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**Rabbi Dovid Goldwasser Discusses The Proper Jewish Response Towards Growing Anti-Semitism**

**By Daniel Keren**



 Earlier this month, Hakhel in conjunction with the Torah Projects Commission of Agudath Israel of America, TorahAnytime.com and Chazaq sponsored a half-day Yarchei Kallah on the Independence Day legal holiday at the Agudath Israel of Madison in Flatbush for the many people in Brooklyn who were off work that day. Hakhel is a Flatbush-based organization dedicated to promoting Torah-true concept to members of our community and was offered to both men and women free of charge.

 The program began with a shiur (lecture) by Rabbi Dovid Goldwasser, internationally renowned Maggid Shiur and Rav of Congregation Bais Yitzchok who spoke on the topic of “Anti-Semitism: A Torah Perspective.”

 He noted that a person just needs to look around the world, even in places one would not expect to find it and we are discovering increasing incidents of terrible anti-Semitism.

**The Jews Must Dwell Badad (Alone)**

 Of course, Rabbi Goldwasser declared, we must protest these vicious attacks on us. But on the other hand, we realize that everything that happens is a lesson for Klal Yisroel (the Jewish nation.) Hashem [thru the prophecy of the non-Jew Bilaam] decreed that we the Jewish nation must dwell badad (alone), not to be reckoned among the [other] nations [of the world] (Bamidbar/Numbers 23:9)

 A Midrash declares that we should separate ourselves from the non-Jews and all their detestable things. We as Jews, Rabbi Goldwasser said, must put our trust only in Hashem and not in the militias or police and the good will of the non-Jewish governmental leaders. Pirkei Avos (2:3) warns us that these leaders only befriend us for their own advantages and in our time of need they cannot be found.

 A person has to be very careful to realize that there are many things that we can do to secure our own communities from outside attacks. The Melitzer Rebbe said that if Jews do not attack or embarrass other Jews, Hakodesh Baruch Hu would not give over to the goyim the ability to harm any Jew.

 When a person is trying to concentrate, often outside noise can be very disturbing. There was once a Rebbe who was thus unable to concentrate because a friend of his was visiting the house and was speaking very loudly to the Rebbetzin. The Rebbe tried repeated to politely ask the guest to lower her volume without success until he got angry. The woman was embarrassed and she left.

**An Unexpected Shidduch Suggestion**

 Not too long after, the Rebbe’s wife was nifteret (passed away). Someone who was not aware of what happened suggested to the Rebbe that perhaps he might marry a certain woman who happened to be the one who spoke too loudly when he was trying to concentrate on holy matters. The Rebbe surprisingly agreed in part because he realized that he had upset the woman by complaining that she was talking to loudly to his wife. By agreeing to meet with her and marry her, the Rebbe was trying to alleviate the previous embarrassment which he realize hurt not only himself and the woman, but also harmed the security of Klal Yisroel according to the opinion of the Melitzer Rebbe.

 Rabbi Goldwasser noted that around the world we have seen many disturbing incidents. Now we find politicians and government leaders saying negative comments about Israel. We have to understand that today when people say negative things about Israel they are really saying terrible things about you and me and all Jews.

 We have to be different from all of the nations of the world. One cannot believe for even one moment that any Jew can acculturate into the goyish society and truly be accepted by the non-Jews.

 Rabbi Goldwasser recalled that Rabbi Avigdor Miller, zt”l, taught us that there are certain sins that during the Second World War caused the punishment of the Churban (the Holocaust). A person has to understand that sometimes a fire breaks out. When asked about whether or not Holocaust studies should be taught in the schools (both public and religious), Rabbi Miller said it depends.

**Trading the Glory of Yerushalayim for the Pleasures of Berlin**

 If the individual will be taught about the role of the Abishter (our Father in Heaven) who warned of the punishments that would occur to the Jewish people if they forsake the Torah and tried to ingratiate themselves in Berlin and Vienna at the expense of desiring the glory of the Holy City of Yerushalayim, than yes such studies should be taught to students in the schools.

