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Parshat HaShavua sheet

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Parshat Eikev

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LETTING GO

By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

In this week's portion Moshe talks about what was perhaps the most traumatic moment of his career. After spending 40 days and nights on the highest level of spiritual elevation, he returned from Mount Sinai to a scene that filled him with horror. At the foot of the mountain the Jews were reveling around a golden calf.

Naturally Moshe was appalled. Here he was, holding the *luchos* (tablets), a G-d-given immortal gift, and he faced a nation plunged into an act of idolatry. He smashes the *luchos*.

But if we analyze the narrative there is an interesting word that Moshe inserts as he describes his actions on that day. *"I descended from the mountain and the two tablets were in my hands. Then I saw and behold! You had sinned unto G-d; you made yourselves a molten calf. So I grasped the two luchos and I threw them from my two hands and smashed them in front of your eyes"* (Deuteronomy 9:15-17).

Moshe was holding the tablets when descending the mountain. Why did he clutch them before throwing them from his hands? Weren't they already in his hands?

Shouldn't the verse tell us *"Then I saw and behold! You had sinned and you made yourselves a molten calf. So I threw the tablets from my two hands and smashed them in front of your eyes."* Why, and in what way did he grasp them?

A friend of mine told me a story about his great grandfather, a brilliant sage and revered tzadik. Whenever he saw one of his children commit an action that was harmful to their physical or spiritual well-being he would stop them. But this sage knew that stopping a child is not enough. The youngster would need a punishment too, whether it be potch (Yiddish for slap), reprimand, lecture, or the withholding of privileges. But when a potch or harsh rebuke was due, the rabbi would not give it immediately. He would jot the transgression down in a small notebook and at the end of the week he would approach the young offender. After giving the child a hug and embrace, he reminded the child of the incident and explained to the child that his actions were wrong. "I should have punished you immediately when I saw you commit your act," he would say, "but honestly, I was angry then, and my punishment may have been one spurred by anger, not admonition. Now, however, that occurrence is in the past and I am calm. Now I can mete your punishment with a clear head. And you will know that it is given from love, not anger." He then proceeded to punish the child in a way that fit the misdeed.

Moshe was upset. But he did not want to throw the *luchos* down in rage. He therefore grabbed them and held them tight before hurling them. Moshe, in his narrative, tells us that he seized the *luchos* before breaking them. He wanted to send a clear message to the revelers below. That the *mussar* (ethical reprove) that he was affording with this action was not born out of irrational behavior or in anger.

Before smashing the *luchos* Moshe embraced them, just as a father hugging a child that he would soon admonish. Because Moshe wanted to tell us that before we let loose, we have to hold tight.

The Fruits of Israel

By Moshe Kempinski

The Land of Israel and its interconnected history with the people of Israel seems to be continuously intertwined with its produce and fruit. In the Torah portion of Eikev we read that the land of Israel is described as "A land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig trees, and pomegranates; a land of olive oil and honey (Deut. 8:8)."

When Jacob determines to send a gift of appeasement to the mysterious viceroy in Egypt, we read how Jacob with the prophetic aspect of his destiny based name of "Israel" decides to send fruit; "So Israel, their father, said to them, If so, then do this: take some of the choice products of the land in your vessels, a little balm and a little honey, wax and lotus, pistachios and almonds." (Genesis 43:11)

When Moshe sends spies into the land of Israel we read; "And they came unto the valley of Eshcol, and cut down from thence a branch with one cluster of grapes, and they bore it upon a pole between two; they took also of the pomegranates, and of the figs." (Numbers 23:23)

When they returned we read them declaring the following. "And they told him, and said: 'We came unto the land whither thou sent us, and surely it floweth with milk and honey; and this is the fruit of it.'" (ibid: 27) Yet they failed to read the message of these fruits and rejected the land and entered into 40 years of wilderness and exile.

Then, when the people were to finally succeed in entering the land, the farmers were commanded to bring their first fruits to the Temple. After a year of toiling, planting, watering, tending, and caring for the produce man has grown, the farmer enters his field. He sees the first ripening fruit of one of the seven species and he ties a band over this fruit and declares "This is for Bikkurim (the ceremony of first fruits)". Later, when it ripens, he places it in a basket.

