

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI AVI WEISS**

### Shabbat Forshpeis

**T**hree covenants (brit) are mentioned in the Torah, the covenant of the pieces (Genesis 15), the covenant of Sinai (Exodus 19), and the covenant of our portion, which was made just prior to our entry into Israel (Deuteronomy 29). Truth be told, they each contribute to the making of the nation of Israel.

The covenant of the pieces between G-d and Abraham established the family of Israel. It was nothing less than the planting of the seeds from which the Jewish people ultimately emerged. Abraham and Sarah were designated as the father and mother. From them, the children of Jacob were ultimately born. Soon after, we coalesced into a people hood.

The covenant of Sinai introduces a new element. As we became a people, it was crucial that we be governed by law. That law, given at Sinai, is the Torah. Its principles and precepts form a foundation which unites Jews, creating a sense of mission that we become a "a kingdom of priests and a holy people."

The covenant of our portion introduces a third critical component. It is not enough to be a people governed by law. Another crucial aspect is required for nationhood - a land. This element is addressed by the brit of our portion. Standing as we were, just days before entry into Israel, our portion begins with the words "When you come into the land," and concludes with the message of the brit. Not coincidentally, these three covenants, people, Torah, and land, comprise the basis of Jewish nationhood. It is in the words of Rav Kook a combination of the people of Israel, with the Torah of Israel, in the land of Israel.

Throughout the centuries, there have been those who have been bent on destroying the Jewish nation, by attacking one of these three pillars. Some like Amalek in Biblical times, or the Nazis in the modern era, have focused their venom on the Jewish people. Their goal was simply to annihilate us.

Others have directed their hatred against our Torah. A prime example is Christian persecution of Jews in what Raul Hilberg calls "fifteen hundred years of anti-Semitic activities." Their claim was that they had no intention to murder Jews. Rather, it was to kill those who rejected their G-d. Basically, they stated, we accept Jews, but only if they embrace Jesus. In the end, however, it became clear that their goal of

destroying our fundamental Torah beliefs was the equivalent of destroying the Jewish people.

Today another type of Jew hatred has emerged in the form of anti-Zionism. Truth be told, in the post-Holocaust era, it is simply not polite to directly target Jews or even their Torah. Hence, the attack against the Jewish land. In the end, however, a Jewish land is so fundamental to Judaism that any attempt to deny Jews their homeland is nothing less than an attempted destruction of the Jewish people. Simply put, anti-Zionism is equivalent to anti-Semitism.

The land of Israel, together with the people and Torah of Israel, are integral parts of our nation. To attack the Jewish land is intense anti-Semitism. This is the time for Jew and non-Jew to stand up and be counted. To be silent is to be complicit. All people of decency should proclaim "I am a Jew." © 2006 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.

**RABBI LEVI COOPER**

### What's in a Name?

**O**ur tradition sees names as more than mere functional labels, bestowed in order to call or refer to people. Biblical names are often accompanied by an explanation that reflects the recipients' appearance or deeds, or more significantly, their essence or destiny.

Thus Esau, who was born with a full head of hair, was given a name indicating his physical appearance (Genesis 25:25 and commentators). Moses's name reflected how the daughter of Pharaoh drew him from the Nile (Exodus 2:10). More meaningful are biblical names that include an element of foreshadowing. Noah's birth was accompanied by the aspiration that the newborn would provide comfort "from our work and from the toil of our hands, because of the ground which G-d cursed" (Genesis 5:29).

With this background we can understand the import of biblical name changes (B. Berachot 12b-13a and parallels). The first biblical hero to have his name changed is the father of our nation - Avraham - formally known as Avram. Our sages explain that originally his name denoted that he was the av (father) of his native country, Aram. His new title reflected the future of his progeny, as he was to become an av of many nations.

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The Talmud proposes that the name Avraham designates our forefather as the av of the entire world, perhaps reflecting the monotheism that Avraham bequeathed to society. In a similar vein, the matriarch Sara was originally known as Sarai (my princess), but altered to signal her greater role as a leader of humanity.

What happens to a defunct name - is it abolished entirely or merely relegated to secondary status? In the case of Avraham, the biblical verse indicates that his previous name was superseded, as G-d directed: "Your name shall no longer be called Avram, and your name shall be Avraham" (Genesis 17:5). According to one sage this verse teaches a positive commandment to use the name Avraham instead of the former Avram. Another sage concludes that there is a prohibition on using the old name.

