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Ki Tavo 5783

The Torah Upheld and Restored

Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm z"l (Originally delivered September 7, 1974)

The confirmation of the covenant that is described in this morning's Sidra, is a one-time event that must have been extremely impressive. The Levites and the Ark were in the valley, between two mountains, upon each of which stood six tribes. The Levites would pronounce 12 blessings in one direction, and the tribes on that mountain would answer, "Amen." The Torah gives us only one list, that of the curses.

The climax of these 12 is the following: **ארור אשר לא יקים**, "cursed is he who will not yakim the words of this Torah to do them." Translators differ as to the work yakim. Our text reads, "execute." Hertz translates, "confirm," probably following Nahmanides. Others render the word, "fulfill," or "uphold."

The Jerusalem Talmud, in Sotah, was also puzzled by that word, and apparently took it literally. Yakim means to upbuild, to erect, to restore, and not simply to uphold or confirm or fulfill. Thus: **וראי ית תורה נופלת**. וכי יש תורה נופלת? "I have seen the words 'who will not erect.' Is there, then, a fallen Torah?"

The Talmud had in mind the relationship of the kind that is expressed in the verse that we add to the birkhat ha-mazon (grace) on Sukkot: הרחמן הוא יקים לנו את סוכת: דוד הנופלת, "May the Merciful One restore for us the fallen Sukkah of David." That is why the Talmud asks: if we must restore (yakum), does that not imply that the Torah has fallen? It takes the word yakim not as related to לקיים ("to uphold," passively) but להקים ("to restore," actively).

The Jerusalem Talmud continues: how does one erect or upbuild the Torah?

The first answer is rather cryptic: **רבי שמעון בן יקום אומר**: רבי שמעון, זה חזן, it refers to the hazzan. The hazzan was, in Talmudic days and parlance, a functionary, what is today referred to as the שמע. How is this related to the upbuilding and

restoring of the Torah? Nahmanides explains that the verse refers, quite literally and prosaically, to the task of raising the Torah at the end of the service – the hagbah, performed (in those days exclusively) by the hazzan. Hence, the Torah, according to this interpretation, denounces one who performs the picking up of the scroll of the Torah incorrectly, and blesses the one asher yakim, who does it properly:

להראות פני כתיבתו לכל ... שמגביה אותו ומראה פני כתיבתו לעם העומדים לימינו ולשמאלו ומחזירו לפניו ולאחריו שמצוה לכל האנשים ונשים לראות הכתוב ולכרוע ולומר וזאת התורה אשר שם משה וכו'. (Perhaps this is the source of the Rabbis' insistence: **המגביה נוטל שכר כולם**.)

The second opinion is more fundamental: **רבי שמעון בר** חלפתא אומר זה בית דין של מטה. It is the responsibility of the earthly authority – the king and the Sanhedrin and the judges and the rabbis and teachers and parents – to raise the Torah, to give it stature and status and prestige, to restore it to eminence, when they notice that it is not being revered properly. It is their task, כנגד המבטלין, in the face of those who cause the Torah to suffer neglect, to upbuild it.

Thus, the Talmud continues, **על דבר זה קרע יאשיהו ואמר**, על דבר זה קרע יאשיהו ואמר, על דבר זה קרע יאשיהו ואמר. When the priest Hilkiyah brought to King Josiah a copy of the Torah, which had not been seen for many years because of idolatrous presentations, and he read the curse against one who does not restore this Torah, he rent his garments in grief, acknowledged his failure, and said: "it is my duty to restore it." That is precisely what he did. His reign was marked by the upbuilding and restoration of the Torah.

I am pleased to report that there are at least some signs of such upbuilding abounding in today's news, which is otherwise so depressing. Thus, many yishuvim, not at all

formally religious, are putting aside a day for the study of Torah during the month of Ellul, under the influence of such groups as Pe'ilim, or TaLaT, or Gesher. Our own city's Board of Jewish Education has instituted an "educational hotline," which in itself may not have any direct result, but certainly acts as a very constructive "consciousness-raising" mechanism. And the group of 15 American Jews from Yeshiva University who have just returned from Australia, have left behind a record of stunning, galvanizing effect on young people in Melbourne and Sydney. Hundreds of young people and their parents are being "turned on" to Judaism and to Torah.

Following the same thought, the Jerusalem Talmud continues by implying that the act of restoring Torah is not that of a single man, the hazzan, or even that of the authorities, but of every single Jew: בשם ר' תנחום בר חייא, למד ולימד ושומר ועשה והיה סיפק בידו להחזיק ולא החזיק הרי זה בכלל ארור.

No matter how "frum" you are, no matter how much Torah you have studied or taught, no matter how difficult it is to give today, regardless of how high inflation or how

Climb Every Mountain

Dr. Erica Brown

In this week's Torah reading, Ki Tavo, Moses gave the Israelites an unusual command. He told the people that after they crossed the Jordan River, they were to separate into two distinct groups; each group was charged with a different recitation. On one mountain, Har Gerizim, six tribes were to stand and bless the people: Simon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph, and Benjamin. On the other mountain, Har Eival, the remaining tribes – Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan, and Naftali – were to stand and articulate a set of curses. The Levites were then to respond to all the Israelites "in a loud voice (*kol ram*)" (Deut. 27:14). The text of these blessings and curses are listed in our sedra. When read in synagogue, the curses are chanted in a low voice.

Imagine the spectacle. Ki Tavo offers the staging. The mountains provided an expressive and dramatic backdrop, amplifying the curses and affirming the blessings. The people understood that if they were at a mountain, something grand and important was to take place. Mount Moriah was where Abraham, the knight of faith, was willing to risk it all for his faith in God. His

depressed the market, Jewish charity and especially Torah must not become the first victim of the economy, and the last one to benefit from its upturn. Whoever can support Torah (and every one can to some extent) and does not, is included in the curse. Conversely, whoever does help according to the extent of his abilities, is included in the blessing.

Our task is manifold: to study, to teach, to do – and to support those who study and teach and do and observe.

As we enter the new year, painfully aware of the economic problems of the old year that simply will not go away, we read a warning not to abandon expressions of Torah in our community.

But more than just continued and enhanced support in the objective sense is mandated by the Sidra. Also prescribed is: an attitude.

The whole תוכחה is not ascribed to a single sin – save one small item: לא עבדתם את ה' אלקיכם בשמחה... We must not only support Torah, but we must do it unbegrudgingly, with joy.

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individual commitment on that mountain was mirrored by the collective covenant we undertook as a people at Mount Sinai, when, with the natural orchestra of thunder and lightning, we were given the Ten Commandments. Suddenly, not far from the river that was to liberate us from the wilderness, we were presented with not one, but two mountains. No leader was declaring his faith there or handing us the law. The recitations were left to the people themselves. The Levites merely said 'amen' to each statement.

These mountains represent the different stages in the spiritual development of a people. The first mountain, Abraham's mountain, represents faith. The second, Moses' mountain, represents law. But what does this set of mountains represent?

To answer this question, we turn to the verses that immediately precede ours. The chapter begins with the mandate to inscribe all of the commandments on large boulders after crossing the Jordan River. The boulders were to be plastered, and "all the words of this Law" were to be written directly on the plaster. Commentators debate what

these words were and if it was indeed possible to contain every law on these large stones. At this same location, the Israelites were to build an altar also made out of stone to God. The stones of the law were twinned with the stones of worship to consecrate this new land immediately upon entry. If the people had any doubt about the values embedded in this new stage of their lives or the difference between where they came from, Egypt, and where they were going, the Land of Israel, these stones sent an unambiguous message of conviction.

Then, right before the tribes were to break up and climb their respective mountains, the Israelites heard a surprising announcement: “Then Moses and the Levites spoke to all Israel: ‘Be still and listen, Israel. Today you have become the people of the Lord your God. Therefore, listen to the Lord your God, keeping his commandments and decrees, with which I charge you this day’” (Deut. 27:9-10). For their forty long years of desert wandering, they were, we assumed, God’s people. God freed them from slavery, gave them the tablets, protected them day and night with a cloud and a pillar of fire, and gifted them daily with manna. These are acts that indicate a strong and growing bond. Yet, until that moment, that very day, our verse strangely imply that the people were not yet truly God’s people.

Each mountain experience represented a new stage of collective identity precipitated by an immersive, transformative experience. The Israelites first crossed a body of water as an act of liberation. They were going to cross yet another body of water to become a nation. It was not enough to put words on stones or to arrange rocks into an altar. They had to understand the ramifications and consequences of their behavior: the good, the bad, and the ugly. Moses would no longer be there to guide them or beg

for forgiveness when they sinned. They needed to co-create and own a collective moral spirit embodied in the curses and blessings they spoke out loud to each other across these mountains. The words that echoed in the space between made them accountability partners to each other. When they were not speaking, they were told to be still and listen.

