

In this week's *Parashah*, we read about the making of the Golden Calf and of Moshe's prayers that *Hashem* forgive *Bnei Yisrael*. At first, *Hashem* says (33:2-3), "I shall send an angel ahead of you . . . to a land that flows with milk and honey, because I shall not ascend among you, for you are a stiff-necked people, lest I annihilate you on the way." Moshe prays, and he is taught the Thirteen *Middot Ha'rachamim* / Attributes of Mercy, which we are to say whenever we need *Hashem's* mercy (see 33:19 and *Rashi z"l*).

R' Shlomo Wolbe *z"l* (1914-2005; a pre-eminent figure in the *Mussar* movement) writes: This is what Moshe was praying for--that *Hashem* agree to relate to us with mercy, for without that, we could never endure. At first, *Hashem* said that he would not ascend to *Eretz Yisrael* in *Bnei Yisrael's* midst; rather, He would send an angel to lead them. Moshe succeeded in having *Hashem* reverse this decree. But, if *Hashem* would not act mercifully toward *Bnei Yisrael*--stiff-necked people, who are prone to sin--having Him in their midst would be disastrous.

R' Wolbe continues: In the *Vidui* / confession on *Yom Kippur*, we refer to sins that we committed due to "*Kashyut Oref*" / being stiff-necked or stubborn. This refers to the fact that, no matter how much we work on correcting bad traits, there is always a risk of falling back into them because we tend not to address the root causes of those bad traits. As long as a person does not address the root causes of his bad traits, he can never be confident that he will not return to those traits. (*Shiurei Chumash*)

Bitachon

This year--a *Shemittah* year--we will *iy"H* devote this space to discussing the related subject of *Bitachon* / placing one's trust in *Hashem*.

Rabbeinu Bachya ibn Pekudah z"l (*Saragossa, Spain; early 11th century*) lists ten benefits of *Bitachon*. The second of these benefits is as follows:

When a person trusts in *Hashem*, that *Bitachon* will cause him not to submit to another person. He will not place his hopes on any man, nor put his trust in human beings. He will not be subservient to others in order to win their favor, nor will he flatter them. He will not agree with them about that which is inconsistent with serving *Hashem*. Their ways will not frighten him, and he will not be afraid to oppose them. He will be free of the burden of expressing gratitude to them and the obligation of repaying them [--see below]. When rebuking them, he will not hold back for fear of offending them, and he will not dress up that which is false, as the prophet says (*Yeshayah* 50:7), "But, *Hashem Elokim* helps me; therefore, I was not ashamed . . . I know that I will not be timid."

(*Chovot Ha'levavot: Sha'ar Ha'bitachon*, Introduction)

R' Manoach Hendel *z"l* (Poland; died 1611) clarifies: When R' Bachya writes that a person with *Bitachon* "will be free of the burden of expressing gratitude to them and the obligation of repaying them," he means that a person who places his trust in *Hashem* will not feel the need to request gifts or favors from others and, therefore, he will not be burdened constantly with the obligation to express gratitude. However, continues R' Manoach Hendel, it goes without saying even a person with *Bitachon* must express gratitude to anyone from whom he does derive a benefit.

(*Manoach Ha'levavot*)

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“Remember for the sake of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yisrael, Your servants, to whom You swore by Yourself, and You told them, ‘I shall increase your offspring like the stars of heaven, and this entire land of which I spoke, I shall give to your offspring and it shall be their heritage forever.’” (32:13)

R’ Shlomo Kluger z”l (1785-1869; rabbi of Brody, Galicia) explains: Moshe said to *Hashem*, “Remember for the sake of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yisrael, Your servants, to whom You swore by Yourself”--You promised them that they would receive *Eretz Yisrael*. However, it was understood that You would not give the Land to them personally; rather, You would give it to their descendants.

Separately, “You told them, ‘I shall increase your offspring like the stars of heaven, and this entire land of which I spoke, I shall give to your offspring and it shall be their heritage forever’.” What was the purpose of that promise, since You already had told the Patriarchs that their descendants would receive the Land? It must be that the first promise referred to *Bnei Yisrael* when they are righteous, while the second promise referred to *Bnei Yisrael* when they are not deserving--as was the case after the sin of the Golden Calf. Indeed, Moshe’s argument concluded, that must be why You said, “Forever”!