Indeed, once Avraham was granted his new name, scripture does not employ his previous moniker. The Talmud dismisses a verse that makes reference to Avraham's previous name - "You are G-d, the Lord who chose Avram" (Nehemiah 9:7) - explaining that the author is recounting what happened in days of old, rather than referring to our patriarch by his previous name.

Interestingly, almost all codifiers, enumerators of commandments and commentators make no mention of the restriction on Avram usage (cf. Rabbi Avraham Abele Gombiner, 17th century, Poland). One commentator explains that normative law does not accept this stricture, rather it follows the verse "Avram who is Avraham" (I Chronicles 1:27), which preserves the former name (Rabbi Ezekiel Landau, 18th century, Poland-Prague).

The stance against employing "Avram" is somewhat tempered when it comes to the use of "Sarai." In this case, our sages conclude that only Avraham was prohibited from using his wife's former name. Notwithstanding, as a general rule, new names supplant former monikers.

A notable exception is Ya'acov, who is promised a new name following his struggle against a mysterious assailant (Genesis 32:28). Indeed this pledge is realized, as G-d later directs: "Your name shall no longer be called Ya'acov, but Yisrael shall be your name" (Genesis 35:10).

The language of G-d's instruction to Ya'acov and His directive to Avraham are strikingly similar: "Your name shall no longer be called . . ." Yet Ya'acov's name change is never entirely complete; in numerous biblical passages his old moniker is used. Even G-d continued to call Ya'acov by his former name: "And G-d said to Yisrael, in a vision of the night, and he said: 'Ya'acov, Ya'acov. . .'" (Genesis 46:2). Thus the sages conclude that Ya'acov's original name was not entirely uprooted; it merely became secondary to his new name.

Given this data, it is unclear why Ya'acov's name change is not complete. Following the biblical paradigm, where a name is more than a mere moniker, we can suggest a greater significance to Ya'acov's partial name change. Ya'acov's name initially denoted the tight grip he had on Esau's ekev (heel) as the twins emerged from Rivka's womb (Genesis 25:26). Later, Esau sees a different significance in his brother's name. As Ya'acov cunningly acquires the birthright and later the blessings from Yitzhak, Esau cries out: "Is he not rightly named Ya'acov, for he has tricked me - va'ya'akveni - these two times" (Genesis 27:36), using the Hebrew word with the same root as his brother's name.

After he flees the wrath of his brother, Ya'acov is outmaneuvered by his father-in-law, Laban, as he wakes after his wedding with an unexpected bride (Genesis 29:25). His years spent with Laban are marked by dubious business arrangements and cunning plans, as both Ya'acov and his father-in-law seek the upper hand.

Later in his life, Ya'acov is tricked by his sons, who present the blood-stained colored coat of his beloved Joseph. As the brothers design, Ya'acov reaches his own tragic conclusion: "A horrible beast has devoured him; Joseph has surely been torn to pieces" (Genesis 37:33). Finally, towards the end of his life, Ya'acov is forced to endure the maneuverings of Joseph, who conspires to bring the family to Egypt.

Ya'acov's scheming as he jostles with his brother, his wheelinG-dealing with Laban and the troubles he bears at the hands of his children can be contrasted with the name he is granted - Yisrael, which contains both G-d's name and the word yashar, upright. Ya'acov's destiny is to be a paradigm of honesty - "Grant truth to Ya'acov" (Micah 7:20). Alas, the journey to this ideal is fraught with machinations which must be surmounted.

This may reflect the voyage of our people as we seek our destiny on the world stage. Our challenge as a nation remains overcoming wily characteristics associated with the name Ya'acov and striving to be a people distinguished by uprightness and morality before G-d. Indeed, the prophet foretells of the pride of Ya'acov being restored as the pride of Yisrael (Nahum 2:3).

Perhaps this ideal is within arm's reach of our generation, as a glimmer of hope may be gleaned from the name chosen for our modern state: Yisrael. © 2006 Rabbi L Cooper. Rabbi Levi Cooper is Director of Advanced Programs at Pardes. His column appears weekly in the Jerusalem Post "Upfront" Magazine. Each column analyses a passage from the first tractate, of the Talmud, Brachot, citing classic commentators and adding an innovative perspective to these timeless texts.

**RABBI DOV KRAMER**

## Taking a Closer Look

**T**he Torah lists the curses (and by extension, the blessings) read by Mt. Grizim and Mt. Aival (Devarim 27:15-26). Besides the "general" curse placed upon anyone that does not fulfill the Torah, there are 11 specific curses that Moshe commanded be called out, with the entire nation affirming their acceptance of them. Rashi tells us that these 11 correspond to 11 of the 12 Tribes. Shimon, however, was not included in having a designated curse "because he (Moshe) didn't have it in his heart to bless [the Tribe of Shimon] before he died when he blessed the other tribes (33:1-26), therefore he did not wish to curse [them]."

