



The Marcos and Adina Katz YUTORAH IN PRINT

Ki Savo 5782

One Nation, All Alone, Under God

Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm z"l (Originally delivered September 15, 1973)

In the portion of this week's reading which describes the blessings that will come upon Israel, we read one verse that is outstanding by its magnificence: וראו כל עמי הארץ, "And all the nations of the world will see that the name of the Lord is called upon you, and they will be afraid of you."

What does Moses mean when he says that "the name of the Lord will be called upon you?" The Talmud (Ber. 6a) quotes an answer by one of the greatest of all sages, Rabbi Eliezer Hagadol (the Great). In a pithy comment of but three words, he says: אלו תפילין שבראש, the "name of the Lord" that is "called upon us" refers to the Tefillin that we wear upon the head.

How remarkable! Is that all it takes to frighten away the anti-Semite bent upon a pogrom? Is the Tefillin worn upon the head really sufficient to neutralize the venom of the anti-Jewish enemy, his plentiful arms and allies?

If we turn to the Talmudic passage from which this quotation is taken, and study it in context, we discover what I believe is the real meaning of the statement of Rabbi Eliezer the Great. Immediately after quoting his response, the Talmud asks:

הַגִּי תְּפִילִין דְּמָרִי עֲלֵמָא מַה כְּתִיב בְּהוּ? אָמַר לֵיהּ "וּמִי כְּעַמּוֹד יִשְׂרָאֵל גּוֹי אֶחָד בְּאַרְצוֹ". אָמַר לָהֶם הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא לְיִשְׂרָאֵל: אַתֶּם עֲשִׂיתוּנִי חֲסִיבָה אַחַת בְּעוֹלָם, וְאֲנִי אֶעֱשֶׂה אֶתְכֶם חֲסִיבָה אַחַת בְּעוֹלָם.

The Agadah often speaks of the Tefillin that are worn not only by man, but by God. Now the Talmud asks: we know that in the Tefillin of man is written the profession of unity, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one." But what is written in the Tefillin that, so to speak, God himself wears? They answer that the Tefillin of God bear the message: "Who is like unto Thy people Israel, one nation upon the earth."

And the Rabbis explain: The Lord said to Israel, "You made of Me a unity in the world." Our espousal of God's

oneness is reciprocated by God's affirming our uniqueness in the world.

Now, reading our original passage in context, we see that "the name of the Lord" refers not to man's but to God's Tefillin של ראש! Hence, what the Sages really meant to say is this: What will win respect and inspire awe in others is the Jewish ability to stand alone, to be a חסיבה אחת בעולם, to risk loneliness, to remain secure through friendliness, to hold its own if necessary against the entire world. When Jews have sufficient faith in "the name of the Lord" to act on the basis of the confidence that we will remain בארץ בחד, one nation upon the earth, then will survive and we will flourish.

This is true for us as individuals. If we are embarrassed by our Jewishness and fearful of being outsiders and aliens in a non-Jewish culture, if we will yield easily to the majority's pressures upon us to conform, then we will deserve no יראה or respect for us, because we will have dishonored ourselves. Those pseudo-WASPs, those Jews who would have preferred to be re-born non-Jewish, who do not acknowledge their ethnic origins or religious traditions, are in truth not authentically human. The self-deniers have, as it were, ripped the Tefillin off the head of God and left themselves both headless and heartless.

What Rabbi Eliezer is telling us is that we must have the courage of our convictions and ignore the pressure of numbers. If you think you are right, if you are convinced that what you are doing is correct and moral, then do not be worried by the fact that most people are against you, that you may look silly, that people will gaze at you as though you came from another world. If you are right, proceed to do what is right in your eyes and do not be worried that you offend majority opinion.

Indeed, Rabbi Eliezer the Great himself beautifully exemplified this principle. He was born to a very wealthy father who, like most wealthy fathers, preferred that his

son become a well-to-do businessman. But when Eliezer was 22 years old he decided that he would rather become a scholar and so, at a relatively advanced age, he made his way to Yavneh and enrolled in the Academy of Rabbi Yohanan b. Zakkai. His father was furious at him for abandoning the family business and going into something as impractical as Talmudic scholarship. He made up his mind, after some time, that he would himself travel to Yavneh and there publicly disinherit his son. When he came to Yavneh, the great teacher Rabbi Yohanan b. Zakkai noticed him and called out to Eliezer, saying: “עמוד ודרוש,” Rise up and deliver the lecture. Eliezer was truly frightened, because he regarded himself as only a beginner, disqualified and unprepared for such a task. But the teacher insisted, and Eliezer delivered himself a brilliant and scintillating Talmudic lecture.

So impressive were his words that the audience gasped, and the teacher kissed the student upon the forehead. When Eliezer's father Hyrkanos saw this, he arose and declared that although he had come to disinherit Eliezer, he now wished to announce that he is so overwhelmed that he is going to leave all his money and estate to his son.

All through his life, R. Eliezer continued to demonstrate this single-minded stubbornness of following what is right no matter who is in the opposition. At one crucial point of his life, when he was already a world-famous teacher and had distinguished students – counting among them no less a figure than Rabbi Akiva – R. Eliezer clashed with his colleagues on a point of law. They declared a certain oven as טמא, ritually unclean, and he pronounced it טהור, ritually clean. When the matter was taken to a vote and the opposition won, R. Eliezer refused to go along. The matter led to confrontation, and as a result of R. Eliezer's persistence and his refusal to accede to majority rule, he was placed in excommunication – and remained in this ban for many years, until his death. He was beloved by his colleagues and students, revered universally, and yet in order for the Halakhah to survive they felt it necessary to take this extreme action against him. But he refused to be budged. The principle he found in the divine תפילין שבראש was something he implemented in his own life.

