

REWARD TO THOSE WHO BROUGHT THE CHILDREN / WRITE THIS "SONG"

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: CD #1044 – Must You Stand For Chazoras HaShatz On Rosh Hashana? Good Shabbos!

In Order To Give Reward To Those Who Brought The Children

The Torah introduces the mitzvah of *Hakhel* in *Parshas Vayeilech*. *Hakhel* is a national gathering held once every seven years in which all Jews – men, women, and children -- come together to celebrate national unity and purpose: "Gather together the people – the men, and the women, and the small children, and your stranger who is in your cities – so that they will hear and so that they will learn and they shall fear Hashem your G-d and be careful to perform all the words of the Torah." [Devarim 31:12].

The Talmud teaches [Chagiga 3a] an intriguing idea about *Hakhel*: "It was the week when it was the turn of Rav Elazar ben Azariah to give the lesson and the topic being discussed that day was the mitzvah of *Hakhel*. What did he expound? He expounded as follows: 'Gather the nation, the men, the women and the children...' We understand that the men came to learn and the women came to listen, but what purpose was there to bring the children? In order to give reward to those who brought them!"

The *Mei HaShiloach* and other commentaries as well expound on this idea of "to give reward to those who brought them". Is it just a question of getting reward for "*schlepping*" the kids? Perhaps for the same reward, the parents could have been commanded to carry along with them a sack of potatoes? It clearly means something more than that. The *Mei HaShiloach* interprets "giving reward to those who brought them" to mean that exposing one's children to the events of *Hakhel* is going to make an impression on the children and eventually the parents will reap the reward of having children who in their youth were impacted positively by the *Hakhel* ritual.

Imagine what a sight that was! The closest thing we have to *Hakhel* today also comes out approximately every 7 years – every seven and a half years to be exact – the *Siyum HaShas*. When

my children were younger, I made a point of taking them. It is an amazing sight. Even if they are only out there in the concourse buying their kosher hot dogs, seeing tens of thousands of Jews together is impressive. It makes a lasting impression.

A person can ask himself afterwards "Was it worth it? I schlepped him, I took him out of school, I took him on the train, it cost me money. Was it worth it?" The Talmud teaches "to bring reward to those who bring them". Exposing children to such a gathering DOES make an impression. In the long run, it will certainly be worth it! Eventually the parents will realize reward for these efforts.

I know someone who made his own *Siyum HaShas* (marking the personal completion of studying the entire Babylonian Talmud). I asked him why he made a *Siyum HaShas* and he told me "My father made a *Siyum HaShas* when I was a boy and I saw what a big deal it was! I said to myself then, 'When I get older I want to do that also!'"

A parallel *Mechilta* in *Parshas Bo* quotes the same story as the Gemara in Chagiga with Rav Elazar ben Azarya, the mitzvah of *Hakhel*, and the explanation of why we bring the children -- "in order to bring reward to those who bring them." However, the *Mechilta* adds at the end, "Rav Yehoshua states 'Happy is our Patriarch Avraham who can count Rav Elazar ben Azaryah as one of his descendants.'" Why, we might ask, is Rav Yehoshua singling out *Avraham Avinu* in this statement? Should not *Moshe Rabbeinu* have *nachas* from Rav Elazar ben Azarya? What about *Yakov Avinu*, *Dovid HaMelech*, or *Shlomo HaMelech*? What is so special about *Avraham Avinu* and his connection to Rav Elazar ben Azaryah?

The answer is that the Almighty told us something about Avraham Avinu – why He chose him and why *Hashem* refers to as 'Avraham the one I love' [Yeshaya 41:8]. The *Chumash* provides the answer. It is no mystery. "For I have cherished him (*ki yeda'ativ*), because he commands his children and his household after him that they keep the way of Hashem, doing charity and justice..." [Bereishis 18:19]. The Ramban interprets *ki yeda'ativ* to mean, "For I have chosen him". I have chosen him, the Almighty testifies, because I know that he will give over the *mesorah* [tradition] to his children! Therefore, he is the first "patriarch"; he is the first 'Av'. He knows how to preserve *Yiddishkeit* – he does it by commanding his children and household.

When Rav Elazar ben Azariah makes the same observation and teaches, "Why did the children come to *Hakhel*? It is to bring reward to those who bring them!" he is echoing the teaching of the Patriarch Avraham. This is exactly the tradition Avraham instituted in *Klal Yisrael*. Therefore "Happy are you *Avraham Avinu* to be able to count Rav Elazar ben Azarya as one of your descendants."

Write This "Song"

I saw a beautiful observation in the *sefer HaKesav VeHakabalah*. The Torah teaches the very last of

the six hundred and thirteen commandments in *Parshas Vayelech*: "So now, write this song (*haShirah hazos*) for yourselves, and teach it to the Children of Israel, place it in their mouth, so that this song shall be for Me a witness against the Children of Israel." [Devarim 31:19]. From here we learn Biblical *Mitzvah* #613 – Writing a Sefer Torah.