 But if the Holocaust is simply taught as history without any connection to Hashem and His warning of the curses (tochocha) for not obeying the Torah, it is, Rabbi Goldwasser quoting Rabbi Miller, absolutely worthless and perhaps G-d forbid, only creates a perverted desire among the goyim to launch their own Holocaust attempts against the Jewish nation today.

 Rabbi Goldwasser warned that Jew today has to be concerned about his middos (character traits). When difficulties come upon us, we have to be like the brothers of Yosef [who not recognizing their brother who was the Viceroy of Egypt] asked themselves “Why has Hashem done this to us?” This should be our response.

 Much worse than physical punishment is emotional abuse. How does one, Rabbi Goldwasser wondered, blog terrible things about another Jew?, most frequently anonymously. The damage that such an individual inflicts upon his victim is much greater than even a vicious physical beating.

**The Danger of Absorbing Non-Jewish Cultural Influences**

 A person has to stay very clear from anything that would cause us to absorb the cultural influences of the non-Jews. In the Chumash, in Parshas Balak, we are taught the terrible lesson of how Bilaam was unable to get G-d to curse the Jews. Indeed Hashem transformed the non-Jewish prophet’s attempted curses in blessings.

 Instead, Bilaam tried another tactic. Before leaving his patron Balak the king of Moab in disgrace, Bilaam suggested that if Moab would persuade their attractive daughters to seduce the Jewish men and convince them to also sin by worshipping the idol Baal Peor, this would enrage the G-d of Israel and He would punish the Jewish nation most severely. Indeed Balak also persuade the kings of Midian to join this plot and as a result 24,000 Jewish men were killed by Hashem in a terrible megefah (plague) that was only stopped by the heroism of Pinchas, the grandson of Aharon HaKohen.

**The Auctioning of a Small Miniature Statue of Hitler**

 Rabbi Goldwasser noted that recently [in 2016] one of the world most famous and prestigious auction houses – Christies’s of New York located in the heart of Manhattan’s exclusive Rockefeller Plaza had an auction of fine art, antiques, and valuable books and manuscripts. Included was a lot of a small miniature statue of a kneeling childlike - Adolf Hitler, yemach shemo. Rabbi Goldwasser wrote a letter of protest to Christie’s demanding that the item be removed from the auction because of its offensive nature to the Jewish people and to all decent members of the human race.

 He got a seven-page letter in response trying to explain that it was not a glorification of the founder of the Nazi Party but a rather simple an historical object. The letter even seemed to imply that by kneeling, the figure of Hitler was supposedly doing “teshuva” (repentance for his terrible deeds to humanity.) The item had a starting bid of $3 million and shocked the entire art world by selling for a record-breaking 17 million dollars. If anything it was a wake-up call to Jews around the world that the admiration for one of the world’s worst Jew hater and mass murderers is still strong and that the lesson of the Holocaust has not been learned by everybody.

**The Importance of Improving Personal Middos**

 Rabbi Goldwasser concluded his lecture by emphasizing that a Jew can help overcome the dangers of anti-Semitism by undertaking the study of personal middos and redoubling our efforts in tefillah (praying to Hashem) and the study of our holy Torah.

*Reprinted from the July 22, 2021 edition of the Flatbush Jewish Journal.*

**Parshas Eikev**

**Earning a Living:**

**The Great Life Test**

**By Rabbi Bentzion Shafier**

**Founder of TheSmuz.com**



“*Who feeds you manna in the wilderness, which your forefathers knew not, in order to afflict you and in order to test you to do good for you in the end?*” – Devarim 8:16

 For forty years living in the midbar, the Jewish people ate mon. The Torah explains that one of the reasons that the mon was given to the Klal Yisroel was in order to test them. The Siforno explains the test: “Will you do His will when He gives you your sustenance easily without pain?”

