

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: BLESSING & HIDDENNESS

Rabbi Yitzchak (Bava Metzia 42a) says: “The [Divine] blessing only rests on something that is hidden from the eye,” and its source is a word in this week’s Parshah. The Torah says, “יצו ה' את הברכה באסמך – Hashem will command the blessing in your grain silo” (Devarim 28:8). Rabbi Yitzchak’s drashah is based on the connection between the word “באסמך – in your grain silo” and the word “סמוי – hidden.” The verse now reads: Hashem will command the blessing in your hidden place.

But why should blessing be tied to hiddenness?

One simple answer: Something hidden is not subject to the negative side effects of jealousy. Ostentatious wealth invites envy; and envy is associated with a destructive power that our sources refer to as עין הרע, the “evil eye.” On the other hand, keeping wealth under wraps is a wise preventative measure that protects against the evil eye.

This explanation presents a difficulty, says the author of the Torat Chaim commentary on Bava Metzia (Harav Avraham Chaim Shor, זצ"ל, passed away in 1632, Galicia). That same passage says before measuring one’s own grain, a person must say a special prayer to make sure his produce is not negatively affected. This is because blessing doesn’t rest on that which is weighed, measured, or counted – only on something hidden from the eye. This can’t be because of jealousy and the evil eye, because the person is measuring his own grain. There must be another reason that blessing is linked to hiddenness.

Blessing is a mini-miracle. Hiddenness, says the author of the Torat Chaim, preserves the dignity of the miracle. As the verse says, “כבוד אלוקים הסתר דבר – It is the honor of Hashem to conceal a matter” (Mishlei 25:2). We saw this in action when the prophet Elisha was G-d’s messenger to bring about a miracle for a poor widow. Her creditors were pressuring her for payment, but all she had was one small container of oil. Elisha instructed her to borrow as many vessels as she could, then close the door. Once inside, Hashem would bless the small container and it would miraculously fill up all of the vessels she had borrowed. On the verse, “Close the door behind you and your sons,” (II Melachim 4:4), Rashi explains, “It is the honor of the miracle that it should come discreetly.”

Perhaps this could be explained as follows: Blessing is an infinite Divine quality that Hashem even bestows upon physical things like the produce in the grain silo. Blessing allows the physical to transcend physical limitations. A small amount increases beyond what seemed possible; the few becomes many; freshness lasts much longer than the rules of physical decay would dictate. However, when physical limitations are highlighted, blessing is compromised. Weighing, measuring, and counting highlight physical limitations. Visibility exposes physical limitations. All of these go against the grain of the infinite Divine quality that brings blessing. “Blessing doesn’t rest on that which is weighed, measured, or counted – only on something hidden from the eye.”

SOURCE GUIDE: THE ETERNAL TODAY

Rashi makes two comments in Parshat Ki Tavo based on the expression “היום הזה – on this day.” Both say to look at something that seems to have happened long ago (the giving of the Torah and the Jews becoming Hashem’s People) as if it happened today. This source guide seeks to uncover the theme underlying these comments and their ramifications for avodat Hashem (service of G-d).

A. On This Day

Here are Rashi’s two comments and the verses they are built on:

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| <p>1. Devarim 26:16 On this day Hashem your G-d commands you to do these laws and statutes; and you should keep and do them with all of your heart and all of your being.</p> <p>Rashi “On this day Hashem your G-d commands you” – Every day they should be new in your eyes as if you were commanded them today.</p> | <p>דברים כו:טז היום הזה ה' אלקיך מצוה לעשות את החקים האלה ואת המשפטים, ושמרת ועשית אותם בכל לבבך ובכל נפשך.</p> <p>רש"י "היום הזה ה' אלהיך מצוך" – בכל יום יהיו בעיניך חדשים כאילו בו ביום נצטוית עליהם.</p> |
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The motivation behind Rashi’s comment is, as the Midrash (Tanchuma Ki Tavo 1, that Rashi is based on) says, the obvious difficulty in the verse: Didn’t Hashem give the Torah and command the mitzvot forty years earlier? Here is Rashi’s second, very similar, comment:

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| <p>2. Devarim 27:9 Moshe and the Kohanim of the Levites spoke to all of Israel, saying, “Take heed and listen, Israel, on this day you have become a nation to Hashem your G-d.</p> <p>Rashi “On this day you have become a nation” – On every day it should be in your eyes as if you were entered into the covenant with Him today.</p> | <p>דברים כז:ט וידבר משה והכהנים הלויים אל כל ישראל לאמר, "הסבת ושמע ישראל היום הזה נהיית לעם לה' אלקיך."</p> <p>רש"י "היום הזה נהיית לעם" – בכל יום יהיו בעיניך כאילו היום באת עמו בברית.</p> |
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Rashi’s second comment solves a similar difficulty, according to the Taz (Harav David Halevi Segal, זצ"ל, 1586-1667, Poland, in his super-commentary on Rashi). Did not Hashem call Israel “My nation,” even when they were in Egypt? Why does Moshe say that only on “this day” they became His nation?