The implication is that there really was a 12th curse to be read, but in order to somewhat compensate for not blessing them (a few days later) he withheld it. Which raises the question of what the curse was that he would have added but didn't. It also seems a bit awkward that there was a potential sin that would have received an extra warning (by cursing anyone that transgresses it) but was left off because he knew he was not going to bless Shimon.

Before attempting to answer these questions, I would like to take a little detour. Several years ago, Rabbi Mordecai Kornfeld wrote an article (<http://dafyomi.shemayisrael.co.il/parsha/archives/ki-tavo1.htm>) attempting to connect each curse with a specific tribe. Since Shimon was skipped, he matched the other Tribes in the order they were mentioned (27:12-13) with the curses in the order they were given. In order to do so, he gave 3 possible connections between a tribe and its curse. The curse was designated for the tribe either to show that it could not be attributed to them, because they were outstanding in that respect, or because they were more susceptible to sinning in that manner and needed a more direct warning. Rabbi Kornfeld, who thanked Rav Gedaliah Press for helping in fill in some gaps, based his piece on two others who had made these connections, the Pirchay Nisan and the Tchailes Mordecai. The Maskil LeDovid also specified which tribe corresponded to each curse and why.

Rabbi Kornfeld's starting point was the connection the Talmud (Shabbos 55b) makes between Reuvain, the 6th tribe mentioned (besides Shimon) and

the 6th curse. In order to show that Reuvain never had relations with Bilhah, one of his father's wives, Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar said, "is it possible that his descendants will stand on Mt. Aival and say 'cursed is anyone that lies with his father's wife' when he had committed this sin?" The very fact that they were associated (even as participants in accepting this curse) exonerated Reuvain, showing that he must not have done something that would bring upon him (and therefore on them) a curse.

Although I found the attempt to connect all of the tribes to their specific curse commendable, there were certain aspects I am uncomfortable with. Not just at some of the tenuous connections made, but with the premise that any connection at all is enough to warrant being associated with the corresponding curse. If we are basing these connections on the one the Talmud made, then they should all be consistent, with the curse indicating that something that was suspected must not be true.

For example, the connection between Levi and the curse befalling an idol worshipper was said to be their not having sinned by the golden calf. Since they were "outstanding" in this regard, they corresponded to this curse. I would suggest that the other tribes didn't believe that no one from the entire tribe of Levi had sinned. Perhaps their zealotry (stepping forward to punish those who had sinned) was really an attempt to overcome the very same weakness, not that they were so far removed from the sin. By associating the Tribe of Levi with the curse against anyone who worships idols, any suspicion that they secretly committed the same sin was removed.

Besides retaining consistency with the connection between Reuvain and their corresponding curse, we no longer need to use the blessing part of the equation. As Rabbi Kornfeld points out, according to his hypothesis many of the connections are not between the tribes and the curses, but with the blessings. Levi would correspond to the blessing upon those that do not worship idols, not the curse upon those that do. However, Rashi's wording is that Moshe didn't want a "curse" associated with Shimon; according to Rabbi Kornfeld's approach (and he Maskil LeDovid's) they could just as easily have been associated with a blessing instead.

The question is whether we can really find a connection between each tribe and the corresponding curse in a way that exonerates them, removing a pre-existing suspicion, rather than relying on additional criteria for making the connection. I will try to, but admit that some of them are no less tenuous a connection than already suggested. My main point here is that I think the connections have to consistently show that something previously suspected must not be true. Some of these associations are based on the ones that

the Maskil LeDovid and Rabbi Kornfeld made, others are not.

Yehudah would correspond to the curse against belittling parents. Perhaps this is because he was primary in the movement to get rid of Yosef, and he could therefore be accused of being lacking in his respect for his father. The Maskil LeDovid points out that Yehudah was punished for making his father "recognize" Yosef's special coat by Tamar making him "recognize" his cloak, staff and ring (see Sotah 10b), which may lead us to believe that he didn't speak properly to his father. He adds that Yehudah's first wife was the daughter of a "Canaanite" (see Beraishis 38:2), and even though our sages tell us that it means he was a "merchant," some might have thought it meant literally a descendant of the nation that Yehudah's parents had been so adamant that they not marry. Agreeing to this curse showed that Yehudah could not have been deficient in this area.