These baskets were then brought to the Temple in a festive procession. As the procession would walk through the streets of Jerusalem, all the workmen, scholars and even the king would stop what they were doing and stand in honor of these farmers.

The Torah commentator Bartenura raises the following question. According to another Jewish law, it is obligatory to stand in honor of a Torah scholar when he passes. This is done not so much to honor the scholar as it is to honor the Torah that he represents. Yet that same Jewish law states that craftsmen do not have to stop their work to stand up for such a scholar as this would interrupt their work and livelihood. "Why", asks the Bartenura, "is this not the case regarding these farmers bringing the first fruits?"

The reason seems to be that these farmers, in this situation, during these festive times act as high priests. They are the tools of G-d's revelation within nature. This would be true anywhere in the world. Yet this is especially true in the land wherein Heaven touches the earth.

In such a place the very fruits carry a Divine message. They declare the return of the experience of Kvod haShem (G-d's Glory), symbolized by the fruits and blossoms of the land. As the prophet Ezekiel describes the final return of the people from Exile in the following way; "But you, O mountains of Israel, will produce branches and fruit for my people Israel, for they will soon come home." (Ezekiel 36:8). Every fruit, every tree, every flower is a testament to the fulfillment of HaShem's promises.

The fruits and produce of this land also express another important message. When HaShem takes his people out of the land of Egypt, he declares "So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey.." (Exodus 3:8) What does the term "milk and honey" represent?

Israel is a land that presently produces more milk per capita than most other countries. It is also a country that produces an overabundance of dates and fruit that produce honey. Ramban points out that if you are looking for a country that has the right climate, good pasture land and lots of water to create the environment for producing an abundance of milk and milk products you might go to a country like Switzerland. That land is known for its cheese and its chocolate. Yet it is not known for its dates or figs. That is because one needs two differing climate conditions for each of these products.

HaShem is saying that he is bringing His people into a land that defies those rules of nature. This is a land that will produce large amounts of milk and honey because it is God's land and it is "a land that HaShem your G-d cares for. The eyes of HaShem your G-d are always upon it, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year." (Deuteronomy 11:12)

The sage, Rashi, says based on Rabbi Abba's understanding in the Talmud of the verse in Ezekiel regarding the fruits of the land (Sanhedrin 98a) that "When Eretz Yisrael gives forth its fruit in abundance the end will be near, and there is no clearer sign of the End of Days."

Me, You and Us

By Rabbi Yossy Goldman

Who is more important, the Jew or the Jewish people? Is it Reb Yisroel or *am Yisroel*?

In last week's *parshah* we read the first chapter of the Shema. This week, we read the second. Yet there are so many similarities between the two. In fact, certain sentences are virtually identical. Why would the Torah, normally so cryptic, be so repetitious?

If one examines the text closely, a significant distinction between the two chapters becomes immediately discernible. The first chapter is in the singular and the second is in the plural. Teach Torah to your *son* in the first, and to your *children* in the second. Put *tefillin* on your *hand* in the first, and on your *hands* in the second.

But why the need for both? Why not use one or the other? Why a paragraph for each expression? The answer is that G-d speaks to the individual, but G-d also speaks to the community. He addresses the Jew, and also the Jewish People. The first paragraph of the Shema teaches us that each and every single individual is important, even critical, and G-d addresses every individual personally. The second paragraph reminds us that there is also a sum of all the parts; that together, individuals make up a community. And communities, too, are very important. In some ways, we acknowledge the supremacy of the individual; in others, community is supreme.

Yes, there is a tension at play here. The Talmud captures these seemingly conflicting notions when it examines why humankind was created differently from the animal kingdom. As described in the first chapter of Genesis, animals were created in herds, while only one man and one woman were created initially. Says the Talmud: This is to teach us that a) it was worthwhile for the Almighty to create the world for but a single individual, and b) so that no human being could boast that his or her pedigree is better than anyone else's. We *all* come from Adam and Eve, so you are no better than me, nor I than you.

Thus, from the very same event, the Torah teaches us this paradoxical lesson: on the one hand, the individual human being is king; while on the other, humanity reigns.

