

# The Narrow Bridge

## גשר צר מאוד

### PARSHA PERSPECTIVES

#### Short Divrei Torah on Parshas Ki Savo

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לע'נ פעסל בת ישראל מנחם / לזכות חילינו

#### **DESCENT FOR THE ASCENT**

##### Lubavitcher Rebbe

*"When you enter the land that Hashem, your G-d, is giving you..." (26:1)*

Allegorically, "coming into the land" refers to the descent of the soul into the body at birth. This descent is quite drastic, for when we leave our idyllic, spiritual abode, we find ourselves confronting a world whose physicality is so overwhelming that it totally obscures the Divinity within it.

Nevertheless, this new abode is a gift "that Hashem, your G-d, is giving you." This is because before our descent into a body, we are capable of experiencing only the degree of Divine consciousness that characterizes our pre-birth level of spirituality. In contrast, in the course of fulfilling our mission in the physical world, we acquire the ability to experience much higher levels of Divine consciousness. Thus, our descent into this world leads to an ultimate ascent - a level of Divine revelation higher than we had ever known.

Being aware of this process helps us maximize the time we spend in this lifetime, inspiring us to live our lives in the fullest and best way possible. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 9, p. 357) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

#### **REWARDED FOR WILLINGNESS**

##### Malbim

*"When you enter the land... you must take the first of all the fruit of the earth..." (26:1-2)*

Fulfill this commandment (of the first fruits) because it is as a reward for this that you shall enter the Land. (Sifri)

Actually, the commandment to offer the first fruits was to come into force only after the Jews would have settled in the Promised Land, but the willingness of the Jewish people - while they were still living in the wilderness - to accept this obligation for that future day when they would be in their own country, gave them sufficient merit to enable them to conquer Canaan.

#### **PRIVILEGED TO GIVE**

##### Chida

*"When you enter the land... you must take the first of all the fruit of the earth that you will bring from your land that G-d is giving you..." (26:1-2)*

The Gemara (Kiddushin 7) tells us that if someone important accepts a gift, it is as if the important person had given a present to the giver, because of the pleasure the acceptance of the gift affords the giver.

The Torah uses the verb "take" in this sense with reference to the offering of the first fruits. It implies that those making the offering thereby "take" or accept from G-d a gift in the form of the pleasure afforded by the privilege of being allowed to offer up the first fruits of their harvest.

#### **BEGINNING ANEW**

##### Reb Noson of Breslov

*"When you enter the land... you must take the first of all the fruit of the earth that you will bring from your land that G-d is giving you..." (26:1-2)*

*Bikkurim* signify the characteristic of renewal. Just as a farmer brings his first fruits to the Temple each year, so too, a person must try to renew himself each year.

The *mitzvah* of *bikkurim* teaches us that no matter what troubles or difficulties we experience, we can always recall G-d's kindnesses and strive to renew our dedication to Him.

In the Torah, the *mitzvah* of *bikkurim* is followed by the *mitzvah* of tithes, after which Moshe states: "Today G-d commands you" (Devarim 26:16). Specifically, "today" - for today is a new day, a chance for renewal.

Our Sages warn us to keep far away from any sin, even the smallest (Avot 2:1). They also teach us that no matter how a person acted in the past, he should never give up hope (cf. Rashi on Devarim 26:16). Be careful of sin, and renew yourself. Begin again, begin anew! (Likutey Halakhot IV, p. 103a-206)

## RECEIVING AND SPREADING DIVINITY

### Baal Shem Tov

*“When you enter the land that Hashem, your G-d, is giving you as an inheritance, and you possess and settle it, you must take the first of all the fruit... put them in a basket and go to the place that G-d will choose to make His Name dwell there.” (26:1-2)*

*Aretz, land, is related to ratzon, will, as our Sages state, “Why is the earth called aretz? Because it desires to perform its Creator’s Will.”*

*“When you enter the land” - when you arrive at a powerful desire for spirituality, you must realize that “G-d is giving you” the ability to experience this yearning, because He bequeathed it to each Jew as a gift.*

*“You possess and settle it” - it is your duty to internalize the experience so that it settles permanently within you.*

*“Take of the first of all the fruit... put them in a basket” - Divine lights must be captured with appropriate receptacles; spiritual highs must be tethered to daily reality by translating them into practical deeds.*

*How is this done? “Go to the place that G-d will choose.” When we travel to a specific location, it is not us who chose to journey there; rather, Divine Providence orchestrated events leading us to the location that requires elevation through our Divine service.*

*What is the nature of that service? “To make His Name dwell there” - to spread Divinity throughout the physical world.*

## ALL FOR ONE

### Lubavitcher Rebbe

*“When you enter the land... you must take the first of all the fruit of the earth that you will bring from your land that G-d is giving you...” (26:1-2)*

This commandment became operative only after the entire Jewish people were settled in their land. As can be seen in the Book of Yehoshua, this process took fourteen years. Until the conquest and settlement of the land was complete, no one was obligated to bring their first fruits annually to the Temple.

The reason for this is because the ritual of the first fruits expresses our thankfulness for G-d’s goodness, and as long as there remained even one Jew who had not yet received his portion in the Land of Israel, the people as a whole could not experience complete joy and thanksgiving.

The same applies to us today: As long as there is even a single Jew who is materially or spiritually deprived, the rest of us cannot experience complete joy. The material or spiritual plight of our fellow Jews - and through them, the plight of all humanity and creation in general - should inspire us to action designed to remedy this situation. - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

## GREATNESS THROUGH ADVERSITY

### Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

*“When you enter the land... you must take the first of all the fruit of the earth that you will bring from your land that G-d is giving you...” (26:1-2)*

The mitzvah of bikkurim requires a farmer to bring his first ripened fruits to the Beis HaMikdash, where he presents them to a kohen and makes a declaration commonly known as מקרא בכורים. In this declaration, the farmer briefly recalls the story of our ancestors’ enslavement in Egypt and the miraculous Exodus. The pesukim of מקרא בכורים are the text which we discuss at the Pesach seder to fulfill the mitzvah of סיפור יציאת מצרים (telling the story of *Yetzias Mitzrayim*).

In מקרא בכורים, the farmer says about our ancestors in Egypt, ויהי שם לגוי גדול - that they became a great nation there. Rav Soloveitchik cites the Zohar (Shemos 189a) as noting the importance of the word שם in this pasuk. It was specifically *there*, in Egypt, in the depths of suffering and anguish, that Bnei Yisrael attained greatness. The Rav explains:

*“...only there in Egypt could the Jews become a great people; had they not been in Egypt, they would not have been transformed into a גוי גדול. The Jewish people became great in crisis. Knesses Yisrael had to spend many years in slavery in order to attain nationhood and greatness. It had to see and experience evil, tyranny, ruthlessness - for one cannot hate Satan unless one knows him well and has dealt with him. To hear stories about Satan is not enough; direct experience and involvement are indispensable. Joseph was sold to Potiphar, the chief executioner, in order to acquaint him with human cruelty. Had Jacob remained in Canaan, his children and future generations would not have developed extra sensitivity vis-à-vis fairness and honesty. We would not have hated cruelty and ruthlessness with passion and zeal. Had we not been in Egypt, had we not felt the pain caused by the whip, we would not have understood the divine law of not oppressing the stranger or the law of loving one’s neighbor. Had we not spent years of horror, we could not have grown and developed into a great nation. In pain and despair, we have attained greatness and nationhood.”*

It is difficult to achieve greatness when everything in life comes easily. Adversity compels us to dig deep inside ourselves and discover the power, strength and capabilities we never knew we had, and which would otherwise have gone to waste. Without being challenged, we would not access the deep layers of potential within our beings.

The word נסיון (test, or challenge) is related to the word נס, which can mean “miracle,” but also refers to a flag held up high. It is through life’s tests and challenges that we are elevated, that we grow, that we attain greatness. ויהי שם לגוי גדול. It is specifically there, in Egypt, when facing hardship, that we become great.

The Ramban, commenting on the story of עקידת יצחק, writes that Hashem brings tests in order to bring our potential into fruition - להוציא הדבר מן הכח אל הפועל. Without challenges, we would forever remain in our comfort zone, and would never grow. Adversity brings out our potential, forcing us to develop skills and qualities that we would otherwise never realize we were capable of.

