

A Taste of Text: Source based learning for Shabbat

This weekly sheet is brought to you by Rabbi Dr. Moshe Freedman of the New West End United Synagogue in conjunction with Shapell's/Darché Noam

PARSHAT KI TAVO

DVAR TORAH: WHAT IF YOU DO GET BLESSED?

In the blessings of our parshah there is a word that caught the attention of the commentators. The Torah says that if the People of Israel will listen to Hashem and keep His mitzvot, “וּבָאוּ עֲלֵיךָ כָּל הַבְּרָכוֹת הָאֵלֶּה – All these blessings will come upon you – וְהִשְׁיִגְּךָ – and they will overtake you.” Didn’t the Torah already said that the blessings will come upon us? What is added by saying that they will ‘overtake’ us? Furthermore, saying that blessings “overtake” us seems to be a strange way of saying that we’ll be blessed.

Two explanations are quoted in the name of Reb Simchah Bunim of Peshischa, 1827-1765) זצ"ל (Poland) in a collection called Kol Mevasser (Parshat Ki Tavo). His explanations take a different direction than some of the classic commentators, and they deal with a question that, he suggests, we should be asking ourselves. The question is: What if we do merit the blessings Hashem promises? How can we hold on to them? How can we make sure the blessings reach their mark?

His first answer: Even though you did mitzvot and the blessings are coming down from Heaven in your direction, it is not so obvious that you are able to receive them. In order to receive the blessing Hashem wants to give you, you must make yourself a vessel open for blessing. This is the message of the last Mishnah in the Talmud: “Rabbi Shimon son of Chalafta said: The Holy One, blessed be He, did not find a better vessel for Israel to hold onto blessing other than peace” (Uktzin 3:12). Hashem is broadcasting blessings in our direction, but we must have the peaceful receiver to tap into them; otherwise they’ll go elsewhere. This is what our verse says, that the blessings will reach you. וְהִשְׁיִגְּךָ – they will overtake you.

But even after the blessings do reach us, says Reb Simchah Bunim, וְהִשְׁיִגְּךָ teaches us an additional lesson. The blessings will only stick with the same ‘you’ that you were before the blessing came – וְהִשְׁיִגְּךָ. You merited the blessings because of humility that expressed itself in becoming a true servant of the Almighty. But will you remain that when you actually become blessed? Will you stay the same humble individual after you see the Divine favor that comes our way?

“And G-d will give you of the dew of the Heavens” (Bereishit 27:28). Dew, unlike rain, comes even when we don’t merit it. We should relate to the blessings that come to us as if they were dew, with the cognizance that they come to us only as a Divine gift, not earned payment for our righteousness “כִּי לֹא יִצְדַק לִפְנֵיךָ כָּל חַי” – “For no living creature can stand up to true Divine justice” (Tehillim 143:2). This was Hevel’s downfall. The story of Kayin and Hevel (Cain and Abel) leaves us with one question mark – why does Hevel get killed? Hevel’s sacrifice, teach Reb Simchah Bunim’s disciples, was received because he gave it with a humble heart “Hevel also brought a sacrifice” (Bereishit 4:4). But, as the Targum Yerushalmi (Bereishit 4:8) tells the story, after the sacrifices Kayin challenged that there must be no Divine justice because his sacrifice wasn’t accepted, Hevel said, “Yes there is; yours wasn’t accepted because you weren’t righteous enough but I was.”

Loving peace will make us a vessel open to blessing, but humility will allow us to hold on to those blessings when they come our way.

SOURCE GUIDE: LIGHT IN THE LAND OF ISRAEL

This week's Haftarah, sixth of the seven Haftarot of consolation, begins and ends with imagery about light and the end of days. This source guide will follow those verses step-by-step, then look at a passage in the Midrash that, based on a verse in Tehillim, develops the image further.

A. The Light Comes

The words of the prophet are directed at the Land of Israel:

<p>1. Yishayah 60:1 Rise up and shine, for your light has come and the glory of Hashem shines upon you.</p>	<p>ישעיה ס:א קוּמִי אוֹרֵי כִּי בָא אוֹרְךָ וּכְבוֹד ה' עִלְיֶךָ זָרַח.</p>
--	--

- The word "אוֹרֵי" is a verb here (the accent is on the first syllable) meaning "shine."
- We translated the word בָּא as "come," but some (the Radak quotes such an approach) translate it as "set," as in "ובא השמש" – "the sun set" (Vayikra 22:7); the Malbim explains why he rejects this explanation.

What do we know about this light so far? Two things: it is referred to as "אוֹרְךָ" – "your light" – uniquely Israel's; and it comes from Hashem's glory.