(*Chochmat Ha’Torah* p.225)

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R’ Baruch Aryeh Halevi Fischer *shlita* (rabbi and educator in Brooklyn, N.Y.) writes: Of course, one is obligated to thank someone who did him a kindness or favor! The *Chovot Ha’levavot* is teaching that a person who has *Bitachon* sees his benefactor as *Hashem’s* messenger and does not find expressing gratitude to be a burden. In contrast, one who thinks that the benefit he received originated from the benefactor will always worry that his gratitude was not good enough to satisfy the benefactor, and that the benefactor will not do him favors in the future. (*Lev Ha’ari*)

One might ask: If everything is decreed by *Hashem*, and any benefactor is merely *Hashem’s* messenger, why is one obligated to show gratitude to the benefactor at all?

Rabbeinu Bachya himself answers this question: The *Gemara* (*Bava Batra* 119b) teaches: “*Hashem* brings about good things through meritorious people.” This means that *Hashem* chooses people as His agents to help others because those people want to help others. True, *Hashem* controls the ultimate success or failure of everything we undertake, but His agents/our benefactors deserve our gratitude for wanting to help us. Indeed, this is why they deserve the same gratitude even if their efforts to assist are unsuccessful.

(*Chovot Ha’levavot: Sha’ar Ha’bitachon*, ch.4)

“When you take a census of *Bnei Yisrael* . . . , every man shall give *Hashem* an atonement for his soul when counting them, so that there will not be a plague among them when counting them.” (30:12)

R’ Yitzchak Ze’ev Yadler z”l (1843-1917; Yerushalayim) explains: There is no one in the world who does not need an atonement, for, as King Shlomo writes (*Kohelet* 7:20), “There is no man on earth so righteous that he always does good and never sins.” When the Jewish People are united, R’ Yadler continues, we atone for each other, for in the same area or subject matter that one person sins, another does a good deed. Thus, we protect each other. However, taking a census highlights the individuality of each person, not his membership in the group. Therefore, a different form of atonement is required, as our verse teaches.

(*Tiferet Tziyon*)

“*Bnei Yisrael* shall observe the *Shabbat*, to make the *Shabbat* an eternal covenant for their generations.” (31:16)

Keeping *Shabbat* is the type of *Mitzvah* our Sages call an “*Eidah*” / testament, for it testifies that *Hashem* created the world.

R’ Eliezer Halevi Ish-Horowitz z”l (rabbi of Tarnograd, Poland; author of one of the foundational works of the *Chassidic* movement; died 1806) asks: Why does *Hashem* need our testimony? Moreover, how can we testify that *Hashem* created the world when we have a self-interest in the matter? Specifically, as *Rashi* z”l explains (in his commentary to *Bereishit* 1:1), the reason the Torah begins with Creation is to declare that *Hashem* created the world and, therefore, He can give *Eretz Yisrael* to whomever He chooses. This is our rebuttal to the nations of the world who claim that we stole the Land!

R’ Eliezer answers the first question with a parable: A king hired a tutor for his children, and he ordered the tutor to teach the young princes an anthem that glorified the king, and to have them sing the anthem every day in front of the king. The tutor asked the king, “With all due respect, you are a glorious king! Why do you need their praise?”

The king responded, “I do not need their praise! Indeed, if I did need it, I would not have them sing the anthem in front of me; I would have them sing it in front of my subjects. Rather,” the king explained, “the purpose of learning and singing the anthem is to remind the young princes that they are children of a glorious king, so that they will behave the part.”

Similarly, writes R’ Eliezer, *Hashem* does not need our praise or our testimony. Rather, its purpose is to remind us whose “children” we are, so that we will behave the part.

This answers the second question also, R’ Eliezer concludes. If the purpose of our testimony was to tell the world that *Hashem* is the Creator, then one, indeed, could argue that we are biased. However, that is not the goal. Instead, when we observe *Shabbat*, we testify to ourselves that our Father is the Creator. This reminds us whose children we are, so we will behave accordingly.

(*Noam Megadim V’kavod Ha’Torah*)