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**Rabbi Yisroel Brog Discusses**

**How to Deal with the**

**Difficult Challenges in Life**

**By Daniel Keren**

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**Rabbi Yisroel Brog**

(Parashat Matot-Masei – Growing through Most Difficult Times by Rabbi Yisroel Brog – Torahanytime.com, 41:14 minutes video)

Tragedy strikes everyone in life and depending on a person’s emunah (faith) in Hashem, people react in different ways. Obviously the stronger one’s faith in Hashem, the easier one can handle not only the heartbreak, but also unexpected consequences that this loss, whether it be a loved one, a job, a shidduch, etc. can cause whether it be emotional or financial or both.

It would seem to me that without a concept of an all-powerful and loving G-d who knows what He is doing, nothing in life, even success would make sense. Intellectually we who profess to have emunah and bitachon (trust) in Hashem understand that tragedies are given by Hashem for our benefit, even if we can’t comprehend it in our lives.

**Studying the Commentaries to Sefer Iyov**

One need only study the commentaries to Sefer Iyov (the Book of Job) to understand that Hashem has His reasons and we like Iyov have not seen the whole show of life. It is only after 120 years or when Moshiach comes with the geulah (the redemption of the Jewish people) and may that be soon that we can understand how all the painful chapters in life were for our own benefit.

On Parshat Matos-Masei, the first yahrtzeit (memorial anniversary) was held for Yehuda ben Reb Dovid and Eidel, a very talented Torah scholar who was nifter from a very unusual disease (a cancer behind his facial mask). He left behind a widow still devastated by her great loss trying to raise two young children ages 3 and 2. She called Rabbi Yisroel Brog, the Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivas Tiferes Avigdor in Cleveland [named after his illustrious grandfather – Rav Avigdor Miller, zt”l] and asked him to dedicate a shiur in memory of her husband’s yahrtzeit.

He began by saying his goal in his lecture was to offer some steps and pointers in how to deal with these [unwanted] challenges in life.

He acknowledged that people lose husbands, earlier or later in life. People lose wives. People lose parents. People become divorced. People become extremely lonely in their lives. Anybody who has ever gone through a major challenge in their life may often [if their emunah and bitachon is weak] ask the following question:

**What Does Hashem Expect from Me?**

What in the world does Hashem expect from me? The person who has undergone such a major difficulty in their life would follow up by declaring that they are not a superman, a superwoman. They don’t see themselves as a hero, but rather a pashut (simple) man or woman.

And of course they have heard that Hashem doesn’t give a challenge that one can’t handle. But they tell Rabbi Brog, that they aren’t able to deal with their particular challenge. Again the question arises, “What does Hashem expect of them?”

Rabbi Brog’s response is: “I say to them that you are wrong. You could [handle the challenge.] Challenges are what Hashem gives to ordinary people, not brave warriors or supermen.

There is no denying he added that “people who are faced with these challenges are overcome with fear. A child loses a parent - [it is] a tremendous fear. A wife loses a husband – a tremendous fear. Somebody gets divorced late in life, time is moving on – it is a tremendous fear.

To learn more of Rabbi Brog’s no-nonsense response to how a Jew should respond to such difficult times and how to utilize them to grow spiritually, view his 41:14 minute lecture by clicking the Torahanytime.com website. Then when on the home page, click at the top the icon for speakers and then scroll down in alphabetical order to Rabbi Yisroel Brog. Then scroll down four lectures to “Parashat Matot-Masei – Growing through Most Difficult Times.”

If you don’t have that much time, you might want to instead google or click – Dealing with the Toughest Challenges in Life by Rabbi Yisroel Brog, a shorter 8:53 minute video. Or if you really have time, view and learn from both videos.

*Reprinted from this week’s edition of the Jewish Connection.*

**Rabbi Berel Wein**

**On Parshat Ekev**

**By Rabbi Berel Wein**



The word that this week's Torah reading derives its name from is Ekev. There are many subtle nuances that exist within this short three letter Hebrew word. Our teacher Rashi uses a midrashic interpretation that connects the word to the Hebrew noun which refers to the heel of a person.