Yisachar corresponds to one who infringes on his neighbor's property. He was conceived when Rachel traded her allotted time with Yaakov for Reuvain's flowers. Was he the result of his mother infringing upon what really belonged to Rachel? Similarly, the head of Yisachar brought his offering on the second day of the Mishkan's dedication (see Rashi on Bamidbar 7:19), and Reuvain complained that they should have gone before him. Did they infringe upon what was really Reuvain's? This association shows otherwise.

Yosef corresponds to the curse against misleading the blind. During his time as Viceroy in Egypt, he appeared antagonistic towards his brothers before telling them who he really was. Was he guilty of misleading them for not revealing his identity right away? Apparently not.

Binyamin corresponds to mistreating those less fortunate (i.e. an orphan, widow or convert). The Pirchay Nisan connects them by pointing out that he was an orphan himself, and would be protected by this curse/blessing. According to Rabbi Kornfeld's criteria, the connection could have been the need for the leaders that would come from Binyamin, such as Shaul and Mordecai, to treat all people under their rule fairly. However, limited by my criteria, I have (so far) only thought of admittedly weak possibilities. Perhaps the comparison made by Yaakov in his blessing of Binyamin to a "wolf that rips apart" led others to believe that he took advantage of the weak, or perhaps a comparison was made to his brother Yosef, who befriended the children of Bilhah and Zilpah (see Rashi on Beraishis 37:2). Binyamin not doing the same (if he didn't) could have been taken to mean that he didn't care as much as Yosef for those in a weaker position. (Better suggestions for this, or anything else, are always welcome at dkramer@compuserve.com.)

Gad corresponds to the curse on committing bestiality. This may have stemmed from the significance they placed on their animals, such as when they mentioned building their shelters before building homes for their families (see Rashi on Bamidbar 32:16).

Asher corresponds to incestuous relationships between siblings. Rashi (Devarim 33:24) tells us that the daughters of the Tribe of Asher were very attractive, and the Maskil LeDovid says that it was not evident if they had ever been with someone before. Therefore, others may have suspected that the men of Asher were more susceptible to this type of relationship, especially since, when their sisters got married, their husbands wouldn't know if anything had occurred. This curse, directed at Asher, proved that these suspicions were unfounded.

Zevulun corresponded to having a relationship with the mother-in-law. Zevulun's livelihood was at sea (see Beraishis 49:13), so could not be learned or practiced while land-locked in the desert or at the border of the Promised Land. This may have led to their being home more, and since there is a fear of a relationship developing between a husband and his mother-in-law (see Bava Basra 98b), others may have suspected that this was occurring among the people of Zevulun. (For the last two suggested suspicions, bear in mind that our sages tell us that the nation cried because relationships within members of the family became prohibited, see Rashi on Bamidbar 11:10.)

Dan corresponded to secretly smiting someone, which Rashi explains to refer to slander and gossip. The Maskil LeDovid points out that Dan was the oldest of the children of Yaakov from the maidservants, and was the one that told Yosef that they were being mistreated by Leah's children. Yaakov compared Dan to a snake (Beraishis 49:17) and since the snake is the symbol of gossip and slander, it might have been thought that this was a character trait of the tribe, until this curse showed otherwise.

Naftali corresponds to accepting bribes to testify against others. The Abarbanel uses the wording of the blessings of both Yaakov and Moshe to show that they had an inclination towards the nicer things in life. It can therefore be suggested that whenever they testified in court their integrity might have questioned out of a fear that they would easily take a bribe in order to afford to live in luxury.

The bottom line I am suggesting is that each curse corresponded to its respective tribe specifically to dispel a misconception. Since they agreed to the contents of the curse, it must not apply to them. If so, Shimon being excluded was not beneficial to them, but detrimental, as no rumors about them were dispelled. Rather than Moshe leaving out a 12th curse to compensate for not blessing them, it is possible that he left it out for precisely the same reason that he didn't

bless them - because of what they had done in Shittim (see Rashi on Devarim 33:7).

Since all of the Torah was included in the curse against those that do not fulfill the Torah, the main reason to specify the first 11 was to counter certain misperceptions about each tribe. Because Moshe felt this was unwarranted for Shimon, and/or not applicable, he only listed these 11. © 2006 Rabbi D. Kramer

### MACHON ZOMET

## Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

**T**his week's Torah portion marks the end of Moshe's long sermon about the mitzvot, which began in the portion of Va'etchanan (Devarim 5:1) and which continues through the recent portions. Moshe lists many commandments. The last two, which appear in the beginning of this week's portion, are "the recitation for the bikurim" (26:1-11) and "confession about the maaser" (26:12-15). Why did Moshe choose to end his sermon with these two mitzvot?