 It seems that the Siforno is telling us that the fact that the Jewish nation didn’t have to work was one of the great trials that they faced.

 This Siforno is very difficult to understand. We know that HASHEM metes out many life tests. But where have we seen that not having to struggle is a challenge? How could the fact that it was easy to make a living be a nisayon?

**Moishe and the Monopoly Game**

 This question can be answered by focusing on why HASHEM wants man to work? The ox was created to plow, the donkey to haul loads, the beaver to dam streams. But, man was created for a very different purpose. Man was not created to be a beast of burden. So, why does HASHEM want man to work for a living?

 One of the reasons can be best understood with a moshol. Imagine that a man recognizes that his eight-year-old son has difficulty getting along with his peers. The little boy is constantly getting into fights, and in general seems to miss social cues. The school psychologist tells him that his son has social integration issues. He just doesn’t understand the rules of social conduct.

 The father, takes it upon himself to help his little Moishe become a mentsch. As part of the plan, he takes time off from work and invites Moishe and his friends to a play date. There they are on the floor playing Monopoly. At a certain point during the game, an ambulance passes, siren blasting, and as all the boys look to the window, the father notices Moishe reach into “the bank” and take out a five hundred dollar bill.

 The father doesn’t say anything. A few moments later, the doorbell rings. Again, all the boys look up, and Moishe meanwhile reaches into the box and takes out two thousand dollars. When this happens again a few moments later, the father asks Moishe to join him in the kitchen.

**The Father’s Question to His Son**

 “Moishe,” says the father, “I couldn’t help but notice that some of the money that belongs in the bank somehow ended up in your pocket. Could you explain this to me?”

 “Sure,” Moishe answers. “You see, last night I heard you and Mommy talking about how you need a lot of money. So here, I took this for you!”

 While the sincerity of the little fellow might be touching, he is missing the point. The only reason the father was involved in this activity was to teach him how to be a mentsch. The father doesn’t need the money, and certainly isn’t taking time off of his busy day to earn “Monopoly money.” But Moishe in his naiveté missed the entire point of the exercise.

 This is an apt moshol to man working. HASHEM doesn’t need man to work to earn a living. HASHEM has lots and lots of money. HASHEM created the situation that man has to work to allow him to have to earn his daily bread. Now man is dependent. Now man is without, and now man can go through one of the greatest of life’s tests: how will he go about this activity called earning a living? Will he be honest? Will he be ethical? When he has difficulty in earning a living, will he learn to trust in HASHEM, or will he make that ultimate mistake thinking it is the sweat of his brow and the strength of his hand that earns him his bread?

**Man Needs Needs**

This seems to be the answer to the Siforno. The generation of the midbar was on a lofty plain. They had received the Torah from HASHEM and were living in a virtual yeshiva. While the mon took care of their daily needs, it was also as a great social experiment: would they attain the same closeness to HASHEM **without** having to earn a living? Would they still reach out to HASHEM if they didn’t lack? Would they still come to recognize their dependence upon HASHEM if they didn’t need to struggle to survive? The mon was a test to see if they could reach greatness without the normal life settings – without needs.

 This concept has great relevance in our times when we are seeing tests of faith all around us. And we see many fall. Many fall prey to materialism; many fall prey to the great race to acquire more; and even more fall to the understanding that it is my efforts that earn me my daily bread. One of the results of this fallacious thinking is the questionable ethics that we see being practiced.

**The Sad Reality**

 The sad reality is that lying, cheating, and stealing amount not only a lack of morality; it’s a waste of the great opportunity of life. HASHEM doesn’t need our money. HASHEM hand-crafted situations that allow a person to grow — to become a mentch. If he engages in dishonesty in the marketplace, it is ultimately himself that he is robbing because the entire scenario was only created to allow him to become great.

 When I stop to understand that HASHEM doesn’t need me to work, but has put me in this very situation to allow me to grow, that changes the way that I deal with the entire concept of working for a living, and greatly impacts the methods I employ in doing so.