If this is true for us as individuals, it is certainly true for Israel as a people today. We must be prepared for what is coming upon us. We must recognize that the State of Israel is in for some difficult times in the diplomatic and political world, and possibly even militarily. Israel is more and more facing isolation. It has earned the enmity of the Soviet Union. It is isolated from the Third World who in their

recent assembly repeated the ritualistic condemnation of and hatred for Israel. The UN continues treating Israel like a pariah, and the Civil Airlines Organization, which always procrastinates and dawdles when hijackings are carried out against Israeli aircraft, springs into action and tries to prevent hijacking, without any loss of life or property. Arab oil is now being used perhaps for the first time, in a deliberate attempt to isolate Israel diplomatically. The Energy Crisis in the US is exaggerated in order to fall in line with this pressure. Russian-American detente promises no great help for Israel. A weakened Presidency leaves Israel in a most difficult position. And, if we are honest with ourselves, we will admit that pleased as we are at having the first Jewish Secretary of State in American history, we are also worried lest he will bend over backwards in an attempt to prove that he is not prejudiced in favor of Israel.

So we must be prepared to remain alone, friendless, isolated.

At times of crisis it has been our experience for this past quarter century, that Israelis usually rally, whereas Diaspora Jews usually cave in. To the dismay of most Israelis, we Jews of the Diaspora panic rather quickly.

So, Israel must certainly continue to seek friends where it can, and we American Jews must use our political influence and clout discretely and wisely. But we must not panic. We must remember that our normal condition is עם לבדד ישכון, often alone and different in the world. It is during these times of loneliness – when we are חטיבה בעולם, one nation upon the earth, as the statement in God's Tefillin declares – that we will draw that admiration and respect of others who will appreciate our strength and courage during these periods of solitude, who will recognize “that the name of the Lord is called upon,” and then we shall prevail.

I do not mean to say that American Jews must offer blind support for every Israeli policy, whether foreign or certainly internal. But if the decision of the Israelis should be to go it alone, let us not try to move them on the basis of our own inner panic. At such times we must give them strength, and not infect them with our weakness.

It is at times of this sort that we must be aware of the principle enunciated in the Divine Tefillin. We have been, בני אחד בארץ, and will probably always will remain בני אחד בארץ.

This is our burden and glory, as the Name of the Lord is called upon us. We shall remain one nation, all alone, under God.

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Out of Proportion

Rabbi Joshua (The Hoffer) Hoffman z"l

Rav Amnon Bazak, in his *Nekudas Pesicha*, points out an interesting contrast between this week's parsha, Ki Savo, and parshas Re'eh. Both parshiyos mention the blessings and curses to be given at Mt. Gerizim and Mt. Eival. However, while parshas Re'eh goes on to explain, at length, the way to attain the blessings, namely, through observing the mitzvos of the Torah, parshas Ki Savo places much greater emphasis on the curses than on the blessings. In fact, even though the Torah commands the nation to place the blessings and the curses on the respective mountains, only the curses are spelled out. Moreover, in the section of the tochecha, or rebuke, which follows, fourteen verses present blessings, and fifty-three verses present curses and punishments. In addition, although the section of tochacha in parshas Bechukosai ends with a comforting note, the section in Ki Savo ends abruptly, with a description of the Jewish exiles being placed on the market as slaves, with no prospective customers (Devorim 28:68). What is the reason for this difference in emphasis? Rav Bazak suggests that the difference may be due to the different stages in Moshe's farewell oration to the people in which the two parshiyos were presented to them. Parshas Re'eh is set at the beginning of the mitzvoh section of Moshe's address, and, as such, emphasizes the positive nature of Torah observance. Parshas Ki Savo, on the other hand, begins the final stage of Moshe's address, in which he delivers more rebuke and warning, in hopes that this will move the nation to observe the Torah out of fear of the punishment that will come if they transgress its commandments.

I do not believe that Rav Bazak's solution to the problem he presents is tenable, because it misrepresents the real nature of Moshe's rebuke of his people. From the very beginning of his farewell address, in parshas Devorim, we find that he tempered, and sometimes preceded, his message of rebuke with expressions of love. For example, in parshas Devorim, he tells them, "I said to you at that time, saying, I cannot carry you alone. The Lord, your God has increased you and behold you are today as the stars in the heaven in abundance. May the Lord, the God of your forefathers, add to you a thousand times yourselves, and bless you as He has spoken of you. How can I alone carry your burden and your quarrels?" (Devorim 1:10-12). I would, therefore, like to

suggest a different approach to the focus on punishments and curses in this week's parsha, based on an insight provided by Rabbi Shlomo Goren in his *Toras HaMikra*.

As a prelude to the covenant at Mt. Gerizim and Mt. Eival, where the blessings and curses were to be delivered, Moshe tells the people, "Keep the commandment that I am commanding you this day. It shall be on the day that you cross the Yardein... that you shall set up great stones for yourself and you shall coat them with plaster. You shall inscribe on them all the words of the Torah... It shall be when you cross the Yardein, you shall erect these stones... There you shall build an altar for the Lord your God... You shall slaughter olah offerings to the Lord your God. You shall slaughter peace offerings and eat there, and you shall rejoice before the Lord, your God. You shall inscribe upon the stones this Torah, well clarified" (Devorim 27:1-8). Thus, in conjunction with the covenant to be made at the site of the two mountains, as perpetuated by the writing of the Torah on the stones, the people were commanded to bring sacrifices and rejoice before God. The Talmud (Pesachim 109a) derives from these verses that the obligation of rejoicing on the festivals consists, in the time when the Temple is standing, in consuming meat. The commentary of Tosafos there asks why this obligation is derived from the verses written in connection with the covenant at Mt. Gerizim and Mt. Eival, rather than from verses written in connection with the festivals themselves. Rabbi Goren further asks, what kind of simcha, or rejoicing, was there at this covenant, that called for the sacrifices that were brought, in the first place? Weren't curses and punishments given there? In light of Rabbi Bazak's comments, we may strengthen this question by noting the seeming disproportionate emphasis on curses and punishment in this presentation of the covenant! Why, then, did the rabbis choose to learn the nature of the obligation of rejoicing on the festivals from these verses?

