

In this week's *Parashah*, Moshe Rabbeinu warns *Bnei Yisrael* against haughtiness, saying (8:12-14), "Lest you eat and be satisfied, and you build good houses and settle . . . and your heart will become haughty and you will forget *Hashem* . . ."

R' Yosef Konvitz z"l (1878-1944; rabbi in Newark, NJ; President of the Agudath HaRabonim of the United States and Canada) asks: At first glance, the Torah should have said, "When you eat and are satisfied, and you build good houses and settle . . . lest your heart will become haughty and you will forget *Hashem* . . ." After all, did *Hashem* not promise us that we will eat and be satisfied and have good homes in *Eretz Yisrael*? Moreover, is developing haughtiness not a mere possibility, rather than a certainty?

R' Konvitz answers: In fact, *Hashem* does not promise the Jewish People material success in *Eretz Yisrael* under all circumstances. The reason is that, unfortunately, excess wealth has a history of leading the men astray, as we read (*Hoshea* 2:10), "I lavished silver upon her [the Jewish nation], and gold; but they used it for the *Ba'al* [a form of idolatry]." Because material success is not guaranteed, the verse says, "Lest you eat and be satisfied . . ."

R' Konvitz continues (perhaps commenting on the American immigrant experience he witnessed): Unfortunately, one does not need to be wealthy to become haughty; just making plans for, and dreaming about, becoming wealthy is enough to make a person haughty. Therefore the Torah says, "Your heart will become haughty . . ." (*Divrei Yosef*)

Shabbat

Midrash Rabbah relates: Moshe saw that *Bnei Yisrael* had no rest in Egypt. He went to Pharaoh, and he said, "If a master does not allow his slave to rest once a week, the slave will soon die. Likewise, your slaves *Yisrael*--if they do not rest, they will die." Pharaoh responded, "Go do for them as you say." Moshe then went and taught *Bnei Yisrael* to rest on *Shabbat*. [Until here from the *Midrash*]

R' Shraga Feivish Hager z"l (1958-2024; *Kosover Rebbe*) writes: Based on this *Midrash*, it is written that *Bnei Yisrael* would gather on Friday night during their exile in Egypt to strengthen each other's belief in *Hashem*.

Likewise, R' Hager writes, there is a *Chassidic* custom to gather together on Friday night to accept upon oneself the yoke of Heaven among like-minded friends, to elevate oneself as part of a group by uniting in singing songs of love for *Hashem*, and to purify and refine oneself through this gathering.

We read (*Yirmiyah* 17:13), "*Hashem* is the *Mikveh* of *Yisrael*." R' Menachem Mendel Hager z"l (1768-1825; the "*Ahavat Shalom*"; ancestor of the *Rebbs* of *Kosov* and *Vizhnitz*) notes that the root of *Mikveh* can refer to a gathering (see *Bereishit* 1:9). It also refers to a *Mikvah* in which one immerses. Thus, the verse teaches that when the Jewish People gather whole-heartedly as one, they purify themselves as if they had immersed in a *Mikvah*. Others note that by negating oneself to his friends, one brings great spiritual "lights" down upon himself--another reason to be part of a group on *Shabbat* night.

(Of course, the foregoing is only meant to suggest a way to attain greater holiness. It is not speaking of a situation in which a person is required by *Halachah* to immerse in a *Mikvah*.)

(*Shabbat Malka Kadisha* p.201)

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(*Yisroel Moshe ben Yosef a"h* - 20 Av)

“When Hashem sent you from Kadesh-Barnea, saying, ‘Go up and possess the Land that I gave you’--then you rebelled against the word of Hashem, your Elokim: you did not believe Him and you did not listen to His voice.” (9:23)

R’ Meir Simcha Hakohen (1843-1926; rabbi of Dvinsk, Latvia) writes: The phrase “you rebelled” includes two acts of rebellion. First, “you did not believe Him” when He said that *Eretz Yisrael* is good (see *Devarim* 1:32), and second, “you did not listen to His voice” when He commanded you not to try to ascend to *Eretz Yisrael* on your own (see 1:42-43).

