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In the Long Run

Rabbi Joshua (AKA The Hoffer) Hoffman zt"l

The famous English economist, John Maynard Keynes, was once presenting an analysis of the national economy, when he was asked, “ what will happen in the long run?” In response, he said, “ in the long run, we are all dead.” Perhaps it is this pessimistic view of life by such an influential economist that contributed to economics’ reputation as being “the dismal science.” The Jewish view of life, however, does not follow the pattern that was laid out by Mr. Keynes, as a study of the beginning of this week’s parsha, in tandem with the end of last week’s parsha , reveals.

Parshas Eikev begins with the statement, “ And it will be ‘because of’ (*eikev*) your listening to these ordinances, and your observing and performing them: the Lord, your God, will safeguard for you the covenant and the kindness that He swore to your forefathers” (Devorim 7:12). The midrash, as cited by Rashi, already noted the peculiar use of the word ‘*eikev*’ - because of - rather than the more usual term, ‘*im*’ - if, which would have rendered, ‘if you listen to these ordinances, etc.’ The midrash explains that the word ‘*eikev*’ also means ‘heel,’ and the Torah, by using this word, is thereby hinting that reward will come for observing mitzvos that people deem to be light, or unimportant, and tread on with their feet. This comment of Rashi must be seen in conjunction with his comment on the last verse of parshas Vaeschanan, “You shall observe the commandments, and the statutes and the ordinances that I command you today, to perform them.” (Devorim 7:13). Rashi there explains that we are to do the mitzvos today, and receive our reward for them tomorrow, in the world to come. Therefore, when the Torah now tells us that we will receive reward in this world for mitzvos that we do, Rashi explains this to be referring to a specific kind of mitzvoh, as alluded to in the word ‘*eikev*’ (for a further discussion of the Torah’s promises of earthly

rewards for observing mitzvos in light of the Talmudic statement that ‘reward for mitzvos is not in this world,’ see Netvort to parshas Eikev, 5759, available at Torahheights.com).

We may, however, add a certain nuance to Rashi’s understanding of the reward for seemingly minor mitzvos, based on another source. The medieval commentary, *Pa’aneach Razah*, by Rabbi Yitzchok ben Yehudah HaLevi, seems to understand the midrashic explanation of ‘*eikev*’ differently from Rashi. He writes that the first letters of the two words, ‘*eikev tishme’un*’ - because you will listen’ - are the same letters that are at the beginning of the words ‘*eiruv tavshilin*’ - which is a rabbinic enactment to prepare certain food items before a Yom Tov that runs into Shabbos, in order to permit cooking and baking on that Yom Tov for Shabbos. The rabbis tell us, continues the author of *Pa’aneach Raza*, that Avrohom kept all of the mitzvos, including the rabbinic mitzvoh of *eiruv tavshilin*. Thus, the word ‘*eikev*’, hints to this seemingly minor mitzvoh that Avrohom observed, along with the rest of the mitzvos. The special reward that one receives for doing such mitzvos, then comes when it is done in conjunction with all the rest of the mitzvos, as was the case with Avrohom. The image of the heel, then, according to *Pa’aneach Raza*, should perhaps be taken to mean that we need to keep all of the mitzvos, ‘from head to heel.’

Rashi’s grandson, Rashbam, seems to understand the term *eikev*, as used in our verse, differently from the way his grandfather does. According to Rashbam the word *eikev* refers to the end of a process. In this sense, the verse must, again, be interpreted in connection with the verse near the end of parshas Vaeschanan ; “You must know that the Lord, your God, He is the God, the faithful God, Who safeguards the covenant and the kindness for those who love him and for those who observe His commandments, for a thousand

generations “ (Devorim 7:9). Rashbam explains this to mean that we should not think that God will fulfill his promise whether or not we observe his mitzvos. Therefore, God tells us, that He “safeguards the covenant and the kindness for those who observe His commandments”. If the nation does not observe the commandments, God will wait even for a thousand generations, until the people are worthy. This message, says Rashbam, concludes with the first verse in parshas Eikev, in which God says that if the people do observe the mitzvos, then God will not wait until the thousandth generation, but fulfill his promise with the current generation.