Rabbi Goren answers his questions by pointing to the nature of the covenant at Mt. Gerizim and Mt. Eival. After all, wasn't a covenant to observe the commandments of the Torah already made at Mt. Sinai? Why, then, was there a need to make another covenant? The commentaries explain that this covenant was one which created the corporate identity of the Jewish nation and imposed upon it mutual

responsibility for the observance of mitzvos. By virtue of this covenant, a Jew who has already fulfilled, for example, the mitzvoh of shofar on Rosh HaShanah can still blow it for someone else who has not yet fulfilled the mitzvoh, even though only one who is obligated in a mitzvoh can fulfill it on behalf of someone else. The reason is that because all Jews are responsible for each other, as long as even one Jew has not fulfilled a particular mitzvoh, no Jew has performed it in a complete way. As the medieval commentator Ritva explains, this is because the Jewish people are considered as one collective body. This could only be accomplished in Eretz Yisroel, where the Jewish nation is truly one, as the Zohar says in pashas Emor. As Rav Yosef Dov Halevi Soloveitchik explained, the covenant was begun by Moshe in the plains of Moav, shortly before the people crossed the Yardein, but only completed in Eretz Yisroel, at Mt. Gerizim and Mt. Eival, under the leadership of Yehoshua. It was this creation of the corporate entity of the Jewish people, says Rabbi Goren, the solidification of its national identity, that was the source of the great simcha that was celebrated at the site of the covenant. Rav Goren does not mention this, but we have, in the past, often referred to the teaching of Rabbi Albo in his Sefer Halkkarim, that a person attains simcha when he acts in accordance with the nature of his soul. Since it is the nature of a Jew to want to observe the mitzvos of the Torah, doing so should bring him joy. Transferring this concept to the national level, then, when the formation of the collective entity of the Jewish nation, to serve as the bearer of God's name in this world, can be seen as a fulfillment of its nature, and, so, the event when this occurred was an occasion for joy. Based on this analysis of Rabbi Goren, I believe that we can now begin to understand why there is such a focus on curses and punishments in the covenant made at Mt. Gerizim and Mt. Eival.

In the beginning of parshas Ki Savo, we are told of the mitzvoh of vidui ma'aser, which entails gathering whatever trumos and ma'asros one has in his possession on the fourth and seventh years of the shemittah cycles, and making a declaration that we have fulfilled the various details involved in the mitzvos of ma'aser. As part of this declaration, the farmer says, "I have listened to the voice of the Lord, my God ; I have acted according to everything You have commanded me" (Devorim 26:14). Rashi, citing the Sifrei, explains that when the farmer says that he has done all that God commanded, he means that he has rejoiced and brought joy to others with the ma'aser. The farmer further says, "Gaze down ('hashkifa') ... and bless Your people Yisroel, and the

ground that You gave us, as You swore to our forefathers, a land flowing with milk and honey" (Devorim 26:15). The midrash, in Shemos Rabbah (41:1), points out that the word 'hashkifa' has a connotation of pain throughout Scripture except for this one verse in Ki Savo, and that the difference in this verse is because the people who bring out their ma'aser convert a curse to a blessing. Rabbi Elchanan Adler, a rosh yeshivah at Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary, suggested, in a recent talk, that this power is a result of the simcha in which the mitzvoh is done. Perhaps we can add that this simcha is a result of connecting to the Jewish people, as the Sifrei says, rejoicing and causing others to rejoice. Just as the covenant at Mt. Gerizim and Mt. Eival generated great joy through the creation of the corporate entity of the Jewish people, so too, performing the mitzvos connected with ma'aser, giving it to others, including the poor among the nation, who receive ma'aser ani, promotes the feeling of unity among the nation. Moreover, ma'aser is a mitzvoh that relates to Eretz Yisroel, which unifies the Jewish people. It is, then, this strengthening of the unity of the Jewish people that generates simcha, and in turn is able to convert a curse to a blessing.

Returning to the covenant at Mt. Gerizim and Mt. Eival, we can now understand the seeming emphasis on curses that we saw in it, as pointed out by Rabbi Bazak, and still understand why there was such a feeling of joy in connection with it. Because this covenant resulted in the creation of the corporate entity of the Jewish nation, the principle of mutual responsibility came into effect. While this principle, on the one hand, could have a negative effect, causing each person in the nation to suffer the curses pronounced if the mitzvos would not be observed, it can also have a positive effect, when the people do keep the mitzvos, thereby enabling the nation to fulfill its task as the representative of God in this world, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. By doing this, they would have the ability to convert the curses into blessings, and bring great joy to the world. Seen in this way, the more curses that were pronounced, the more opportunity existed to bring about blessings, both to the Jewish nation, and the world in general, by acting as an example for them.

This past week, I attended a celebration of the completion of tractate Yoma in the Daf Yomi cycle. At this completion celebration, or siyum, Rabbi Haskel Besser, a member of the presidium of Agudath Israel of America, spoke, and pointed out that on the night of Rosh HaShanah, we eat certain fruits and vegetables, and, based

on their names, mention blessings that we pray God will grant us. He pointed out that not all of the names of these foods have good connotations. For example, the leek is called 'karsi,' which means 'to cut off.'