Leaders cannot carry the full weight of accountability alone. Leadership accountability, in the words of the editorial team at Indeed, a global employment website, “reduces blame shifting” and decreases mistakes. It also encourages a culture of experimentation because only those who are truly accountable can assess gains and risks (“Accountable Leadership,” Feb. 27, 2023). Accountability requires courageous followers who have learned to stand up for what they believe in and commit to action. It often requires a strenuous climb.

With the climb up their respective mountains and their recitation of curses and blessings, the Israelites figuratively and emotionally imitated Moses and became the masters of their own destiny. They had to be the mountain climbers. In *Studies in Spirituality*, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks writes that to be a committed Jew, you don’t always need a mountain: “The beauty of Jewish spirituality is precisely that in Judaism, God is close. You don’t need to climb a mountain or enter an ashram to find the Divine Presence.” You need the light of Shabbat candles, the warmth of community, or the kindness of strangers.

But for leaders to grow, they have to be willing, not only to climb mountains, but also to identify the next mountain to climb.

So, what mountain lies before you right now that you need to scale?

Themes from the first Aliyah of Parashas Ki Savo

Rabbi Daniel Z. Feldman

The first Aliyah of Ki Savo takes a more uplifting tone than what will come later in the parashah, beginning with the mitzvah of Bikurim. The Sifrei, quoted in Rashi, identifies the theme of the mitzvah: that we not be *kefuyei tov*, ungrateful people.

As the Chovas HaLevavos and others emphasize, *hakaras ha-tov* is the foundational principle in Judaism, necessary for a successful relationship with the rest of the Torah. According to many, this is also the underlying value

of Kibud Av V’Eim and the reason that mitzvah occupies such a prominent place in the aseres hadibros.

As the sefarim point out, *hakaras ha-tov* is about more than manners; as a direct translation indicates, it refers to an internal “recognition” of how one has benefited. As such, it is not tied into the benefactor having provided kindness willingly or selflessly, as can be seen from the Torah’s commandment not to hate the Mitzri who provided hospitality for the Jews, even as they were

enslaved (Devarim 23:8). Accordingly, the gemara (Bava Kama 92b) understands such recognition should be extended even to inanimate objects, ruling that one who has drunk water from a well should not throw water into that well. The Shittah Mekubetzes understands from here that one should not even have thoughts of disrespect towards one from whom one has benefitted.

As the Ramban notes, even the smallest amount counts as Bikurim, just as even the smallest field triggers an obligation of Peah and Bikkurim. (Peah 3:6). R. Simcha Zissel Broide, the Rosh Yeshiva of Chevron (Sam Derekh) notes how this displays the fantastic potential of a minimal expression of gratitude: from this small launching pad will come the broad reflection upon all the blessings of Jewish history that will unfold (see also his longer essay at the end of the sefer).

The pasuk continues, *V'yarashata v'yashavta bah*, teaching, as Rashi notes, that the mitzvah of Bikkurim applies only once the Jews enter the Land. As such, a comment of the Sifrei is difficult to understand: "Perform this mitzvah, so that you can come into the Land." You can't get the job unless you already have experience; you can't get experience without having the job. It would seem impossible to fulfill the commandment before entering the Land, and thereby earn such entry, if it is not yet applicable.

A number of suggestions are offered to resolve this difficulty. R. Shimon Schwab posits that "*Aretz*" in this context refers to the mikdash, which could perhaps resolve other textual difficulties. Some, such as the Steipler, read the Sifrei to be saying that the Jews should understand that they are entering the Land so that they can fulfill the mitzvos, rather than enjoy the fruits for hedonistic reasons, a theme highlighted by Bikurim.

This is also asserted by R. Yissachar Shlomo Teichtal (author of the *Eim HaBanim Semeichah*) who explained thusly the juxtaposition to the mitzvah to remember the attack of Amalek at the end of Parashas Ki Setze. Amalek, who attempted to dampen the religious enthusiasm of the Jewish people, is further defeated by the eager embrace of the mitzvos, especially Bikurim which is associated with joy.

It might also be suggested that the reference to a performance of "this mitzvah" prior to entering the Land is to its underlying value rather than to its actual details. It is a mindset of *hakaras ha-tov*, and an appreciation for the divine providence that has brought them to this point, that

will gain them entry into the Holy Land.

26:2: *valakachta, v'heveisa*. The pasuk commands "taking" and "bringing" the fruits, but there is a machlokes whether this refers to taking from the field at the time of harvesting (the view of Rashbam) or from the house to the Beis HaMikdash (Ramban, Rabbenu Tam in Tosafos to Bava Basra, 82a sv batzran) (see Meshekh Chokhmah).

R. Elisha Horowitz, in his sefer *Bei Chiya*, suggests the difference of opinion may hinge on some additional possibilities as to the purpose of Bikurim, as collected by the Agravanel. One theory is that the mitzvah is to sublimate one's personal desires to the dedication towards holiness. If so, it would make sense to apply the pasuk at the time of harvesting, before the fruits have been brought to the house. Another theory is that once the farmer has reached a moment of contentment, he is asked to recollect all of the travails of the past. In that case, it is the time at home that is the more likely subject of the pasuk.

26:5 *Arami oved avi ...* These pesukim are well known from their prominent placement in the Hagadah; the Rambam (Hil. Chametz, Ch. 7:1-4) writes that one should ideally go on at length with this section. One would have thought that pesukim from the first half of Sefer Shemos, directly describing the Exodus from Egypt, would have been better candidates.

However, as R. Chaim Yaakov Goldvicht and others display, it is the "*aniyah*" of Bikkurim that serves perfectly the goals of the lechem 'oni' – sh'onim alav devarim harbeh (Pesachim 36a). It is no accident that one word, *hoda'ah*, encapsulates both gratitude and acknowledgment; to do the latter is necessarily to do the former. And to acknowledge is to acknowledge fully; to bring to the moment the full sweep of history that proceeded, with all of its challenges, tears, and devastations, and allow it to contrast with the triumph of "today", *hayom*.

Indeed, "*HaYom*", to be the acknowledgment it must be, must compress within itself all of Jewish history, and constantly renew, so that the Jew can joyously stand with his first fruits – and sit at his Pesach table – and truly "respond" (*aniyah*) as the moment demands.

Once again, the juxtaposition to Amalek is relevant. The attack of Amalek has failed; the cynical attempt to make Jewish history meaningless, happenstance, irrelevant, has itself become historical artifact; it is Israel that endures and renews.

26:11 v'samachta b'chol ha-tov... Human nature is the “hedonic treadmill”; the more blessings we experience, the more we feel we need. It is, therefore, especially at the time of harvest that we need the commandment to

I've Had Enough

Rabbi Joshua (*The Hoffer*) Hoffman z"l

Near the end of the section of tochacha, or rebuke, the Torah tells us, “Because you have not served the Lord, your God, with joy and with goodness of heart, out of abundance of everything” (Devorim 28:47). Most commentators view this as the reason the Torah gives for the terrible punishments described in this section. We have discussed, in the past, why the nation is deserving of such horrendous punishment for a seemingly minor offense. There is, however, another way of understanding his verse, which is offered by Rav Meir Simcha HaKohein of Dvinsk in his *Meshech Chochmah*. He explains that the verse should be split into two parts, the first part telling us that we are punished for not serving God, and the second part telling us that the reason we did not serve God is because that our happiness came from the abundance of good that we had, from material riches, rather than from spiritual depth. Rav Meir Simcha points out that a verse in the beginning of the parsha, in connection with the bringing of bikkurim, or first fruits, to the Temple, explains what the source of the proper kind of rejoicing should be. We are told there, “And you shall rejoice with all the goodness that the Lord, your God, has given you” (Devorim 26:11). The idea expressed here is that our joy should not come from the material possessions themselves, but from the fact that God has given them to us, thereby demonstrating His love for us.

Perhaps we can add to this explanation by saying that when the Torah tells us that the people rejoiced over the abundance of good they had, they were viewing their possessions in the wrong way. They realized that they had a great amount of wealth, and this made them happy, although they would have been even happier if they had more. The proper attitude, however, is that a person should be happy with whatever he has, realizing that it comes from God, and God provides him with exactly what he needs to accomplish his task in life. This approach to life can be seen in the contrasting attitudes of Ya'akov and Eisav to their possessions, as recorded in parshas Vayishlach. When

“Rejoice in all the good” that we have been given (see also R. Mordechai Gifter, *Pirkei Torah*). It is both an uplifting promise, and, given the aliyos that will follow, an ominous warning.

