

**LIGHT
FROM
THE
FUTURE
PARSHAS R'EI**

**BY
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**LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE
ESSAYS ON PARSHAS R'EI**

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**Dedicated to the Lubavitcher Rebbe, who,
more than any Jewish leader, has prepared us
for Moshiach and the imminent Redemption**

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INTRODUCTION

The following collection of essays on *parshas R'ei* was taken from the weekly Torah messages that I have been sending to hundreds of individuals over the past 22 years.

These messages were written in the spirit of the talks of the Lubavitcher Rebbe. Several of them are actually based on or adaptations of his essays and discourses on the parsha.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe declared that we are living in unique times. He applied the words of the Midrash to our day:

“The time of your Redemption has arrived.”

The Rebbe stated further that the straightforward way for us to bring about the actual Redemption is by learning what the Torah says about Moshiach and Redemption. While learning Torah in general has the capacity to change our mindset, learning about Moshiach and Redemption has the capacity to alter of exile-constrained way of

thinking and cultivating a liberating manner of thinking.

In this spirit, each one of these messages concludes with an application of the Torah lesson of that week to our understanding of Moshiach and Redemption, as well as to help us prepare for the coming of Moshiach and the imminent Redemption.

It is my fervent hope that these essays will contribute to the process of changing our *galus/exile* mindset into a Moshiach mindset, which is effected by the study of these themes in Torah.. And may this effort contribute to the imminent Redemption through our righteous Moshiach. Amen.

Parshas R'ei is unique because of its opening word and title: R'ei.

All along Moses has been admonishing the Jewish people “Shema-Hear.” But now he is revealing to them that they can come to an even higher level of connection to G-d by the way of vision.

Chassidic philosophy explains that the higher form of learning through the visual is the hallmark of the future.’

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In the Messianic Age, Moshiach will teach us through that medium, so that everyone, even the simplest person, will see the whole picture at once. It will be far more penetrating and impactful than hearing the same teachings from Moshiach.

ESSAY ONE

WORD BY WORD

From our vantage-point we see negativity and
we have a need to rationalize it.

From G-d's "perch" there is only blessing.

In the imminent Messianic Age we will all see
things from His perspective.

ESSAY ONE

WORD BY WORD

From Above

This week's Torah portion of *R'ei* begins with the verse,

"See I am giving to you today a blessing..."

This verse refers to the fact that the blessing, and the revelation of G-dliness that accompanies it comes from Above. Accordingly, the blessings are of the highest and most profound order. Indeed, the Rebbe explains how each of the words of this verse emphasizes that approach.

R'ei-See

The Hebrew word for this word, *R'ei*, translated literally as "see," implies the establishment of a deep and powerful connection. Thus our Sages state, "hearing does not resemble seeing," and they forbid an

eyewitness from acting as a judge. Once someone has seen a misdeed committed, he will never be able to conceive of a redeeming virtue for a defendant. In contrast, when a person is told about an event, he is allowed to serve as a judge and indeed, all trials depend on listening to such testimony.

What is the reason for this distinction? When hearing, one approaches a concept step by step, gathering all the particulars. This resembles an ascent upward. In contrast, when seeing, one is brought into direct contact with an event as a totality all at once. Only afterwards, does one focus attention on the particulars.

Hence seeing is associated with the dynamic energy that comes from Above

"Anochi-l"

The Hebrew word used here, *Anochi*, rather than the more common "*ani*" communicates a greater magnitude of pride. It suggests that the speaker I saying, "I, whomever I truly am."

In this context this is a reference to G-d's very essence, suggesting that the blessings

and Revelation derive from G-d's innermost essential being.

Nosain-am Giving

The Talmud states that, "One who gives a gift [in contrast to one who sells a product] gives it with a good eye." This implies that the giver of a gift, gives it with pleasure and with the most favorable terms.

This implies that the Giver's giving is one that does not look at the worthiness of the recipient. Unlike a purchase, which requires his substantial investment, the gift is given because of the good will of the Giver. And because it is given so graciously it is given with the most liberal terms.

Lifneichem-Before You

"*Lifneichem*" in Hebrew relates to the word "*pnimiyus*" -- inner dimension. This is a reference to the nature of G-d's giving wherein the flow of energy is internalized within the recipient.

At first glance, this internalizing aspect of the blessing could appear to come from the recipient. However, in this context it can only happen from G-d's infinite power.

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The rationale for this, the Rebbe explains is as follows:

When something comes from below it first touches one's external layers and only later does it penetrate more deeply into one's inner sanctum. By contrast when the influence comes from above it first touches one's more spiritual side which is internal and only then the external. Since the Torah mentions the blessing will be given to our internal level it indicates that it comes from above.

Hayom - Today

This reflects the concepts of light and revelation, for the day is the time of light. It is also associated with a dimension of eternity, as our Sages state, "Whenever the word 'today' is used [the influence] is eternal and forever."

Once again the theme of something that is infinite and must come from on High.

Beracha-Blessing and...

When the Torah speaks of blessings and its reverse as coming from G-d it actually refers to two modes of G-dly blessings: the overt, contained blessings as well as the more transcendent, but hidden, blessings.

Since both of these categories of blessings come from G-d, those blessings which manifest themselves as the reverse, will ultimately be transformed into overt blessings.

If we were dealing with open blessings exclusively, it would leave the negative forces to continue their obfuscation and the hidden dimension of G-d's blessings would not come to fruition.

But where does the power to transform these concealed blessings? The answer is that it must come directly from, G-d, for whom they were never anything but powerful and transcendent blessings.

As long as we are in exile, we still have to deal with the blessings remaining hidden and to find solace in the fact that they are inherently blessings.

As soon as the Redemption will unfold, imminently, we will be exposed to G-d's

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direct light, in relation to which there is only revealed and unrestricted blessing.

ESSAY TWO

WHERE IS JERUSALEM?

Jerusalem is a city and a mindset.

Jerusalem is a heightened state of awareness.

Both dimensions are elusive and must be
pursued.

ESSAY TWO

WHERE IS JERUSALEM?

No Mention of it in the Torah!

Jerusalem! Which Jew is not filled with pride and awe as s/he thinks of this eternal city? For almost 2,000 years Jews were prevented from living in this historic and holy city, yet, we never forgot its glory. As the Psalmists has so eloquently expressed it: "If I forget you, Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its dexterity." (Psalm 137:5)

It is thus puzzling that nowhere in the Five Books of Moses, does the Torah even mention this city by name. The closest we come to an identification of this city, is in this week's Torah portion *R'ei*. "This you may do only on the site that G-d your L-rd will choose from among all your tribes, as a place established in His name."

Commentators raise the obvious question. Why didn't G-d identify the name His chosen city? Why did the Jewish nation have to wait

hundreds of years until its whereabouts was disclosed?

City for All Equally

One of the answers to this question relates to the equitable distribution of the land to all of the twelve tribes. Had the Jews known the where the "chosen city" was located at the time they entered the Promised land, every tribe would have demanded to be situated nearby. And, if one tribe or another would have been informed that its share of the land was to be far away from the capital, this tribe would have not participated in its conquest

City of Complete Awareness

There is however a deeper way of understanding why the location of Jerusalem was a mystery for several centuries. Jerusalem was not only the capital city of Israel, but it is the Jewish people's source for spiritual inspiration.

According to some commentators, the word Yerushalayim/Jerusalem is a composite of two Hebrew words: *Yirah* and *shalem*. *Yirah*, while often translated as "fear," actually, and more

precisely, means "awe" or "reverence." *Shalem*, is Hebrew for "whole" or "complete." Combined, these two words imply that Jerusalem is the place where one can achieve not just a mediocre level of reverence for G-d, but rather a level of awe and respect that is total

The Talmud states: "Everything is in the hands of Heaven except for the reverence for Heaven." Simply put, one cannot rely on G-d to achieve respect for Him. Our talents and characteristics are "accidents" of birth, i.e., they are pre-determined by G-d. However, the way we utilize these talents; the moral decisions we make as to how we live our lives – these decisions, inasmuch as they reflect our appreciation and reverence for G-d, are solely determined by us

The Need to Seek

We can now understand why the Torah does not mention explicitly where Jerusalem is situated. To find Jerusalem one must seek and search.

The same applies to the Jerusalem within us, the reservoir of decency, respect and

reverence for G-d and His creatures, who were created in His image, must be sought and searched for. It is not served to us on a silver platter. This is and has always been true about the extrinsic Jerusalem as well as the intrinsic Jerusalem. In the words of the prophet: "...she is Zion, there is none that seek her" (Jeremiah 30:17). The Talmud comments: "From this we gather that she ought to be sought after."

Jerusalem and Moshiach

Jerusalem and Moshiach are intertwined. As in the third blessing of the Grace after Meals, the restoration of Jerusalem (primarily the Bais Hamikdash, the Holy Temple) is linked to the restoration of the Davidic dynasty. Likewise in the Amidah prayer the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the throne of David are juxtaposed.

The parallel can be extended. In the prayer for the New Moon, there is a citation from Hoshea (3:5): "...They shall seek G-d their G-d and David their king." The prophet here encourages the seeking of King David, a reference to the Moshiach the scion of King David.

This can be interpreted on two levels as well. We should seek the leader who is qualified to be Moshiach, even as we search within our own souls to discover the spark of Moshiach within us.

The reason why seeking Moshiach is desirable is based on a concept that the attribute of kingship cannot be actualized without the nation over whom he is king elicits that trait.

When the nation cries out, as they did in Biblical times, “*Yechi Hamelech*-Long live the king” and similar expression of accepting him as their monarch, that actualizes his power of leadership. With their continued expressions of acceptance of his sovereignty it enhances his role as monarch.

ESSAY THREE

THE CASE AGAINST NEGATIVISM

Fighting evil even with violence may be a
necessity in an imperfect world.

The *spirit* of fighting should never be
institutionalized.

Good deeds and the spirit that inspires them
are intrinsically positive and should become
engrained within us.

ESSAY THREE

THE CASE AGAINST NEGATIVISM

Abraham the Iconoclast

Destruction of idols and idolatry has been a part of Jewish tradition from the days of Abraham. When little Abraham was but a child, the Midrash relates, he was an iconoclast in both the figurative as well as literal sense of the word. Abraham's father *Terach* owned an idol business which Abraham destroyed. From that point onward Jews have always been confronted with situations that challenged them to destroy all forms of idol worship.

This week's Torah portion of *R'ei* devotes an entire section to the commandment the Jews were given upon their arrival in the Promised Land of Israel:

“Do away with all the places where the nations worship their gods... You must tear down their altars, break up their sacred pillars, burn their Asheira trees, and chop down the statues of their

gods, obliterating their names from that place.”

Don't do it to G-d!

Following these instructions to destroy and obliterate all traces of idolatry, the Torah continues:

“Do not do this to G-d your G-d.”

Talmudic literature interprets this verse very literally; Do not destroy anything that is holy, such as the Temple in Jerusalem, a synagogue. Additionally, we should not erase G-d's name.

The question arises, why anyone would think that it would be permissible to destroy something that is associated with G-d. From the juxtaposition it would appear that because the Torah instructed us to destroy everything associated with idolatry, it then became necessary to emphasize that we may not do it to G-d your G-d! Who, in his right mind would ever make the transition from destroying idols to tearing down the Temple in Jerusalem?!

Negative Conditioning

This exhortation actually provides us with profound insight into the human psyche as well as into the fundamentals of Judaism.

When the Torah commanded the Jewish people to begin their career as a nation in a new and holy land by fighting a war and following the carnage that occurs on the battlefield with the destruction of idolatry, the Torah realized how this could affect our attitudes towards Judaism. When a person is engaged in a war or dispute, even it is for the most noble and righteous of causes, one must take great care that the negativism and violence do not become an ingrained part of one's personality.

A negative person relates to everything in a negative way. An iconoclast rips down not only idolatrous institutions but, when the iconoclasts or holy warriors finishes their G-d given task of destroying idols, they then channel their destructive energies to tear down even good and holy structures, because the need to constantly destroy has become second nature to them.

This can also happen in a more subtle way. Jews who returns to their roots very often

were motivated by a rebellious spirit; they were rebelling against the materialism, secularism, immorality etc. There is a possibility that they may also rebel against their new establishment. They have to be instructed to not do the same thing to G-d and Torah.

Yes, they can still use their rebellious spirit in a positive way by fighting against complacency or regression in their Judaism. They should not use it to attack other people and other holy institutions.

What's Your Obsession?

On a more sophisticated level, the exhortation not to do this to G-d your G-d, is intended to relegate the need that some have to fight against evil to a secondary position.

While there is always a need to fight evil, our obsession should be building and releasing our positive energies. We cannot express our dedication to "G-d *your* G-d," the Torah tells us, by simply destroying evil. We must seek G-d by traveling to Jerusalem, the City of Peace, and go to the Holy Temple where G-

d's presence was accessible by way of positive actions.

Compartmentalized Evil

The above was important throughout history when evil was quite formidable. This message is particularly relevant now, when we stand on the very threshold of a new era of Redemption, at which time there will be no more evil, we must get used to putting more of our energy into doing good, rather than just fighting the evil in our midst. While we must counter any and every evil, we must focus our attention on releasing the positive G-dly forces within ourselves and the world around us.

Although it seems that evil has become more potent in recent years, from the evil of Nazism and Stalinism to the evil of ISIS and other terrorist groups who seek to destroy the Jewish people, the truth is that evil is far weaker and less ubiquitous than ever before.

As explained in other essays, from the beginning of time our mission has become the separation of good from evil, for everything good has some mixture of evil in it

and vice versa. This intermingling of good and evil occurred at the dawn of history when Adam and Eve partook of the forbidden Tree of Knowledge.

Every time a person has performed a Mitzvah or resisted evil, the good has become more distilled as it has separated from evil.

As we stand close to the Final Redemption, with the cumulative effects of millennia of Mitzvos performed, evil is now mostly separated from the good and is therefore simultaneously more potent but less invasive into the hearts of good people. The benefit of this separation is that the good is also much more potent, refined and pure.

Moreover, evil cannot exist without syphoning some life from the forces of good with which it is intermingled. Hence as evil becomes more potent it “recognizes” that its days are numbered, and as a result, it is making its last stand.

Since evil has been compartmentalized and marginalized, our need to combat evil should also be compartmentalized and marginalized. It should not be our primary focus and obsession.

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Our primary focus and obsession, rather, should be on bringing more light to the world by doing one more Mitzvah. In one of the Rebbe's final messages to the world: "To increase in acts of goodness and kindness."

ESSAY FOUR

JEWISH GIVING

Tzedakah is the paradigm for all Mitzvos.

Tzedakah is unique because it involves the
totality of the person.

Tzedekah liberates the world because it
fulfills our very raison d'etre.

ESSAY FOUR

JEWISH GIVING

No Need for Translation

Tzedakah – one of the major themes of this week's parsha – is one of the few words that does not have to be translated for most Jews. Even those Jews who have strayed so far from Jewish practices and have lost their Jewish language skills, have not forgotten to give tzedakah. Generosity and compassion, the Talmud reveals, is engrained within the psyche of every Jew. It is an inheritance from our Patriarch Abraham who epitomized kindness and love.

Brings Redemption

According to the Talmud, “The Jewish People will only be redeemed because of the Mitzvah of tzedakah.” What is it about this Mitzvah, that, more than any other Mitzvah, brings about our Redemption?

A simple explanation is that G-d rewards us “measure for measure.” When we give

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Tzedakah to sustain those who are in need, G-d performs His form of Tzedakah by sustaining us.

However, the obligation to give to the poor demands not only helping him survive but also to restore the needy person to his or her original financial status.

When applied to the Jewish people who languish in exile, it would not suffice for G-d to simply making it easier for us to survive in exile, which He did and for which we are grateful. G-d “must” also restore us to our original glory as it was in the days of King Solomon with our Bais Hamikdash intact. For that to happen, He must bring us the Final Redemption, otherwise He will not have adequately fulfilled the Mitzvah of Tzedakah.

Purpose of Creation

Chassidic thought provides several other explanations.

One explanation, based on the seminal work Tanya, relates to the premise articulated by our sages in the Midrash that G-d created the world because “He wanted a dwelling place in the lowliest realm.” When the world was first

created, G-d ensured that there would be a separation between the Divine and the mundane. The world was utterly independent and obscured the G-dly forces of creation that were/are responsible for everything in existence.

Obviously, G-d's intention was that this dichotomous and clouded existence should change. Ultimately, it was G-d's plan, to have the entire world recognize G-d's role in creation.

