child beginning the transition to adulthood, especially in today's world, is confronted with the appeal of "doing whatever everyone else does" and "doing what I want". While the ben sorer u'moreh is an extreme situation of complete abandonment, this outlook is quite common. The warning drawn out from this sin is the importance of demonstrating to our children the tremendous rewards of following Jewish law. Our Jewish identity should not be one that our children see as an anchor or sacrifice; rather, we should teach our children the enlightened path a Jewish life opens for us, leading them to embrace such a path.

## Greatness in Counting

*Mrs. Michal Horowitz*

**A**mongst the myriad of mitzvos outlined in this week's parshas, Parshas Ki Seitzei, we are commanded regarding the punishment of lashes. The Torah tells us: When there will be a dispute between people, and they have recourse to judgement, and they judge them, and they vindicate the righteous one and find the wicked one guilty; It will be that if the wicked one ought to be beaten, the judge shall cast him down; and he shall strike him, before him, according to his wickedness, by a count; אַרְבָּעִים יִכּוּ, לֹא יִסִּיף: פֶּן-יִסִּיף לְהַכּוֹתוֹ עַל-אַלְפָּה מִכָּהּ; Forty shall he strike him, he shall not add; lest he continue to strike him many blows beyond these, and your brother will be degraded in your eyes (Devarim 25:1-3).

It is interesting that in the final verse, the sinner is called 'your brother,' but prior to this, he has been called 'the wicked one.' Why now, after he has received the lashes, is he called 'your brother?' Rashi teaches: כָּל הַיּוֹם קוֹרְאוֹ: אַחֲרַי, your brother? Up to the time of the flogging, he is called 'wicked one,' but once he has been flogged, the Torah calls him 'your brother.'

From here we learn that although the beis din may rule that a Jew is deserving of punishment for his sins, and at that moment he is termed a rasha (a wicked person), once the punishment has been carried out, we must see him, once again, as our brother. For all of Israel are brothers, and all of Israel - at times - are sinners. Hence, we cannot judge him more stringently than the Torah judges him. Once he has received his punishment, and G-d has forgiven him, we too must do the same.

As for the number of lashes, while the verse tells us to strike him forty times, the Sages differ. Rashi (to v.2, בְּמִסְפָּר) notes (quoting Makkos 22b) that the number of lashes is a number close to forty, but not forty itself. Hence, the wicked person receives thirty-nine lashes.

In his Parsha Parables, R' Mordechai Kamenetzky relates the following powerful insight, in the name of R' Yechezkel Meir Halstock, the Rebbe of Ostrovitz (d.1928, Poland).

The Rebbe would quote the Gemara in Makkos where the power of the sages is derived from a pasuk in our parsha: "How foolish are those people who stand for the Sefer Torah but do not stand for the Rav. Aren't the rabbis

more powerful than the Torah itself? The Torah tell us that there are forty lashes to be meted out in case of a serious transgression, yet the sages interpret the verse so as to mete out one less than forty, for a total of thirty-nine.

“The Gemara thus deduces that the rabbis have more power than the Torah, so they deserve at least as much - if not more - respect than a simple scroll.”

However, the Rebbe continued, pointing out a particular question regarding this teaching. “There are quite a number of occasions where the sages reinterpret the Torah’s text. They tell us to wear tefillin above our hairline, not between our eyes, as the Torah seems to command. And the other tefillin is placed on our arm not our hand, although a strict textual reading would have us do so.

“In fact, there is even an instance quite similar to the case of the counting of the lashes! The Torah tells us to count fifty days of Omer before celebrating the holiday of Shavuot. Yet the sages reinterpret the number and tell us to count forty-nine. Why is that example not cited to show the power of the sages? Is the ability to make a holiday one day earlier not sufficiently powerful attestation of the sages’ strength, wisdom, and greatness?” (Parsha Parables, Devarim, p.670)

In fact, the command to count fifty days of Omer is found much earlier in the Torah, back in the book of Vayikra (23:16), before the Israelites ever left Har Sinai, and began their journey to the Promised Land. The mitzvah concerning the flogging is given in year forty of their desert wanderings. Why did the Sages wait till this mitzvah to tell us how great the rabbis are, in understanding that forty (lashes) really means thirty-nine. Why would we not learn about the greatness of the rabbis, and Torah She’baal Peh (the Oral Law), from the teachings of the rabbis to count forty-nine days (of Omer) instead of fifty, a law that was given (ironically) forty years earlier?!