The paradox finds expression in Halachah (Torah law) as well. On the one hand, Torah law rules that we ought not to pay exorbitant ransom monies if an individual is taken hostage; this is to avoid rewarding and encouraging hostage taking, so as to safeguard the community as a whole: we may save this one individual, but in doing so we increase the danger to the community. On the other hand, Torah law rules that should a dangerous enemy demand that Jewish leaders hand over to them a particular individual lest they attack the entire community, it is not permitted to sacrifice even one individual for the sake of the community.

So we need both sections of the Shema. In Torah, both are paramount, the individual and the community.

Why do I focus on this theme today? Because in approximately five weeks' time we will usher in the New Year, and the ongoing tension between the single and plural will manifest itself very blatantly. "Why must we pay to pray?" some will demand. They will decry the shameless commercialism of organized religion. And, yes, a *shul* should have a heart. And our houses of prayer should not be allowed to become materialistic and mercenary, lest we lose the young, the poor and the idealistic. At the same time, individuals need to be sympathetic to the hard facts of congregational life. We cannot take for granted or take advantage of our established—and costly to maintain—infrastructures. The tension is sometimes tangible as we struggle to balance these two, seemingly exclusive, imperatives of Jewish life.

Statistics vary. In some communities, not more than 30% of Jews are officially affiliated. In others, the figure is much higher. The community must be sensitive, welcoming and embracing of every individual who seeks to belong. Still, individuals must be fair too. If everyone demanded a free ride, how would a congregation support itself?

Let us keep reciting both chapters of the Shema. Then we can look forward to healthy Jews and wholesome Jewish communities.

“And it shall be, because you listen to these ordinances and keep and do them, that Hashem, your G-d, shall keep with you the covenant and the mercy that he swore to your fathers” (7:12)

“Eikev” contains the same letters as the word “keva.” The reward for our good deeds will be granted to us in a place of permanence, as opposed to this world. This is why the posuk continues by saying that Hashem shall “guard for you the covenant.” Hashem will guard our deserved reward and keep it for us until the time when we will see it come to fruition in the future.

“You will eat and you will be satisfied and you will bless Hashem, your G-d, on the good land that He gave you” (8:10)

Why is there an obligation to bless Hashem? Does Hashem need our blessing? Rabbeinu Bachya and the Sefer HaChinuch provide the same answer to this question. Hashem is the source of all blessing in the world and everything in the world was called into existence by Him, the primary cause of all existence. Without Hashem, nothing could exist. We do not recite blessings because Hashem needs them, but because through them we express our recognition that we receive food from Him alone. We show our belief that Hashem causes produce to grow and enables it to sustain us and that Hashem’s providence guides our daily life. It is our recognition of Hashem as the source of all blessings. When we express that, we will be blessed from Him. The Sefer HaChinuch concludes that someone who is careful to always recite Birchas HaMazon after eating will be blessed with an honorable livelihood for all his days.

“You have been rebellious against Hashem from the day that I knew you” (9:24)

The word “mamrim” contains a small letter “mem.” The small letter indicates that the “mem” is deemphasized and the word can also be understood as “marim,” “bitter.” The people were bitter and this is why they constantly complained to Moshe. They were rebellious, but the root of the problem was that they felt bitterness with regards to their situation in the wilderness. We must be sure to always keep a positive attitude in life and this will shield us from becoming upset, depressed and rebellious.

“The Children of Israel journeyed from Be’eros Bnei Ya’akan to Moserah, there Aharon died and he was buried there and Elazar his son ministered in his place” (10:6)

R’ Nissan Alpert suggests an answer based on the following story: There once was a rabbi who interviewed for a position in a certain city and was told that R’ Akiva Eiger, the Taz and the Magen Avraham were all buried there. This impressed him and convinced him to take the job. After he arrived, he found out that this was false information and he became very upset that he had been duped. The people told him that their words were not actually false because people in that town were not learning the Torah of those great tzadikim and it was as if they were being buried in that city. Similarly, Aharon’s teachings and values were ignored when the people wanted to go back to Egypt. When they turned around and headed back to Moserah, it was as if they were burying Aharon there by not listening to what he had taught them during his lifetime.

