

Parshah Halacha¹ - Parshat Ki Tavo/Shabbaat Selichot

Leading the Way

Perspectives on Outreach

Sponsored by Larry and Phyllis Sheftel in memory of Larry's parents, Michel Shlomo ben Moshe and Shifra bas Yehudah Leib HaLevi

To sponsor or subscribe, please contact rabbicitron@hotmail.com

The Torah portion of Ki Tavo states² the 11 curses to be uttered by the Levites when the Jewish people would stand at Mount Gerizim and Mount Eival on the west bank of the Jordan River. The Torah says there were also blessings uttered at that occasion, as it says, “The following shall stand upon Mount Gerizim to *bless* the people (verse 12).” The Mishnah explains³ (quoted in Rashi on the verse) that before each curse was uttered, a corresponding blessing was said. For example, the first of the curses said by the Levites while facing Mount Eival was “Cursed be the man who makes any graven or molten image...” But before this was said, the Levites faced Mount Gerizim and said, “Blessed be the man who does not make a graven or molten image...” The same pattern was followed for all of the curses.

Why Were Blessings Not Explicit?

The commentaries question why the blessings were not mentioned explicitly in the verse. They offer several explanations (quoted in Pardes Yosef):

- 1) As a rule, the Torah does not explicitly promise Divine blessings for specific mitzvot. It reserves such blessings for those who observe every law of the Torah. The reason for this is that, otherwise a person might say, since I can receive a blessing for observing only several mitzvot, why must I trouble myself to observe all of them? In our case, if the Torah were to explicitly state a blessing for keeping each of these 11 mitzvot, then one might think he can receive Divine blessing for doing only one (or more) of these mitzvot without observing the rest of the mitzvot. Instead the Torah merely alludes to these blessings. The people of that generation, however, were given explicit blessings

¹ *Parsha Halacha is underwritten by a grant from Dr. Stephen and Bella Brenner in loving memory of Stephen's father, Shmuel Tzvi ben Pinchas, and Bella's parents, Avraham ben Yitzchak and Leah bas HaRav Sholom Zev HaCohen*

² Deut. 27:14-26

³ Sotah 32a

for observing those mitzvot so that they not feel dejected from hearing only curses.
(Radvaz, Teshuvot, Ktav Yad 86)

- 2) The blessings the Jewish people were promised for observing these Mitzvot are in the spiritual realm of *Olam Haba* (the World to Come). As such, they are not explicitly stated in the Torah since such matters are beyond the grasp of the average person. Instead, the Torah only alludes to it and leaves the rest of the explanation to the Oral Torah. (Rabbi Tzadok HaKohen of Lublin).⁴
- 3) The Taz (in Divrei David) points out that Rashi (on verse 24) says that only 11 curses were uttered corresponding to 11 of the tribes while the curse corresponding to the tribe of Shimon was left out. The reason for this is that Moshe did not want to utter a curse corresponding to the tribe of Shimon since he did not plan to bless the tribe of Shimon before he passed away. (This was due to their sinning with Moabite women.) As such, the Taz explains, if the Torah were also to enumerate the blessings and leave out the blessing corresponding to the tribe of Shimon, it would be another public embarrassment of that tribe which was uncalled for.

The Fourth Curse

The fourth curse was “Cursed be he who misguides a blind person on the way.” Rashi (and the other commentaries) explain that this refers to one who gives bad advice to a person who is “blind” in that area. This interpretation echoes that of Rashi (based on Torat Kohanim) on the verse (Levit. 19:14), “Do not place a stumbling block in front of the blind.” Rashi explains this to refer to one who gives bad advice which will benefit only oneself.” For example one who advises someone to sell his property when it’s not actually a good time sell, so that he (the advice giver) can buy it for himself.

The Ba’al HaTurim adds that the verse also refers to someone who leads another person to sin. The following verse with similar wording in the book of Proverbs (Mishlei 28:10) echoes this teaching: “One who misleads the upright to an evil way.” This means that the one seeking the advice is upright (and righteous) while the one giving the advice tries to corrupt him and turn him towards an immoral path.

The Abarbanel gives four examples of this:

- 1) Bilaam, who advised the Mo’abites to send their daughters to seduce the Jews, (See Numbers 25)
- 2) Achitofel, who advised Avshalom as to how to rebel against his father King David, (See Shmuel II, 16)
- 3) Izevel (Jezebel), who advised and engineered the execution of Navot, the neighbor of her husband King Achav (See Kings I, 21)
- 4) King Menashe, who influenced countless Jews to serve idols. (See Kings II, 21)

⁴ Kuntres Divrei Chalomot, 27 (what was revealed to Reb Tzadok in a dream on Friday night of Parshat Behar 1881)

The Fourth Blessing

Since, as explained above, each curse was preceded by a corresponding blessing, it would seem that the fourth blessing would go something like this: “Blessed is he who guides the blind on the way,” i.e., one who leads others to make good choices and encourages them to stay away from sin and cling to mitzvot. (See above as to why the Torah did not state this explicitly.)

The rest of this article will focus on the perspective of the Lubavitcher Rebbe as to how to accomplish the above goal of encouraging the (spiritually) blind to observe mitzvot. I was moved to write this article after hearing a podcast⁵ where it was suggested that the Lubavitch movement focuses on outreach and downplays the importance of Torah study. This could not be further from the truth as can be seen from many of the Rebbe’s comments, letters and talks some of which are compiled below.

