**S.A.L.T. – PARASHAT EIKEV**

**By Rav David Silverberg**

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**IN LOVING MEMORY OF**

**Jeffrey Paul Friedman**

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**לע"נ**

**יהודה פנחס בן הרב שרגא פייוועל**

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Motzaei Shabbat

Toward the beginning of Parashat Eikev (7:17-18), Moshe addresses those among *Benei Yisrael* who doubted the nation’s ability to defeat the formidable armies of Canaan: “If you say in your heart, ‘These peoples are more numerous than me – how can I vanquish them?’ – do not be afraid of them; remember what the Lord your God did to Pharaoh and to all of Egypt.”

The Chida, in his [*Penei David*](http://hebrewbooks.org/pdfpager.aspx?req=40237&st=&pgnum=309), observes that Moshe here uses the term “*levavekha*,” rather than the simpler term “*libekha*,” in reference to the people’s “heart.” The difference between these two words, the Chida writes, can be determined from Rashi’s comments earlier in Sefer Devarim (6:5), in explaining the command to love the Almighty “*be-khol levavekha*” – “with all your heart.” Based on the Gemara, Rashi writes that this command requires us to love the Almighty “with both you inclinations” – that is, with both our positive inclination and our negative inclination. “*Levavekha*,” as opposed to “*libekha*,” connotes the human being’s full range of emotions and natural tendencies, both good and bad. Whereas “*libekha*” refers to a state of unequivocal commitment and exclusive focus, “*levavekha*” denotes conflict, tension and struggle between different inclinations and drives.

Returning to our verse in Parashat Eikev, the Chida explains that the concern of “*eikha ukhal le-horisham*,” that *Benei Yisrael* might be unable to overcome the powerful Canaanite nations, could have arisen from both the negative and positive areas in the people’s hearts. On the one hand, this fear could have resulted from a deficiency in faith, as occurred at the time of the sin of the spies. On the other hand, the people may have understandably feared that the wrongs they committed during their travels through the wilderness may have rendered them unworthy of defeating the nations of Canaan. Such a concern may have thus reflected not a lack of faith, but an honest and keen recognition of the gravity and consequences of sin, and genuine fear of Heaven. Moshe therefore assures the people that regardless of the cause of their fears, they can and must trust in God’s explicit promise to lead them to resounding victory over the nations of Canaan.

Unlike the battle to conquer *Eretz Yisrael*, most undertakings do not come with God’s explicit guarantee of success. But with regard to them, too, we often find ourselves hesitant or even fearful of ambitious goals and undertakings. The Chida’s insightful remarks remind us of the need to carefully examine the origin and source of our hesitations and fears. Sometimes, they are the product of the *yetzer tov*, of a mature and responsible recognition of our own limits and of pragmatic constraints. On other occasions, however, our reluctance to take on ambitious goals originates from our *yetzer ha’ra*, from vices such as laziness or selfishness. We must carefully analyze our “*levav*,” the conflicting aspects of our personalities, our positive and negative tendencies and inclinations, to determine whether our reluctance is justified or something we ought to try to overcome.

Sunday

In Parashat Eikev, Moshe tells *Benei Yisrael* of the great qualities of the Land of Israel, contrasting the conditions they will soon enjoy after crossing into the land with the harsh conditions of the wilderness they had just traversed. Moshe makes reference in this context to the presence of iron and copper: “…a land whose stones are iron, and from whose mountains you shall hew copper” (8:9). The Ramban explains that Moshe informed the people of the availability of these resources in *Eretz Yisrael* “which are a vital need for the residents of the land.” Moshe mentioned iron and copper because of their particular importance, emphasizing that just as God miraculously provided the people with their needs in the wilderness, He was now bringing them to a place that can naturally sustain them and provide them with what they need.

The Ramban then cites the preceding phrase in this verse – “*lo techsar kol bah*” (“it is not lacking anything”) – and comments, “[the lack of] resources of silver and gold is not a deficiency in the land.” It appears that the Ramban here implicitly addresses the question of how Moshe could claim that the land lacks “nothing,” when it does not contain precious metals like silver and gold. The answer to this question, the Ramban seems to be saying, is that Moshe speaks of resources that are needed for living, and not luxuries. He speaks in praise of *Eretz Yisrael* for containing everything that serves “a vital need for the residents of the land,” despite the fact that it does not necessarily offer all amenities that people crave.