Rabbi Aharon Dovid Goldberg, in his commentary *Shiras Dovid*, cites this explanation of Rashbam, and asks, how he can say that God’s fulfillment of his promise to the forefathers is dependent on the nation’s observance of the mitzvos? Didn’t God tell Avrohom explicitly that the fourth generation of the exile would return to the land? He answers that the people would have entered the land even if they had not observed the commandments, since God promised Avrohom that the fourth generation would return there. However, they would not have remained there very long if they did not observe the mitzvos, and would go into exile, and only return on a permanent basis when they did follow the Torah. I would like to suggest a different answer, based on a comment of the Ramban in parshas Bo, 12:40. The Torah tells us there that the sojourn of the children of Israel in Egypt was four hundred thirty years. Ramban asks, didn’t God tell Avrohom that the nation would be in exile for four hundred years? He answers that they had to stay an additional thirty years because of their sins. Rav Dovid Feinstein explained that the period of four hundred years was similar to a minimum sentence handed

down by a judge. If the prisoner serves out his sentence properly, he will be released on schedule. Otherwise, he may have to serve a longer sentence. Thus, the nation could have served a sentence of even longer than four hundred thirty years. According to Rashbam’s explanation of the verses we are examining, the sentence could have lasted a thousand generations, if the nation did not begin observing the mitzvos. The end of the process - eikev - would come when the nation followed God’s Torah, so that they would be worthy of entering the land.

In light of Rashbam’s explanation, the use of the word ‘vehaya,’ - ‘and it will be’ - in the beginning of our parsha, in the opening phrase, ‘vehaya eikev tishmeun’ - and it will be because of your listening - takes on added significance. As Rabbi Chaim ben Attar points out in his commentary, this word is, according to the Talmud, an expression of joy. Although the simple explanation of the use of this term here is that the reward God will grant will bring joy to the people, Reb Zadok HaKohein of Lublin explains, in his commentary *Peri Zaddik*, that the joy referred to must be seen in conjunction with the rebuke mentioned at the end of the previous parsha. God’s rebuke is a means of bringing the people to observe His commandments and come close to Him, and, thus, ultimately generates a state of joy. Following the Rashbam, perhaps we can explain the joy expressed here as coming from an awareness that, no matter how long the people may stay in exile, in the end, God will fulfill his covenant with the forefathers and grant the entire land to them. The joy, then, comes from the knowledge that, on a national scale, we are in the middle of a process, and, in the long run, we will endure and possess all of the land that God promised our forefathers to give to us.

Small is Big

Rabbi Assaf Bednarsh (Transcribed and adapted by a talmid)

At the beginning of this week’s Parsha, Rashi quotes a well-known Medrash. The pasuk says: *Ve-haya eikev tishmaun*. And while the word *eikev* in this pasuk simply means as-the-result-of, Rashi interprets it as a heel and says: *Im be-mitzos kalos she-adam dash ba’akevav tishmeun*. When will you get this tremendous reward promised to you at the beginning of this week’s parsha? If you keep the *mitzvos kalos*—the small mitzvos—that people disregard and step on with their heels (so to speak).

Apparently, there is some special *sechar* for doing the small things that we don’t normally notice. Those things we might not properly keep. We might consider those things insignificant because they are so small. Why would we be tempted to violate or not fulfill the small mitzvos? So the simple pshat is—like the *Da’as Zekeinim* of the Ba’alei Tosafot explain—that human beings tend to be attracted to the big things—to the exciting, romantic, earth-shattering events. We like big things! They get our attention—they

get our adrenaline going—they excite us. And often, it's hard to take those small, day-to-day things seriously. And the person could end up ignoring, forgetting, violating these things, or not doing them properly. Therefore, the Medrash here tells us that Hashem reminds us that we should pay attention to the small mitzvos, just like we do to the big. The Taz thinks that it's unlikely that someone will come to violate the small, easy-to-do things. Why would someone not fulfill a mitzvah that only takes a second? And he suggests that Rashi is referring to going *lifnei meshuras ha-din*—going the extra mile and being *mehader* the mitzvos. That's not something that's a strict obligation. But when we do them, we show that we are not just trying to be *yotzei zein*, discharge our debt to the Ribono Shel Olam, and cross it off our to-do list. We really want to grow and do what Hashem wants us to do. We strive to express our love for Hashem and come close. And they say: When do you get the big reward? Not when you only do those things that you have to do. But when you do the little, non-obligatory things, which would be reasonable that someone may not fulfill. After all, it's not an obligation. What really shows that we care and want to strive and grow is when we go that extra mile. And that is what truly makes us spiritual people—and not just observant—and earns us the big reward mentioned in our Parsha.