“A land that Hashem, your G-d, seeks out; the eyes of Hashem, your G-d, are always upon it, from the beginning of the year to the year's end” (11:12)

Sefer Apiryon tells an anecdote about the Ramban's arrival in Eretz Yisrael. He looked around and saw that the land was overgrown with wild vegetation and appeared uncared for. At this sight, the Ramban commented that the comfort of Eretz Yisrael was readily apparent. He gave an example to explain this. When a woman is expecting a child, her body produces milk and continues to do so after the child is born. If there is no longer a child who needs the milk, the body ceases to produce it. The Ramban said that the continued growth of vegetation in Eretz Yisrael is a sign that her children will yet return. As long as the land is still growing, then we can be assured that it has a future. This is the meaning of the posuk (Yeshaya 51:3), "For Hashem will comfort Tzion, He will comfort all its ruins; He will make her wilderness like Eden and her wasteland like a garden of Hashem." When we see Eretz Yisrael growing constantly in our time, it should encourage us that the final consolation of Yerushalayim is near.

By Rabbi Mayer Friedman

In Parashat Eikev, Moshe tells *Benei Yisrael* of the great qualities of the Land of Israel, contrasting the conditions they will soon enjoy after crossing into the land with the harsh conditions of the wilderness they had just traversed. Moshe makes reference in this context to the presence of iron and copper: "...a land whose stones are iron, and from whose mountains you shall hew copper" (8:9). The Ramban explains that Moshe informed the people of the availability of these resources in *Eretz Yisrael* "which are a vital need for the residents of the land." Moshe mentioned iron and copper because of their particular importance, emphasizing that just as God miraculously provided the people with their needs in the wilderness, He was now bringing them to a place that can naturally sustain them and provide them with what they need.

The Ramban then cites the preceding phrase in this verse – "*lo techsar kol bah*" ("it is not lacking anything") – and comments, "[the lack of] resources of silver and gold is not a deficiency in the land." It appears that the Ramban here implicitly addresses the question of how Moshe could claim that the land lacks "nothing," when it does not contain precious metals like silver and gold. The answer to this question, the Ramban seems to be saying, is that Moshe speaks of resources that are needed for living, and not luxuries. He speaks in praise of *Eretz Yisrael* for containing everything that serves "a vital need for the residents of the land," despite the fact that it does not necessarily offer all amenities that people crave.

The lesson that emerges from the Ramban's comments (as noted by Rav Shmuel Alter in *Likutei Batar Likutei*) is that we need to learn to distinguish between necessity and luxury. The Ramban emphasizes that *Eretz Yisrael* is praised for its properties that offered *Benei Yisrael* everything they needed, even though they did not offer everything *Benei Yisrael* would have wanted. And this observation made about *Eretz Yisrael* can be made about life generally. We should be grateful and able to "praise" our lives when we have what we need, even if we do not have everything we want. Just as *Eretz Yisrael* is described as a land that "lacks nothing," even though it lacked luxuries, our lives, too, can be joyously celebrated for "lacking nothing" even when we still have many wishes unfulfilled.

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THE BLESSING FOR FOOD AND ITS CONNECTION TO THE LAND

by Rabbi David Chai Hacohen

One of the few mitzvot given to us in this week's Torah portion is to recite a blessing at the end of a meal. As is well known, the definition of the mitzva is that one who eats a "kazayit" of bread made from one of the five main types of grain must recite three blessings. These are: (a) for the food; (b) for the holy land we have received; and (c) for the holy city, Jerusalem, which is the heart of the land and is at the heart of the people. We are obligated by this mitzva whether the meal was eaten within *Eretz Yisrael* or outside, and irrespective of whether the bread was made from grain produced in the land or not. And this leads to an obvious question: Why should we have to thank G-d for the land and for Jerusalem every time we eat, no matter where we are in the world? In addition, how are these two sites, important as they are, related to a private act of eating?

A more detailed look at the text of the Torah portion makes the question even stronger. The wording of the passage seems to imply that the blessing is related to the good of the land and not to our own personal needs. Moshe's words, as he was commanded by the Almighty, emphasize the praises of *Eretz Yisrael*. "For your G-d is bringing you to a good land, a land of rivers... A land of wheat, and barley, and grapes... A land whose stones are iron... And you shall eat, and be satiated, and you shall bless your G-d." [Devarim 8:7-10]. That is, the reason for the blessing is to praise the land, together with its fantastic scenery, its refreshing and healthy atmosphere ("mountain air as clear as wine," as in Naomi Shemer's song), its clear water flowing through the mountains and the hills, its natural treasures, and most of all its glorious fruits, from the seven unique species. Why is the praise of the land linked to a private blessing for food eaten by an individual?