Earlier in Sefer Devarim (4:20), Moshe refers to Egypt as כור הברזל - a smith's furnace, in which iron instruments are made. The heat of the oven hardens metal, allowing it to take shape and become the unique utensil or tool that it is destined to become. Similarly, מצרים, our difficult experiences, are what helps us "take shape," enabling us to achieve greatness and maximize our unique potential.

## PRIVATE TIME

### Rav Tzadok HaKohen

*"When you enter the land... you must take the first of all the fruit of the earth that you will bring from your land that G-d is giving you..." (26:1-2)*

In the entire parshah of *Bikkurim* (first fruits) and *Viduy* (confession), we do not find the letter ט (*samech*) which represents the Satan (סמאל).

This is because this parshah is comparable to a son speaking and pleading with his father. Fortunately, the Satan cannot interfere during such a tender and emotional period of time.

## RECOGNIZING THE SOURCE

### Sassover Rebbe

*"...you must take the first of all the fruit of the earth..." (26:2)*

Rashi comments: "A man goes down in his field and sees a field that has begun to ripen. He wraps a reed-grass (*gami*) around the first fruit as a sign, and says, 'This is hereby consecrated as *bikkurim* (first fruits).'"

Why does the verse specify "reed-grass"? When one sees his field blossoming, he may think that it was of his doing. After all, he planted, sowed, and plowed and therefore feels proud seeing his field producing plenty of crop. That is why our Sages insisted that before he brings the crop to Hashem, he should place a reed-grass around the first fruits. *Gami* is the acronym of "*gedolim maasei Hashem* - the growth is the work of Hashem." He will then remember that the blessing of a blossoming field is a blessing from Hashem.

## OFFERING OUR BEST

### Lubavitcher Rebbe

*"The kohen will take the basket from your hands and move it before the Altar of Hashem, your G-d." (26:4)*

Each of us comprises both a priest and layperson: Our inner priest is the part of us that is given over wholly to G-d, concerned with our relationship with Him by communing with Him in prayer, studying His Torah, and fulfilling His commandments. Our inner layperson, in contrast, is concerned with our physical survival, comfort, and satisfaction.

Both components of our consciousness are necessary. Nonetheless, we learn from the commandment of bringing the first fruits and giving them to the priest that in order to remain in control of our material pursuits - that they serve us rather than that we serve them - we must give the best parts of our lives to our "priest." This enables us to transform the rest of our material lives into holy acts, through which we deepen our connection to G-d and accomplish our Divine mission - to make the world into His true home. - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

## INFUSING MEANING

### Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

*"You should then declare before Hashem, your G-d: 'An Aramean [Lavan] tried to do away with my father. He [Yaakov] descended to Egypt and stayed there, few in number. There he became a great, strong, and numerous nation.'" (26:5)*

This week's parshah introduces the rules of *bikkurim*, the first fruits that are brought to the Beis HaMikdash. The ceremony is scripted, including the farmer's attestation, "I have declared to G-d that I came to the land that our forefathers were promised" (26:3). The Kohen then takes the basket of fruits, after which the farmer immediately "answers" by briefly recapping the history of the Jewish people from the time they went to Egypt and became slaves, and then were subsequently freed (26:5). However, the script seems to be missing something, as it mentions a declaration that was never previously mentioned, and an answer to a question that was never asked.

Rabbi David Forman asks these questions and offers an enlightening answer: The mere presence of the farmer with his fruits is itself a declaration. The farmer's attendance bears witness to the fulfillment of G-d's promise of a home for the Jewish people. But does the farmer really understand? After putting down the basket, the farmer goes into the history of the people, giving fortification and context to his actions.

It is easy to get caught up with the details of life and lose sight of the bigger picture. We follow the rules, directions, and commandments, but understanding why we do things will make our actions more meaningful for us and for those that look up to us. The process of *bikkurim* outlines the process by which to infuse meaning into our actions. Showing up is the first step, taking positive action is the second step, and understanding our action's purpose and significance confirms that those actions will be meaningful and eternal.



## **MAINTAINING HUMILITY**

### **Radomsker Rebbe**

*“You should then declare before Hashem, your G-d: ‘An Aramean [Lavan] tried to do away with my father. He [Yaakov] descended to Egypt and stayed there, few in number. There he became a great, strong, and numerous nation.’” (26:5)*

The Hebrew word *“anita - you shall declare,”* comes from the word *“anah - to be humble.”* Before one wishes to speak to the Almighty, he should realize his own humility and only then *“say before Hashem.”*

[Similarly, Reb Eliezer HaLevi Horowitz noted that *“Aramean”* denotes arrogance. Therefore, had our father Yaakov chosen to lead a life of arrogance, it *“would have destroyed my father.”* However, he called out to Hashem and was humble. The pasuk teaches that to maintain humility, one must remember our Father and call out and say before Hashem, *“An Aramean would have destroyed my father.”*]

## **PERFECTING OUR SPEECH**

### **Rebbe Nachman**

*“You should then declare before Hashem, your G-d: ‘An Aramean [Lavan] tried to do away with my father. He [Yaakov] descended to Egypt and stayed there, few in number. There he became a great, strong, and numerous nation.’” (26:5)*

*“He descended to Egypt” - compelled by the word [of G-d]. (Pesach Haggadah)*

A person can overcome all of the barriers that prevent him from serving G-d by expressing his words before G-d in prayer. This is called perfected speech.

When speech is imperfect, however, it descends into exile, which is represented by Egypt. *Mitzrayim* (מצרים, Egypt) alludes to *Meitzar ha’garon* (מצר הגרון, the narrowness of the throat).

When speech is trapped in a person’s throat, he cannot express his prayer before G-d, and consequently, he cannot overcome his obstacles.

Therefore, because speech went into exile, Yaakov could not overcome his obstacles and descended into Egypt. (See Likutey Moharan I, 66:5B)

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The bridge between holiness and unholiness is the realm of the mundane, which can be used for either pure or impure purposes.

The bridge between holy speech and unholy speech is Targum (the Aramaic translation of the Torah), which has the potential for both good and evil.

Lavan was an Aramean, and thus represents Targum. Through his unholy use of the Aramaic language, Lavan tried to cause Yaakov to fall from holiness into evil.

But Yaakov subdued the evil in the Targum by staying away from evil speech - such as slander and lies - and elevated the holiness in the Targum by seeking out the good in speech - e.g., Torah, prayer and *hitbodedut*. (See Likutey Moharan I, 19:4)

## **REASON TO REJOICE**

### **Radomsker Rebbe**

*“Then, you shall rejoice with all the good that Hashem, your G-d, has granted you and your household...” (26:11)*

If a man receives a generous gift from a mighty king, he rejoices not so much for its actual value, but more so for the fact that it came from the king himself. The main reason for this joy at the gift is the thought of who the giver is. Therefore, the Torah states: *“And you shall rejoice in all the good”* not only because it is good but primarily because it is what *“Hashem, your G-d, has given you”* - just the thought of Who gave it to us should give us great joy!

## **JOY OF THE MITZVAH**

### **Rabbi Dovid Hoffman**

*“Then, you shall rejoice with all the good that Hashem, your G-d, has granted you and your household...” (26:11)*

Mashal: When Rav Shneur Zalman of Liadi zt’l began to disseminate his teachings, many young men flocked to him and became his ardent followers, despite the prevailing opposition to the chassidic movement.

They found that chassidus injected a new vitality and joy into serving Hashem that was lacking in traditional Judaism.

Among the newly converted chassidim were two sons of a leading Torah scholar of the time. One day, they approached the Ba’al HaTanya with a dilemma that had been on their minds for some time:

Should they attempt to win their father over to the chassidic approach to serving Hashem, as they found it spiritually fulfilling, or was he too set in his ways to change his lifestyle? *“Tell me,”* asked the Rebbe, *“does your eminent father perform mitzvos with joy?”*

*“Every year,”* related one of the sons in reply, *“when we finish building our sukkah, our father climbs onto a bench and kisses every piece of the s’chach.”*

*“In that case,”* said the Ba’al HaTanya, *“don’t worry. He’s fine just the way he is!”*

Nimshal: The Arizal (Sha’ar HaGilgulim) discusses the great importance of expressing joy in the service of Hashem. In fact, the Arizal is quoted as saying that the high levels of holiness that he reached were attained through *simcha shel mitzvah* - performing mitzvos with joy. One should keep this in mind in his approach to daily *mitzvah* observance.