*Reprinted from this week’s website of Theshmuz.com.*

# Rav Avigdor Miller on

# Cigarettes and First Steps



 **QUESTION:** **Is there anything wrong with smoking only one cigarette a day?**

 **ANSWER:** If you’ll give me a contract that it won’t be more than one cigarette, I’ll agree. But since you cannot give such a contract, you have to know it’s the beginning of a career of chain smoking.  Eventually that’s what happens.
 You have to know that in all things there’s a principle: The first step is what’s most important. Someday I’ll talk about that bli neder. The first step! Be careful with that first step!

 Let’s say you’re going someplace on the street and somebody starts walking with you and he says, “Come into this place with me,” and so you walk in with him. You have to know that the first step you just took is the beginning of a career either upward to Hakodosh Boruch Hu or down to Gehinom.  It depends where he’s taking you.  Just one step!

 If you look back, you’ll see in your career somebody persuaded you to take one step in the right direction! And therefore the first cigarette is the beginning of the end.

 *Reprinted from the July 22, 2021 email of Toras Avigdor. Adapted from Tape #719.*

**The Important Lessons to the Jew Of the Great and Terrifying Desert**

**From the Talks of the Lubavitcher Rebbe**

**Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, Zt”l**



 This week's Torah portion, Ekev, talks of the desert in which the Jews wandered before entering the Land of Israel. It is described as: "The great, terrifying desert, where there were snakes, vipers, scorpions and thirst. Where there was no water... "

 The great desert symbolizes our long galut (exile). A desert, uninhabited by man, is symbolic of the Jewish people in relation to the other nations of the world. The uninhabited areas of the globe far outnumber the portions which are populated, in the same way that the nations of the world far outnumber the Jews. Furthermore, within the Jewish nation itself, those who observe the Torah and mitzvot are also vastly outnumbered by those who do not yet observe.

 The Torah warns us that the very consideration that the outside world is "great" is the first step in causing our spiritual exile. Thinking that because we are outnumbered means that other nations have power over us creates the possibility that these non-Jewish influences can enter our lives.

**The Fear of the Non-Jewish World**

 The next spiritual step down is alluded to in the word "terrifying." This is the fear that the non-Jewish world will find out that we keep the Torah. This thinking causes a Jew to measure his behavior according to non-Jewish standards and increases the power of the galut over the Jewish soul.

 The next level down is that of "snake." A snake's "hot poison" alludes to the heat and enthusiasm which a Jew can have for things which are really foreign to his essence. When a person's excitement is reserved solely for physical pleasures, his enthusiasm for the spiritual is decreased.

 From here, the next jump down is to the level of "vipers" -- saraf -- which in Hebrew comes from the word "to burn." This is the level on which a person's whole interest toward the satisfaction of his physical desires is so great that it completely overshadows any attraction to G-dliness.

**A Total Coldness and Indifference to Holiness**

 But even worse than this is the level of "scorpion." A scorpion's sting is cold, symbolizing total coldness and indifference to holiness. Heat and excitement, even if directed toward things which are unworthy, can eventually be redirected into enthusiasm for holiness. But when a person is cold to everything, it is much more difficult to inspire him.

 The lowest level belongs to the "thirst, where there was no water." G-d, in His kindness, sometimes causes a Jew to be thirsty for holiness and Judaism, but if one is very far from Torah (called "water" by our Sages), he may not recognize for what he is thirsting. This is the lowest level of our exile.

 The antidote to the progression of spiritual degradation is the avoidance of the first pitfall, that of considering the world to have unnecessary significance. By having the proper mindset we will merit the Final Redemption.

*Reprinted from the 5756/1996 Parshat Ekev edition of L’Chaim Weekly. Adapted from the works of the Lubavitcher Rebbe.*

**Why Do We Cover**

**Our Eyes for Shema?**

**By**[**Yehuda Shurpin**](https://www.chabad.org/search/keyword_cdo/kid/15169/jewish/Shurpin-Yehuda.htm)



Artwork by Sefira Ross

 When saying the first six words of the Shema, it is a universal Jewish custom to cover one’s eyes with the right hand.