It is easy to see similarities between these two mitzvot. They both involve parts of the harvest which must be dedicated for a special purpose: The bikurim are the first fruits, which are given to G-d, and the maaser must be given to the poor and the destitute. In both cases, there is also a specific requirement to declare that the mitzva has been fully observed. Bikurim: "And now behold I have brought the first fruits of the land which you gave to me, G-d" [26:10]. Maaser: "I have removed the holy material from the house... I listened to the voice of my G-d, I did everything you commanded me to do." [26:13-14].

However, there is a conspicuous difference between the two mitzvot. The declaration about the bikurim consists of giving thanks to G-d, since "he gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey" [26:9], and it follows that it is right to thank Him for "the first fruits of the land, which you gave to me." The goal of this mitzva is explicit: "And you shall be happy with all the good that your G-d has given to you and to your house" [26:11]. The passage of the confession about the maaser is different- it includes a prayer for the future. "Look down from your holy residence, from heaven, and bless your nation Yisrael, and the land which you gave us, as you promised our fathers, a land flowing with milk and honey." [26:15].

Evidently each mitzva represents a different aspect of the entrance into Eretz Yisrael. In the passage of the bikurim, a man summarizes the history of the nation of Yisrael, starting with leaving the land and leading up to when he is privileged to bring an offering from his fruits to the place which will be chosen by G-d. He is filled with feelings of thankfulness to G-d, keeping in mind Moshe's warning about the mitzvot at the beginning of the sermon: "And you shall remember your G-d, for He is the one who gives you strength to

become wealthy" [8:18]. From this point of view, the entrance into the land is the end of a long journey, and now that Bnei Yisrael have reached peace and a heritage, the man can look back with satisfaction, thanking G-d for the past and beginning to live a natural life as a nation.

But at this point the passage of the maaser appears, and this changes the point of view. The entrance into the land is not simply the end of a process, it is also a new beginning-to fulfill the mitzvot, which, as is emphasized throughout the book of Devarim, can best be performed in Eretz Yisrael. The satisfaction gained from the good harvest not only obligates a man to thank G-d, it also requires him to share his good fortune with others who do not have such benefits. Living a natural life in the land not only obligates a person to acknowledge the good that G-d has done, it also forces him to live a life based on moral ideals. Therefore in this second passage there is an emphasis on the future, together with a prayer for G-d's continued blessing.

### RABBI ZVI MILLER

## Parsha Insights

**D**uring the era of the Temple, we observed the Mitzvah of Bikorim. That is, we fulfilled the precept to bring the first fruits of the harvest to the Temple and to recite a declaration of praise to HaShem. This sweeping expression of gratitude includes the goodness that HaShem bestowed on the Nation of Israel from the inception of our people, to the miraculous deliverance from Egypt, and up to the sweet fruits that grew in our orchard.

The essence of this Mitzvah is the recognition and appreciation of HaShem's goodly blessings. In addition, concerning our performance of this ceremony the Torah states (Devarim 26:11): You shall rejoice with all the goodness that HaShem, your G-d has given you. The import of this verse is that the expression of thanks must be read at a time of happiness.

In light of this, the Torah reveals a vital aspect of gratitude. Not only is it proper to thank our benefactor, even more, we must show him that his kindness has awakened great happiness in our hearts. A true sense of appreciation consists of feelings of gratitude as well as joy for the kindness we have received. Then we express our joyous gratitude to the one who has offered us his favor.

Similarly, we find the verse (Devarim 2:7): HaShem, your G-d has blessed you in all of your endeavors. Meaning, if we do not appreciate the kindness that HaShem showers upon us, we might consider ourselves lacking and unfortunate. Rather, we must recognize the wonderful blessings that HaShem bestows upon us so that we perceive that we are fortunate.

Every person, regardless of his status, is the recipient of countless blessings from HaShem. When we reflect on His goodness, we will become aware that HaShem loves us infinitely and eternally. The more we contemplate on his wonderful kindness, the happier we will be.

May we realize the unabated compassion that HaShem showers upon us every second of our existence. Then our prayers will be deep expressions of joyous thanks to our merciful Creator. (Based on Da as Torah of Rav Yerucham HaLevi) TODAY S IMPLEMENT: Contemplate on the intellect that HaShem has granted to you, feel happy for this gift and then thank Him for granting you an intelligent soul.