The Ostrovitz Rebbe answered as follows: The power of the sages was not just in refining a seemingly literal translation. Their greatness lay in an ability to read the

Torah that says to give forty lashes and through myriad proofs and deductions mete out one less lash. What is more, the greatness of the sages stems not just from the power of deductive reasoning, computations and mathematics, but from the power to make a punishment one lash lighter for a sinner.

Because “the greatness of a Torah leader is not to find more burdens for his followers, but to look for a way to lighten the existing ones. That is a great man” (Parsha Parables, Devarim, p.671).

To deduce from the command to count fifty days that we count forty-nine days of Omer reveals the analytic greatness of the sages in their understanding of Torah. But their true greatness is revealed in their deduction that forty lashes actually means thirty-nine. For the greatness of our leaders is the compassion and concern they show their flock in alleviating and lessening their burdens, pain and suffering. That is greatness!

Even when he was too weak (due to his debilitating Parkinson’s Disease) to recite Tehillim, Rav Nosson Tzvi Finkel zt”l (1943-2011), Rosh Yeshiva Yeshivas Mir Yerushalayim, still had the capacity to offer solace to petitioners and visitors who came to seek his support and blessing. “In his last year, someone came to unburden himself. A difficult health issue was affecting someone in his family, and it was becoming too much for him to bear. R’ Nosson Tzvi was laying on the couch, thoroughly drained. After hearing the man’s story, he said, ‘I don’t have the koach (energy) to do anything - not even daven. All I can do now is cry.’ R’ Nosson Tzvi then instructed the person to bring a Tehillim. The person sat next to R’ Nosson Tzvi and began to recite Tehillim, while R’ Nosson Tzvi lay there and cried” (Rav Nosson Tzvi, Artscroll, p.318).

May we emulate the greatness of the sages, as we strive to lessen the burdens of our brothers, in any way that we can.

## The Ben Franklin Effect

*Rabbi Dr. Mordechai Schiffman*

In his autobiography, Benjamin Franklin tells of a rival legislator with whom he was having trouble getting along. Franklin devised what may seem as a counterintuitive plan to win him over. Knowing that this

rival had a rare book in his library, Franklin sent him a message requesting that the legislator lend him the book for a few days. Franklin returned the book with a thank you note a week later. Subsequently, the man who up to

this point never spoke to Franklin, treated him with great civility and they kindled a friendship for the rest of their lives. The lesson from this story became known in the psychological literature as the Ben Franklin Effect. First studied in the 1960's by Jon Jecker and David Landry, the Ben Franklin effect demonstrates that a benefactor who does a favor for another person is likely to increase positive feelings towards the person he is benefiting, even if the benefactor originally did not like the other person. The hypothesized psychological concept underlying this phenomenon is cognitive dissonance. We tend to dislike having competing conceptions of ourselves in our minds so we generally try and synthesize perceived differences. On the one hand, it doesn't make sense to help someone that I don't like, yet on the other hand, I helped this person who I thought I didn't like. Hence, subconsciously I resolve that it must be that I really do like the person.

If we pay close attention to the laws Moshe Rabbeinu repeats in Sefer Devarim, we will notice discrepancies between the formulation in Devarim and previous presentations. In Parshat Ki Teitzei the law regarding helping a fallen animal on the road states, "If you see your fellow's donkey or ox fallen on the road, do not ignore it - you must help him raise it" (Devarim 22:4). Yet in Parshat Mishpatim the law reads as follows: "When you see the donkey of your enemy lying under its burden and would refrain from raising it, you must nevertheless raise it with him" (Shemot 23:5). While there is more than one difference between the pesukim, the most glaring one that the commentators address is the switch from the animal belonging to one's enemy ("*sona'acha*") to belonging to one's fellow ("*achica*"). Why the switch from enemy to friend?