Rav Asher Weiss, in his drashos, has a totally different way of looking at this Rashi. He says that Rashi is not referring to whether you will fulfill something. Rashi is addressing someone who will fulfill the mitzvos of the Torah. At the very least, they would fulfill the easy ones. It takes three seconds, costs no money, and they are very easy to do. Who would not want to fulfill those mitzvos? What's the problem? We fulfill easy, everyday mitzvos. But very often, we do so *ke-mitzvos anashim melumado*—habitually, as a routine, and without any kavanah. Conversely, oh, do we have kavanah for the big mitzvos! Shofar, for example, or when we get to the Neila on Yom Kippur, boy, are we all pumped up! And even mitzvos like Birkas ha-Chama occurring once every 28 years—we really get ourselves psyched up for them. But those things that we do every day we take for granted, and we don't pay attention to them anymore. You know, in this very parsha, we have the one bracha that is *mi-deoraisa*—the Birkas ha-Mazon. How many people have the same kavanah in this bracha as they have for Birkas ha-Ilanos—which is a mitzvah *de-rabanan*? Why is it so? Because Birkas ha-Ilanos is once a year. It's

exciting; it's different; it's new. While bentching is nearly every day. But really, I think that the *yesod* of the Torah is that in order to be great, to reach heights, and accomplish, you don't need anything special—something that happens once a month, once a year, or not even once in a lifetime. You don't need something that will be in the newspapers or will go down in the history books. Baruch Hashem, we get a chance to do something significant every second of every day. In contrast, there are secular people out there who try to change the world. Maybe once in their lifetime, they have a chance to save the environment, to bring peace to some war-torn country. These are wonderful things. And they get their *sechar*. But we can change the world—obviously, a little at a time—every second. And says Rav Asher Weiss: That's what Rashi meant. There are mitzvos that we do fulfill, but we dash them *be-akeivo*—we don't take them seriously. We do them *en passant*—in passing and without thinking twice. If only we could stop and think: Whoa! Right now, I have an opportunity to talk to Hashem, praise Him, and serve Him! If only we could see G-d in the little things. Then every moment could be a highlight and a spiritual inspiration.

I heard someone comment once. Why would you step on things with your heels? Often, people do that because they are in a rush to get somewhere else. We always rush to get someplace else. Oh, there is some other mitzvah coming up later—some great thing that will take place next week—another thing later this afternoon—etc., etc. If we are always rushing to someplace else—and we don't stop to appreciate the greatness of this moment—then we lose ninety percent of the opportunities to grow and become the kind of *ovdei Hashem*—the kind of *ruchniyusdik* people we want to become. Maybe that's exactly what the Torah teaches us at the beginning of this week's Parsha. *Ve-haya eikev tishmeun*—if there are things we normally do without thinking. And yet, if we would stop and think about them, we would realize what an amazing opportunity they are—how every little thing in the world can bring us closer to Ribono Shel Olam. Then we will be naturally *zoche* to the brocha of *Ve-shomar Hashem Elokecha lecha es ha-bris ve-es ha-chesed asher nishba la-avosecha*. And the closer we come to Hashem, the closer He will come to us and bring us the *Nechama* and the *Geula* we eagerly anticipate.

Shabbat Shalom.

The True ‘Measure’ of Israeli Fruits

Rabbi Moshe Taragin

They heard the reports and they had seen the actual fruit. They had personally witnessed the gigantic grapes hauled back by the spies. They had gazed at outsized figs and succulent pomegranates. Additionally, they recalled Moshe’s promise, decades earlier about a land of milk and honey. It was finally time to transition from monotonous manna to luscious fruit and abundant produce. Finally, they could take leave of the sandy desert and enjoy the lush pasturelands of Israel.

