

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

The setting: Jerusalem some twenty centuries ago. The occasion: bringing first fruits to the Temple. Here is the scene as the Mishnah describes it.¹ Throughout Israel, villagers would gather in the nearest of 24 regional centres. There, overnight, they would sleep in the open air. The next morning, the leader would summon the people with words from the book of Jeremiah (31:5): “Arise and let us go up to Zion, to the House of the Lord our God.”

Those who lived near Jerusalem would bring fresh figs and grapes. Those who lived far away would bring dried figs and raisins. An ox would walk ahead of them, its horns plated with gold and its head decorated with an olive wreath. Someone would play a flute. When they came close to Jerusalem they would send a messenger ahead to announce their arrival and they would start to adorn their first-fruits. Governors and officials of the city would come out to greet them and the artisans would stop their work and call out, “Our brothers from such-and-such a place: come in peace!”

The flute would continue playing until the procession reached the Temple Mount. There, they would each place their basket of fruit on their shoulder – the Mishnah says that even King Agrippa would do so – and carry it to the Temple forecourt. There the Levites would sing (Psalm 30:2), “I will praise you, God, for you have raised me up and not let my enemies rejoice over me.”

The scene, as groups converged on the Temple from all parts of Israel, must have been vivid and unforgettable. However, the most important part of the ceremony lay in what happened next. With the baskets still on their shoulders the arrivals would say, “I declare today to the Lord your God that I have come to the land that the Lord swore to our ancestors to give us.” Each would then hold their basket by the rim, the

Cohen would place his hand under it and ceremoniously wave it, and the bringer of the fruit would say the following passage, whose text is set out in our parsha: “My ancestor was a wandering Aramean. He went down into Egypt and lived there as a stranger, few in number, and there became a great nation, strong and numerous. The Egyptians mistreated us and made us suffer, subjecting us to harsh labour. We cried out to the Lord, God of our ancestors. The Lord heard our voice and saw our suffering, our toil and our oppression. The Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with terrifying power and signs and wonders. He brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. And now I am bringing the first fruit of the soil that you, O Lord, have given me.” (Deut. 26:5-10)

This passage is familiar to us because we expound part of it, the first four verses, in the Haggadah on Seder night. But this was no mere ritual. As Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi explained in his *Zakhor: Jewish History and Memory*, it constituted one of the most revolutionary of all Judaism’s contributions to world civilisation.²

What was original was not the celebration of first fruits. Many cultures have such ceremonies. What was unique about the ritual in our parsha, and the biblical world-view from which it derives, is that our ancestors saw God in history rather than nature. Normally what people would celebrate by bringing first-fruits would be nature itself: the seasons, the soil, the rain, the fertility of the ground and what Dylan Thomas called “the force that through the green fuse drives the flower.” The biblical first-fruits ceremony is quite different. It is not about nature but about the shape of history, the birth of Israel as a nation, and the redemptive power of God who liberated our ancestors from slavery.

This is what was new about this worldview:

[1] Jews were, as Yerushalmi points out, the first to see God in history.

[2] They were the first to see history itself as an extended narrative with an overarching theme. That vision was sustained for the whole of the biblical era, as the events of a thousand years were interpreted by the prophets and recorded by the biblical historians.

[3] The theme of biblical history is redemption.

² Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Memory*, University of Washington Press, 1982.



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¹ Mishnah, Bikkurim 3:2-6.

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It begins with suffering, has an extended middle section about the interactive drama between God and the people, and ends with homecoming and blessing.

[4] The narrative is to be internalised: this is the transition from history to memory, and this is what the first-fruits declaration was about. Those who stood in the Temple saying those words were declaring: this is my story. In bringing these fruits from this land, I and my family are part of it.

[5] Most importantly: the story was the basis of identity. Indeed, that is the difference between history and memory. History is an answer to the question, "What happened?" Memory is an answer to the question, "Who am I?" In Alzheimer's Disease, when you lose your memory, you lose your identity. The same is true of a nation as a whole.³ When we tell the story of our people's past, we renew our identity. We have a context in which we can understand who we are in the present and what we must do to hand on our identity to the future.

It is difficult to grasp how significant this was and is. Western modernity has been marked by two quite different attempts to escape from identity. The first, in the eighteenth century, was the European Enlightenment. This focused on two universalisms: science and philosophy. Science aims at discovering laws that are universally true. Philosophy aims at disclosing universal structures of thought.