 Why? The simple answer is that doing so allows one to concentrate properly without visual distractions.1

 It is crucial to have the proper intention when reciting the first verse of [Shema](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/705353/jewish/The-Shema.htm), even more so than during other parts of prayer. As we say the words, we focus not just on the meaning of the words, but on accepting the yoke of heaven. We concentrate on the idea that G‑d is the only true reality. This intention is so important that one who recites the words of this verse but does not think about its meaning needs to recite it again.2

 The custom to cover one's eyes can be traced back to the times of the Mishnah, when Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi (Judah the Prince) would cover his eyes while reciting the first verse of the Shema.3

**Direction of the Eyes**

 Some early commentators, however, explain that Rabbi [Yehuda HaNasi](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/112279/jewish/Rabbi-Judah-the-Prince.htm) covered his eyes while reciting the Shema because some had the custom to look in all directions so as to accept divine sovereignty throughout the world. Rabbi Yehuda covered his eyes, for he wished to conceal his precise eye movements while reciting the Shema.4

**The Secret of the Blind Maiden**

 The kabbalists, most notably Rabbi Yitzchak Luria, known as the Arizal, explain that one is meant to use the right hand to close5 one’s eyes while reciting the first verse of Shema.

 The [Arizal](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/111878/jewish/Rabbi-Isaac-Luria-The-Ari-Hakodosh.htm%22%20%5Co%20%22Rabbi%20Isaac%20Luria%20-%20The%20Ari%20Hakodosh) explains that this is connected to a very enigmatic “riddle” found in the Zohar.

 The [Zohar](https://www.chabad.org/kabbalah/article_cdo/aid/380410/jewish/The-Zohars-Mysterious-Origins.htm) relates that “an old man” (*saba*), ostensibly a donkey driver, met Rabbi Yossi on his travels and posed several questions to him, but Rabbi Yossi failed to appreciate their true significance. However, his colleague Rabbi Chiya sensed that there was more to the questions than met the eye, and after probing the matter, they realized that the old man was in fact teaching them some of the deepest mystical secrets.

 The “riddle” that he had the hardest time understanding was the following:

Who is the beautiful maiden without eyes, whose body is concealed and revealed, who comes out in the morning and disappears during the day, who is adorned with ornaments that never were?

 There is much discussion about the meaning of this “riddle.”6 But to simplify the Arizal’s explanation as it relates to the reading of Shema, “the maiden” refers to the divine attribute of *malchut* (“kingship”),which at times is referred to as the Shechinah (the feminine aspect of the divine). In this context, it is also referred to as “Rachel.”

 There are four spiritual worlds within the kabbalistic formulation of the cosmos, the world of Atzilut (“Emanation”) being the highest of the four. In this realm, nothing has physical form or color, and sight is nonexistent.

 When we recite the Shema, we are elevating the Mayin Nukvin (“Feminine Waters”) to the world of [Atzilut](https://www.chabad.org/kabbalah/article_cdo/aid/431124/jewish/Close-to-the-Light.htm%22%20%5Co%20%22Close%20to%20the%20Light), setting the stage for the unification of the feminine and masculine, or the [unification](https://www.chabad.org/therebbe/article_cdo/aid/3494573/jewish/The-Wedding-Maamar.htm) of the soul and the [Shechinah](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/2438527/jewish/The-Shechina.htm%22%20%5Co%20%22The%20Shechina). Since the Mayin Nukvin are entering Atzilut, a world that is higher than sight, one must close one’s eyes during the first line of the Shema.

 The reason we specifically use the right hand (even if one is a lefty), which symbolizes the attribute of *chessed* (kindness) as well as the Mayin Dechurin (“Male Waters”), is also connected to this “riddle.”