Moshe doesn’t disappoint them. He lists seven varieties of crops and fruits which are indigenous to the land of Israel: wheat, barely, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives, and honey. This catalog is a balanced list of basic grains for nourishment, essential fruits for both vitamins and commerce, as well as scrumptious delicacies.

It is uncommon for one single region to yield both grains, as well as olives and pomegranates, fruits which typically require tropical climates. Yet, Israel is outfitted for both, precisely because it isn’t a specific region. Instead, it is a microcosm of all the world’s regions, and it covers a broad range of climates and topographies. Everything can be found in this magical land of Hashem.

Lyrical Fruits

Fruits and crops in Israel are more than just edibles. The epic saga of Shir Hashirim portrays a legendary courtship between a king and a peasant girl, which, in reality, is an allegory for our relationship with Hashem. At various points in the story, the woman, or the Jewish people, are compared to grapes, pomegranates, wheat, figs, and honey. The “fruits of Israel” are poetic metaphors for the beauty of the land and the splendor of its people. Hashem conveys his love to us both through fruit metaphors and also, by providing actual produce. Moshe channels the mystique of these fruits to excite the people about the land of their future.

Halachik manuals

Interestingly, Chazal viewed these iconic and visually appealing fruits as a handbook of halachik measurements. These fruits aren’t only symbols of the land’s fertility, they are also codes for halachik measurements and quantifications, known as shiurim. For example, wheat

assists us in determining tzara’at impurity. If someone lingers in a house afflicted with tzara’at long enough to consume wheat bread, he becomes impure. Similarly, figs represent the minimum “size” of food which, if carried from private to public domain on Shabbat constitutes a violation of the melacha of hotza’a. Of course, everyone is familiar with olive-sized ‘k’zayit’ shiur which governs the halachik act of eating. The fruits aren’t just romantic symbols of our love with Hashem and His land, they are also halachik instruments affecting a wide range of halachik applications.

What are these seven fruits and crops? Are they beautiful embodiments of the land of Israel or are they halachik codes? In truth, they are both, since our association with the land of Israel is both halachik and poetic. The fruits convey a dual metaphor reflecting the two modes of our love for Israel.

A land of commandments

The midrash frames Moshe’s request for entry into Israel as a desire to fulfill mitzvot which weren’t compulsory outside the land. Living in Israel, in the immediate vicinity of Hashem, requires and invites greater halachik dedication. It is inconceivable that the presence of Hashem doesn’t also mandate greater halachik obligation. The closer we stand to Hashem and the more intimate our relationship, the more augmented our duties and our commandments.

Entire systems of halacha pertain only in Israel, from agricultural laws to national obligations such as building a mikdash, appointing a king and eliminating idolatry. Moreso, the Ramban asserted that all mitzvot are limited to the land of Israel. Mitzvot outside the land of Israel are merely rehearsals for authentic mitzvah performance upon our return to Israel. Our tradition has rejected this extreme position, but this opinion captures the spirit of “augmented” halachik responsibilities in Israel.

For this reason, Chazal deciphered the seven fruits as codewords for halachik information. The orchards and wheatfields of Israel are legal manuals guiding our adherence to halacha.

Processing redemption with halacha

Our relationship with Israel, though, must not be reduced purely to “halachik calculus”, and cannot be appreciated solely by assessing how many extra mitzvot apply in this land. This type of halachik calculus generated a radical position asserted by a 12th century Tosafist named Rav Chaim Cohen. He argued against emigration to Israel, as immigrants would become entangled with unfamiliar halachot which are difficult to adhere to. Instinctively, we disagree with this attitude and bristle at the notion of avoiding halachik responsibility – even if the halachik duties are complicated and challenging.

This extreme 12th century position highlights a general tendency to frame our relationship with Israel and with redemption, purely through halachik models. This is understandable, given that we have absolutely no tradition about redemption, and we are advancing along uncharted historical territory. This is the first time that we are experiencing redemption without prophetic guidance. In the absence of any concrete masorah about redemption, it is reasonable and even logical to fall back upon halachik paradigms for guidance.