Ya'akov offered gifts to Eisav, Eisav said, “I have plenty” (Berishis 33:9) while Ya'akov said, “I have everything” (Bereishis 33:11). While Eisav, who was rooted in materialism, remarked on how abundant his possessions were, Ya'akov simply said that God has provided him with precisely what he needs. Thus, the verse in the beginning of the parsha, which teaches us that we should be joyous over the fact that it is God who provides us with our possessions, also teaches us since it is, in fact, God who provides us with our needs, we should realize that what we have is exactly what we need. As we have mentioned in the past, Rav Yosef Albo, in his *Sefer HaIkkarim*, or *Book of Principles*, explains that joy comes when a person acts in accordance with the nature of his soul. In our context, knowing that what we have is given to us by God, Who knows what we need to fulfill our mission in this world, should be the cause of our joy, rather than what we have, per se, causing us joy.

There is another way of connecting the verse at the beginning of the parsha with the verse included in the tochacha. Rav Tzvi Yehudah Kook, in a talk included in the recently published collection, *Pe'amim*, says that true joy comes only when we are in Eretz Yisroel. This is what the Torah is telling us when it says, “And you shall rejoice with all the goodness that the Lord, your God, has given you,” in reference to the bikkurim, the first fruits produced in the land. The verse that is embedded in the tochacha comes to teach us that, in Eretz Yisroel, joy comes in a background of darkness. In the midst of the difficulties and darkness which we experience, we should be able to realize joy in being in Eretz Yisroel. Although Rav Tzvi Yehudah does not say this, this seems to be the meaning of what the rabbis tell us, that Eretz Yisroel is one of three good gifts which God gives us that we receive only through afflictions, or suffering. The idea here is that without any hardship involved, a gift is not meaningful to a person. Viewed in this way, we can say that the parsha begins by telling us that true joy can only come in Eretz Yisroel, which is the place

where the Jewish nation is able to carry out its function of being a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Furthermore, this joy comes in the midst of darkness and suffering which puts the joy into relief, bringing us to understand that the

challenges that God presents us with are meant to bring out our inner potential, to arouse us to fulfill our national task, and for each of us to fulfill our personal task in the context of the wider national goal.

Are You Happy?

Rabbi Assaf Bednarsh (Transcribed and adapted by a talmid from the YUTorah shiur originally entitled “Parsha Bytes - Ki Tavo 5778” and presented at Gruss Kollel in Yerushalayim on August 30, 2018)

There’s a beautiful vort from the Sfas Emes on this week’s Parsha. At the beginning of the Parsha, in the text of Vidui Ma’aser, the Torah commands us to say: *Lo ovardi mi-mitzvosecha ve-lo shachachti*. And everyone struggles with the question. If, in the first half of this pasuk, we already said *lo ovardi mi-mitzvosecha*—I didn’t do anything wrong—what does *lo shachachti* add?

The Sfas Emes answers that *lo ovardi mi-mitzvosecha* means I didn’t do anything wrong—I kept all the mitzvot. *Lo shachachti* means I did all the mitzvot and didn’t forget why I’m doing them—what the mitzvot are all about. He says you can fulfill every mitzvah in the Torah, not do anything wrong, and yet forget that Hashem exists and you’re serving Him. You can just keep a routine of *mitzvas anashim melumada*. You can do everything right because you like to do things right, to be consistent and responsible. But you can forget that the whole point of all the mitzvot is to bring us close to Hashem and to serve Him. So, *lo ovardi mi-mitzvosecha* means I didn’t do anything wrong. *Ve-lo shachachti* implies that I did everything right and did not forget the whole idea behind it—Whom I am trying to approach. And this fits very nicely with Rashi—even on a halachic level—who says: *Lo ovardi mi-mitzvosecha*—I didn’t do anything wrong. *Ve-lo shachachti mi-le-varechecha*—I did not forget to say a brachah.

There’s a Ritva who explains why we say a brachah before doing a mitzvah. It’s a whole lomdish sugyah. I understand why we say a brachah before eating. Because Hashem gave us something we benefit from, we must thank Him. But why say a brachah before the mitzvah? So Ritva and Noda Be-Yehuda explain that we do it to help our kavanah. Because we could do it stam, but the brachah makes us think: *Hashem, Elokeinu, Melech ha-Olam, asher kideshanu be-mitzvosav, ve-tzivanu*—we’re really doing this to serve Hashem, who’s our Adon—the King of the Universe. And this helps our kavanah in

the mitzvah. The Sfas Emes complements Rashi very nicely. *Lo ovardi mi-mitzvosecha*—I didn’t do anything wrong. And I didn’t forget to stop and focus, and remember that Hashem is our Almighty God, Sovereign King of the Universe, who was mekadesh us with His mitzvot, and commanded us... i.e., why I’m doing this and what it’s all about.

The Kotzker has a similar vort. A little later in the parashah, there’s a famous line. It’s perhaps the most notable line in the tochacha. Rambam in Hilchos Lulav made it famous. *Tachas asher lo avadeta es Hashem Elokecha be-simcha u-ve-tuv leivav*. And Rambam says that doing the mitzvot with simcha is so consequential because, in the tochacha, it doesn’t say that the retribution is for not being owed Hashem. It says that the punishment came for not being *oved Hashem be-simcha u-ve-tuv leivav*. So why is it not enough to just be owed Hashem? Of course, it’s always nice to be joyful. Who doesn’t want to be happy? But why is it so crucial that if we serve Hashem without joy, all these terrible things, chas ve-sholom, come upon us? We could explain that that if you don’t serve Hashem be-simcha, it won’t last—eventually, you’ll stop serving Hashem. It’ll be too hard for you, and you’ll give up. And if you do serve Hashem with joy, you’ll be able to keep it up. But Kotzker gives a deeper explanation: Why would someone serve Hashem and do the mitzvot, without simcha? If every time you did a mitzvah, you would think: I’m really connecting to Hashem now—then you would always have simcha. The Rav explained that simcha was a result of being lifnei Hashem. If you really understand why you’re doing the mitzvot, you will always be be-simcha—you are connecting to Hashem. But if you do it as a mitzvas anashim melumadah, as a pattern, routine, lifestyle, etc., then you won’t have simcha. It becomes just like everything else I do. I must put on my seat belt, but I don’t put on my seat belt be-simcha. I need to brush my teeth, yet I don’t do it be-simcha. It’s just one of these

things you must do, and there's nothing terribly exciting about it. If you do the mitzvos without be-simcha, you're doing them—but you're forgetting Hashem. And now we understand why the Torah treats this so harshly.

Many of these ideas come from chassidische Rebbes. And this exact style of parashanut is a more chassidic form of parashanut. But some vorts are not just chassidische vorts. You don't have to be a classical chassid or a neo-chassid, or any chassid, to recognize

Bikurim, Total Dedication

Rabbi Hershel Reichman

The parsha begins with the mitzva of bikurim. Every farmer in Israel has a mitzva to bring a gift of first fruits from the seven species to the Beis Hamikdash. He is supposed to deliver them to the kohen as a token of his appreciation for Hashem's beneficence in giving him the blessings of fruits and crops in Israel.

The Midrash Tanchuma makes a puzzling statement, which Shem Mishmuel explains. The Midrash quotes the pasuk "*Bo'u nishtacha'veh v'nichra'a nivrecha lifnei Hashem o'seinu*. Let us prostrate, kneel, and bow before Hashem our Maker." We actually say this pasuk in our own prayers. The Midrash wants to know the difference between these three forms of bowing. What is the difference between *hishtachavaya*, *kriya*, and *bricha*?

The *hishtachavaya* form of bowing means to lie flat with one's face on the floor, while extending one's arms and legs. *Nichra'a* means to kneel; with his knees on the floor, the person also places his hands down. We will later see what *nivrecha* means. These are the three different forms of bowing to Hashem.

What is the meaning of all this? The Midrash gives an unclear and puzzling answer. Moshe Rabbeinu had an inspired prophetic vision, *ruach hakodesh*. He saw that the Beis Hamikdash would eventually be destroyed and the mitzva of bikurim would cease. With no Beis Hamikdash, we wouldn't be able to fulfill the mitzva of bikurim. So, Moshe decreed that the Jewish people pray three times a day—shacharis, mincha, and maariv—since Hashem loves prayers.