 Throughout the Talmud, the blind are called *sagi nahor—*“enough of light” or “full of light.” This is because one’s physical sight, which gazes out at the mundane and materialistic world, often contradicts and weakens one's “inner” spiritual sight.

 The idea of ​​[G‑d](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/433240/jewish/God.htm)’s oneness, that is, that G‑d is the only true reality, often seems contradicted by our physical senses. We see and smell and taste and feel the world around us, while divinity is an abstract and spiritual reality.

 Therefore, when we say the Shema and proclaim the oneness of G‑d, we are affirming that true reality is neither what our eye sees nor what we experience naturally and intuitively. By covering our eyes, we are indicating our desire to disconnect from the physical and connect to the spiritual.7

**The Shechinah Rests Upon the Face**

 When we recite the Shema and accept upon ourselves the yoke of heaven, the Shechinah, Divine Presence, rests upon our face. Out of respect for the Divine Presence, we cover our faces, as G‑d told Moses, “And it shall be that when My glory passes by, I will place you into the cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with My hand until I have passed by.”8 ,9

**Judgement and Mercy**

 In the first verse of Shema, we proclaim that “the L‑rd is our G‑d; the L‑rd is one.”10 With this statement, we are affirming our belief that both G‑d’s attribute of strength and judgment and G‑d’s attribute of mercy are really one. Thus, we cover our eyes, symbolizing that what we may perceive with our physical eyes as negative is, in truth, positive.11

 Of course, we await the day when we will see this positive reality with our physical eyes as well. May it be speedily in our days!

**FOOTNOTES**

[1.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/1047775/jewish/Why-Do-We-Cover-Our-Eyes-for-Shema.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22footnoteRef1a1047775) *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 61:5.

[2.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/1047775/jewish/Why-Do-We-Cover-Our-Eyes-for-Shema.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22footnoteRef2a1047775) Ibid. 60:5.

[3.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/1047775/jewish/Why-Do-We-Cover-Our-Eyes-for-Shema.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22footnoteRef3a1047775) Talmud, Berachot 13b.

[4.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/1047775/jewish/Why-Do-We-Cover-Our-Eyes-for-Shema.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22footnoteRef4a1047775) Rabbi Hai Gaon, quoted in *Sefer Haruch* on Berachot 13b.

[5.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/1047775/jewish/Why-Do-We-Cover-Our-Eyes-for-Shema.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22footnoteRef5a1047775) This is more in line with the classic explanation of Rabbi Yehuda’s actions.

[6.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/1047775/jewish/Why-Do-We-Cover-Our-Eyes-for-Shema.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22footnoteRef6a1047775) See also [The Riddle of the Saba.](https://www.chabad.org/kabbalah/article_cdo/aid/380690/jewish/The-Riddle-of-the-Saba.htm)

[7.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/1047775/jewish/Why-Do-We-Cover-Our-Eyes-for-Shema.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22footnoteRef7a1047775) Kli Yakar, [Exodus 24:4](https://www.chabad.org/9885#v4); *Mishnat Chachamim* 23:495; see also *Tanya, Igeret Hakodesh* 9.

[8.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/1047775/jewish/Why-Do-We-Cover-Our-Eyes-for-Shema.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22footnoteRef8a1047775) [Exodus 33:22](https://www.chabad.org/9894#v22).

9. Yesodei Yeshurun, Siddur Lechol, Keriyat Shema

[10.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/1047775/jewish/Why-Do-We-Cover-Our-Eyes-for-Shema.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22footnoteRef10a1047775) [Deuteronomy 6:4](https://www.chabad.org/9970#v4).

[11.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/1047775/jewish/Why-Do-We-Cover-Our-Eyes-for-Shema.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22footnoteRef11a1047775) Kol Arye, Vayigash.

*Reprinted from the Parshat Va’eschanan 5781 email of Chabad.Org Magazine.*

**What Did Omri Casspi Say?**

**By Sivan Rahav-Meir**



 “I hope it was an easy fast for all who fasted.” This was the first sentence spoken by Omri Casspi, among the greatest Israeli basketball players, at his press conference Sunday evening (Motzei Tisha B’Av) in which he announced his retirement.