## THE JOY OF TORAH

### Rabbi Efreim Goldberg

*“Then, you shall rejoice with all the good that Hashem, your G-d, has granted you and your household...” (26:11)*

Concluding the section of *bikkurim*, the Torah commands (26:11), ושמחת בכל הטוב אשר נתן לך ה' אלוקיך - “You shall rejoice in all the goodness which Hashem your G-d has given you.” We are commanded to be happy, to feel content and blessed with all that Hashem has given us.

The Ohr HaChaim offers an additional interpretation of this pasuk, based on the Gemara’s teaching (Berachos 5a), that the word טוב refers to Torah (אין טוב אלא תורה). He writes:

“If people would feel the sweetness and pleasantness of the goodness of Torah, they would go into a frenzy and lust for it, and they would consider the entire world’s worth of silver and good like nothing, because Torah incorporates all the goodness in the world.”

Nothing parallels the joy and beauty and diving into Torah learning, whereby we tap into eternity, and experience the sweetness and sanctity of the Torah.

The work U’lesitcha Elyon explains that according to the Ohr HaChaim’s understanding, Hashem here guarantees us that if we take the first step, if we make an effort and apply ourselves in the study of Torah, then we will find it enjoyable and pleasurable. ושמחת is not a command, but a promise, assuring us that if we put in the time and work to delve into the טוב, the unparalleled “goodness” of Torah, then we will experience the joy of Torah. As the pasuk exhorts in Tehillim (34:9), טעמו וראו כי טוב ה' - “Taste and see that Hashem is good.” Once we have a “taste” of Torah, we will see כי טוב, just how sweet and enjoyable it is.

Even if it at first it appears that Torah cannot provide the same joy and satisfaction as the “competition,” of all the vain, worldly pleasures which seem so alluring, we are guaranteed that ושמחת בכל הטוב, eventually we will experience the unparalleled joy of Torah learning. We just need to take the first step, trusting that we will then see just how exhilarating and beautiful the Torah is.

## APPRECIATION BREEDS CONTENTMENT

### Rabbi Efreim Goldberg

*“Then, you shall rejoice with all the good that Hashem, your G-d, has granted you and your household...” (26:11)*

The Torah concludes its discussion of the mitzvah, commanding by *bikkurim* of ושמחת בכל הטוב אשר נתן לך ה' אלוקיך - “You shall rejoice in all the goodness that Hashem your G-d has granted you” (26:11).

Rav Shlomo of Radomsk, in Tiferes Shlomo, comments that this pasuk speaks of the vitally important quality of הסתפקות, feeling gratified over what one has, without comparing oneself and one’s life to other people and their lives.

Let us try to imagine the scene of a wealthy landowner and a simple, poor farmer coming to the Beis HaMikdash together with their *bikkurim*. The wealthy landowner, in all likelihood, has many fields producing numerous different species of fruit, whereas the simple farmer has but one small field. The simple farmer presents his little basket of fruits, whereas the wealthy fellow brings enormous crates full of different kinds of produce.

The Tiferes Shlomo writes that the Torah turns to both men and commands, ושמחת בכל הטוב, to feel equally gratified and happy with what they have. Once we start comparing ourselves to others and look to see what they have that we don’t have, we can never be happy. We are commanded ושמחת בכל הטוב, to feel genuine joy and contentment, celebrating all that we have, rather than worrying about we do not have.

The way we experience this feeling of contentment, the Tiferes Shlomo writes, is indicated in the next clause in this pasuk: אשר נתן לך ה' אלוקיך. When we realize that everything we have has been given to us as a gift from Hashem, from the King of the universe, then we will feel privileged and content, regardless of how much or how little we have.

The Tiferes Shlomo notes that if a person receives a gift from a king, no matter what it is, even a small item of little inherent value, he cherishes it and is overjoyed. This small gift demonstrates that the king paid attention to him, that the king took interest in him, and this itself brings the recipient immense joy.

Everything we have - our health, our families, a roof over our heads, a car, furniture, everything - has been especially given to us by Hashem. The Creator and King of the universe has given us so many gifts - how can we not rejoice? By recognizing אשר נתן לך ה' אלוקיך, that Hashem has given us everything we have, we can achieve ושמחת - genuine joy and satisfaction.

We live in our time with the greatest level of comfort and convenience than any other generation in the history of mankind, and yet, so many people are unhappy. People suffer from low self-esteem, discontentment, and a lack of fulfillment. A lot of this has to do with the fact that they are comparing themselves to other people. We must strive to experience ושמחת בכל הטוב, to rejoice in what we have irrespective of how our lives compare to other people’s lives. If our happiness depends on having what others have and we as yet do not have, then we will never experience happiness. We must train ourselves to feel content with all the beautiful gifts we have been given, rather than making our happiness dependent on obtaining that which we currently lack.

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The Torah commands making the מקרא בכורים proclamation with the words, וענית ואמרת. Rashi, based on the Gemara in Maseches Sota (32), explains that the term וענית refers to הרמת קול - projecting in a loud voice. The Torah specifies that this proclamation must be made loudly, and not in a whisper.

Rav Dovid Kronglass, in Sichos Chochmah U'mussar, offers an insight to explain this requirement. Generally, when people face a dire crisis, an emergency situation, they cry out to G-d for help, with a great deal of passion and intensity. They give everything they've got, all their feelings and emotions, in reciting their *tefillos*. Large Tehillim gatherings are held, and the prayers are loud and emphatic. But normally, when life proceeds normally, without major crises or dangers, our gratitude - if expressed at all - is expressed quietly, without much feeling and emotion. The halacha of קול הרמת in the context of מקרא בבורים teaches that our "thank you" must be as loud as our "I need you." We are to thank Hashem for everything that is going right with the same emotion and intensity with which we plead to Him when things aren't right.

## **ELEVATING PHYSICALITY**

### **Lubavitcher Rebbe**

*"You must declare... 'I have also given the Levite [his due, as well as the first fruits to the Kohen].'" (26:13)*

As opposed to most offerings brought in the Temple, the first fruits were not burned on the Altar, but given to a priest to eat. Although portions of those sacrifices that were burned on the Altar were also eaten or used by the priests, the first fruits were unique in that no part of them whatsoever was burned on the Altar. The priest only placed them in front of the Altar for a short time, and they were thus considered to have been given to G-d. After this, they were enjoyed entirely by human beings.

The reason for this is that while all sacrifices expressed how we strive to become closer to G-d in some way (this being the meaning of the Hebrew word for "sacrifice," *korban*), the first fruits chiefly expressed the attitude we are intended to have toward our involvement in the physical world. We are not meant to destroy physicality but to elevate it, so that its inherent holiness is revealed even while it retains its physical state. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 9, p. 358) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

## **REIGNING OUR PASSION**

### **Rabbi Moshe Schochet**

*"You must declare... 'I did not violate any of Your commandments nor have I forgotten them...'" (26:13)*

The Torah records the obligation of *viduy ma'aseros* - the confession a farmer states upon the completion of separating *maaser*. What is the Torah teaching us with the seemingly unnecessary statement of "*v'lo shachachti - nor have I forgotten them*"? If someone states, "*Lo avarti mi'mitzvosecha* - I did not violate any of Your commandments," then we would presume that they didn't forget them.

The Sefas Emes explains that a person can be in middle of performing a *mitzvah* and yet forget about the *mitzvah*.

How often do we find ourselves performing *mitzvos* without any thought or focus? We wake up and realize that we are in the middle of the *bracha Shema Koleinu*, in *Shemone Esrei*, and we have no idea how we got there. We go through the motions of fulfilling the Torah's instructions without thinking about what we are actually doing.

The Sefas Emes is teaching us a powerful and important lesson. We must break out of our robotic routines and begin to concentrate on what we are doing. We need to inject passion and enthusiasm into our relationship with Hashem.

Elul is the time to re-adjust our attitudes and approaches so that we can feel Hashem's presence and ensure that we have a deeper and more meaningful relationship with Him.