However, the blessing we pronounce before eating it is, "may our enemies be cut off." My teacher, Rav Aharon Soloveichik, noted that this can be done in any language, so that a person can take the fruit dubbed uglee and pray that our enemies should have an ugly year. Although there are a number of different explanations for this custom, Rabbi Besser explained that the idea behind it is that on Rosh Hashanah, we have the ability to convert the bad to the good, and we pray that God's attribute of justice will be changed to His attribute of mercy. Rabbi Besser

went on to show that our ability to effect this change is especially pronounced on Yom Kippur, when God grants us atonement for our sins. Although Rabbi Besser did not say this, following Rabbi Goren's analysis and our explanation of it, this ability comes as a result of the joy that emanates from the strengthening of the corporate identity of the Jewish nation, which is God's representative in this world. By committing ourselves to this calling, we further Jewish unity, and thereby promote God's glory in this world. As we read the section of blessings and curses in the synagogue this week, let us, as the Talmud tells us, hope that it will mark the end of the calamities we have experienced this past year, and the beginning of a new year filled with God's blessings.

The Positive Vision

Rabbi Assaf Bednarsh (Transcribed and adapted by a talmid from the YUTorah shiur originally given in the Gruss Kollel in Yerushalayim on Sep 11, 2014)

The beginning of the Parsha talks about the mitzvah of Bikurim. Sefer ha-Chinuch explains: What's the point of Bikurim? It is to appreciate that even though we worked hard as farmers and produced all this fruit—and even nowadays, when we work very hard in whatever jobs we do to earn our salaries—it really all comes from Hashem. And we acknowledge this fact, and that's the pashut pshat in Bikurim. There could be another aspect you could medayek on the level of Drash. The Mishna says in the Third Perek of Bikurim: *Keytzad mafrishim ha-Bikurim? Yored adam be-soch sadeihu ve-ro'e te'eina shebikra, eshkol she-bikeir, rimon shebikeir*. When a person comes to his field and sees a fig, a grape cluster, or a pomegranate that's the first of its kind to ripen, then he marks them as Bikurim. There are seven species from which we bring Bikurim. Why did the pasuk mention only three specific ones? It could be that Chazal are trying to hint something to us here. Who do we know that brought an eshkol, rimon, and te'eina? The Meraglim! When they wanted to speak Lashon Hara about Eretz Yisroel—how bad it was—they said: Ah. Here are the fruits of Eretz Yisroel. Look how bad and weird this land is. So maybe the hint in the Mishna is: of course, seven species are obligated in Bikurim. But why did the Mishna choose to mention specifically these three species? Perhaps it's to teach us to act the opposite of Meraglim—as a tikun for their sin. We take the same fruit that they did, and instead of saying bad things about Eretz Yisroel when we bring them, we

say: *Va-yevi'enu el ha-makom ha-zeh, va-yiten lanu es ha-aretz ha-zos eretz zavas chalav u-dvash*. And we also say: *Higadeti ha-yom la-Hashem Elokecha ki vasi el ha-aretz asher nishba Hashem la-avoseynu la-ses lanu*. We davka take the same things they did, but unlike the Meraglim, we say good things about Eretz Yisroel. And maybe that's an additional reason behind the mitzvah of Bikurim. Chazal darshen the word *Mei-artzecha: Me-shvach artzecha*—from the praiseworthy of your Land. And even though the trumos, ma'asros, and all other mitzvos teluyos ba'aretz involve all plant species, the Bikurim come only from the sheva minim—me-shvach artzecha—the fruits that make Eretz Yisroel look best. Maybe part of the mitzvah of Bikurim is not only to thank Hashem for everything he gives us, but specifically to appreciate how great the gift of Eretz Yisroel is. And to use these gashmius fruits to praise Eretz Yisroel and appreciate both its gashmius and its ruchnius. And I think it's especially relevant for those dwelling here in Eretz Yisroel. Because there are many things that we encounter here in Eretz Yisroel that you could interpret in various ways—either negatively or positively (depending on whether you view the glass as half-empty or half-full). Maybe the mitzvah of Bikurim is telling us that Hashem wants us to take all that we see in Eretz Yisroel and do the opposite of the Meraglim, focus on how great Eretz Yisroel is and appreciate what a special gift it is. And maybe then we will be zoche, unlike the Meraglim, to inherit Eretz Yisroel and dwell there in perpetuity.

Lessons from Bikkurim

Mrs. Michal Horowitz

This week's parsha, Parshas Ki Savo, begins with the mitzvah of Bikkurim, the first fruits of the shivas ha'minim (blessed produce species of Eretz Yisrael; Devarim 8:8) that the landowner brings, in a celebratory procession, up to the Beis HaMikdash, preferably from Shavuot through Succos (Devarim 26:1-11).

The first fruits were given to the kohanim who were on duty at that time. They divided the produce among themselves to be eaten within the walls of the holy city of Jerusalem. The kohen took the fruit and returned the expensive containers (brought by the rich people) to the owners. In the case of a reed or grass basket (brought by the poor people), both the first fruits and the basket were given to the kohanim. After sleeping in Jerusalem overnight, the farmer was free to return home.

This beautiful mitzvah, which is an expression of hakaras ha'tov to Hashem for the Holy Land and its bounty, is so fundamental and important that the Medrash teaches that for Bikkurim, the whole world was created! (Medrash Bereishis Rabbah 1:4).

When the farmer offered the fruits as a gift to the kohen, he recited a special passage, known as the Mikreh Bikkurim (Devarim 26:5-10). Much of the passage is familiar to us, as it makes up a significant portion of the Maggid section of the Haggadah shel Pesach.

The passage begins with the history of Yaakov Avinu working for Lavan, who wanted to destroy him, then Yaakov and his family descending to Egypt, it recalls the Egyptian enslavement, the subsequent redemption, and our arrival to the Land flowing with milk and honey.