This is a puzzling Midrash. First, there is the discussion of the three forms of bowing before Hashem. What do they mean? What is their connection to bikurim? Second, what is the meaning of Moshe's vision of the future

that although it's great to do all the mitzvos, to say *lo avarti*, and do everything right, ultimately, you don't want to confuse the *ikar* for the *tafel*. And the point of the mitzvos is *Hashem — Elokeinu — Melech ha-Olam — asher kideshanu be-mitzvosav, ve-tzivanu*. The point of the mitzvos is to build our relationship with Hashem, and whenever we do the mitzvos, we have to make sure to remember that we're serving Hashem. And if we do that, it'll be much easier to be be-simcha always.

termination of the mitzva of bikurim that would happen together with the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash? This was the motive for his takana of instituting the three daily prayers. How do these prayers replace the bikurim? Why are bikurim the mitzva that must have a replacement? There were many mitzvos of the Beis Hamikdash that ceased with its destruction. Why does the Midrash single out the mitzva of bikurim as the prime mitzva of the Beis Hamikdash? Why does this mitzva need to be replaced and how do prayers replace it?

Fingers of the Hands and Fingers of the Feet

Shem Mishmuel discusses the significance of the three forms of bowing mentioned above. He explains a fascinating idea. The explanation starts with a statement from the oldest book of Kabbala, *Sefer Yetzira*. It is ascribed to Avraham Avinu, and was passed down through the generations. It says that Hashem made a compact with Avraham when He made the *bris mila* with him. This covenant continues for generations. *Sefer Yetzira* describes the mitzva in a strange way. Hashem made the pact with Avraham between the ten fingers of his hands and the ten fingers of his feet.

The circumcision clearly takes place in an area of the body between the hands and the feet. Somehow, *bris mila* is connected to the fingers of the hands and the fingers of the feet. What does this mean?

Shem Mishmuel explains this based on another Midrash that says angels have no evil inclination. When Hashem tells them not to do something, He only tells them once. One word from God is enough. However, people have an evil inclination. So, when God tells people to stop, He says it twice. Many *psukim* read, *va'yedaber Hashem el Moshe*

leimor. *Vayedaber* and *leimor* are said twice. Once is not enough. This is because Moshe is not an angel. He was a human being and had a *yeitzer hara*, so he had to be told twice. This Midrash explains why we see this pasuk so often in the Torah. Since Moshe was human, Hashem urged him twice to do or not do whatever He commanded.

Secrets

Shem Mishmuel quotes his father, the Avnei Nezer, who offers a deeper interpretation of this idea. There's a fundamental rule in life, as Chassidus emphasizes. The Gemara in Chagiga 13 quotes a passage from Sefer Ben Sira: "*B'mufla mimcha al tidrosh, bim'chusa mimcha al tachkor*. Don't try to reveal things that are hidden. Don't even think of things that are covered." Don't delve into secrets—what is behind, what is ahead, what is above and what is below. Only deal with what you are supposed to deal with.

The human being has a mind. It is a tremendous tool. We are supposed to use this tool to think. However, we have to realize that no matter how bright and brilliant we are, there are many elements of the universe that Hashem has created which we will never know. He has kept a certain portion of His creation secret, only for Himself, or perhaps for a select few people. These are called *nistaros*, secret things. According to Chassidus, the majority of God's creation will never be known to us. We will never understand in this world what heaven is like, what Gan Eden is, how Hashem administers the system of reward and punishments, how God runs the world in terms of morality and ethics, and of what happens to us in our after-life experiences.

This is besides the deep mysteries of science. I recently read an article in a science journal that said that for every discovery

in science, ten new problems arise. The discovery itself raises ten new questions. As our scientific knowledge expands, our lack of knowledge increases tenfold! When I grew up in school, our teachers taught us that the atom has a nucleus and neutrons and protons. In the atom you have electrons spinning around the nucleus. We thought there were only three parts to an atom, naïve as we were.

Then they built nuclear accelerators and after smashing some protons and neutrons they discovered that within the protons and neutrons were many sub-atomic particles. The proton is not one simple element, but rather comprised of many sub-elements. And who knows what those are made

of themselves? As we've delved into this one area, we have discovered so much that we don't know.

This applies to medicine as well, and every human endeavor. We are dealing with a world of *nistaros*, secrets. There are more secrets than the things that we will ever know.

Why do you have to go and discover every secret that Hashem has put away? Don't try to find out all secrets. Some are not for you to know.

In human affairs, this is also good advice. You don't have to know everybody's secrets and motivations. When someone tells you new information about other people, you don't need to know how he found that out. Why do you have to do know how he found out? Let secrets be.

God gave us a mind to discover things. It is also supposed to know where not to look, to restrict itself to focus on what should be known. There is a limitation on the human mind. Although we have a great mind, there are things that are higher, more secret and more hidden, things that we are not supposed to probe. We are supposed to accept that that's the way things are and that certain things are beyond our grasp.

This includes how Hashem deals with *tov* and *ra*, good and bad things that happen to people. Despite all the different approaches to this question in our tradition, including *sefer Iyov* and many *Gemaras*, there is no final and complete answer. There is something about good and bad events happening to people that will always remain mysterious. This question will never be fully understood by people.

Dual Limitations

We have to know when to stop probing. This is a restriction on the upper end of the human experience, on our thoughts. Furthermore, on the lower end we need to control our physical desires.

We live in this world, and we have to care for our physical concerns. We have to eat and drink and sleep. But we should limit the comforts we pursue. While caring for our physical needs, we must maintain our humanity. We can't always give into our physical instincts. We must have dual limitations, one limit on our upward reach and the other on our downward reach.

Shem Mishmuel says this is symbolized by the *bris mila*, which is between the fingers of the hands and the fingers of the feet. When a person raises his hands, his fingers rise higher than any other part of the body. The toes reach the

lowest point of the whole body.

The covenant of mila symbolizes restriction. As Jews, we can't do everything we want to do, and we can't think of everything we want to think of. We embrace the concept of restriction as symbolized by the fingers of the hands and feet, not going up too high and not sinking too low.

Angels are essentially intellectual; they don't have a physical side as we understand it. Also, angels are restricted. God tells each angel his mission and the angel has no other responsibilities. Hashem tells the angel only once what he has to do. The angels know that they should not try to rise above their missions. People, though, are told of their missions twice. "Do your mission," Hashem says. "But don't try to go above your mission and don't go below it, either." Man has a double restriction, both on his upper and lower levels.

Three Kinds of Submission

We now return to the three forms of bowing to Hashem. In *hishtachavaya*, a person completely prostrates himself in front of Hashem. We do this on Yom Kippur, stretching our hands and legs as we lie flat on the floor. Through this body language we say to Hashem, "I submit to You with my hands, which can reach as high as I can, and with my legs, which reach down as far as I can go. Both parts of me are subject to Your will." We place our hands and fingers flat on the ground, even though they should reach up. Even though our legs can stretch and move us in different directions, we place them flat on the floor. This indicates that we nullify our human reach before the will of God. Our reach in both directions, up and down, are controlled by Hashem.

The second form of bowing, kneeling, doesn't involve the hands. It involves bowing on the legs. The knees are bent, and the person kneels. The act of *kriya* is primarily in the legs, hips, stomach, and chest, the middle area of the human body.

We know the human being has three levels of soul: *nefesh*, *ruach*, and *neshama*. These soul levels power the three elements of human existence: the physical, emotional, and intellectual. In bending the knees, this form of bowing represents controlling one's emotions, the middle section of the person. It does not relate to the intellect. The full bowing also includes the submission of the *sechel*. *Hishtachavaya* emphasizes surrendering one's mind in particular. When a person prostrates before God, he surrenders his or her intellect to Him. I will think in

the ways that He wants me to think. *Kriya*, kneeling on the legs, does not involve the head. It involves the hips, legs and knees, stomach, and chest. This takes the middle section of the body and surrenders the emotional part to Hashem.

In summary, *hishtachavaya* surrenders the intellect and *kriya* surrenders the emotional aspects of the soul.

The third form, *bricha*, is a kind of bowing which is not flat out and not exactly on the knees. It reminds us of the word *livroch*. This is an agricultural method, a way of replanting certain kinds of vegetation. In this method, a plant that grows straight up is turned down and its top part is replanted into the ground. Afterwards, the top end of the plant will grow roots and essentially become a new growth. This is a specialized form of farming and helps yield more crops. This form of bowing, then, probably involved curling down into somewhat of a ball, with the person bringing his head down close to his knees. This would resemble the agricultural method. What is the idea of this kind of bowing? The body itself is twisted to do God's will. *Hishtachavaya* focuses on the *sechel*, because it involves the hands. *Kriya* involves the middle and lower sections, as the hips and torso are bent over, representing the *ruach*. Then *bricha*, turning the body into a ball shape, represents the *nefesh*, that the body itself will be subject to Hashem's will.

Nefesh, *ruach*, and *neshama* are represented uniquely in each of these three forms of bowing. We subject each part of ourselves to Hashem.