## **HELPING OTHERS**

### **Rabbi Shlomo Ressler**

*"You must declare... 'I did not violate any of Your commandments nor have I forgotten them...'" (26:13)*

When the farmer finishes tithing his produce for the year, the Torah tells him to disperse the tithes to the Leviim, orphans, widows, and poor so they may claim it. We then declare that anything designated for others has been divested/given, that we did not stray from any commandments, and that we have not forgotten (26:13). Why would we have to declare that we followed all the commandments and that we did not forget? Wouldn't one imply the other?

Oznayim LaTorah suggests that the commandment not to forget references a previous commandment not to forget what Amalek did to us. While Amalek attacked our weak, we are commanded to give extra attention to those less prosperous and privileged and help them as best as we can. Following commandments is an attestation of our personal adherence to the Torah's laws, while declaring that we have not forgotten is about helping others achieve their own personal growth.

## **THE STRAY SHEEP**

### **Rebbe Nachman**

*"You must declare... 'I did not violate any of Your commandments nor have I forgotten them...'" (26:13)*

There are differences among those who transgress. There are individuals who repent immediately and there are those whose transgressions lead them astray into sinful lives.

Dovid HaMelech stated (Tehillim 119:176): "I have strayed as a lost sheep - seek out Your servant; for I have not forgotten Your commandments." This is like a sheep who wanders away from the shepherd but is close enough to hear his voice, recognize it, and return.

However, if the sheep wanders too far, he no longer hears the voice and continues to wander along winding and twisting paths until the shepherd gives up looking for him.

“I have strayed as a lost sheep” - I am as a lost sheep who has not wandered too far from the straight path. You have proof, therefore, “seek out Your servant.” I am seeking the Shepherd; I want to return to Him “for I have not forgotten Your commandments.” I have not forgotten the voice of the Torah and its commandments, and I regret my transgressions and want to return to Hashem.

## **SPREAD THE JOY**

### **Rabbi Elimelech Biderman**

*“I have done all that You commanded me...” (26:14)*

Rashi explains these words to mean, “I was happy and made others happy by it.” The tzaddikim show from here that someone who is appropriately joyful and brings joy to others can truly proclaim, “I have done all that You commanded me.”

It is Hashem’s Will that His children be constantly happy. Someone who brings joy to others, is fulfilling this desire.

## **BEYOND RATIONALE**

### **Lubavitcher Rebbe**

*“Gaze down from Your holy dwelling, from the heavens, and bless Your people, Israel...” (26:15)*

The person who makes this declaration is testifying that the Jewish people are devoted to G-d passionately, beyond the limits of what would be dictated by logic.

In return for this “irrational” devotion, we ask that G-d treat us “irrationally,” as well - crowning our efforts with success that surpasses what would rationally be expected.

We should not consider such irrational devotion to G-d to be voluntary or supplementary; G-d requires us to constantly challenge ourselves, to prove to Him and to ourselves that our devotion to Him and to our life’s mission knows no bounds.

In return, He showers us with His unbounded blessings, transforming even dire situations into revealed good. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 19, p. 120) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

## **CHOSEN FOR OUR DEEDS**

### **Ibn Ezra**

*“You have declared Hashem this day to be your G-d...” (26:17)*

The Hebrew term *he'emarta*, “you have declared,” is in the causative inflection of the verb “to say,” implying that by reason of the good deeds you have performed you caused Hashem to say that He will “be your G-d.”

## **A MUTUAL DECLARATION**

### **Rebbe Nachman**

*“You have declared Hashem this day to be your G-d...” (26:17)*

*He'emarta* (you have declared) and *he'emirkha* (He has declared) connote glorification and praise. (Rashi)

We glorify G-d by declaring: “G-d is One” (Devarim 6:4), and He glorifies us by calling us “His nation” (cf. Shemos 19:6). These display, respectively, our faith in G-d and G-d’s commitment to us. (See Likutey Moharan I, 31:9)

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*He'emarta* (you have declared) and *he'emirkha* (He has declared you) both come from the root Amar (say). When a person engages in *hitbodedut* and opens up his heart to speak to G-d, confessing his sins and his desire to draw close to Him, then the Divine Presence, as it were, faces this person and opens up Her heart, pouring out Her woes and consoling him. For Israel is literally “a portion of G-d from Above” (Iyov 31:2), and every blemish that a Jew makes in his soul, he makes in the Divine Presence as well.

Thus, “You declared to G-d... and G-d has declared to you” - as each Jew declares his sins and remorse before G-d, the Divine Presence speaks to him and consoles him by letting him know that She will seek strategies to rectify all of his blemishes. (See Likutey Moharan I, 259)

## **INDUCING BLESSINGS**

### **Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev**

*“You have declared Hashem this day to be your G-d...” (26:17)*

The underlying principle here is as follows: The bounty that comes from G-d is called “speech” [דבור], as it says (Tehillim 33:6), “With the word [דבר] of G-d the heavens were created.” When the Jewish people are on a high spiritual level, they elicit G-d’s speech, causing Him to confer on us all manner of goodness. But if, G-d forbid, we are not on such a high level and therefore do not do this, it says (Shemos 15:11), “Who is like You among the powerful,” which our Sages (Gittin 56b) expound to mean, “Who is like You among the mute?” [i.e., we cause G-d, so to speak, to restrain Himself from bestowing His beneficence upon us via His speech.]

This is the allusion in the phrase “You have set apart G-d this day.” Since the word for “you have set apart” [האמרת] is related to the verb “to speak” [אמר], this means: “today you induced G-d to speak,” i.e., to confer His bountiful benevolence on the Jewish people.

This is true when the Jewish people are on a high spiritual level. This situation is alluded to by the word “today,” which implies that they are fulfilling the directive (see Rashi on Devarim 26:16) “Each and every day, the Torah should be in your eyes as if it were new,” so that you pursue it enthusiastically, the way someone becomes excited over some new discovery.



## **DISTINCTION BY OBLIGATION**

### **HaKesav Ve'HaKabbalah**

*"And Hashem has declared you today to be His treasured people, as He spoke to you, and that you should keep all His commandments..." (26:18)*

G-d has made you exceptional and important by giving you His commandments to keep. This is the distinction that sets you apart from all the other nations.

## **OUR TREASURED BOND**

### **Lubavitcher Rebbe**

*"And Hashem has declared you today to be His treasured people... to make you supreme above all the nations... a holy people." (26:18-19)*

The basis of our relationship with G-d is that He chose us as His "treasure," which means that He and we are bound together supra-rationally. This bond is hidden; it exists in our lives as an undercurrent, whose presence we rarely even sense. It is therefore necessary to bring this intrinsic bond to the surface by relating to G-d actively. We do this in two ways:

First, by being "a holy people," dedicating ourselves to G-d's purposes by studying His Torah and observing its commandments. This separates us from the materiality of the world, setting us apart as a holy nation.

Second, by being a "kingdom of nobles" who rule over the materiality of the world, co-opting its positive aspects into our Divine mission. This engages us in the materiality of the world.

By actualizing our bond with G-d in these two ways, we can develop the sensitivity that enables us to palpably feel our hidden, inherent relationship with Him. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 18, pp. 21-23, 409-410; *ibid.*, vol. 11, pp. 5-7) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

## **PURELY INCLINED**

### **Lubavitcher Rebbe**

*"And Hashem has declared you today to be His treasured people... to make you supreme above all the nations... a holy people." (26:18-19)*

G-d has "set us apart" from evil and wrongdoing. Our Divine nature and true inner self render us totally above any involvement with evil, and therefore, inherently incapable of wrongdoing.

Therefore, when we do something that distances us from G-d, we can always return to Him. When we are motivated to return to G-d out of passionate love for Him, not only can we forsake negative behavior and habits at any instant (thereby defying the natural forces of inertia and habituation); we can even convert past deliberate wrongdoings into motivations for positive behavior. - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

## **PRIVILEGED TO SERVE**

### **Rabbi Shlomo Ressler**

*"And Hashem has declared you today to be His treasured people, as He spoke to you, and that you should keep all His commandments..." (26:18)*

Moshe records affirmations that the people make to G-d and those reciprocated by G-d. The people commit to (1) be G-d's nation; (2) walk in His ways; (3) keep His statutes, laws, and commandments; and (4) listen to His voice (26:17). G-d reciprocates by selecting the Jewish nation to represent Him and to keep all the commandments (26:18). What does "listen to His voice" signify? Also, why is "keep the commandments" listed as one of G-d's reciprocated virtues when it would be the people that would be keeping those commandments?