Identity is about groups, about Us and Them. But groups conflict. Therefore the Enlightenment sought a world without identities, in which we are all just human beings. But people can't live without identities, and identity is never universal. It is always and essentially particular. What makes us the unique person we are is what makes us different from people in general. Therefore, no intellectual discipline that aims at universality will ever fully grasp the meaning and significance of identity.

This was the Enlightenment's blind spot.

³ The historian David Andress has just published a book, *Cultural Dementia*, subtitled *How the West Has Lost its History and Risks Losing Everything Else* (London, Head of Zeus, 2018), applying a similar insight to the contemporary West.

Identity came roaring back in the nineteenth century, based on one of three factors: nation, race or class. In the twentieth century, nationalism led to two World Wars. Racism led to the Holocaust. Marxist class warfare led eventually to Stalin, the Gulag and the KGB.

Since the 1960s, the West has been embarked on a second attempt to escape from identity, in favour not of the universal but the individual, in the belief that identity is something each of us freely creates for him- or herself. But identity is never created this way. It is always about membership in a group. Identity, like language, is essentially social.⁴

Just as happened after the Enlightenment, identity has come roaring back to the West, this time in the form of identity politics (based on gender, ethnicity or sexual orientation). This will, if allowed to flourish, lead to yet more historical disasters. It is a major threat to the future of liberal democracy.

What was happening in Jerusalem when people brought their first-fruits was of immense consequence. It meant that that they regularly told the story of who they were and why. No nation has ever given greater significance to retelling its collective story than Judaism, which is why Jewish identity is the strongest the world has ever known, the only one to have survived for twenty centuries with none of the normal bases of identity: political power, shared territory or a shared language of everyday speech.

Clearly, not all identities are the same. Characteristic of Jewish identities and others inspired by the Hebrew Bible are what Dan McAdams calls "the redemptive self."⁵ People with this kind of identity, he says, "shape their lives into a narrative about how a gifted hero encounters the suffering of others as a child, develops strong moral convictions as an adolescent, and moves steadily upward and onward in the adult years, confident that negative experiences will ultimately be redeemed." More than other kinds of life story, the redemptive self embodies the "belief that bad things can be overcome and affirms the narrator's commitment to building a better world."

What made the biblical story unique was its focus on redemption. In partnership with God, we can

⁴ In his new book, *21 Lessons for the 21st Century* (London, Jonathan Cape, 2018), Yuval Harari argues passionately against stories, meanings and identities and opts instead for consciousness as the basis of our humanity, and meditation as a way of living with meaninglessness. He takes a position diametrically opposed to everything argued for in this essay. In the modern age, Jews – whether as philosophers, Marxists, postmodernists or Buddhists – have often been leaders of the opposition to identity. The late Shlomo Carlebach put it best: "If someone says, 'I'm a Catholic,' I know that's a Catholic. If someone says, 'I'm a Protestant,' I know that's a Protestant. If someone says, 'I'm just a human being,' I know that's a Jew."

⁵ Dan McAdams, *The Redemptive Self: Stories Americans Live By*, Oxford University Press, 2006.

change the world. This story is our heritage as Jews and our contribution to the moral horizons of humankind. Hence the life-changing idea: Our lives are shaped by the story we tell about ourselves, so make sure the story you tell is one that speaks to your highest aspirations, and tell it regularly. *Covenant and Conversation 5778 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l ©2018 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"When you come to the land which the Lord your God gives to you as an inheritance and you inherit it.... You shall take from the first of all the fruits of the earth which you shall bring from your land.... And you shall respond and you shall say before the Lord your God: "My father was a wandering Aramean." (Deuteronomy 26:1–26:5) The Mishna in Bikkurim magnificently describes the drama of the bringing of these first fruits, the massive march to Jerusalem of farmers from all over Israel with the choicest fruit and grain of their labors in their hands, the decorated marketplaces of our Holy City crowned by the magnificent fruits, and the speech-song of each individual farmer as he stood in front of the Temple altar with the offering he handed to the priest. What an impressive demonstration of fealty to the Master of the Universe, who is hereby recognized as the Provider of all produce and the Sustainer of all sustenance.

But God's bounty was not the purpose of bringing the first fruits. The clear emphasis here is the arrival of the Israelites to the Land of Israel – after having been enslaved and afflicted by the Egyptians, and after the Almighty heard their prayers and took them from Egypt to Israel with great miracles and wonders. Eating the fruits of our own land emphasizes the evils of slavery when we could not produce our own food and the inalienable rights of Jews (as well as all humans) to freedom and the independence to provide for their own needs.

