

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 EIKEV

DVAR TORAH: 3 TYPES OF FORGETFULNESS

In ten verses of our Parshah, Moshe Rabbeinu tells Israel not to forget G-d: “Watch out lest you forget Hashem your G-d ...” (Devarim 8:11); “Your heart will become haughty and you will forget Hashem your G-d ...” (Devarim 8:14); and “It will be if you forget Hashem your G-d ...” (Devarim 8:19).

The Torah describes a process that involves three stages and three forms of forgetting G-d.

The last and most intense form of forgetting G-d is to ignore Him. The idolater ignores G-d. “It will be if you forget Hashem your G-d and go after other gods, serve them and bow down to them ...” (Devarim 8:19). He has replaced G-d with gods. He lives as if the G-d who took Israel out of Egypt and brought them to the rich and fruitful Land of Israel doesn’t exist, G-d forbid. But ignoring G-d, the Torah says, leads only to destruction. As that same verse concludes: “... I testify before you today that you will surely be destroyed.”

A second form of forgetting G-d is arrogance, haughtiness. “Lest you eat and are satiated; and you build good houses and settle; and your cattle and sheep will increase; and your silver and gold increase, as does everything of yours – and your heart will become haughty and you will forget Hashem your G-d who took you out of the Land of Egypt, from the house of bondage” (Devarim 8: 12-14). The arrogant man looks at his successes and accomplishments and says, “It was my might and the power of my hands that made all of this wealth” (Devarim 8: 17). The Torah needs to tell this person: “Remember that it is Hashem your G-d who gives you the power to become wealthy” (Devarim 8: 18).

Rabbi Yochanan equates haughtiness with blasphemy. “Rabbi Yochanan quoted Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai, who said: ‘Anyone who has within him haughtiness is as if he worshipped idols.’ Rabbi Yochanan himself said: ‘Anyone who has within him haughtiness is as if he denied G-d’s existence (כופר בעיקר)’ (Sotah 4b). The Maharal explains: G-d is the cause of all; and all others are effects, dependent on Him and created by Him. The arrogant person, impressed by his powers and his own accomplishments, does not see himself as dependent, as an effect. He removes the Cause from the picture. He is worse than the idolater, for even the idolater serves another. The haughty person does not serve; he is not a receiver. Like one who denies G-d, the haughty man is caught up with what he causes, not with what G-d causes.

How do we avoid these last two terrible levels of forgetfulness – idolatry and haughtiness? It is by avoiding the first level of forgetfulness – not remembering G-d. The Torah’s advice (beginning with the mitzvah of Birkat Hamazon, blessing Hashem after a meal): “You will eat and be satiated; and you should bless Hashem your G-d over the good Land that He gave you. Watch out lest you forget Hashem your G-d; by not keeping His commands, laws, and statutes that I am commanding you today” (Devarim 8:10-11).

We strive for constant G-d consciousness, like David Hamelech had: “I place Hashem before me constantly” (Teillim 16:8). That path begins by remembering G-d at our moments of satiation and success.

SOURCE GUIDE: COMFORT THROUGH FEAR BY RABBI AVRAHAM FISCHER

As Israel is ready to enter the Land of Israel, Moshe addresses Israel's fear of the seven powerful Canaanite nations living in the Land. This source guide addresses Moshe Rabbeinu's surprising way of assuring the People.

A. Trepidation

In preparing the children of Israel for the conquest of the land of Canaan, Moshe anticipates the people's trepidation, and he promises Hashem's ongoing support:

<p>1. Devarim 7:17-21 (17) Perhaps you might say in your heart, "These nations are more than I; how can I dispossess them?" (18) You shall not be afraid (לא תירא) of them. You shall surely remember that which Hashem your G-d did to Pharaoh and to all of Egypt: (19) The great tests which your eyes saw, and the signs and the wonders, and the strong hand, and the outstretched arm whereby Hashem your G-d brought you out – so will Hashem your G-d do to all the nations before whom you are afraid (ירא). (20) Furthermore, Hashem your G-d will release the hornet against them, until the destruction of those that are left and those that hide themselves before you. (21) You will not be affrighted (לא תעריץ) before them, because (כי) Hashem your G-d is in your midst, a G-d Who is mighty and feared (נורא).</p>	<p>דברים ז:יז-כא (יז) כי תאמר בלבבך, "רבים הגוים האלה ממני איכה אוכל להורישם?" (יח) לא תירא מהם. זכר תזכר את אשר עשה ה' אלקיך לפרעה ולכל מצרים. (יט) המסות הגדלות אשר ראו עיניך והאיתת והמפיתים והיד הנזקה והזרע הנטויה אשר הוצאת ה' אלקיך – כן יעשה ה' אלקיך לכל העמים אשר אתה ירא מפניהם. (כ) וגם את הצרעה ישלח ה' אלקיך בם עד אבד הנשארים והנסתרים מפניה. (כא) לא תעריץ מפניהם כי ה' אלקיך בקרבך קל גדול ונורא.</p>
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Moshe is trying to assure the people that they have no reason to fear the inhabitants of the land in the upcoming wars, because Hashem will defend them just as He did in Egypt. But, then why is He described as "a G-d Who is mighty and feared?" Would it not have been more comforting to hear that Hashem is caring and protective?

B. Fear of G-d vs. Fear of Man

The author of Haketav Vehakabbalah (Harav Yaakov Tzvi Meklenburg, זצ"ל, 1785-1865), quoting Rabbi Yehudah Leib Margalioth, זצ"ל (1747-1811), head of the bet din (rabbinic court) in his birthplace Lesslau, explains that fear of Hashem is different from any other feeling towards Him. For example, one may fully honor, love and be grateful to other people, with no diminution of the honor, love and gratitude that are due to Hashem. This is not, however, the case when it comes to fear of Hashem, which is lessened by the fear of others.

[Of course, the Torah teaches us to revere our parents and our teachers, and it uses the same word, ירא, for both. However, these are forms of reverence that are commanded precisely **because** they develop one's fear of Heaven; they certainly do not compete with it.]

The idea of the preeminence of the fear of Hashem is demonstrated in the exchange in the Talmud between Rabban Yochanan ben-Zakkai and his students while the sage lay on his deathbed:

<p>2. Berachot 28b The students asked him, "Bless us." He said to them: "May it be His will, that your fear of Heaven be as much as your fear of flesh-and-blood." His students asked, "No more than that?" and he replied, "Would that it were as much as that! For you know that when a person is about to sin, he first thinks, 'I hope no person sees me.'"</p>	<p>ברכות כח: אמרו לו רבינו, "ברכנו." אמר להם, "יהי רצון שתהא מורא שמים עליכם כמורא בשר ודם." אמרו לו תלמידיו, "עד כאן?" אמר להם, "ולואי! תדעו, כשאדם עובר עבירה אומר 'שלא יראני אדם.'"</p>
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One's awe of Hashem must supersede all else.

What does it truly mean to fear Hashem? It means to be aware constantly of His greatness, and of the fact that nothing escapes His sight. It means to be afraid of nothing – neither embarrassment nor power, neither pain nor death – so much as one fears Him. Thus, the fear of anyone or anything other than Hashem detracts from the fear one ought to have for the Almighty.

Actually, the essence of the observation of Haketav Vehakabbalah is to be found in the brief comment of the Ibn Ezra on the words “You will not be affrighted before them”:

<p>3. Ibn Ezra on Devarim 7:21 “You will not be affrighted before them”: Be affrighted only of Hashem, Who is a G-d Who is mighty and feared.</p>	<p>אבן עזרא על דברים ז:כא "לא תערוץ מפניהם" – רק תערוץ מהשם שהוא קל גדול ונורא.</p>
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The only fear to be cultivated is the fear of the Almighty.

C. Malbim: ירא vs. ערץ

Malbim (Harav Meir Leib ben Yechiel Michel, זצ"ל, 1809-1877) develops this idea still further. First, it is important to note the different words for fear used in this passage: ירא and ערץ. Earlier in Devarim (1:29), Malbim differentiates between these two terms. He states that ירא is fear that focuses on the other's power; while ערץ is fear generated by a feeling of one's own weakness and inadequacy

We can apply this distinction to our passage, as well. At first, the people might be overwhelmed by the sheer numbers of the nations, which would result in יראה. But, they are told, do not be awestruck by their prowess: “Perhaps you might say in your heart, “These nations are more than I; how can I dispossess them?” **You shall not be afraid (לא תירא)** of them.” After all, Egypt's might and superior numbers were no match for Hashem. In the same manner “will Hashem your G-d do to all the nations before whom you are **afraid (ירא)**.”