Ohr HaChaim suggests that listening involves actively studying the Torah for ways to improve our observance of its statutes, laws, and commandments. This attentiveness and eagerness to understand more of the Torah indicates to G-d that we are truly committed to Him. In turn, and perhaps as a direct outcome of our enthusiasm, G-d commits to allowing us to safeguard those commandments. This approach emphasizes the reverence appropriate when learning and observing the Torah's many laws. The commandments are not a burden but rather a privilege granted to us as a way to improve our perspective, relationships, and lives.

## **THIS TOO IS FOR THE BEST**

### **Rabbi Moshe Feinstein**

*"And you shall rejoice before Hashem, your G-d..." (27:7)*

Why does the Torah tell us that Bnei Yisrael should eat and rejoice at the site of Mount Eival, the mountain reserved for the admonitions? Would it not be more appropriate to rejoice at Mount Gerizim, where the blessings were uttered?

This teaches us a most powerful lesson: One should realize that when he is visited by difficulties in life, it should not be viewed as a negative situation. Difficulties offer numerous positive effects, to cleanse, to refine, and to bring one to humility.

## **FROM CURSE TO BLESSING**

### **Reb Eliezer Litzhensk**

*"You shall inscribe on the stones all the words of this Torah, well clarified..." (27:8)*

Hashem said to Moshe that he should write the words of admonishment and the curses clearly so that the tzaddikim of future generations should be able to interpret them for the good. This pasuk teaches us that the righteous have the inner ability to interpret admonishment for the good and change curses into blessings.



## **SUITABLE FOR ALL**

### **Rabbi Efreim Goldberg**

*“You shall inscribe on the stones all the words of this Torah, well clarified...” (27:8)*

Later in this parsha, Moshe commands Bnei Yisrael to erect an altar at Mount Eival upon entering Eretz Yisrael, and to engrave upon the stones “all the words of this Torah” (27:8).

Different views are taken by the commentaries as to what precisely was written on these stones. The Ibn Ezra says that the list of the 613 mitzvos was written, whereas the Ramban writes that the entire Torah was engraved on the stones. Others claim that only Sefer Devarim was engraved.

Regardless, it has been suggested that these stones, bearing the inscription of words of Torah, represented the “mezuzah” of Eretz Yisrael. Just as the *mezuzah* at the entrance to our homes is to establish the purpose and essence of our homes, as a place where Torah is studied and practiced, similarly, at the “entrance” to the Land of Israel, a “mezuzah” was put in place to make it clear that this is what our country is all about.

Moshe commands that the words must be written באר היטב (“explained very clearly”), and Rashi, based on the Gemara (Sota 32), interprets this to mean that the text must be written in שבעים לשון, the seventy languages that were used in the ancient world.

Why was this necessary? Why did the Torah need to be written in all languages? Isn’t the Torah only for us? Did the ambassadors of other countries really need to understand the text of the Torah when they visited Eretz Yisrael?

I would suggest that perhaps these seventy languages are not, in fact, the languages spoken by other peoples, but rather the different languages spoken among Am Yisrael. They are the languages of the Ashkenazim and of the Sefardim; the distinct languages of Vizhnitz, Bobov, Lubavitch, Satmar and Ger. Of course, we only have one Torah. But the Torah has room for numerous different “languages,” different styles, which speak to and are suitable for different groups of people.

These שבעים לשון are also relevant to different geographical regions and different time periods. Rav Hirsch, in 19th-century Germany was able to eloquently and effectively communicate the Torah in a language which was suitable for that time and place. Meanwhile, over in Lithuania, the Torah was communicated in a much different language.

The Torah was written in שבעים לשון to teach us that there is room for different languages and styles. Of course, the Torah itself never changes, but the way and form in which it is communicated must be tailored to each generation and each community to ensure the Torah’s successful and accurate transmission.

## **PROPER PREPARATIONS**

### **Rabbi Shlomo Ressler**

*“You shall inscribe on the stones all the words of this Torah, well clarified...” (27:8)*

The Jews are instructed that on the day they cross the Jordan River and enter their new land, they are to gather large stones, plaster them, and engrave upon them the entire Torah. Why are these instructions given twice in short succession, with slightly different wording (27:2, 27:4-8)?

Rav Hirsch posits that the first instructions included the words “And it will be on the day that you cross the Jordan” because they were instructed to begin preparing the stones before they even crossed the Jordan. It is only by virtue of the preparation that they merited to cross the Jordan in the first place. This instruction speaks to the power of mindset, intentional preparation, and concrete action in helping us achieve actual change.

As we near the *Yamim Noraim* (High Holidays), this lesson is especially relevant for us; as we seek to improve our lives, the first step needs to be a change in our approach, ensuring that we give proper thought to our actions.

## **PRECIOUS VOICE**

### **Rebbe Nachman**

*“You shall inscribe on the stones all the words of this Torah, well clarified...” (27:8)*

He saw their affliction when He heard their outcry. (Tehillim 106:44)

When a person engages in the study of the Torah’s wisdom and explanations, then his voice alone - even without words - is so precious to G-d that when he cries out to Him, G-d saves him.

This is seen in the initial letters of the words *Be’shamo et rinatam* (בשמעו את רנתם, when He heard their outcry), which spell *Ba’er* (באר, explanation) - since one’s exposition and explanation of the Torah refine his voice to arouse G-d’s compassion. (See Likutey Moharan I, 27:5)

## **SANCTIFYING THE SECULAR**

### **Lubavitcher Rebbe**

*“You shall inscribe on the stones all the words of this Torah, well clarified...” (27:8)*

Rashi explains that the words “very clearly” imply that the Jews were to translate the Torah into the seventy original languages of humanity and to write these translations on this altar.

It is certainly preferable to study the Torah in the original Hebrew, for the subtle nuances of meaning inherent in the text - not to mention its allusive and mystical subtexts - can only be noticed and appreciated in the original.

Nevertheless, there is an advantage in studying the Torah in secular languages, namely, that using these languages to study the Torah elevates and sanctifies them, at least while they are being used for this purpose.

Furthermore, expressing the Torah's concepts in secular idioms allows the sanctity and message of the Torah to permeate even those layers of existence that are otherwise antithetical or antagonistic to Divine consciousness.

Thus, by studying the Torah in other languages, we prepare the world for its ultimate spiritual elevation and sanctification, which will occur with the Messianic Redemption. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 36, pp. 38-44) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

## **DAILY RENEWAL**

### **Lubavitcher Rebbe**

*"This day you have become a people [bound by covenant] to Hashem, your G-d..." (27:9)*

Our desire for novelty is an intrinsic component of our humanity. Moshe therefore told the Jewish people that they become G-d's people anew every single day.

The covenant between G-d and the Jewish people was made only once, with the Giving of the Torah at Har Sinai. But G-d renews it with each one of us on a daily basis. We should therefore view the daily personal renewal of our relationship with G-d with as much interest and enthusiasm as if it were the first time - for indeed, it is! (Hitva'aduyot 5745, vol. 5, p. 2929) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

## **ACQUIRING UNIQUENESS**

### **Rabbi Shamshon Raphael Hirsch**

*"This day you have become a people [bound by covenant] to Hashem, your G-d..." (27:9)*

On "this day" - when you take the oath to observe the Torah - "you have become a people." The Jews became a nation not by virtue of acquiring a land or language of their own, but only by taking upon themselves the Torah's yoke even while still in the wilderness - without a land or any other tangible attributes of nationhood. Therein lies the unique character of the Jewish people.

## **HEARING HASHEM**

### **Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev**

*"This day you have become a people [bound by covenant] to Hashem, your G-d..." (27:9)*

Rashi explains, "Every day, it should be as new in your eyes." How can you achieve this? By believing that with each and every breath you take, you receive new vitality (see Bereishis Rabbah 14:9). Thus, you are a new person with each breath.

Through such belief, you will merit to hear, every day, the giving of the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai. As the verse indicates when it says (Devarim 27:10), "You shall therefore obey [ושמעתי בקול, literally, 'hear the voice of'] G-d."