The lesson that emerges from the Ramban’s comments (as noted by Rav Shmuel Alter in [*Likutei Batar Likutei*](http://hebrewbooks.org/pdfpager.aspx?req=4119&st=&pgnum=76)) is that we need to learn to distinguish between necessity and luxury. The Ramban emphasizes that *Eretz Yisrael* is praised for its properties that offered *Benei Yisrael* everything they needed, even though they did not offer everything *Benei Yisrael* would have wanted. And this observation made about *Eretz Yisrael* can be made about life generally. We should be grateful and able to “praise” our lives when we have what we need, even if we do not have everything we want. Just as *Eretz Yisrael* is described as a land that “lacks nothing,” even though it lacked luxuries, our lives, too, can be joyously celebrated for “lacking nothing” even when we still have many wishes unfulfilled.

Monday

After reassuring *Benei Yisrael* that God would lead them to victory over the nations of Canaan, Moshe warned them to destroy the Canaanites’ idolatrous articles, and admonishes, “*lo tavi to’eiva el beitekha*” – they should not bring objects of pagan worship into their homes (7:26).

*Chazal* interpreted this prohibition both in its literal sense, and as a broader prohibition. On the one hand, the Mishna in Masekhet Avoda Zara (21a) establishes that it is forbidden to lease one’s home as a residence for a pagan, as this would result in objects of idolatrous worship being brought into his home, in violation of “*lo tavi to’eiva el beitekha*.” This clearly reflects the literal meaning of this prohibition, which forbids allowing idols into one’s home. Additionally, however, the Gemara rules in Masekhet Pesachim (48a) that one violates this prohibition by deriving benefit from an object of pagan worship. The example given is an *asheira*, a type of tree which was worshipped by an ancient pagan cult. If one uses the wood for his personal benefit, the Gemara teaches, he transgresses the prohibition of “*lo tavi to’eiva el beitekha.*”

The *Avnei Neizer* (O.C. 375) explains that the broader interpretation of this law flows naturally from the literal meaning. The Torah forbids bringing an object of pagan worship into one’s home, and *Chazal* understood that deriving direct, personal benefit from an idol is no different from bringing it into one’s home. By directly benefitting from the idol, one essentially brings it into his life, and, in a sense, even into his very being. Therefore, the prohibition against benefiting from an idol is a natural extension of the prohibition against bringing it into one’s home.

On this basis, the *Avnei Neizer* suggests explaining the view of the Ran in Masekhet Pesachim. The Gemara (Pesachim 28b) cites the view of Rabbi Shimon, who appears to maintain that there is no Biblical prohibition against benefiting from *chametz* on Erev Pesach. Whereas Rabbi Yehuda rules that all the *chametz* prohibitions take effect already in the afternoon of Erev Pesach, Rabbi Shimon – according to the straightforward reading of the Gemara – rules that no Torah prohibition applies before the actual onset of Pesach. The Ran, however, advances a different reading of the Gemara, according to which Rabbi Shimon concedes that the Torah forbids eating and deriving benefit from *chametz* in the afternoon of Erev Pesach, but he maintains that one who does so is not liable for transgressing a *mitzvat lo ta’aseh* (a Biblical prohibition). It appears that according to the Ran’s understanding of this view, there is an affirmative command to abstain from *chametz* already on Erev Pesach, but the Biblical prohibitions against eating and deriving benefit from *chametz* do not take effect until the evening, when Pesach begins. The question naturally arises as to where the Torah issues such an affirmative command. If the Torah’s prohibition against eating and benefiting from *chametz* do not apply on Erev Pesach, then on what basis does the Ran say that there is nevertheless a Biblical command to abstain from *chametz* at this time?

The *Avnei Neizer* explains that this conclusion stems from the command of “*tashbitu se’or mi-bateikhem*,” which obligates us to rid our homes of *chametz* already by the afternoon of Erev Pesach. If the Torah requires banishing *chametz* from our homes, the *Avnei Neizer* reasons, then it naturally extends to all forms of personal benefit. As in the case of objects of pagan worship, a requirement to ban *chametz* from the home *ipso facto* translates into a ban against personal benefit, whereby one brings the *chametz* into his life and into his being.

Tuesday

The Torah in Parashat Eikev (8:10) introduces the *mitzva* of *birkat ha-mazon*, which requires reciting a blessing after eating: “You shall eat and be satiated, and you shall bless the Lord your God for the good land which He has given you.”

One of the intriguing *halakhot* relevant to *birkat ha-mazon* is the obligation of *zimun*. If three or more halakhic adults ate together, they are required to formally introduce *birkat ha-mazon* by one of them announcing an “invitation” to the others to bless the Almighty who has provided them with food. The other express their “consent,” and they then begin *birkat ha-mazon*. In the past, when *birkat ha-mazon* was recited in the framework of a *zimun*, one person would recite the blessing for the entire group, all of whom would listen silently and answer “*amen*” at the conclusion of each *berakha*.