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### RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

## Haftorah

**T**his week's haftorah brings us to the concluding dimensions of Hashem's encompassing efforts to comfort the Jewish people. The prophet Yeshaya shares with us a glimpse of the glorious era of Mashiach and reveals Hashem's unbelievable sensitivity and concern for His chosen nation. Yeshaya begins, "Rise and project your light because the radiance of Hashem shines upon you." (60:1) The prophet's message is that in the days of Mashiach the Jewish people will serve as a reflection of Hashem's light unto the nations of the world. Yeshaya continues, "Lift your eyes and see them coming; your sons coming from afar and your daughters accompanied by the kings of the world." (60:3-5) The cloud of darkness and confusion which continuously plagues society will finally be lifted and the entire world will flow into Jerusalem in streams to discover the truths of Hashem and His Torah. Instead of the all too familiar scene of the Jewish people flowing out of their homeland into exile, a new flow will occur. Not only will our oppressors permit us to return to Israel, they will even personally escort us back to our homeland. And to complete this picture, nations will display sincere interest in the Jewish people's traditions and will flock to our homeland to discover our Jewish values and systems. The influx will be so overwhelming that we will wonder in amazement if we are merely imagining these sights, or if, in truth, history has made a full turnabout.

The prophet continues, "All the choice sheep of Kedar will gather to you.... to be offered on My altar and accepted with desire." (60: 7) The nations of the world will appreciate in sincerity the value of service to Hashem through sacrifice and will continuously offer Him an abundance of sacrifices. In place of their cruel campaign for thousands of years to destroy and never allow the reconstruction of the Bais Hamikdash they will finally comprehend spiritual values and utilize the Bais Hamikdash to capacity. The prophet adds, "And foreign nations will build your walls and their kings will

contribute the funds." (60:10) Even the demolished walls of Israel's cities will be rebuilt by her oppressors, nations who previously acted so harshly toward the Jewish people.

Hashem explains the reason for this unexpected reversal and says, "Because in My time of anger I smote you and in My time of desire for you, I will show you My compassion." (60:10) The Metzudos Dovid explains this passage in the following manner. Needless to say, the experiences of the Jewish people are unparalleled by any other nation. Their extent of shame, persecution and tragedy covers the pages of world history in awesome proportions. This is because they, and only they, are the direct subject of Hashem's disturbance and anger. Unlike the nations of the world who are generally ignored by Hashem the Jewish people are always in His direct focus. Hashem responds to our every turn and reprimands us accordingly with the constant severe beatings we suffer. But all of this is an outgrowth of His unconditional love for us and His determination to keep us on the right path. And when the moment arrives for Hashem to display His kindness to His people it will be done in these very same proportions. Being the direct subject of Hashem's concern and compassion Hashem will shower His love upon His people in a most encompassing way. Hashem pledges to reverse the unpleasant experiences of the Jewish people's past and replace them with a glorious future. He therefore commits Himself to undoing the darkness of our past with the indescribable brightness of our future.

The Jewish nation finds it quite difficult to forget the pain and shame of their exile and to this Hashem responds in a most magnificent way. Hashem informs them that their return from exile will be through none other than those very same nations who were responsible for the exile. They will personally escort the Jews back to their homeland with dignity and respect and will actually crave to be amongst those who are privileged to reside in the land of Israel. Regarding this, Yeshaya says, "And the sons of your past oppressors shall humbly walk to you and all of your previous scorners shall prostrate themselves before you." (60:14) And as we cited earlier, these very same nations and sovereigns who labored so diligently to tear down the walls of Israel will now personally rebuild them.

The prophet completes the picture and states in the name of Hashem, "In place of copper I will bring gold and in place of steel I will bring silver. I will convert your previous tax collectors into peaceful acquaintances and your oppressors into charitable associates." (60:17) Hashem's compassion for His people knows no bounds and demands that even their financial oppression must be rectified. Therefore in place of the oppressors' unwarranted tax collections from the Jewish people, these same oppressors will

offer the Jews an abundance of personal monetary gifts. All the stolen Jewish wealth will be graciously returned ten-fold and in addition these same collectors will generously contribute considerable financial resources to the Jewish people. (see Radak, Malbim, ad loc.)