But, the question has been raised: If the Creator Himself made this "separation" how do we change that which G-d wrought?

The answer is Mitzvos. With the performance of a Mitzvah (translated as commandment, but, also [a G-dly] connection) we become more G-dly and some of the screen that obscures G-d's presence is removed. Inasmuch as the Mitzvah is a divinely ordained physical act, it instills divinity into the physical realm.

Moreover, not only does the Mitzvah change the person's nature, but also the object with which the Mitzvah was performed becomes more G-dly. By extension, all the resources that went into the performance of the

Mitzvah and into the making of the object with which the Mitzvah was performed, are affected in a positive way; they too become G-dly.

With the cumulative effect of Mitzvos, the world, gradually but, surely, becomes a dwelling place for G-d.

Mitzvos Bring Moshiach

This is what the Messianic Age is all about. It is a time when not only will there be world peace, but, more fundamentally, it is when the world will be what it was intended to be: a world where truth prevails because the true nature of the world's G-dly existence will no longer concealed.

This explains the statement made by our sages: "the world was created for the Messianic Age (Talmud, *Sanhedrin*).” Another Midrashic passage states that the world was created for the purpose of Torah and Mitzvos. In light our analysis of the role of Mitzvos, these two passages are complementary.

Through our observance of the Mitzvos we refine the world to the point that it becomes

the world that G-d had in mind at the time of creation.

The Uniqueness of Tzedakah in Making a Dwelling for G-d

Despite the fact that all the Mitzvos have the same effect: they bring holiness into the physical world; (which includes: a) the body that performs the Mitzvah, b) the object with which the Mitzvah is performed and c) the environment that provided the resources for the above), the Mitzvah of Tzedakah stands out as having a greater impact than any other mitzvah.

So fundamental is Tzedakah that our sages declared that “it balances all other Mitzvos” and in the Jerusalem Talmud it is referred to simply as “**The** Mitzvah.”

Totality!

What distinguishes Tzedakah from all other Mitzvos is the extent to which it refines and elevates the physical realm. In the words of the Tanya (Chapter 37):

“...it is the core of the precepts... for in all other Mitzvos only one faculty of the life sustaining soul is embodied, and then only at the time of the performance of the Mitzvah. By contrast, Tzedakah, which a person gives out of the toil of his hands, surely all the strength of his vital soul is embodied in the execution of his work or occupation by which he earned the money. Thus, when he gives Tzedakah, one's whole vital soul ascends to G-d. Even where one does not depend on his toil for a livelihood, nevertheless since with his Tzedakah money he could have purchased necessities of life, for his life sustaining soul, hence [in effect] he is giving his soul's life to G-d.”

In simple terms this means that Tzedakah has the greatest impact on the refinement of the person and his/her environment because it involves the totality of the human effort. All of one's energies go into earning a living. And in those instances where one does not have to work for a living, the money given to Tzedakah is potentially sufficient for sustaining one's entire life. Hence, giving

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Tzedakah is the equivalent of giving one's total existence.

And it is precisely this type of change that the world needs to realize its final movement towards the coming of Moshiach.

ESSAY FIVE

COPING WITH TRAGEDY

Human nature impels us to ask *why* there is tragedy.

Torah teaches us to ask *what* we should do to prevent tragedy and heal those who have suffered.

ESSAY FIVE

COPING WITH TRAGEDY

A Modern Day Curse

This week's parsha eerily begins with the words: "See I place before you a blessing and a curse."

As we go to print, the world is once again witness to a colossal tragedy, the magnitude of which has yet to be revealed. Hundreds, if not thousands of people; have perished. Hundreds of thousands of people have been made homeless and jobless. Millions of people's lives have been adversely affected.

And unlike 9/11, we cannot put the entire blame on human choices. To be sure, we can always argue that if we had been better prepared etc. the tragedy would not have been so enormous. Nevertheless, one must come to the inevitable conclusion that the hurricane itself, and a significant portion of the destruction it wreaked, could not have been prevented by human intervention.

It is only natural for us to hear people raising the perennial question, why? Why does G-d

allow such misfortune to happen? And even though the same question can be asked any time there is even minimal and localized suffering, it is human nature that moves people to raise the question specifically where the tragedy is of monumental proportions, such as the tragedy in the South East of our country.

Unsatisfying and Misguided Explanations

As a result of this tragedy and the gnawing question it engendered, we are going to hear a chorus of religious leaders saying one thing or another that goes against basic Jewish belief and, in the final analysis, does not really answer any question. It just makes the questioner feel comfortable with their preconceived ideas of what their G-d must look like. It is an exercise in creating G-d in our image, rather than trying to reflect the Divine within ourselves. Instead of recognizing the utterly transcendent nature of G-d, many are desperate to fit G-d into their mold.

I am referring to the two extreme reactions:

On the one hand, we hear fundamentalists of all religions speaking of how this, and other tragedies, are a punishment for the sins of the people.

From the opposite side of the religious spectrum, however, we frequently hear the argument that G-d is not omnipotent; He cannot control the events of the world.

While the second view contradicts everything we know in our tradition about G-d and is theologically and logically flawed, the first view is arrogant, demeaning to G-d, and foolish.

It is arrogant because it assumes that we understand G-d's ways.

It is demeaning because it turns G-d into a merciless tyrant. No loving father would ever punish his children for an infraction of the rules, the way G-d has "punished" His children.

It is also foolish, because it doesn't really answer the question, If G-d is punishing the wicked, why does He allow utterly innocent people to be hurt?

Ask: What and What Should We Do, not Why?

The only valid approach, from the perspective of the Torah, is that while we can occasionally understand **what** G-d does, we cannot possibly fathom **why** He does it. We can and must also try to understand what our course of action should be when we confront adversity. We cannot ever fully grasp G-d's ways.

To be sure, some of the suffering in our world is a result of someone's sins; just as if one cuts their finger blood will flow. Actions have consequences. Evil begets evil and good begets good. Also, there are crimes so heinous that one would not be disturbed at the notion that G-d has punished the perpetrators of those crimes. But this is a far cry from the suggestion that all suffering is a form of punishment.

Punishment for Sin is Inexplicable

Indeed, the concept of punishment for sins does not explain: a) the magnitude of suffering; b) why innocent people suffer along with the guilty; c) why G-d cannot deal

with our sins in a different, “more humane,” way.

Furthermore, by trying to understand G-d’s ways, it takes away our sense of pain and outrage when others suffer. To the same extent that G-d does not want us doubt His existence and role in our lives, He does not want us to sit back and accept the evil and pain that exists in our world in the name of G-d.

If we were to fully grasp why there is suffering, it would make us insensitive to the suffering.

What we do know about our world and the purpose of its existence is that G-d wanted an imperfect world to be made perfect by our choices and actions.

G-d Does Not Need Us to be His Defense Lawyers

To paraphrase the opening verses of this week’s parsha:

G-d placed before us a world that possesses both incredible blessing and horrendous curses, and commands us to transform those curses into blessings.

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Nowhere, have we been told to justify evil and suffering and serve as G-d's defense lawyers. G-d does want us to fight evil and allay suffering and pain, even as we continue to have faith in Him and plead with Him to bring an end to the exile and all the pain that goes along with it, and usher in the time when the fruit of our labor will become evident for the entire world – with the coming of Moshiach and the imminent redemption.

ESSAY SIX

GIVE WITH JOY

There is materialistic selfishness and
selflessness.

There is also a form of spiritual selfishness
and selflessness.

Assisting others even before we generate
positive feelings in giving is spiritual
selflessness.

ESSAY SIX

GIVE WITH JOY!

Phrased in the Negative

One of the Mitzvos discussed in this week's parsha is the mitzvah of giving Tzedakah. The Torah refers to this basic obligation in several ways

After the Torah mentions the command to give Tzedakah, it continues:

“...and you heart shall not feel bad when you give to him, for G-d, your G-d, will bless all your work and everything you do because of this.”

A simple question can be asked. Why does the Torah phrase this directive in the negative? Why couldn't it have phrased it in a positive vein, “And you shall rejoice when you give him?” After all, we know how important it is to do a Mitzvah with joy.

The Primary Objective

One answer that may be proposed is that when a person gives Tzedakah the main thing

is for the needy person to receive it. The feelings that we experience when we give Tzedakah are not nearly as important as the actual act of giving. The reality is that there are needy people and causes that we can and must help regardless of our feelings.

This doesn't mean that our feelings that accompany this Mitzvah are not important. It does mean that our desire for self-perfection and refinement ought not to cause us to shirk our obligations towards others by saying that we are not doing the Mitzvah with the proper feeling. We should never postpone giving until such time that we give for the right reason. We should give without delay, and work on our feelings and our idealism afterwards, if need be.

Thus, the Torah does not emphasize the joy that must accompany our giving of Tzedakah for that would take the focus off the main objective of Tzedakah to help others. The Torah just mentions the negative part; that we should not feel bad when we give, for that is an integral part of giving. Were we upset that we had to part with our hard earned money, it would show. That, in turn, would make the recipient of our Tzedakah feel

uncomfortable and degraded. So while we might be helping him or her financially, we will simultaneously be making the beneficiaries of our generosity feel terrible. And as the Talmud explains, an essential part of giving Tzedakah is making the recipient feel good not just giving money.

Trusteeship

On a deeper level, one can explain why the Torah emphasizes that we should not feel bad and fails to mention that we should give with joy.

To understand this we must preface a well-known concept that has its roots in classical Jewish sources and has been expanded upon in Chassidic literature. The concept is that, in fact, we do not really give our own money when we give Tzedakah. G-d, in His infinite wisdom, wished to give us an opportunity to be His partner in sustaining the world. Rather than distribute the resources He created directly to all, He chooses to give more to some so that they will be His partners in giving to others.

In other words, the money that we earn is given to us in trusteeship. We were entrusted with this money—at least a significant part of it; ten to twenty percent according to Jewish law—until such time that the opportunity presents itself to “return” that which was allocated for others to their rightful owners.

This thought, can be rather humbling, because it makes us realize that our money is not really exclusively ours and that our giving is not simply an act of generosity and benevolence but a righteous act—which is the true translation of the word Tzedakah, not charity—we are returning that which rightfully belongs to those in need.

For a truly sensitive person, not only can this be a humbling feeling, it can also be depressing. For it posits that the other person was made poor only to give us the opportunity to help them. In a strange way, we become “accomplices” in their pain and suffering. So, even as we rejoice at the opportunity to help these unfortunate people by giving them Tzedakah, our joy is marred by the sense of sadness that they had to suffer so that we can partner with G-d.

We might therefore be troubled by the question, why couldn't G-d distribute the wealth equitably in the first place? Why is there so much unfairness in the world? Granted, as was mentioned above, G-d created the inequity so that we can reverse it. But it still hurts and we might exhibit some of this sadness as we give the Tzedakah to the needy individual.

Postpone the Sadness

The Torah therefore admonishes us not to harbor these negative thoughts when we give Tzedakah. We should reserve these sad thoughts for other times; the times that are designated for soul-searching; when it doesn't get in the way of our giving and the manner in which we give. When we are trying to uplift the spirits of the downtrodden, we cannot afford to be sad and bring them down.

As Jews we must not allow our questions and anguish get in the way of our observances. This must be balanced by the heartfelt pleas to G-d: Why is there still suffering in this world? Why has Moshiach tarried so long? How much longer do we have to stay in

Galus-exile? But even as we ask these questions, we must not let them bring down our spirit, but continue to do our Jewish thing with joy and gladness of heart. It is the combination of sincere complaints to G-d for every second we remain in exile and joyful dedication to His commandments in these last moments of exile that become the catalysts that will ultimately usher in the Messianic Age.

ESSAY SEVEN

OPEN YOUR HANDS AND SEE

Empathy is seeing into the inner sanctum of
the other's heart and soul.

ESSAY SEVEN

OPEN YOUR HANDS AND SEE

Repetition

One of the Torah sources of the Mitzvah of tzedakah is in this week's parsha of *R'ei*.

“If there will be a destitute person among you, any of your brothers, in any of your cities, in the Land that G-d, your G-d, is giving you. You must not harden your heart or shut your hand from your destitute brother. Rather you must surely open your hand to him...”

In the original text, the Torah uses a compound verb best translated as “Open, you shall open your hand...”

Whenever the Torah repeats a word or a phrase it is as an instructive emphasis. Rashi comments that this repetition is intended to teach us that one should give again and again. A person who gives may be tired of giving to the same person again or may even be irked when called upon to donate frequently to multiple causes. People find it

much easier to give one amount once a year. Individual donors therefore have to be admonished to give repeatedly as the need dictates.

A story is told of a Chassidic Master who told a wealthy magnate who grumbled that he was tired of giving repeatedly, “Why are you not tired of eating repeatedly?”

No Tarrying

Another interpretation of the reason for the repetition of the word for opening one’s hand is based on an observation made in the work *Shalmei Todah* (written by Rabbi Shlomo Danah, a 19th century Tunisian rabbi) that the initials of these three words *ki pasoach tiftach* (open, you shall open...) form the Hebrew word *teikef*, which means “immediately.”

The clear implication of this hint is that one should not tarry when called upon to assist a needy person.

This can explain why the Torah repeats this expression. When a person procrastinates after being told to do something, the commander will usually repeat the command to get the person to comply without delay.

This injunction against tarrying is the basis of a powerful and poignant story recorded in the Talmud (Ta'anis 21a) concerning the Sage Nochum ish Gamzu, one of Rabbi Akiva's teachers from whom he learned to thank G-d for everything. "This too is for the good" was his favorite refrain even when it appeared that something very negative occurred.

Yet, despite his obsessive optimism and the positive spin he gave to virtually every negative phenomenon, Nochum Ish Gamzu never forgave himself for the following incident:

"I was once traveling on the road to the house of my father-in-law and I had with me three donkey-loads; one of food, one of drink, and one of various delicacies. A poor man came and stood before me on the road and said to me, 'My teacher, sustain me!' I said to him: 'wait until I unload from the donkey.' I did not have a chance to unload the donkey before his soul departed."

Nochum ish Gamzu blamed his delay for the death of the poor man and accepted upon himself all forms of suffering as penance for

what he considered to have been an egregious sin.

In truth, Nochum was not guilty of any crime or moral lapse. If the man had been more forceful and stated “I’m starving” instead of just “sustain me,” Nochum would certainly have acted with much more haste. Apparently the man did not look deathly ill nor did he convey urgency in his request.

Why then did Nochum blame himself so severely?

Seeing is Penetrating

We can answer this question by first considering the name of this week’s parsha, *R’ei*, which means “See.”

Since the entire parsha is so named, it stands to reason that this name relates to all of its subjects. One may ask, if this premise is true, then what is the connection of “seeing” to the Mitzvah of tzedakah?

Upon some reflection, we can see that the connection of *R’ei* to tzedakah is quite obvious. It is not enough to give to the poor and needy. One must also see their plight. It’s not enough to lend an ear to hear directly

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from the destitute about their dire situation for two reasons:

First, it is very likely that the poor and downtrodden will not share with you all their misery and the deep humiliation of poverty and the need to depend on the kindness of others. The most embarrassing thing for a person is to have to beg for sustenance. And if they are no longer embarrassed that means that they have internalized their degradation to such an extent that it has become an inseparable part of their entire being. They have reached the very nadir of degradation.

Moreover, there are some people who are so anguished that they are struck mute spiritually and can no longer express emotions. This does not mean that they don't hurt; it just means that they cannot vent their hurt, which compounds their emotional pain. They are forced to keep it bottled up. The only way one can appreciate the measure of their suffering is by seeing into their inner turmoil and pain.

Second, even if they are uninhibited enough to unburden themselves and vent their misery unfiltered, the listener will only be able to pick up some of the most external

aspects of their plight. It is in the nature of audio that it is perceived from a distance; the listener stands “outside and eavesdrops.”

To help a needy person requires, first and foremost, that we not only hear their story but we also see what is really going on in their lives. To do that requires us to get closer. One must be able to see, reflect and empathize with the sufferer.

Why the Need to See?

One may wonder, what does the poor person gain whether we see his or her plight or just have a general idea of it? Isn't the main thing that we help this individual in his or her moment of need?

The answer is twofold:

First, when we empathize with someone we treat them with more sensitivity. The Talmud states that if you give to the poor without sensitivity it can actually cause more pain; he or she might even be better off without your assistance.

Moreover, the Talmud states that even if one does not hurt the beneficiary, one who makes him feel valued by speaking to him with

soothing and comforting words deserves more blessings than the one who simply helps materially.