Mystical Universes

Shem Mishmuel takes this one step further. He uses this model to explain three of the four universes Hashem created. The first universe, *Atzilus*, is so high that even the mystics don't really understand it. Then come the universes of *Briya*, *Yetzira*, and *Asiya*.

We live in *Asiya*. *Yetzira* is where the angels are. *Briya* is where the souls of Gan Eden and God's throne are. The three worlds that, according to Kabbala, we can have access to are *Briya*, *Yetzira*, and *Asiya*. Our three-part soul corresponds to these three levels. *Asiya* corresponds to our physical side, the *nefesh*. We are physical beings; that's why we fit here in this world. This world, therefore, is an important world for mitzvos.

Above this world is *Yetzira*, the world of angels, where the *ruach* of man belongs. Angels don't sin. They represent prayers and songs to God. This emotional, *ruach* side is the source of speech.

Angels talk and communicate; people do that, too. The wind, literally *ruach*, that comes from one's mouth forms that speech. The highest level of the soul is the *neshama*, intellect. This fits into the level of *Briya*. When the human intellect ponders the greatness of God, then we ascend to the world of *Briya*.

The world of *Briya* is almost completely good. Yetizra has both good and bad, as there are both good angels and bad angels. The world of *Asiya*, according to Kabbala, is mainly bad. Surprisingly, there are more bad energies in this world than good. It is a tough world since it is mostly physical. The situation is stacked against us, pushing us towards evil. Man often finds himself in evil situations, as the verse states, "Yeitzer lev ha'adam ra mi'ne'urav."

This is why Hashem put us in this world. When we achieve the victory of good over evil in this world, we create goodness in evil's home territory.

Seven Mitzvos, Seven Sefiros

The Rambam writes that when a person brings bikurim he fulfills seven mitzvos. 1) He brings them to the Beis Hamikdash. 2) He places them in a vessel. 3) He reads the psukim. 4) He brings a sacrifice. 5) He sings songs. 6) He lifts them. 7) He stays in Yerushalayim. There is also an additional mitzva: to bow.

Hashem created the world in ten steps, known as the ten *sefiros*. In Chassidus and Kabbala, there are ten levels of God's middos, and ten corresponding human traits of tzelem Elokim. The levels of existence therefore are related to the number ten. Ten is the basic number of our number system because Hashem created the world in ten steps.

In Kabbala, the number ten is split into three parts. The first set consists of three points, then six points, and then the final point, number ten. The first three, called *chochma*, *bina*, and *da'as*, are more intellectual, relating to God's throne. The next six: *chesed*, *gevura*, *tiferes*, *netzach*, *hod*, and *yesod*, are in the *Olam Ha'Yetzira*, the world of angels, the emotional world. Finally, *malchus*, the last of the ten, has to do with action and our physical world. These are the ten levels of God's creation and they are reflected in the three universes that we can fathom.

The number seven therefore represents the connected middle and lower levels of existence: the six emotions of the world of the angels, plus the final point of action in this world.

We see through this that bikurim has ten levels. It has seven mitzvos and involves bowing, which is the eighth

event. Bowing, as we explained, represents the *sechel*. I give my intellect to God.

With this kind of bowing we surrender the three intellectual elements of *chochma*, *bina*, and *da'as*. We perform the seven mitzvos of bikurim. Through the mitzvos of bikurim, a person expresses and demonstrates dedication to Hashem with the seven middos of Olam Ha'Asiya, the universe of action, and Olam Ha'yetzra, the world of angels. Then, through bowing, he incorporates the top three points, dedicating his three intellectual levels to God as well.

When a farmer brings his bikurim to the Beis Hamikdash and bows down, he expresses that he is offering Hashem his totality. He offers his mind, his emotions, and his physical side in service to Hashem, in appreciation of the first fruits. He is fulfilling *l'avdo b'chol levavchem, b'chol nafshechem uv'chol meodchem*, serving God with all his emotions, his intellect and his physicality.

Ten Step Dedications

On Rosh Hashana we recite ten psukim in the three special sections of musaf—*malchuyos*, *zichoronos*, and *shofros*. We say psukim from the Torah, neviim, and ksuvim (the psukim of ksuvim come entirely from Tehillim). The three psukim from Torah represent *sechel* and *neshama*. The three psukim from nevi'im represent the *ruach*, the inspiration of the prophets. The three psukim of Tehillim represent the physical *nefesh*. Dovid was king in this physical world. He dealt with the practical concerns of the economy and with military and social concerns. His was the level of *nefesh*. In using the psukim of Torah, nevi'im, and ksuvim we dedicate the totality of our being to Hashem—our intellect and emotions, as well as our physical side. At the beginning of the year we totally dedicate ourselves to Hashem for the whole year.

Shem Mishmuel says we repeat this process every day when we wake up in the morning. A Jewish man puts on tzitzis and tefillin and says *kriyas shema*. These mitzvos address all three levels of the human being. Tzitzis has to do with the body, the physical level; the tefillin with the *ruach*; and *kriyas shema* with the mind.

Good Beginnings

"*Hakol holeich achar hareishis*. Everything depends on how you begin." If you begin something properly, then, with that good foundation, everything that follows will more easily go in the proper way. But if you start off the wrong

way, stumbling at the beginning, it can be very difficult to get back on track. If a racehorse stumbles out of the gate in a race, he will most probably lose. It is very important to start off well.

Rosh Hashana is very important since it is the beginning of the year. If we can start off the year with proper, good dedication to Hashem, with intellectual, emotional and physical dedication, then we can more easily have a good year. Rosh Chodesh is also a beginning. Every morning we begin our day with davening, starting the day on a good spiritual foundation. This then makes it easier to go through the day as a spiritual experience.

The first fruits are the beginning, the physical start for a farmer. The farmer must also make sure that the spiritual side is done properly. The farmer brings these fruits to Yerushalayim, the first of all cities of the world. If Yerushalayim is good, then the whole world will be good.

These first fruits are brought to Yerushalayim. Every city of the world can learn from Yerushalayim. So many heads of state come nowadays to visit Yerushalayim. They want to see the holiest city of the world. They want to see how the holy city functions. “Maybe I can model my city and state after Yerushalayim,” they think.

The Jewish nation is the first nation in the world. “*Kodesh yisrael laShem reishis tevuaso.*” Am Yisrael is the first of Hashem’s harvest. We are the first of all the nations. If the first is established properly, then everything else can model after that beginning. If the Jewish people has its spirituality and service of Hashem in order, then we can serve as a powerful model for the rest of the nations of the world. This is the primary mission of Am Yisrael, as Yeshayah 61 teaches, “You are the priests of Hashem.” You will lead the world and they will model themselves after you, just as every Jew models himself after the kohen gadol in the Beis Hamikdash.

Beginnings are so important—of marriage, of school, of a job, of a new home. Start these off the right way. Establish them as places and times that focus on spirituality, on serving Hashem in holiness.

This is why the Jewish people, the first of all peoples, takes their first fruits and brings them to Yerushalayim, the first of all cities. According to the Gemara, the best time to bring bikurim is in the summer time, between Shavuot and Sukkos. This is the time of the coming of Rosh Hashanah. It is the time of new beginnings and of change. The goal is to create a total commitment to Hashem at every level

from the very beginning, from the most basic level.

Three Levels of Prayer

Moshe Rabbeinu saw a vision in *ruach hakodesh* that the Beis Hamikdash would be destroyed. He was upset because bikurim is such an important mitzva. It establishes the tone for everything in the Beis Hamikdash and in Eretz Yisrael for the Jewish people. It is the beginning that establishes the correct way. So, Moshe made three tefillos to replace it: shacharis, mincha, and maariv.

Avraham davened shacharis. Avraham the philosopher taught the world about Hashem. He was about *sechel*. We start the day with our *neshama* in shacharis. The second prayer is mincha, which comes from Yitzchak Avinu. He embodied *ruach*, incredible dedication of soul to give one’s life because of one’s love and dedication to the Almighty. This a function of the spirit and emotions. We daven mincha even during the bustle of the day, taking the time to express our emotions to Hashem in the midst of everything. Maariv is the prayer of Yaakov Avinu, representing the *nefesh*. Night is a time of concern for physical safety. It can be a time of danger. Everything is black. People feel threatened in the dark. Much of Yaakov’s life took place in this type of darkness.

Yaakov had tremendous physical struggles with Eisav and Lavan. He represents commitment to Hashem in times of darkness. Moshe thought, if we don’t have a Beis Hamikdash and bikurim, at least let us have some way to dedicate ourselves to Hashem on all three levels. This is why Moshe introduced these three prayers. This is why the Midrash which connects them to the bikurim also connects them to the three forms of bowing to Hashem. Let us dedicate our *sechel* through *hishtachavaya*, our *ruach* through *kriya*, and our *nefesh* through *bricha*. We prostrate, kneel, bow, and twist into a ball, dedicating ourselves in every possible way to Hashem and to His Torah.