Without such faith, you will not hear the voice of G-d, only words of Torah. But when you constantly hear the Torah being given at Har Sinai, you will also merit to hear the voice of Hashem, your G-d.

## **CONQUERING MOUNTAINS**

### **Rabbi Shlomo Ressler**

*"These [tribes] shall stand to bless on the people on Har Gerizim... And these [tribes] shall stand on the curse on Har Aivel..." (27:12-13)*

The Jewish people are divided, with six tribes representing blessings on one mountain (Gerizim) and the remaining six representing curses on another (Aivel) (27:12-13). Why did the people have to be divided such that half of them represented curses? Wouldn't it have been better if everyone represented the blessings?

Oznayim LaTorah suggests that the tribes representing the curses were those that had more significant struggles in their lives; among them were the children of Yaakov's maidservants, who were born into an unfavorable situation. These tribes did not represent curses; they represented overcoming adverse circumstances.

The wording in the pasuk supports this position: For the blessings, the Torah says, "The following shall stand to bless," and for the curses, the Torah says, "And the following shall stand on the curses." The tribes that overcame adversity were highlighted to encourage all of us to fight through adversity until we stand proudly on our personal mountaintops.

## **DRAWING DOWN BLESSINGS**

### **Lubavitcher Rebbe**

*"It shall be if you listen to the voice of Hashem, your G-d... All the following blessings will pursue you and overtake you." (28:1-2)*

We are taught that on the Jewish New Year (Rosh HaShanah), G-d decrees our livelihood and health for the coming year. And yet, we pray every day for health, sustenance, and many other Divine blessings. Is this daily prayer necessary, in that all has already been decreed on Rosh HaShanah?

This verse provides the answer to this question: G-d's blessings both "pursue" us and "overtake" us. On Rosh HaShanah, all the blessings necessary for their respective purposes descend ("pursue" us) to a certain level of reality where they wait in storage to be drawn down further ("overtake" us) into our physical world. The vehicle for bringing blessings down to us is our daily prayer and devotion to G-d.

## **PROUD TO BE A JEW**

### **Divrei Sha'arei Chaim**

*"Blessed shall you be in the city..." (28:3)*

"In the city" - by the reward for the commandments that you observe (publicly) in the city. (Midrash)

Some people observe their Judaism and perform its commandments within the walls of their own homes, but are ashamed of their religion when they are among others, fearing that they may be called "fanatical," "old-fashioned" and such.

Therefore, the Torah says: "Only if you're unashamed to observe the commandments even 'in the city' - when you are among others, will you receive the blessings." Similarly, we read in the opening paragraph of the Shulchan Aruch: "You shall not be ashamed in the presence of those who deride you."

## **CONCEALED GOODNESS**

### **Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev**

*"G-d will order the blessing to be with you in the granaries." (28:8)*

The underlying principle here is as follows: At times G-d bestows His goodness upon the Jewish people on His own initiative, for it is His way to have compassion on His nation, Yisrael. Such bounty is revealed and manifestly good. At other times, however, the Almighty bestows His benevolence upon the Jewish nation only as a result of our initiative. This beneficial bounty that comes as a result of our arousal comes invested in a garment, and so at first may not look good. Only later does the good become manifest. Until then, the good is concealed.

This, then, is the deeper meaning of the phrase "G-d will order the blessing to be with you," referring to the bounty that comes as a result of our power and arousal. This is what the phrase "to be with you" indicates: the blessing is conferred on account of our arousal. This is why the verse adds that such a blessing is "in your granaries" [באסמין], for this word alludes to something that is "concealed" [סמוי] from the eye. The goodness is concealed and hidden, as it was, for example, in the case of the binding of Yitzchak.

## **QUANTUM LEAPS**

### **Lubavitcher Rebbe**

*"Hashem will confirm you for Himself as a holy people... [if] you go in His ways." (28:9)*

Following G-d's path as outlined in the Torah enables us to "walk." Before our souls descend into our bodies, we experience G-dliness in a relatively static fashion. Any new level of Divine consciousness that we reach can be understood in the context of our previous level of spiritual understanding. Thus, our spiritual growth prior to birth is a limited, step-by-step process.

In contrast, once our souls have entered our bodies and we are able to study the Torah and perform G-d's commandments, we are able to move toward G-d with quantum leaps. This ability enables us to "walk," i.e., to make real progress in our relationship with G-d.

This knowledge can inspire us not to remain complacent regarding our spiritual lives, but to aspire to levels of Divine consciousness beyond what we can presently even imagine. We can achieve these levels through devoted study of the Torah and the performance of G-d's commandments. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 4, p. 1132) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

## **GAINING REVERENCE**

### **Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev**

*"And all the peoples of the earth will see that you are called by Hashem's Name, and they will fear you." (28:10)*

The Talmud (Berachos 6a) states: "The Name of Hashem is proclaimed over you, and they will revere you." R' Eliezer HaGadol elaborates: "These are the *tefillin* that are worn in the head (*b'rosh*)."

The wearing of *tefillin* in itself does not make the nations revere us. The verse does not say, "*tefillin* that are on the head" but "*tefillin* that are in the head." The concept of *tefillin*, the faith in Hashem, should be internalized so that we constantly think what the *tefillin* are teaching us; then there will be reverence from the nations.

## **AWE OF HASHEM'S PRIDE**

### **Rebbe Nachman**

*"And all the peoples of the earth will see that you are called by Hashem's Name, and they will fear you." (28:10)*

Our Sages state that the *mitzvah* of *tefillin* has the power to draw the fear of G-d upon the nations (Berachot 6a).

How much more, then, does this *mitzvah* have the power to draw the fear of G-d upon the person who is wearing the *tefillin*! The more he becomes aware of G-d's greatness, the more humble he will be. (See Likutey Moharan I, 38:5)

Our Sages (Berachot 11a) refer to *tefillin* as *Pe'er* (פאר, glory), which is the root of the word *hitpa'arut* (התפארות, pride). *Tefillin* also represent strength.

When we put on *tefillin*, we adorn ourselves with our pride in G-d. Accordingly, the *tefillin* contain passages from the Torah that declare G-d's greatness.

Our Sages teach that G-d also wears *tefillin*, as it were. The passages of Torah in His *tefillin* tell of His pride in the Jewish people (ibid., 6a).

When the nations of the world see us wearing our *tefillin* and see the pride that G-d takes in us, they will be in awe of us. (See Likutey Moharan I, 17:1)

## **INTERNALIZING TEFILLIN**

### **Rabbi Dovid Hoffman**

*“And all the peoples of the earth will see that you are called by Hashem’s Name, and they will fear you.” (28:10)*

The Gemara (Brachos 6a) states: Rabbi Eliezer HaGadol says, *“And the nations of the world will see that the Name of Hashem is called upon you and they will fear you’ this refers to tefillin of the head (shel rosh).”*

The Gemara seems to imply that when a Jew wears his head tefillin, it will inspire fear in the hearts of the nations, and they will be afraid. Why is it, then, that although so many people wear tefillin daily, they have not achieved the fear, or in most cases, even the reverence of the gentile nations?

Rav Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev zt’l explains that the Gemara does not state *“Tefillin of the head,”* but rather *“Tefillin in the head.”* The message inscribed on the parchment inside the tefillin - belief in the unity of G-d, serving Him with one’s heart, soul, and fortune, sanctifying His name, and the remembrance that Hashem delivered us from bondage to make us truly free - must be absorbed by the Jew wearing it and incorporated into his head in order to achieve the reverence of other people.

*Tefillin “of the head”* refers to a verbal declaration of the principles contained therein, and while this is a mitzvah, it is of limited value. *Tefillin “in the head”* refers to integrating the tefillin into one’s character, a sincere dedication and commitment to everything written in them, so that one’s every thought and action reflects the principles contained in the tefillin.

Klal Yisrael’s mission is to set an example of spiritual commitment, and thus merit reverence. The nations of the world will revere us when our behavior reflects the Divine Presence. This can be attained only when the tefillin are *“in the head.”*

## **SURPASSING THE ANGELS**

### **Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev**

*“G-d will open up for you His good treasury, the heavens...”(28:12)*

The underlying principle here will be explained, based on what our Sages say (see Bava Basra 75b), *“In the future the ministering angels will say ‘holy’ [kadosh] before the righteous [the same as we declare G-d’s holiness nowadays in our prayers].”* As such, the righteous are superior to the Heavenly beings.