From this perspective I can understand why the first fruits are only to be brought from the seven species which are unique and bring praise to the Land of Israel (Deut. 8), and why only an individual who owns a portion of the Land of Israel and on whose portion the fruits actually grew is obligated to perform the command of the first fruits (Mishna, Bikkurim 1:1–3). This commandment is all about God's gift of the land of Israel to the Jews; that is why we find that in the eleven verses of the first fruits speech-song, the noun "land (eretz)," appears no fewer than five times, and the verb "gift (matan)" (by God), no fewer than seven times!

To further cement the inextricable relationship between the first fruits and the Land of Israel, Rabbi Elhanan Samet (in his masterful biblical commentary)

cites a comment by Rabbi Menahem Ziemba (Hiddushim, siman 50) in the name of the Holy Ari, that the commandment to bring the first fruits is a repair, a tikkun, for the Sin of the Scouts. Perhaps that is why the Mishna links the command of the first fruits specifically to the fig, grape, and pomegranate ("If an individual goes into his field and sees a fig, a grape-cluster and/or a pomegranate which has/have ripened, he must tie them with a cord and state that these are to be first fruits" – Bikkurim 3:1), precisely the three fruits which the scouts took back with them (Num. 13:23).

And the Bible relates to the scouts on their reconnaissance mission with the very same language that God commands the Israelite concerning the first fruits: Moses tells the scouts, "And you shall take from the fruits of the land" (13:20), "We came to the land...and it is even flowing with milk and honey, and this is its fruit" (13:27), and – in remarkably parallel fashion – God commands the Israelites, "And you shall take from the first of all the fruits of the land" (Deut. 26:2), "Because I have come to the land" (26:3), "And He gave to us this land flowing with milk and honey" (26:9). In effect, God is saying that we must bring precisely those first fruits from that very special land which the scouts rejected, or at least lacked the faith to conquer and settle. Fulfilling the command of the first fruits is in effect a gesture of "repentance" for the Sin of the Scouts. And in similar fashion, all of us privileged to return to Israel after 2000 years of exile are similarly repenting for the sin of the Scouts! ©2018 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

Throughout this final oration of Moshe, he constantly emphasizes that when the Jewish people finally cross the Jordan and enter the land of Israel there are additional commandments and behavior patterns that will be demanded of them. He reiterates that the land of Israel is bountiful and beautiful, blessed and holy but he warns them that this is a venue that makes demands upon its inhabitants.

The rabbis of the Talmud reinforce this idea by stating that the land of Israel inflicts growing pains upon those that come to live there. It will always be a place of challenges and problems, of difficulties and situations that will have to be overcome. But it is also the land where the eyes of the Lord so to speak are upon it throughout the year and that living in such a land is replete with great opportunities and a sense of mission and holiness.

Neither its topography nor weather patterns, its agricultural bounty and prosperity are to be deemed as ordinary and natural. It is the ultimate land of unpredictability, for its well-being and blessings are wholly dependent on the behavior of its inhabitants and, naturally, on the will of God.

As such, the land is always subject to the behavior and attitudes of its human inhabitants. It is the land of ultimate free will and freedom of choice that the Lord has endowed human beings with. Moshe constantly reminds the generation that is about to enter the land of Israel of their obligations and duties to God and to Torah. This will be the key to their success and longevity in the land of Israel.

We are now participating in the third major effort of Jewish society to live in the land of Israel. Throughout our long exile we have always aspired to return here and to build a Jewish society in the holy land worthy of our ancestors and the great prophets of Israel. Many of the reasons why our first two attempts to establish such a permanent Jewish society here failed are unfortunately still present.

Many past ills such as idolatry and the lack of national pride no longer really govern our thoughts or tempt our behavior. It is difficult to imagine that we would have learned nothing from history and would, God forbid, repeat all the past errors of first and second Temple times. Yet, we all realize that the challenges that face us are great and that the road we traverse is still difficult and dangerous.