An insightful explanation of the meaning and significance of *zimun* is suggested by Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch, in his Torah commentary (here in Parashat Eikev):

If nothing tends more to throw men back on to their own selves, and is liable to make each man a competitor to his neighbor than the struggle for food, then this fellowship in eating and in saying the Beracha should, so it seems to us, bring about freeing such feelings of selfish thoughts by calling to mind thoughts of the Goodness of God being directed to all at the same time simultaneously in the same way.

The recitation of *birkat ha-mazon*, as clearly emerges from the context in which it is presented here in Parashat Eikev, is intended to direct our attention to the fact that God provides us our needs and sustains us. Even though it appears that we obtain food and our other necessities through our hard work and ingenuity, we are bidden to “remember that it is He who gives you the strength to achieve wealth” (8:18). Moshe tells *Benei Yisrael* that once they leave the miraculous existence of the wilderness and begin tilling the land and partaking of the food they produce through their own efforts, they must attribute their successes to God, and remember that ultimately, only He provides their sustenance, and this message underlies the *birkat ha-mazon* obligation.

For this very reason, Rav Hirsch explains, *Chazal* established the *zimun*, whereby people join together to collectively express their gratitude to God as a single group and organic unity. The pursuit of a livelihood, by its very nature, entails fierce competition, as each individual must struggle for his or her piece of the collective pie, whether it’s in the form of a job, a promotion, a grant, or some other avenue of sustenance. By joining together to recite *birkat ha-mazon* as a group, we reinforce our awareness that God is the one who provides our needs, and He is fully capable of simultaneously and adequately caring for all of us. The institution of *zimun* reflects the notion that *birkat ha-mazon*, acknowledging God as the ultimate source of our livelihood, has the effect of bringing us together and helping us overcome the tension and friction that the difficult quest for sustenance so often creates. Once we recognize that it is God who provides our needs, and that His capabilities are unlimited, we naturally reduce the degree of competitiveness and fight which we bring with us to the workplace, as we fully trust that God is perfectly capable of feeding us all. This recognition reminds us that we should all be working together, not against one another, in our efforts to secure a livelihood, and in expressing our profound gratitude to the Almighty each day for all He gives us.

Wednesday

In Parashat Eikev, Moshe recalls the sin of the golden calf, in response to which he shattered the stone tablets which bore God’s engraving of the commandments. In the aftermath of this incident, as Moshe tells, God instructed him to carve a new set of tablets, and then to construct a special ark where they would be contained.

The Midrash (*Devarim Rabba*, 3:13), commenting on this episode, cites the verse in Kohelet (7:9), “*Al tevaheil be-ruchakha li-kh’os ki ka’as be-cheik kesilim yanuach*” – “Do not be frantic with your spirit to anger, because anger rests in the bosom of fools.” Surprisingly, the Midrash interprets this verse as a reference to Moshe’s angry reaction to the golden calf, when he threw down the tablets and shattered them on the ground. The Midrash relates that God said to Moshe after this incident, “Moshe, you are venting your anger on the tablets of the covenant. Do you want Me to vent My anger? You will see that the world could not survive for even one moment!”

Whereas other sources in *Chazal* clearly approve of Moshe’s shattering the tablets in response to the golden calf, the Midrash here appears to take a different position, condemning Moshe’s reaction as an inappropriate expression of anger.

It is worth noting the verse *Chazal* chose for expressing Moshe’s mistake. Kohelet warns of “*tevaheil be-ruchakha*” – reacting “frantically” with anger. One of the common causes of anger is the emotion of “*behala*” – panic and anxiety. Often, upon observing a grave breach, we panic, assuming that the situation necessitates a drastic response. In our frantic quest for a sufficiently drastic response, we explode in anger. King Shelomo thus teaches that anger is reserved for “*kesiliim*” – “fools.” Intelligent people have the wisdom, patience and discipline to remain calm and collected while trying to think of an appropriate response to the wrong that has been committed. It is only the fool who despairs from finding an effective response and thus resorts to an impulsive fit of raw fury.