According to Rashi’s reading of these two verses, the Torah here speaks to all Jews of all generations. The expression “on this day” in the sentences, “On this day Hashem your G-d commands you to do these laws and statutes,” and “On this day you have become a nation,” refers to every day of Jewish history. All Jews at all times are to look at the Torah as if it was given today and that Israel just today became a nation.

B. Constant Re-creation

But wasn’t the Torah actually given 3328 years ago? Didn’t Israel become G-d’s nation in Egypt? Why does Rashi – and the Midrash – tell us to look at these events in any other way?

Could it be that Rashi is merely directing us to create an illusion of newness in order to serve Hashem energetically? Is he just telling us to feel **as if** the Torah and mitzvot were given today, and **as if** Israel entered the covenant today, so that we will serve Hashem with more excitement and motivation than if we just viewed the Torah and covenant with G-d as ancient?

The author of the Kedushat Levi (Harav Levi Yitzchak of Berditchov, זצ"ל, 1740-1809) does not think so. To appreciate his comment we must first look at a line at the end of the first blessing of the morning Shema:

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| <p>3. Siddur – Blessings of Kriat Shema [Hashem, in His goodness, renews every day, constantly, the works of creation. As it says, “To [the G-d] who makes great lights, for His lovingkindness is forever.</p> | <p>סידור תפילה – ברכות קריאת שמע הַמְחַדֵּשׁ בְּטוֹבוֹ בְּכֹל יוֹם תְּמִיד מַעֲשֵׂה בְּרָאשִׁית. פְּאֵמוֹר לַעֲשֵׂה אוֹרִים גְּדוֹלִים. כִּי לְעוֹלָם חֶסֶדּוֹ.</p> |
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This offers a new perspective on the continuity of creation. Instead of viewing Hashem as having created the world once and allowing it to continue existing, this line says that Hashem constantly renews and re-creates the world. Perhaps this perspective is behind the Kedushat Levi’s words about Rashi’s comment:

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| <p>4. Kedushat Levi – Parshat Ki Tavo Since you believe that with each and every breath you receive new life force, you are therefore a new creation. If so, through this belief you will merit hearing Maamad Har Sinai (the experience Israel had as they stood at Mount Sinai) every day. Since you hear Maamad Har Sinai, the Torah’s verse, “You will hear the voice of Hashem your G-d” (Devarim 27:10). Otherwise, you are not hearing the voice of Hashem but the words of the Torah. But if you merit to at all times hear Maamad Har Sinai you will merit to hear Hashem’s voice itself.</p> | <p>קדושת לוי - פרשת כי תבא מחמת שאתה מאמין שבכל נשימה ונשימה אתה מקבל חיות חדש אם כן אתה בריה חדשה, אם כן תזכה על ידי אמונה זו לשמוע בכל יום את מעמד הר סיני, ואם כן כיון שתשמע מעמד הר סיני זהו שאמר ושמעת בקול ה' אלהיך, כי בלא זה אין אתה שומע בקול ה' רק דברי תורה. אבל כשאתה זוכה לשמוע בכל עת מעמד הר סיני תזכה לשמוע בקול גופא של ה' אלהיך.</p> |
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You will not merely feel **as if** you were given the Torah today; but you will truly receive the Torah today. And you will hear the Divine voice, not just read what was said several thousand years ago. One who perceives that Hashem re-creates us daily also perceives that He is giving us the Torah daily. This perception – that even after Hashem created the world He continues to constantly re-create it – has other ramifications:

Repentance – How is the personal change that goes along with teshuvah (repentance) possible? Even if Hashem forgives a person’s sins, how can the penitent break away from his past? But if Hashem is constantly regenerating the world, re-creating it and breathing into it new life, He literally re-creates the sinner into a transformed individual. This could explain the radical change the Rambam speaks of:

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| <p>5. Rambam Mishneh Torah Laws of Repentance 7:7 Yesterday he was separated from Hashem the G-d of Israel ... and today he is clinging to the Divine Presence.</p> | <p>רמב"ם הלכות תשובה ז:ז אמש היה זה מובדל מה' אלקי ישראל ... והיום הוא מודבק בשכינה.</p> |
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Hashem re-creates the true penitent as a new individual. He is genuinely a new person. **Joy** – Harav Yaakov Moshe Charlop, זצ"ל (1882-1952, Rav of Shaarei Chesed and close disciple of Harav Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook, זצ"ל) opened his drashah during Seudah Shelishit (the Third Meal) on Shabbat Parshat Ki Tavo with the following words:

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| <p>6. Mei Marom Part 12 – p. 136 Joy comes at a time of renewal ... The feeling of renewal is to recognize that the entire world and all of existence is being renewed by Him, may He be blessed, each and every moment. From that and through that comes direct joy. Without that there is no joy in the world.</p> | <p>מי מרום חלק יב – עמוד קלו השמחה תבא בעת ההתחדשות ... הרגשת ההתחדשות הוא להכיר שכל העולם וכל ההויה כולה מתחדשת מאתו יתברך בכל רגע ורגע, וממנה ועל ידה תבא השמחה הישרה ומבלעדה אין שמחה בעולם.</p> |
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At the time a person is told that he merited something great – won the lottery, was hired for the job, etc. – he ignores any annoyances and feels no hatred, just joy and excitement. When the novelty wears off, he slides back into his old patterns; but at the time of the acquisition he ignored all else. Focusing on the excitement of the gift of the constantly re-created new world is a source of great joy.

May we merit experiencing Torah and mitzvot in the way Rashi speaks of them – “as joyous as they were when they were given at Sinai” (see Shir Hashirim Rabbah 1:53 and Nefesh Hachaim 4:14). May we appreciate being Hashem’s Nation, as a new gift from Him, today.

ARTICULATING LOVE FOR THE LAND BY RABBI SHIMSHON NADEL

The mitzvah of Bikkurim is accompanied by a unique verbal declaration. The farmer, offering his 'first fruits,' begins with a historical account of the People of Israel, culminating with their entrance into a fertile land "flowing with milk and honey." He expresses his gratitude for being able to bring the first fruit of the Land that Hashem has given him. According to the Rambam, this declaration is a separate mitzvah (Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Bikkurim 3:10).

But why does the Torah require the farmer to make a special verbal declaration when bringing his Bikkurim?

Beyond just expressing his gratitude to Hashem, the farmer articulates a love for the Land of Israel.

According to the Ari Hakadosh, the mitzvah of Bikkurim serves as a tikkun, or rectification, of the Sin of the Spies. In fact, the Spies intended to instill fear in the Jewish People with the fruit of the Land!

The Torah relates that the Spies, "...cut from there a vine with one cluster of grapes, and they carried it on a pole, by two, and of the pomegranates and of the figs" (Bamidbar 13:23). Rashi comments that they returned with the large fruit, "with the intent to spread slander, 'Just as the fruit is unusual, so are its people unusual.'"

The Mishnah (Bikkurim 3:1) describes how one designates his 'First Fruits': "How do we separate Bikkurim? When a man descends into his field and sees figs ripening, a cluster [of grapes] ripening, or a pomegranate ripening, he ties a string to it and says, 'These are Bikkurim'..." It is curious that the Mishnah specifies only figs, grapes and pomegranates, while all of the 'Seven Species' must to be separated as Bikkurim. Harav Menachem Zemba זצ"ל, one of the great Torah giants of pre-war Europe, explained that these three fruits are precisely the very fruits that the Spies bring back with them from the Land: Figs, grapes, and pomegranates. By mentioning only these three, the Mishnah is alluding to the fact that the mitzvah of Bikkurim is a tikkun, or rectification for the Sin of the Spies (Chiddushei Hagaon Rav Menachem Zemba).

The Spies "despised the desirable Land" (Tehillim 106:24). By speaking ill of the Land of Israel, they sinned with their faculty of speech. The mitzvah of Bikkurim serves a rectification for the Sin of the Spies because it requires of us to see the good in the Land, and express our love for it. And that is why the Mitzvah of Bikkurim is accompanied by a unique verbal declaration. It requires us to express our thanks to Hashem verbally. It's not enough to just feel a sense of gratitude. It has to be vocalized.

As Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur approach, it is an appropriate time to reflect on the gift of Israel, and articulate our love for the Land.

שבת שלום ומבורך וכתובה וחתימה טובה

*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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