Second, and more importantly, when we see the person's plight we will not dither in our response. When we see suffering we cannot tolerate it for even a split second. Moreover, when we have insight into the true condition of other we see how acute the situation is and will not delay delivering assistance because our tarrying can cause the other's condition to deteriorate.

Nochum Heard but did not See

This explains why Nochum ish Gamzu could not forgive himself for taking his time in rendering assistance to the destitute person he met on his way.

Nochum was a man who was usually able to see more deeply into every person and every situation. His eyes were much more penetrating than those of the average person, which explains how we was able to see the good in everything no matter how bad it seemed. His eyes penetrated beneath the surface and saw the hidden good.

Yet, when it came to seeing the hunger, pain and anguish of this starving man, his eyes only saw the exterior of a man who was able to hide his dire situation.

When Nochum ish Gamzu realized that his eyes failed him and his normal penetrating x-ray vision did not function properly so he did not see the other's plight, he condemned himself. Nochum most likely said to himself, "How can I, the man with penetrating vision, not have appreciated this man's suffering?"

Thus, the Talmud relates that Nochum "went and fell on his [the dead starving man's face] and said, "Let my eyes which took no pity on your eyes, become blind..."

He blamed his eyes for failing to perform their function.

Open Your Eyes!

The lesson for today is obvious. We must use our eyes in ways that enable us to see beneath the surface of another's façade.

In addition, we must "open our eyes" to see beneath the façade of our exile. As the Rebbe revealed to us, Redemption is right in front of us. We just have to "open our eyes" to see

it. And by opening our eyes we will make the Redemption a palpable reality for all.

Telling G-d to Open His “Eyes”

Our Sages teach us that whatever G-d commands us to do He observes, in His own way. If G-d asks us to give tzedakah then He surely does so too. G-d gives us life and sustains us. He provides us with all of our needs and in many cases all of our wants. But the ultimate Tzedakah will be when He takes us out of Galus.

But, just as giving alone does not suffice, we must also **see** the plight of the destitute and not just hear it from them or about them. So too, we must ask of G-d that He **see** our pain and suffering in exile and respond accordingly.

When He sees our pain and suffering G-d will not tarry. Every second the Galus lingers leads to tragic and lethal consequences for the Jewish people and indeed the entire world, both spiritual and physical.

Responding accordingly also means that G-d will take us out of exile with compassion and love. Our Sages warned us that one possible

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scenario for the Final Redemption is a very painful one. We therefore implore G-d to see that we have suffered enough. We want Moshiach now, and we want the Messianic process to unfold both imminently, and smoothly, with love and compassion.

ESSAY EIGHT

LIVING IN BOTH WORLDS

Living in one world is easy.

Straddling the fence between two worlds by
compromising each is precarious.

The ability to live fully in both worlds is
Divine.

ESSAY EIGHT

LIVING IN BOTH WORLDS

Hearing or Seeing?

Moses has been delivering an impassioned soliloquy to the Jewish people weeks before his passing. And repeatedly, he invokes the expression: “*Shema Yisroel*” – “Hear o Israel.”

But when we begin reading this week’s parsha, *R’ei*, Moses changes his approach and his use of language. Instead of saying “hear” or “listen,” he says “See, I place before you today a blessing and a curse.”

Several questions arise:

First, why did Moses decide to change his mode of expression from Shema-Hear to R’ei-see?

Second, **what** did Moses want them to see?

Third, what did Moses mean when he said, “See, I place before you.” Did Moses mean to suggest that it was he who gave them blessings and curses? Do they not all come from G-d? Why then does Moses attribute

the blessings and the curses to himself?

Certainly, one can say that Moses was simply quoting G-d. One could also explain that, moreover, Moses was so devoted to G-d that G-d spoke through him. Nevertheless, it would have been perfectly fine if Moses would have simply stated: “See, G-d gives you a blessing and a curse.”

Moses Changed Gears

One answer to these questions is based on the commentary *Or Hachaim* (authored by Rabbi Chaim ben Atar, the great Sephardic Sage, a contemporary of the Ba’al Shem Tov) that Moses was actually pointing to himself. When he said, “See, I give you today a blessing and a curse.” he actually meant, “**Look at me**, because I am qualified to speak to you about the things in life that are truly blessed and those that are actually curses.

To explain: When Moses saw how all of his efforts to convey the Divine message to the Jewish people were not penetrating, he realized that it may have been because they looked at the messenger and felt that he was

speaking from a different place.

Moses, to the Jewish people was on a higher perch and came from a different world, a world in which there were only spiritual blessings. Moses could not fathom, they imagined, the struggles of the average person, who cannot always know which is the curse and which is the blessing. And even if one does know right from wrong, it is not always easy to control oneself and avoid the curses.

Moses sensed their skepticism. Moses sensed their doubts about their ability to hear and internalize the messages he was delivering to them.

Moses, therefore, changed gears and resorted to “plan B.” Rather than just preach what was the right way, he would show them that he also was exposed to both worlds. He was raised in the palace of Pharaoh, exposed to all of the wealth and culture of Egypt and could have very easily chosen for himself that kind of a lifestyle. Nevertheless, despite his comfortable existence, he left that environment and even risked his life to save a fellow Jew. And the rest is history.

Moses was well aware of the two competing influences in life and knew how to make the

right choices. Moses was therefore eminently qualified to impress upon the people that they too have the ability to shun the curses that may appear initially as blessings. So Moses says to them, “Look at how I have been capable of knowing right from wrong. And this awareness I am imparting to you.

Was the Humility?

Now, one might think that by Moses pointing to his own role was a contradiction to the way the Torah characterizes him as the humblest man that ever lived. How do we reconcile his humility with the way he asked the people to look at him and his choices?

The answer is that this too was a part of Moses’ self-sacrifice. If the needs of the people dictated that he show them his own example, so be it.

In truth, not only did he not compromise his humility it was an affirmation of it, for when a person is capable of doing that which goes against one's nature to help others, that is the sign of true self-effacing behavior.

Moshiach’s Call for Humility

The Midrash relates that Moshiach will make the announcement to the Jewish people upon his arrival: “**Humble ones**, the time of your redemption has arrived.” Why is it necessary for him to address the Jewish people as “humble ones?” Why couldn’t he use some other praise?

One answer is that calling us humble is not intended simply as praise but an integral part of the process of bringing the Redemption. True humility is not putting ourselves down. Genuine humility is when we put aside our own material interests, and even our own spiritual interest, to assist another.

That is the sign that we are indeed ready for the true and complete Redemption.

ESSAY NINE

CLIMBING THE LADDER

Two people are on a ladder; one is on the top rung and one is on the bottom rung. Which one is closer to the top?

The answer depends on which direction they are going.

ESSAY NINE

CLIMBING THE LADDER

Will there Always be Poverty?

As we approach the month of Elul—the month before the New Year—it is customary to reflect on the weekly Torah portion, particularly as it pertains to our preparation for Rosh Hashanah.

One of the central themes of this week's parsha is the Mitzvah of Tzedakah. This suggests, quite literally, that one way of earning all of the blessings and the Tzedakah that G-d gives us for the New Year is to perform our own acts of Tzedakah. By reaching out to others in need, G-d reciprocates and reaches out to us in our times of need.

The Torah introduces this Mitzvah in two parts that appear to be somewhat contradictory.

After discussing the law of the Sabbatical year which cancels all debts and it is therefore forbidden to “demand payment

from his friend or his brother,” the Torah continues with the promise:

“There will no longer be any poor among you, for G-d will bless you repeatedly in the Land G-d your G-d, is giving you as an inheritance and a possession.”

In other words, by following G-d's commandments, the scourge of poverty will be removed from the land.

A few verses later where the Torah speaks of the commandment to open our hands and hearts to give to the poor, the Torah continues,

“There will never cease to be destitute people within the land, and therefore I am commanding you, as follows, ‘you should repeatedly open your hand to your poor brother and to your destitute in your land.’”

The Midrash, cited by Rashi, points out the apparent contradiction in these verses.

In the first citation, the Torah avers that there will be no more poverty: “There will no longer be any poor among you.”

Yet in the second citation the Torah states unequivocally: “There will never cease to be destitute people within the land.” Which is it? Will there always be poverty, or will it eventually be abolished?

Reconciliation

Rashi, citing the Midrash answers that when Israel follows G-d’s commandments, poverty will indeed become obsolete. However, when we fail to live up to the Divine standards of the Torah, poverty will still be around.

The commentary *Kli Yakar* asks a simple question. Where in the text, where it describes the perennial nature of poverty, does it give any hint that it refers to a situation where people do not follow G-d’s commandments?

Kli Yakar answers that if we examine the text carefully we will see that it begins by referring to the land (where the poor reside) simply as “the land.” By contrast, when it issues the command to open our hands to the poor it stresses “of **your** land.”

Kli Yakar explains that this verse refers to Jews who refused to return to the Land of

Israel in the days of Ezra when the Second Temple was built. Their insistence on remaining in exile was considered as if they did not want to follow G-d's will and therefore, the Torah predicts, that in circumstances like theirs, poverty will stay around for a long time.

From the Kli Yakar's textual analysis it is evident that the command to give to the poor of "your land" is intended to express the preeminent role of giving Tzedakah to the poor and needy in the Land of Israel.

Indeed, Jewish legal authorities equate giving Tzedakah to the poor and needy in the Land of Israel to the need to give Tzedakah to the poor of one's own community. In other words, one's obligation first and foremost is to give to one's community before giving to other communities. And giving to Israel is considered a local need and is given highest priority.

Why Perennial Poverty?

A question still remains. When the Jews who lived through the Babylonian exile refused to move to Israel with Ezra, it was indeed

considered a sin on their part. But why did that solitary sin accord them the dubious distinction of being labeled a society that will forever have to experience poverty?

A second question: Based on *Kli Yakar’s* analysis that distinguishes between the Jews of the Diaspora and the Jews who lived in Israel it would seem that there would be no poor left in Israel. Why then does the Torah command the Jews who live in the Diaspora to help support the poor in Israel? Why were there still poor in Israel?

This question can be answered very simply that although the Jews who returned to Israel did the right thing in that regard, they still failed to meet the high standard of “doing G-d’s will,” that would have rendered poverty obsolete.

However, this only serves to reinforce our first question, why would the solitary sin of not going to Israel maintain their state of impoverishment if everything else about them was in order?

Which Direction are You Facing?

One may suggest that the physical state of impoverishment is a physical manifestation of a spiritual one. One could be on the highest rung of the ladder—rich in the true sense of the word—and yet be so far from the goal because the person on the ladder is facing downward—and therefore be no better off than the one who never stepped foot on the ladder.

At the time the Second Temple was built, Israel was still in ruins and the land was desolate both physically and spiritually. Many of the Jews who refused to return to Israel did so because they felt more spiritually, as well as physically, secure in the Diaspora. So while they were on a higher rung than their brethren who did return to Israel, their direction on the ladder was going down.

So we have two forms of spiritual poverty:

One form is poverty because they are on the lowest rung of the ladder. Their lives are bereft of spiritual content. They do few Mitzvos and are far from the ideals of Judaism. There are some who are so impoverished that they have yet to get even to the first rung of the ladder. They are still mired in the earthliness and earthiness of life.

However, since they possess a spark of Jewish feeling in them, their situation is only a temporary one. They will eventually get on the ladder and climb it rung by rung until they reach the top.

The second form of poverty is far worse. It can even include rabbis or spiritual people who think they are—and may indeed be—on the highest rung of the spiritual ladder. But, because they think they have achieved such heights, they think that they need not cross over into the Land of Israel when G-d deemed it appropriate to do so.

In effect, they are, as stated above, facing the earth. They represent the ultimate impoverished individuals because they don't realize how far they truly are from the goal.

Three Kinds of Jews

All this can be applied to today's Jewish life. The Jewish community is usually divided into categories based on affiliation (Orthodox, Conservative, Reform) or political philosophy (liberal, conservative), active or non-active in their respective communities etc. These labels do little to describe the true nature of the

person and their position on the Jewish ladder.

If we have to divide the Jewish people into categories—not for the sake of creating divisions between them, but for the sake of understanding where we stand in relation to our common goal and purpose—it would be more helpful to divide them into the following three groups:

There are those Jews who are, Jewishly speaking—although only G-d can determine this—on the ground, inert and have no conscious desire to be anywhere else. They have absolutely no interest to enter the Promised Land in either the literal or figurative sense of the term.

At the opposite end of the spectrum it would seem are those Jews whose ambience is thoroughly and totally Jewish. They live and breathe Jewish knowledge and their lives pulsate with Judaism. They are, outwardly at least, on the highest rung of the ladder of Judaism. They certainly don't have a desire to get into the Promised Land because in their mind they got there long ago.

And there are those amongst us that might very well be on the lower or lowest rung of

the ladder or even lower, but they are making a sincere effort—albeit in many cases, a minimal one, baby steps—to get on that ladder.

Of these three categories, ironically, only the last is potentially out of the woods and is not spiritually impoverished. They feel the need to go to the Land of Israel—physically and spiritually—because they are looking for more ways to express their Jewishness. For them poverty will eventually disappear.

However, for those who are on the lowest rung or on the highest rung and harbor no desire to get into the mindset and state of enhanced holiness represented by the Land of Israel are sorrowfully destined to remain impoverished. And while those on the higher rungs might be more fortunate than their inactive brethren they are ultimately worse off because they do not feel the need to grow.

This was the state of the Jewish people who chose to remain behind in the more structured and comfortable life that existed in Babylonia. They were more settled in their Judaism but they missed the boat when it came to helping to build the Land of Israel

and the Temple, which would have never been destroyed had all of the Jewish people united in that effort.

Carving our Comfortable Niches in the U.S.A.

We are now living in a similar—although not identical position—as our Babylonian forebears. We can choose to carve out comfortable niches as it pertains to Judaism or we can forge ahead and do all that we are capable of doing to bring the final Redemption.

The message of this week's parsha thus is to recognize that being comfortable in exile—no matter how intense our Jewish life may be—is a sign that we are impoverished.

Our challenge is to pull ourselves out of this morass and do all that we are capable of doing of helping the poor, whether they are “Jews for Nothing,” or Jews who are for everything except to get out of exile. It is our duty to assist them in every way possible even as we motivate ourselves to do the same.

Preparation for Rosh Hashanah

This message is particularly poignant at this time of the year, as we enter into the transitional month of Elul.

Our Sages tell us that Rosh Hashanah is the spatial parallel to the Land of Israel. We are now about to enter into this New Year, the same way Jews were/are poised to enter into the Land of Israel and the messianic Age.

We have to ask ourselves the question: Are we content with the limited growth of this year? Are we satisfied where we are now? Do we want to enter into, not just a new year on the calendar, but a new and refreshing dimension of life? Do we want the most for all of our people? The answer is certainly a resounding yes! And therefore G-d will certainly grant us—among all of Israel—a good, sweet and redemptive new year!

ESSAY TEN

THE VALUE OF TRUE WEALTH

The myth is that the more material goods we
accumulate the wealthier we are.

The truth is that the more we give away the
wealthier we are.

That kind of wealth can never be taken away
from us.

ESSAY TEN

THE VALUE OF TRUE WEALTH

Five and Ten

One of the primary sources in the Torah for the Mitzvah of giving Tzedakah—loosely translated as charity, but more accurately as “righteousness”—is in this week’s parsha, *R’ei*.

The Torah states:

“You shall always take the tithe from all the produce of the seed crop that the field produces.”

The straightforward understanding of this verse is that it refers to the tithing of one’s crops. However, our Sages applied this verse to the conventional giving of Tzedakah from our general income as well..

According to Jewish law, we are obligated to give at least one tenth of our income to Tzedakah. It is preferable, however, to double that amount and give two tenths of our income to Tzedakah.

These two levels of giving are derived from the above-mentioned verse when translated more literally: “Separate a tenth, [indeed] a tenth, of your produce...” The repetition of the word “tenth” is interpreted by our Talmudic sages to suggest that we ought to give minimally one tenth of our earnings to Tzedakah, but preferably one fifth.

Another Talmudic interpretation of the repetition of the words: “a tenth, [indeed] a tenth” is based on a variant reading of the Hebrew word: *t’aseir*. In this novel translation the verse reads: “Tithe so that you will become rich.”

There is a principle, established by the Rebbe, that whenever two interpretations are given to the same words or verse, they are interconnected. What connection can we find between the interpretation that encourages us to give two tenths of our income to Tzedakah with the interpretation that encourages us to give Tzedakah as a way of achieving wealth?