This, then, is what the verse *“G-d will open up for you His good treasury, the heavens”* alludes to:

The goodness that is the treasure of the Heavenly beings, which is presently closed and concealed from you, will be opened for you by the Almighty, for you will then be on a higher spiritual plane than the celestial beings.

## **THE LIONS HEAD**

### **Apter Rav**

*“Hashem will place you at the head, not at the tail...” (28:13)*

Why the double expression? Isn’t it obvious that if one is a “head” it’s not possible to be a “tail”?

At times it’s better to be a “tail” than a “head,” as the Mishnah (Pirkei Avos 4:14) puts it: *“Rather the tail of a lion than the head of a fox.”* Therefore, the Torah says: *“And Hashem will make you the head”* - you shall be at the head of a “head”; *“and not the tail”* - and not at the head of a “tail.” You shall be the head of a lion and not the head of a fox.

## **BLESSINGS AND EXPANSION**

### **Rabbi Dovid Hoffman**

*“Hashem will place you at the head, not at the tail; and you will be solely on top, you will not be on the bottom; when you heed.” (28:13)*

A person cannot be on top and on the bottom at the same time. If he is on top, then he is obviously not on the bottom, and vice versa. If so, why does the Torah insist on declaring that in good times, the Bnei Yisrael *“will be solely on top and not on the bottom”*? Isn’t that quite obvious?

Rav Tzadok Hakohen of Lublin zt’l provides the following insight based on the words of the pasuk in Navi (Divrei Hayamim I, 4:10): *“If You will surely bless me and will extend my borders.”* Why is a prayer for both a blessing and an extension?

Sometimes people are given a large and plentiful bounty; however, it can destroy their lives if they are not properly equipped to handle it. Thus, in actuality, this was a prudent request. In order to be able to absorb and manage the myriad blessings of Hashem, it is absolutely necessary to become wiser, bigger and better, and be blessed with a broader perspective and deeper understanding.

It is now understood what the Torah meant by the double blessing of *“you will be solely on top,”* and *“you will not be on the bottom.”*

When the Jewish People follow in the dictates of the Torah, Hashem will shower His people with an abundance of blessing. To that extent, they will surely *“be on top.”* They will be leaders to whom all the world will look to for moral clarity and guidance. Yet, at the same time, Hashem will also ensure that Klal Yisrael does not become complacent, that we do not stay put and remain *“on the bottom,”* small-minded, little people with blessings too big for us to deal with or to handle. Rather, when the Jewish People are worthy of true blessings, Hashem will help us grow and expand, in order to properly receive and appreciate those blessings.



## **QUICK TO RISE, SLOW TO FALL**

### **Reb Azriel Hildesheimer**

*"...you will be solely on top, you will not be on the bottom..." (28:13)*

It is nature's law that stones fall quickly when dropped and rise slowly when thrown up into the air, because gravity draws them down. In contrast, fire rises quickly and goes down slowly, because flames naturally flare up. Both flames and stones move quickly in the direction in which their nature draws them, and slowly when they are forced into the opposite direction.

Similarly, a Jew's sacred soul is drawn up to Heaven by its very nature, and any descent is out of keeping with its character. Alternatively, an impure soul is pulled down to the ground by nature of its impurity and any ascent would be contrary to its character.

Therefore, the Torah says: "And you will be solely on top" - you shall rise rapidly, because it is natural for you to rise; "and you will not be on bottom" - and that rise shall not represent an increase in an undesirable trait that would act to drag you down and make it difficult for you to rise.

However, at a later point - in connection with the curses - we read: "The stranger who is in the midst of you shall mount up above you, higher and higher, and you shall come down lower and lower" (28:43). The stranger - whose soul by its nature tends to drag him down - will rise slowly and with difficulty, "higher and higher," only by degrees, like a stone that is thrown into the air. Likewise, your downfall, which is contrary to your nature, will be gradual. You will descend "lower and lower," and not plummet all at once, because your natural tendency would be to rise and it is difficult for you to fall.

## **THE RIGHT TYPE OF FEAR**

### **Reb Noson of Breslov**

*"...because you did not serve Hashem, your G-d, with joy and goodness of the heart, out of an abundance of everything." (28:47)*

This verse is part of the section of the Torah called the *Tokhachah* (Rebuke), whose description of punishments arouses fear of G-d and fear of sin. Nevertheless, this verse speaks about serving G-d with joy. Fear is an important element in one's devotions, but it is intended to bring a person closer to G-d, not to distance him. (Likutey Halakhot V, p. 232a)

## **HOWEVER HASHEM SEES FIT**

### **Rabbi Moshe Kormornick**

*"...because you did not serve Hashem, your G-d, with joy and goodness of the heart, out of an abundance of everything." (28:47)*

This verse describes how our failure to serve Hashem with joy will bring terrible anguish on the Jewish People.

Accordingly, we need to know how to serve Hashem with joy, and what happens if we are placed in a situation where we cannot be joyful.

Serving Hashem with joy is not only the delight that we should experience when we perform Mitzvos, but also the underlying feeling of gratitude that whatever circumstances we find ourselves in, we can always find a way to fulfill the Will of Hashem.

The following story illustrates this concept; that it is truly possible to serve Hashem in every circumstance that we find ourselves in:

Under one of the cruel regimes that imprisoned Jews for practicing their religion, two prominent Rebbes were taken from their Beis HaMedrash and thrown into a prison cell. They shared a small, dark room with only each other and a bucket of waste - still full from the previous "tenants" - for company. At the sight of his prison cell, one of the Rebbes began to cry, "I'm not crying because we are in jail, I know that Divine providence led me here and everything Hashem does is for the best; I am crying because I have not yet davened *Mincha* yet, and now that there is a smelly bucket of waste in the cell, I am forbidden to pray. How can I serve Hashem if I can't even daven?"

The other Rebbe smiled and responded, "Just as you serve Hashem by doing His Will and davening *Mincha* every day, so too, now you are doing His Will by not davening *Mincha*... but you are serving Hashem in just the same way!"

After hearing this, the Rebbe who had not yet davened, rose with tears of joy. He grasped his friend's hands and together they sang and danced around the bucket of waste, ecstatic at the thought of serving Hashem according to His Will.

Hearing all the commotion, the prison guards approached the cell and witnessed the bizarre scene of two prominent Rebbes dancing and rejoicing around a bucket of waste. Not wanting the Rebbes to have any kind of pleasure, they stormed the prison cell and removed the bucket, delighted at having deprived the Rebbes of their source of joy... As soon as the guards left, the Rebbe who had not yet prayed, turned towards Jerusalem and davened *Mincha*, once again delighted to serve Hashem in the best possible way!

## **JOYFUL REWARD**

### **Rabbi Elimelech Biderman**

*"...because you did not serve Hashem, your G-d, with joy and goodness of the heart, out of an abundance of everything." (28:47)*

The Sefas Emes learns from this that if we receive the terrible punishments of the *tochacha* (rebuke) for not serving Hashem with enough joy, then certainly, if we do serve Hashem with joy and continue to fulfill the Torah happily despite the fact that we are suffering in exile, we will be rewarded and merit the final redemption.

## **DANCING FOR JOY**

### **Rebbe Nachman**

*"...because you did not serve Hashem, your G-d, with joy and goodness of the heart, out of an abundance of everything." (28:47)*

When a person cheers himself with the joy of a *mitzvah* - such as Torah study or the performance of good deeds - this joy is so great that it reaches down to his feet and lifts them up - i.e., he dances for joy. Similarly, one who serves G-d with joy can reach all the way down into the lowest levels and elevate the souls that have been trapped there due to their sins. (See Likutey Moharan II, 81)

## **HEAVENLY JOY**

### **Lubavitcher Rebbe**

*"...because you did not serve Hashem, your G-d, with joy and goodness of the heart, out of an abundance of everything." (28:47)*

The words "with joy and heartfelt gladness from an abundance of everything" can also be read, "with more joy and heartfelt gladness than anything else." In other words, G-d asks that we derive enjoyment from studying His Torah and fulfilling His commandments more than we can possibly derive from anything else.