There are many distractions and obstacles that face us in trying to create a Jewish state that Moshe envisioned centuries ago. Yet, if we look back at how far we have come, against all odds and many enemies, we should be able to realize that it is within our grasp to fulfill the words of Moshe as they appear in this week's Torah reading. It is clear that we live in a special place and in special times. As such, we have to rise to the occasion and be a special people. ©2018 Rabbi Berel Wein - Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

In this week's portion Moshe (Moses) tells the Jewish people, "that as the Lord rejoiced over you to do you good...so the Lord will rejoice over you to cause you to perish, and you will be torn from...the land [of Israel]." (Deuteronomy 28:63) Is it possible that God rejoices in our destruction?

Rashi quotes the Talmudic interpretation, "so the Lord will make your enemies to rejoice over you." In other words, the nations of the world, rather than God, exult. (Megillah 10b)

Another answer can be offered by taking into account the next sentence. There, Moshe tells Am Yisrael that "the Lord shall scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth until the other." (Deuteronomy 28:64) This can be viewed as a blessing. Even if we are attacked, the entire nation of

Israel cannot be decimated, as there will always be other Jewish communities in other parts of the world who will live in safety. Hence, even in the exile our continuity is guaranteed, resulting in God's joy. (See Ramban, Genesis 32:9)

An alternative suggestion comes to mind. Consider the famous story of Rabbi Akiva and his colleagues who visited the Temple site after its destruction by the Romans. As those in his company cried out, Akiva laughed. When questioned how he could laugh, Akiva responded: As the prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem has come true; so, too, will the prophecy of renewal. Perhaps Akiva was leaning on our very text which describes God's joy in the midst of our suffering. (Makkot 24b)

My colleague, Rabbi Aaron Frank, suggested that the biblical term for joy that is used here - sahs - differs from the word commonly used for joy - simcha. Simcha is total; sahs is God's joy in protecting us, even when we are most vulnerable.

Note the text recited at a wedding: sos tasis ve-tageyl ha-akarrah which can be understood to mean that Israel, the barren one, is joyous in knowing that, no matter how bleak the barrenness is, it will be protected by God.

Here the relationship is similar to a parent caring for a child in a desperate situation. Certainly the parent is not joyous — but there is sahs in the sense that the parent knows that he/she is giving all of the love possible to help shield his or her child. In turn, the child is comforted in that love.

No wonder we do not use the term simcha when greeting, as by definition, every year brings difficulties and challenges. Still, we pray that this be a year of goodness (shannah tovah), the goodness of feeling God's protection no matter what life does out. ©2018 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale

RABBI AHRON LOPIANSKY

TorahWeb

There is a famous parable for Elul, comparing it to a king strolling in his field, and anyone can approach him. This moshol is quoted as if it were a midrash; but it is not. [There is a midrash that the Tur brings about a group of people preempting the king, by coming to him while he's travelling, but its intent is quite different.] It is a moshol of the Baal Hatanya [Likutei Torah Reeh].

On the surface of it, the parable seems to not have much content. It is simply a somewhat vague metaphor for having an easier way in with the king. But why would this be so? Why DON'T WE need to make an appointment with the king at his palace like everyone else? What prompted the royal stroll?

Let us take a closer look at his words: "Why are the yud gimmel middos revealed during Elul, though they are a very high revelation suitable mainly for Yom Kippur? One can compare it to a king who before he arrives in the town, is accessible to everyone and he is friendly with them. When the king goes to the city, THEY THEN FOLLOW HIM. And once he is in his palace they need permission to enter..."

I think that the words "they then follow him" are the crucial words. For although one needs special permission to enter the palace, these poor peasants are so far removed from the refinement of the monarchy that they lack any interest to even make an appointment to see the king. What does the king do? He extends himself undeservedly to them, so that they gain some sense of what he is. When there interest is aroused, and their passions are excited, they follow the king to his palace. And now they must deserve to enter.

If you wish, this is actually a passuk in Shir Hashirim. In the fifth perek there is a description of the king's beloved having become tired of the king. He begs her to open the door, and she replies that she is tired and has gone to sleep. He then puts his hand through the keyhole, and she begins yearning for him. But now he is gone, and she must spend the rest of her time pursuing him.

This is the same dynamic. A beloved has lost interest, and unless that interest is aroused again, she/he will never even bother to pursue the king.