B. Darkness

<p>2. Yishayah 60:2 For behold, darkness covers the earth and a dark cloud the nations, but Hashem shines upon you and His Glory can be seen upon you.</p>	<p>ישעיה ס:ב כִּי הִנֵּה הַחֹשֶׁךְ יִכְסֶה אֶרֶץ וְעֲרַפֶּל לְאֻמִּים וְעֲלִיף זָרַח ה' וּכְבוֹדוֹ עִלְיֶךָ יִרְאֶה.</p>
---	---

As opposed to sunlight, this light is selective, shining as a spotlight on Israel while darkness fills the rest of the world.

C. The Nations

Even though the nations of the world seem to have been left in the dark, that changes in the next verse:

<p>3. Yishayah 60:3 The nations will go by your light, and kings to the glow of your shining.</p>	<p>ישעיה ס:ג וְהֵלְכוּ גוֹיִם לְאוֹרְךָ וּמְלָכִים לְנֹגַהּ זָרַחְךָ.</p>
--	--

Through Israel the rest of the nations are able to access the Divine Light. This theme, that Israel is to be a "light unto the nations" – "לאור גוים" – appears elsewhere in the Book of Yishayah (see the Radak's explanations of Yishayah 42:6 and 49:6).

The Haftarah now speaks of the return to Zion: "Lift up your eyes and see how they have all gathered and come to you" (Yishayah 60:4). The People of Israel converge on the Land of Israel, and so do the nations of the world who come to learn from them and help them rebuild the country.

The end of the Haftarah (verses 15-20) sings of the amazing transformations that will take place in the end of days: Israel will go from having been deserted and hated to being connected and the source of great joy; I will replace copper with gold, says G-d, iron with silver, wood with iron, and wood with iron.

D. The Sun and the Moon

Even the sun and moon will be replaced (see Radak and Malbim on how literal this is) in the end of days:

<p>4. Yishayah 60:19 No longer will the sun be for you a light by day, and the shine of the moon will no longer illuminate for you. Hashem will be an eternal light and your G-d for your splendor.</p>	<p>ישעיה ס:יט לֹא יִהְיֶה לְךָ עוֹד הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ לְאוֹר יוֹמָם וּלְנֹגַהּ הַיָּרֵחַ לֹא יֵאִיר לְךָ וְהָיָה לְךָ ה' לְאוֹר עוֹלָם וְאַלְמוֹנֶיךָ לְתִפְאֳרָתְךָ:</p>
--	---

The Malbim explains: Just as now the moon reflects the light of the sun, in the future the tzaddikim and the prophets will reflect the Divine Light. “Your G-d” – your special connection with G-d – will make you (Israel’s tzaddikim and prophets) shine with splendor. And Hashem’s own light will eclipse any temporal sunlight.

Note also the contrast between “daily” sunlight and Hashem’s “eternal” light, the subject of the next verse:

<p>5. Yishayah 60:20 Your sun will no longer set and your moon will no longer be gathered in, for Hashem will be for you an eternal light and your days of mourning will be completed.</p>	<p>ישעיה ס:כ לא יבוא עוד שמשך וירחך לא יאסף פי ה' יתנה לך לאור עולם ושלמו ימי אבלך:</p>
---	--

Unfortunately, Israel’s previous great periods were all followed by some downturn, some setting of the sun. Forty days after the giving of the Torah came the sin of the Golden Calf; the unity and success of Yehoshua’s era were followed by the up and downs of the period of the Judges; Shmuel’s revolution was marred by the request for a king; immediately after Shlomo Hamelech’s forty-year Golden Age Israel broke into two kingdoms led by Rechavam and Yeravam. A similar thing happened after the return to Zion in the Second Temple period, as Israel degenerated into disunity and internal conflict. But in the end of days we will experience an eternal light and the end of mourning. It will be like a sun that never sets.

E. The Pesikta

In light of the above, take a look at the following Midrash:

<p>6. Pesikta Rabbati Parshah 36 “Rise up and shine, for your light has come and the glory of Hashem shines upon you. For behold, darkness covers the earth and a dark cloud the nations, but Hashem shines upon you and His Glory can be seen upon you” (Yishayah 60:1-2): This is what was said through Ruach Hakodesh by David King of Israel: “For with You is the source of life, through Your light we will see light” (Tehillim 36:10). Who was David referring to in this verse? It refers to none other than the Congregation of Israel. They said before the Holy One, blessed be He: Master of the Universe, because of the Torah that You gave me – that is called “the source of life” – I will in the future take pleasure in Your light in the coming era.</p> <p>What is meant by “Through Your light we will see light”? Which light was the Congregation of Israel expecting? It is the light of the Mashiach, as it says, “G-d saw the light, that it was good” (Bereishit 1:4): This teaches us that the Holy One, blessed be He, looked forward to the Mashiach and his actions before the world was created and he hid [that light] for His Mashiach and his generation under His Throne of Glory.</p>	<p>פסיקתא רבתי פרשה לו "קומי אורי כי בא אורך וכבוד ה' עליך זרח כי הנה החשך יכסה ארץ וערפל לאמים ועליך יזרח ה' וכבודו עליך יראה" (ישעיה ס:א-ב): זה שנאמר ברוח הקודש על ידי דוד מלך ישראל: "כי עמך מקור חיים באורך נראה אור: (תהלים ל"ו:י). כנגד מי אומר דוד למקרא הזה? לא אמרו אלא כנגד כנסת ישראל. אמרו לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא: רבוננו של עולם, בשביל התורה שנתת לי שנקראת "מקור חיים" אני עתידה להתענג באורך לעתיד לבא.</p> <p>מהו "באורך נראה אור"? איזה אור שכנסת ישראל מצפה? זה אורו של משיח, שנאמר, "וירא אלקים את האור כי טוב" (בראשית א:ד): מלמד שצפה הקב"ה במשיח ובמעשיו קודם שנברא העולם וגנזו למשיחו לדורו תחת כסא הכבוד שלו.</p>
---	---

- How does the verse in Tehillim add to our understanding of the first few verses of our Haftarah?
- Plug in the Midrash’s explanation to the verse in Tehillim: Who is the speaker? What is the “source of life”? What light will we see through Hashem’s light?
- See the continuation of that Midrash that includes more material on the Messianic period: the reaction of the forces of evil; the Mashiach calling out to the Jewish People from the roof of the Beit Hamikdash; and how the nations of the world will relate to Israel.
- Based on the Midrash, is the light imagery of our Haftarah only applicable to the end of days, the Messianic period? Is it in some way applicable right now?

HANDS UP! BY RABBI GIDON SHOSHAN

In the opening verses of this parshah the Torah discusses the mitzvah of bikkurim, the requirement to bring the first fruits of the harvest to Jerusalem as a gift to the Kohanim. The Torah mentions that the Kohen takes the fruits from the hands of each Jew. In fact, the Gemara concludes that the bikkurim are, in some way, deeply related to hands.

The hands and arms are distinct from every other part of the body. While all other parts of the body are anchored in specific positions and are relatively unmovable, the hands are not fixed at all. They can be lowered below the feet, raised above the head, and extended to any point or in any direction in between.

Harav Shlomo Yosef Zevin, זצ"ל, points out that inasmuch as the hands represent our entire creative endeavor, our behavior, our handiwork – they are representative of our spiritual nature. Just as hands can be used in any way to extend up or to reach down, so it is with all our actions. Each action that we take in this world is embedded with rich spiritual power, potentially positive or negative. With our actions, we can reach up to the heavens or degrade ourselves to a level unbefitting of humanity.

The mitzvah of bikkurim demonstrates how the first and primary actions and achievements that we take with our hands are dedicated to holiness. For this reason we wash our hands each day when we rise. As the day begins, our first action is to dedicate our hands, our creative potential, to the task of elevating ourselves and the world. על נטילת ידים, the blessing that we recite when we wash, conveys this quite literally. נטילת ידים means elevating the hands.

Remarkably, the Rashba explains that the mitzvah of washing the hands in the morning is a directive similar to the one given to the Kohanim in the Beis Hamikdash. Just as they wash their hands before engaging in the Temple service, so do we wash ours before embarking on our day of Divine connection. Perhaps this is the reason that Moshe lifted his hands during the war with Amalek. The hands, more than anything else, demonstrate our potential to elevate or degrade. When Israel is elevated spiritually, every victory is ours.

May Hashem bless each of us to constantly elevate ourselves, our surroundings, and our world.

Dedicated in memory of
Chava Goldschen bas Yaacov, ז"ל

*This publication is compiled by the staff and Rabbonim at **Shapells/Yeshivat Darché Noam** for men and **Midreshet Rachel v'Chaya Seminary** for women in Jerusalem. Find out more about the **married couples' programme** and the **Pathways Israel** and **Pathways Plus** programmes offered at www.darchenoam.org +972-2-651-1178, 5 Beit Hakerem Street, Jerusalem.*

To dedicate a Taste of Text, please email Rabbi Freedman at
rabbi.dr.moshefreedman@gmail.com

For back issues and other articles by Rabbi Freedman please see
www.moshefreedman.com