Let us hope that this incredibly inspiring message influences us at this important time of new beginnings. May this year be one of total and complete surrender to Hashem at every level, with our *nefesh*, *ruach*, and *neshama*. May we be zoche to all three worlds—*Asiya*, *Briya*, and *Yetzira*—and to return to Eretz Yisrael and to the Beis Hamikdash.

Secret Crimes

Rabbi Moshe Taragin

The season of teshuvah and of moral improvement has arrived. A honest moral accounting helps us identify the sins we hope to repair and the character flaws we hope to overcome. A comprehensive personal inventory though, must address, not only specific actions, but overall behavioral trends. Which situations bring out our better selves and which situations bring out the worst in us. One aspect to consider is how we behave in a world which affords us greater anonymity.

Reenacting Sinai

The Torah was delivered upon a barren mountain, situated in a sterile desert. As Hashem's word lies beyond time and space it descended to this world beyond the realm of human civilization. Once we entered Israel though, it became necessary to restage the Sinai experience.

Without embracing Hashem's word our license to this land is nullified.

Soon after we entered the land, the delivery of Torah was recreated upon two mountains in Northern Israel, in current day Samaria. Several fundamental commandments were reformulated, including many of those already engraved on the tablets. This list includes injunctions against idolatry, warnings against moral crimes and a lengthy list of sexual prohibitions.

Alongside these familiar prohibitions, we also received a brand new warning. We were cautioned not to harm others through acts committed in secret.

Years earlier, at Sinai there was no mention of "secret" crimes, and for good reason. During our tiring desert journey, we didn't enjoy any private or personal space. The entire population of three and a half million was crammed into a relatively tight radius. Life outside the Jewish encampment was unsafe, and no one dared venture beyond the perimeter and beyond the protection of divine clouds. The prospect of a sin committed in secret or in private was unrealistic and no specific warning was required.

Entering Israel however, and building private homesteads presented a new danger of clandestine sins against others, and this new threat demanded an entirely new warning.

Public opinion serves as a powerful deterrent against immoral behavior.

Concern about preserving our reputation and sensitivity to prevailing social codes both disincentivize unethical behavior. Actions taken outside of the public eye, however, are always less restrained and, often, are more dishonest and manipulative. When we are faceless, we are often shameless. When identity is hidden, we aren't answerable for our actions, and our conduct slides. For this reason, at the Israeli reenactment of Sinai, we were specifically warned about inflicting harm upon others through concealed behavior.

Halloween study

A famous social experiment known as the Halloween study, conducted in 1976, convincingly demonstrated the effects of social accountability. As part of the study, some children were asked general identification questions such as where they lived, or questions about their family, while other children remained completely anonymous. Both sets of children were offered candy, and their behavior was monitored by out-of-sight observers. Even though they weren't aware they were being watched, the children acted differently. Those who had identified themselves were more restrained in taking candy, whereas those who had remained anonymous were less inhibited. Mere knowledge that our identity is transparent provides social accountability and encourages self-regulated behavior. Concealed identity, on the other hand, affords us a shroud of anonymity under which our behavior is less restrained.

The Modern Cloak of Anonymity

The internet has provided us all with a cloak of anonymity, enabling our personal expression without disclosing our individual identity. Admittedly, this invisibility has provided various benefits, such as allowing us to voice unpopular opinions and empowering us to be critical of governments without the fear of retaliation.

However, the cloak of anonymity which the internet offers is eroding healthy communication. Freed of any social accountability, we ignore or even flout the norms of civility which should govern and moderate human interaction. Conversation on the internet often degenerates into aggression, anger, bigotry, shaming, and bullying. Comments and talkbacks are often radicalized, and people are vilified for their opinions. Of course, as to be expected,

all this verbal chaos ends in antisemitism.

Whereas we used to cancel checks or appointments, today we cancel people, and we stifle their voices. Ironically, freedom of expression has led to the oppressiveness of “cancel culture”. Beware the tyrannies which misused freedom always imposes.

Finally, anonymity encourages cowardly aggression. It isn't incidental that the infamous hacking group, which assaults organizations and countries which they believe to be criminal, is called “Anonymous:”. It is too easy to attack others without announcing your identity or intent.

The internet has provided a cloak for cowards.

Inevitably, our discourteous internet conversation bleeds into our daily life and infects our overall communication style. What happens on the internet quickly influences what happens in real time. Our world is angrier and more rude, in part, because of the way we speak to one another on the internet.

Additionally, the rapid pace of internet communication encourages us to respond hastily, as we impetuously say and write things we later regret and are often forced to retract. Hurried internet communication conditions us to speak recklessly, without properly filtering our thoughts before they reach our lips.

The Torah warns us against harming others through secret crimes. The realm of secret crimes and the scope of these crimes have each expanded in the modern world. Comprehensive religious self-examination demands that we consider how we have communicated on various internet platforms.

Hypocrisy

Sins committed in secret also invite hypocritical behavior. When we sin in secret, we open a gap between our public persona and our real self, making claim to moral or religious standards which we don't actually adhere to. When personal behavior deviates too sharply from public

impression, we become walking deceptions. Sometimes our hypocrisy is calculated and other times it is unwitting, but either way, we mislead others about our virtue and we gather unfair reputational benefits.

Aside from the deception of others, hypocritical behavior also makes us inauthentic as we constantly pursue two different lives – our real persona and our public masks. Sins performed in secret aren't just harmful to others but toxic to a life of authenticity.

Accepting Ourselves

Though we crave authenticity and abhor hypocrisy, we must not judge ourselves too harshly. It is virtually impossible to completely live by our own moral code and to completely sync our inner lives with the values we cherish. Ultimately, social acceptance and personal reputation are powerful motivators of religious behavior, and there will always be a gap between our public and private selves. As long as that gap isn't too large, and as long as we don't intentionally manipulate people or falsely engineer our reputation, we must accept the limits of human nature and the inescapable built-in duplicity. Everyone lives with a gap between professed moral standards and personal conduct. Gaps are acceptable, canyons are not.

The Talmud relates the death-bed scene of the great teacher, Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai. In his final religious guidance to his students, he asked that their fear of Heaven equal their fear of social opinion. His shocked students protested that fear of Heaven should exceed concern for social reputation. With wisdom accrued over a lifetime he responded “halevai”. If only they acted in private in the presence of G-d at least as piously as they presented themselves in public. Recognizing human Nature, this wise man urged his students to sync their private lives with their public behavior. He probably understood that they would never fully succeed, but he encouraged them to try.

And Your Children Will Be Given Over

Mrs. Michal Horowitz

At the end of this week's parsha, Parshas Ki Savo, the Torah informs us of the terrible klalos, the curses and Divine retribution, that will befall the nation when it does not go in the ways of Hashem. After recording a series of beautiful brachos that will be

bestowed upon the nation when it goes in the ways of Hashem (Devarim 28:1-14), the pasuk introduces the curses by telling us:

והיה אם לא תשמע בקול ה' אלהיך לשמר לעשות את כל מצותיו וחקתיו אשר אנכי מצוך היום ובאו עליך כל הקללות האלה והשיגוך

- And it will be, if you do not listen to the voice of Hashem, your G-d, to observe to fulfill all His commandments and statutes which I am commanding you this day, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you ... (28:15).

There is a long standing custom to read this portion of the Torah quickly and quietly, to demonstrate that we do not want to ever know of such travails. Furthermore, there is a tradition that we read this parsha before Rosh Hashana so that *tich'leh shana v'kil'kilo'se'ha* - let the year and its curses end; *tachel shana u'virchoseha* - let the new year and its blessings begin.

Amongst the klalos are two pasukim that seem redundant. One pasuk tells us: *בניך ובנותיך נתנים לעם אחר ועיניך ראות וכלות אליהם כל-היום ואין לאל ידך* - *Your sons and daughters will be given over to another people, and your eyes will see and long for them all day long, but your hand will be powerless* (28:32); while another verse tells us: *בנים ובנות תוליד ולא-יהיו לך כי ילכו בשבי* - *You will bear sons and daughters, but you will not have them, because they will go into captivity* (28:41).

Why do we need two pasukim to seemingly relay the same message: in a time of destruction, desolation and utter chaos, your children will be given, or sent, away? Quite a number of years ago, my father-in-law, Mr. Naftali (Norman) Horowitz, suggested a very powerfully beautiful, albeit very painful, understanding of these verse.

