

A PARASHA THOUGHT

EXPANDED  
ROSH HASHANA  
EDITION

RABBI  
SHIMON  
FRANSKY



Looking around the backyard of my parent's new home, there was one thing you couldn't miss: ivy. Lots of it. This invasive weed, not uncommon to the Toco Hills area of Atlanta, had spread across most of the expanse of our yard. Big, green, triangle leaves sprouting from thick thorny vines had grown so thick, it hid the ground from view. As I stepped off the patio, our neighbor's yard caught my eye. The result of years of neglect, the ivy grew four feet high! Wrapping itself around the trunk of every tree in her yard, it had sapped them of their nutrients, the trees' bark decayed and rotted. Looking back at our yard, I noted to my relief the ivy just reached my ankles. A cause for worry? Well, why would one suggest that? After all, the neighbor's ivy was unmanageable, tall and thick, not ours. Foolish thought? Definitely. Uncommon? Unfortunately, not.

The third *aliyah* in this week's *parashah* records some serious *musar* from Moshe *Rabbeinu*, his parting speech to *Klal Yisrael*. It discusses the consequences that a person will incur should he decide in his heart to abandon the Torah, to go with the cravings of his heart. A few of the words however, are extremely cryptic. *Passuk 17* says, *pen yesh bachem shoresh poreh rosh v'laana* – perhaps there is in one of you a root sprouting bitter vegetation (a loose translation). What is the Torah trying to convey by referring to our *ta'avos* (desires) as bitter sprouts? *Passuk 18* continues, *ki b'shrinus libi eilech l'maan s'fos harava es hatz'meah* – He will think 'I will go with the cravings of my heart', thereby adding watered to the thirsty. (Again, a loose translation.) 'Watered to the thirsty'? It's hard to even formulate a question, the words themselves are not easily understood!

The Ramban explains the word watered (*ravah*) is an expression of a satisfied soul, providing sources in scripture to support this. Similarly, he writes that the word

thirsty (*tzameah*) symbolizes a soul that desires, again providing sources from scripture. The comparison follows the words of the previous *passuk*, which calls our desires a bitter sprout. To further understand this analogy, the Ramban lays out a fundamental principle regarding the nature of desires. When one satisfies an *unhealthy* drive within themselves, instead of staving off the *yetzer hara* (evil inclination), one counterintuitively strengthens the urge, expanding it to greater expectations. (It is worthwhile to mention that while one may feel temporary relief in the moment, what the Ramban is saying holds true in the long run.) The Ramban gives an example of a person involving himself in promiscuous activity, gradually progressing to worse and worse depravity, far beyond what he could have imagined himself doing from the onset. This is the idea the *passuk* is conveying. One might have a small "bitter shrub" in his heart, a relatively minor desire for something the Torah forbids. One might rationalize that following the cravings of his heart can't be too bad, he's not a *rasha* (wicked person), just a little deviant. The Torah warns us that such rationalization will only lead to adding "watered" things he never dreamed of desiring to what he now thirsts.

In today's global village we are bombarded with breaking news from every corner of the world, for better or for worse. Inevitably, among those many headlines are juicy stories of various and sometimes quite creative acts of decadence by an assortment of famous people, ranging from politicians to sports players. Not to mention the constant stream of gossip that floods our Jewish social media outlets, with stories of this nature not uncommon. Our natural reaction is to gasp and haughtily look down at people

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LEARNING WITH THE KOLLEL  
(CHOSHEN MISHPAT)

WITH  
RABBI MEIR MINSTER

As the *shemita* year comes to an end with the start of Rosh Hashana, an element of the *shemita* laws will impact us here, even outside of the land of Israel – the *mitzvah* of *shimitas kesafim* (abandonment of loans). The Torah records an *Aseh* and *Lo Saseh* (a positive and negative command) not to collect loans that are already due once *shemita* ends. (Some say that certain aspects of these laws begin already at the start of the *shemita* year.) According to many opinions, these restrictions are only Rabbinic today, since we do not have a *Bais Hamikdash* or practice *Yovel*, and find the Jewish people scattered across the world.

Furthermore, there are also two prohibitions against withholding making loans, out of the fear of the upcoming *shemita* and the need to abandon collection of these loans. Hillel, seeing that people were in fact reticent about making loans, instituted the practice of *Prozbul*, which allows the collection of loans even after the *shemita* year. *Prozbul* works by transferring the loans to *Bais Din*, which empowers the lenders to collect the loans on their behalf and allows them to keep the money in exchange for their efforts. It is common practice today for everyone to write a *Prozbul* before Rosh Hashana to collect outstanding loans. It should be noted that not all debts or even loans are subject to the laws of *shemitas kesafim*.

An additional interesting point of discussion is exactly how *shemitas kesafim* functions when a *Prozbul* is not

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# יג' מידות הרחמים



A central part of both Yom Kippur and Selichos are the 13 Attributes of Mercy – מימחרה תודים ג'. This prayer goes back to the sin of the golden calf. After the Jewish people sinned Moshe recited this *tefillah*, and the Gemara (*Rosh Hashana*) says that Hashem told Moshe that anytime the Jewish people sin “*Yaaseh l’fonai k’seder hazeh*” – do before Me this order and I will forgive the Jewish people. The *navi* Micha repeats a more extensive version of the 13 attributes of God.

Traditionally, the understanding of the Gemara is to say the thirteen attributes to invoke Hashem’s mercy.

However, if we take a deeper look, the Gemara did not tell us to **say** these *middos*, rather to **do** these *middos*. What does it mean to do these *middos*? Rav Moshe Cordovero, one of the great *kabbalists* who lived in Tzfas in the time of the *Arizal*, wrote a *sefer* called *Tomar Devorah*. In the first chapter he develops the idea that each of the 13 Attributes is a specific *chesed* (kindness) that Hashem does for us, and describes how we can incorporate them into our own lives so that we can do these 13 Attributes and invoke the mercy of Hashem. (Much of the chart below is based on the *Matnas Chaim* commentary to *Tomar Devorah*.)

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS	HASHEM'S מידה	מיכה ז: יח-כ	שמות לד: ו-ז
Be kind even to people while they continually hurt us.	As we do a sin, at that very moment Hashem is giving us the ability to sin against him, yet He still continues to give us life as we sin against Him.	מי אל כמוך  (Mi Keil Camocha)	ה' ה' אל  (Hashem-Hashem-Keil)
Forgive people that have harmed us even when we may still be dealing with the pain they have caused.	When we sin it creates an incriminating angel that should take away our life to avenge the sin. However, Hashem in His kindness sustains the angel, and waits until we do <i>teshuva</i> (repentance). If we don't, eventually Hashem gives a punishment.	נשא עון  (Nosei avon)	רחום  (Rachum)
Fix a mistake that someone else made (e.g., cleaning up another person's mess).	Hashem Himself wipes away the spiritual dirt of our sins.	ועובר על פשע  (V'over al pesha)	וחנון  (V'chanun)
Treat and care for other Jews as one would for his own family, and do not want something bad to happen to them. Additionally, this includes not speaking badly about others.	Hashem treats us like a relative of His, and has tremendous mercy.	לשארית נחלתו  (L'sh'eiris nachalaso)	ארך  (Erech)
Treat other Jews who are distant from Hashem with love; hate the sin not the sinner.	Even if a person continues to sin, Hashem does not punish him forever. Rather, Hashem is kind to him, hoping that he will do <i>teshuva</i> as a result of the kindness.	לא החזיק לעד אפו  (Lo hechzik lo'ad apo)	אפים  (Apayim)

When you see someone else not acting in the proper manner, you should still treat him kindly on the basis of his good deeds. Additionally, people who are struggling with a spouse should appreciate the good their spouse does for them, even when other ways they behave may be challenging.	Hashem created a storehouse where all the <i>chesed</i> that Klal Yisrael does is stored, and when the incriminating angels speak badly about the Jewish people, Hashem judges us favorably because of that <i>chesed</i> .	כי חפץ חסד הוא (Ki chafeitz chesed hu)	ורב חסד (V'rav chesed)
A person should not harbor feelings of hatred towards someone who has sinned towards them; rather, he should accept his apology and strengthen the friendship even more than before you were wronged.	When people do <i>teshuva</i> , Hashem loves them even more than He did prior to the sin.	ישוב ירחמנו (Yashuv Y'rachameinu)	ואמת (V'emes)
We should remember the good others have done for us and forget about the bad they did to us.	Hashem allows our <i>mitzvos</i> to fly until they reach before Hashem. However, our sins do not enter Hashem's inner chamber.	יכבשו עונתנו (Yichveshu Avonoseinu)	נצר חסד (Notzer chesed)
After a wicked person, who one is required to hate due to his sins, has received some sort of punishment, we should love this person since Hashem has already punished him, and some of his impurity has been removed.	Hashem punishes the people that hurt the Jewish people, even though we were deserving of punishment, because after we have been punished, because of His great love for us, it is as if Hashem regrets punishing us, and therefore takes revenge from those who oppressed us.	ותשליך במצולת ים כל חטאתם (V'sashlich bimitzolat yam kol chatosam)	לאלפים (La'alaphim)
Treat others with compassion, and better than they deserve.	Hashem treats those who only do the minimum of service to him, with the <i>midah</i> of <i>Emes</i> , which is <i>din</i> (justice) mixed with tremendous <i>rachamim</i> (mercy).	תתן אמת ליעקב (Titein emes l'Yaakov)	נושא עון (Nosei avon)
Treat righteous people better than "regular" people.	Hashem treats those who act above the letter of the law with love and kindness that is without boundary.	חסד לאברהם (Chesed l'avraham)	ופשע (Va'fesha)
When one meets someone who is far from Torah, try to bring him back to the ways of Hashem.	Even to the people that do not act properly at all, Hashem bestows kindness on them, not because of their own merit but by virtue of the fact that they are descendants of the <i>Avos</i> .	אשר נשבעת לאבותינו (Asher nishbata la'avoseinu)	וחטאה (V'chata'a)
Find the good in every Jew, even if at first it does not seem so apparent, and takes some work	Even when the Jewish people run out of <i>zechus Avos</i> (the merit of the forefathers), Hashem patches together merits, even if they are from the very distant past.	מימי קדם (Mimei kedem)	ונקה (V'nakei)

## LEARNING WITH THE KOLLEL (CHOSHEN MISHPHAT)

CONTINUED

implemented. According to the *Yeraim*, although the creditor may not ask for the money, the borrower remains fully obligated to pay until the lender declares his intent to abandon the loan. (*Bais Din* does have the power to compel the lender to do so). The majority opinion however maintains that the effects of *shemita* are automatic. Even within this view, there are still differences of opinion whether *shemita* cancels the loan completely, or just restricts the creditor from collecting it. (Either way, the borrower is encouraged to offer to return the money as a gift.)

A practical difference between these opinions presents itself when a lender collected a loan without writing a *Prozbul*, intentionally or out of ignorance. Is there now an obligation to return the money to the borrower, after the fact?

A competent *halachic* authority should be consulted. 🕍

## A SHINING EXAMPLE

RABBI EPHRAIM SKOLNIK

Moshe Weberstein felt inspired by a few recent stories that he heard and decided that since he was doing well in business, he would give back to the needy of his community. He walked into the local large kosher grocery store near his house in Lakewood, New Jersey, and walked over to the manager. He handed him his credit card and said, "I want to give \$5,000 to cover the biggest outstanding customer bill that you have in the store." The manager took the credit card and nonchalantly paid the balances. He then gave back the credit card and said, "Thank you." Mr Weberstein was a little shocked at not getting more of a response. He asked the manager, "I just gave a nice sum of money to people I don't even know and all you say is a quick thank you?" "To tell you the truth," said the manager, "it is a very nice thing you did. But over here in this kosher grocery store people come in multiple times a week to pay other people's bills." *Mi Keamcha Yisroel*. The greatest nation in the world. 🕍

## HAFTORAH HAPPENINGS

RABBI YAAKOV MARCHUK

NEW!

The Haftorah of the first day of Rosh Hashana comes straight out of the beginning of *Sefer Shmuel* and is one of the most moving stories in *Tanach*. We read about Chana's pain of being childless for many years, and the large family of her co-wife Penina. We read how Chana prays like never before, and is blessed with a child, Shmuel (who goes on to be the next Jewish leader), and finally her prayer of thanksgiving when she drops two-year-old Shmuel off at the *Mishkan*, to learn from Eli *Hakohen*.

What's clear from the story is that Chana had been dealing with this pain for many years, and surely had prayed many times. What happened that particular time that her *tefillah* shook the heavens and was answered? In *passuk* 8, Chana's husband, in attempt to console her, asked, "why are you so sad? Am I not better than ten sons?" Right after that, Chana began her *tefillah*. Malbim points out that until that moment Chana had relied on her husband, thinking that he was also praying for them. However, once he asked her, "am I not better than ten sons," she realized that it was all on her and if she didn't *daven* for herself no one else was going to do it for her. After that she *davened* like never before, which led to her *tefillah* being answered. 🕍

## A PARASHA THOUGHT

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who commit such acts. We would *never* do such a thing, we tell ourselves. Our Sages had a different approach: *kol haroeh sotah b'kilkula yazir atzmo min hayayin* - Anyone who sees a *sotah*, a woman suspected of infidelity, should make a vow to keep himself away from wine (*Sota*, 2). Our Sages understood these verses. We all have ugly inclinations only we ourselves are privy to. The four-foot field of ivy we see in someone else's yard may quickly become ours *because we have the very same weed*

*in ourselves*, albeit smaller. The Torah with the Sages' understanding has given us the tools to cut out those bad *middos* (traits) from our souls. May these days of closeness to Hashem enable us to do so.

\*For those of you wondering, the first summer in that house I spent a good deal of my vacation weed-whacking and getting rid of that ivy. 🕍



## TRACING OUR MINHAGIM

RABBI YEHUDAH LEVI

Dipping the apple in the honey and eating other *simanim* (symbolic foods) on the eve of Rosh Hashana are of the more novel practices observed on the holiday. The *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* (19<sup>th</sup> century) explains that the idea of this practice is that, along with a relevant prayer, we partake of foods that share a characteristic or phonetic makeup with an element of good we hope to merit in the New Year. For example, we eat sweet honey with wishes of a sweet year. In his commentary, *Mordechai*, Rabbi Mordechai ben Hillel Ashkenazi (13<sup>th</sup> century) finds a Biblical precedent for this custom in the prophet Nechemia, who instructed the people to, "[E]at rich foods and drink sweet beverages" (Nechemiah 8:10), on Rosh Hashana. A more specific list of foods appears in the Gemara *Kereisos* 6a, where Abaye mentions five fruits and vegetables that a person should be accustomed to eating at the beginning of the year: gourd, fenugreek, leek, beets, and dates. Some other common *simanim*, like pomegranates, apple, and an animal head, are mentioned by the early *halachic* codifiers, *Tur* and *Mordechai*. While many understand that the foods themselves serve as an auspicious sign, others, like the *Meiri*, explain that the symbolisms are to inspire us to proper behavior. Accordingly, it is worthwhile to recite the accompanying prayer with concentration, utilizing the opportunity for a sincere appeal to Hashem for a happy and healthy year. May we all merit such a year. 🕍

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