Why did they not listen? R’ Meir Simcha explains: *Bnei Yisrael* thought they were being tested, much like the wayward Talmudic sage Elisha ben Avuyah (a.k.a. “*Acher*”) 1,500 years later, who heard a Heavenly voice proclaim: “Everyone repent except for *Acher*!” Had *Acher* ignored that proclamation, his repentance would have been accepted. Unfortunately, he did not repent. Conversely, *Bnei Yisrael* thought Hashem was challenging them to show their love for *Eretz Yisrael*. Tragically, they were wrong. (Meshech Chochmah)

“At that time Hashem said to me, ‘Carve for yourself two stone Tablets like the first ones, and ascend to Me to the mountain, and make a wooden ark for yourself.” (10:1)

Midrash Tanchuma teaches: “Stone Tablets”--in the merit of Yaakov (see *Bereishit* 49:24). Another opinion: In the merit of the *Bet Hamikdash* (see *Yeshayah* 28:16). Rabbi Shimon says: In the merit of *Mashiach* (see *Daniel* 2:34). [Until here from the *Midrash*]

R’ Yedayah Ha’penini z”l (13th century; Provence) writes: This *Midrash* is meant to teach the purpose for which Hashem gave us the Torah.

He explains: Some say that the purpose of the Torah is to teach proper *De’ot* / beliefs and character traits, while the *Mitzvot* that involve action are just tools to purify and refine man so that his proper *De’ot* can “shine” without interference. The Patriarchs, of whom Yaakov is a representative, are symbols of this view, for they were the first true believers and the first who tried to educate their fellow men about G-d.

R’ Yedayah continues: A second viewpoint is that the purpose of the Torah is to distance man from excess, teach him about *Teshuvah* / repentance, and encourage him to live a life of moderation. The *Bet Hamikdash* represents this idea, for that is where a person could see Hashem being served and where one could focus on *Teshuvah*.

Finally, writes R’ Yedayah, some say that the purpose of the Torah is to enable the establishment of a functioning society--for example, through *Halachot* / laws about honesty in business dealings, treating others with respect, etc. *Mashiach*, who will rule over a utopian society, is a symbol of this view.

R’ Yedayah concludes: There is truth to all three of these viewpoints, but not to any one of them alone. (Be’urei Haggadot)

“In order to inform you that man does not live by bread alone, rather by everything that emanates from the mouth of Hashem does man live.” (8:3)

R’ Yosef Sorotzkin *shlita* (Kiryat Ye’arim, Israel) writes: Man is composed of *Ruach* / a spiritual part (i.e., the soul) and *Guf* / a physical part (i.e., the body). What connects them is bread, for without bread (food), the *Ruach* would leave the *Guf*. But bread is itself physical. If that which binds the *Ruach* to the *Guf* is itself *Guf* (physical), then man is controlled overall by the *Guf*! What should a person do to avoid this?

R’ Sorotzkin answers: To remedy this, we recite *Berachot* over our food, thus sanctifying the act of eating. According to the *Zohar*, the physical food itself becomes sanctified when one acknowledges that he received his food from G-d’s “table” and declares that he is eating it in order to strengthen himself to serve Hashem. That makes the food something *Ruchani* / spiritual that connects one’s body and soul, not just physical food. (Megged Yosef)

“You will eat and you will be satisfied, and you shall bless Hashem, your Elokim, for the good Land that He gave you.” (8:10)

In *Birkat Ha’mazon* / the blessing after eating bread, we do not only thank Hashem for the food we ate and for the “good Land” that He has given us, as the *Pasuk* says. We also give thanks “because You took us, Hashem, our Elokim, from the land of Egypt,” as well as “for Your Brit / covenant that You sealed in our flesh,” “for Your Torah which You taught us,” and “for life, grace, and loving-kindness which You granted us.”

R’ Avigdor Miller z”l (1908-2001; rabbi, *Mashgiach Ruchani*, and *Rosh Yeshiva* in Brooklyn, N.Y.) writes: We read (*Kohelet* 7:14), “On a good day, be pleased.” *Midrash Rabbah* comments: “If there is a year in which there is no drought, go out to your vineyard, see, and rejoice; see your olives and rejoice.” [Until here from the *Midrash*]

Why must the verse tell us to be pleased on a good day, and why must the *Midrash* teach us to rejoice when there is no drought? Do those feelings not occur naturally? R’ Miller explains: The verse and the *Midrash* are teaching us to use good days to reflect on Hashem’s many kindnesses towards us--for example, not only should a farmer be thankful when there is no drought, he should use that gratitude as a springboard to thank Hashem also for the fact that he has a vineyard and an olive grove. Do not miss a valuable opportunity to attain a greater recognition of Hashem’s kindness, *Kohelet* and the *Midrash* are teaching. Indeed, R’ Miller writes, when a person has a good day, he should know that the primary purpose for which Hashem gave him that good day is so he could use it as a stepladder to elevate himself.

R’ Miller concludes: The same idea explains the text of *Birkat Ha’mazon*. When we feel grateful for our food, it is an opportunity to recognize Hashem’s kindness in general. (Lev Avigdor p.3)