In the passage, the landowner says: וַיַּרְעוּ אֶתְנוּ הַמִּצְרַיִם, וַיִּתְּנוּ עָלֵינוּ עֲבָדָה קָשָׁה, and the Egyptians mistreated us, and they afflicted us, and they placed upon us hard work (26:6). How can we explain the words, וַיַּרְעוּ אֶתְנוּ הַמִּצְרַיִם, and what do they come to teach us?

As with any study of lashon ha'kodesh, identifying the shoshon (root) of the word often teaches us much about the message of the Torah.

Rabbi Dr. Abraham J. Twerski z'l explains, "While the concept of the term וַיַּרְעוּ is indeed 'mistreated,' the literal translation of the word is 'made bad' (from the shoshon

רע). Furthermore, if the meaning of the verse is that the Egyptians did bad to us, the correct Hebrew expression is וַיַּרְעוּ לָנוּ, they did bad to us, rather than וַיַּרְעוּ אֶתְנוּ, lit., they made us bad. The more accurate translation of this verse, therefore, is 'the Egyptians made us bad,' i.e., they corrupted us.

"Interestingly, another possible translation of וַיַּרְעוּ is derived from the word 'רע, friend', in which case, the phrase would read, 'they befriended us.'

"The two meanings of the word וַיַּרְעוּ may thus coincide. The Egyptians corrupted us both with their cruelty, which caused us to lose our sensitivity for one another, and on the other hand, by befriending us. We became degenerate by associating with them.

"It is said that those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it. Psychology has elucidated a defense mechanism of 'identification with the aggressor,' wherein the victim adopts characteristics of his abuser. One would think that a child who was abused by a parent would resolve that he would never harm his children the way he was harmed. Research has shown this not to be true. Sadly, parents who suffered abuse in their childhood may repeat the pattern with their own children.

וַיַּרְעוּ אֶתְנוּ, lit., they made us bad. Alshich (R. Moshe Alshich, b.1508 in the Ottoman Empire, Turkey, d. 1593, Tzfas, buried in the Old Cemetery, Tzfas) explains that the abuse suffered by the Israelites in Egypt caused them to be insensitive to one another" (Twerski on Chumash, p.416-417).

This is the first interpretation of וַיַּרְעוּ אֶתְנוּ, they made us bad. The mistreatment and abuse one suffers, tragically, may be perpetuated by the victim himself. In this case, the Egyptian enslavement was so brutal, so ongoing, and so painful, that the slaves themselves became cruel and insensitive to the plight and suffering of their brethren.

As for the second interpretation of וַיַּרְעוּ אֶתְנוּ, based on the root word for friend, how do we explain that the Egyptians 'befriended us'?

Continues R' Dr. Twerski, "The second source of corruption is perhaps even more dangerous than the first. We are profoundly influenced by our friends and our environment. So much so, that the Rambam writes that a

person who lives in a corrupt community must relocate, and if one cannot find a community that is wholesome and pure, one should live in the wilderness rather than be subject to a corrupt environment!

“In the decades since the horrors of the Holocaust, statistics show that Judaism has lost more than six million souls due to intermarriage and assimilation. Assimilation among ‘friends’ is a greater threat to Jewish survival than the open brutality of our enemies.

“The holiness and purity of Jewish morals, and way of life, has been eroded and corrupted by the permissiveness

The Season of Doubt

Rabbi Moshe Taragin

The tochacha section of parshat Ki Tavo depicts horrifying scenes of wretched human suffering. As divine retribution for our ongoing national infidelity, we plummet into a dark world of destruction and chaos. A gruesome apocalypse unleashes a wave of fear and panic, numbing and confusing its victims. This dazed condition is described with the suggestive phrase of *timhon leivav*. Our wounded hearts are blanked and bewildered.

In addition to this condition of confusion and incomprehension, the term *timhon leivav* also portrays a syndrome of doubt and disbelief. Pain and suffering become so severe that we start to doubt: can this really be happening? Why is Hashem subjecting us to such nightmarish suffering? Will it ever end, or is this our new reality? Unmanageable suffering leads to incredulity and, regrettably, we lose certainty about our security, our future, and our very existence. *Timhon leivav* describes a muddled, Kafkaesque world of upheaval, which envelops us with agonizing doubt. The foundations of our reality begin to crumble.

Sins of religious doubt

Every Yom Kippur, in our extensive *viduy*-confessional known as ‘*al chet*’, we acknowledge sins of “*timhon leivav*”. Evidently, the disorder of *timhon leivav* isn’t limited to the tochacha nightmare of divine punishment, but afflicts our daily lives.

In the narrow sense, the crime of *timhon leivav* refer to sins of religious doubt. Often, when we grapple with the larger mysteries of life or with difficult personal struggles, we question Hashem’s motives, or we doubt His reasons. When we face indecipherable questions, we wonder about

and immorality that prevails in western civilization. King David bewails this state of being and cries, ‘וַיִּתְעַרְבוּ בַגּוֹיִם וַיִּלְמְדוּ מִעֲשֵׂיהֶם - they mingled with the nations and learned their ways’ (Tehillim 106:35). That historical tragedy is unfortunately with us today as well.

“We must be on guard in both realms, not to allow our ethics and morals to be destroyed by either interpretation of *וַיִּרְעוּ אֶתָּנוּ*, neither their abuse, nor their overtures of friendship,” (Twerski on Chumash, p.417) so that we may ensure the wholesomeness and integrity, kindness, holiness and purity of Am Yisrael.

Hashem. Even when we don’t doubt His motives, we sometimes struggle to make Him relevant in our world. The world doesn’t always feel godly, and we are often uncertain about His impact in our lives.