A Torah Obligation⁶

“The involvement in spreading Judaism (*Ufaratzta*) is a Biblical obligation. Just as one must help a physically impoverished person – to feed and clothe him – so, too, in spiritual matters. The benefit will be both for the teacher (*mashpi’a*) and student (*mekabel*), as the Talmud states (Pesachim 112a) that the mother cow’s desire to feed its infant is greater than the desire of the calf to suckle.”

Kollel before Outreach

On many occasions the Rebbe instructed that before going out to a faraway city to spread Torah, a newly married man should spend at least one year in full-time Torah study in a Kollel setting.⁷ (Obviously, this was after studying for many years in Yeshiva *before* marriage.)

Personal Torah Study⁸

In addition, after sending his emissaries to distant places, the Rebbe instructed them to continue their own personal Torah study sessions, preferably with a *chavrusah*, but if that were not possible, on their own.

The Rebbe wrote to one of his emissaries, “I was pleased to hear that you are increasing in studying Chassidut. Certainly, you are not satisfied with the hours during which you teach others but are rather studying the concepts on your own as well.”

⁵ <http://podcast.headlinesbook.com/e/9719-understanding-the-differences-in-hashkafah-between-the-litvish-lubavitch-worlds/>

⁶ Shlichus Kehilchata (Israel 2016) by Rabbi Tuvia Teldon, pg. 16 from Kovetz Ho’aderet VeHa’emunah 2014

⁷ Shlichus Kehilchata pg. 21 based on various sources

⁸ Ibid pg. 23 and 25

To another he said, “If one doesn’t have a fixed time for Torah study, he is damaging his entire mission (*shlichut*). We see this in actuality – that the more Torah a *Shaliach* or other public figure studies, the more successful he is in his work. And the opposite is also true.”

At a farbrengen (Parshat Sheini 5738) the Rebbe once remarked, “When one who is working in the public sphere has a free moment, he should ‘grab it’ to learn Torah. He should then learn with even more energy and diligence than one who studies Torah all day.”

Be on a Higher Level

“If one wishes to impact (be *mashpia* on) others, especially children, to improve in a certain area, one must be a living example of someone who behaves in an exemplary manner in that area.”⁹

Daven Shacharit with a Minyan¹⁰

“The secret to success in everything in life is to be organized... The key to being organized during the day is to daven (pray) the morning service (*shacharit*) with a minyan. Prayer in the morning is like Rosh Hashana which affects the entire year. If one davens properly, the entire day is different. This is like a person’s body. If the head is working properly, all of the limbs can function properly. To begin the day on the ‘right foot,’ one must pray with a minyan. If one prays without a minyan, the day is without ‘hands and feet;’ it can be wasted away instead of being organized.”

Outreach Work Is Primarily for Married People¹¹

“During the times for learning in the Yeshivah, the students are not under their own jurisdiction; they must study every moment. One who comes late for learning in the Yeshivah because of outreach must make up that time – doubly. Generally, outreach is primarily for married people who, in any case, are no longer studying Torah full-time.”

As a rule, the Rebbe did not send unmarried men on full-time *shlichut* (outreach work).

Mixed Setting

The Rebbe instructed several people that only married men should do outreach work in a setting that involves men and women that are not segregated.¹²

Always Follow the Halacha

⁹ Ibid pg. 23

¹⁰ Ibid, pg. 38 from a private audience with Rabbi Yakov Getz

¹¹ Ibid pg. 71 from a private audience with the staff of the Central Lubavitcher Yeshivah, 1973

¹² Pg. 72

The Rebbe often mentioned and told many of his emissaries, that one must follow the halacha (Jewish law) on all matters and that sometimes one must even go beyond the letter of the law. Here are some examples:¹³

- “One must not neglect any law or custom, even if one feels that doing so will enable him to reach more people.”
- “If one does not follow the Shulchan Aruch (Code of Jewish Law), one cannot excuse himself by saying that so-and-so said it was okay. There is no need to even ask someone about the matter if it goes against the Shulchan Aruch.”
- “Whenever one encounters halachic questions about his outreach work, one should turn to the rabbi of that city and follow his ruling.”

No Concessions¹⁴

The Rebbe encouraged those doing outreach to try to influence people to keep Torah and Mitzvot properly – without any compromise. Here are some examples:

- “We see here in America that when one demands of his community members and their families that they observe Torah and Mitzvot without compromise – the complete and full Torah – they are not scared off. On the contrary, they are happy that they are being told the complete truth.”
- “When one offers (halachic) compromises, the community members lose their faith in their rabbi.”
- “Since halacha is the will of G-d Himself, it is clear and obvious that a human being cannot, Heaven forbid, make negotiations with G-d’s will (i.e., compromise in order to reach more people.)”

Not to Attend a Mixed Marriage¹⁵

A woman once wrote to the Rebbe that her brother was going to be “marrying” a non-Jewish woman and that she had not wanted to attend the wedding but the family was pressuring her to attend and warning her that they would cut off their ties with her if she did not.

The Rebbe responded that she is correct in not wanting to attend since it is forbidden to do so according to Shulchan Aruch and that is what she should do.

May we merit the blessing of the Mishnah (Avot 5:18) “Whoever brings merit to the community no sin shall come through him!”

Wishing you a Shabbat Shalom UMevorach and a Ketiva VaChatima Tova for a Good Sweet Year!

Copyright 2019 by Rabbi Aryeh Citron

¹³ Ibid pgs 77 – 79

¹⁴ Ibid pages 80 – 81 based on various letters

¹⁵ Ibid, pg. 147