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The Chabad Online Weekly Magazine

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Re'eh — *Deuteronomy 11:26-16:17*

About two mountains, from which blessings and curses are announced; a home for G-d, and the difference between holiness and chosenness; meat and blood; and false prophets, idolaters, kosher signs, tithes, pilgrimages, and the special Jewish idea of charity

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Re'eh 5763 (2003)

Quote for the day

Ten powerful things were created in the world: mountains are hard, but iron cuts through them; iron is hard, but fire melts it; fire is strong, but water extinguishes it; water is strong, but clouds bear it; clouds are strong, but wind scatters them; wind is strong, but the body contains it; the body is strong, bur fear breaks it; fear is potent, but wine dispels it; wine is powerful, but sleep assuages it; and stronger than all these is death. But charity delivers from death.

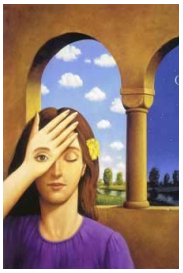
(Talmud, Shabbat 156b)

Daily Thought

Dark Paths

He could have placed streetlamps along all the pathways of wisdom, but then there would be no journey. Who would discover the secret passages, the hidden treasures, if all of us homed in straight for our destination?

This magazine contains sacred Torah material. Please do not discard.



COMMENT

The Eye of the Soul

by Yanki Tauber

"See, I give you today blessing and curse" (Deuteronomy 11:26).

"Blessing" is a very important word. We need to know that there is goodness in the world, and that this goodness has been given to us and made accessible to us.

"Curse" is an important word, too. We need to know that there are negative things we must disavow and defeat. That's what being a moral creature is all about: knowing that there is good and there is bad, knowing the one from the other, and knowing to embrace the former and reject the latter.

"You" is a very important word, too. We must know that the choice is ours, that we, alone, are responsible for our choices. That the world has been placed in our hearts, and in our hands.

"Today" is also important. Our actions are not a stab in the dark, noted in the depths of heaven by an invisible Hand, to be accounted for in a distant afterlife. The implications of our choices are present and immediate.

But the most important word in the above-quoted verse is the three letter verb that opens the sentence — and opens the Torah section of *Re'eh* (Deuteronomy 11:26-16:17) giving the section its name. The word "see".

Of all our senses and faculties, sight is the most real and absolute. Hence the law (Talmud, Rosh Hashanah 27a) that "a witness cannot be a judge." A judge must be open to arguments in defense of the accused; having *seen* the act committed, this would-be judge has too powerful an impression of the man's guilt — he is no longer capable of finding sympathy or justification for the deed.

When we hear something, smell something, feel something or deduce something logically, we know it to be true. But it is never an absolute knowledge. There always remains some reservation, some inkling of doubt, some vestige of "yes, but..." But not when something is seen. Sight is one virtually "perfect experience."

This is why the prophets describe the messianic era as a time of seeing: "Your eyes will see your Master" (Isaiah 30:20); "All flesh will together see that the mouth of G-d has spoken" (ibid. 40:5). To "see" is to inhabit a world in its ultimate state of perfection, a world which has realized its Divine purpose and attained a total and absolute knowledge of its Creator.

Thus the Torah names one of its 54 sections *Re'eh* ("See") and proclaims: "See, I give you today blessing and curse."

See the blessing. Gain intimate, absolute knowledge of the essential goodness of your Creator, your world, your own soul. It is there; *see* it.

See the curse. See that it is not truly accursed, for evil is a nonentity, a mere absence as darkness is but a withdrawal of light. See that it "exists" only to challenge you to defeat it, only to provoke your passion for good, only to rouse your most profound loyalties and convictions and powers. See it for what it really isn't and you shall conquer it. See it for what it really is and you shall transform it into even greater blessing.

See yourself. Know who and what you are, and know it absolutely: a child of G-d, granted the power to be His partner in creation and perfect His world. All hindrance and limitation, all failure, is only the failure to see your true potential. See yourself, and there is nothing you cannot achieve.

See today. Do not merely "hear" goodness and G-dliness as an abstract concept; see it in the here and now, see its immediacy and its realizability. See it coming to light today.

In recent years, the Rebbe repeatedly asked: what remains to be done?

Abraham has been here, and so has Isaac and Jacob, Moses and Aaron, David and Solomon, Elijah and Ezra, Maimonides and the Baal Shem Tov. They each did their thing to make our world a home for G-d. We've had our Exodus, our Revelation at Sinai, we settled the Promised Land, built the Holy Temple, wrote a Talmud, were scattered to the four corners of the earth, endured every test and trial imaginable, survived a Holocaust. What remains to be done?

It's all been done, said the Rebbe. We just need to open our eyes and see.

By Yanki Tauber, editor@chabadonline.com; based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, www.therebbe.org

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COMMENT

Juice

by Yanki Tauber

The amazing thing was how quickly it happened. Within minutes, hundreds of millions of light bulbs, air conditioners, microwave ovens, computers, refrigerators, phone systems, traffic lights, cash registers, subway cars and blow-dryers died. Ceased. Stopped. Just like that.

Actually, it didn't take any time at all to happen. Because nothing happened. Rather, it stopped happening. The flow of electricity, which modern life had grown so dependent upon, stopped flowing. The delicate equilibrium of ebb and flow which enables the transmission of the electric energy from one geographical point to another was somehow disrupted, and thousands of cities went dark, one by one.

Luminance, movement and artificial thought do not come naturally to the light bulb, subway car and computer. Essentially, these are just variously shaped and joined pieces of plastic, metal and glass. It's only that they've been ingeniously designed and constructed in such a way that a current of electricity passing through them makes then perform a variety of complex -- and very useful -- tasks. But even as they perform these tasks, they remain dark, dumb and immobile bits of matter. They're not really acting -- they're being acted upon by the current of energy that's "enlivening" them. The moment this external acting force ceases to act, these objects will simply revert to their natural state. The subway car becomes a waiting room and the computer becomes a desk ornament.

When the juice stopped flowing in the cities of the Northeast, we weren't just set back 150 years. A century-and-a-half ago we got along just fine without electrical appliances. In 2003, we had to learn all over again to accept the temperature of the atmosphere on a summer evening, make do with more humble sources of light, use our own two feet as a means of transportation, and do our computing with a naked human mind, aided, at most, with pencil and paper.

But imagine that life itself ran on electricity. That the engine of our heart, the RAM and ROM of our brain, the force fields that pull together countless billions of cells, atoms and quarks into a "body", the surges of will and desire that form the core of our "self" -- were all wired to one huge "power station". Imagine that we lived with the awareness that, in every instant of time, we were utterly dependant upon this outside power source for existence and life. That our existence and life were not inherent qualities that we somehow "possess", but are acted upon us by that external energy source, and that the moment that source should cease to so act, we would simply cease.

That, in fact, is how the founder of Chabad Chassidism, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi (1745-1812), describes the entirety of creation. All of existence, explains Rabbi Schneur Zalman, was created by G-d ex nihilo ("something from nothing"). Since "something from nothing" is an absolute impossibility, this means that the essential nature of our existence remains "nothing"; our somethingness is a quality that must be constantly imposed upon us by an outside force that is beyond both "something" and "nothing" (for indeed He created both notions) and can thus manipulate them both, imposing the one upon the other.

G-d's creation of the world, therefore, was not a one-time act. G-d constantly "speaks" the world into being, exactly as He did the very first time He uttered "Let there be..." "If the letters," writes Rabbi Schneur Zalman, "of the Ten Utterances by which the earth was created during the Six Days of Creation were to depart from it for an instant, G-d forbid, it would revert to naught and absolute nothingness, exactly as before the Six Days of Creation" (Tanya, part II, ch. 1).

A frightening thought? I don't think so. In fact, the more I think about it, the more encouraging it is. What this basically means is that every nanosecond of time G-d looks upon our world, contemplates all the good and evil, kindness and cruelty, triumphs and failings, imperfections and strivings that goes on in it, and makes a conscious decision to grant it existence and life. It's as if you would ask the Creator, a billion times a second, "Seeing what's become of it, would you do it all over again?" and G-d says, "Yes, I would, exactly as it is" -- and does it.

If G-d sees something worthwhile there, I'm assuming that we, too, can.

By Yanki Tauber, editor@chabadonline.com; based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, www.therebbe.org

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CURRENT

Blackout

By Simon Jacobson

These words were written in the dead of a dark night in New York, waiting for some electricity to allow them to be sent over the power lines that connect us to cyberspace.

As the "power of the sun weakened" on the 16th of Av, all lights went out for 50 million people in North Eastern United States.

When it becomes dark outside we have before us a true study in human nature.

Inevitably, we will be hearing about the financial toll of this blackout. Investigations -- city, state and federal, independent and no so independent -- will drag on for months as to the source of the power failure, fingers will be pointed, wise politicians will exploit it for their own glory. No doubt we will hear about "new" measures being taken to modernize the power grid. We will be seeing graphs and maps, analysts and pundits of every size and shape, dissecting the electrical failure and comparing it to the blackouts of '65 and '77. Surely parallels will be drawn between 9/11 and 8/14 -- our vulnerability, our overconfidence in our invincibility, our need to create new defense systems.

All that and more will dominate headlines for the next weeks. I therefore would like to focus on an entirely different angle -- the human, psycho-spiritual drama behind all these events. Not so much on the symptoms and their remedies, but the roots and the commentary they offer on the human condition.

Interesting to see what people do when they cannot rely on their expected source of energy. We have become so dependent on electricity that people everywhere around me literally had no idea what to suddenly do after the power was gone.

No TV. No Internet. No clubs. No subways. No lights. The only things left are the things we do naturally -- read, sing, study, pray (solve a crossword puzzle? No that doesn't fit in...).

I must confess that though my life orbits so much around books and writing, I was left utterly naked, walking the streets, observing, smiling at the ironies, sitting on the Parkway bench, concerned for those stuck somewhere, watching the headlights pierce through the black streets, studying the thousands streaming down the streets -- completely amazed at the fact that I had no inking what I should or would be doing for as long as the electrical appliances and equipment were down. That's how dependent we have become on this external energy.

The Talmud tells us that beginning from the 15th of Av (August 13th this year) the "power of the sun" begins to weaken, as the days get shorter and the nights longer. This is also the reason why this was called the "day of breaking the axe" -- on this day they ceased using the axe to cut down trees for wood in the Temple. The wood needed to be as dry as possible. Once the sun began setting earlier the wood no longer would be at its driest, so they stopped cutting the wood.

Yet, the Talmud continues, these longer nights provide us the opportunity to study more Torah, because, as the sages put it, "Night was created for nothing else but study." The solitude and silence of night is conducive for mental concentration.

This year's 16th of Av blackout teaches us that this night power is much more than just about the physical nature of night. The sun represents aggressive, brute power. The sun is a mammoth source of energy; no object can come close to the sun without being consumed by its light and heat. The sun is a colossal oven that warms and illuminates the entire solar system.

The moon, conversely, is soft, receiving light. Humans are able to come close to the moon, even walk on it. The moon is not spewing nuclear forces and exploding with bursting spurts of energy. The moon silently reflects. With no light of its own, it reflects the light of the sun.

We have been well trained to be "solar" people. To take charge, to be pushy and aggressive -- to be "go getters," because, as we're programmed, no one else will take care of you if you don't take care of yourself.

What we know less of is the art of "lunar" energy. The gentle, sensitive power of listening, reflecting, absorbing.

We know how to give, how to command, how to bark. But do we know how to receive, how to listen,

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Blackout

how to reflect?

And therein lies the mystique of night -- the mystique and romance of the moon. You don't see two people in love staring at the sun. You see them gaze at the moon...

In its reflective repose, the haunting moon casts a glow that is especially conducive to introspection -- to listening to the song of your own soul.

People in New York (and I am sure in the other areas affected by the power failure) are speaking about the eerie silence around us, about the surreal feeling of the city with no lights. I wonder which is more eerie: the sound of air conditioners and subways or the sound of our souls?

We have become so dependent on electricity that we don't know how to access our own inner electricity, our own inner juice.

Take away electricity, gas -- all external sources of fuel, and what are we left with?

But know this: When some lights go out, others come on.

This year's 8/14-Av 16 blackout sure blacked things out; it certainly "broke the axe" of the Northeast -- the hub of the commercial world. It taught us how utterly unreliable are our common sources of survival and comfort. How we are so dependent on physical light and energy, and so awkward with our own inner light and energy.

I know, I know that some of you will say I am overreacting: a blackout hasn't happened for over 25 years. A small price to pay for the convenience of non-stop electricity. That is all true, but my point is not to knock the benefits of modern life; just to point out the vulnerabilities we have acquired as a result of our overdependence on Con Ed for "energy" and inevitable underdependence we have developed for our own inner energy.

Interestingly, it also taught us some things that we were not aware of (at least I wasn't): How we are all connected by these power grids. And as one fails, it ripples into another and another. If that's the case in a power failure, how much more so in a power surge. We have the ability to empower each other, one flame lighting another and yet another. forever and ever.

Truth be told, the blackout also brought out the darker part of human nature. When our energy crutches are pulled from under us, some of our lurking demons emerge in the night. After being hidden for so long, even our deeper lunar light may not have a comfortable resting place when the lights go out...

But that too is the challenge of night: To extract the inner juice from within us. To some that may come easier than others, especially if you have trained and exercised your inner electricity.

Some people in the New York streets were charging double for drinking water and others were giving it out for free. Some were breaking windows and looting, while others were crawling into subway tunnels to help others escape. Some were yelling and screaming, others were playing music in the streets.

When your inner juice emerges you sing and dance even in the dark night. You illuminate the blackest streets with glowing light and intimate warmth.

They call fuel "natural energy" because it comes from beneath the ground. It may be "natural" for the earth, but once humans put their hands on it becomes a man-made commodity subject to all human failings. Our true "natural" energy is the one that we generate from within.

Your own inner electricity. You own internal juice.

Sometimes we need our external lights to go out for our inner lights to shine.

It's now 2:10 PM on Friday. Power has come back to my neighborhood in Brooklyn.

Eerie sounds begins to echo around us...

Will it drown out the sound of Shabbat? We shall see...

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VOICES

Dance of Love

by Chana Weisberg

A friend of mine recently gave birth to a baby boy. This child was not my friend's first, but was born after a handful of other wonderful, talented and healthy children.

This past Sunday afternoon, I attended the *Brit Milah* (circumcision) celebration. There were many other well-wishers celebrating in the birth and joy of a new life.

But the celebration was a bittersweet one; the newborn baby was born with Down's Syndrome.

We all stood solemnly in the shul listening to the blessings ushering the baby into the covenant of Abraham, our forefather. At the conclusion of the blessings we all wished *Mazal Tov!* to the parents and the many relatives present. Soon a joyous song and dance broke out, attracting, like a magnet, more and more into its circle.

There was an undercurrent of raw emotion in the large room. Entranced, I watched the circle of dancers and the smiling onlookers who clapped along.

I noticed one woman's husband dancing around and around. I knew that this man was battling a severe life-threatening illness.

Another in the circle was a father whose child was severely physically challenged. His wife stood a few rows behind me. She wore a gentle smile on her lips, but her deep-set eyes revealed the story of her trials.

A close friend and confidant was also present, observing and smiling. I knew that she had been trying futilely to have a child of her own.

More and more continued to join, and as the circle turned, I noticed a man who had recently lost his job and was in dire financial straits.

These were but a few of the people present. I was sure that many others were also carrying in their hearts their own little package of sorrow, their own little bundle of pain.

As I stood watching, the rhythm of the happy song overtook me, becoming the dance and rhythm of life itself in which we were all taking part as we expressed our thanks to our Creator.

And as I studied the scene, I thought how we humans are endowed with such an enormous range of emotions. I marveled at the depth and intensity of love one can feel for a child, for a spouse, for a parent. I wondered how this immensity of feeling can be contained within such finite beings. Yet our emotions assert themselves constantly, almost having a life of their own, full of texture and depth, full of cravings, wants and desires.

They are real, they feel real. From the happiness of a gentle, graceful moment to the despair of a dark hour overshadowed by grief.

If only I could capture and preserve forever the lightness of pure and undiluted joy, hope or happiness! If I could only throw a switch that would stop the floods of sadness, frustration and sorrow!

But watching the circle, I saw how we cannot stop the torrents of feelings. Instead, we all ride the roller coaster of life, loving the moments on the top but aware with certainty that these will plunge, too, to moments of struggles, as the ride of life races forward.

And as I watched, I thought about the commandment to love You, our G-d, unconditionally, with the entire range of our feelings, with all our might, all our passions and all of ourselves.

I thought how this love is revealed each time, despite what You put us through. Despite the difficulties and struggles. Despite the depth of anger, frustration and despair. Despite the heaviness and the pain. Despite how our moments of gratification and joy far too rapidly become tinged with loss and despair.

Despite the apparent unfairness of life.

Despite knowing all this, and feeling it even deeper.

Despite this all, we take this whole mixed bag, the whole gamut of emotions — the positives and the negatives, the happiness and the hurt, the goodness and the grief — and we still present it all to You, as we dance around and around in the circle of life, singing and celebrating our love to You.

Is a greater form of unconditional love possible?

Chana Weisberg is the author of — on the lives of Biblical women and on the feminine soul — and is currently working on two more. She is the dean of the JRCC Institute of Torah Study in Toronto and lectures worldwide on issues relating to women, relationships and mysticism. She welcomes your comments or inquiries about her speaking tours and books, and can be contacted at cweisberg@chabad.org

Painting by Chassidic artist Hendel Lieberman

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STORY

Tainted Soup

By Yrachmiel Tilles

It appeared to be a holiday in the Jewish community of Lumzha. The streets were freshly cleaned, the windows of the houses facing the street were sparkling, and everyone was dressed in their best clothing.

What was the occasion? One of the most important Torah scholars of the generation was coming for a brief visit, so the entire community was poised at the entrance of the city to greet the esteemed sage, **Rabbi Akiva Eiger**.

A wave of emotion and joy rolled through the waiting crowd when Rabbi Eiger climbed down from his carriage and glanced warmly along the rows of his crowded reception committee. Many called out a cheery *Shalom aleichem*, while those in the very front thrust out their right hands to try to give a welcoming handshake.

For the duration of the great Rabbi's stay in Lumzha, a long line of petitioners stood in front of the house where he was lodging. Among them were Torah scholars who sought his help in resolving difficulties that arose in their studies, while others came to receive his blessing or advice about matters in their personal lives.

One woman, Ettel, burst into copious tears as soon as she entered the famous scholar's room. She had nine sons, eight of whom were both dedicated and successful in their Torah studies in the yeshivah. But she was upset about Moshe-Noach, her fifteen-year-old, who was floundering in the study of Talmud. Nobody could understand why, since he was a clever lad, who did excellently in his secular subjects, such as grammar and math.

Rabbi Eiger listened carefully to her report. He thought for a few moments and then said, "The greatest authorities in Jewish law have written that one must be exceedingly careful that young children should not taste any forbidden foods, since such foods can dull and coarsen the mind towards Torah."

Ettel was startled at the implication that her son could have eaten something not kosher, but she did her best to keep her face impassive. The rabbi nevertheless picked up on her thought and said gently, "Perhaps it happened once without you knowing it, and that is why he has so much trouble understanding the *Gemara*."

"What can we do about it then?" asked Ettel, still shocked at the idea.

"Let him persevere in toiling in the study of Torah, despite his hardships, and G-d will help him," responded the great rabbi.

Ettel's husband was disturbed to hear the words of the illustrious Rabbi Akiva Eiger about their son. How could it be? Their children never ate anything other than what they received at home. He immediately summoned Moshe-Noach and questioned him as to whether he had ever eaten anything outside of the house. The lad answered that he never had, but his father insisted that he think about it more thoroughly. Finally, Moshe-Noach remembered that once, many years before when he was much younger, something had happened on Chanukah.

He and his friends were returning from school earlier than usual, in order to be on time for the kindling of the Chanukah lights. When they passed the town hotel, they saw that a wedding was about to take place. One of the members of the wedding party noticed them, invited them to come in, and offered them something to eat. To the best of his memory, he took a bit of chicken-lentil soup.

His parents were surprised to hear about the incident, especially after so many years had intervened, but they did not see how it offered a solution to the puzzle the Torah luminary had presented them. Both the owner of the hotel and the *shochet* (ritual slaughterer) who slaughtered meat for him were known to be punctilious in their observance of the kashrut laws and true G-d-fearing men.

Nevertheless, the father was determined to pursue the matter till the end. He hurried over to the hotel and discussed the matter with the owner. The latter willingly took out his old record books to try to identity exactly whose wedding it was that took place on that day of Chanukah years before.

It turned out to not be so difficult after all. In the curling pages of a ledger nearly a decade old he found

STORY

Tainted Soup

it clearly written that on the 26th of Kislev, the second day of Chanukah, in the year 5566 (1805), was catered the wedding of Yekutiel Alpert — his second marriage. It was also recorded that the groom had paid the entire bill in advance.

The father of Moshe-Noach knew Mr. Yekutiel Alpert very well. He was an uncouth man, not exceptionally observant, who lived in a house at the outskirts of town. Nevertheless, this information still did not solve the family's mystery. The food had been prepared under the control of the hotel, not the married couple.

So the father decided to go next to the house of the *shochet*. The latter received him politely asked what was the occasion for the surprise visit. Upon hearing that the matter concerned the wedding of Yekutiel Alpert, the *shochet* was visibly distressed.

"Oy, oy!" he cried out. "Once again I have to rake that open wound?!"

Moshe-Noach's father was startled by his words. His ears picked up as the *shochet* proceeded to supply details.

"I erred in the slaughter of the chickens for that wedding. Not that I actually made any mistakes in the procedures," he hastened to explain. "But something was very wrong. Only, I didn't know it at the time. Not until a few days after that wedding.

"Walking in the street, I encountered one of the chassidim of Lumzha, an important member of the Chabad community. As I passed by him he gave me a hard stare and said, 'Who would have thought? A respected Jew sells his soul in pursuit of monetary gain! Unbelievable!'

"I was shocked to hear such words directed at me. I stared at him, seeking clarification. He said, 'We heard that you were the one who slaughtered chickens for the wedding of Alpert. Surely you knew that some of the most important rabbis of our time, including **Rabbi Shneur Zalman** of Liadi, issued a decree forbidding him to remarry until he redid the divorce of his first wife, in which the *get*, the bill of divorce, turned out to be invalid.'

"My whole body began to tremble involuntarily as the chassid took out of his pocket a copy of the letter from Rabbi Shneur Zalman. It said:

I was astonished and disturbed to hear of this deed which should never be done among Jews, which was done in your domain. How can a divorce be sanctioned if the get is invalid according to the Torah? …Therefore you must take upon yourselves to prevent this man from marrying another woman, Heaven forbid, until the problem is fixed. And if, Heaven protect us, such a wedding should be announced, to decree upon all the shochtim in the area a rabbinical prohibition against slaughtering any animals or fowl. If they should transgress and slaughter, all the meat is to be considered treif and forbidden to eat.

"When I saw that letter with my own eyes," continued the *shochet*, "I was beside myself with horror. Even though I had known nothing and heard nothing about the problem with the divorce, I was mortified at having transgressed the instructions of a leading rabbi of our generation. I decided to undergo dozens of fasts, which I did, but I still don't feel as if I have atoned for my error."

The next day the entire story spread quickly through Lumzha. Everyone was amazed by both the power of Rabbi Shneur Zalman's decree, and the acute Divine inspiration of Rabbi Akiva Eiger.

Biographical Notes:

Rabbi Akiva Eiger (1761-1837), the chief rabbi of Posen, Prussia for 23 years, was an acclaimed scholar whose analyses of and innovative insights into the Gemora are studied in nearly all yeshivas. **Rabbi Shneur Zalman** of Liadi (1745- 1812), one of the primary disciples of the Maggid of Mezritch, is the founder of the *Chabad*-Chassidic movement. He is the author of *Shulchan Aruch HaRav* and *Tanya* as well as many other major works in both Jewish law and the mystical teachings.

*Translated-adapted by from the Hebrew weekly **Sichat HaShavua**. Rabbi Tilles is co-founder of ASCENT OF SAFED, and editor of Ascent Quarterly and the www.ascent.org.il and www.kaballaonline.com websites*

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ESSAY

On Humility

By Rabbi Dr. Jonathan Sacks

How virtues change! Moses, the greatest hero of Jewish tradition, is described by the Bible as "a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth." By today's standards he was clearly wrongly advised. He should have hired an agent, sharpened up his image, let slip some calculated indiscretions about his conversations with the Almighty and sold his story to the press for a six-figure sum. With any luck, he might have landed up with his own television chat show, dispensing wisdom to those willing to bare their soul to the watching millions. He would have had his fifteen minutes of fame. Instead he had to settle for the lesser consolation of three thousand years of moral influence.

Humility is the orphaned virtue of our age. Charles Dickens dealt it a mortal blow in his portrayal of the unctuous Uriah Heep, the man who kept saying, "I am the 'umblest person going." Its demise, though, came a century later with the threatening anonymity of mass culture alongside the loss of neighbourhoods and congregations. A community is a place of friends. Urban society is a landscape of strangers. Yet there is an irrepressible human urge for recognition. So a culture emerged out of the various ways of "making a statement" to people we do not know, but who, we hope, will somehow notice. Beliefs ceased to be things confessed in prayer and became slogans emblazoned on t-shirts. A comprehensive repertoire developed of signalling individuality, from personalized number-plates, to in-your-face dressing, to designer labels worn on the outside, not within. You can trace an entire cultural transformation in the shift from renown to fame to celebrity to being famous for being famous. The creed of our age is, "If you've got it, flaunt it." Humility, being humble, did not stand a chance.

This is a shame. Humility — true humility — is one of the most expansive and life-enhancing of all virtues. It does not mean undervaluing yourself. It means valuing other people. It signals a certain openness to life's grandeur and the willingness to be surprised, uplifted, by goodness wherever one finds it. I learned the meaning of humility from my late father. He had come over to this country at the age of five, fleeing persecution in Poland. His family was poor and he had to leave school at the age of fourteen to support them. What education he had was largely self-taught. Yet he loved excellence, in whatever field or form it came. He had a passion for classical music and painting, and his taste in literature was impeccable, far better than mine. He was an enthusiast. He had — and this was what I so cherished in him — the capacity to admire. That, I think, is what the greater part of humility is, the capacity to be open to something greater than oneself. False humility is the pretence that one is small. True humility is the consciousness of standing in the presence of greatness, which is why it is the virtue of prophets, those who feel most vividly the nearness of G-d.

As a young man, full of questions about faith, I travelled to the United States where, I had heard, there were outstanding rabbis. I met many, but I also had the privilege of meeting the greatest Jewish leader of my generation, the late Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneersohn. Heir to the dynastic leadership of a relatively small group of Jewish mystics, he had escaped from Europe to New York during the Second World War and had turned the tattered remnants of his flock into a worldwide movement. Wherever I travelled, I heard tales of his extraordinary leadership, many verging on the miraculous. He was, I was told, one of the outstanding charismatic leaders of our time. I resolved to meet him if I could.

I did, and was utterly surprised. He was certainly not charismatic in any conventional sense. Quiet, self-effacing, understated, one might hardly have noticed him had it not been for the reverence in which he was held by his disciples. That meeting, though, changed my life. He was a world-famous figure. I was an anonymous student from three thousand miles away. Yet in his presence I seemed to be the most important person in the world. He asked me about myself; he listened carefully; he challenged me to become a leader, something I had never contemplated before. Quickly it became clear to me that he believed in me more than I believed in myself. As I left the room, it occurred to me that it had been full of my presence and his absence. Perhaps that is what listening is, considered as a reli-

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On Humility

gious act. I then knew that greatness is measured by what we efface ourselves towards. There was no grandeur in his manner; neither was there any false modesty. He was serene, dignified, majestic; a man of transcending humility who gathered you into his embrace and taught you to look up.

True virtue never needs to advertise itself. That is why I find the aggressive packaging of personality so sad. It speaks of loneliness, the profound, endemic loneliness of a world without relationships of fidelity and trust. It testifies ultimately to a loss of faith — a loss of that knowledge, so precious to previous generations, that beyond the visible surfaces of this world is a Presence who knows us, loves us, and takes notice of our deeds. What else, secure in that knowledge, could we need? Time and again, when conducting a funeral or visiting mourners, I discover that the deceased had led a life of generosity and kindness unknown to even close relatives. I came to the conclusion — one I never dreamed of before I was given this window into private worlds - that the vast majority of saintly or generous acts are done quietly with no desire for public recognition. That is humility, and what a glorious revelation it is of the human spirit.

Humility, then, is more than just a virtue: it is a form of perception, a language in which the "I" is silent so that I can hear the "Thou", the unspoken call beneath human speech, the Divine whisper within all that moves, the voice of otherness that calls me to redeem its loneliness with the touch of love. Humility is what opens us to the world.

And does it matter that it no longer fits the confines of our age? The truth is that moral beauty, like music, always moves those who can hear beneath the noise. Virtues may be out of fashion, but they are never out of date. The things that call attention to themselves are never interesting for long, which is why our attention span grows shorter by the year. Humility — the polar opposite of "advertisements for myself" — never fails to leave its afterglow. We know when we have been in the presence of someone in whom the Divine presence breathes. We feel affirmed, enlarged, and with good reason. For we have met someone who, not taking himself or herself seriously at all, has shown us what it is to take with utmost seriousness that which is not I.

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PARSHAH IN A NUTSHELL

Re'eh

Deuteronomy 11:26-16:17
Torah Reading for Week of August 17-23, 2003

"**See**," says Moses to the people of Israel, "I place before you today a **blessing** and a **curse**" — the blessing that will come when they fulfill G-d's commandments, and the curse if they abandon them. These should be proclaimed on **Mount Gerizim and Mount Eibal** when the people **cross over** into the Holy Land.

A **Temple** should be established in "**the place that G-d will choose to make dwell His name there** where the people should bring their **sacrifices** to Him; it is forbidden to make offerings to G-d in any other place. It is permitted to slaughter animals elsewhere not as a sacrifice but to eat their **meat**; the blood, however (which in the Temple is **poured upon the Altar**) may not be eaten.

A **false prophet**, or one who entices others to worship idols, should be put to death; an idolatrous city must be destroyed. The identifying signs for **kosher** animals and fishes, and the list of non-kosher birds (first given in Leviticus 11) are **repeated**.

A tenth of all produce is to be eaten in Jerusalem, or else exchanged for **money** with which food is purchased and eaten there. On certain years this **tithe** is given to the poor instead. **Firstborn** cattle and sheep are to be offered in the Temple and their meat eaten by the Kohen (priest).

The mitzvah of **charity** obligates a Jew to aid a needy fellow with a gift or loan. On the **Sabbatical year** (occurring every seventh year) all loans are to be forgiven and all indentured servants are to be set free.

Our Parshah concludes with the laws of the three **pilgrimage** festivals — **Passover**, **Shavuot** and **Sukkot** — when all should go to "**"see** and **be seen**" before G-d in the Holy Temple.

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PARSHAH SUMMARY & COMMENTARY

Re'eh

Deuteronomy 11:26-16:17
Torah Reading for Week of August 17-23, 2003

"See, I set before you today a blessing and a curse."

Thus opens our Parshah, the Torah reading of Re'eh ("See"). The blessing, Moses proceeds to explain, shall come about "because you will heed the commandments of the L-rd your G-d, which I command you today. And the curse, if you will not heed the commandments of the L-rd your G-d, but turn away from the way I command you this day, to follow other gods, which you did not know.

Upon their entry into the Holy Land, the people of Israel are instructed to proclaim the blessing on Mount Gerizim, and the curse on the nearby Mount Ebal. This pair of mountains, Moses directs, are "on the other side of the Jordan, way beyond in the direction of the sunset, in the land of the Canaanites, who dwell in the plain, opposite Gilgal, near the plains of Moreh..."

Get Rid of the Idols, Build a Home for G-d

Upon their entry into the Land, the Israelites are instructed to "utterly destroy from all the places where the nations, that you shall possess, worshipped their gods, upon the lofty mountains and upon the hills, and under every lush tree."

And you shall tear down their altars, smash their monuments, burn their asherim (idolatrous trees) with fire, cut down the graven images of

Commentary

SEE, I GIVE YOU TODAY A BLESSING AND A CURSE (DEUTERONOMY 11:26)

Freedom of choice has been granted to every man: if he desires to turn toward a good path and be righteous, the ability to do so is in his hands; and if he desires to turn toward an evil path and be wicked, the ability to do so is in his hands...

This concept is a fundamental principle and a pillar of the Torah and its commandments. As it is written [Deuteronomy 30:15]: "See, I have set before you life [and good, and death and evil]" and "See, I set before you today [a blessing and a curse]"... For were G-d to decree that a person be righteous or wicked, of if there were to exist something in the very essence of a person's nature which would compel him toward a specific path, a specific conviction, a specific character trait or a specific deed...how could G-d command us through the prophets "do this" and "do not do this,"...? What place would the entire Torah have? And by what measure of justice would G-d punish the wicked and reward the righteous...?

(Mishneh Torah, Laws of Repentance 5:1-3)

SEE, I GIVE YOU TODAY A BLESSING AND A CURSE (11:26)

See, I give you today the blessing and its transmutation.

(Yonatan ben Uziel's [Aramaic] translation of the verse)

"See" — Moses is giving the Children of Israel the power of sight — to perceive that the true nature of evil is nothing more than a transmutation and distortion of the Divine good. When evil is thus seen, it can be transformed into the good that it essentially is.

(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)

YOU SHALL NOT DO SO TO THE L-RD YOUR G-D (12:4)

— to offer sacrifices to G-d in any place you choose (as the nations did to their gods), but rather "at the place that He will choose."

Another interpretation is: "And you shall tear down their altars… and destroy their names… [but] do not do so [to the L-rd your G-d]" — this is a prohibition to erase the Name of G-d [from any writing] or remove a stone from the altar or from the courtyard (Talmud, Makkot 22a).

Rabbi Ishmael said: Would it enter your mind that a Jew would tear down the altars of G-d? Rather, [the meaning of "You shall not do so" is that] you should not do like the deeds of the nations so that your sins would cause the sanctuary of your fathers to be destroyed (Sifri).

(Rashi)

One who smashes a single stone of the Altar or the Temple or the Temple courtyard in a destructive manner [violates a biblical prohibition] as it is written (Deuteronomy 12:4): "[You shall smash their altars...] You shall not do the same to the L-rd your G-d."

(Mishneh Torah, Laws of the Holy Temple 1:17)

ONLY TO THE PLACE WHICH THE L-RD YOUR G-D SHALL CHOOSE (12:5)

The location of the Altar [in the Holy Temple] is very exactly defined... It is a commonly-held tradition that the place where David and Solomon built the Altar on the threshing floor of Arona, is the very place where Abraham built an altar and bound Isaac upon it; this is where Noah built [an altar] when he came out from the Ark; this is where Cain and Abel brought their offerings; this is where Adam the First Man offered a korban when he was created — and it is from [the earth of] this place that he was created....

(Mishneh Torah, Laws of the Holy Temple 2:1-2)

WHEN G-D YOUR G-D SHALL BROADEN YOUR BORDERS, AS HE HAS PROMISED YOU, AND YOU WILL SAY: "I SHALL EAT MEAT..." (12:20)

Rabbi Ishmael says: Originally, "meat of desire" (i.e., meat eaten for pleasure, as opposed to the sacred meat of the korbanot offered in the Sanctuary) was

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their gods, and destroy their name from that place.

You shall not do so to the L-rd, your G-d.

But only to the place which the L-rd your G-d shall choose from all your tribes, to set His Name there; you shall inquire after His dwelling and come there.

And there you shall bring your burnt offerings, and your sacrifices, and your tithes, and the upliftings by your hand, and your vows and your donations, and the firstborn of your cattle and of your sheep.

And there you shall eat before G-d, and you shall rejoice in all your endeavors you and your households, as G-d has blessed you.

"Meat of Desire"

Throughout their 40 years in the desert, the people had been instructed on the various offerings that were brought in the Sanctuary, the meat of which was eaten — under special conditions of sanctity — by the person making the offering, and/or the kohen ("priest"). Now Moses introduces a new dietary concept — meat eaten as part of an ordinary meal rather than as an extension of the Temple service.

When the L-rd, your G-d, expands your boundary, as He has promised you, and you say, "I will eat meat," because your soul desires to eat meat, you may eat meat, according to every desire of your soul.

If the place G-d chooses to put His Name there will be distant from you, you may slaughter of your cattle and of your sheep,

Commentary

forbidden to them. It was only after they entered the Land of Israel that it was permitted to them.

Rabbi Akiva says: On the contrary: the verse comes to forbid them meat of an animal killed without shechitah (see following verse). Originally, it was permitted for them to eat meat without shechitah; it was only after they entered the Land of Israel that this was forbidden to them.

(Talmud, Chulin 16b-17a)

AND YOU SHALL SLAUGHTER OF YOUR CATTLE AND FLOCKS WHICH G-D HAS GIVEN YOU, AS I HAVE COMMANDED YOU (12:21)

We derive from this verse that there is a commandment regarding slaughtering, how one must slaughter. Since this commandment is not written anywhere in the Torah, we deduce that these are the laws of ritual slaughtering which were given orally to Moses on Mount Sinai.

(Talmud, Chulin 28a; Sifri)

Here we have explicit proof for the Torah SheBaal Peh ("Oral Torah"), as we see how the "Written Torah" refers to it.

(Maimonides)

HOWEVER, BE STRONG NOT TO EAT THE BLOOD... (12:23)

Since it is stated "be strong", we learn that they were awash in [the practice of] eating blood. Therefore, it is necessary to state, "be strong." These are the words of Rabbi Judah.

Rabbi Simeon the son of Azzai says: The Torah comes only to caution you and to instruct you as to what extent you must be steadfast in fulfilling the commandments: If regarding blood, whose temptation it is easy to resist, since a person has no desire for it, the Torah needed to strengthen you with its admonition, how much more so must one strengthen oneself for all other commandments!

(Sifri; Rashi)

IF THERE WILL ARISE AMONG YOU A PROPHET... AND HE GIVES YOU A SIGN OR A WONDER (13:2)

The people of Israel did not believe in Moses because of the miracles he performed. Indeed, one who believes because of miracles retains a measure of doubt in his heart, since a "miracle" can be done by trickery or sorcery. Rather, all the miracles he performed in the desert were by necessity, not to prove his prophesy: it was necessary to drown the Egyptians, so he split the sea and submerged them in it; they needed food, so he brought down the manna; they thirsted so he split the rock; Korach and his company denied [his authority], so the earth swallowed them up; and the same with all the miracles.

So why did they believe in him? Because when we stood at Sinai, our own eyes saw and our own ears heard the fire, the sounds and the flames, and how Moses approached the cloud and G-d's voice called to him, and we heard it say: "Moses! Moses! Tell them such and such..." As it is written [Deuteronomy 5:4]: "Face to face G-d spoke with you" and [ibid. 5:3], "Not with our ancestors did G-d make this covenant..." The event at Sinai alone is the proof that Moses' prophesy is true without the shadow of a doubt, as it is written [Exodus 19:9], "Behold, I shall come to you in a thick cloud, so that the people should hear Me speak to you and also believe in you forever." From this we see that prior to that, they did not believe in him with a

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> which G-d has given you, as I have commanded you, and you may eat in your cities, according to every desire of your soul.

This meat needn't be eaten under conditions of ritual purity (*tum'ah v'taharah*), as is the case with the meat of the offerings — "the impure and the pure may be eaten together." The only legal restrictions are that the animal be kosher (as specified further on in our Parshah), that it be slaughtered "as I have commanded you" (i.e., in accordance with the laws of *shechitah*) and,

> You must be strong not to eat the blood, for the blood is the soul; and you shall not eat the soul with the flesh.

The False Prophet, the Inciter, and the Idolatrous City

> If there will arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of a dream, and he gives you a sign or a wonder. And the sign or the wonder of which he spoke to you happens, [and he] says, "Let us go after other gods which you have not known, and let us worship them." You shall not heed the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of a dream; for the L-rd your

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faith that is everlasting, only with a faith that leaves a possibility for doubts and second thoughts.

Thus, the ones to whom Moses was sent, they themselves are the witnesses that his prophesy is authentic, so that he needn't perform any proofs for them. He and they both witnessed [his prophesy] together, like two witnesses who witnessed something together, each one of whom is a witness that his fellow is saying the truth, and neither of whom requires any proof of the other's honesty...

So if a prophet arises and performs signs and great wonders and seeks to deny Moses' prophesy, we do not listen to him, and we know with certainty that these sign are by trickery and sorcery. For Moses' prophesy is not based on proofs, that we should weigh these proofs against those proofs. Rather, we saw it with our eyes and heard it with our ears, just as Moses did. This is as if witnesses would testify to a person regarding something he saw with his own eyes that it was not as he saw it; this person would take no heed of them, but know surely that they are false witnesses...

(Mishneh Torah, Laws of the Fundamentals of Torah 8:1-3)

YOU ARE CHILDREN OF THE L-RD YOUR G-D (14:1)

The soul... of the Jew is literally "a part of G-d above" (Job 31:2)... As it is written: "My firstborn child, Israel" and "You are children of the L-rd your G-d." Just as the child derives from the brain of the father, so, too, as it were, the soul of every Jewish person derives from the "mind" and "wisdom" of G-d...

(Tanya, ch. 2)

FOR YOU ARE A HOLY PEOPLE TO THE L-RD YOUR G-D

G-d gives physical form to the spiritual; the Jew makes spiritual the physical.

(Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov)

THESE ARE THE ANIMALS WHICH YOU MAY EAT... (14:4)

The birds and many of the mammals forbidden by the Torah are predators, while the permitted animals are not. We are commanded not to eat those animals possessive of a cruel nature, so that we should not absorb these qualities into ourselves.

(Nachmanides)

The great Kabbalist, Rabbi Isaac Luria, taught that every created thing possesses a "spark" of divine energy that constitutes its essence and soul. When a person utilizes something toward a G-dly end, he brings to light this divine spark, manifesting and realizing the purpose for which it was created.

In all physical substances, a material "husk" (kelipah) encases and conceals the divine spark at its core, necessitating great effort on the part of man to access the spark without becoming enmeshed in the surface materiality.

No existence is devoid of a divine spark — indeed, nothing can exist without the pinpoint of G-dliness that imbues it with being and purpose. But not every spark can be actualized. There are certain "impregnable" elements whose sparks are inaccessible to us. The fact that something is forbidden by the Torah means that its "husk" cannot be penetrated, so that its spark remains locked within it and cannot be elevated.

Thus, one who eats a piece of kosher meat and then uses the energy gained from it to perform a mitzvah, thereby elevates the spark of divinity that is the essence of the meat, freeing it of its mundane incarnation and raising it to a state of fulfilled spirituality. However, if one would do the same with a piece of non-kosher meat, no such "elevation" would take

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G-d is testing you, to know whether you really love the L-rd your G-d with all your heart and with all your soul.

You shall follow the L-rd,your G-d, fear Him, keep His commandments, heed His voice, worship Him, and cleave to Him. And that prophet, or that dreamer of a dream shall be put to death; because he spoke falsehood about the L-rd your G-d Who brought you out of the land of Egypt, and Who redeemed you from the house of bondage, to lead you astray from the way in which the L-rd, your G-d, commanded you to go; so shall you eradicate the evil from your midst.

Nor should any compassion be shown toward the inciter who attempts to lead others to worship idols. And if an entire city falls prey to idolatry, the city should be utterly destroyed.

G-d's Children

"You are children of the L-rd your G-d." says Moses to the people. "You shall neither cut yourselves nor make any baldness between your eyes [in mourning] for the dead.

"For you are a holy people to the L-rd your G-d, and

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place. Even if he applied the energy to positive and G-dly ends, this would not constitute a realization of the divine purpose in the meat's creation, since the consumption of the meat was an express violation of the divine will.

This is the deeper significance of the Hebrew terms assur and mutar employed by Torah law for the forbidden and the permissible. Assur, commonly translated as "forbidden," literally means "bound", implying that these are things whose sparks the Torah has deemed bound and imprisoned in a shell of negativity and proscription. Mutar ("permitted"), which literally means "unbound," is the term for those sparks which the Torah has empowered us to extricate from their mundane embodiment and actively involve in our positive endeavors.

The "bound" elements of creation also have a role in the realization of the divine purpose outlined by the Torah. But theirs is a "negative" role — they exist so that we should achieve a conquest of self by resisting them. There is no Torah-authorized way in which they can actively be involved in our development of creation, no way in which they may themselves become part of the "dwelling for G-d" that we are charged to make of our world. Of these elements it is said, "Their breaking is their rectification." They exist to be rejected and defeated, and it is in their defeat and exclusion from our lives that their raison d'etre is realized.

(The Chassidic Masters)

THESE ARE THE [LAND] ANIMALS WHICH YOU SHALL EAT... THESE YOU MAY EAT FROM ALL THAT ARE IN THE WATERS... ALL PURE (I.E. KOSHER) BIRDS MAY BE EATEN... (14:4, 9, 11)

Land animals, which were created from the soil, are rendered fit to eat by the severing of both vital passages (the windpipe and the gullet). Fish, which were created from the water, do not require any shechitah to render them fit to eat. Birds, which were created from a mixture of soil and water, are rendered fit to eat with the severing of either one of the two vital passages.

(Talmud, Chulin 27b)

AND THE SWINE, THOUGH HE BE CLOVEN FOOTED, YET HE CHEWS NOT THE CUD; HE IS UNCLEAN TO YOU (14:8)

Just as the swine when reclining puts forth its hooves as if to say, "See that I am kosher," so too does the empire of Rome boast as it commits violence and robbery, under the guise of establishing a judicial tribunal. This may be compared to a governor who put to death the thieves, adulterers, and sorcerers. He leaned over to a counselor and said: "I myself did these three things in one night."

(Midrash Rabbah)

THESE SHALL YOU EAT OF ALL THAT ARE IN THE WATERS: WHATEVER HAS FINS AND SCALES YOU MAY EAT (14:9)

All fish that have scales also have fins (and are thus kosher). But there are fish that have fins but do not have scales, and are thus impure. If so, the Torah could have written only "scales," without having to also write "fins"? ... Said Rabbi Abahu, and so it was learned in the study house of Rabbi Yishmael: This is so that "Torah be increased and made great" (Isaiah 42:21).

(Talmud, Niddah 51b)

What is the deeper significance of this law?

The student of Torah is comparable to a fish in water, as in Rabbi Akiva's famous parable. His fins are the means by which he moves forward through the water—the intellect and study skills with which he advances in wisdom and increases the Torah and makes it great with his own contributions (chiddushim) to Torah learning. His scales are his protective armor against predators and adverse elements—his fear of Heaven, which shields his learning

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G-d has chosen you to be a treasured people for Him, out of all the nations that are upon the earth."

The Kosher Laws

You shall not eat any abomination.

These are the animals that you may eat: ox, lamb, and kid; gazelle, deer, and antelope, ibex, chamois, bison, and giraffe. And every animal that has a split hoof and has a hoof cloven into two hoof sections, [and] chews the cud among the animals that you may eat.

Both kosher signs are necessary in order for the animal to be permissible for consumption. "the camel, the hyrax, and the hare", which chew the cud but do not have split hooves, as forbidden, as is the swine, which has split hooves but does not chew the cud

These you may eat of all that are in the waters: all that have fins and scales, you may eat. But whatever does not have fins and scales, you shall not eat; it is unclean for you.

In respect to fowl, the Torah does not give kosher signs, but rather lists twenty-one species of non-kosher birds to be excluded from the Jew's diet.

Also:

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from error and distortion.

One might think that the primary requirement for success in Torah is the "fins", while the "scales" serve a secondary function. It is the fins that move the fish forward, while the scales merely preserve what is. After all, learning is an intellectual exercise; piety and fear of G-d are lofty virtues, but are they any use in navigating the complexities of a difficult Tosafot?

In truth, however, the very opposite is the case. A scholar with fins but no scales is a non-kosher fish. He might swim and frolic with his talent and genius, but his learning is corrupt; it is not Torah, but his egoistic arrogation of the divine wisdom. On the other hand, the Talmud tells us that while there are fish with fins and no scales, all fish with scales have fins (and are thus kosher). If a person approaches Torah with an awe of its divine author and the commitment to serve Him, he will certainly succeed. Regardless of the degree of his intellectual prowess, he will find the fins with which to advance in his learning and contribute to the growth of Torah.

(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)

And these are [the birds] which you may not eat: The eagle, the ossifrage, the osprey. And the white vulture, and the black vulture, and the kite after its species. And every raven after its species. And the ostrich, and the owl, and the gull, and the hawk after its species. The falcon, and the ibis, and the bat. And the pelican, and the magpie, and the cormorant. And the stork, and the heron and its species, and the hoopoe, and the atalef... (14:12-19)

In Hebrew, the 21 non-kosher species of bird are: nesher, peres, ozniyah, raah, ayah, dayah, oreiv, bat yaanah, tachmas, shachaf, netz, kos, yanshuf, tinshemet, kaat, racham, shalach, chassidah, anafah, duchifat, atalef.

The commentaries differ as to the identity of many of these species, so that the above translation reflects but one of many interpretations. Other interpretations include the following species in the list (while eliminating others): griffin vulture, albatross, woodpecker, swan, goshawk, long-eared owl, and/or capercaillie.

The Talmud offers a number of identifying markers that are common to kosher fowl, including the fact that they are not predators. In practice, Torah law rules that due to the many uncertainties as to the precise identity of the non-kosher birds listed by the Torah, only birds with a tradition of Kashrut should be eaten.

One of the non-kosher birds on the Torah's list is the chassidah (stork). Chassidah — which is the feminine form of the word "chassid" — means "benevolent one"; the Talmud explains that this bird is called chassidah "because she is benevolent toward her compatriots." Why then, asked the Rebbe of Kotzk, is she a non-kosher bird? Because, explained the Chassidic master, "she is benevolent toward her compatriots." One must be benevolent also, and especially, to the "other" — benevolence directed only towards one's peers is the mark of a non-kosher Chassid...

IF THERE WILL BE AMONG YOU A NEEDY PERSON, FROM ONE OF YOUR BROTHERS IN ONE OF YOUR CITIES... (15:7)

The poor of your city take precedence over the poor of a different city.

(Rashi)

OPEN, OPEN YOUR HAND TO HIM... (15:8)

Rabbi Elazar would give a coin to a pauper, and only then would he pray.

(Talmud, Bava Batra 10a)

Ten powerful things were created in the world: mountains are hard, but

PARSHAH SUMMARY & COMMENTARY

Re'eh

Deuteronomy 11:26-16:17
Torah Reading for Week of August 17-23, 2003

Every flying insect is unclean for you

You shall not eat any carcass (i.e., and animal not killed in accordance with the special slaughtering procedures and laws of "shechitah"). You may give it to the stranger who is in your cities, that he may eat it, or you may sell it to a foreigner; for you are a holy people to the L-rd your G-d.

You shall not cook a kid in its mother's milk. (i.e., the prohibition against mixing milk with meat).

Tithes and Suspensions

A tenth part of all crops should be taken to the holy city Jerusalem and eaten "before the L-rd your G-d"

And if the way be too long for you, that you are unable to carry it, for the place which the L-rd your G-d will choose to establish His Name therein, is too far from you...

Then you shall turn it into money, and bind up the money in your hand, and you shall go to the place the L-rd your G-d will choose.

There the money can be turned back into "whatever your soul desires" — "cattle, sheep, new wine or old wine... and you shall eat there before G-d, and you shall rejoice, you and your household" — remembering to invite also the Levite "for he has neither portion nor inheritance with you."

Commentary

iron cuts through them; iron is hard, but fire melts it; fire is strong, but water extinguishes it; water is strong, but clouds bear it; clouds are strong, but wind scatters them; wind is strong, but the body contains it; the body is strong, bur fear breaks it; fear is potent, but wine dispels it; wine is powerful, but sleep assuages it; and stronger than all these is death. But charity delivers from death.

(Talmud, Shabbat 156b)

Turnusrufus asked Rabbi Akiva: "If your G-d loves the poor, why doesn't He feed them?"

Said [Rabbi Akiva] to him: "So that we should be saved from purgatory (in the merit of the charity we give)."

Said he to him: "On the contrary: for this you deserve to be punished. I'll give you an analogy. This is analogous to a king who got angry at his slave and locked him away in a dungeon, and commanded that he not be given to eat or to drink; and a person came along and gave him to eat and to drink. When the king hears of this, is he not angry at that person...?"

Said Rabbi Akiva to him: "I'll give you an analogy. This is analogous to a king who got angry at his child and locked him away in a dungeon, and commanded that he not be given to eat or to drink; and a person came along and gave him to eat and to drink. When the king hears of this, does he not reward that person...?

(Talmud, Bava Batra 10a)

King Munbaz squandered all his treasures, and the treasures put away by his ancestors, feeding the poor during years of hunger. His brothers and his father's family ganged up on him and said to him: "Your ancestors stored treasure and added to the treasures stored by their ancestors, and you squandered them!" Said he to them: "My ancestors stored below, and I stored above; my ancestors stored in a place where a foreign hand can reach, and I stored in a place where a foreign hand cannot reach; my ancestors stored things that do not bear fruit, and I stored things that bear fruit; my ancestors horded money, and I horded souls; my ancestors stored for others, and I stored for myself; my ancestors stored for this world, and I stored for the World to Come.

(Talmud, Bava Batra 11a)

Never, ever, have we seen or heard about a Jewish community that does not have a charity fund.

(Mishneh Torah, Laws of Gifts to the Poor 9:3)

There are eight levels of charity, each greater than the next.

[1] The greatest level, above which there is no greater, is to support a fellow Jew by endowing him with a gift or loan, or entering into a partnership with him, or finding employment for him, in order to strengthen his hand until he need no longer be dependent upon others...

[2] A lesser level of charity than this is to give to the poor without knowing to whom one gives, and without the recipient knowing from who he received. For this is performing a mitzvah solely for the sake of Heaven. This is like the "anonymous fund" that was in the Holy Temple [in Jerusalem]. There the righteous gave in secret, and the good poor profited in secret. Giving to a charity fund is similar to this mode of charity, though one should not contribute to a charity fund unless one knows that the person appointed over the fund is trustworthy and wise and a proper administrator, like Rabbi Hananya ben Teradyon.

[3] A lesser level of charity than this is when one knows to whom one gives, but the recipient does not know his benefactor. The greatest sages used

PARSHAH SUMMARY & COMMENTARY

Re'eh

Deuteronomy 11:26-16:17
Torah Reading for Week of August 17-23, 2003

Every seventh year is *shemittah*, during which all work in fields ceases, and all debts are suspended. Though these laws seem to pose financial hardship to the Jew, G-d promises that, "there will be no needy among you... if you hearken to the voice of the L-rd your G-d, to be careful to do all this commandment, which I am commanding you today... and you will lend to many nations, but you will not borrow; and you will rule over many nations, but they will not rule over you."

Charity

> If there will be among you a needy person, from one of your brothers in one of your cities... you shall not harden your heart, and you shall not close your hand from your needy brother.
>
> Rather, open, open your hand to him, and you shall lend him sufficient for his needs, which he is lacking...
>
> You shall surely give him, and your heart shall not be grieved when you give to him; for because of this thing that G-d will bless you in all your work and in all your endeavors.

Our Parshah concludes with the laws requiring the giving of a gift to a freed servant, the offering of first-born animals to G-d, and the three pilgrimage festi-

Commentary

to walk about in secret and put coins in the doors of the poor. It is worthy and truly good to do this if those who are responsible for distributing charity are not trustworthy.

[4] A lesser level of charity than this is when one does not know to whom one gives, but the poor person does know his benefactor. The greatest sages used to tie coins into their robes and throw them behind their backs, and the poor would come up and pick the coins out of their robes so that they would not be ashamed.

[5] A lesser level than this is when one gives to the poor person directly into his hand, but gives before being asked.

[6] A lesser level than this is when one gives to the poor person after being asked.

[7] A lesser level than this is when one gives inadequately, but gives gladly and with a smile.

[8] A lesser level than this is when one gives unwillingly.

(Mishneh Torah, Laws of Gifts to the Poor 10:7-14)

PARSHAH SUMMARY & COMMENTARY

FROM THE CHASSIDIC MASTERS

THE TRANSLATION OF EVIL

See, I give you today the blessing and the curse

Deuteronomy 11:26

The blessing and the curse: all phenomena, and all human activity, seem subject to categorization by these two most basic definers of reality. A development is either positive or negative, an occurrence either fortunate or tragic, an act either virtuous or iniquitous.

Indeed, the principle of "free choice" — that man has been granted the absolute autonomy to choose between good and evil — lies at the heart of the Torah's most basic premise: that human life is purposeful. That our deeds are not predetermined by our nature or any universal law but are the product of our independent volition, making us true "partners with G-d in creation" whose choices and actions effect the continuing development of the world as envisioned by its Creator.

Philosophers and theologians of all ages have asked: From where does this dichotomy stem? Does evil come from G-d? If G-d is the exclusive source of all and is the essence of good, can there be evil in His work? If He is the ultimate unity and singularity, can there exist such duality within His potential?

In the words of the prophet Jeremiah, "From the Supernal One's word/ there cannot emerge/ both evil and good"(Lamentations 3:38). Yet the Torah unequivocally states: "See, I am giving you today the blessing and the curse" — I, and no other, am the exclusive source and grantor of both.

Transmutation

One approach to understanding the Torah's conception of "the blessing and the curse" is to see how this verse is rendered by the great translators of Torah.

Aramaic, which was widely spoken by the Jewish people for fifteen centuries, is the "second language" of the Torah. It is the language of the Talmud, and even of several biblical chapters. There are also a number of important Aramaic translations of the Torah, including one compiled at the end of the first century ce by Onkelos, a Roman convert to Judaism who was a nephew of the Emperor Titus; and a translation compiled a half-century earlier by the great Talmudic sage Rabbi Yonatan ben Uziel.

In Onkelus' translation, the Hebrew word *kelalah* in the above-quoted verse is translated literally as "curse" (*lotin* in the Aramaic). But in Rabbi Yonatan's translation, the verse appears thus: "See, I give you today the blessing and its transmutation." The author is not merely avoiding the unsavory term "curse" — he himself uses that term but three verses later in Deuteronomy 11:29, and in a number of other places in the Torah where the word *kelalah* appears. Also, if Rabbi Yonatan just wanted to avoid using a negative expression, he would have written "the blessing and its opposite" or some similar euphemism. The Aramaic word he uses, *chilufa*, means "exchange" and "transmutation," implying that "the curse" is something which devolves from the blessing and is thus an alternate form of the same essence.

In the words of our sages, "No evil descends from heaven" — only two types of good. The first is a "blatant" and obvious good — a good which can only be experienced as such in our lives. The other is also good, for nothing but good can "emerge from the Supernal One"; but it is a "concealed good," a good that is subject to how we choose to receive and experience it. Because of the free choice granted us, it is in our power to distort these heavenly blessings into curses, to subvert these positive energies into negative forces.

Onkelos' is the more "literal" of the two translations. Its purpose is to provide the student with the most rudimentary meaning of the verse. The verse, in the Hebrew, says "the blessing and the curse," and Onkelos renders it as such in the Aramaic. Anyone searching for the deeper significance of the negative in our world must refer to those Torah texts which address such issues.

On the other hand, the translation of Rabbi Yonatan ben Uziel provides a more esoteric interpretation of the Torah, incorporating many Midrashic and Talmudic insights. So instead of simply calling "the curse" a curse, it alludes to the true significance of what we experience as evil in our lives. In essence, Rabbi Yonatan is telling us, what G-d gives is good; but G-d has granted us the ability to experience both "the blessing and its transmutation" — to divert His goodness to destructive ends, G-d forbid.

From The Chassidic Masters

This also explains why Rabbi Yonatan translates *kelalah* as "transmutation" in the above-cited verse (verse 26) and in a later verse (verse 28), yet in verse 29 he renders it literally as "curse," in the manner of Onkelos. In light of the above, the reason for the differentiation is clear: the first two verses speak of *G-d's* giving us both a blessing and a "curse"; but G-d does not give curses — only the option and capability to "transmute" His blessings. On the other hand, the third verse ("And it shall come to pass, when the L-rd your G-d has brought you into the land ... you shall declare the blessing on Mount Gerizim and the curse on Mount Eval") speaks of *our* articulation of the two pathways of life, where the "concealed good" can be received and perceived as an actual "curse."

Galut

On a deeper level, the different perspectives on the nature of evil expressed by these two Aramaic translations of the Torah reflect the spiritual-historical circumstances under which they were compiled.

Galut, the state of physical and spiritual displacement in which we have found ourselves since the destruction of the Holy Temple and our exile from our land nearly 2000 years ago, is a primary cause for the distortion of G-d's blessing into "its transmutation." When the people of Israel inhabited the Holy Land and experienced G-d's manifest presence of in the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, they experienced the divine truth was a tactual reality. The intrinsic goodness and perfection of all that comes from G-d was openly perceivable and accessible.

Galut, on the other hand, is a state of being which veils and distorts our soul's inner vision, making it far more difficult to relate to the divine essence in every event and experience of our lives. *Galut* is an environment in which the "concealed good" that is granted us is all too readily transmuted into negativity and evil.

The translation by Rabbi Yonatan ben Uziel, also called the "Jerusalem Translation," was compiled in the Holy Land in the generation before the Temple's destruction. The very fact that its authorship was necessary — that for many Jews the language of the Torah was no longer their mother tongue and the word of G-d was accessible only through the medium of a vernacular — bespeaks the encroaching *galut*. The "concealed good" was already being experienced as something other than an expression of G-d's loving relationship with us.

Still, in Rabbi Yonatan's day the Holy Temple stood in Jerusalem. The descending veil of *galut* was translucent still, allowing the recognition, if not the experience, of the true nature of reality. One was aware that what one perceived as negative in one's life was a distortion of the divine goodness.

The Onkelus Translation was compiled a generation later by the nephew of the Roman Emperor who destroyed the Holy Temple and drove the people of Israel into exile. In Onkelus' day, the *galut* had intensified to the point that the prevalent reality was that of a world dichotomized by good and evil, a world in which the "concealed good" is regarded as simply "the curse."

But it is precisely such a world that offers the ultimate in freedom of choice, which, in turn, lends true import and significance to the deeds of man. It is precisely such a world that poses the greater — and more rewarding — challenge to reveal the underlying goodness, unity and perfection of G-d's creation.

FOOTNOTES

1. Certain editions of the Chumash include both a "Translation of Yonatan ben Uziel" as well as a "Jerusalem Translation." According to most commentaries, these are two versions of the same work.

Meat

When G-d your G-d shall broaden your borders, as He has promised you, and you will say, I shall eat meat, for your soul shall desire to eat meat, you may eat meat to your souls desire.

Deuteronomy 12:20-23

"Last and first You created me" (Psalms 139:5) ... If man is worthy, he is told: You are first among the works of creation. If he is not worthy, he is told: The flea preceded you, the earthworm preceded you.

Midrash Rabbah, Vayikra 14:1

There are those who contest the morality of eating meat. What gives man the right to consume another creature's flesh? But the same can be said of man's consumption of vegetable life, water or oxygen.

PARSHAH SUMMARY & COMMENTARY

From The Chassidic Masters

What gives man the right to devour any of G-d's creations simply to perpetuate his own existence?

Indeed, there is no such natural right. When man lives only to sustain and enhance his own being, there is no justification for him to tamper with any other existence to achieve this goal. As a great Chassidic master put it, "When a person walks along without a thought of G-d in his head, the very ground under his feet cries out: Boor! What makes you any better than me? By what rights do you step on me?" The fact that man is a "higher" life form scarcely justifies the destruction of dumb or inanimate creatures. Moreover, according to the teachings of Kabbalah, the souls of animals, plants and inanimate objects are actually loftier than that of the human being; for in the great collapse of the primordial world of Tohu the higher elements fell lowest (as the highest stones in a collapsing wall fall farthest), so that the loftier sparks of divine light came to be incarnated in the so-called "lower" tiers of the physical world.

Man *does* have the right to consume other creatures only because, and when, he serves as the agent of their elevation.

The spiritual essence of a stone, plant or animal may be loftier than that of a human being, but it is a static spark, bereft of the capacity to advance creation's quest to unite with its Creator. The cruelty of the cat or the industry of the ant is not a moral failing or achievement, nor is the hardness of the rock or the sweetness of the apple. The mineral, vegetable and animal cannot do good or evil — they can only follow the dictates of their inborn nature. Only man has been granted freedom of choice and the ability to be better (or worse, G-d forbid) than his natural state. When a person drinks a glass of water, eats an apple, or slaughters an ox and consumes its meat, these are converted into the stuff of the human body and the energy that drives it. When this person performs a G-dly deed — a deed that transcends his natural self and brings him closer to G-d — he elevates the elements he has incorporated into himself, reuniting the sparks of G-dliness they embody with their source. (Also elevated are the creations which enabled the G-dly deed — the soil that nourished the apple, the grass that fed the cow, the horse that hauled the water to town, and so on).

Therein lies the deeper significance of the verse quoted above, "And you will say, I shall eat meat, for your soul shall desire to eat meat." You may express a desire for meat and be aware only of your body's craving for the physical satisfaction it brings; in truth, however, this is the result of your *soul's* desire to eat meat — your soul's quest for the sparks of G-dliness it has been sent to earth to redeem.

Desire

There is, however, an important difference between the consumption of meat and that of other foods. The difference involves desire and the role it plays in the elevation of creation.

The human being cannot live without the vegetable and mineral components of his diet. Thus, he is compelled to eat them by the most basic of his physical drives — the preservation of his existence. Meat, however, is not a necessity but a luxury; the desire for meat is not a desire motivated by need, but desire in its purest sense — the desire to experience pleasure.

In other words, animals are elevated — their flesh integrated into the human body and their souls made partner in a G-dly deed — only because G-d has instilled the desire for pleasure in human nature.

This means that the elevation of meat requires a greater spiritual sensitivity on the part of its consumer than that of other foods. When a person eats a piece of bread and then studies Torah, prays or gives charity, the bread has directly contributed to these deeds. In order to perform these deeds, the soul of man must be fused with a physical body, and the piece of bread was indispensable to this fusion. Man eats bread in order to live; if he lives to fulfill his Creator's will, the connection is complete. But man eats meat not to live, but to savor its taste; thus, it is not enough that a person lives in order to serve his Creator for the meat he eats to be elevated. Rather, he must be a person for whom the very experience of physical pleasure is a G-dly endeavor, something devoted solely toward a G-dly end; a person for whom the physical satisfaction generated by a tasty meal translates into a deeper understanding of Torah, a greater fervor in prayer, and a kinder smile to accompany the coin pressed into the palm of a beggar.

Thus the Torah says: "When G-d your G-d shall broaden your borders, as He has promised you... you may eat meat to your soul's" desire. From this the Talmud derives that, "originally, they were forbidden to eat "meat by desire" (*bassar taavah*); it was only after they entered the Land [of Israel] that they were permitted to eat meat by desire." For the first genera-

PARSHAH SUMMARY & COMMENTARY

FROM THE CHASSIDIC MASTERS

tion of Israel's existence as a people — from the time they received the Torah and erected the Sanctuary in the Sinai Desert until they settled in the Holy Land — the only meat they were permitted to eat was the meat of the *korbanot*, the animal sacrifices offered to G-d in the Sanctuary. The consumption of this meat was a mitzvah, which meant that its elevation was achieved by the fact that eating it constitutes a direct fulfillment of a divine commandment. However, they did not have the capacity to elevate "meat of desire" — meat that is eaten for the purpose of granting pleasure to its consumer. So the consumption of such meat was forbidden. Indeed, the children of Israel were rebuked and punished for expressing a desire for meat, as related in the 11th chapter of Book of Numbers.

It was only after G-d broadened their borders, granting them a mandate to make "holy" an adjective of "land", that they were enabled to sanctify this most corporeal corner of human life.

(What was the case in Jewish history was also the case in the history of mankind. Originally, man was granted license only to eat "of every seed-bearing herb on the face of the earth, and every tree on which there is fruit-bearing seed" (Genesis 1:29). It was only after the Flood, following which the world was imbued with a greater spiritual potential, that G-d told Noah that "every moving thing that lives shall be food for you.")

Similarly, our sages have said that "A boor is forbidden to eat meat" (Talmud, Pesachim 49b). The license given to man to consume the creatures and creations of the world and subjugate it to serve him is not unconditional. It is contingent upon his sensitivity to the spiritual essence of G-d's creations, and his commitment to *serve them* by making them component parts of his sanctified life. It takes an individual with broad spiritual horizons to properly relish a steak.

Based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe www.therebbe.org; adapted by Yanki Tauber, editor@chabadonline.com

FOOTNOTES

1. See Talmud, Yoma 76b; ibid., Bava Kama 72a; Tanya, ch. 7. Bread and meat are employed here as prototypes of necessity and luxury; in this context, a cream pie or a yacht would be a form of meat, while a piece of meat eaten to keep body and soul together would fall under the category of bread.

2. Rabbi Yishmael, cited by the Talmud in Chulin 16b. Rabbi Akiva (ibid., 17a) interprets the verse differently, understanding the words "when G-d your G-d shall broaden your borders" not as a qualification of "you may eat meat to your souls desire" but of what the Torah states immediately afterwards, "You shall slaughter of your herd and your flock which G-d has given you, as I have commanded you." Thus, according to Rabbi Akiva, not only was "meat by desire" permitted in the desert, it was even permitted without *shechitah* (the *halachically* prescribed manner of slaughter), while all meat eaten following Israels entry into the Holy Land requires *shechitah*.

However, the deeper significance of the law that Rabbi Akiva derives from these verses is identical to that of the law derived by Rabbi Yishmael. *Shechitah* means "drawing forth" (Talmud, Kiddushin 82a); the slaughter of an animal in accordance with the divinely-mandated laws of *shechitah* is what enables its elevation — the drawing of the animal out from its beastly state into the domain of a life consecrated to the service of the Creator. In the desert, *shechitah* was limited to the animals offered in the Sanctuary, for only these could be "drawn forth" in the manner that *shechitah* makes possible. The only difference in the opinions of Rabbi Yishmael and Rabbi Akiva is that Rabbi Yishmael states that since the full elevation of meat of desire was not possible in the desert, its consumption was prohibited, while Rabbi Akiva holds that it was nonetheless permitted, since a lesser elevation could be achieved.

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WEEK AT A GLANCE

M o n d a y Av 20 | August 18

On This Date: **Zohar published (1558)**

First printing of the Zohar, the fundamental work of the Kabbalah (Jewish esoteric and mystical teachings), authored by the Talmudic sage, Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai.

Links: The Mystic Dimension
http://www.chabad.org/article.asp?aid=42944

Passing of R. Levi Yitzchak Schneerson (1944)

Av 20 is the yahtzeit (anniversary of the passing) of the Lubavitcher Rebbe's father, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak Schneerson (1878-1944), in Alma Ata, Kazakhstan. Rabbi Levi Yitzchak was Chief Rabbi of Yekaterinoslav (currently Dnepropetrovsk), and was arrested and exiled to Alma Ata by the Stalinist regime as a result of his work to preserve Jewish life in the Soviet Union.

T u e s d a y Av 21 | August 19

On This Date: **Passing of R. Chaim Brisker (1918)**

Passing of Rabbi Chaim Soloveichik of Brisk (1853-1918), outstanding Talmudic scholar and Jewish leader.

f r i d a y Av 24 | August 22

On This Date: **Hasmonean holiday (circa 100 BCE)**

The Hasmoneans reinstated the rule of Jewish civil law, replacing the Roman secular law, and declared this day a holiday.

Light Shabbat Candles before sunset [Go...]

s h a b b a t Av 25 | August 23

Torah reading: Re'eh (Deut. 11:26-16:17)
Haftarah: Isaiah 54 (3rd of the "7 of Consolation")

Ethics of the Fathers: Chapter 5

Laws & customs: **blessing the new month**

This Shabbat is Shabbat Mevarchim ("the Shabbat that blesses" the new month): a special prayer is recited blessing the Rosh Chodesh ("Head of the Month") of upcoming month of Elul, which falls on Thursday and Friday of next week. Prior to the blessing, we announce the precise time of the new moon's "birth" -- Wednesday, 3:43:12 pm (Jerusalem time). It is a Chabad custom to recite the entire book of Psalms before morning prayers.

Links: On the Significance of Shabbat Mevarchim
http://www.chabad.org/article.asp?aid=54766