Faith is never perfect, and even devout believers experience passing moments of doubt and of religious uncertainty. We can forgive ourselves for these short-lived moments of religious qualms, but not for consuming doubt which grips our imagination and prevails over our faith. Confessing the sins of *timhon leivav*, we apologize for the lingering doubt which vexes faith and thins our belief.

A culture of doubt

In a broader sense, our confession of *timhon leivav* addresses more than just theological wandering. Sadly, we occupy a world with too much doubt and not enough belief, and, as a result we have all become chronic skeptics.

We relentlessly suspect the accuracy of our news, because, in an internet age of unlimited information flow, we are swamped with fake news. Institutional trust is at an all-time low, and we possess little faith in public institutions such as government, corporations and communal organizations. When trust in public institutions attenuates, the fabric of society withers and, without common rallying points society falls into disunity. Distrust and doubt corrode social harmony and diminish any shared sense of common endeavor.

Tainted relationships

Doubt is contagious, and doubt in the public sector creeps into our private lives and infects our relationships. Instead of believing in people and affording them the

benefit of the doubt, we assume the worst, and thereby, we corrupt our relationships. Sturdy relationships are built on trust and seeing the best in others. Even when we don't understand people's intentions, trust allows us to have faith in their motives. Trust provides confidence and enables dependance. When doubt sets into these relationships, they are quick to crumble.

Impostor Syndrome

At some point, when we exhaust people and institutions to doubt, we start to suspect the last possible target- ourselves. The modern world has introduced a new and harsh form of *timhon leivav*, referred to as "impostor syndrome". Highly successful people begin to doubt their talents, accomplishments, or ability to live up to other people's expectations. Am I really that successful, or have my accomplishments been accidental or lucky? Can I continue to live up to internal or external expectations, or will my true identity be revealed, exposing me as a fraud? Unhealthy and extreme *timhon leivav* gnaws at our conscience, casting doubt over society, relationships, and even personal identity. For this we feel remorse and confess. Too much doubt and not enough conviction and belief.

Hashem gifted us with wisdom to discern right from wrong, true from false, and reality from fantasy. He also endowed us with passion to deeply believe in values, in other people, and most of all, in ourselves. He doesn't want us to live in a swirl of doubt, and when we slip into crippling *timhon leivav* we forfeit one of His greatest gifts. Our *timhon leivav* confession seeks *teshuvah* and forgiveness for consenting to too much doubt and for ignoring conviction.

Too little doubt?

It is also fair to ask: shouldn't we also confess the sin of living without enough doubt. We all benefit from a little more doubt. Isn't a healthy degree of doubt crucial for integrity and for honest self-examination? Can we err in pursuing, as my teacher Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein

Broad-Perspective Gratitude

Rabbi Efreim Goldberg

Parshas Ki-Savo begins with the mitzva of *bikkurim*, which requires a farmer to bring his first fruits that ripe, to the *Beis Ha'mikdash*, where he would present them to a *kohen* and make a special proclamation

wrote, "a passion for right that is insufficiently informed by introspection"? Without reasonable doubt, we become too cocky and too self-confident in our own views, and too dismissive toward others with opposing views. Our politically polarized world has radicalized our tendency to discredit any opinion which doesn't match our own, and to vilify those who possess differing views. Aside from being disrespectful to other human beings, brash confidence in our own exclusive truth invites simplicity and shallowness.

We live in an ideologically charged age in which we strongly identify with our religious, political, and ethnic identity. We have become so ideologically self-assured that we don't often turn the microscope inwards to probe our own values or to check their fitness. We are too busy incriminating alternate ideologies and too triumphant in taking ideological "victory laps", that we have eliminated doubt from our inner dialogue- if any internal dialogue even exists.

Healthy self-doubt leads to genuine introspection, and to the type of penetrating self-analysis which lays ourselves bare, but provides more authentic identity, more internalized values and most of all, personal integrity.

So, as we begin the season of repentance and improvement, we ask Hashem to remove doubt, but also to preserve it. In our search for Hashem and for belief, please help us remove doubt and darkness and provide clarity and contentment. Help us remove corrosive doubt and toxic skepticism from our world. Help us build trustful relationships of confidence and commitment. Help us believe in ourselves, our abilities and our accomplishments.

But also put doubt into our heart. Let this doubt soften us with intellectual humility and with respect for those who are different from us. Remove fake self-assurance and shallow certainty. Let us see clearly our authentic selves, even if that view is blurry. At least it is real.

Hashem, help us navigate the murky depths of *timhon leivav*.

called *מקרא ביכורים*. In this proclamation, the farmer briefly recalls the history of our ancestors' enslavement in Egypt and the miraculous Exodus. He then acknowledges that Hashem brought our nation into the Land of Israel, and

announces that he has now brought his first fruits.

Clearly, as already Rashi comments, the purpose (or one of the purposes) of bikkurim is הכרת הטוב, expressing gratitude for one's agricultural blessings. But why does this expression of gratitude extend so far as to recall how Yaakov settled in Egypt, leading to his descendants' oppression, and then the miracles of yetzias Mitzrayim? Why is all this included in the expression of gratitude for a successful crop?

Rav Moshe Shmuel Shapiro explained, based on the Rambam's discussion in Moreh Nevuchim, that we should recall the hard times in order to more fully appreciate the good times. When we're healthy, it behooves us to recall the times when we weren't, to enhance our feelings of gratitude for the functioning body with which Hashem has now blessed us. And so, when the farmer looks at his new fruits, he should not only feel grateful for the produce, but also reflect upon the hardships in our nation's past, that we were once lowly, tormented slaves without a homeland, without freedom, and without basic human rights, in order to have greater appreciation for what he now has.