בנים ובנות תוליד ולא-יהיו לך כי ילכו בשבי - *You will bear sons and daughters, but you will not have them, because they will go into captivity* - this verse (28:41), my father-in-law suggested, refers to the consequences of destruction and exile. In such times, the children will be captured by the enemy R”L and taken away (see Gittin 57b for the narrative of 400 boys and girls being taken to Rome by ship, in the aftermath of the churban, for purposes of promiscuity).

On the other hand, *בניך ובנותיך נתנים לעם אחר ועיניך ראות* - *Your sons and daughters will be given over to another people, and your eyes will see and long for them all day long, but your hand will be powerless* (28:32), refers to a different situation entirely. Perhaps, my father-in-law suggested, this refers to the tragic, beyond painful situation when Jewish parents needed to give over their own children - to farmers in the country-side, to nuns in the convent, to former employees who would save these children in barns, cellars, or attics. This curse, then, is perhaps more profound than the first one (G-d forbid, may we never know of either). Whereas in v.41, the enemy

captures and takes away the children, in v.32, it is the child's own parent who chooses, R”L, to give over the child to a foreign religion, to an enemy nation, to foe instead of friend, in order to save the child's life.

In 1993, Rav Yisrael Meir Lau shlita met with the pope in Rome. “I asked the pope's permission to tell him a story I had read in *The Holocaust: A History of the Jews during the Second World War*, by Sir Martin Gilbert. I was interested in hearing the pope's reaction to the story. The pope nodded his head in acquiescence.

“A young Jewish couple in Kraków, David and Helen Hiller, had a two year old son named Shachne. When the Nazis arrived in Kraków in 1942 and transferred some of the Jews to the slave labor camp of Płaszów and some to Auschwitz, the Hillers left their baby with Catholic neighbors, the Jachowicz family, until they could come back for him. Unfortunately, the parents never returned.

“The child grew up. By age four, he had memorized the Sunday prayers that he heard in the Catholic Church. When he turned five, Mrs. Jachowicz contacted the local priest and requested to have the boy baptized as a Christian. The young parish priest asked her if she could imagine the reaction of the child's biological parents to such an act. She answered that she had to be honest with him. ‘I remember the scene exactly,’ she said. ‘As I held the child in my arms, my good neighbor Helen stood by the door and waved good-bye to her son. She requested of me, ‘Mrs. Jachowicz, if I do not come back, please try to return the child to the Jewish people.’ ‘If that is what she wanted,’ the young priest replied, ‘I am not willing to baptize him under any circumstances.’

“I addressed the pope with great emotion: ‘This priest, sir, was named Karol Wojtyła. It was you.’ Then I asked if he remembered this specific incident. For a moment silence filled the room. Then, with a warm smile, the pope said, ‘That boy, Shachne Hiller, is today a religious Jew in Brooklyn. By the way, this is not the only incident of this type. I did the same thing in all similar cases.’ His reply surprised me. I made a quick calculation and discovered that 48 years had elapsed from 1945 until our meeting in 1993. For all these years, the pope had followed the path of that Jewish boy from Kraków whom he had refused to baptize” (Out of the Depths, p.295-296).

While this true account is moving and inspiring, and certainly this young parish priest, as well as Mrs. Jachowicz, would be considered Righteous Amongst the Nations,

how many children given over to other religions were not returned after the Shoah? How many parents, like David and Helen Hiller, had to tragically leave their Jewish children in the care of other nations? How many parents had to hope and pray they would return to claim the child,

while knowing they might never live to see that day...? How many times in our bitter history of exile have we witnessed the fulfillment of *לעם אחר ועיניך נתנים*? How many times in our bitter history of exile have we witnessed the fulfillment of *לעם אחר ועיניך נתנים*? *ראות וכלות אליהם כל-היום ואין לאל ידך*? May the old year and her curses end, may the new year and her blessings begin.

The Centrality of Joy in Jewish Observance

Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

Parashat Kee Tavo is one of the two parashiot in the Torah that features the terrifying and intimidating prophecies known as the *תּוֹכַחָה* —“Tochacha,” G-d’s reproof of the Jewish people for not following the dictates of the Torah.

Of all the ominous verses found in this portion, among the most frightening is Deuteronomy 28:41, which reads: *בְּנִים וּבָנוֹת תּוֹלִיד, וְלֹא יִהְיוּ לָךְ, כִּי יֵלְכוּ בְּשִׁבְיָ וּבָנוֹת יֵלְכוּ בְּשִׁבְיָ, וְלֹא יִהְיוּ לָךְ, כִּי יֵלְכוּ בְּשִׁבְיָ*, *You shall bear sons and daughters, but they will not be yours, for they will go into captivity*. Many commentators see in this verse the Torah’s prediction of massive assimilation that will take place among the Jewish people.

It is ironic, that we have fast days commemorating the destruction of the Temples, we have Kinot-lamentation hymns, that are recited on Tisha B’Av to recall the crusades. In modern times, we have Yom Ha’shoah, the day designated to commemorate the Holocaust. All of these observances and rituals mark and recall the physical destruction of the Jewish people, which, of course, over the ages have resulted in massive and heartbreaking losses. It seems, however, as if the spiritual losses have been virtually ignored.

Jewish historians note that at the time of the Second Temple, Jews constituted about 10% of the Roman empire. It is estimated that there were about 8 million Jews in the year 48 C.E. With all the physical destruction, all the brutal human executions, statisticians have concluded that despite these massive numeric losses, there should still be approximately 500 million Jews alive in the world today. Nevertheless, our numbers hover at around only 15 million Jews worldwide.

Where are the many hundreds of millions of missing Jews? It is very likely that many of these missing Jews were killed through “kindness,” through assimilation, and through the blandishments of the general culture. Over the centuries, more Jews have been lost to the seductive sirens of Canaanite idolatry, Spanish poetry, Italian art, German

philosophy and American science, than to Amalek, William the Conqueror, Ferdinand and Isabella, Bogdan Khmelnitzky, and even Adolf Hitler.

This, unfortunately, is exactly what the Torah predicts in parashat Kee Tavo, only six verses after the prediction of the loss of progeny. Why do the Jewish people sustain these losses, the Al-mighty asks in His Torah? The answer, found in Deuteronomy 28:47, declares: *תַּחַת אֲשֶׁר לֹא עֲבַדְתָּ*, *אֶת הַשֵּׁם אֱלֹהֵיךָ בְּשִׂמְחָה וּבְטוֹב לֵבָב, מֵרַב כָּל הַיּוֹם וְלַיָּלָה, כִּי לֹא עֲבַדְתָּ אֶת הַשֵּׁם אֱלֹהֵיךָ בְּשִׂמְחָה וּבְטוֹב לֵבָב, מֵרַב כָּל הַיּוֹם וְלַיָּלָה*, Because you failed to serve the L-rd, your G-d, amid gladness and goodness of heart, when everything was abundant.

We Jews have so much of which to be proud. Jewish history, as I have noted many times in these messages, is one unending series of revolutionary moral and ethical victories, celebrating our people’s unheralded contributions to the world. But we ourselves, too often, fail to appreciate the scope of these contributions. Instead, we all too frequently emphasize the negative, the expulsions, inquisitions, and horrendous destructions. Perhaps because of this obsession with victimization, we fail to sufficiently emphasize the joy in Jewish life, and fail to transmit that upbeat message to the younger generation.

Many years ago, I visited a family whose six-year-old daughter died suddenly of an embolism. It was by all accounts a great and grievous tragedy. I approached the child’s grandmother with trepidation, a stately and gracious woman, who had done much to help NJOP and to reach out to distant Jews on the Upper West Side of Manhattan with her extraordinary hospitality and creativity. Six months earlier, her 18-year-old grandson in Israel almost lost his life in a horrible automobile accident that occurred during a fierce snowstorm in the upper Galilee. He was in a coma for many months, and required extensive physical rehabilitation.

Quite innocently, I said to the grandmother, “It has been a terrible year. We pray that the coming year should be one of goodness and health for you.” She simply responded,

“Rabbi, we have much for which to be grateful!” It was a heroic response, emphasizing the “silver lining,” despite the many painful clouds. Thinking back, I realized that because of this remarkable woman’s inner faith and upbeat nature, I should have expected nothing less than undaunted optimism in the face of adversity.

The Psalmist instructs us, (Psalms 100:2), עֲבֹדוּ אֶת ה' בְּשִׂמְחָה, Worship G-d with much joy. It is not always easy, but it is vitally necessary. One of the great chassidic masters, Rabbi Simcha Bunam once noted, that someone searching for their lost article rejoices only when they retrieve the loss. That is what is expected. But seekers after G-d, Reb Simcha Bunam explains, rejoice even in the search. (Itturay Torah, Vol. VI, p.167)

This is the lesson that the Torah, in Parashat Kee Tavo,

Achieving Greatness Through Adversity

Rabbi Efreim Goldberg

The mitzva of bikkurim requires a farmer to bring his first ripened fruits to the Beis Ha'mikdash, where he presents them to a kohen and makes a declaration commonly known as מקרא בכורים. In this declaration, the farmer briefly recalls the story of our ancestors' enslavement in Egypt and the miraculous Exodus. The pesukim of מקרא בכורים are the text which we discuss at the Pesach seder to fulfill the mitzva of סיפור מצרים (telling the story of Yetzias Mitzrayim).