Another question:

How can the Torah encourage us to perform such an important mitzvah—according to the Talmud it is the equivalent of all the Mitzvos

and it is the Mitzvah that brings Redemption—for an ulterior motive?

On the most basic level, the answer to the question is that the Torah was concerned with the welfare of the poor and needy. The Torah is not concerned about the motives of the giver as much as it is concerned about the needs of those who are hurting. Character refinement can wait; a person without food, clothing or shelter cannot!

The Poor Man's Entreaty and the Rich Man's Impudence Revisited

We can find a deeper and more insightful answer to this last question in light of a point made in an essay for last week's parshas Vo'eschanan that referred to the verse from Proverbs:

“The poor speaks entreatingly but the rich responds impudently.”

The Midrash, incredibly, compares the entreating poor individual to Moses and the rich person who speaks impudently to G-d.

This was understood to mean that Moses acted like a poor man who did not demand entry into the Promised Land. G-d, however,

wants us to act like the rich who act with impudence. G-d wants us to employ “kosher” chutzpah to demand of Him to bring an end to the suffering and misery associated with Galus and bring us the Redemption without delay!

Two questions still arise:

If the Midrash's reference to G-d as the rich person who speaks impudently was intended to teach us to speak with chutzpah, why does the Midrash apply this teaching to G-d and not directly to us?

Second, why does the verse ascribe chutzpah to the rich?

Defining Wealth

To answer these questions we must define wealth.

True wealth does not exist in our realm. No matter how much one has in terms of material or even spiritual resources there is always something he or she is lacking. A billionaire might be lacking in health. A poor and sick person can be rich in love and kindness. The only true source of inexhaustible and unmitigated wealth is G-d.

And to the extent that we are connected to Him, we get a taste of that wealth and the chutzpah that goes along with it; i.e., the power to make demands and have our demands met.

We can now have a deeper appreciation of what the Torah means when it intimates that we ought to give Tzedakah so that we become wealthy. Perhaps, our sages were hinting to us that if we want to acquire true wealth, i.e. a taste of **G-dly** wealth, we must do G-dly things, specifically the Mitzvah of Tzedakah.

Generally speaking, this means that by performing any Mitzvah—which is defined as a Divine commandment and connector to the Divine—we, in turn, become Divine.

However, of all the Mitzvos that we can do to become G-dly and “wealthy” one Mitzvah stands out because it is the ultimate Divine act—the act of Tzedakah. The act of giving requires one to have possessions. Indeed, the more one has the more he or she can give. G-d is the ultimate “Wealthy One” and the ultimate Giver of Tzedakah. All of what we have is a product of Divine beneficence. It is a manifestation of the Divine source of true

wealth. And when we emulate G-d in this regard, we too are accorded the title of being truly wealthy.

This sheds light on a famous story of a great and wealthy sage who advised a certain king. When the king asked him for an accounting of his possessions, the Sage indicated a much smaller amount than his real wealth. The rabbi was charged with the crime of hiding his true worth to the king and was duly imprisoned. But knowing the integrity of the Sage, the king demanded an explanation from the Sage as to why he reported only one fifth of his true worth. The Rabbi answered that the only money he really owned was the money he gave away to Tzedakah, which was a fifth of his income.

All the money or other earthly possessions—and even intellectual, cultural and even spiritual possessions—do not really make you rich. Only the things that we share with others—money, knowledge, warmth etc.—are indicators of our wealth. It represents Divine wealth that has enduring value.

Thus, our Sages say, if you want to acquire true, enduring and pure wealth give Tzedakah.

Tzedakah Brings Redemption: Why?

And thus, our Sages also state that when we give Tzedakah we hasten the process of Redemption.

One explanation for this, in light of the above discussion of the nature of true wealth, is that while every Mitzvah makes the world a more G-dly world and renders it better equipped to experience the Redemption through Moshiach, only the ultimate rich man possesses the G-d-given holy chutzpah to demand it.

Connecting the Dots

We can now also understand the connection between this interpretation of the verse that we should give Tzedakah in order to acquire wealth with the alternate interpretation that the preferred manner of giving is to give two tenths.

When one gives the bare minimum, he or she is not demonstrating the Divine trait of wealth. By giving and then giving again, one demonstrates that his or her manner of giving is not just satisfying the minimum requirement. It is instead the first step in

breaking out of the parameters of the impoverishment of exile that stifle us and keep us from enjoying true G-dly wealth.

To be sure, even if we act poorly and fulfill our minimum requirements of Tzedakah, Moshiach will still take us out of exile. In fact, one of the scenarios described in the Torah for Moshiach's arrival is that he will come as "a poor man riding on a donkey." This is not a reflection of Moshiach, but rather of the impoverished resources we bring to bear in the pursuit of our Redemption.

We prefer, and therefore strive, however, to come before G-d as rich people and be able to say to Him, "We are a wealthy and deserving people because of all the cumulative good we have done through the millennia, particularly the lavish way we have given and given." This way Moshiach arrives majestically and leads us into the ultimate age of G-dly wealth that will envelop the entire world.

ESSAY ELEVEN

THE BROTHER OF A POOR MAN

**There is no greater poverty than hoarding
wealth.**

**There is no greater wealth than sharing it
with others.**

ESSAY ELEVEN

THE BROTHER OF A POOR MAN

The Most Important Mitzvah

Tzedakah is one of Judaism's very important Mitzvos. In some ways, it is the most important of them all. The Talmud states that Tzedakah by itself is equal to all the other Mitzvos. Tzedakah is singularly important because it hastens the Redemption. We are taught that Israel will not be redeemed except through Tzedakah.

These and other statements about Tzedakah in the Talmud demonstrate its centrality in Jewish life.

This unique Mitzvah is also discussed in several places in the Torah. One of them is in this week's parsha:

"If there will be a destitute person—from among one of your brothers or from one in your town—in the Land that G-d, your G-d, is giving you, you must not harden your heart or shut your hand from your destitute brother. Rather, you must repeatedly

open your hand to him and give him (charity or) give him a loan—sufficient to fulfill his requirements that he is lacking.”

Rashi's Enigmatic Comment

Rashi interprets the words “from your destitute brother” as a warning of what will happen if you do not give Tzedakah:

“If you don't give it (Tzedakah) to him, your end will be that you will be a brother of a destitute person.”

Rashi, presumably, was troubled by the apparently superfluous nature of the words “from your destitute brother.” The verse could have simply stated: “You must not harden your heart or shut your hand.” It would have been understood literally, as referring to a penniless person.

Rashi, therefore, understands these words as foretelling the punishment for not giving Tzedakah: you will become the brother of a destitute person.

Rashi's comment, however, begs the obvious question: Why would the punishment for not helping the poor be that one becomes the

brother of a poor man? Why wouldn't the punishment be impoverishment itself? Furthermore, this uncharitable person is already a brother of someone destitute, for that is how the Torah introduces the subject: "If there will be a destitute person—from among one of your brothers."

Seven Answers

There are at least seven ways to resolve this question:

Some commentators interpret Rashi's words as suggesting that the tables will be turned. The punishment for not helping your brother is that he shall become rich and you will become poor and will need to depend on your wealthy brother for support.

A second and simpler explanation can be offered:

The word "brother" is meant figuratively here, as a permanent companion. In this view, Rashi actually means that just as one cannot sever biological ties with a brother, so too will the miser find himself in constant companionship with poverty as retribution for the lack of compassion for his own

brother. Poverty will be a permanent fixture of his life.

His Insensitivity will be Exposed

Third, the miser's punishment is that everyone will know that he is a brother of a destitute person, even if he attempts to cover up his insensitivity with public philanthropy.

According to Jewish law—as Rashi in an earlier comment cites—we must give precedence to our own family, community, etc., before giving to others. There are individuals who are charitable but do not give to their own flesh and blood. By contrast, they are more than willing to contribute to outside causes.

There are even those who give primarily — or even exclusively — to non-Jewish causes. Their rationale may be that this form of charitable giving will reward them with more recognition and acclaim.

These selective philanthropists obviously do not want people to know that they don't give to their own. Since they are so kind to others, they think no one will suspect that they are cruel to their own flesh and blood.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – R'EI

The Torah therefore states that the punishment for not helping your brother is that your insensitivity to his needs will be exposed. The entire town will talk about the cruel brother who did not want to help his own kin. You will always be known as the “brother of the destitute.”

The story is told of a wealthy man who was solicited to contribute to one of the town’s charitable causes. He refused to give, using the excuse that he had a poor brother to support.

A while later, that same brother came to the charity collectors and asked for their assistance. When they asked him why he needed it since he had a rich brother, he spoke the ugly truth: his brother refused to help him. The charity collectors promptly returned to the wealthy brother and demanded to know why he used his poor brother as an excuse. His reply was: “I indeed have a poor brother, and if I don’t help **him**, why should I contribute to **your** cause...”

Why Wait? Help him Now!

Fourth, another understanding of Rashi’s words is that the “punishment” for not giving to your poor brother is that your brother will end up remaining indigent. Here we are dealing with someone who could help his brother but may feel that others should help instead. Whether those others are the Jewish community or the government, the Torah exhorts us to not rely on them; charity begins at home. And if you will not help your brother, you will forever bear the guilt of not supporting your brother in his destitution, because he will most likely remain destitute. In the end, you will have no choice but to help him. Why then did you not help him immediately, when you were made aware of his plight?

Discovering our Brotherhood

Fifth, a more positive “spin” can be put on the “punishment” by focusing on the definition of the word brother. As was noted above, it is not restricted to one’s biological brother but extends to every member of the Jewish people.

There are some people who do not want to help their fellow Jew because they do not

recognize the kinship that exists between all of the Jewish people. We are all brothers and sisters. There is an essential unity that binds us together regardless of our station in life or level of Jewish observance.

The Torah therefore promises that ultimately you **will** become the brother of that destitute person; you will eventually recognize that we are all brothers and sisters and you will certainly help him.

Tragically, history has demonstrated that, all too often, Jews discover their commonality, shared history, destiny and indeed their shared soul, in times of tragedy or crisis. In the past, when we experienced poverty and suffering it brought us closer; we recognized our inherent unity. Now, when we prosper there is a lamentable tendency to forget that we all are truly one.

Thus, the Torah's question: why wait until you suffer the indignity of poverty to appreciate that you are brothers? Recognize this reality **now** and you will help usher in the age when the poor shall be no more.

A sixth explanation is that when we refuse to help our brother who is materially poor we will become his brother in poverty. Whereas

the brother is only materially poor, the rich miser will become spiritually poor.

Moshiach: The Destitute?

There is a seventh way of understanding Rashi's comment. According to the classic work *Or Hachaim*, the destitute person is an allegory for Moshiach. The Hebrew word for destitute is *evyon*, which means "one who desires everything." Moshiach harbors the passionate desire to redeem the Jewish people. He cannot tolerate the lack of Redemption. He feels impoverished because he has been unable to redeem the Jewish people.

From this perspective, we can reinterpret the commandment to give Tzedakah to the destitute as an obligation to assist Moshiach in realizing his goal of redeeming the Jewish people.

We are thus commanded to "not harden your heart or shut your hand from your destitute brother." This can be understood to mean that we should not harden our hearts and cling to an exile mindset where we remain indifferent to Moshiach's heartfelt desire to

bring Redemption to the world. We too must cry out sincerely and passionately, “*Ad Masai*—How much longer” do we have to remain in exile?

Pleading for our exile to end, no matter how fervently, will not suffice. We also have to keep our hands open, i.e., do one more Mitzvah that will tip the scales in favor of Redemption.

The Torah adds “from your destitute brother” to indicate, as Rashi says, that if we don’t give him Tzedakah we will ultimately become a brother to the destitute person.

In the context of *Or Hachaim’s* interpretation of the destitute person as Moshiach, we can understand this phrase to mean that even if we fail to do our part in sharing Moshiach’s passion, Moshiach will still redeem us. In the end, we will all become his brother and join him in the unfolding of the Redemption.

The profound question is whether we will grasp the opportunity to have a positive role in the process or simply stand back and let Moshiach accomplish everything without us?

Become Moshiach’s Brother Now!

In the Rebbe's historic talk of the 28th of Nissan 5751, he told us that he had done all he could do himself to bring Moshiach, and now it was up to us to finish this greatest of tasks. We should open our hearts (by crying out "*ad masai*" with sincerity) and open our hands, by tenaciously searching for ways to bring Redemption, with particular emphasis on the literal Mitzvah of Tzedakah. Don't wait until later to join Moshiach, become his brother now!

ESSAY TWELVE

RIGHT OR LEFT?

There is a perennial debate:

Which is greater the one who initiates a good project or the one who completes it?

The best of both worlds is to link the beginning with the end.

ESSAY TWELVE

RIGHT OR LEFT?

The Secret to Wealth

The Torah introduces the commandment to tithe our produce (and by extension to give one tenth of our net earnings to Tzedakah) by using a repetitive expression: “Tithe you shall tithe.” In most translations the repetition is simply translated as “You shall surely tithe.” The repetition is understood as emphasis, conveying a sense of urgency. However, the fact that the Torah indicates urgency by repeating the word “tithe” must serve us didactically as well.

The Talmud addresses this issue and translates the repetitious phrase in a novel way: “Tithe in order that you shall become rich.” In Hebrew, the word for “Tithe (which means “give a tenth”), is *aser*. The Hebrew word for “you shall become rich” is *t’ashir*. Since there are no vowels in the Torah, both words share the same consonants and are therefore understood to be interchangeable.

The Path to a Refined Mind and Heart

One can take this promise of “Tithe so that you will become rich,” i.e., wealth as a reward for giving Tzedakah, a step further:

The Talmud states: “There is no one poor except one who is poor in knowledge.” It follows, conversely, that no one is truly rich unless he is rich in knowledge.

Wealth is thus primarily a spiritual concept. The reward of wealth for the giving of Tzedakah is therefore one of spiritual wealth. When a person gives Tzedakah it actually has a beneficial effect on his or her mind. In the words of the Alter Rebbe in his *Torah Or*: “When a person gives to another his mind and heart become refined a thousand-fold!”

If one wants to enjoy true intellectual and emotional wealth he or she must give to others.

The Road to Redemption is Paved with Tzedakah

On yet another level we can interpret this statement in a novel fashion:

Just as there is spiritual wealth and poverty which is measured by the degree of one's intellectual and emotional sophistication, there are also historical periods which can be characterized as poor or rich. For example, the generation of the desert is referred to as a "generation of knowledge," because they received the Torah at Mount Sinai.

In the days of King Solomon, the Jewish people reached their pinnacle and enjoyed incredible spiritual—as well as material—wealth.

Generally speaking, as long as we were in the Land of Israel with our Bais Hamikdash-Holy Temple we enjoyed great spiritual affluence. .

By contrast, the period of Galus-Exile, bereft of our Bais Hamikdash and exposed to great suffering and assimilation, is a period of spiritual impoverishment.

The ultimate period of wealth is reserved for the future Messianic Age, which we are eagerly anticipating.

Hence, the Torah informs us that if we tithe today in the period of exile we will enjoy great spiritual wealth in the coming Age of Redemption.

This interpretation actually echoes the words of the Talmud: “Tzedakah is great for it hastens the Redemption.” What is novel about the interpretation is the way it clarifies the connection between Tzedakah and Redemption.

Why is tzedakah singled out as the Mitzvah that leads to Redemption? Aren't all Mitzvos that we perform the agents that bring Redemption? What is so unique about Tzedakah?

One answer is that Tzedakah reverses the status of a person who is poor and needy. G-d reciprocates in kind and takes us out of the state of exile/spiritual impoverishment into the state of wealth-Redemption.

Mitzvah for Ulterior Motive?

All of the abovementioned three explanations agree that it is appropriate to perform the Mitzvah of Tzedakah with the intention of becoming wealthy, materially or spiritually.

This accords with the Talmudic statement that it is completely justified for one to give Tzedakah with the intention, for example,

that it should secure his son's recovery from illness.

This appears to be an exception to the ideal expressed in Ethics of the Fathers that one should serve his Master without the intention of getting a reward. While giving Tzedakah for ulterior motives is justified it is still not the highest form of the Mitzvah.

The Ultimate form of Altruism

Upon deeper reflection, the giving of Tzedakah to hasten the Redemption is not the same as giving for a personal benefit.

