



Parshas Ki Savo

For the week ending 18 Elul 5757
19 & 20 September

Overview

When the *Bnei Yisrael* dwell in the Land of Israel, its first fruits are to be taken to the Temple and given to the Kohen in a ceremony which expresses recognition that it is Hashem who guides the history of the Jewish People throughout all the ages. This passage forms one of the central parts of the Haggadah that we read at the Seder. On the last day of Pesach of the fourth and the seventh years of the seven-year cycle of tithes, a person must recite a confession that he has indeed distributed the tithes to the appropriate people in the prescribed manner.

With this *mitzvah* Moshe concludes the commandments that Hashem has told him to give to the Jewish People. Moshe exhorts them to walk in Hashem's ways, because they are set aside as a treasured people to Hashem. When the *Bnei Yisrael* cross the Jordan River they are to make a new commitment to the Torah. Huge stones are to be erected and the Torah written on them in the seventy primary languages of the world, after which they are to be covered over with a thin layer of plaster. Half the tribes will stand on *Mount Grizim*, and half on *Mount Eval*, and the Leviim will stand in a valley between the two mountains and recite twelve commandments and all the people will answer "Amen" to the blessings and the curses. Moshe then details the blessings that will be bestowed on the *Bnei Yisrael*. These blessings are both physical and spiritual. However if the Jewish People do not keep the Torah, Moshe details a chilling picture of destruction, resulting in exile and wandering among the nations.

Insights

ROCK OF AGES

"And it will be on the day that you will cross over the Jordan to the Land which Hashem your G-d is giving you. And you will erect for yourselves large stones and cover them with plaster...and you will write upon the stones all the words of this Torah with a clear explanation. (27:2-8)

*"I met a traveler from an antique land
Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert... Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that it's sculptor well those passions read,
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed:
And on the pedestal these words appear:
"My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look upon my works ye Mighty, and despair!"
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away."*

Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822)

If you drive down the A38 to Salisbury Plain in England, there will appear in the distance a strange forlorn group of enormous stones erected in a circular pattern. These stones are called Stonehenge. Somewhere between 300 and a thousand years after the Jewish People left Egypt, Stonehenge was erected. Its origin and purpose remain a mystery. Some say that Stonehenge was a Druid temple. Others say it was an astronomical observatory. Others say it marks the grave of King Arthur.

When the nations of the world wish to immortalize their conquests, they erect large stones as memorials to their military prowess and their dominion. When the Jews set up large stones it is because they are commanded to write on them "all the words of this Torah."

Ozymandias, the Druids and King Arthur are wraith-like memories, faded by time, while "Am Yisrael Chai!" — The People of Israel and the Torah of Moshe live and endure.

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GOING THROUGH THE MOTIONS

“Because you did not serve Hashem, your G-d, amid gladness and goodness of heart...” (28:47)

Reading this week’s Parsha is like watching a film of two cars about to collide in slow-motion. We feel inexorably chilled when we read the dire warnings of the results of failing to keep the Torah and compare these all too accurate predictions with the grim reality of Jewish history.

One of the strangest predictions that the Torah makes is that the Jewish People will be punished *“Because you did not serve Hashem, your G-d, amid gladness and goodness of heart...”* Why doesn’t the Torah talk about idol worship, immorality, baseless hatred? Aren’t those better reasons for exile and tragedy? What’s so wrong about not serving G-d with “gladness and goodness of heart” that provokes such terrible consequences?

“Manner reveals his matter.” When you ask someone to help you to do the dishes, you can tell whether he really wants to help or not. If he says to you *“Is there anything else I can do?”* his help is sincere. But if he says *“Can I go now?”* then you know he had one foot out the door the whole time.

Similarly, when the Jewish People fail to serve Hashem *“amid gladness and goodness of heart,”* it is symptomatic of the fact that their whole reason for serving Hashem is selfish.

People worshipped idols because they wanted to control their deities. They thought they could “buy off” the rain god with a sacrifice or two. Or they could get the sun god to behave by a few quick libations. When the Jewish People serve Hashem without gladness and goodness of heart, they are revealing that they relate to G-d in the way of idol worship — trying to “buy off” Hashem by merely going through the motions.