In מקרא בכורים, the farmer says about our ancestors in Egypt, ויהי שם לגוי גדול – that they became a great nation there. Rav Soloveitchik cites the Zohar (Shemos 189a) as noting the importance of the word שם in this pasuk. It was specifically there, in Egypt, in the depths of suffering and anguish, that Benei Yisrael attained greatness. The Rav explains:

... only there in Egypt could the Jews become a great people; had they not been in Egypt, they would not have been transformed into a גוי גדול. The Jewish people became great in crisis. Knesses Yisrael had to spend many years in slavery in order to attain nationhood and greatness. It had to see and experience evil, tyranny, ruthlessness – for one cannot hate Satan unless one knows him well and has dealt with him. To hear stories about Satan is not enough; direct experience and involvement are indispensable. Joseph was sold to Potiphar, the chief executioner, in order to acquaint him with human cruelty. Had Jacob remained in Canaan, his children and future

is attempting to convey. It is not sufficient to be joyous on Purim, or on Simchat Torah, or after the sounding of the shofar at the conclusion of Yom Kippur. True seekers of G-d know that the process itself should be an endeavor of joy. True seekers of G-d know that there is, as the Chofetz Chaim, כְּוִנַּת הַלֵּב לְמִצְוָה עֲצָמָה, there is a sense of fulfillment that brings on joy just from the process of performing a mitzvah. The process of giving charity, of visiting the sick, comforting the mourner, is, and should be, a joyous process, a fulfilling process, making the heart swell.

More than anything else, what is needed in Judaism today to help stem the horrific losses that we are sustaining as a result of assimilation, is to transmit, not only, a sense of joy, but to emphasize that the process of seeking G-d and finding G-d brings joy to each and every one of us..

generations would not have developed extra sensitivity vis-à-vis fairness and honesty. We would not have hated cruelty and ruthlessness with passion and zeal. Had we not been in Egypt, had we not felt the pain caused by the whip, we would not have understood the divine law of not oppressing the stranger or the law of loving one's neighbor. Had we not spent years of horror, we could not have grown and developed into a great nation. In pain and despair we have attained greatness and nationhood.

It is difficult to achieve greatness when everything in life comes easily. Adversity compels us to dig deep inside ourselves and discover the power, strength and capabilities we never knew we had, and which would otherwise have gone to waste. Without being challenged, we would not access the deep layers of potential within our beings.

The word נסיון (test, or challenge) is related to the word נס, which can mean “miracle,” but also refers to a flag held up high. It is through life’s tests and challenges that we are elevated, that we grow, that we attain greatness. ויהי שם לגוי גדול. It is specifically there, in Egypt, when facing hardship, that we become great.

The Ramban, commenting on the story of עקידת יצחק, writes that Hashem brings tests in order to bring our potential into fruition – להוציא הדבר מן הכח אל הפועל. Without challenges, we would forever remain in our comfort zone, and would never grow. Adversity brings out our potential, forcing us to develop skills and qualities that we would otherwise never realize we were capable of.

Earlier in Sefer Devarim (4:20), Moshe refers to Egypt as כור הברזל – a smith’s furnace, in which iron instruments are made. The heat of the oven hardens metal, allowing it to take shape and become the unique utensil or tool that

it is destined to become. Similarly, מצרים, our difficult experiences, are what helps us “take shape,” enabling us to achieve greatness and maximize our unique potential.

Brit Moav & Teshuvah Me’Ahava

Rabbi Johnny Solomon

Parshat Ki Tavo delineates the terms of the covenant which were forged between God and Bnei Yisrael once the people crossed over into the Land of Israel, stating that “these are the words of the covenant that the Lord commanded Moshe to make with Bnei Yisrael in the land of Moav, alongside the covenant that He had made with them at Horev” (Devarim 28:69).

Naturally, reading about this second covenant leads us to examine its relationship with the covenant forged at Sinai/Horev, and it is this question which the Malbim systematically addresses (in his commentary to Devarim 27:9 & Devarim 27:26) where he writes:

‘At Ma’amad Har Sinai, there was no spiritual awakening (hit’orerut) amongst the Bnei Yisrael to receive the Torah. Instead, it was God who sent Moshe to instruct them - as we find in Parshat Yitro (Shemot 19:16) where we read how ‘God appeared to them at Mount Sinai with thunder and lightning and with a dense cloud.’ This was done in order to embed a sense of fear (Yir’ah) amongst the people, as it says, ‘so the awe of God will be with you always, keeping you from sin’ (Shemot 20:17). This is why the people limited themselves at this point when they declared, ‘all that the Lord has spoken we shall do (Na’aseh)’ (Shemot 19:8) - which is something that someone would say when performing a task out of fear while showing no interest in the actual purpose of the action that they’ve been called upon to do. In fact, [further evidence to support the contention that the covenant at Sinai stemmed from Yir’ah (fear) is the fact that] it was only after the people heard the Asseret HaDibrot, and only once they were given the laws found in Parshat Mishpatim, and only after Moshe spoke the contents of scroll of the covenant into the ears of the people, that the people then proclaimed, ‘we shall do and we shall heed (Na’aseh VeNishma)’ (Shemot 24:7). This is because their initial commitment to the covenant stemmed from fear (Yir’ah) ... In contrast to this, the covenant that was later affirmed in the plains of Moav, after Moshe shared

all the words of the Torah, emerged from a kindling of the people’s souls to cleave to God. Accordingly, at this point they accepted the entire Torah with a great desire and in response to an active spiritual awakening... Thus until this point they were considered to be ‘children of God’, whereas now they reached a higher level of being ‘with God’... and they accepted the yoke of God’s kingship with Ahava (love).’

To distill this idea, what this means is that the covenant at Sinai (Brit Har Sinai) stemmed from a feeling of fear (Yir’ah) towards God, while the covenant in Moav (Brit Arvot Moav) stemmed from a feeling of love (Ahava) towards God.

As we know, these two concepts of Yir’ah (fear) and Ahava (love) are often compared and contrasted in rabbinic literature, and this is particularly the case when it comes to the topic of teshuvah (repentance) where our Sages (see Yoma 86a-b) speak about ‘repentance out of fear’ (Teshuvah M’Yir’ah), and ‘repentance out of love’ (Teshuvah Me’Ahava).

With this in mind, I believe that a clear connection can be made between Brit Har Sinai and Teshuvah M’Yir’ah, and Brit Arvot Moav and Teshuvah Me’Ahava, such that an enriched understanding of Brit Arvot Moav can help us better comprehend the nature of Teshuvah Me’Ahava.

We’ve previously explained that Brit Moav reflected a willing and passionate commitment to partake in God’s covenant, and that it stemmed from an active desire to feel a sense of ‘ownership’ of that covenant. And how is that related to Teshuvah Me’Ahava? It is because someone who truly undergoes Teshuvah Me’Ahava is called a ‘Ba’al’ or ‘Ba’alat’ Teshuvah which, as Rabbi Moshe Shternbuch explains (Teshuvot VeHanhagot Vol. 4 OC 148), reflects someone who has a sense of ‘ownership’ of their new Jewish life having since undergone a process of repentance. However, teshuvah doesn’t always work that way.

When individuals are inspired to return to a more committed Jewish life but they do so under the influence

of others or for the sake of others, then they lack a sense of 'Ba'alut' (ownership) of this new version of themselves. In such a situation, their journey has been motivated by Yir'ah (fear), and it reflects the commitment that was made at Mount Sinai where the people simply proclaimed, 'all that the Lord has spoken we shall do (Na'aseh)' (Shemot 19:8).

In contrast, when someone becomes a true Ba'al or Ba'alat Teshuvah, and they feel a sense of ownership of their new Jewish life, then this parallels the commitment which was made in Arvot Moav out of Ahava (love).

Having explained all this we can now see a deep connection between Parshat Ki Tavo and the month of Ellul, because just as Ellul is often explained to be an acrostic of the words 'Ani Ledodi Vedodi Li – I am for my beloved and my beloved is for me' (Shir HaShirim 6:3), and just as the month of Ellul is meant to encourage us to undertake steps towards Teshuvah Me'Ahava, so too, Parshat Ki Tavo records the terms of the covenant to be forged in Moav – a covenant forged in Ahava (love).