Giving for the sake of Redemption is indeed a completely altruistic form of giving because the Messianic Age is the ultimate Tzedakah. The Jewish people and indeed all of humanity will be liberated. Material and spiritual poverty will cease to exist. Even G-d is said to be "suffering" in exile and He too will be liberated with us.

There can therefore be no greater act of Tzedakah than to bring Moshiach. Thus, giving Tzedakah so that it will lead to the ultimate Tzedakah is arguably the purist form of Tzedakah.

An Enigmatic Midrash

With this introduction of how Tzedakah leads to Redemption we might be able to decipher an enigmatic Midrash on the words “Tithe you shall tithe.”

The Midrash cites an earlier verse in Genesis as an elucidation of our verse:

The verse in Genesis refers to Abraham’s statement to his nephew Lot before they parted ways:

“If I go to the left then you go to the right, and if I got to the right then you got to the left.”

This Midrash is quite puzzling. How does this verse shed any light on the verse “Tithe you shall tithe...”?

The simple explanation given is that the difference between the word for tithing in Hebrew (*Asair*) and the word for “you shall be wealthy” (*Ta’ashir*) wealth is the placement of the dot on the letter *shin*. If it is placed on the left then the letter *shin* is pronounced like the English letter “s.” If it is placed on the right side of the letter then it is pronounced as the English “sh.”

This then is what the Midrash had in mind:

To understand the repetition of the word “*Asair*-Tithe *ta’asair*-you shall tithe” one must look at the placement of the dot.

“If I will go left—i.e., if I will place the dot on the left and read the word “*Asair*-tithe,” then the result will be wealth, where the dot is placed on the right side and reads “*t’ashair*-you shall be wealthy.” If however, I will place the dot on the right, and my focus is to get rich, and I relegate tithing to a secondary position, then the result will be that I will end up with the dot on the left; I will have only one tenth of what I could have earned.”

As ingenious as this interpretation is, we must search for a deeper meaning that will provide us with a lesson about life in the present and how we are to prepare for the future.

Abraham or Moshiach: Who is Superior?

The following is based on the words of the Shaloh (a 16th Century Sage) who interprets Abraham and Lot as people who personify two ideals:

Abraham is the man of kindness. He is consumed with a passion to love and give to

others. Lot, surprisingly, is the symbol of Moshiach! Lot was the ancestor of Moab, Ruth. King David and the entire Davidic dynasty leading to Moshiach.

When we speak of the positioning of Abraham and Moshiach it emerges that Abraham, the man who epitomized kindness, is on the right. The right hand is the giving hand and therefore symbolizes kindness. The monarchy, with its wealth and power to impose itself on others is associated with the left hand. Particularly the Messianic Era is one in which the spiritual power associated with the left (*Gevurah*) will be superior to the spiritual force of the right (*Chesed*).

This poses a riddle. Who is greater and whose ideal is superior? Abraham or Moshiach? Is it Abraham, whose kindness and Tzedakah are the catalysts that brings about the Messianic Age? Abraham is the very source and impetus for the entire process of making this world a “Dwelling Place for G-d,” which will be fully realized in the Messianic Age. Without Abraham’s initiative there would be no process. Or perhaps is Moshiach superior, because he represents the culmination of that process and the ushering

in of a new world order of Divine revelation with all of its attendant benefits such as world peace.

Hence Abraham's question as to which direction he and Lot should go right or left was actually a theological question as to whose role is superior.

And the answer is that from one vantage point the argument can be advanced that without Abraham there could be no Moshiach, while, it can also be said that without Moshiach, Abraham's work would not be crowned with success. In addition, the fact that one may give Tzedakah with the express intention that it brings Redemption implies that it is not an inferior form of Tzedakah because the Messianic Age is the highest ideal.

This then is the connection to the idea that Tzedakah leads to the era of richness, indicating, on the one hand, the preeminence of tzedakah as the catalyst for Moshiach, and also intimating, on the other hand, that Moshiach is the ideal.

In these last moments of exile as we wait for Moshiach to usher in the Messianic Age it behooves us to keep both ideals in mind: Our

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – R'EI

obsession today must be giving; giving material assistance, teaching the values of Judaism to assimilated Jews and bringing the message of the imminent Redemption to the entire world.

When we combine Tzedakah with Moshiach we solve Abraham's riddle. We have both Tzedakah and Moshiach combined!

ESSAY THIRTEEN

THE TRIPLE HEADER

Some people focus on G-d.

Some concentrate on themselves.

And some direct their attention to others.

Our Sages say: “Reflect on [all] *three* things.”

ESSAY THIRTEEN

THE TRIPLE HEADER

Why Three Prohibitions?

This week's parsha, *R'ei*, cites the commandment not to eat a mixture of milk and meat. This Mitzvah was mentioned in two earlier sections. It is mentioned first in the parsha called *Mishpatim* that deals primarily with civil law as well as in the parsha called *Ki Sisa* that contains the story of the Golden Calf, and now a third time in this week's parsha, which states "do not cook a kid in the milk of its mother."

Rashi, citing a Talmudic source, comments that the three identical phrasings of this prohibition actually represent three separate prohibitions: a) one may not cook milk and meat; b) one may not eat a mixture of milk and meat, and c) one may not derive any benefit from that mixture, such as selling it or feeding it to one's animal.

We can gain an insight into understanding why the Torah chose to divide this prohibition into three parts and why were

they placed specifically in these three Torah portions by way of an introduction:

Reflect on Three Things

In *Avos* (Ethics of the Fathers), the Talmudic tract that deals with Jewish ethics, the Sages state:

“Reflect upon three things... know from where you came...”.

The Rebbe asked why the need for the introduction of “Reflect on three things?” It could have just stated: “Reflect on where you came from etc.” And why did he have to stress the number three?

The Rebbe answered that this teaching highlights the existence of **three** pivotal entities in our lives. Our existence is not limited to G-d and us. We must recognize and reflect that there is a third entity as well—the world around us. It does not suffice to have a relationship with G-d; one must also take that relationship and apply it to the world.

We were placed here not just to use the world and its resources as a means to cement our own relationship with G-d. The world

around us rates as an equal partner in the scheme of creation. Our mission is to effect a change in the world. In the words of the Midrash: “G-d desired a dwelling place in the lowest of domains.” We make that happen by bringing G-dly light into the world.

We can now understand why the Torah emphasizes the prohibition of mixing milk and meat thrice, and in the aforementioned Torah portions. Each mention of this prohibition is geared to underscore one of the three aspects of existence upon which we must reflect on as well as how compliance with this proscription helps us realize each of these three aspects.

The First Link: The Social Aspect

The first time the commandment appears it is in the context of the rational and social commandments called *Mishpatim* such as not stealing, lying etc..

That parsha—which follows immediately after the revelation of G-d on Mount Sinai to give us the Torah—focuses on the Torah’s objective of making the world a G-dly place. It does not suffice to be in a spiritual

relationship with G-d which ignores the rest of existence. In this context, the prohibition against mixtures of milk and meat also possesses a social character.

According to some commentators, one must distance oneself from engaging in an activity that can be construed as a lack of sensitivity to G-d's creatures. As some commentators state, cooking a kid in the milk of its mother is the epitome of cruelty. Thus the Torah wishes to sensitize us by enjoining us from engaging in the act of cooking the meat in the milk.

In addition, as the *Chinuch* and others explain, this prohibition is directed against the notion that we may unreservedly manipulate the world of nature. Meat and milk represent diverse forces with which one may not tamper. We may not take the liberty to mix them and thereby undermine G-d's system of nature.

This explanation, too, relates to the idea of *Mishpatim*. *Mishpatim* are the laws that govern society and ensure a stable and harmonious world. Anything we do to disrupt that harmony and balance will prove detrimental to our own personal stability and

balance as well as negatively affect the world around us.

Mishpatim were thus the first set of commandments to be given at Sinai—subsequent to the initial Ten Commandments (See Rashi and the Mechilta on the beginning of the parsha). The reason for the juxtaposition of the *Mishpatim* to the Sinai experience is to underscore that the Torah's main objective is to transform the world into a G-dly domain. This we accomplish by specifically observing the *Mishpatim* that help us make the world into a peaceful and harmonious place.

To be sure, this Torah portion also contains the more spiritual types of Mitzvos. But, in the context of this parsha, they are also geared to making the world around us into a more spiritual and G-dly place. The focus remains the same: Do not ignore the third link in this Divine chain.

The Second Link: The G-d Aspect

The second time we read of this commandment it is in the context of the Golden Calf. After having degenerated into

idolatry so soon after we heard G-d's voice telling us "Do not have any other gods in My presence" we were ordered to desist from mixtures of milk and meat which, as the Rambam suggests (See *Kli Yakar*), was a staple at pagan rituals. Desist from eating this culinary dish so that you distance yourself from any form of idol worship.

While, the prohibition in *Mishpatim* focuses on the way this Mitzvah impacts the world, the second prohibition in the parsha of *Ki Tisa* focuses on the way it affects our understanding and awareness of G-d. The very first two commandments given at Sinai—and thus the foundation of all the others—were: "I am G-d your G-d" and "Do not have any other gods in My presence." The single most important declaration of the Jew is the Shema, in which we affirm our belief in the absolute unity of G-d. Partaking of the mixture of milk and meat desensitizes us to that awareness.

We see then that the focus of the second reference to the prohibition of milk and meat is on our level of awareness of G-d. This is reflected in a second major theme of this parsha, the construction of the Mishkan, G-

d’s Sanctuary. It is through this Sanctuary that we are able to realize the highest and most acute form of G-dly awareness.

Indeed, the very name of that parsha—[*Ki/ Sisa*—connotes the idea of rising to greater heights. Eating a forbidden mixture of milk and meat, thereby emulating the pagan ways, is antithetical to the person’s ability to experience a true awareness of the one G-d.

The Third Link: The People Aspect

The third time we read of this prohibition is in this week’s parsha, *R’ei*, which deals with how we must distinguish ourselves as a nation because **we** are G-d’s children. Here the focus is not on the world around us, not even on the awareness of G-d—although these objectives are in the background and help to facilitate the third objective—but on the way we distinguish **ourselves** as a unique and holy people, and to earn the title “G-d’s children” we must live and act in a princely and G-dly way.

Thus the section dealing with the dietary laws is introduced with the words: “You are children of G-d. Do not gash yourselves...” As

Rashi explains, the reason we may not mutilate our bodies is because we are G-d’s children. Even our bodies must be reflective of our identity as His children.

From this warning against defacing our bodies the Torah continues with the Jewish dietary laws, which have as their goal the sanctification of the body. To achieve this goal we have to regulate our diet so that it conforms to G-d’s precepts for our diet, one that nurtures our G-dly nature and that which distinguishes us from all other nations, as the Torah explicitly states.

After detailing all of the forbidden species of animals that we are forbidden to partake of, the Torah concludes with the prohibition of milk and meat. As a holy nation we may not have any association with this mixture in any way, shape, or form. Anything that detracts from our sensitivity to G-d’s world or to our awareness of G-d obstructs our identities as members of a holy nation and our status as G-d’s children.

This is also reflected in the name of this week’s parsha, *R’ei*, which exhorts us to “see”—not just hear—the blessings that G-d promises us for complying with His

commandments. When we live a Torah oriented life that exemplifies our role as G-d's children we can then actually see the blessings. We do not have to wait for some future date to appreciate the good we've accomplished; we see the results immediately. A Jew whose behavior elicits responses of admiration and reverence—because he or she is overtly a proud and holy Jew—realizes and enjoys the blessing immediately.

All of the three focuses—the world, G-d, and us—find their fulfillment in the Messianic Age which is ushered in by Moshiach, who himself embodies these three elements in their most ideal and harmonious way.

Moshiach: The Monarch

Moshiach's main focus is to change the world and bring to fruition G-d's objective of making the world a dwelling place for Him. Moshiach is not a spiritual hermit hiding in a cave. He is intimately aware of the world's problems and through his inspiration, wise counsel, and initiative gets others—as a true leader—to help transform the world into a more perfect world through the teachings of Torah and the implementation of its

commandments, including influencing non-Jews to follow their “Seven Noahide Commandments.”

Moshiach is called a king, because like a king he will have dominion on the entire world; making sure that everybody fulfills their responsibilities for a civilized and G-dly world.

This aspect of Moshiach parallels the first objective—represented by the prohibition of mixing milk and meat in *Mishpatim*—of making the world a perfect place

Moshiach: The Ultimate Teacher

Moshiach is also the one whose knowledge of the mystical teachings of Torah—which he will share with all of the Jewish people—gives him the ability to have an unparalleled understanding and awareness of G-d. Thus Moshiach will build the Third Temple, the structure that will be the medium through which an unadulterated vision of G-d will become a reality.

This aspect of Moshiach parallels the Parsha of *Ki Sisa*, which deals with “raising the head” of the Jewish people. The idiom “raising the

head” has been interpreted in Chassidic philosophy as bringing our knowledge (“head”) to a far more sublime level. This is Moshiach’s role as the ultimate teacher of Torah.

This function of Moshiach goes hand in hand with his role as the one who will build the Holy Temple (the subject matter of *Ki Sisa*). The primary part of the Temple was the Ark, which symbolizes the infinite knowledge of G-d.

Ultimate *Jewish* Leader

Moshiach is also the one who achieves his third and ultimate goal through emphasizing the uniqueness of the Jewish nation. Moshiach focuses on, and cultivates, the awareness of the Jewish people's Divine role as a “nation of priests and a holy people.”

Hence Moshiach will be able to gather all of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel and unify them because when the elements that obscure our identities as G-d’s children are removed we will then all feel that we are brothers and sisters—children of the one G-d.

ESSAY FOURTEEN

ERASING FOR THE PURPOSE OF WRITING

Destroying a relationship is a terrible thing.

Restoring a relationship is a wonderful thing.

**Creating a totally new and incomparably
good relationship is Divine,**

ESSAY FOURTEEN

ERASING FOR THE PURPOSE OF WRITING

Don't Destroy Holy Property!

One of the prohibitions that are mentioned in this week's parsha concerns the destruction of holy property.

After the Torah commands the Jewish people to destroy the pagan shrines and altars of the Land of Canaan, they were told “Do not do this to G-d your G-d.” Our sages interpret this as an admonition not to destroy holy property, i.e., the Holy Temple, its altar and other holy implements.

The Midrash raises an interesting question:

“Can anyone even consider that a Jew would destroy their Altars?”

Why then does the Torah have to exhort us not to do it?

This question is likely based on the premise that the average person does not do something just for the spite of it. Of what benefit is it to anyone to destroy the Altar in the Temple? And a person who would do so

spitefully would most likely not be deterred by the Torah's admonition not to do so.

Don't Erase G-d's Name!

The Midrash answers:

“This is an admonition not to erase the name of G-d.”

In other words, the prohibition is directed against destruction of G-d's name. This interpretation, to not erase G-d's name, has been incorporated into Jewish law.

A practical application of this prohibition would be the case of an editor of an article who wants to delete G-d's name. The editor may not erase the word, but rather indicate some other way that the word should be deleted.

Exception to the Rule

There is one situation, however, where the Torah does permit the erasure of G-d's name. As a part of the ritual the Torah prescribes to determine that a woman was innocent of the suspicion of adultery, G-d's name would have to be erased. The Talmud comments that G-d

is willing to have His name erased in order to prove her innocence and bring peace and harmony to husband and wife.

Why would it be permissible to erase G-d's name to create peace? Does the end justify the means? Would one be permitted to harm another for the purpose of obtaining something positive? Why then is it permitted to destroy something holy in order to facilitate some positive outcome? And, more importantly, why did G-d devise a system where it is necessary to erase and His name.

The Mystical Dimension of Marriage

The answer lies in the mystical dimension of marriage. Marriage is more than just the means to ensure that there is a future. Marriage is more than a means to express love between two people. Marriage is that and much more. Primary among the objectives of marriage is to bring together the greatest and most potent Divine energies that are represented by and channeled through a man and a woman.

Man's spiritual energy, in and of itself, cannot express itself peacefully in this world. If G-d's

“masculine energies,” which are generated by men, would be the exclusive Divine force, it would overwhelm the world. Only when the “male” Divine energy is synthesized with the “feminine” aspect of G-dly energy (i.e., the potential to receive, absorb and internalize G-dliness), can the world internalize, and be “comfortable” with, the G-d's presence.

Whatever holiness is thus compromised by the erasure of G-d's name is compensated by the creation of a harmonious marriage. Their peaceful marriage is a living manifestation of G-d's name.