The point of the Baal Hatanya's parable is that for the process of din to be meaningful, a desire must first be aroused in the populace to achieve closeness to Hashem. Thus, Elul is a time when Hashem grants us - - undeservedly -- a rush of spirituality. This is not the real spirituality, for real spirituality comes only by dint of effort. It is meant to draw us out of our beds of comfort, to begin following the king to his palace. And at the palace we must show ourselves deserving. ©2018 Rabbi A. Lopiansky & TorahWeb.org

ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

Eating of the First Fruits

Translated for the Encyclopedia Talmudit by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

In this week's portion there is reference to the Mitzvah of "Bikurim" (first fruits) and the Mitzvah of "Maaser Sheini" (tithes that one must bring and consume in Yerushalayim). However the Mitzvah of actually eating the "Bikurim" and "Maaser Shani" is found elsewhere. The Mitzvah of eating Bikurim is found in Devarim 12:5,6, and of the eating of "Maaser sheni" in Devarim 14:26.

Since however, both Mitzvot are mentioned in this week's portion and are in close proximity to each other and have many similarities, our sages learn one from the other with the exception that "Maaser Sheni" is eaten in Yerushalayim by its owners, but the "Bikurim"

are presented to the "Kohanim" (priests) when the people arrive in Israel with their first fruits.

The declaration when one brings his "Maaser Sheni" to Yerushalayim is "I have not eaten of it in my intense mourning" which we derive that one must be happy when eating of the "Maaser Sheni" when one comes to Yerushalayim. As well, the Kohen who is receiving the "bikurim" must also be happy and not in a state of mourning. Some derive this from the passage "And you should be happy because of all the good".

The Mitzvah of "Bikurim" and all of its requirements, is not only upon an Israelite who brings his fruit to a Kohen, but also is applicable to the Kohen who receives the "Bikurim" and indeed he is required to recite the blessing "Asher kidishanu b'mitzvotav vtzivanu le'echol Bikurim" (who has commanded one to eat Bikurim) when he receives the "Bikurim". ©2016 Rabbi M. Weiss and Encyclopedia Talmudit

RABBI DAVID S. LEVIN

A Heart to Know

Our parasha this week concludes with a series of p'sukim which cry out for further explanation.

The Torah states: "And Moshe called to all of Yisrael and he said to them you have seen all that Hashem did before your eyes in the land of Egypt to Par'oh and to all of his servants and to all of his land. The great trials that your eyes beheld, those great signs and wonders. But Hashem did not give you a heart to know, or eyes to see, or ears to hear, until this day. And I led you forty years in the wilderness, your garment did not wear out from on you, and your shoe did not wear out from on your foot. Bread you did not eat and wine or intoxicant you did not drink so that you would know that I am Hashem your Elokim."

The key sentence in this series is, "But Hashem did not give you a heart to know, or eyes to see, or ears to hear, until this day." It is clear that this pasuk needs analysis. We must first ascertain what each phrase means and then understand how one can say that we were not yet given these aspects until this day. The lev, heart, is often referred to by our sages as the center of knowledge and understanding. When the Torah asks man to love Hashem b'chol l'vav'cha, with all your heart, it is speaking both of an emotional connection and an intellectual attachment to Hashem. Both intellect and emotion are assumed to be centered in the heart. The lev, heart, depends on the ayin, eye, to open both the intellect and the emotion. Harav Zalman Sorotzkin explains, "the eye sees and the heart desires and the body does." Rabbeinu Bachya asks why the heart is mentioned in the pasuk before the eyes if the eyes first see and that sight gets the attention of the heart. He likens the lev to the lavan, white, of the tzitzit, the fringe on a four-cornered garment, and the ayin to the t'cheilet, the blue strand which is added to make the fourth of the strands of the

tzitzit. When forming the tzitzit the lavan must come first and then the t'cheilet is added. This is a reminder to man that the Torah requires that our lev should control that for which we are tempted by our ayin. Perhaps that is why there are three strands of lavan to the one strand of t'cheilet.

The aznayim, the ears, are also used here as a form of understanding. We sometimes say "I hear you" to mean that I understand what you are intending by your words. One may discard what one hears unless it is corroborated by the evidence of sight; but when sight and sound are matched, one feels that the evidence is solid and the understanding is clear. For this reason, the ears are listed last in our pasuk as sound is not reliable by itself but only is reliable when confirmed by sight. Rav Sorotzkin points out that at Har Sinai the B'nei Yisrael were raised to the level of angels and were able to see sound, "and all the people were able to see the sounds (of the shofar)." At that time, but not since, the nation was capable of both senses of understanding equally at the same moment.