Rabbi Meir Simcha of Dvinsk, in his commentary, Meshech Chochma, suggests a chronological answer. Something significant happened in between the presentation in Parshat Mishpatim where it says "enemy"

## Preserving Nationalism

*Rabbi Moshe Taragin*

**P**arshat Ki Teitzei presents a seemingly harsh set of guidelines for inclusion within the Jewish people. Marriage is strictly limited to pedigreed Jews and, additionally, not all races are granted access into Judaism. Certain nationalities, such as Amon and Moav,

and Parshat Ki Teitzei where it says "fellow," namely, the sin of the golden calf. To make his point, Rabbi Meir Simcha first references the Gemara in Pesachim (113a), which is bothered by the use of the term "*sona'acha*" - enemy or hated one - used in in Parshat Mishpatim. Doesn't the Torah in Parshat Kedoshim (Vayikra 19:17) prohibit us from hating each other? The Gemara answers that there is an exception to the rule. One is allowed, and even perhaps obligated, to hate someone whom he sees has transgressed a commandment. In a powerful limitation of the application of this Gemara, Rabbi Meir Simcha argues that this is only true before Bnei Yisrael sinned with the golden calf. Afterwards, we all became spiritually flawed and limited. Only someone who is pure and virtuous, would be allowed to have a righteous indignation towards those that have sinned. After the sin of the golden calf, there is nobody who could reach such a status, hence everyone should be considered brethren. Therefore the pasuk in Parshat Ki Teitzei switches from the term "enemy" to "fellow," because enemy is no longer a viable option.

Rabbeinu Bechaye suggests a different answer to the switch from enemy to friend. He writes that the Torah is hinting to a strategy as to how to transform someone from an enemy to a friend. If there is someone that you don't like, and you go out of your way to help him, you will come to like him. By doing him a favor, you will become his friend. In other words, the switch of the words in the pesukim is hinting to the Ben Franklin effect.

If we would like to decrease the amount of strife and hatred in our lives, we would do well to internalize these messages. First, realize that there are limited acceptable justifications for hating someone. Second, if we do have strong negative feelings towards other people, consider doing them a favor. By acting kindly towards them, you can alter your own perceptions and enhance the relationship, transforming them from "*sona'acha*" to "*achica*."

are completely excluded based on past national misdeeds. Other nationalities such as the Egyptians are allowed to convert but must undergo a three-generation transitional period before marriage with fully pedigreed Jews is licensed. Full membership within the Jewish nation isn't

inclusive, but severely restricted.

To some, these restrictions appear bigoted and chauvinistic. The modern enlightened world has successfully created inclusive educational settings, workplaces and even families- embracing people regardless of race, religion or ethnicity. In an era of universal empowerment and equal opportunities, the very mention of nationalism is offensive to many.

Wariness and suspicion of nationalism has intensified over the past two centuries, as humanity has been exposed to the dangers of virulent nationalism. Western Civilization has repeatedly suffered at the hands of violent Fascist states which placed loyalty to State and national culture above the value of individual life. These States weaponized their societies to brutally suppress the outsider. The European continent in particular bore the major brunt of these Fascist regimes first in their confrontation with Nazi Germany and subsequently in their suppression under the dark cloud of Communist expansionism for 40 years. Traumatized by these horrific mutations of nationalism, much of the modern world and the European continent in particular harbors deep antagonism to the notion of nationalism. "All humans are equal" and society should aim, in the minds of these opponents of nationalism, toward a more pluralistic and embracing society unattached to local "tribal" identities.

This movement toward pluralistic universalism, was also abetted by technological advancements as well as scientific inroads. Advances in transportation and communication dramatically shrunk our vast world and dismantled the cultural barriers which, in the past, were reinforced by distance. The more we are exposed to different peoples and their cultures the more we expect ethnic differences to fade. Modern science and its mapping of human history, has attested to the genetic similarity of all humans as well as their common past. Much of our modern world, frightened by the perils of unbridled nationalism and convinced of the indistinguishability of humanity, condemns the "parochial" interests of nationalism.

Interestingly, recently various Western societies have sharply reacted to these liberalizing universalist trends by enabling far right nationalistic movements which once again attempt- in many cases through violent means , to purify their national heritage. These dangerous reactionary movements have further convinced many of the rampant dangers of nationalist identity.

However, the rejection of nationalism comes at great cost as national identity provides a crucial anchor for human development. Ideally, national identity provides "baselines" for core values. Although the development of identity is subjective and personal, certain primary core values are transmitted by "association" rather than independently absorbed. The gemara in Yevamot (79a) which describes Jews as merciful, modest and charitable isn't just portraying a genetic reality. It is also recommending a national profile, which Jews should aim to adopt. The abolition of national identity has created a large scale identity crisis in the modern world. National identity provides an identity baseline which can then enable more personal development.

Nationalism also provides a sense of historical "verticality"; affiliation with land and people bonds us to our past and aligns us with our future. It allows our experiences to be informed and impacted by past generations while it attunes our decisions to our collective future. Without these national and historical anchors personal experience becomes "isolated" or trapped in the present, and our behavior can sink into selfishness and negligence. Life as part of a "line" of national and historical experience is more meaningful than life as an isolated "point"- unconnected to past and unconcerned with future.

Finally, a "common sense" of a national past yields a more firm sense of joint experience and mutual kinship.

Those who share a common past feel an innate

sense of community and common purpose. When the Rambam lists the motivation for tzedaka charity (Laws of Charity chapter 10), he stresses that all Jews are considered children of G-d; every Jew is a brother and if "brothers aren't merciful to one another who else will care for their needs"? Despite the hardships of exile, Jews across the world have always enjoyed impressive unity, stemming, in part from our sense of common destiny.

Humanity is currently involved in an crucial struggle of ideas. It is searching for a healthy balance between inclusion and nationalism. Still scarred by the violent eruptions of racism and hatred in the name of nationalism humanity still harbors an unhealthy bias toward nationalism. The world is still seeking that delicate balance between these two important poles of inclusion and nationalism. Jews are mandated to extend welfare to an entire planet, but we are also meant to safeguard our national identity and our joint historical mission. The

severe restrictions upon entry into Judaism and marriage with Jews listed in Ki Teitzei, are intended to help preserve that national identity.

At the conclusion of history we have returned to our homeland-aided by a process of secular nationalism or Zionism. Millions of Jews who aren't classically religious have rediscovered their attachment to land, history and people. Though religious Jews yearn for a religious state we are gratified that our nationalist ambitions have been expressed. We value national identity, even if it is unaffiliated with religious practice.

Furthermore, our nationalist return is meant to instruct

humanity at large. We live at the forefront of human history- defying toxic and harmful ideas while advancing beneficial values. Jews are involved in the battlefield of ideas just as we struggle on the actual battlefield of history. Our Zionist/Nationalist return to our homeland reminds humanity of the enduring value of nationalism. We demonstrate nationalism this to a world which remains skeptical of nationalism. So many opponents of Israel are driven by a disgust for nationalism. Our struggle to resettle our land isn't only geographical but intellectual; we are here to remind the world of the value of nationalism.

## Ben Sorer U-Moreh: The Past and the Future

*Rabbi Jonathan Ziring*

**T**he law of the ben sorer u-moreh, the rebellious son, is one of the most challenging in the Torah. Due to a series of exegetical moves that make the chances of a child fitting the criteria vanishingly small, the Talmud even presents a position that this law never has, nor ever will, be implemented. Rather, the Torah teaches it so that we can expound it and gain reward (Sanhedrin 71a).

Maharsha (ibid) argues that a central reason that this law is impossible is that it depends on the participation of the parents. The Talmud justifies the execution of a thirteen-year-old rebel by predicting his future, ala Minority Report. Given his gluttonous and rebellious actions, we can assume that his actions will spiral out of control, leading to violent theft and murder. However, Maharsha argues, no parent will agree with this assessment, rather believing, hoping, and (ideally) working towards ensuring that their son never reaches that level. [Maharsha bemoans that in his time the final element was lacking, as parents chose not to discipline their children.]

Maharsha's suggestion, however, highlights one of the deepest tensions in this law that emerges from another comment by Chazal. Probing possible psychological or religious causes for such a son, the Midrash (Tanchuma 1, cited by Rashi to 21:11) constructs the following scenario based on the juxtaposition of this law to those that precede it. Noting that the Torah's discussion of the rebellious son follows the law of the captive woman, taken and married as an expression of uncontrollable lust, followed by the prohibition for one with two wives, one loved and one hated, to treat a younger son of the beloved wife as the

firstborn, the Midrash suggests a cause and effect. If one marries such a woman for lust, he will eventually hate her. In turn, that will lead to his child rebelling.

This sequence of events heightens the problem noted by Maharsha. While it may be true that no parent would want to have his son executed, especially for a bit of overeating that may indicate a future life of crime, in this case it is worse. Even if the father were to believe that his son will become a criminal, as Chazal present it, it is his fault! Thus, such a parent has two options, both of which would make it unfathomable for him to participate in the judging of his child. First, as Maharsha notes, no parent should or would lose hope in his or her child, though it is that loss of hope upon which this law is predicated. Second, were the father to resign himself to this possibility and give his child over to the courts, in this case it would be the greatest abdication of responsibility. As Chazal understand it, the child's rebellion is due to the father's lack of restraint.

It may be that this recognition is part of what compelled the contention that this law was not intended to be practical, but rather was meant to be understood and its messages integrated. The theoretical parent is one who is willing to understand how any small action, if not kept in check, can lead to a lifestyle of more serious moral failings. Yet, he was unable to integrate that message in his own life, nor accept responsibility after the fact for the results of his indiscretions. Such a person should not exist.

Yet, while we hope that no parent would have such a poisoned relationship with his child, this dynamic often permeates our interactions with others. We are all too

willing to understand our own minor mistakes as isolated incidents, denying that they are, or may become, part of a problematic lifestyle. However, when we look at others, we judge them as if every minor crime is indicative of a systematic character flaw. This often allows us to deny our role in generating problematic situations and relationships. The repentance that Elul demands should push us to do the opposite. In others, we should understand that not

## Fake News

*Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner*

**W**ant a long life? Moshe told us how: Either observe all of the mitzvot (Devarim 4:40, 5:29-6:3, 11:9, 32:46-47), or observe specific mitzvot:

- Honour your parents (Shemot 20:12; Devarim 5:16)
- Send away a mother bird before taking her young (Devarim 22:6)
- Maintain honest weights and measures (Devarim 25:15)

We can see why fulfilling the entire Torah could earn long life. Ditto for honouring one's parents, a feat which the Sages describe as virtually superhuman. (Kiddushin 31b) Perhaps honest commerce earns an unusual reward because civil society requires commercial trust. But why should sending away a mother bird, a brief and inexpensive act of momentary mercy, earn such a lofty reward?

In an unpublished sermon, Rabbi Nisson Shulman explained that, "Many brushstrokes, one after the other, finally make up the masterpiece... Training a child to say 'please' and 'thank you' will help make the total gentleman and lady once that child grows to become an adult." So sending away the mother bird is important as training us in personal sensitivity and generosity.

Similarly, Rambam emphasized the influence of the small moment in his guidance for tzedakah. He wrote, "Great qualities will not be achieved via great deeds, but via a great number of deeds... For example: One who gives 1,000 dinar to a suitable recipient, once, to one person, will not achieve generosity via this one great deed, as will one who gives 1,000 dinar over one thousand occasions, each one generously." (Commentary to Avot 3:15)

However, perhaps the Torah associates long life with a brief and inexpensive act for another reason: More than preparing us for big moments, small moments are the true

every wrong indicates a flawed personality, and even if it does, our approach should be constructive rather than accusatory. On the flip side, when we examine our own misdeeds, we should look for the ways that have become endemic to our identity, or at least, work on ourselves to prevent those missteps from defining the people we become.

substance of our lives.

Rabbi Meshulam Dovid Soloveitchik noted a midrash which shows how small moments of sensitivity defined our great leaders: "G-d does not elevate someone before testing him with a small matter, and only then does G-d elevate him. Two giants, G-d tested them with a small matter and found them faithful, and then He elevated them to greatness. He tested David with sheep, and [David] led them to the wilderness, to distance them from theft... And so with Moshe it says, 'And he led the sheep into the wilderness' to remove them from theft, and G-d took him to herd Israel, etc." (Shemot Rabbah 2:3; and see *ibid.* 2:2 as well)

We see the same in G-d's choice of King Shaul; we meet Shaul when he is searching for his father's lost donkeys. During that pursuit, he addresses his servant humbly and respectfully. His food runs out, and still he persists on his family's behalf. He only halts out of concern that his father might start worrying about the search party. (Shemuel I 9, Tosefta Berachot 4:18)

The Talmud supports the idea that small moments are significant in themselves, teaching that one of the questions we must answer when we face Divine judgment is, "Did you establish fixed times for Torah study?" (Shabbat 31a) The emphasis is not on a grand deed of studying for sixteen consecutive hours. Our goal is to maintain consistency, even on a low level.

This is one of the pitfalls of reading the news; headlines miss small moments. A few stories dominate the news cycle: nations wage war, governments fight internally, and athletes perform on-field achievements or off-field antics. These events matter, but they convey an inaccurate view of our world. Life is local. The great influences on lives, relationships and moods are family and friends, the bus

driver, the customer, the neighbour, the schoolteacher. Witness the fact that when people pass away, their eulogies generally focus far more on what they did in those small moments than on any headlines with which they were involved.

Understandably, we will always be attracted by the

## Humilty

Rabbi Chananya Berzon

**W**hen you build a new house you should make a guardrail for your roof, so that you should not cause blood to be spilled in your house, lest someone should fall and get hurt. ( Ki Tetze 22:8)

The Rav writes:

*We have many laws pertaining to safety; our code is replete with them. These laws are rooted in the notion of human exposure to so-called accident. Not only the body is vulnerable, but also the human soul is vulnerable exposed... The awareness of vulnerability, of being exposed, engenders many ethical virtues, among which the most important is humility... Man must practice humility... humility is perhaps the highest ethical virtue.*

And here the Rav cites Rambam in Hilchot De'ot , 2:3

*"[man must be] exceedingly humble and lowly spirit."*

*Rambam uses the word exceedingly, where he doesn't use that in relation to other human traits or qualities, stressing the importance of humility."*

In Ramban's Iggeret , the well-known letter to his son, he writes, "the quality of humility is the finest of all admirable traits. When your actions display genuine humility, then the spirit of Hashem's presence will rest upon you." If you feel you're of humble character, then Hakadosh Baruch Hu feels close to you, links up with you. But if you're conceited, that causes hatred from Hakadosh Baruch Hu towards you."

The Rav continues and writes, "Human pride and arrogance disappear the moment man becomes aware of his vulnerability and of the suddenness with which fortune changes." It changes *bi'rega* , within a second!

impressive home run, which quickens our pulse and arouses our imagination. Our fairy tales and Marvel™ movies will portray the heroic rescue leading to love, fame and fortune. But in the real world, the big news is when we send away the mother bird, living a life of sensitivity, generosity, and loyalty to Hashem.

This awareness is cleansing, even cathartic.

We started the Hebrew month of Elul , and the minhag, tradition, in almost all of the Jewish communities is to recite לְדוּד לֵה' אֹרֵי , תהלים כו . There are many powerful statements in this particular perek , but I'd like to dwell on one; one that is difficult to comprehend, and that is כִּי אֲבִי וְאִמִּי עֲזָבוּנִי וְה' יִאֲסֹפֵנִי .

In Rav Hirsch's book on tehillim he translates it, "for even if my father and mother would have forsaken me, Hashem will still take me up."

How can we think of such a daunting thing, my father and mother abandoning me? And only then Hakadosh Baruch Hu will come save me?

So, I'd like to give a little twist; humbly say, when I reach the lowest level, I'm at the bottom, then I realize those whom I thought were my beloved parents, the ones who loved me and nurtured me all these years, could theoretically abandon and forsake me. I'm everything to my parents, they love me more than they love themselves, and theoretically my parents could throw me to the wolves! It's at this point that Hakadosh Baruch Hu draws closer to me, because I am now the epitome of humility, of lowness.

The month of Elul is a preface to the יָמֵי נִוְרָאִים , those Days of Awe, and they should promote humility! Think of the shuddering shofar , that shivering sound; think of לְדוּד ה' אֹרֵי , and think of סְלִיחוֹת . If those minhagim can be brought to the surface to bring us to the position of humility, then when we come to the tefillot and we say וּבְכֵן פָּחַדְךָ , the fear we could have, that can lead us to שְׂמֵחָה ! לְאִרְצֶךָ וְשִׁשׁוֹן לְעִירְךָ וְצַמִּיחַת קֶרֶן לְדוּד עֲבָדְךָ