True, one may not erase even the ink on paper that forms G-d's name. If, however, it enables us to “write” G-d's name in the form of the union of two human beings whose love and respect for each other is based on the foundations of Torah – that is permissible and would even be desirable.

If the superficial expression of G-d in this world through the medium of writing is sacred, how much more so is the expression of the Divine as it is concretized within marriage and the home. It can, therefore, override the prohibition against erasing G-d's name.

Our sages tell us that when a marriage breaks up, the Altar sheds tears. The Altar was the medium through which G-d would reveal His presence in the world. But, even the Altar could not reveal as much of G-dly energy in the world as can a happy marriage based on the principles of Torah.

Thus, when G-d's presence would “depart” as a consequence of the dissolution of a marriage, the Altar sheds tears, as if to say, “I cannot fill in the void that was just created.”

How did G-d allow the Destruction of His Own Temple?

The question has been asked, how G-d could have allowed the Holy Temple to be destroyed? Doesn't G-d keep His own commandments?

The answer is that if we see G-d “erasing His own name,” by allowing the destruction of the Temple, it can only be justified in the context of G-d rebuilding the Temple and expressing His presence in an incomparably more dramatic way.

The destruction of the Two Temples are a prelude to G-d restoring His relationship with

His people, through which He leaves the imprint of His name on this world. Moreover, the relationship G-d will have with us in the Third Bais Hamikdash will significantly surpass the relationship we enjoyed with the previous two Temples.

May we realize the rapprochement between the A-mighty and His nation, through the revelation of Moshiach and the building of the Third Bais Hamikdash, imminently!

ESSAY FIFTEEN

GIVE AGAIN AND AGAIN

Doing good for selfish reasons is acceptable if
one's primary interest is the welfare of
others.

ESSAY FIFTEEN

GIVE AGAIN AND AGAIN

Tzedakah is Righteousness, Not Benevolence

Charity is the English word often used to translate the Hebrew word Tzedakah. It has been pointed out many times, however, that there is a fundamental difference between the two. Charity is an act of benevolence and generosity, Tzedakah (from the root: *tzedek*) means righteousness. It is the right, just and proper thing to give to those who are less fortunate than ourselves.

This week’s Torah portion highlights this crucial Mitzvah and sheds light on the Jewish perspective of Tzedakah.

When the Torah introduces this Mitzvah it uses a repetitive expression: “*Nason titein*—Give, you shall give.” There are many explanations as to why the Torah uses a redundant expression. Each one of them contributes to a better understanding of the unique Jewish perspective on Tzedakah.

The Talmud explains that the repetitive expression is to teach us that one should give even a hundred times. This means that there is no limit to the Mitzvah of Tzedakah. As long as there is a need and one has the means to do so, one is expected to give. If Tzedakah was no more than an opportunity to express our own generosity, giving once would have sufficed. But, Tzedakah is predicated, first and foremost, on the needs of others that must be filled and not on one's own need to be generous.

Giving for Oneself and Giving for the Other

It is told of the Chassidic Master, Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Riminov that when he saw an impoverished individual he would give him a handsome contribution. After the man had left, he would then pursue him and give him another donation. When his students queried him as to this unusual behavior, he responded:

“The first time I gave because I could not tolerate to see the misery and degradation of this human being. It was painful to watch this wretched human being in his pitiful sate. When I gave him Tzedakah the first time it

was to assuage **my** pain and suffering. I felt uncomfortable and miserable to behold another human being's suffering. The second time I gave, it was for him, for his sake.

"This," Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Riminov stated" is the reason that the Torah repeats the expression of giving. The first word for giving implies that we must give, even if it is to allay our own pain and inability to see the suffering of others.

The second expression the Torah employs is to teach us that that type of giving does not suffice. Our giving should not just be motivated by the need to remove our own pain. We must give again because we recognize that it is our duty to help others.

Two Objectives of Tzedakah

There is an even more basic way to explain the repetition of the expression to give. There are two different objectives of Tzedakah. The primary objective is to help the needy. If there is a void in society, it is our responsibility to fill it.

There is also a secondary motive in the giving of Tzedakah. Each and every time we give

Tzedakah it helps to refine us. Tzedakah is the medium through which we become sensitized and refined.

With this appreciation for the duality of Tzedakah — giving to refine ourselves and giving because it is our duty to help others — we can resolve an apparent contradiction with respect to the manner in which we give Tzedakah:

On the one hand, the Talmud extols the virtue of those who give anonymously. Yet the Rashba (one of the fourteenth's century greatest Talmudists and Jewish leaders) encourages publicizing those who give to encourage more Tzedakah.

Both approaches are necessary. To refine ourselves it is important that we give anonymously. The less recognition we receive for our actions, the more altruistic we are in giving, the more spiritual the act of Tzedakah becomes and the more it refines us and edifies us.

Conversely, we have to never lose sight of the fact that Tzedakah is primarily intended for the benefit of others. Giving anonymously would not cause others to give. As a result, the needy will be denied the assistance they

could have received if the donor would have become a role model of giving by giving publically.

It is wrong to be concerned about our selfish needs — even if they are lofty spiritual ones — when they might jeopardize the needs of others.

So which is it? Do we give openly or secretly?

To reconcile both demands — the demand of anonymity and publicizing of one's philanthropy — the Rebbe suggested doing both: give publicly and then give more anonymously.

Preparing for Moshiach

Our sages link giving of Tzedakah with the Redemption. By extending ourselves selflessly, we generate G-d's reciprocal response: He will extend Himself to us and bring the righteous Moshiach who will usher in an age concerning which it is said: that poverty will be banished forever.

However, just as there are two objectives of Tzedakah, there are two objectives in Geulah-Redemption.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – R’EI

The first objective is the material and spiritual benefits we will reap in the Messianic Age.

The second objective is the cessation of war, illness and suffering.

Which objective should we favor?

The answer is, both.

While our primary focus should be the selfless goal of bringing benefits to the entire world, we may also think of the way the Messianic Age will refine and elevate us.

ESSAY SIXTEEN

LEVEL PLAYING FIELD

The myth is that evil is stronger than good.

The truth is that while evil is in your face
good has staying power.

ESSAY SIXTEEN

LEVEL PLAYING FIELD

The Negative Not Necessary

This week's Parsha begins with the statement:

“See I set before you today a blessing and a curse: the blessing that you shall listen to the commandments of G-d your G-d... and the curse, if you shall not listen to the commandments...”

At first glance it seems that the latter phrase is superfluous. Once the Torah tells us that the blessings will come as a result of our listening to G-d's voice, doesn't it follow that the curses will come when we do not follow His commandments. Why the need to state it explicitly?

In addition, commentators observe that the Torah does not employ the same terminology for the curses as it does for the blessings. When discussing the blessings it says “*Asher tishm'un*-that you shall listen.” With respect to the curses, however, the Torah employs the word “*im-if*” you shall not listen...” Why doesn't the Torah use the same terminology

with respect to the blessing “*im-if* you shall listen?” Aren’t the blessings also contingent on our fulfillment of the commandments?

Blessings are Foregone Conclusion

Upon deeper analysis, it is clear that G-d treats the blessings differently than the curses.. With regard to blessings, it is a foregone conclusion that they will come. G-d is confident that we will certainly do good and deserve His abundant blessings. Blessings are guaranteed, because obedience to His commandments by the Jewish people is a given.

The curses, however, are introduced with the word “*Im-if*” as if to say “on the off chance that some people might sway from the proper path, there will be negative consequences.”

G-d doesn’t anticipate negative behavior from us. But, in case it does happen, He is “compelled,” so to speak, to describe the consequences of these actions—curses.

There is a yet a deeper explanation as to why the blessings are introduced without the qualifying word “if.” G-d gives us His

blessings even **before** we follow His commandments as an incentive to fulfill them. Thus, the Torah states: “The blessing, **that** you shall listen to the commandments..” The curses, by contrast, are never given by G-d in anticipation of evil actions; they are merely consequences of our actions. Negative behavior begets negative effects.

Incentives

With respect to blessings that come from our good behavior, however, there are actually two forms of blessing: One that comes as a special incentive by G-d to facilitate our doing the right thing. Secondly, once we perform the Mitzvot, G-d continues to bless us as a way of furthering our observance of the commandments. Quite apart from the positive energy that a Mitzvah generates, just as a transgression generates negative energy, G-d showers His blessings before and after we perform a Mitzvah, so that we are induced to do the Mitzvah.

This is in consonance with Maimonides' explanation of the rewards that are mentioned in the Torah. According to Maimonides, they are not the real reward for

our compliance with G-d’s will — that reward will come in the “World-to-Come.” When G-d promises reward in this world, His intention is to facilitate continued goodness on our part. The more prosperity and health we enjoy, the more capable we will be to do good.

Induced by G-d

From the above we can learn an important lesson about the dynamics of good and evil. While both good and evil have consequences, only good is actually facilitated and blessed by G-d. And the more good we do, the more the Divine blessing is generated that will lead to even more good.

However, whatever evil one generates by evil behavior, it is not G-d induced. As our Sages say: “One how comes to become pure will be assisted [by G-d]; one who comes to become impure, the door will be opened for him.” While G-d provides **active** assistance for one who wants to do good, He merely opens the door and allows us the opportunity to contaminate ourselves. G-d does not provide active assistance for evil.

Infinite versus Temporal Power

The corollary of this realization — that good is blessed by G-d while evil is generated by human endeavor exclusively — is that good is of infinite value because it is imbued with Divine — thus infinite — blessing and lasts forever. Evil, as a product of human initiative, by contrast, is as finite and transient as we are.

With this premise in hand we can better appreciate the claim made by the greatest Sages of our generation, particularly, the Lubavitcher Rebbe, that the coming of Moshiach is imminent. Many have asked, how could it be that we are more ready than our forebears who, it seems, were so much more pious, spiritual and righteous than us?

One answer that has been given is that the good of our generation is the accumulation of good throughout history. Evil, on the other hand, being, merely an outcome of limited human endeavor, is fleeting and ephemeral. Thus any misdeeds of earlier times have no cumulative effect on our generation and on our ability to actualize the Redemption. .

ESSAY SEVENTEEN

FLYING HIGH

Humans always dreamt about flying.

Flying we can, but it should not be an escape
from the earth, but to see the world from a
higher perch.

ESSAY SEVENTEEN

FLYING HIGH

The Rhyming Non-Kosher Birds

This week’s parsha discusses the laws of kashrut: the animals, fish and fowl that are kosher and may be consumed and those that are not.

Among the list of non-kosher birds the Torah mentions three names that rhyme: “And the *ra’ah* and the *ayah*, and the *dayah*, according to its kind.”

Rashi explains that these three names refer to one bird that had three names. Some identify these three birds as members of the vulture family. Lest one might think that the bird is kosher because it might be known to some by another name, the Torah therefore lists all the variations of this non-kosher bird. No matter what its name, it is not kosher.

Our Internal Non-Kosher Bird

In addition to Rashi’s explanation as to why the Torah identifies this bird by all of its

names, there is also a deeper layer of meaning that speaks to the “non-kosher bird” that exists within each and every individual.

In the allegorical sense, a bird represents our desire and ability to fly to great heights. It connotes ambition and the spirit of adventure with which we are endowed. Humans, although created from the earth, are never content to have both of their feet placed on the ground. We are always looking for ways to fly, both, figuratively and literally.

But there are two types of “birds.” The “kosher” bird seeks to rise above the mundane and material aspects of life. The “kosher” bird is a person in whom the soul burns brightly like a flame that soars upwards.

The “non-kosher” version of the “bird,” by contrast, is one who seeks acclaim, power and distance from others.

Ra’ah: Seeing the Negative

Among the various negative traits that this undesirable adventurer possess is the vulture, or the “*ra’ah*.” The word “*ra’ah*,” Rashi explains, is related to the word in Hebrew

that means vision. This bird distinguishes itself by its ability to see the dead carcasses of animals from a great distance.

In the human form, this non-kosher trait is characterized by the person who in his/her pursuit of “lofty” goals, like the vulture, is actually attracted to all that is devoid of life and decadent on the earth. Rather than soaring through the heavens to find a higher purpose in life, the “*ra’ah*” individual sees and seeks that which is most debased on the earth from his perch in the sky.

In the psychological sense, the “*ra’ah*” personality’s vision is highly selective. It can only spot the negative traits in another from miles away, but cannot appreciate the positive.

***Ayah:* The Ivory Tower Individual**

The second name of the bird is “*ayah*,” which means “where.” This describes the elusive nature of the bird. Translated into human personality traits, this non-kosher approach to ambition addresses itself to a far more sophisticated individual. We are not talking about someone who seeks that which is

debased and negative. We may be discussing an individual who is truly interested in higher endeavors. We may be discussing an intellectual, philosopher, rabbi, theologian or any man or woman of the spirit, who become so enamored with their ability to rise above the ordinary, that they lose touch with others. They occupy their ivory tower from which they look down with contempt and condescension on others who cannot “catch up” with them. They will not allow others to get close to them; they thrive on aloofness. This, too, is a non-kosher characteristic.

But there is one more negative characteristic of this non-kosher bird that can be applied to some people that is represented by the third name of this non-kosher bird: “*dayah*.” The root of the word is similar to that of “*dayeinu*,” it is enough.

This refers to individuals whose goal in life is to soar to greater heights, but places artificial limits as to how high they would like to climb. These are the people who carve out for themselves a comfortable niche at some place where they are simultaneously removed from the “common” folk and from the genuine men and women of the spirit. They

feel threatened by those above them. The person whose spiritual quest can be satisfied might not be expressing a holy trait. The soul can never quench its thirst and quell its desire to get closer to G-d and to all that which is holy.

The reason that a person can express the soul's passion for "flying" while, at the same time, be a "*ra'ah*" "*ayah*" or "*dayah*" personality, is because we are in Galus, a spiritual exile that is characterized by its ability to obscure and even distort the holy drives within us.

This leads us to two conclusions:

First, when we detect unbridled ambition in ourselves we should recognize that it comes from our soul's desire to climb to greater heights.

Second, we must also recognize that because we are in a spiritual exile, even positive and holy energies can be expressed the wrong way. Our challenge is to know where our drives come from, and to redirect them in a positive way. By discovering the holy source of our drives and by redirecting them, we succeed in liberating our souls and

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contribution to the liberation of the entire world through the coming of Moshiach.

ESSAY EIGHTEEN

ACCESSING THE BLESSINGS FOR THE NEW YEAR

Unity and harmony in a relationship brings
blessing.

The path to unity is by making sure that our
internal animal is tamed/kosher.

ESSAY EIGHTEEN

ACCESSING THE BLESSINGS FOR THE NEW YEAR

Getting Marries in ELul

The Shabbat that precedes a new month is called *Shabbos Mevarchim*, the Sabbath that blesses the new month. This Shabbos we will be blessing the new month of *Elul*, the last month of the year and the month of preparation for the New Year. Since *Elul* will determine the nature of our lives for the forthcoming year, it is self-evident that the blessing generated during this Shabbat must be more pronounced than it is other times.

To understand the nature of the blessing of this Shabbat we should be guided both by the spiritual dimension of the month of *Elul* and the weekly Torah portion of *R'ei*.

Elul is known as an auspicious time for weddings. Perhaps the rationale for this is the fact that during *Elul* we evaluate our relationship with our Divine partner—G-d. *Elul* is the month when we reinforce our marital relationship with G-d and it is

therefore an opportune time to get married, for indeed, each marriage is a reflection of the cosmic marriage between G-d and His people. Whenever that marriage is reinforced and strong it augurs well for all other marriages.

The Cosmic Power of a Wedding

One of the reasons for the incredible joy that accompanies a wedding is that a wedding is the ultimate expression of unity. According to the Zohar a marriage is a reunion of two half souls that were separated at birth.

In its very last paragraph, the Talmud states: “G-d could not find a vessel to contain blessing other than peace.” Thus, the greater the unity and state of peace that exists the more blessings can be accessed.

Accordingly, marriage, which is the ultimate form of peace and unity, can elicit the greatest amount of Divine blessings.

The magnitude of blessings that one elicits when one marries is reflected in the *Sheva Berachot*-Seven Blessings that are recited at the wedding ceremony and at festive meals for seven days after the wedding. Every time

we reinforce the unity within marriage, we are capable of revealing those original blessings.

Elul's Blessing Hinted in Parsha

To facilitate the bestowal of abundant blessing for the month of Elul—the month when our marriage with G-d is reinforced—we ought to consult this week's Parsha, which begins: See, I place before you today a blessing and a curse."

