

Parshas Eikev

Presented By Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky Shlita, Dean

1. The Clarity that was Achieved Through the 15th of Av and Yom Kippur

The Mishna in Tractate *Taanis* states, “Reb Shimon Ben Gamliel says, “There are no two greater holidays for the Jewish people than Yom Kippur and the 15th day of Av. On the 15th of Av the maidens of Jerusalem would go out in white garments that were borrowed so as not to embarrass those who did not have their own ...” According to the Gemara, “It is understandable that Yom Kippur is considered a special holiday for the Jewish people because it is a day of forgiveness and atonement. In addition, on that day, G’d gave the second set of tablets (indicating that the Jewish people were reinstated after the Sin of the Golden Calf). However, why is the 15th day of Av considered so special?

The Gemara tells us that on the 15th of Av the tribes of Israel were permitted to intermarry with one another. Until that point the tribes were prohibited from doing so in order for each tribe to retain its portion in the Land. Therefore, before the 15th of Av, it did not allow them to be integrated. However, afterwards, that separation was removed - thus allowing the Jewish people to be more unified.

Another example of the reunification of the Jewish people which occurred on the 15th of Av is in regard to the Tribe of Benjamin. They had been ostracized from the Jewish people because of what they had done (in connection with the incident of the concubine in Giva), and on this day, they were reunited with the Jewish people.

Also, on the 15th of Av the last of the generation of the desert (who had been condemned as a result of the sin of the spies) had ceased to die. Because they had believed the negative reports of the spies regarding the Promised Land, those between the age of 20 and 60 were condemned to die every year in the desert and could not enter into the Land. Until this entire generation had passed away, Moshe did not prophesize on an ongoing basis because the Jewish people were in a state of melancholy. There was not sufficient joy (*simcha*) to allow an ongoing communication between G’d and Moshe – His prophet. The Gemara in Tractate *Bava Basra* tells us that a prophet is only able to prophesize (when he is) in a state of *simcha*. After it had been indicated on the 15th of Av that the generation had finished passing on, Moshe’s level of communication with G’d was restored.

On the 15th of Av, the martyrs of Beitar (who were massacred by the Romans) were permitted to be buried. The Romans had piled the bodies of the Jews they had killed for miles encircling the countryside. They had remained in this state for seven years. Their bodies did not decompose or fall pray to scavengers of the field. Thus, when the decree was annulled this was a great holiday for the Jewish people. On the 15th of Av, when the intensity of the sun begins to wane, the Levites completed cutting the wood that was needed for the altar. That day was referred to as the “day they broke the sickle.”

Rabbeinu Gershom, in his commentary on Tractate *Bava Basra*, explains that the basis for the festivities on “the day they broke the sickle” was that the Tribe of Levy was allowed to return to their Torah study. The primary involvement of the Tribe of Levy was

Torah study (as the Kohanim who had no portion in the Land (“G’d is their portion”). The joy of the 15th of Av was that the entire Jewish people rejoiced when the Tribe of Levy was able to return to their Torah study. Why does the Mishna equate the level of festivities on the 15th of Av to that of Yom Kippur? Seemingly, the two holidays are not comparable because the ultimate joy is to be forgiven and atoned for one’s past sins.

The Torah itself, within the context of mitzvos, is divided into two categories – those mitzvos that are between man and G’d (*bein adam l’makom*) and those that are between man and his fellow (*bein adam l’chaveiro*). The 15th day of Av represents a day in which the Jewish people experienced a correction within the context of *bein adam l’chaveiro* through their unification (in the various events which transpired on that day) and also to a degree in the area of *bein adam l’makom* – which is exemplified by Yom Kippur. Thus, these two days - the 15th of Av and Yom Kippur are the most joyous holidays for the Jewish people.

On the 15th of Av the Jewish people had established their priorities – to be united with no difference or separation among themselves, to focus on their relationship with G’d, and to make their Torah study primary and all other considerations secondary. Therefore even the wealthy class was sensitive to those who did not have- and thus went out wearing white borrowed garments so as not to make the less fortunate feel deprived. Similarly on Yom Kippur, when the focus of the Jewish people is on their spirituality (their relationship with G’d), the material is not seen as being something worthy of status. Thus, even the wealthy class would go out with borrowed garments on Yom Kippur.

2. The Proper Question Can Lead to the Answer

The Torah states regarding the Jewish people entering into the land of Canaan, **“Perhaps you will say in your heart, ‘These nations are more numerous than I; how will I be able to drive them out?’ Do not fear them! You shall remember what Hashem, your G’d, did to Pharaoh and to all of Egypt.”** Sforno explains, “When the Jewish people will say in their heart ‘how will I be able to drive them out?’ it should not be expressed as a result of their fear, but rather, it should be because of the understanding that only G’d has the ability to drive their enemies out of the Land (destroy them) as He had done to Egypt.” The value of reflecting on the question – “how is it possible to conquer the numerous nations of Canaan” is only to come to the realization that when it happens it is the Hand of G’d. This is unrelated to the ability of the Jewish people because it was not possible for the Jewish people to have defeated the Egyptians or the nations of Canaan on their own. Their past and future success could only be attributed to G’d’s intervention.

In the Portion of Shelach, the Torah tells us that the Jewish people wished to send scouts to spy out the Land before entering into it. G’d authorized this by saying, **“Send for yourselves men and let them spy out the Land of Canaan that I give to the Children of Israel...”** Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh asks, “It is understood that the Land of Canaan is the land that G’d gave to the Jewish people. Why then was it necessary for G’d to reiterate this point – *the Land of Canaan that I give to the Children of Israel?*” Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains that G’d was communicating to the Jewish people that they should understand in advance the conquest of the land of Canaan was beyond their capacity. However, since it is the Land that He promised to give to them, He guaranteed that He will intervene and remove the enemy. This was an important point for the Jewish people to comprehend and internalize because if it was not understood sufficiently, they

would become fearful and not want to enter the Land – since it was humanly impossible to conquer.

It is interesting to note that despite the fact that Israel is surrounded by hostile nations who are continuously plotting to bring about its destruction, it is nevertheless surviving and thriving. This reality is unrelated to Israel's superior military or strategic advantage. It is humanly impossible to be sufficiently protected and not be destroyed by the overwhelming number of our enemies. It is only because of the Chesed (Kindness) of G'd that Israel exists and thrives. This is true regarding all of the events in our lives.

In the Haftorah that is read on Tisha B'Av the Prophet Jeremiah states, "The wise man should not pride himself in his wisdom, the strong man should not pride himself in his strength, and the wealthy man should not pride himself in his wealth..." The reason for this is because wisdom, strength, and wealth are all endowments of G'd and not attributable to the individual himself. Rabbeinu Yonah in his commentary on Pirkei Avos (Ethics of our Fathers) explains that although one's abilities/possessions are an endowment from G'd, it is still in the hands of the individual to choose how to invest his wisdom, strength, and wealth. The individual can choose to invest himself in spirituality rather than in the material. As it states in Pirkei Avos "The wise man is one who does learn from anyone, the strong man is one who conquers his inclination (evil inclination), and the wealthy man is one who is satisfied with his portion."

Although one has the ability to choose how to invest his G'd-given resources, one's ultimate success is dependent on Divine Assistance – based on the principle that is stated in the Gemara in Tractate Shabbos, "One who attempts to purify himself will be assisted."

3. Who is Worthy of the Ultimate Praise?

The Portion of Eikev contains the second part of the Shema which states, "**And it will come to pass that if you continually hearken to My commandments that I commanded you today... that you may gather in your grain, your wine, and your oil...**" Seemingly, the verse is describing the ideal situation in which the Jew upholds all the precepts of the Torah and is thus blessed with material bounty. The Gemara in Tractate Berachos cites an argument between Reb Yishmael and Reb Shimon Bar Yochai regarding the context in which the verse "**that you may gather in your grain, your wine, and your oil**" is addressing.

The Gemara asks, "What is the meaning of '...you may gather in your grain...?' It is stated in the Book of Joshua "The words of Torah should not be removed from your mouth." Meaning one should be continuously engaged in Torah study. Does the verse actually mean to say that one should be fully engaged in Torah study without any interruption whatsoever – not even for the sake of livelihood? Or is the Torah telling us that one is permitted to interrupt his Torah study for the sake of earning a livelihood. Reb Yishmael chooses the latter interpretation – that one may interrupt his Torah study for the sake of earning a livelihood.

However, Reb Shimon Bar Yochai argues and is of the position that the verse in the Book of Joshua which states that the Torah should not be removed from one's mouth must be understood literally. One does not interrupt his Torah study even to earn a livelihood because, "If one were to plow in the time of plowing, sow in the time of sowing, harvest in the harvest season, thresh in the time of threshing, and winnow in the time of the wind then what will become of Torah?" Reb Shimon Bar Yochai concludes,

“The Torah is communicating to us that when the Jewish people are continuously engaged in performing the Will of G’d, all of their material responsibilities will be carried out on their behalf by others. However if they are not performing the Will of G’d (as they should) then they must bring in their own harvest – which is the context of the second paragraph of the Shema.”

The Gemara continues in the name of Reb Yehudah b’Reb Elae, “Come and see that the earlier generations are different from the later generations. The earlier generations made their Torah study primary and their work secondary. Consequently they succeeded in their Torah and their material endeavors. However in the later generations (generation of Reb Yehudah b’Reb Elae), they do not have Torah or material success.”

The Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin cites a verse from Proverbs, “...False is grace and vain is beauty – A G’d fearing woman – should be praised...” The Gemara explains, “*False is grace*” is referring to the generation of Moshe and Yehoshua. *Vain is beauty* is referring to the generation of Chizkiyahu (King of Judah). *A G’d fearing woman – should be praised* is referring to the generation of Reb Yehudah b’Reb Elae – whose generation demonstrated an exceptional level of *yiras shamayim* (fear of G’d). Their level of dedication to Torah was to such a degree that six individuals covered themselves with one garment when they studied Torah.”

The Gemara in Tractate Berachos tells us that Reb Elae was identifying the basis for the lack of Torah and material success in his generation – despite people’s level of investment in both. As he states, “...in our generation, we do not have Torah nor material wealth.” However the Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin tells us that the generation of Reb Yehudah b’Reb Elae was exemplary in the area of dedication to Torah – thus being worthy of the ultimate praise. Seemingly, his generation should have had material bounty because of their level of dedication to Torah. How do we reconcile this with the Gemara in Tractate Berachos in which Reb Yehudah b’Reb Elae explains that the reason his generation was so impoverished was because they were not sufficiently engaged in Torah study?

The Gemara tells us that the generation of Moshe is identified by the verse – ‘*False is grace.*’ How could this be referring to the generation that stood at Sinai and experienced G’d face to face? It was because the generation of Moshe stood at Sinai, experienced a direct communication with G’d, and witnessed all of the miracles of Egypt that they were spiritually advanced. Because of their unusual circumstance, they were at a special level. How could one experience such miracles and direct communication with G’d and not be spiritually advanced? Thus, King Solomon identifies their level as ‘false is grace’ because their unusual spiritual level is not fully attributable to themselves.

On the other hand, the generation of Reb Yehudah b’Reb Elae was not exposed to the supernatural and did not have the benefit of leaders such as Moshe Rabbeinu or Yehoshua Bin Nun. Despite the fact that they were not beneficiaries of such exceptional role models as Moshe and Yehoshua, they were exemplary in their level of *yiras shamayim* (fear of G’d). Therefore they are deserving of the ultimate praise. However, their reality was that they were not sufficiently engaged in Torah to merit that their chores would be attended to by others. They did not achieve material success because, although their level of involvement in Torah was exceptional (in their context), it was not sufficient to be classified as one who is ‘continuously engaged in doing the Will of G’d’ with the proper intent.

Any Jew in our generation who adheres to the precepts of the Torah and is

dedicated to its principles – despite the overwhelming level of negative influences – is deserving of the ultimate praise. It is a semblance of the generation of Reb Yehudah b'Reb Elae. However, unfortunately, only a small segment of the Jewish people are fully engaged in Torah study and doing the Will of G'd – and even that segment is not better than the generation of Reb Yehudah b'Reb Elae. We need to re-establish our priorities and designate Torah as primary and our work as secondary, thus, meriting Divine Assistance to be successful in both the spiritual and the material.

4. The Basis for Spiritual Ascent

The Torah states, **“Moshe said to the Children of Israel: And Now, O Israel, what does Hashem, your G'd, ask of you? Only to fear Hashem, your G'd, to go in all His ways and to love Him, and serve Hashem, your G'd will all your heart and with all your soul, to observe the commandments of Hashem and His decrees...”** It is interesting to note that the tone of Moshe Rabbeinu's statement to the Jewish people - “Now...what does Hashem your G'd ask of you?” seems to indicate that G'd is only asking something of them that is not burdensome – something that is not all-consuming. However, Moshe continues to explain G'd's level of expectations: “only to fear Hashem...go in all of His ways... love Him... serve Hashem...” In essence Moshe was saying that all that G'd expects of the Jewish people is to commit every aspect of their existence to Him and be willing to give their lives for G'd. How could this even be considered a seemingly insignificant level of commitment? The Gemara in Tractate Berachos asks, “Is fearing G'd something that is minor?”

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh asks, “Why does the verse begin with ‘And now, O Israel...’? Moshe could have simply said ‘What does Hashem, your G'd, ask of you?’ The reason the Torah adds the word “And now” is to communicate to us that G'd does not expect one to achieve the most advanced levels of spirituality at once. One's total dedication and commitment to G'd is something that develops over time. What is expected of the Jewish people “now” is “only to fear G'd.” If one lives his life fearing and revering G'd he will ultimately come to the point of loving Him. When one achieves the advanced level of loving G'd it will no longer be a challenge to dedicate oneself completely to Him. However, the starting point must begin with the fear of G'd. One must be cognizant that He is the Master and we are His subjects. Every aspect of our existence is endowed by Him and there is nothing attributable to the individual himself – other than choice. G'd is the one who gives life and take it. If one understands this reality, he will fear and revere G'd. Thus, Moshe communicates to the Jewish people – **“AND NOW, O Israel, what does Hashem, your G'd, ask of you? Only to fear Hashem...”**

The Gemara tells us that if one continuously serves G'd without having the proper intent (ulterior motives) – *shelo l'shmah*, one will ultimately come to the level of serving Him with the proper intent (*l'shmah*). Rambam in his work *Shemona Perakim* (Eight Chapters) explains this concept with an allegory. When a parent wants his young child to follow his directive, he offers him a sweet date as an incentive. As the child matures, when the date is no longer an incentive, the parent will offer him a pair of leather shoes. Ultimately when the child matures and develops sufficiently with the proper conditioning, he will come to have an appreciation for the value of doing the will of his parent and no longer need any incentive. The same is true regarding the conditioning necessary to ultimately bring one to an appreciation of the Will of G'd.

Rambam writes in *Hilchos Gitten* the Laws of Divorce that, although a *get* (*writ of divorce*) is only valid when it is given consensually, if the husband does not want to divorce his wife, the court is permitted to coerce him to do so – even through physical

coercion, until he says “I consent.” How is it a valid *get* if we are fully aware that the husband was only in agreement because he could no longer stand the pain? Why is this considered a valid *get*? Rambam explains that the will of every Jew is to do the Will of G’d. It is true that one may be distracted or confused by his conflicts of interest, but essentially the Jew wants to do what the Torah dictates. When one is properly conditioned, his conflicts of interest will no longer interfere with his perception of the value of serving G’d. Thus, Moshe says to the Jewish people, that G’d initially (Now) wants them to fear/revere Him, because ultimately this will bring them to a more advanced level of service which is to serve G’d through love.

5. Establishing a Sensitivity to Spirituality

There is a Positive Commandment of “*Bo Tidbok*- to Him you shall attach yourself.” The Gemara in Tractate Pesachim asks, “How can one attach himself to G’d, since He is a consuming fire?” The Gemara answers that the way a Jew becomes attached to G’d is by providing financial opportunities to a Torah Sage, eating and drinking with him, offering one’s daughter to him, or marrying his daughter. Through this level of association and attachment to the Torah Sage, it is considered as if he is attaching himself to G’d.

The Gemara in Tractate Yomah tells us that a true Torah Sage is one whose inner self is consistent with his outer demeanor – which is that of a Torah Sage. This individual is a representation of G’d’s Presence in this world. Thus, by associating and attaching oneself to a true Torah Sage, it is the equivalent of attaching oneself to G’d. The Torah tells us that it is only when one is attached to G’d that he will have life – in this world and the world to come.

Reb Shach z’tl had said that the wealthiest individual in the world did not experience his level of pleasure in the physical world. When he encountered a challenging Rambam and toiled over it and ultimately resolved his difficulty– the level of joy and elation surpassed any physical experience that could be had in this world.

When one is attached to G’d through Torah, he perceives and understands the unlimited value of every moment because he understands to what degree he is able to invest every moment of his existence.

The Vilna Gaon z’tl wept amid his students before he passed away. They had asked him, “Why are you crying? You should be confident in your passing because of your life’s achievement and your level of Torah. You have achieved a level of greatness of one of the earlier commentators!” The Vilna Gaon responded, “While I am in this world I am able to fulfill the mitzvah of tzitzis (fringes) for a mere few pennies. However, when I will no longer be in this world, I will be denied any spiritual opportunity or growth. Thus, every moment in this existence has infinite value – although it may cost only a few pennies.” The only one who could have such a level of understanding and appreciation for this existence is the one who is attached to G’d. The one who is attached to G’d, because of his understanding of spirituality, will utilize every moment to its fullest.

The Torah states, “*Vatem HaDevakim Ba’Shem Elokeichem Chayim Kulchem HaYom* (But you who cling to Hashem, your G’d- you are all alive today.)” Baal HaTurim points out that on the word “HaDevakim” there is a crown on the letter “kuf.” This crown on the letter “kuf” (which numerically equals 100) alludes to the 100 berachos (blessings) that one should recite each day. Chazal tell us that G’d wants the Jew to recite 100

blessings each day. Thus, the way one attaches himself to G'd is through the 100 blessings of the day. What is the value of a beracha (blessing)?

The Rabbis enacted blessings to be recited in numerous circumstances throughout one's daily activities, which acknowledge G'd as the Omnipotent Being responsible for existence. It is through the recitation of berachos that one is continuously cognizant of G'd's involvement in every aspect of one's life. If one recites a hundred blessings in a day he will realize and appreciate to what degree he is a beneficiary of G'd Kindness. The Gemara tells us that if one recites a blessing without identifying G'd as "the King" the beracha has no value. Thus all of the hundred blessings must mention the Name of G'd and identify Him as the King of the Universe. It is only through this that one can truly appreciate being the beneficiary of His Kindness – thus becoming attached to G'd.

During the time of King David there was a plague that had devastated the Jewish people. King David, being a prophet, understood that the reason for the plague was because the Jewish people were not continuously cognizant of G'd's involvement in their lives. He therefore enacted the recitation of a 100 blessings each day – thus ending the plague.

6. The Barometer for Loving G'd

The Portion of Va'eschanan contains the first portion of the Shema. The Positive Commandment of the Shema is referred to as "Yichud Hashem – the Unity of G'd." When one recites the Shema one declares his belief that G'd is One. However, this concept extends beyond being simply a declaration of monotheism. When one states the first verse of the Shema (which concludes with Echad (He is One), one is asserting that there is nothing in existence that does not emanate from G'd Himself. All existence – past, present, and future – is an expression of G'd Willing it on a continuous basis. The Gemara refers to the recitation of the Shema as "accepting upon oneself the yoke of heaven."

Reb Chaim of Volozhin z'tl in his work Nefesh HaChaim explains that the meaning of a "yoke" is – to what degree must one be committed to the Will of G'd. When a yoke was put on an ox, it was placed on his shoulders to secure his head from being able to move in either direction. It was essential that the ox, when being used for plowing, should have its eyes focused in a straight line of vision- not to be able to look to the right or to the left. The ancient plow was a long blade inserted in the ground and was pulled by the ox to turn the soil. If the ox were to veer even slightly to the right or to the left, the blade would break in the ground. The ox needed to walk a straight line and not deviate from its path as much as an iota. When one accepts the yoke of heaven upon himself, through the recitation of the Shema, one is accepting upon himself a level of commitment not to deviate to any degree from the path of Torah and mitzvos – despite his own interests and needs.

The first verse of the Shema states, "**You shall love Hashem your G'd with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your resources...**" One is obliged to love G'd to such a degree that he should be willing to give his life for the sake of G'd. Sforno explains, "The mitzvah of loving G'd (*Ahavas Hashem*) is to rejoice when one does something that finds favor in the eyes of G'd. When one understands that there is nothing that is more great/honorable than doing something that finds favor in the eyes of G'd, it is an expression of his love for G'd." When one loves another, he is preoccupied with devising ways to please and find favor with that individual. When he succeeds in doing so, he experiences great joy. This can be experienced when one performs any of the mitzvos. For example, when one wears tefillin, one should experience great joy because he is identifying with G'd and doing His Will.

Ramban explains that the concept of a Positive Commandment (*Mitzvas Asei*) is an expression of one's love for G'd (*Ahavas Hashem*). In order for one to perform an action (Positive Commandment) one needs to be motivated. This is facilitated by one's love for G'd. On the other hand, a Negative Commandment is the refrain from doing an action. Refraining from transgression is an expression of one's fear of G'd. Ramban explains that this is why when there is a conflict between a Positive and Negative Commandment (that cannot be reconciled), the Positive Commandment supercedes the Negative because the mitzvah of loving G'd is greater than that of fearing Him.

The Midrash tells us that if one prays within the context of a minyan (quorum of ten men) one begins the Shema with "Shema Yisroel..." However, if one prays in a private setting, the Shema is introduced with the phrase "Kail Melech Ne'eman – G'd Trustworthy King." Rabbeinu Asher and Daas Zikainim Baali Tosfos explain that the reason for this is that it is important that the number of words that are recited in the context of Shema should total "RAMACH – which is numerically 248." This corresponds to every part of the human body. It is to indicate that one accepts the yoke of heaven upon every aspect of his existence. How is it possible for one to dedicate every aspect of his existence to G'd? How could one accept the yoke of heaven to such a degree that all of his own interests and needs become irrelevant? It is only through the love of G'd that one is able to achieve this level of dedication. If one understands and feels privileged that through his performance of mitzvos he brings satisfaction to G'd – then he will have no difficulty in dedicating himself at this special level. He will see it as the ultimate opportunity and privilege – not as a burden.

The Torah states, "Blessed is the one who upholds the Torah and cursed is the one who does not uphold the Torah." Rabbeinu Yonah explains that the one who is "cursed" is not the one who transgresses any of the precepts of the Torah; but rather, it is the individual who chooses to observe all of the mitzvos with the exception of one. Although this individual has committed himself to the vast majority of the Torah, he deserves to be cursed because when a subject selects which commandments of his Master are to his liking (and which are not) it is an expression of defiance and insolence.

The ultimate goal in one's involvement in mitzvos is to feel privileged in their performance. How does one achieve this level of appreciation? The only way one can relate and understand the true value of mitzvos and Torah is through Torah study itself. It is only through dedicated Torah study that one can come to truly love G'd.