The answer must be that only one who recognizes how the light of G-d fills the land is able to make the blessing and really be blessed with His food. The food eaten by *Bnei Yisrael* is not the same as what other nations eat. *Yisrael* is a holy nation, chosen by G-d, and He set aside for them a holy land, whose fruit allows them to be nourished from the glory of G-d. Even one who is physically and spiritually in exile must be aware that his existence, including the physical aspects related to the blessing after the meal, are linked to *Eretz Yisrael*. Thus, we cannot omit the memory of the land and of Jerusalem from the blessing, because they are the source of our unique life.

If

By Sheldon Stern

The 19th century was perhaps the golden age of British poetry. Tennyson, Byron, Shelley, Keats, Burns, and many others are still household names. One poem that made an impression on me was "If" by Rudyard Kipling. He grabbed the readers' attention with his opening line, "If you can keep your head while those around you are losing theirs and blaming it on you" Interestingly, the name of our Parsha Eikev is translated as "If" and its author was also no slouch in the writing department.

Rashi, noting that it's strange to name a Parsha with a conjunction, explained that the title alludes to those "unimportant" Mitzvohs that people dismiss and tread on with their heels(Eikev.) This is difficult, however, because the Mishna in Avos teaches that there's no such thing as a trivial Mitzvoh. We're likely all familiar with the story of the Israeli soldier whose life was saved because he held fast to the Rabbinic ordinance of tying the left shoe before the right. Rabbi Miller has an incisive comment that puts us on the Derech to the answer, "People who abandon the Torah think that they'll be judged for having intermarried and the like. That's certainly true but in addition, Hashem will take them to task for not having had Kavanah in the first Brocho of Shemoneh Esreh." The point is that Hashem sweats the "small stuff." And how do we know this? The Akeidah is arguably the greatest single act in the annals of mankind. At the end of the narrative Hashem, in verses 22:16 and 17, tells Avraham that "because" you listened to My voice and didn't withhold your favorite son you will be rewarded with myriads of blessings. And which word does the Torah employ for "because"? None other than the versatile Eikev. So what is the Torah teaching us? Yes, Avraham was able to go where no one else could go. However, at the same time, he made sure to be exacting in the performance of all Mitzvos including seemingly picayune Rabbinic injunctions. Dr Laura Sclesinger was a big name in the 90s with her radio program in which she fielded calls from those dealing with psychological issues. She converted to Judaism at that time, but a short time later became disillusioned because she didn't have her "splitting the Red Sea moment." Our religion focuses on the mundane and so we have to be as enthusiastic about performing the rote Mitzvohs(Tefilin, Mezuzahs, etc) as we are when Hashem allows us to do something extraordinary. So now we understand why our Parsha is called Eikev. Hashem is conveying to us that we can achieve greatness in His eyes by simply following the humdrum Jewish life. Go to shul, learn the Daf, and give Tzedaka the basic stuff. And we can prove this. One Parsha in Vayikra. is called Kedoshim. You would think that it deals with the laws of asceticism. Nothing could be farther from the truth. It's largely a compendium of Mitvos Bein Adam Lechaveiro, who likes being honest. Hashem knows that the Torah wasn't given to angels and so He just wants us to act like decent human beings.

What we take from this is that Judaism is 24/7 613 as well as performing the plethora of Rabbinic mitzvot. Now that may seem like a lot, but Hashem will cut us some slack if we at least make the effort. I met Willie Rapfogel on Tisha B'Av and he shared the following, "Rav Dovid (Feinstein)said(they were very close)"People think that Judaism is a menu. You know, take one from column A and two from column B." But it doesn't work that way. Perhaps it's instructive to go back to Kipling's opus. The author was basically restating Shakespeare's immortal "To be or not to be" speech, i.e. if one can deal with the vicissitudes and vagaries of life and maintain his composure then he'll be a man and inherit the world. Hashem is really telling us the same thing in our Parsha. Just be a Mensch and the rest will take care of itself.