A Talmudic era Aramaic translation of the Torah known as *Targum Yonatan* does not translate the word "*kelalah*" here as he does in other places to mean curse, but rather "*chilufa*," which means "the opposite," or "the exchange.

The Rebbe explains that this conveys the message that G-d does not give us curses. Everything that comes from G-d is a blessing. We have freedom of choice and the potential to either do what it takes to be receptive to His blessings, or do nothing. When we do not create the "vessel" for His blessings, we are in effect, "exchanging" them for something else that is undesirable.

Resistance to G-d's blessing—either in our personal marriage or in our cosmic marriage—occurs whenever we create artificial division and strife. When the spirit of unity and peace disappear, so do the blessings that accompany a marriage.

The Remedy for Strife and Discord

The question arises, how does one avoid strife and discord? After all we are in possession of an animal instinct that is selfish and seeks to undermine the unity and devotion that a marriage requires.

The answer to this question is also provided in this week's parsha in the laws of Kashrus pertaining to the fitness of an animal for consumption.

Translating this law into the dynamics of a marriage, the Torah informs us that if we want our animal soul to be edible, i.e., an asset that will contribute to our spiritual health and therefore enhance our marriage, we must see to it that it “chew its cud.” We are never to jump to conclusions concerning the motives and actions of our spouse. We must always chew over the situation until we

can make a fair judgment about the other.

This message echoed in the beginning of Ethics of the Fathers: “Be deliberate in judgment.” It is noteworthy that this message was the first ethical directive given by the Men of the Great Assembly to help Jews cope with life in the first years of the Second Temple immediately following the Babylonian exile, when our “marriage” with G-d was “on the rocks.”

But that is still not enough. To make an animal kosher it must have “split hooves.” This, the Rebbe explains, means, metaphorically, that we must not allow our contact with the material world to be complete and absolute. There must be a crack in that connection between our feet and the earthiness of the world.

Translated in practical terms, this means that in order for the marriage to succeed and carry within it all the natural blessings from G-d, we must never allow ourselves to become mired in the pursuit of purely materialistic goals. There must always be a crack in the connection we have with the earth i.e., the material world.

When we are not obsessed with materialism,

we are less selfish and possessive, so that we do not rush to hasty conclusions about the other.

Moreover, the crack in the hoof allows a ray of light to shine through the “hooves.” This means that one permits the light of Torah and G-dliness to enter into their lives and marriage. This is the kind of marriage that is ideal and will endure.

The Wedding of the Future

In the text of the *Sheva Berachos*-Seven Blessings one finds a clear reference to the wedding celebration of the future Messianic Age. That future period will be the most joyous because it will be one in which G-d's light will shine brightly and all of the divisions in our micro or macro marriages will be healed. We will then possess the means to access all of G-d's blessings in their fullest measure.

By focusing on our relationship with G-d as a marriage and with the strengthening of our bond with G-d we will realize all of His infinite blessings in the fullest measure, the greatest of which is the coming of Moshiach,

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at which time young and all old will dance in
the streets of Jerusalem.

ESSAY NINETEEN

THE HEEL REVISITED

Elul, the “heel” of the year, is an
extraordinary ordinary month.

It reflects the extraordinary ordinary (“heel”)
Jews of the last (“heel”) generation before the
Redemption!

ESSAY NINETEEN

THE HEEL REVISITED

Head and Heels

As we approach the month of *Elul*, the last month of the year, we should reflect on the significance of the **end** of the year and contrast it with the year’s beginning.

The beginning of the year we call Rosh Hashanah, the Head of the Year. The reason for the use of the term “head” rather than just beginning, is that just as the human body is given life and directed by its head, similarly, the year has its own head that is the source of life for the rest of the year.

Following this metaphor, the month of Elul that occurs at the end of the year is its heel.

On the surface it would appear as if this month would be the least significant of months, just as the heel is the least prominent part of the body, especially in comparison with the head.

In truth, as discussed in last week’s essay, the

characterization of something as a heel carries within it a positive connotation as well.

The “Heel” Generation

First, as discussed in last week’s essay, the last generations in this pre-Messianic era, have been likened to the heel, as compared to the generation of the Patriarchs and Moses, which were compared to the head.

This designation as a heel was not intended as a put-down, but rather as an indication that as great as our forebears were and as much as they may have accomplished, our generation is the one that will bring the journey of history to its destination. It is the heel that brings perfection to the entire human structure and to the anatomy of history as well.

Heel of the Year

Applying this notion to the final month of Elul:

As important as the head of the year may be, it is only during the month of Elul—the

“heel” of the year—that the year can be made complete. For Elul is the month in which we reflect on all that we’ve done or failed to do during the past year and are given the opportunity to approach G-d and have the past corrected and perfected. True, there are no Holy Days in Elul, but every “ordinary” day in the month can save, enhance and elevate all the weekdays and Holy Days of the past eleven months.

However, this is only one perspective regarding the role of the “heel” in terms of history and in terms of the months of the year. In truth, the metaphor of a heel was intended to convey a far more positive commentary on our generation and on the month of Elul.

Our previous analysis of the designation of our generation—and the month of Elul—as a heel was based on the view of history—and the calendar year—as an organic unit. The progenitors and early leaders of the Jewish nation have been compared to the head, while the later generations were likened to the feet and heels of the historical “anatomy.”

From this perspective the emphasis was placed on the role of “heel” generation as the

one that was charged with the responsibility of **completing** the mission of making the world a good and holy world. In this context, however, our mission, notwithstanding its unique capacity to complete the task, appears trivial compared to the earlier "head" and "heart" generations. This is true, particularly, when we reflect on the huge spiritual gulf that exists between the spiritual giants of the past and ourselves.

This analysis, while it is true. Links us to our past and helps to keep us humble, does not provide us with the whole picture of who we are in the continuum of history.

There is another perspective that views us, the "heel" generation, in a, paradoxically, different light.

Panoramic View of History

There is an old tradition, based on the Talmud, that Moses was given a preview of the future by G-d. When the view of the last few generations—the "heel" generations—appeared, Moses was incredulous and humbled.

What was it about this time period that so

moved Moses?

When Moses was shown the horrific suffering that the Jewish people will endure in the future, prior to the Messianic Age, and that despite the unprecedented suffering and concealment of G-d's presence, they would remain loyal and faithful to G-d and Judaism, he was overwhelmed.

To live in a period of miracles, enjoy a warm relationship with G-d, and then be loyal is no trick. To maintain this loyalty amidst unparalleled suffering and overwhelming forces of assimilation and secularism is indeed a testimony to the incredible G-dly spirit that permeates the "heel" generation.

On the one hand, we have been likened to a dwarf standing on the shoulders of a giant. We cannot compare ourselves to the spiritual stature of our ancestors. From the perspective of knowing, feeling and communicating with G-d, our predecessors were certainly head and shoulders above us. We must always be mindful of their teachings and example and realize that when we stand on their shoulders, we encompass them and we also acquire the capacity to go beyond them.

However, from the perspective of responding to G-d's voice amidst the confusion, chaos and darkness, our generation wins with flying colors. We are the ultimate generation, the one that deserves Moshiach more than any preceding one.

Elul the Least and Most Significant

The same can be said about the month of Elul. On the one hand, it is the least significant of months that stands on the shoulders of the preceding nine months. Thus Elul can rectify that which was neglected in the past eleven months and enhance that which was done throughout the year.

But, Elul possesses an independent preeminent character as well. It is the month about which it has been said that the "king is in the field." This means that it is the month in which G-d meets us on **our** turf and is accessible to all. Far from being the inferior month that must rely on the strengths of other months for its own health, it is the month that enables us to enjoy a relationship with G-d unlike any other time of the year.

May we all utilize the power of the

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forthcoming month of Elul to elicit from G-d
a promise to grant us a good and sweet year,
and a year of Redemption.

ESSAY TWENTY

THE BLESSED MONTH

**Marriage, the theme of the month of Elul,
requires following the laws and message of
Kashrus to succeed and thrive.**

ESSAY TWENTY

THE BLESSED MONTH

Elul Weddings

Elul, the Hebrew name of the upcoming month is said to be an acronym for the four Biblical words, “*Ani l’dodi v’dodi li*, I am my beloved’s and my beloved is mine.” This month, which precedes the New Year, is the month when the love between G-d and the Jewish people is said to be at its peak. It is therefore a month that we can get closer to G-d in preparation for the New Year.

Because of this month’s spiritually romantic and blessed character, many marriages will be scheduled during Elul.

It is thus fitting that this week’s Parsha opens with: “See I place before you today a *beracha*-blessing and a *kelalah*-curse.” When one embarks on a new life, they should realize that G-d presents them with the greatest of blessings.

Curses or Exchanges?

But what about the curses?

Targum Yonasan, a Talmudic era Aramaic translation and commentary, does not translate the word “*kelalah*” here as he does in other places to mean curse, but rather “*chilufa*” which means “the exchange.” This, the Rebbe explains, is because the Torah stresses that the *beracha* and *kelalah* come directly from G-d. “See I give you today...” And since no evil can truly come from G-d, the curse in its original form is actually G-d’s blessing. But we, through our misguided behavior, have the capacity to divert the blessing, exchanging the blessing for its opposite.

There is no area or occasion where G-d directly bestows His blessings upon us than on the occasion of a wedding. This is underscored by the “*Sheva Berachos*,” the seven special blessings that describe how G-d blesses the newlyweds, recited during the wedding ceremony and during the next seven days.

The message of this Parsha according to Targum Yonasan for the newlywed — and for every husband and wife — is clear:

If you want to preserve G-d's personal and most powerful blessings, one must behave in a manner that prevents the incredible blessings from being diverted into a curse.

And precisely because the blessings that are bestowed upon the newlywed are so potent, the potential for the negative is therefore also greater. As our Talmudic rabbis observe that the Hebrew word for both man and woman contains the two letters of *Aleph* and *Shin*, which spells the Hebrew word *Aish*, fire. The word for man also contains the Hebrew letter *Yud* while the word for woman contains the Hebrew letter *Hei*. These two letters form G-d's name. The message is clear:

When a marriage allows for the presence of G-d, moreover, when a marriage is expressive of G-d's relationship and love affair with us, then man and woman will live together in peace, harmony and bliss. If, G-d forbid, the element of G-d is missing, then we are left with the word *aish* -fire. Husband and wife then become two potent destructive forces that threaten each other as well as everyone around them.

To the extent that we allow the G-dly element of our lives dominate our marriage,

then we become the recipients of the greatest G-dly blessings.

Fire Prevention

The question, however, arises. How does one avoid strife and discord which can divert the blessing of marriage into a curse? After all, we are in possession of an animal instinct that is selfish and can undermine the unity and devotion that a marriage requires.

The answer is also provided for in this week's parsha in the laws of Kashrus, pertaining to the kashrus of an animal. The animal must possess two characteristics to be kosher. And while, the Torah must be understood literally, that keeping kosher is a vital part of our lives, there can also be a metaphoric message that can help us deal with the animal nature within us.

If we want our animal soul to be edible, i.e., an asset that will contribute to our spiritual health and the enhancement of our marriage, we must see to it that the animal chews its cud. This means that we are never to jump to conclusions concerning the motives and actions of our spouse. We must always think

and rethink what really happened, what were the real motives, before we can make a fair judgment about the other.

But that is still not enough. One must also have “split hooves.” This means, metaphorically, that we must not allow our contact with the material world to be absolute. There must be a crack in that connection between our feet and the earthiness of the world, which allows a ray of G-dly light to shine through the “hooves,” that which connects us to the material world. When we are not obsessed with materialism, we are less selfish and possessive, so that we do not rush to hasty conclusions about the other and are more receptive to the G-dly dimension of our lives and our marriage

Chewing our Cud and having Split Hooves as a Preparation for Moshiach

Marriage — and all of the manifold blessings that go along with it — is also an apt metaphor for the Messianic Age. When we follow the prescription of “chewing our cud” being less judgmental of others and “split hooves” when we allow the light of Torah to enter into and temper our materialistic

nature, we will be more receptive to the coming of Moshiach and the ultimate Redemption, when true peace, harmony and love will prevail throughout the world.

Repetition and Bifurcation Symbols of Redemption

On a deeper level, the idea of chewing our cud is the concept of repetition. Repetition is one of the symbols of Redemption, according to the Midrash.

In practical terms, when we show our boundless devotion to G-d and find excitement every time we repeat our prayers and our Torah studies it is a sign that we have broken out of the mold that doesn't allow us to see the value in repetition.

Having split hooves is indicative of the person who can serve G-d in two opposite ways. He will invest the same excitement and enthusiasm when he is doing a Mitzvah that is on the right, such as helping the poor and needy which derives from the attribute of *chesed*, as he would be in doing an act that expresses *gevurah*, strength and restraint, which is associated with the left.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – R’EI

By demonstrating the ability to break out of a mold one has mastered the liberating power within his or her soul and is ready for the ultimate liberation with Moshiach. One of Moshiach’s names is Ben Partzi, which means the one who can break out of barriers or molds.

A marriage, macro or micro, thrives when we repeat gestures of love and respect and are able to change gears when the situation necessitates it.

Mazal Tov!

ESSAY TWENTY-ONE

INTERMINGLING JOY

There are two types of joy: limited and
unbounded.

The joy of Simchas Torah is unlimited and
enables us to break out of our constraining
boundaries.

ESSAY TWENTY-ONE

INTERMINGLING JOY

“One may not Mix Joy with Joy”

Joy is central to Judaism. We are commanded to serve G-d with joy at all times. This is particularly true during the Jewish Holidays, when we are commanded to show our joy more demonstrably, as it states in this week's parsha with respect to the Festival of Sukkos: “You shall rejoice on your festival...”

There are, however, restrictions on how and when we can celebrate. The Talmud derives from this commandment that while we are engaged in one mandated form of joy we may not engage in another form of joy.

The primary illustration provided in the Talmud relates to marriage. The Mishnah states that one may not get married even during the semi-week day period of Jewish Holidays.

Another source for this rule of not “mingling joy” that the Talmud cites is the dedication of the First Temple. King Solomon celebrated its

dedication for seven days before the Festival of Sukkos.

Why didn't he celebrate the dedication during the Festival of Sukkos? That would have a welcome accommodation for the Jews who had to come for the pilgrimage holiday of Sukkos and not compelled them to be away from their work for an additional seven days.

This holy sequence, the Talmud asserts, proves that one may not mix a mandated joyous celebration with another. Since the dedication of the Temple represented one form of celebration and the Festival of Sukkos represents another form of joy they could not be observed concurrently.

Another source for this restriction is cited by the Jerusalem Talmud:

When Jacob was conned into marrying Leah instead of Rachel, his father-in-law Laban offered to give him Rachel after seven days of waiting. The reason for the seven day wait was that one should not mingle one joyous celebration with another.

The rationale for this is provided by the Tosphos commentary: Two simultaneous celebrations will detract from each other.

Celebrating each one individually enables one to devote all of his or her attention and energies to the celebration at hand.

A question has been raised: Based on the premise that two simultaneous celebrations will detract from the joy one will feel with them individually, why then do we celebrate Simchas Torah on the Festival of Shemini Atzeres [which is celebrated for one day in Israel and two days in the Diaspora]. Shemini Atzeres is the culmination of the Festival of Sukkos and surely its particular form of joy should not be compromised by the particular joy of Simchas Torah, which marks the completion of the reading of the entire Five Books of Moses.

The Inner Dynamic of Shemini Atzeres

One way of answering this question is to appreciate the deeper significance of both Shemini Atzeres and Simchas Torah. Each of these Holidays contains many layers of meaning.

Shemini Atzeres, the Rebbe explains (*Likkutei Sichos* volume 29) is the culmination of the Festival of Sukkos, which is also referred to as

the *Chag haAsif* Festival of Ingathering. Sukkos is the season of gathering all the crops that were harvested from Passover onward and were now ready to be consumed.

This agricultural event, the Rebbe explains, parallels the spiritual event of ingathering all of the spiritual energy which was first generated during the first Holiday of Pesach and Shavuos.

During Passover the first glimmer of light was generated when the Jews were liberated from Egypt and expressed their faith in G-d.

It was followed by Shavuos when they received the Torah and declared “We will do and we will hear.” But, it was still remained largely theoretical.

This period of growth was stalled temporarily by the Golden Calf debacle, but the spiritual cycle was restored and made complete on Yom Kippur. That was the time when the people reached the level of *Ba'al Teshuvah*, having repented for their involvement in the creation of the golden calf, a repentance which actually deepened their connection to G-d and His Torah.

Thus, the Festival of Sukkos, which comes shortly after Yom Kippur, provides us with unparalleled power to gather in, integrate and internalize the Divine light that was generated throughout the past six months.

Shemini Atzeres takes the power of Sukkos to the next level. The very word Atzeres connotes withholding and absorbing. It is on Shemini Atzeres that we reach the climax of retaining all of the Divine light; it is therefore also when our joy reaches its climax.

Simchas Torah: Ditto!

This is also the deeper significance of Simchas Torah. It is not just a celebration of completing an entire cycle of Torah reading. It also represents our reaching the apex of Torah, which involves the complete integration of Torah and the Jew. When we dance with the Torah on Simchas Torah, we are the Torah's legs. This melding did not happen at the Exodus or when the Torah was first given at Sinai. Only a Ba'al Teshuvah who has been tested and returned has the capacity to make the Torah an inseparable part of his or her being. And this

transformation is what we celebrate on Simchas Torah.

Our joy on Simchas Torah is about an internal connection to the Torah, which builds on the essence of Shemini Atzeres: internalizing Judaism.

We can now answer the question as to why the contemporaneous celebration of Shemini Atzeres and Simchas Torah does not contradict the principle that “one may not mix one joy with another.” Both celebrations are, indeed, one and the same. Rather than conflicting they complement and enhance each other.

Anatomy of Joy: Breaking through Barriers

One may suggest another explanation for why the joys of Shemini Atzeres and Simchas Torah do not conflict with one another. This requires a deeper understanding of the dynamic of joy.

The Talmud has an expression: “A king may break through boundaries.” It means that a king has a right to break through fences of private property on route to his destination. The king is not restricted to the normal

boundaries that must be respected by all others.

The Rebbe Rashab (Rabbi Sholom Dovber Schneersohn, the fifth Lubavitcher Rebbe) paraphrased that Talmudic law and applied it to *simcha*-joy: “*Simcha*-Joy breaks through boundaries.”

The same power a king can exercise to remove the barriers which stymie others can be experienced through joy. It has the capacity to remove all the internal blockages that interfere with our own spiritual and physical lives. *Simcha* removes the blockages between our mind and our heart, our hearts and our actions as well as our stifled feelings for others.

However, there are many levels of joy; as many as there are levels of the soul. The Midrash and Kabbalah teach us that there are five levels of the soul, the highest of which is *Yechidah*. The *Yechidah* level is the spark of Moshiach we each possess but with which we are in touch only on special occasions.

One of the factors that distinguish *Yechidah* from the other four levels of the soul is that they each have their own distinct forms. One level is fixed in the intellectual mold. Another

level associated with emotion is likewise cast in a frame. These different aspects of our soul function best, of course, when they work in concert and cross over into the other's "territory."

When a person has a profound understanding of the greatness of G-d or the beauty of a Mitzvah but is not emotionally moved, joy can aid in allowing some of the understanding to seep through the blockage and influence the emotions.

The Essence of Joy

However, as long as the lower four levels of the soul are not affected by the *Yechidah*, they each retain some measure of independence from one another. Joy can only go so far in removing the boundaries and barriers between the various parts of our personalities. Sometimes the joy of one level can actually conflict with the joy that emanates from another level.

However, the *Yechidah* has no fixed borders. And while it transcends the other four levels it also permeates them. The metaphor most often used for the *Yechidah* is oil, which has

the paradoxical property of rising above other liquids while, simultaneously, permeating other substances.

When the *Yechidah* is exposed and unleashed it removes all the barriers associated with the other parts of the soul.

Simchas Torah, Chassidus teaches us, is the Holiday in which the *Yechidah* of the Jew is revealed. We can therefore experience the ultimate level of joy: a joy that is connected to the soul's very essence, in relation to which all boundaries fall to the wayside.

This is the joy that unites all Jews.

This is the joy that inspired Jews in the former Soviet Union to fearlessly dance in the streets, not even knowing why they were there, except for the fact that they were Jews and it was Simchas Torah. Their *Yechidah* was opened bare.

This is the joy that unifies all the other levels of the soul.

This is the Joy that is a taste of Moshiach.

Never Too Much Joy

We can now understand why the principle that we may not mix one joyous celebration with another does not apply to Simchas Torah. That principle is based on the constraints of human nature. We cannot experience two distinct forms of joy without one diminishing or adulterating the other. That may be generally true, but not when we reach the essence of joy. On Simchas Torah the barriers disappear. A seamless connection unites the various sources of joy and one form of joy actually enhances the other.

We are about to enter into the age when the *Yechidah* will be revealed perpetually in its full glory. This will make a huge difference in our lives.

Living in Galus, we have had to learn how to cope with adversity. In addition, we have had to learn how to cope with celebrations. The Prophet Malachi predicted abundant blessings. The Talmud (*Ta'anis* 23a) reinterprets some of the words used there to describe how the recipients of these blessings will not be able to tolerate them and “their lips will wither saying ‘enough!’”

In the days of Moshiach all that will change. We will no longer have to cope with

misfortune. We will also be able to tolerate and enjoy the greatest abundance of material and spiritual good. The letters of the word Moshiach when rearranged spell *yismach* “he shall rejoice or *yisamach* ‘he shall cause others to rejoice.” We will then experience the joy of barrier breaking-*Yechidah*, which will let us fully experience all the diverse sources and causes of joy and bring about a perpetual Simchas Torah.

ESSAY TWENTY-TWO

PEACE AND KOSHER

BIRDS

Birds symbolize soaring high and peace.

**There are multiple ways of flying high, kosher
and non-kosher.**

**There is, however, only one definition of
peace.**

ESSAY TWENTY-TWO

PEACE AND KOSHER BIRDS

Two Names for Birds: *Tzippor* and *Oaf*

This week's parsha repeats the laws of animals that are kosher and fit for human consumption. The Torah lists the animals, birds and fish that are kosher and those that are not kosher.

When the Torah speaks of the birds that we may eat it employs two different words for bird:

In the introductory verse that states "you may eat every bird from a ritually pure species," the Torah uses the word "*tzippor*" for bird.

After the Torah lists the names of the non-kosher birds it repeats the admonition to eat only kosher fowl. Instead of the word "*tzippor*" that was mentioned earlier it uses the word "*oaf*" for bird prompting the following two questions:

First, why does the Torah have the need to repeat the admonition to eat only kosher species of fowl?

And second, why does the Torah employ two different words for the word bird, “*tzippor*” and “*of*”?

The Bird Within Us

To answer these questions it is important to understand that when the Torah speaks of kosher and non-kosher animals, birds and fish it speaks of these laws on multiple levels or dimensions.

To be sure, the primary meaning of the text and its most important application is the straightforward surface meaning of the text: we are forbidden to consume the non-kosher species of birds, fish and animals, and we are permitted to eat the kosher ones.

But the Torah also addresses the ethical and spiritual dimensions of life. And thus the reference to species that we may or may not consume is also intended as a guide for us in our spiritual development.

Dreaming about Birds

When the Torah speaks of birds that we may or may not eat it is also addressing the bird within us.

A bird has two characteristics that humans possess as well. A bird can travel across large expanses without encountering the obstacles that animals that are on land experience, and they can travel much more quickly.

Indeed, this trait is what our sages in the Talmud had in mind when they stated: “One who sees a bird in his dream should anticipate peace.”

Peace is when two entities, far apart from each other, are brought together. The bird is the creature that traverses seas and continents making the world a smaller place; essentially uniting disparate and distant places.

It is thus no wonder that the Hebrew word “*tzippor*” has the same numerical value as the word Shalom, which, of course, means peace.

It is also significant that the word “*tzippor*” (when spelled without the optional letter vav) is also the numerical value of the phrase “*zeh Moshiach-this is Moshiach,*” alluding to

Moshiach's role as the one who ushers in an age of true peace.

It is clear then that the bird-*tzippor* symbolizes our ability to make connections and bring about peace and unity.

Don't Cut the Bird!

This thought could also shed light on the enigmatic story of the Covenant G-d made with Abraham where he was told to take several animals and to cut them in half as part of the ritual associated with a covenant. However, he was also told to take a bird, a *tzippor*, which he did not split in half.

When G-d made His covenant with Abraham he alluded to all of the travails of his descendants, the Jewish people. He also alluded to the fact that a time will come and the *tzippor* that symbolizes Moshiach will make things whole again. The Jewish people will be gathered together to the Land of Israel in a peaceful and harmonious world. The bird-*tzippor* will not be cut into two.

Flying High

A bird also possesses another unique characteristic. It can soar effortlessly to heights that no other land creature can reach unaided. This too alludes to the human trait of seeking to climb the ladder of achievement and success to scale unimaginable heights—to fly high. This characteristic is represented by the Hebrew name “*oaf*” for bird that means to fly.

This trait, however, comes in two forms. There is the kosher bird; the one that flies high so he or she can get closer to G-d and draw that inspiration into everyday life. It is the person who surmounts all the obstacles and sees things from a higher perch.

However, there is a non-kosher form of the “*oaf*” personality; the one who soars to greater heights. Some may look to rise above others and view those below condescendingly.

Alternatively, there are also some whose sole interest is to be spiritual. They therefore cannot relate to the physical world; the place that G-d put us so that we engage it and refine it. Either way, the “*oaf*-flying high” personality and mindset is detrimental to the mission for which we were placed here. It is a non-kosher bird.

Isn't there a Non-Kosher form of *Tzippor*?

The Talmud declares that we never find the word *tzippor* used to describe a non-kosher bird as opposed to the term “*oaf*.”

Based on our analysis that the term *tzippor* represents the trait of peace, the question arises: Aren't there negative, or non-kosher, forms of peace just as there are non-kosher forms of ambition and achievement. The idea of unity is not always the ideal. There are forms of peace and unity that one must resist and oppose.

For example, when fire and water meet and unite without the separation of a pot the two elements neutralize each other. Hence the Talmudic statement that seeing a pot in a dream is also a symbol of peace. The pot is the “*shadchan*-matchmaker” that allows fire and water to coexist. Any other mixing of the two, in the interests of peace and unity, will prove disastrous.

All this indicates that while the notion of peace is noble and desirable, one must not seek peace between two elements that were intended to be separate.

Why then does the Talmud state that *tzippor* is always used in conjunction with kosher birds if there are undesirable forms of peace?

True Peace or No Peace!

In truth, there is only one form of peace. When the pursuit of peace is uncalled for it isn't simply an inferior peace; it is the antithesis of peace.

To refer back to the analogy of fire and water, when we mix them it is not simply a weak form of peace; it is disastrous for both elements.

Similarly, the Torah in this week's parsha stipulates that certain things must be separated, such as milk and meat. By mixing them we do not create peace, albeit a bad peace. Rather what we've created is a forbidden and spiritually deleterious mixture where both the milk and the meat "threaten" each other's existence. It is like mixing two innocuous chemicals. The mixture can cause an explosion resulting in the loss of both chemicals. That is the opposite of peace.

True peace is the only real peace. It is when two disparate elements come together in a

harmonious blend. In truth, the reason they can get together is because that which separates them is only a façade. Deep down, they are united. The “peace process” works to restore the innate unity that was previously hidden from view.

And it is that peace that will be inaugurated in the Messianic Age with the arrival of Moshiach, because Moshiach will be able to discern between the artificial nature of things and the genuine affinity they have.

ESSAY TWENTY-THREE

MIRACLES OF THE JORDAN

Miracles are not intended for show.

**Miracles associated with Israel showcased the
unique opportunities and empowerment it
possesses.**

ESSAY TWENTY-THREE

MIRACLES OF THE JORDAN

Moses' Last Will and Testament

In the beginning of this week's parsha, Moses' continues his final monologue to the Jewish nation before they were to enter the Promised Land.

Moses tells them:

“See! I am giving to you today a blessing and a curse. The blessing (is being given) on the basis that you will listen to the commandments of G-d, your G-d, which I am commanding you today. And the curse (will come) if you do not listen to the commandments of G-d, your G-d... to follow other gods...”

Moses continues to tell them:

“When G-d your G-d will bring you to the Land which you are going to come and take possession of, you should place (the people who will recite) the blessing (facing) towards Mount Gerizim, and

(when they recite) the curse (they should turn so that they face) towards Mount Eval.” The Torah then proceeds to describe the geographic location of these mountains.

After discussing the blessings and the curses, Moses then continues:

“For you are crossing the Jordan to come and take possession of the Land, which G-d your G-d, is giving you. You will take possession of it and settle in it. So be careful about observing all the supra-rational commands and rational commands that I am presenting before you today.”

Why Emphasize the Crossing of the Jordan?

The question that arises when we read the last few sentences is the emphasis on the crossing of the Jordan River. Why is it so important to mention that they will enter the Promised Land by crossing the Jordan? It could have just stated: “For you are going to come and take possession of the Land...”

Rashi, the Torah’s principal commentator, responds to this question and explains that

the mention of the crossing of the Jordan was to indicate that

“The miracles they will experience when they cross the Jordan will be a sign that they will enter and inherit the land.”

Several questions can be raised on Rashi's answer:

First, why was there a need for new miracles to impress upon them that they will inherit the land. Weren't the old miracles, among them the recent conquest of the land of Sichon and Og, sufficient proof of their ability to settle the land?

Second, Rashi does not say that the miracles would demonstrate that they will be capable of “conquering” the land, but rather to “enter and inherit” the land. We could easily understand that it may take a miracle to conquer a land from a formidable military force. But why would a miracle be necessary to enter and inherit the land?

Enter and Inherit

One can answer these questions by analyzing the meaning of the words “enter” and

“inherit” employed by Rashi. When we use the word “enter” in conversation it lacks any profound meaning. However, in the context of entering the Promised Land, “entering” conveys a rather important concept. One could physically go from one place to another, but that does not necessarily mean that the person has truly penetrated into the place that he or she entered. “Entering the land” in the Biblical context means to identify with and become part of the land.

Likewise, the word “inherit,” when used casually simply means that one has taken possession of something. In the Torah’s usage of the word “inheriting” it means absorbing and internalizing that which one has inherited. In the same way as the Torah is described as “an inheritance,” likewise the Land of Israel is not just a place that belongs to the Jewish people; it is an integral part of them.

In simple language this means that one can go to the Land of Israel and not identify with its true nature and character. When the Land of Israel and its inhabitants are two distinct entities, then these inhabitants have never truly entered or inherited the land.

It is for this reason that Moses reminded them of the miracles they will experience in the crossing of the Jordan. These miracles were to serve as reminders that they have the requisite spiritual ability to truly enter the land and inherit it in the full sense of these words.

Our Relationship with Israel Unparalleled

Our relationship with Israel is unique. No other nation has ever identified with a geographic location the way the Jewish nation has. But our relationship to Israel is not a nationalistic or chauvinistic one. It is based on the principle that when G-d created the world, he created it with a purpose and a plan to make the world a good and G-dly world. He then chose the Jewish people to be the messengers to deliver His plan to the entire world.

To facilitate the execution of our G-d given mission, He also created a unique land; a land that fuses the physical and spiritual in the most harmonious fashion. This land is best suited for the Jewish nation to help them to reveal their own spiritual potential so that they can fulfill their mission.

However, in order for us to reap the benefits from entering and inheriting the land, we must recognize and respect its true character by first realizing its unique nature and by living our lives in consonance with G-d's plan.

This explains why Moses had to remind them of the miracles they will experience when they cross the Jordan. This was a way of impressing upon them that there was something unique about their entering into and inheriting the land. This was not to be a conventional conquest and possession of a country.

Entering the Land of Israel was to set into motion a process that would literally affect the entire world. For it is from this Holy Land that light was generated to the entire world, inasmuch as Israel is the center of the universe in the most important sense of the word. It is from this chosen land that G-d's plan for the entire universe will be realized, culminating with the final Redemption through Moshiach. At that time, all of the Jewish people will return to Israel, to live in peace and harmony. From there peace will finally come to all the nations of the world.

The word “Jordan” is related to the term used in the Book of Psalms (Psalm 72) to describe Moshiach’s dominion over the world. It is not simply a geo-political concept; it is a spiritual concept. Moshiach will instill the values associated with the Land of Israel to the entire world.

This is the deeper meaning of the Midrashic statement that in the Messianic Age the Land of Israel will spread to and encompass the entire world. The entire world will feel the Mastery of G-d in a palpable way.

May we see the crossing of the Jordan in all of its shades and meanings with the true and complete Redemption under the leadership of our righteous Moshiach, **now!**