Additionally, the Torah here teaches us about the broad perspective from which our feelings of gratitude must

emerge. Besides being grateful for the blessings of the present, we should also appreciate the background, how much had to happen for us to have received these blessings.

Many people have the practice at family celebrations to speak about the family's history, to reflect upon the challenges and struggles of the previous generations, whose perseverance allowed this simcha to occur. We take some time to consider that if just one great-grandparent hadn't miraculously survived, the youngster who is now celebrating a bar-mitzva or wedding would not have been born. If the great-grandparents had not made the courageous decision to rebuild, to start a family, this simcha would never have happened. If the great-grandparents had not made the heroic sacrifice of closing their business on Shabbos, and sending their children to Jewish day schools, who knows if the family would now be living a Torah life. The מקרא ביכורים proclamation teaches us about broad-perspective gratitude, that we should occasionally reflect upon all that needed to happen for us to enjoy the countless blessings in our lives, and to feel grateful to Hashem and to everyone involved in allowing us to receive these blessings.

No Cause for Shame

Rabbi Immanuel Bernstein

There was an interesting enactment mentioned in the Mishnah (Bikkurim 3:7) that related to the bringing of bikkurim to the Beis Hamikdash. Part of the mitzvah involves reciting a collection of verses which describe briefly the history of the Jewish people, from their humble origins as slaves in Egypt until this special time when they are in their land. However, as the Mishnah recounts, not everyone who brought the fruits was capable of reciting these verses by themselves, for some of them did not know how to read. In response to this, the kohanim were made available for these people so that the kohen would say the words and the farmer would repeat after him. The Mishnah continues that, after a while, the Sages instituted that everyone should have a kohen say the words before them, regardless of whether or not they could read, so as not to shame those who could not read the words themselves.

The following Mishnah (Mishnah 8) describes the different types of baskets that people used to bring their

bikkurim in, for the purpose of beautifying the mitzvah. Those who were of means would bring the fruits in baskets made of silver, while those who could not afford such costly vessels brought them in baskets of straw. The question arises: Why do we not find a parallel follow-up enactment, similar to the one mentioned above, namely, that everyone should bring the fruits in a straw basket so as not to embarrass those who did not have silver ones?

By making an enactment in the first case, but not the second, the Sages were communicating a crucial lesson. In stipulating that everyone should have a kohen read before him, two things were achieved. Firstly, this spared anyone who did not know how to read any shame while reciting this section. Secondly, it let people know that not knowing how to read Hebrew is something that is worth being ashamed about. This is the beauty of the "non-enactment" regarding the materials for the vessels. No one was spared the shame of not bringing their fruits in a silver basket, to teach us that not having silver baskets is no cause for shame.

Watch Out for Laban, He's More Dangerous than Pharaoh!

Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

Parashat Kee Tavo is an “ominous” parasha. It is one of two Torah portions that features the תּוֹכְחָה—To’cheh’cha – G-d’s threat of terrible punishment for the People of Israel for failing to heed His words.

Interestingly, the parasha starts on an entirely different theme: the confessional recited in the Temple by those who bring בִּכּוּרִים—Bikkurim—the first ripened fruits of the field. In a moving and festive ceremony, Jewish farmers express their gratitude to the Al-mighty for His beneficence and for His guiding role throughout Jewish history.

As part of the ceremony, the farmer takes back his basket of first-ripened fruits that he has given to the Kohen (priest) and makes a brief pronouncement. This compact outline of Jewish history underscores the fact that without G-d’s intervention there would be no land that is sacred to the Jewish people, let alone the crops from which the people of Israel now benefit.

As part of the declaration, the farmer recites the words: אָרָמִי אֲבֹד אָבִי, (Deuteronomy 26:5) which, according to Rashi, means: “An Aramean tried to destroy my father.” Those who are familiar with the Passover Haggadah may recognize this phrase, because it plays an important role in retelling the story of the slavery of Egypt.

Rashi asserts that “Aramean” refers to the clever “con artist” Laban, Jacob’s father-in-law, who tries to deceive Jacob at every turn. Were it not for G-d’s intervention, our forefather Jacob would have ended up penniless and possibly dead.

Our commentators tell us that the story of Laban is included in the Passover Haggadah in order to teach us that Laban, our close relative—father of Rachel and Leah, presumably our friend, is actually more dangerous than Pharaoh. After all, with Pharaoh—what you see is what you get—a virulent anti-Semite, who makes no bones about his public desire to destroy the Jewish people.

Laban, on the other hand, feigns love for Jacob and his family, but deep in his heart rages a seething desire to do away with them. Our rabbis tell us that Laban puts us off guard, he appears to embrace and love Israel, his children and grandchildren, after all, they are his flesh and blood! But the blood relationship serves as paltry protection from the likes of Laban!

It is universally known that Pharaoh hates the Jews and

wants to destroy them, so Israel is on the alert. But few of us would suspect that Laban, our next-of-kin, harbors nefarious intentions.

Many of us are concerned, and justifiably so, about the recent proliferation and increase of perfidious anti-Semitic attacks, not only in Israel, but the world over. Despite our surprise at the extent of worldwide anti-Semitism, Jews are always on the alert for their overt enemies. For overt enemies, we can always improve our security and heighten our vigilance. The greater threat, however, is the threat that we don’t hear, see or smell—the threat that is taking an incredible toll on our people. The Laban of today is assimilation, that subtle but pernicious enemy, that is “killing” far more Jews through kindness, than were ever killed by violence and murder.

One of the reasons that assimilation is so profoundly impacting on our children today is because our young people do not appreciate what Judaism has to offer. Young Jews are defecting not out of disenchantment with Judaism. They are walking away due to ignorance! Which, of course, compounds the problem.