In instructing us how to properly respond to wrongdoing, the Midrash draws our attention to the example set by the Almighty Himself. He witnesses wrongdoing at all time, and yet He keeps the world running. If He would react frantically, with raw “emotion,” rather than carefully calculating to determine the most effective response, then “the world could not survive for even one moment.” The very fact that the world survives and continues to run at every moment in itself teaches us that we cannot react viscerally to every wrongful act that we witness or that is directed against us. Rather than act with “*behala*,” frantically, like “fools,” we need to try as much as possible to remain in control of our emotions and carefully and rationally determine the most appropriate response.

Thursday

Yesterday, we noted a passage in the Midrash’s comments to Parashat Eikev (*Devarim Rabba*, 3:13) which, in contradistinction to other sources, seems to criticize Moshe for his decision to break the stone tablets in response to the sin of the golden calf. The Midrash cites the verse in Kohelet (7:9), “Do not be frantic with your spirit to anger, because anger rests in the bosom of fools,” and applies it to Moshe’s angry reaction to the people’s worship of a golden image. God, the Midrash tells, repudiated Moshe for venting his anger, whereupon Moshe asked, “So, what should I do?” The Midrash says that God then commanded Moshe to chisel a new set of tablets, upon which God would then engrave the commandments anew.

This final part of the exchange between God and Moshe conveys an important and meaningful lesson relevant to anger, namely, the willingness to make amends and try to repair the damage caused by an angry outburst. After hearing God’s condemnation of his anger, Moshe did not ignore the criticism, or even simply commit to reacting more calmly in the future. Rather, he turned to God to ask what he could do in the present to repair the damage which he caused. Too often, after an outburst of anger, we are unwilling to humble ourselves and make amends, and instead stubbornly insist that we acted correctly, even if in our heart-of-hearts we recognize the inappropriateness of our furious reaction. Unable to bring ourselves to acknowledge failure, and to admit to having lost our composure, we stand our ground and defend our exaggerated reaction. The Midrash here teaches us of the need to humbly recognize and apologize for our mistakes, for our occasional bouts of irrationality, and for our unwarranted expressions of anger, and to sincerely seek to repair whatever damage this caused, rather than stubbornly refusing to admit to failure.

(See Rav Moshe Taragin’s [“A Midrash for Eikev: Anger and its Remedy”](http://www.yutorah.org/sidebar/lecture.cfm/861755/rabbi-moshe-taragin/a-midrash-for-eikev-anger-and-its-remedy/))

Friday

In the beginning of Parashat Eikev, we read the blessings that *Benei Yisrael* are promised in reward for their observing God’s commands, including, “*lo yiheyeh vekha akar va-akara*” – that nobody will experience infertility (7:14). The Gemara in Masekhet Bekhorot (44b) comments that this promise refers not only to literal infertility, but also to the “infertility” of our prayers: “*she-lo tiheyeh tefilatekha akura*.” The simple meaning of the Gemara’s comment is that our prayers will achieve their desired outcome, and produce the result we wish, like parents who produce offspring.

The Gemara then notes the next word in this verse – “*u-vi’vhemtekha*” (“and among your animals”), promising that our livestock will likewise be fruitful and reproduce. To explain the relevance of this word to the promise of the success of our prayers, the Gemara comments that our prayers are answered when we conduct ourselves “like animals.” *Tosefot* explain this as a reference to humility, to the sense that we are unworthy and undeserving of God’s special blessing and grace. If we humbly see ourselves as “animals,” recognizing the insufficiency of our achievements in *avodat Hashem*, then we are promised that our prayers were not be “infertile.”

Rav Moshe Yechiel Epstein ([*Eish Dat*, p. 28](http://hebrewbooks.org/pdfpager.aspx?req=3221&st=&pgnum=26&hilite=)) suggested a deeper reading of the Gemara’s remark. Just as we are commanded to reproduce in the literal sense, by begetting offspring, we are likewise expected to “give birth” to ourselves in the form of constant growth. Throughout our lives, we are to strive to produce ourselves anew, to transform ourselves into different and better people. In this vein, Rav Epstein explains the phrase, “*she-lo tiheyeh tefilatekha akura*.” The goal of prayer is not only to produce the desired result, to obtain that which we pray for, but also to elevate ourselves through communion and communication with God. This transformative effect, the Gemara teaches us, can only occur if we “make ourselves like animals,” if we acknowledge the need for growth and improvement. If we feel content with our current spiritual standing, and deny the need for change, then change will not likely occur. We are therefore advised to be mindful of our flaws and shortcomings, to recognize that no matter how much we do and how much we have accomplished, we still far fall short of our potential, then our prayers and other religious endeavors will be “fertile” and “fruitful,” and achieve their ultimate goal of elevating us to higher levels and allowing us to constantly produce new selves, each and every day of our lives.

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