The issue, however, is that redemption, by definition, doesn't naturally fit into halachik models. Redemption is a history-altering experience which awakens the deep soul of Jewish consciousness. It is a historical lyric sung by The Jewish imagination throughout the generations. The sound is growing louder as Hashem calls us back from the wastelands of exile urging us to partner with him in the closing chapter of human history. This divine echo can't be construed through the halachik terminology of obligations and prohibitions. Of course, we cannot, G-d forbid violate one iota of halacha in the “service” of redemption, however,

redemption can't and shouldn't be understood solely through a halachik lens. Redemption is a poetic leap of the Jewish imagination- a return to the orchards and olive groves of our past romance with Hashem.

Two examples of halacha-ization

Often the issue of reciting hallel on Yom Ha'atzmaut is incorrectly viewed as a barometer for a person's commitment to the redemptive experience. It is perfectly legitimate for someone to decline to say hallel based on numerous halachik considerations, while still deeply identifying with this historical process. Redemptive attitude cannot be gauged through halachik instruments. It is too personal and too historical.

Likewise, the question of whether living in Israel constitutes a mitzvah is often cited, when discussing the redemptive nature of the state of Israel. Only if there is an actual mitzvah to live in Israel, the argument goes, should 1948 be defined as redemptive. Famously, the Rambam omitted living in Israel as a mitzvah. Does that mean we should be less devoted to the process? Again this is a misapplication, as, ironically, living in Israel may be too large and too seminal to be shrunken into a specific or narrow mitzvah. It may be too seminal and too important to be listed among the roster of 613 activity-based mitzvot. Again, a halachik model- in this case defining an act as a mitzvah-may not be capable of fully capturing the spirit of redemption.

Many voices call us back to our homeland. The land of augmented halachik observance is calling us. The land of ancient romance between Hashem and His people is calling us. A Jew must answer each of these calls. The fruits of Israel are speaking again..in stereo.

Upon What Does Man Live?

Mrs. Michal Horowitz

In this week's parsha, Parshas Eikev, the great orator, teacher and leader, Moshe Rabbeinu, continues to speak to the nation from whom he is about to part ways. In reminding them of their years of desert travels and wanderings, Moshe tells the nation - and records for posterity:

וַיְזַכְּרֵם אֶת-כָּל-הַדֶּרֶךְ, אֲשֶׁר הוֹלִיכָה ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ זֶה אַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה בְּמִדְבָּר לְמַעַן עֲנִתְךָ לְנִסְתָּךְ, לְדַעַת אֶת-אֲשֶׁר בְּלִבְךָ הִתְשַׁמֵּר מִצְוֹתָי אִם-לֹא
And you shall remember the entire path along which

Hashem your G-d, has led you these forty years in the wilderness, in order to afflict you, to test you, to know what is in your heart, if you will keep His commandments or not;

וַיַּעֲנֶךָ וַיְרַעֲבֶךָ, וַיִּאֲכַלְךָ אֶת-הַמָּן אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יָדַעְתָּ, וְלֹא יָדְעוּ אֲבוֹתֶיךָ לְמַעַן הוֹדִיעְךָ, כִּי לֹא עַל-הַלֶּחֶם לָבְדוּ יִחְיֶה הָאָדָם--כִּי עַל-כֶּל-מוֹצֵא פִי ה' יִחְיֶה הָאָדָם

And He afflicted you, He let you hunger, and He fed you the manna which you did not know and your forefathers did not know, in order to let you know that not on bread alone does

man live, but on all that emanates from the mouth of Hashem does man live (Devarim 8:2-3).

The dor ha'midbar - for forty years - were sustained by manna from heaven. Not by the sweat of their brow, nor by the toil of their hands (cf. Gen.3:19) did they eat bread, but by the pure grace of G-d. Every morn, for forty years, day in and day out (aside from Shabbos, when they received lechem mishnah on yom shishi) the manna fell to sustain them - exactly as much as each person needed, not more and not less. They could not hoard it, nor save any for the morrow, nor take more than what each family needed for the number of people in their tent. With this great miracle, an entire nation of over two million souls was sustained.

What was this great miracle meant to teach that generation, and even more so, meant to teach us; we, who work so hard and imagine that we do eat by the sweat of our brows and by the toil of our hands?

Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch writes, "Even if the notion that we can look to human power alone for our daily bread will not cause us to stray from the paths of duty and righteousness, it may well lead our thoughts beyond the necessities of the immediate present, further and further into the remote future, so that we will come to think that we have not done our duty unless we have assured the means not only for our own future but also for the future of our children and grandchildren. As a result, the concern for breadwinning will become an endless race, leaving us neither time nor energy for purely spiritual and moral concerns.

"That is why G-d led us for forty years in the wilderness. There, in the absence of all the factors that normally enable man to win his bread through a combination of natural resources and human energy, He brought out in sharp relief the one factor which under normal circumstances is only too easily ignored. Instead of nourishing us with the bread of the stamp of human achievement, He fed us with the manna allotted by G-d alone, and He had it come to us day after day, to every soul in our humble dwellings, in a manner that clearly demonstrated G-d's personal care for every soul, both great and small.

"Hence, in this course of preparatory training for our future life, we learned the following basic truth: Human existence does not depend on bread alone - i.e., on the

natural and human resources represented by bread. Rather, man can live by anything that G-d ordains. Even the bread that he obtains by his own skill is ordained by G-d. Therefore, man is not lost, if, for the sake of his allegiance to G-d, he is compelled to forgo all that can be obtained from human and natural resources; indeed, man must know that even in the midst of plenty derived from the resources of man and nature, he still owes his sustenance solely to G-d's special care" (The Hirsch Chumash, Feldheim, commentary to Devarim 8:3).

Today we toil and work to procure our bread, yet the message of the manna is as eternally relevant as ever. Man cannot earn, nor produce, any more than G-d ordains he shall earn. While we live in a world very far removed from the desert existence of that generation, and toil we must to earn our keep, we must always remember the everlasting words of Moshe Rabbeinu: כִּי לֹא עַל-הַלֶּחֶם לְבַדּוֹ יְחִיָּה הָאָדָם--כִּי עַל-כָּל-מוֹצֵא פִּי ה' יְחִיָּה הָאָדָם - man lives, not by bread alone, but by all that emanates from the word of G-d.

In the fast paced, frenetic, "I deserve" and "I earn" generation and society in which we live, it behooves us to take these words to heart.

In regard to concerns over parnassah, Rav Mordechai Gifter zt'l (1915-2001, Rosh Yeshiva Telz Yeshiva Cleveland), would say, "We don't make a living, we take a living. Don't worry about your source of revenue; it comes from the Almighty. He makes it; we take it" (Rav Gifter, Artsroll, p.209). To a talmid from a poor family worried about his future and concerned about earning enough money to support his family, Rav Gifter sat with him for hours and told him his own life story, including the difficulties he had faced in supporting his family. He said, "Without trust in Hashem, I would not even have a loaf of bread on my table" (ibid, p.205).

There is a saying (author unknown) that no one, upon their deathbed, ever said, "I wish I would have spent more time in the office."

We must certainly do our hishtadlus to earn our keep, to provide healthily and well for ourselves and our families, but we must always, always remember, that our true Sustenance comes from the RS"O, and not on bread alone does man live.

Is There Truth to the Notion of Spiritual Accountability?

Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

This week's Torah portion, parashat Eikev, contains the well-known second paragraph of the Sh'ma prayer found in Deuteronomy 11:13-21, which opens with the words of G-d's powerful promise and admonition: וְהָיָה אִם שָׁמַעַתְּ, *And it shall come to pass, if you harken diligently to My commandments.*

The first paragraph of the Sh'ma prayer, found in Deuteronomy 6:4-9, speaks of the reciprocal love relationship between G-d and the people of Israel. It is with the pronouncement of the first line of the Sh'ma prayer that the Jews, from time immemorial, have accepted the dominion of G-d upon themselves.

The second paragraph of the Sh'ma prayer, וְהָיָה אִם שָׁמַעַתְּ, expands on the theme of the first paragraph, focusing on the relationship of responsibility and accountability of the People of Israel with G-d. In effect, the Torah asks: Ultimately, what does love mean? Are not the words with which we profess love, often, mere platitudes? After all, if we do not accept upon ourselves responsibility for our actions toward the ones we profess to love, then the love that we express is, in effect, fatuous and meaningless. And, just as we need to be held accountable in our human relationships, so too, must we be held accountable in our spiritual relationship with the Divine.