 I have nothing to add to all the praises of the world’s elite basketball players who spoke of the professionalism, the humility, and the perseverance of the boy who grew up in Yavneh and made it to the NBA.

 But I was reminded of when Casspi interviewed me on his podcast and opened our conversation with this surprising statement: “I departed for the United States as an Israeli only, but I returned also as a Jew.” He explained this transformation as follows:

 “Outside of Israel, if you do not create an identity, it will not happen on its own. I lived in places like Sacramento, Cleveland, and Houston – without a large Jewish community. But at some point, I stopped and said to myself: ‘Wait a minute, what is going on with me?’ I felt a sense of obligation and began thinking: I represent something, but I know nothing about what I represent.

 “For example: I land in Boston and American Jewish kids are waiting for me there with much excitement and they are staring at me. I represent for them the Jewish nation, the State of Israel, but I am conflicted. After all, if you go outside in Los Angeles on Yom Kippur, it’s just a regular day, traffic as usual. If you do not do something special on Shabbat, you won’t feel any Shabbat. It’s your responsibility to do something since you are not in a Jewish country.

 “My wife and I went through this process together, as a family – Friday night dinner, kiddush, tefillin, holidays, community, Jewish education, kosher food. I felt a sense of obligation towards myself and towards the Jewish community. Many Israelis feel this over there, but there are many unfortunately who do not. Only there was I able to understand that I am an emissary of something great. Sometimes you need to go far away in order to come closer, to discover who you really are.”

 Wishing you much success, Omri, as you continue in the game of life.

*Reprinted from the July 22, 2021 email of The Jewish Press.*

**Rabbi Berel Wein on**

**Parshat Ekev**



 In this week's portion, the Torah seemingly indicates that there is a simple formula for Jewish life and success while living in the land of Israel. If we follow the commandments of G-d and observe the laws of the Torah, the Jewish people will be showered with physical blessings of health, longevity, and prosperity. And if the Jewish people, for whatever reasons, chooses to deviate from the service of G-d, then physical calamities will befall them.

 A literal reading of the Torah portion would certainly bring the reader or student to this conclusion. And yet, this understanding, i.e., observance of the commandments as the determining factor in achieving blessings and success in life in this world, flies in the face of the famous victim of the rabbis of the Talmud that states that a reward for observing the commandments does not really exist in this world.

 If that is the case, then what are we to make of the obviously literal lesson that this week's Torah portion seemingly teaches us? If reward and punishment are not to be based upon the performance of the commandments, then what does the Torah really mean to teach us? These issues and questions have been raised by the scholars and commentators for many centuries. As one can well imagine, there are several different approaches to this question. All of them are worthy of mention, but in this short essay, I will restrict myself to one of the central ideas advanced regarding this problem.

 The promises advanced by the Torah for the observance of the commandments is not meant as a reward, so much as it is intended to be a natural consequence of good behavior and enduring faith. True reward and permanent blessings are rare events in human existence. Many times, a person rejoices when having, what he or she believes, to be a stroke of good luck. Unfortunately, just as often in life, it turns out that the good luck was not so good after all. And the same thing is true in reverse. Many times, we are discouraged by events that occurred to us, only to later see, in the fullness of time, that we should be grateful for that experience. Heaven uses a different measure of goodness and reward than the one that we use in this world.

 We all pray for length of life and longevity of years. However, we have learned that our father Abraham, who was apparently scheduled to live for 180 years, passed away five years prematurely. The Talmud saw this as a blessing, so that he would not be alive when his grandson Esau began his sinful rampage of murder and rape. Standards of reward and punishment that are exhibited by heavenly judgment are beyond human comprehension and understanding. And the rewards of heaven are eternal, while all the good or benefit in this world is always temporary. Therefore, it is indeed possible to say that reward and punishment are truly not present in this world.

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