The sum total of Hashem's restoration plan for the Jewish people is best described in the following words of the prophet. "In place of your previous status, forsaken and despised I shall establish you the majesty of the world, the joy for all generations." (60:15) Oh, if we could only see this now! © 2006 Rabbi D. Siegel & torah.org

#### BRIJNET/UNITED SYNAGOGUE - LONDON (O)

## Daf HaShavua

by Rabbi Stanley Coten, Ruislip Synagogue

**C**ars are an integral part of the 21st century. We rush around in top gear. Modern life wouldn't be the same without the car. An American once suggested that in the United States everyone is entitled 'to life, liberty and a car in which to pursue happiness'. We have taken things too much for granted, for example, the ability to quickly travel from place to place.

What is the Torah concept of thankfulness? Think of the word 'Jew'. The root is the name Yehudah, one of the twelve tribes of Israel which became one of the dominant tribes at the end of the First Temple Era. Hence, all Jews became referred to as Yehudim, though they were still a conglomerate of several tribes.

We are overwhelmed with indebtedness to G-d. There aren't enough megabytes to store the list of the kindness He bestows upon every single one of us in a single day. This is what the mitzvah of Bikurim encapsulates. It is this recognition of gratitude that encourages us to return to G-d the first and best of what He gave us.

Don't think it's insignificant to give some small gift of fruit to G-d. The midrash writes that the mitzvah of Bikurim justifies the creation of the world! The 19th century Chassidic leader, the Sfat Emet, explains the midrash as follows: "G-d is able to create the world in a way that everyone would clearly recognize the greatness of His kingdom. But G-d already has many worlds (in which that can be accomplished). Rather, G-d wants a testimony in the world that He created it, and that testimony justifies its entire creation, even if some exist who deny it." View it as a small shining light in a vast darkness.

This month, Ellul, is the month of introspection. Rosh Hashana, our day of judgement, will be here soon. Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev was looking out over his town square. Everywhere he saw people rushing. He called out to one man and asked, "What are you rushing for?" The man replied, "I'm running to make a living." Rabbi Levi Yitzchak then said, "What

makes you so sure that your livelihood is in front of you so that you have to rush and catch up with it? What if it is behind you? Maybe you should stop and let it catch up with you!"

The Rabbi's message was: Slow down, ponder more. Plan better according to our real objectives. In Ellul, I must ask myself: "Did I contribute to the purpose of creation? How can I personally reposition my direction in life, even in small ways, to be a better contributor?"

Ellul is also a time when G-d is particularly predisposed to listen to our prayers. We must grab the opportunity and become part of a very spectacular process of justifying creation through appreciating everything that exists and using it wisely. In this way, may we fully deserve a New Year full of blessings, both material and spiritual. © 2006 Produced by the Rabbinical Council of the United Synagogue - London (O) Editor Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis, emailed by Rafael Salasnik

#### RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

## Shabbat Shalom

**I**n this week's portion of Ki Tavo we find a surprising—but remarkably edifying—aspect of our nationhood. Just prior to the blessings and the curses heard from Mt. Eval and Mt. Gerizim, the Torah records the following words spoken by Moses, together with the Levites and Priests, to the nation: "Take heed and hear O Israel, this day you have become a nation ('am') unto the Lord your G-d." [Deut. 27:9]

What's so special about this day? Weren't they a nation before Moses divides the tribes, six to the blessings of Mt. Gerizim and six to the curses of Mt. Eval? What about the festival of Pesach, when we were freed from Egyptian domination, or the festival of Shevuot, when we received our Constitution from G-d? What is the significance of this vent between the mountains, forty years after, that qualifies it to have become the determining moment of our achievement of nationhood?

After a long, long journey in the desert, and a long, long journey through the Five Books of the Torah, we finally come to the point where we're about to walk through 'customs'; Ki Tavo gives us a step-by-step description of the transition between the former desert way of life and the new Israel way of life: "And it shall be on that day when you shall pass over the Jordan... that you shall set up great stones and...you shall write upon them all the words of this Torah... in mount Eval... And there shall you build an altar to the Lord your G-d...And you shall offer peace offerings..and you shall rejoice before the Lord your G-d." [Deut. 27:2-7]

That these commands are related to the subsequent statement that we've already quoted—"...this day you have become a nation..."—can be seen from the fact that after the peace offerings were to be brought on the altar, the people are commanded to

'rejoice before the Lord your G-d' (ve-samahta lifnai HaShem Elokecha). Why, the reader initially asks, are the people 'rejoicing before the Lord,' an expression generally associated with the three festivals when the nation goes up to Jerusalem to sacrifice offerings at the Temple, where they experience the true meaning of 'joy'? Is the Torah alluding to a festival which will exist in the future but which is never mentioned in the Torah? (In fact, when the Talmud wants to teach that the only true joy a person can know is from the 'meat' of sacrifices offered at the Temple, R. Yehuda ben Betayra cites our verse, "And you shall offer peace offerings, and shall eat, and you shall rejoice before the Lord your G-d," as a prooftext. [B.T. Pesahim 109a])

Thus the subsequent verse regarding our 'becoming a nation' may very well be linked to the joy of the people who will be bringing these peace offerings when they cross over the Jordan. Evidently, the Torah is revealing a special holiday, the celebration of our birth as a nation with all the concomitant joy that such a festival deserves. But what happened at this point that suddenly turned us into a nation?