The words of the second paragraph of the Sh'ma are straight-forward--no beating around the bush. Clearly and forthrightly, the Torah proclaims the doctrine of reward and punishment: (Deuteronomy 11:13-21) If you serve G-d with all your heart and with all your soul, G-d will give the rain of your land in its season, you will be blessed with abundance of wheat, wine, and oil, you will eat and be satisfied.

But, if you turn aside and worship other gods, the anger of the L-rd will be kindled against you. He will seal the heavens, there will be no rain, the land will not yield its fruit, and you will perish quickly from the good land which the L-rd gives you. G-d, in effect, pleads with His children: Take My words into your hearts and souls...teach them to your children, so that your days may be lengthened.

Contemporary city dwellers, who are so detached from the land, often find it difficult to relate to the agricultural threats in the Bible which seem so remote and anachronistic. But these threats are surely real. Heat waves,

and droughts are not yesterday's nightmares, they are clear and present dangers. The blackouts and the devastating fires that regularly strike broad swaths of our country, take place on the most sophisticated electrical grid and in the lushest forests and farmlands, in the most technologically advanced country in human history. Those failures, which take no small toll in human life, should give us all reason to pause and reassess our almost blind reliance on contemporary technology and science.

Through the words of the Sh'ma, the Torah conveys to us an even more compelling message, a message that the sophisticated 21st century citizen has much difficulty comprehending. While our technologically-enlightened generation has little difficulty accepting the basic rules of physical science, we often dismiss the spiritual rules and the notion of spiritual accountability.

And, yet, the notion of spiritual accountability should not be alien to us. In the physical and scientific world, we are well aware of the rules of strict accountability. Scientists the world over posit, without fear of contradiction, that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction--no ifs, ands, or buts! The laws of gravity, Bernoulli's Principle, the Quantum theory all go unchallenged by both experts and lay people. There is virtual universal acknowledgment that if we pollute our environment, we pay a price. If we deplete the ozone layer through the use of fluorocarbons, we surely increase the likelihood of our exposure to the harmful rays of the sun and increase the incidence of skin cancer. Clearly there is physical accountability.

But what about the spiritual world? If we harm our environment through spiritual pollution, do we pay a price? Jewish tradition says that we do indeed. How? Firstly, Jewish tradition clearly and firmly maintains that the reward for a mitzvah is a mitzvah, and that compensation for sin is sin (Ethics of Our Fathers 4:2). Very often the wages of sin are the guilt we bear, which unsettles us. Sometimes, no further punishment is necessary beyond the mental turmoil and anguish that the sinner experiences.

But, often the punishment for sin has physical consequences as well. Has our profligate behavior regarding waste, radon contamination, PCBs not resulted in whole areas of the earth to become uninhabitable, and

lake and ocean life dying? Is it really a coincidence that new and dreaded sexually transmitted diseases seem to appear just when promiscuous sexual behavior becomes more acceptable? Does anyone really believe that inhaling millions of nano particles of plastic will not affect our health? And what of the tens of thousands of young people who have died of drug overdoses and shootings? Is this not a confirmation of a serious spiritual malaise in our society? Could the COVID-19 epidemic be a signal for humankind to finally “Stop and smell the roses”?

Because sinful behavior is often irresponsible behavior, there is little doubt that we often pay a physical price for these actions. While the idea of paying a physical price for incorrect spiritual actions, may seem farfetched, the idea should not be dismissed. And if we do disregard it, we do so at our own peril. Dare we say that the ozone layer is not affected by our spiritual pollution? Dare we state categorically that our sinful behavior does not manifest

itself in physical disease, in spiritual or mental illness, in harmful behaviors that are mimicked by our children, our students, our disciples, or our co-workers?

Ideas and beliefs change rapidly in our frenetic-paced world. After all, only two centuries ago it would have been ludicrous to suggest that woman could vote, or that we would be capable of communicating to foreign countries over air waves, or to instantly transmit photos from foreign planets. Ideas which seemed preposterous only yesterday, have become reality today, and are virtually taken for granted tomorrow.

There surely is spiritual accountability--G-d and His Torah categorically affirm this notion. The golden lining that results from the notion of accountability is that there really is no question that we can surely rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem--but the first step to rebuilding the Temple must be the spiritual repair of our own hearts and souls.