Rashi tells a Midrash that helps to explain the last statement in our pasuk, namely "until this day." On that day Moshe gave the completed written Torah directly to the Leviim and Kohanim, and the other tribes complained. They argued that Moshe gave the Torah to his "family" and the family might later claim that the Torah was only given to them. Moshe said to the B'nei Yisrael, "This day you have become a people [to Hashem, your G-d]." He told them that on this day I have understood that you cleave to and desire the Omnipresent. Moshe understood on that day that the people wanted to receive the Torah from him as much as he wished to give it to them. He had given the Torah to those who would be responsible for the daily service to Hashem and he hoped that the rest of the B'nei Yisrael would grow to love Hashem as deeply once the Temple was built. It was only through the B'nei Yisrael's complaint that he understood that they had already made that commitment to Hashem.

HaRav Avigdor Nebenzahl explains that man must reach a level of "clinging to Hashem" that can only be reached through Hashem's assistance. This assistance is the Torah and its mitzvot. It is only through our observing the mitzvot that Hashem can raise us up to the exalted level of a "treasured people, an am s'gulah." We must be careful, however, of a distortion of the Torah by our forgetfulness. "The Torah is only truth when it is observed in its complete and authentic manner. Any distortion, even of only a small portion of the Torah, detracts from the authenticity of its observance." HaRav Nebenzahl also cautions us not to observe the mitzvot by rote. It is important to feel the joy of every mitzvah and to rejoice in the opportunity to serve Hashem. The joy with which we observe the mitzvot must be passed on to our children.

In this passage we have clearly defined a

message of which we have spoken often. The B'nei Yisrael had many experiences in the wilderness, both positive and negative, but each one was part of the learning process. The people failed miserably in the trial of the spies that were sent into the land. Their punishment was a serious setback for the people: no one who left Egypt from among the men who were at least twenty years old would be left to enter the land that Hashem had promised our Avot. The B'nei Yisrael could have rebelled as some did and abandoned Hashem and His Torah which they had only received a short time earlier. They could have questioned Hashem and His plan for them. But we have already learned that Hashem acts for our benefit alone. What appeared to be a serious punishment was really a gift to us, for by the end of our experiences in the wilderness, we had finally achieved that necessary desire to cling to Hashem and His Torah. It would only be through that desire that we could guarantee our settlement of the land, for the land would "spit out" those who abandoned the Torah. Our perception of Hashem's actions towards us must always be that Hashem does what is best for us. Hashem not only provides all of our physical needs (our food, our clothing, our shelter, and our health) but also our spiritual needs through His Torah. As we study His Torah and observe His mitzvot may we grow as the B'nei Yisrael grew through their forty years in the wilderness to cling to Hashem and to desire His Torah, and may we also develop a "leiv lada'at v'eynayim lir'ot v'aznayim lishmo'a, a heart to know, eyes to see, and ears to hear" the Will of Hashem. ©2018 Rabbi D.S. Levin

RABBI LABEL LAM

Dvar Torah

"**A**nd it will be that when you come into the land that HASHEM your G-d gives to you as an inheritance and you settle in it. And you should take from the first of all the fruit which came from the land that HASHEM your G-d gave to you...And you shall place it in a basket and take it to the place that HASHEM your G-d has chosen that His Name should dwell there...And declare before HASHEM your G-d, 'An Aramian tried to destroy my father and he went down to Egypt to sojourn there a while and there he became a great and substantial nation. The Egyptians did us harm and afflicted us and they put upon us hard work. And we cried out to HASHEM the G-d of our fathers and HASHEM heard our voices and saw our pains and our burdens and our pressures. And HASHEM took us out from Egypt with a strong hand and an outstretched arm and with great awe and with signs and wonders...And he brought us to this place and He gave to us this land flowing with milk and honey...and now I am bringing the first fruit of the land that HASHEM has given to me..." (Devarim 26:1-10)

The purpose of this whole play can be boiled down to one giant word, "GRATITUDE". Little children can define it. Why does the Torah make a formal exercise out of what is fundamental and self-evident?

I was with a group of visiting Yeshiva students at a Shabbos meal seated next to Rabbi Yosef Grossman. He had just offered to pour some seltzer in the empty cup of a boy sitting nearby. The bochur held up his hand and declared, "I'm good!"

Rabbi Grossman shared with me an interesting linguistic observation that the old time classic answer to someone offering something used to be "no thank you". Nowadays people say, "I'm good". What is the difference between the two expressions? One acknowledges a giver and the other is all about the recipient.