Haftorah: Yeshayahu 60:1-22

In this, the last of the seven *Haftorahs of Consolation*, the prophet Isaiah calls on Jerusalem to arise from the pain of darkness and shadow, and to shine to the world in her full glory. The light of redemption, both physical and spiritual, is being radiated on her. Her long-banished children are returning, and in their wake are the nations of the world who have acknowledged Hashem, and that the Jewish People are his emissaries.

This redemption, unlike those that have preceded it, will be the final and complete one. *“Never again will your sun set, nor your moon be withdrawn, for Hashem shall be unto you an eternal light, and ended will be your days of mourning.”*

WALLS OF PROTECTION

“The sons of strangers will build your city walls....” (60:10)

As far as the Jewish People are concerned, they really didn’t need city walls at all. For no man would dare to wage war on them, and thus they did not need fortresses and strongholds.

HANDS UP!

“And the Kohen shall take the basket from your hands...” (26:4)

Hands are unique.

Hands are different from the other limbs of the body. The other limbs of the body are fixed and static, whereas the hands may be lowered lower than the feet or raised higher than the head.

The same is true on an allegorical/ethical level. Man can lower his hands: i.e., he can stoop to the lowest of the low. He can commit the greatest sins possible. He can murder. He can steal. Everything can be done with the hands. Idiomatically we talk of “blood on his hands,” “dirty hands.”

However, the hands can also be raised up. They can perform the holiest acts. When the Kohen blesses the people he raises his hands. Hands gives *tzedaka* (charity). They put on *tefillin*. We extend “the hand” of friendship and assistance.

The handiwork of a person is symbolized by the acquisitions that his hands have brought him. For this reason, the first of his fruits must be made holy as *Bikkurim*.

Since the beginning always influences what follows, every beginning needs to be holy. For when the beginning is holy, everything that follows will also be holy.

When the hands are raised above the head, when their direction is heavenwards, then the head and the body will inevitably follow after them.

VOICE PROJECTION

“And we cried out to Hashem the G-d of our fathers, and Hashem heard our voices...” (26:7)

In time of trouble it’s not enough merely to pray, but one must cry out to Hashem, then one is answered immediately. Notice here that the verse doesn’t say that Hashem heard our prayers, but He heard our *voices!*

And even though every prayer is answered, there are prayers which are answered in days and prayers which are answered in years.

The essence of one’s prayers should always be for the whole community, and the ideal time — after doing a mitzvah.

However, the “sons of strangers” — non-Jews who had accepted upon themselves the seven *Noachide* laws — certainly needed the walls. For according to the Rambam, the law of the *ger toshav* (non-Jew who has accepted the seven *Noachide* laws) is applicable only during that time when the custom was to have city walls.

Therefore “the sons of strangers” built the city-walls so that they would have the status of *gerim toshavim*. For once they achieved this status, the Jewish People have a mitzvah to provide for their sustenance and welfare.

A wall can be more than just a protection against enemies...

Sources:
Rock Of Ages - Don Isaac Abarbanel
Going Through The Motions - Rabbi Yochanan Zweig as heard from Rabbi Moshe Zauderer
Hands Up! - Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin
Voice Projection - The Chafetz Chaim

Fatherly Advice - tidbits from the Ethics of the Fathers traditionally studied on Summer Sabbaths

“Judge every man favorably (give him the benefit of the doubt).”

Rabbi Yehoshua Ben Prachya, Avos 1:6

Judging people favorably is not only an exercise in justice, but also an investment in your own spiritual security.

One of the most powerful deterrents in improper behavior is the fear of incurring the disapproval of your society. But this is only effective if you respect your friends and neighbors as being people with high moral standards. If you harshly judge any questionable behavior which is an inevitable component of human conduct, then you may arrive at the conclusion that none of the people around you are of good character and therefore you will no longer be ashamed of misbehaving in their presence.

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