HaKesav VeHakabalah was a master of the Hebrew language (*lashon haKodesh*). He asks – why was Torah called a 'song'? If we were asked to draw up a list of ten words which might be used to describe or summarize the contents of Torah, 'song' would very likely not be on the list. Yet the *Mitzvah* to write the Torah is expressed here as "write this song". Why?

HaKesav VeHakabalah writes the word *shir* [*shin-yud-reish*] (song) is related to the word *yashar* [*yud-shin-reish*] (straight). He explains "If you want music to be appealing, the musical notes need to follow one another in a perfectly arranged sequence to provide a harmonious melody." Once music goes "off key," it greatly bothers the listener. This is the essence of *shirah*: A flow, a precise sequencing of the components of the song – one note following another in carefully planned arrangement. When the notes are "off," the song loses its pleasantness.

If that is the case, it is obvious why the Torah is called *shirah*. The Torah is – as the prophet calls it "*Sefer haYashar*" [the Book of the Straight]. The *pasuk* alludes to this: "...behold it is written in the *Sefer haYashar*..." [Yehoshua 10:13]. The Torah is a book of *yashrus* – of being straight.

The *Netziv* in his introduction to the Book of Bereishis writes that this book, in particular, is "the book of the *Yashar*" because it is the story of the Patriarchs who were straight and upright (*yesharim*). The *Netziv* writes that the nations did not know that Avraham kept the entire Torah (even *Eruvei Tavshillin*) [per the teaching of Chazal], but they knew he was a "straight shooter". They knew he was honest and upright.

The word that defines Torah is *Yashar* – to be straight, to be honest, no tricks, no deception. This is what the *Sefer HaYashar* represents. Unfortunately, we live in a time when this principle is observed in the breach rather than in actuality. We hear all too many times stories about people who are "less than *yashar*". Very less than *yashar*! We all cringe when we hear these stories, every time one of these scandals rears its ugly head. That is not the way it is supposed to be.

A nephew of mine corrected a story I had heard involving Rav Aharon Soloveichik, *zichrono l'bracha*. Rav Aharon Soloveichik commuted by plane between Chicago and New York. He lived in Chicago, was a Rosh Yeshiva in Yeshivas Brisk there, and for a time served as a Rosh Yeshiva in Yeshiva University. He travelled regularly between the two cities. One time, his mother-in-law, who lived in New York, wanted to visit her daughter in Chicago, but she did not like to fly. So Rav Aharon Soloveichik accompanied her back from New York to Chicago on the train.

They came to the train station to purchase two tickets and the agent behind the counter said, "you're in luck – today spouses go for free!" So Rav Aharon Soloveichik looked at the agent and said, this woman is not my spouse, she's my mother-in-law! The agent responded, "We don't look at marriage

licenses." Rav Aharon was insistent: "But she is not my wife. Let me see your supervisor!"

The dialog was repeated with the supervisor. Rav Soloveichik protested that they should not be eligible for the free ticket because she was not his wife. The supervisor told him, "Listen here, you look old enough that she looks like she's your wife! What do you care?" "No. She's not my wife. I want to pay for her." This is *yashar*.

Rav Yakov Kamenetsky was a Rav in Toronto before he came to Torah VoDaath. One Purim, the community in Toronto gave him a silver platter. A couple of days later, a congregant saw Rav Yakov in downtown Toronto at a pawnshop. It looked like he was trying to pawn the silver tray he had received earlier that week as a present from his congregation. The congregant went back to the other members of the shul and said "What kind of a Rabbi do we have here? We give him a present and he pawns it!" The President of the shul called in Rav Yakov and demanded an explanation. Rav Yakov told them that the Magen Avraham rules that the presents a Rav gets from his congregation for Purim and Pessach are to be considered as part of his salary. "If it is part of my salary, I have to report it on my taxes so I have to know how much it costs. I went to the pawn shop to find out the fair market value of the tray so I could accurately declare it." This is *yashrus*.

This is the *yashrus* of which the Semag writes [Positive Command #74] that when the Almighty finally comes and redeems us, the nations of the world will say "He acted correctly (*b'Din assa*) because they are honest people (*sh'hen anshei emes*). However, if the Jews will cheat, the nations will wonder "What is this that G-d has done? He chose for Himself thieves and cheaters!"

We daven the entire Rosh Hashana that we want *Moshiach*. We want G-d to rule over the entire world. There is a very simple formula for bringing Moshiach. We must first make ourselves into such people that the nations of the world will be able to say "Ah! Those Jews are so honest! The Almighty knew what He was doing by redeeming them!" -- When that happens, *Moshaich* will come, may it be speedily in our time.

Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem DavidATwersky@gmail.com

Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD dhoffman@torah.org

This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A listing of the halachic portions for Parshas Nitzavim/Vayeilech is provided below:

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