Rabbi E. E. Dessler writes in his essay on Chessed that at any point a person is either a giver or a taker. Either the selfish animal soul is dominating and animating his actions or his G-dly soul which can see well beyond its self. It's hard to tell from the outside which is active. A person can be giving in a given situation and looking for a quid pro quo and therefore his act is really a self involved deed. On the other hand a person can be receiving something and performing a selfless act of giving. How so?

Giving someone else a chance to give to you is also an act of giving. Reb Dessler asks how someone who finds themselves in a receiving mode can express their G-dly desire to give? He answers that the sign of a giver in a receiving situation is, that they seek ways express their gratitude.

Dovid HaMelech asked rhetorically, "How can I repay You HASHEM for all you have done for me!?" There is no concrete answer to that question. Essentially it's a posture of gratitude. The Alter from Kelm, Simcha Zissel adds rocket fuel to this equation. Just in case what HASHEM has done for us personally is not enough, he sees in this "all" You have done for me, includes a broader perspective. The Mishne in Sanhedrin states, "A person has an obligation to say that the whole world was created for me!" So when King Dovid said these words and when we echo his sentiments we can have in mind that the entirety of creation large and small ancient and modern -- all was for made for me. That deepens the debt of gratitude endlessly.

Rabbi Miller advised that in that last Mincha of the year, right before the first Maariv of the New Year on Rosh HaShana it is well worthwhile to thank HASHEM for what He has given you this year before expecting more the next year. I found this to be an electrifying experience the last few years I tried and it only makes perfect sense. My daughter shared with me a strong motivational line, "What if you woke up tomorrow with only those things you thanked HASHEM for today." Let us now take license to expand it. "What if

you woke up next year with only those things you thanked HASHEM for this year." Not one of us would say, "I'm good!" WOW -- how thankful we'd be!?

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RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

Today. It's a powerful word. It is used by doctors to define the exact moment their patients are to stop over-indulging, smoking, and drinking. It is used by account receivables to exact when they want their bills paid. Most importantly, it's used by the Torah in describing what It wants from our attitudes. This week the Torah portion tells us: "Today Hashem commands you to perform these decrees and statutes." (26:16) There is obviously a deeper connotation. The commandments were not given on the day that Moshe read this week's portion. They were given forty years prior. Also, at the end of the Parsha, Moshe calls the nation together and reminds them of the miraculous events that transpired during the exodus from Egypt. He discusses "the great wonders, signs, and miracles that your eyes beheld." (29:1-3) Then he adds something shocking: "But Hashem did not give you a heart to understand or eyes to see until today." What can the word "today" mean in this context? Did the Jewish nation not have the heart to appreciate the value of splitting the Sea forty years back? Did they not revel in the miracle of Manna from its first earthly descent decades previously? How can Moshe say that they did not have eyes to understand until today?

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky explains that perhaps Moshe is telling his nation the secret of eternal inspiration. One may experience miraculous events. They may even have the vision of a lifetime. However, they "will not have the heart to understand or the eyes to see" until that vision is today. Unless the inspiration lives with them daily, as it did upon the moment of impact. Whether tragedy or blessing, too often an impact becomes as dull as the movement of time itself. The promises, pledges, and commitments begin to travel slowly, hand-in-hand down a memory lane paved with long-forgotten inspiration. This week Moshe tells us that even after experiencing a most memorable wonder, we still may, "not have the heart to discern nor the eyes to see." Until we add one major ingredient. Today. © 2018 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.





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13 Miles for 13 Years

by Binny Ciment

(Hi. First of all, my mother is not writing this for me.)

For two summers I went to Camp Simcha and had the best summers of my life. You might ask why I am a part of Chai Lifeline and the real reason is because when I was diagnosed with a brain tumor Chai Lifeline was awesome. They visited me in the hospital, took me to Disney, and kept me happy whenever things got hard. They also helped out my family.

Camp Simcha was the best and now I'm running in honor of my upcoming Bar Mitzvah to make sure other kids in my situation can have the same

amazing summer. I'm also running in memory of my friend who

was with me in Camp Simcha and who I miss a lot.

Training for this will be hard, but trust me, I've been through harder stuff. I know I can do this. Please help me reach my goal by donating here:

<http://tinyurl.com/binny11>

Best - Binny



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