We can do this by contemplating the fundamental differences between joy derived from earthly delights and joy derived from holy pursuits. Firstly, whereas earthly delights and varieties of satisfaction are by nature fleeting, holy delights and satisfaction are permanent. Secondly, G-d Himself created all earthly delights - whether they be physical, emotional, or intellectual. The fact that we find them at all enjoyable is because they reflect, however dimly, something of His essence. It is clear then, that an experience of closeness to G-d is an experience of His authentic essence rather than a dim reflection of it. And this encounter with G-d's essence is precisely what is ours when we study His Torah and fulfill His commandments! (Sefer HaMa'amarim 5717-5718-5719, p. 132) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

## **MITIGATING DECREES**

### **Rebbe Nachman**

*"Then G-d will strike you and your descendants with extraordinary punishments. The punishments will be severe and unyielding, and the illnesses will be terrible and persistent." (28:59)*

At the time that the Heavenly Court dispatches suffering upon a person, they make the suffering take an oath that it will not set out to afflict the person except on such and such a day; and that it will not leave him except on such and such a day, at such and such a time, through the agency of such and such a person and such and such a medicine, and by the hand of such and such a person, on such and such a day. (Avodah Zarah 55a)

*Ve'ne'emanim* (persistent) literally means "trustworthy." Our Sages teach that these illnesses are trustworthy in the sense that when they are sent to punish a person, they take an oath to leave on a certain day. Even if the person has not yet repented of the sin that caused his suffering in the first place, the punishment stays true to its oath and will depart on that day.

However, if the sick person gives charity to a tzaddik before that day, he mitigates the decree. Then any medicine he takes will have the power to heal him.

## **FAITHFUL BLESSINGS**

### **Rabbi Dovid Hoffman**

*"And there will be no rest for the sole of your foot; and Hashem will give you there a fearful heart and pining eyes and disillusioned spirit... and you will be in fear night and day..." (28:65-66)*

Mashal: A couple far-removed from a Torah way of life had a toddler who shrieked day and night almost nonstop. The parents took their child to numerous doctors and specialists, but even after extensive testing, no one could pinpoint the boy's pain. Filled with despair, the parents took their son to experts in the world of amulets and mysticism, but they could not help either.

One day, the mother of the boy was walking in an open market and noticed a page with Hebrew letters on the ground. She picked it up but was unable to decipher the words or their meaning. "This page must be holy. Maybe G-d will cure my son through it," she said to herself. When she returned home, she put it under the pillow of her crying baby.

Amazingly, a change came over the child; for the first time in months, the boy slept peacefully through the night.

Later, she showed the paper to her husband, who recognized that the words were from the *Chumash*. They were written in Parshas Ki Savo and said: "Hashem will give you a suffering soul (disillusioned spirit)... you will be in fear night and day..."

Nimshal: Pure faith can bring about salvation, and, in the case of this child, it even reversed the curses written on the page so that they became a great blessing. Although the Torah lists many tragedies which may befall the Jewish People if they do not follow in the correct path, we are also assured that with faith in the Almighty and the belief that He will see us through the difficult times, these curses will be overturned to become true sources of blessing.

## **NOT FOR SALE**

### **Rabbi Yitzchak Schwartz**

*"Hashem will return you to Egypt in ships, on the road of which I said to you, 'You shall never again see,' and there you will be put up for sale as slaves and maidservants to your enemies, but there will be no buyer." (28:68)*

This verse appears to violate the well-known custom not to conclude a section of the Torah reading on a negative note. Rav Tzadok HaKohen (Pri Tzaddik, Ki Savo 16) points out that, in fact, this is not an exception to the rule. The Zohar (vol. 2, 64b) interprets this verse in a remarkable way:

“These are words of promise, comfort, and consolation. They allude to the end of days as prophesied: ‘As was in the days of your leaving Egypt, I will once again show you wonders, when Hashem will once again do miracles and wonders for the Jewish people as when they left Egypt’ (Michah 7:15). Once again, in the end of days, gentiles will attempt to rid the world of Jews by putting them on ships and attempt to sink them at sea. However, Hashem will turn things around and drown our enemies in the sea as He did to Egypt. There will be tremendous rejoicing, and demonstration of Hashem’s strength more than there ever was since the beginning of time. After all this, the Jewish people will think back to the times when they were sold into slavery to their enemies, but it was not so, as the verse states, there was no buyer!”

## **APPRECIATING BLESSINGS**

### **Rabbi Shlomo Ressler**

*“G-d did not give you a heart to know, eyes to see, and ears to hear, until this day.” (29:3)*

Moshe reminds the Jews of miracles they witnessed in Egypt, the sea, and the desert. Moshe then follows with the statement that “G-d did not give you a heart to know, eyes to see, or ears to hear until this day” (29:3). What does this mean? The people obviously saw and heard the miracles and presumably understood what was happening.

Rabbi Mordechai Kaminetzky submits that Moshe explained to the nation that it is possible to be surrounded by blessings and miracles yet still not give them the attention and mindfulness they merit. To be truly blessed, we must internalize and appreciate all the blessings surrounding us.

## **REMEMBERING MIRACLES**

### **Lubavitcher Rebbe**

*“G-d did not give you a heart to know, eyes to see, and ears to hear, until this day.” (29:3)*

As Moshe told the Jewish people (in the preceding two verses), “You saw before your own eyes all that G-d did in Egypt to Pharaoh, to all his servants, and to his entire land, the great trials that you saw with your own eyes and those great signs and marvels.” Yet he goes on to tell them that it is only now, forty years later, that they have truly begun to “know,” “see,” and “hear” what they had seen back then.

This is because miracles are by definition beyond the normal order of nature. Since our hearts and minds are finite, it can take time for us to digest them, and surely to process them to the extent that they can affect our outlook on life and our behavior. This is why it is so important for us to constantly recall and celebrate the miracles of both the past and the present. We need to re-experience and re-evaluate G-d’s miracles in order to experience their significance ever deeper, uncovering new levels of gratitude and appreciation of G-d’s care for us and discovering new ways that their timeless message provides fresh relevance in our lives. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 37, pp. 153-158) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

## **KNOWING HEART**

### **Rebbe Nachman**

*“G-d did not give you a heart to know, eyes to see, and ears to hear, until this day.” (29:3)*

One must strive to attain a “knowing heart” - a heart that knows that whatever happens in the world comes directly from G-d. (See Likutey Moharan I, 154)

## **SPIRITUAL MATURITY**

### **Lubavitcher Rebbe**

*“G-d did not give you a heart to know, eyes to see, and ears to hear, until this day.” (29:3)*

Moshe said this almost forty years after G-d gave the Torah to the Jewish people. According to the sages, this teaches us that it takes time for students to internalize their teacher’s methodology and analytical approach to knowledge.

Only after observing how the teacher tackles subject after subject, challenge after challenge, will the teacher’s methods crystallize into a coherent methodology in the students’ minds. Once the students have acquired their teacher’s thinking process, they will be able to apply it to any new subject matter that presents itself.

Thus, Moshe meant that now that almost forty years had elapsed since the Jewish people had first been exposed to the Torah and its worldview - and they had observed G-d’s ways during all the intervening years - they were now “mature” enough to live their lives in full accordance with the Torah’s intentions.

Similarly, as the Baal Shem Tov said (Keter Shem Tov [ed. Kehot], addenda 127), we must cultivate the ability to discern G-d’s lessons for us in every event that we witness or experience. This enables us to mature spiritually, learning how to respond to life’s challenges and opportunities in the most effective, positive ways possible. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 34, pp. 164-166) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

## **COMPREHENDING THE WILL OF HASHEM**

### **Lubavitcher Rebbe**

*“And you shall keep the words of this covenant, so that you will succeed in all you do.” (29:8)*

The Hebrew word for “succeed” (*taskilu*) also means “comprehend.” Thus, this verse implies that by fulfilling G-d’s commandments, we will “comprehend all that we should do.”

There are many aspects of life in which we struggle to determine how to act in the most spiritually positive manner. By living in accordance with the Torah’s instructions, we become sensitive to G-d’s Will. This, in turn, aids us in comprehending how to act in accordance with G-d’s Will in the context of those areas of life not directly governed by specific commandments. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 14, p. 106) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

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