Several years ago, while on a lecture tour to Australia, I had an opportunity to spend several days on Oahu, Hawaii (these are the perks of doing mitzvot), a most enchanting island—though not very conducive to religious growth or observance. I spent one afternoon visiting the Polynesian Village, a “must see” tourist attraction. One particular show at the village left me spiritually agitated. The show highlighted Polynesian culture and featured a brilliant performance by a young Polynesian, a descendent of one of the native Hawaii tribes, who attempted to explain his culture to the hordes of tourists. I could not imagine how this young man expected to hold the attention of the tourists for very long, given the fact that his culture did not appear to me to be very intellectually rich, although it must have been very meaningful to the natives and to many others. This was especially true since the performer was operating under a severe handicap—he had to convey his message simultaneously in English and Japanese, since many in the audience were from Japan.

The young man proceeded to shimmy up a huge palm tree, remove a large coconut, and while still high up in the tree, slice the coconut open with a sharp blade and start a

fire by rubbing the flax of the coconut skin together. The audience was enthralled, amused, and duly impressed. The performer then displayed and demonstrated the use of ancient Polynesian tribal war weapons, performed some native war dances, and emitted a series of native war cries.

I know that it is not at all politically correct to be judgmental about other people's culture, but at the time I couldn't help thinking to myself of an incident that occurred way back in 1835, when O'Connell, the powerful Irish parliamentarian, attacked Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli's Jewish ancestry. Disraeli replied without hesitation: "Yes, I am a Jew, and when the ancestors of the right honorable gentleman [O'Connell] were brutal savages in an unknown island, mine were priests in the Temple of Solomon."

We Jews have so much of which to be proud, but our young people are completely unaware of the enchanting treasures of our heritage. While other ancient tribes were

harvesting coconuts, we Jews were teaching the world לֹא תִרְצַח, Thou shalt not murder and the sanctity of human and animal life. While others were rubbing flax together to make fire, Jews were revolutionizing the world with the Torah's teachings about caring for the poor, the infirm, the orphan, and the widow. While others were becoming more proficient at the art of war, our Torah was preaching, 36 times, to love the stranger.

We know what Pharaoh wants to do to us, so we can protect ourselves. But, watch out for brother Laban, the wily Aramean, who is always out there waiting to defeat us. The only way to protect ourselves from Laban is to be knowledgeable enough to resist and respond to his indefatigable efforts to seduce us away from our very special, glorious heritage.

Only proper Jewish education can neutralize those efforts.

Joy in a Relationship with God

Rabbi Jonathan Ziring

When the Jews enter the Land of Israel, they are enjoined to bring the first fruits (bikkurim) to the Beit HaMikdash, and to perform a recitation that encapsulates the history that brought the Jews, and the individual farmers, to their current moment. The mitzvah closes with a call to rejoice:

And you shall rejoice in all of the bounty that your God has bestowed upon you and upon your household, together with the Levite and the stranger in your midst. (Devarim 26:11)

What is the nature of "and you shall rejoice"? Is it a commandment, a promise, or something else?

1: A Reward of Joy

Rabbi Yosef Bechor Shor writes that this is a promise of reward. If one brings the bikkurim, God will enable him to rejoice.

2: A Commandment to Rejoice

Several midrashim explain that the verse includes a commandment mandating all kinds of rejoicing, including song (Arachin 11b), a formal accompaniment to many sacrifices in the Beit HaMikdash. These sources focus on the word "rejoice" by itself.

3: Permission to Rejoice

Several authorities, however, highlight a potential

connection between the beginning and end of the verse, between "rejoicing" and the fact that one accomplishes this with "all the bounty that your God has bestowed." The mitzvah of bikkurim instills humility reminding people that their wealth is not their own, but rather God's.

The stated purpose of several commandments is to avoid this pitfall, and this may be a goal of the bikkurim. The Rambam, for example, writes:

The reciting of a certain portion of the Law when the first fruits are brought to the temple, tends also to create humility. For he who brings the first fruits takes the basket upon his shoulders and proclaims the kindness and goodness of God. This ceremony teaches man that it is essential in the service of God to remember the times of trouble and the history of past distress, in days of comfort. (Guide for the Perplexed 3:39, Friedlander tr.)

Thus, while the person is permitted to rejoice, he must remember that his wealth comes from God. This verse can be understood as permission – as long as one avoids hubris, one is permitted to enjoy. As long as one keeps the perspective that the produce belongs to God, he can celebrate.

4: Rejoicing in God

Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch (Commentary to

the Torah) and Rabbi Yaakov Mecklenberg (HaKtav VeHaKabbalah), however, say that “that your God has bestowed” qualifies the nature of the joy itself. Rav Hirsch writes that the process of reciting the declaration of the bikkurim and internalizing its lessons transforms one’s joy. When one eats the fruit with this mindset, the joy comes from eating that which was granted by God, feeling that

God takes care of the Jewish people as a nation and as individuals.

Similarly, Rav Mecklenberg contends that rather than celebrate the natural joy of having bounty, or the joy of feeling control over that which one produced, one celebrates the acceptance of God. By preceding the enjoyment of the harvest with the bikkurim ritual, one

transforms eating into an act of accepting God and the One ruler and owner of the land. Thus, one celebrates the experience of accepting God, and what the true Master of the land shared with this farmer and his family.

The Talmud (Berachot 35a) writes that reciting a blessing on food allows one to eat by taking the food from belonging to God to being man’s. Here we can apply the perspectives from above – we can either treat a blessing as a way of permitting food, or as an opportunity to transform every act of enjoyment into an opportunity to acknowledge God and His place in our lives. This expansive perspective on bikkurim and blessings ensures that every moment of our lives can be infused with the joy of a relationship with God.