When you call this to mind, not only will you not be **terrified (ירא)** by them; you will not even feel inferior (ערץ) to them: **“You will not be affrighted (לא תערוץ)** before them.”

Finally, it would seem that Malbim has a different understanding of the word "כי" in verse 21, translating it, not “because,” but “when”: “You will not be affrighted before them, **כי** – **when** – [you realize that] Hashem your G-d [Who] is in your midst, [is] a G-d Who is mighty and feared.”

Your fear of Hashem will enable you to overcome your fear of them. By way of analogy, Malbim explains, a person who is pursued by a lion is not concerned about a bee that might sting him! A great and mighty fear overpowers a lesser fear. Similarly, Moshe instructs the Children of Israel to immerse themselves in the fear of Hashem so that that fear will overpower the fear of the nations.

Moshe's message to the people of Israel, therefore, is actually the greatest comfort: Your awe of Hashem will elevate you above mundane concerns. It will ennoble and empower you.

MORTALITY AND BIRKAT HAMAZON

The text of Birkat Hamazon (Blessing Hashem after Meals) focuses on the wonderful things of life: abundance and food, the Land of Israel and Yerushalayim, the Torah and our Covenant with G-d, goodness and kindness. It is an opportunity to bless and thank G-d for the positive things He has given us and we know He will continue to give us.

What about our troubles, our sins, and the negativity we have to cope with in our lives? There are other contexts in our daily service of Hashem, other pages of the Siddur that address those things; but the four blessings of Birkat Hamazon seem to stress and focus on the positive.

Even the fourth blessing – which Chazal instituted when the dead of the Roman massacre at Beitar were able to be buried – blesses G-d over the positive side of that tragedy. It is therefore extremely surprising to read the following comment made by Harav Yaakov ben Asher, זצ"ל (1269-1340), in his Baal Haturim commentary on the verse that is the source of the mitzvah of Birkat Hamazon: Immediately following the verse that is the source for the mitzvah of Birkat Hamazon (Devarim 8:10) are the words "לא תשכח" – “Do not forget” (Devarim 8:11). This, says the Baal Haturim, is because we must remember the day of death in Birkat Hamazon. We do this through the blessing of "הטוב והמטיב" (“He Is Good and Does Good”), that was decreed after the burial of the dead of the Beitar massacre.

Why must we remember the day of death in Birkat Hamazon? One explanation (quoted in the Mishnah Berurah Orach Chaim 175:2) is that physical pleasures, especially the wine that is often drunk with a meal, can lead to a loosening of moral tension, and remembering death counters the inclination to sin.

Here is another explanation, inspired by a dvar Torah that was given by Rabbi Yehoshua Karsh (currently of Northbrook, IL) during a Sheva Berachot celebration that took place in Israel during the Gulf War in 1991. The Gemara (Berachot 31a) says that at the wedding of Mar son of Ravina the rabbis asked Rav Hamnuna Zuta to sing for the assembled. The lyrics of his song were surprising: “Woe to us for we die. Woe to us for we die.” They asked, “What should we reply to you as a refrain?” He answered: “Where is the Torah and where is the mitzvah (commandment) that protect us?”

What was behind Rav Hamnuna Zuta’s strange song? He certainly wasn’t trying to sadden everyone at the wedding (whose central mitzvah is to bring joy to the chatan and kallah [bride and groom])?

Instead, explained Rabbi Karsh, Rav Hamnuna was worried that the celebrants’ joy was externally generated – by the food and drink, the dancing and the singing, the camaraderie of a communal celebration. He challenged them: Can you stare death in the face and still be joyous? His song taught that one whose joy is linked with Torah and mitzvot can do just that – he can remember the day of death and know that we can transcend death. His joy then deepens. We remember the day of death and rejoice in the G-d who has given us the ability to lift ourselves above it – not in any external source.

Perhaps this is why a momentary remembering of the day of death was inserted into the daily Birkat Hamazon: It challenges us to remember the day of death yet still remain joyous.

שבת שלום ומבורך

*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.*

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