Rav Shlomo Goren z"l, former Chief Rabbi of the I.D.F. and then of the State of Israel, alerts us to in a Talmudic passage concerning the confrontation between Joshua and Akhan which points out the answer. Akhan was a soldier from the tribe of Judah whose misappropriation of gold and silver from the captured peoples, in direct violation of G-d's command that all booty be sanctified and dare not be held by private hands, initially brought about defeat and despair among the Israelites in their move to settle the land. [B.T. Sanhedrin 43b]. All of Israel had to share in the punishment meted out to Akhan.

After the Sages find in the words of the text [Joshua 7:20] proof that this was not the first time Akhan had appropriated gold for himself, they ponder why the nation hadn't suffered earlier as a result of Akhan's thefts. R. Yohanan explains that the nation wasn't punished for the hidden sins of other people until they actually crossed over the Jordan and entered the land. Rashi further explains that what transpired at the Jordan constitutes 'a new dimension in the existential nature of the Jewish people'. "They heard and accepted upon themselves that they became responsible for each other on Mt. Gerizim and Mt. Eval" [Rashi, B.T. Sanhedrin 43b]

Indeed, this concept is made graphically evident by an arbitrary division of the twelve tribes, six receiving the blessings and six the curses. Every tribal member becomes intimately bound up with the destiny of his sibling from another tribe—because we are each co-signers for every other child of Israel. "All of Israel is responsible (a co-signer) for each other—kol Yisrael arevim zeh ba-zeh."

This notion of responsibility (aravut) can be seen from the 'great stones' upon which the people

were commanded to write the Torah when they crossed the Jordan. Indeed, the word "stones" (avanim) is a keyword in this passage, mentioned no less than five times in this rather concise section. "Even" (stone) signifies "av" (father) and "ben" (son), parent and children (avanim -- av-banim). Indeed the relationship between parents towards children and children towards parents is essentially a relationship of responsibility. And throughout the generations this is what we have—the sons of one generation become the fathers of the next, the subsequent generations benefiting from and responsible to their forbears with a Divine charge to continue the golden chain of Jewish history by bequeathing the tradition to the future progeny.

And this responsibility is not only to past and future; it is to contemporary Jews as well! Indeed, a fundamental halakhic principle regarding specific Torah commandments magnificently reveals the inherent closeness merging every Jew with his sibling into an almost unified identity. Jewish law treats the recitation of a blessing in vain with great severity, some legalists even considering it to be an infraction of the Decalogue commandment "Thou shalt not take the name of thy Lord in vain." Nevertheless, the law is that although an individual may have already recited the Sabbath or Festival evening Kiddush for himself and his family, he may repeat the blessing for another Jew who has not yet heard it and is incapable of reciting it for himself. "Af al pi she-yatza, motzi"—even though he has fulfilled his obligation, he may recite the blessing another. And the commentators explain that if my friend has not performed the commandment of sanctifying the holy day (kiddush), something is lacking in my sanctification. After all, every Jew is responsible for his fellow!

This is precisely how Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch understands the last of the curses in our portion: "Cursed be he who does not maintain all the words of this law" [Deut. 27:26] This great sage of the modern era points that the grammatical structure of the word 'yakim' (fulfill) is in the 'hif'il' (causative) form, which would then mean that not only is a person required to keep the Torah himself, but he must see to do it that others keep it as well. According to this last interpretation, a Jew who is only concerned about the Sabbath traffic on Bar-Ilan Road disturbing his prayers, but is totally unconcerned as to why the people are traveling in cars in the first place, as to why so many Israelis have become alienated from Judaism, and does nothing to bring them back to the beauty of the tradition, is not fulfilling the spirit of our Torah or of our nation. And only when we realize that "arev" also means "sweet", and only when every Jew is truly sweet to every other Jew—whatever the nature of his religious commitment, that we will begin to truly take responsibility for each other and become worthy of our nationhood. © 1997 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin