

## TORAH PERSPECTIVES

RABBI EPHRAIM RAUCH



### BITACHON

One of the major themes in this week's parshah is the theme of Bitachon, to trust in and rely upon Hashem. At its core, Bitachon is the ability to understand that all of the goings on in the world are directly from Hashem's command and to carry out His desire. This includes everything, both the good and the bad, the expected happenings, and the unexpected occurrences. They are all sent by Hashem as part of His Master plan in running the world. Each of them is Hashem taking care of us, and in many cases communicating with us. Knowing this and internalizing it allows us to attain the lofty heights of Bitachon, coming to see Hashem's hand in everything, and recognizing that success is only possible through Him.

This theme is first brought out in Parshas Behar with the mitzvah of Shmittah, which demands that we leave our fields unworked for every seventh year, the year of Shmittah. Theoretically, this creates a calamity for both the individual and the national economy. How is a farmer meant to provide food for his family if he's not allowed to work his field and sell his crop? How is the economy supposed to manage if, after six years, all the stores refrain from selling produce, no grain, no fruits, and no vegetables? This mitzvah certainly presents a formidable challenge for all.

However, the Torah addresses this and says, וכי תאמרו מה נאכל, וכי תשאלו את ה' בשנה השביעית וכו' וציויתי את ברכתי וכו'. "When you will ask what shall we eat in the seventh year, etc., and I will command my blessing, etc." The passuk is clear. Hashem will ensure there is enough food. He will command His brachah and cause the fields to produce threefold during the sixth year, providing sustenance until the new crop is ready in the eighth year. The message of this mitzvah is loud and clear; it's meant to strengthen our Bitachon and teach us where our sustenance really comes from. Hashem is always the One providing for us, even when we're working the field, etc. The proof is the fact that we have sufficient sustenance even when we don't engage in business. If we trust in Hashem and rely on Him to provide, we'll have what we need.

However, later, in Parshas Bechukosai, the message of Bitachon takes on a far more serious tone. Bitachon is part of the

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## Meaning — BEHIND THE *Minhag*



RABBI HILLEL MULLER

### KISSING THE HAND

We had the privilege of hosting the former Chief Rabbi of Israel, Rabbi Yitzchak Yosef, this past week. It was a tremendous Kavod HaTorah, as more than 500 men, women, and children came out to hear his words of Torah and to pay their respects.

Many people noticed that when greeting the Rav, individuals would kiss his hand. This is a long-standing custom in many Sephardic communities around the world, where kissing the hand of a Chacham is a sign of honor and reverence for Torah.

The Gemara in Maseches Berachos (8B) relates that Rabbi Akiva said: "There are three things I admire about the Medeans: When they cut meat, they do so only upon a table; when they kiss, they do so only upon the hand; and when they speak privately, they do so only out in a field." Rashi and the Maharsha explain that kissing on the face could result in saliva being exchanged, whereas kissing the hand was considered more refined and respectful.

Similarly, the Gemara in Maseches Avoda Zara (17A) tells us that when Ulah would return from the Beis Midrash, he would kiss his sister's hands. Rashi explains that it was customary for people leaving the synagogue to kiss the hands of their parents and those greater than them in stature and wisdom.

The Zohar states that Rabbi Elazar and the תלמידים of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai would kiss his hands as a sign of reverence and connection to holiness.

Rav Chaim Chizkiyahu Medini writes (שו"ת חמ"ד) (מערכת הקו"ף כלל ז') that this is an ancient and long-

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mandate to which we are held accountable when we are lacking in proper Bitachon. This comes up in Parshas Bechukosai where we are given the tochecha, the Torah's description of all the tragic horrors that will befall the Jewish Nation as punishment if they don't follow the edicts of the Torah. The Torah repeatedly utilizes the term "Keri" in introducing different segments of the tochecha, indicating that this concept of "Keri" plays a role in bringing about the tochecha. The pasuk says, *אם תלכו עמי בקרי וכו', והלכתם עמי בקרי, בהמת קרי*. The commentaries struggle to understand this term. The actual word "Keri" comes from the word "mikreh," which means happenstance. Based on this, the commentaries offer different explanations. The Rambam in Moreh Nevuchim explains a deep idea. Hashem tells us, "When you veer off the path, I will send you difficulties as a message to steer you back to the way of the Torah. If you fail to read these struggles as messages from Me and instead understand them to be natural occurrences, that will exacerbate the problem and trigger the harshest of punishments." Worse than our sins and deviations from the Torah is our inability to recognize that nothing happens by chance, everything is from Hashem and for a purpose. We are taken to task when we are too obtuse to learn from the events in our life that Hashem wants us to change. Still, Bitachon isn't an all or nothing endeavor. R' Moshe Feinstein notes an intriguing order in the process of Shmittah. The passuk first tells us the mitzvah of Shmittah. Then it says that if you will ask what will we eat, I will give my blessing, providing extra produce. It seems as though the brachah will only come about if we express concern. Why doesn't the Torah skip this part and just write that we'll merit extra blessing if we fulfill the mitzvah? Says R' Moshe, Hashem actually only gives us this extra brachah if we express concern. If we follow the mitzvah without question, then Hashem gives us something far greater — He gives us the same amount of produce as every other year, but just makes it last much longer. This is a much more desirable form of the brachah — Hashem takes care of us without our needing to do extra work. In contrast, one who did ask, "What will be?" gets the brachah that his field will yield triple the produce. He then needs to do triple the amount of harvesting and build extra storehouses. It all depends on what level of Bitachon we reached, whether we're concerned that doing Hashem's mitzvah will bring us to danger or we trust that He'll take care of us. The reason the Torah only mentions the brachah after we express concern is because that's when we need that lower level of brachah mentioned in the Torah. The powerful lessons to be learned are that we need to recognize Hashem's role in our lives and the fact that everything we have comes from Him. Additionally, we need to have our eyes open to read the messages He is sending us, knowing that He's trying to communicate with us on our own level. ▲

### Meaning Behind the Minhag >>> continued from front

standing minhag.

A Sephardic Jew once offered the following insight: a person shakes hands with the right hand, while the left hand is used for less dignified purposes. Kissing the right hand after a handshake expresses trust and respect — an affirmation that the person whose hand you just shook understands the sanctity and cleanliness associated with the right hand, viewing it as tahor. ▲

## DID YOU KNOW



RABBI BINYAMIN SCHIERMEYER

PARSHAS BEHAR BECHUKOSAI

1 That Alexander the Great didn't charge the Jews living in Eretz Yisrael taxes during shmita years since the Jews weren't working their fields. (Yosefun/Josephus)

2 That there is a bird called "Deror" which literally means freedom. When the bird is free it sings, however when the bird is "enslaved" to a human, it won't sing, it won't eat, and eventually it dies. (Ibn Ezra)

3 That in the future, the bark of the tree is going to be edible. (Sifra) Not only that, but even non-bearing fruit trees in Eretz Yisrael will bear fruit. (Rashi)

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# Climbing HIGHER



RABBI YOSEF CHAIM PINKUS

Megillas Rus is read on Shavuot, though it doesn't receive as much attention as Megillos Esther or Eichah. Similar to those Megillos, however, it encapsulates the fundamental themes of the holiday.

Chazal tell us Rus was a princess. She converts to Judaism and marries into a family of Israelite expatriates who had moved to Moav to escape a famine. This family was punished for having fled at a time when they could have helped their people. The family, other than the matriarch Naomi, dies before their time, leaving Naomi, Rus, and Orpah. Naomi decides it is time to return to her homeland. At first, both daughters-in-law come along. Ultimately, only Rus chooses to stay with Naomi.

The story continues. Destitute, Rus meets Boaz, they marry, and as the end of the Megillah tells us, she has a son Oved. The family tree is traced. Oved has Yishai, and Yishai has Dovid, who becomes the King of Israel. When reading the story, one gets the sense that the entirety of the Megillah is intended to lead up to this final point of the ancestry of Dovid HaMelech.

The Sefer Nachlas Yosef asks, why is this emphasis on Dovid's ancestry so central? Building on this question, we can further ask why the Megillah is read on Shavuot. The story does take place against the backdrop of the harvest, and the laws of leket, shikcha, and peah are core to the narrative. Shavuot, a harvest festival, seems well-aligned. But those details appear to be mere setting and the stated purpose is Dovid's ancestry, which seems irrelevant to the holiday altogether. Why?

He answers that the focus of the Megillah teaches us what is truly important in life. The Mishnah in Pirkei Avos tells us that the world rests on three things, one of which is chesed. Rus was defined by chesed. Naomi was a widow in a world where that was a near-death sentence — a world where the farmer needed to utilize every ounce of strength in his body to wrestle food from the ground, where the curse Hashem gave Adam — *b'ze'as apecha tochal lechem* — was a living, breathing, deadly reality. A world where a woman without a husband to provide for her was in an incredibly precarious position. There were no other economic options for Rus and Naomi. Moving back to Eretz Yisrael, they immediately became dependent on the charity of others like Boaz for basic sustenance.

And Rus did not need to do that! She could have gone

back and shown up at the palace gates with a tearful story about mistakes made, wrong choices, a marriage gone sideways and she would have been welcomed in. The entire time she was struggling all she had to do was turn around and she would soon have a hot meal, a warm bed, and a future. Instead, she chose to stay with Naomi and support her.

Then, when she chose to marry Boaz, she was choosing an older man with no guarantee of a lasting future (and in fact, there was none, as Boaz died shortly afterwards). The pasuk quotes Boaz (3:10): "your latest act of kindness is greater than the first."

Boaz, our other main character, was also acting with chesed. He was a leader, a man of wealth, standing, and reputation. And here he was, agreeing to marry a woman from Moav, from a nation the Jews had complicated history with, from a background that carried real social stigma. People would talk. Such a union between two people who personified sacrifice and chesed for one another produced Dovid. The pathway to kingship was paved with chesed.

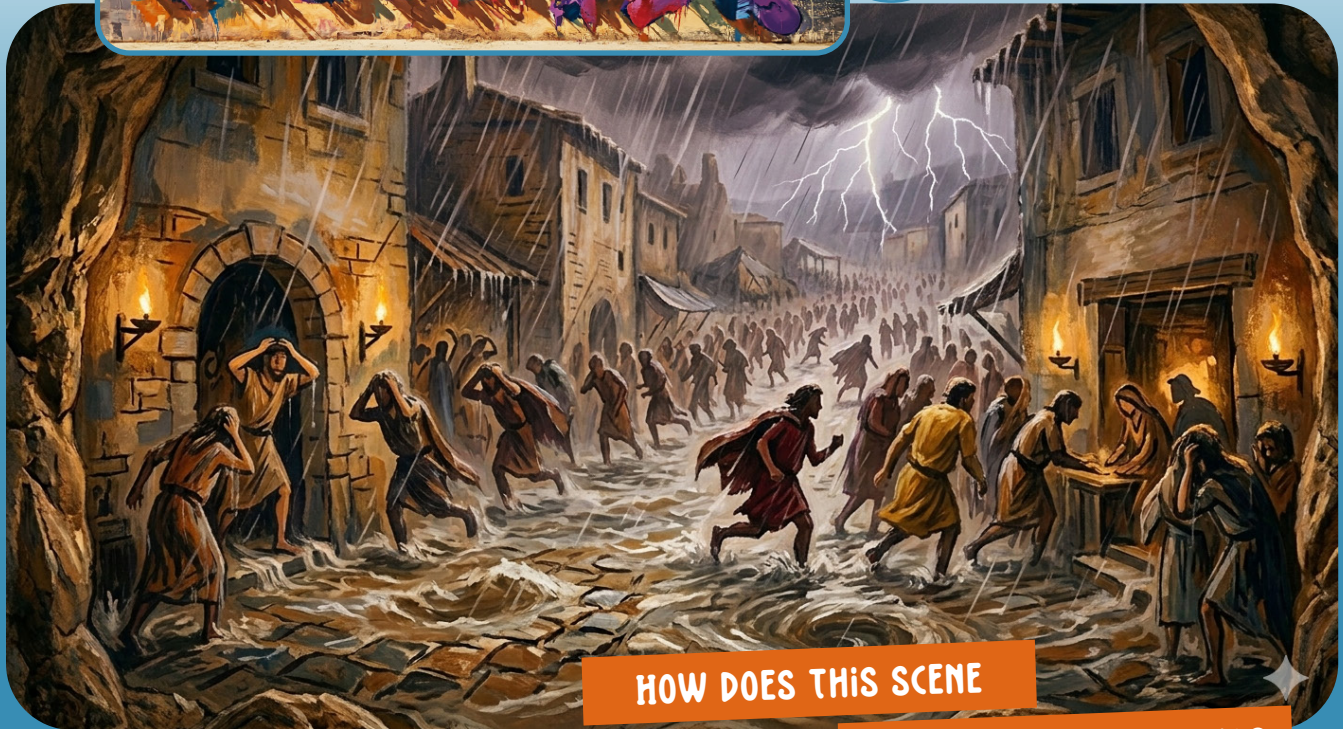
This connection is significant. We daven for the restoration of the kingship of Dovid. Why Dovid specifically? Shmuel warned that a king wields tremendous power over every aspect of life, painting an image of a tyrannical figure imposing his will on the people. But the kingship of Dovid was different. It was a kingship defined by service, by caring for the people physically, materially, and spiritually. With the right leadership, rooted in chesed, an entire nation can be uplifted. Rus laid the groundwork for Dovid's malchus.

On Shavuot we celebrate the giving of the Torah. But there are prerequisites for accepting the Torah. One cannot simply bring Torah into one's life and expect it to change everything without first doing the groundwork. The Vilna Gaon teaches us that the Torah's effect on the soul is like rain falling on the ground. It causes whatever is planted there to grow, whether good or bad. "If one is good-hearted, the Torah will increase his piety; but if his heart contains the seeds of bad character, the bitterness will only increase." The kingship of Dovid possessed great power, and grounding that power with good middos, and specifically chesed, led to an everlasting legacy. The same is true for us. We too can take the Torah, this incredibly powerful force, and if we properly equip ourselves, we can grow like never before.

Megillas Rus teaches us that regardless of setting — whether a national malchus or a personal relationship with Torah — what matters is character, and laying the right foundation. When the foundational work is done correctly, the legacy can be everlasting. As it was for Rus, that timeless personification of chesed, so, *b'ezras Hashem*, shall it be for us. ▲



RABBI ELI PERLMAN



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