He indicates that there are important considerations in Torah and life that people somehow step upon with their heel without understanding the importance and ramification of so doing.

Most commentators interpret the word to mean a causative issue. It indicates that because a person does or does not do certain actions and behaviors, immense consequences flow from that seemingly unimportant decision. We are all aware that the Torah views the events of personal and national life to be one of cause and effect.

**The Importance of Every Act or Omission of an Act**

Nothing happens in a vacuum or at random and it is human behavior that sets the stage for all later events, even events that will occur centuries or millennia down the line. This lends importance to every act or omission of an act that a human being performs. And thus, the interpretation of Rashi falls in line with the general interpretation of the word Ekev.

We are being taught that there is nothing in life that should be considered completely unworthy of contemplation. Every situation, no matter how minor we may deem it to be, or inconsequential is a matter of importance and contains within it ramifications that we are unaware of but are present.

The course of life is always mysterious, surprising, unexpected, and basically inexplicable. No one in our world today would have expected it to look the way it does just six months ago. We had all made plans for our immediate and long-range future. All those plans have been dashed by the dreaded coronavirus and its consequences.

And yet, as we stand dazed and confused by what has struck us, deep down we are aware that there is a cause that has activated this situation. I am not speaking about an immediate direct cause – the escape of the virus from the Wuhan Chinese laboratory.

**A Superficial Cause that Answers Little and Explains Even Less**

That is only a superficial cause that answers little and explains even less.

Rather, there is a deep-seated cause within human society of the early 21st century that has provoked this reaction to the behavior, agendas and thought processes of modern civilization. If the cause is to be searched for in our attitudes and behavior, then that requires contemplation and rational thought instead of preconceived utopian ideas. It requires a sense of humility and a return to the basic values of human life as represented to us by the Torah and taught to us by Moshe our revered teacher

Human civilization needs a little less hubris, less arrogance, more minimal expectations of life, and a realization that even though man may have many great ideas, it is the will of the L-rd so to speak that will eventually prevail one way or another.

*Reprinted from this week’s website of Rabbiwein.com*

**Parshas Eikev**

**Who Gave You the Idea?**

By Rabbi Bentzion Shafier

Founder of TheSmuz.com



*When you enter the Land of Israel, you will enjoy prosperity and abundance. You will build beautiful homes. Your crops and livestock will increase. You will amass gold and silver. And all that you engage in will flourish… If you become arrogant and say, “My strength and the might of my hand made me all this wealth…*”

*“Then you shall remember HASHEM your G-d: that it was He Who gives you strength to make wealth, in order to establish His covenant that He swore to your forefathers, as this day.”* — *Devarim* 8:18

**The Strength of My Hand**

Historically, one of man’s greatest shortcomings has been taking credit for HASHEM’s work. Only too often does a man find success, and in his arrogance feels that his power and his might created his empire. The Torah warns us, “Remember — it was HASHEM who brought all this to be.”

While this may sound like a straightforward concept, the Targum adds an intriguing twist. He defines the words, “HASHEM gave you the *strength*,” as “HASHEM gave you the *advice* to acquire that merchandise.”

In other words, if you take credit for prosperity, remember that HASHEM gave you the counsel that led to it.

**The Role of the Targum**

This Targum is difficult to understand. The role of Targum is *peshat* —straightforward meaning. The Torah said, “Remember that HASHEM gave you the strength to make this wealth.” It is far more than advice that HASHEM gives. HASHEM created the heavens and the earth. Hashem wrote the laws of physics, chemistry, and biology. HASHEM created and maintains all of physicality — from the constellations down to cellular functions. Why would the Targum limit the explanation to this one issue of HASHEM giving *advice* to acquire merchandise?

The answer to this can be best understood with an example.

**A Farmer in the Field**

Imagine a simple farmer standing in his field, ready for harvest. Looking out, he sees rows and rows of ripe corn standing tall, stretching as far as his eye can see. He feels joy in his heart as he revels in the abundance of his bumper crop. And then he looks out at his neighbor’s field. Meager. Under grown. Spotty.

The farmer thinks to himself, “Dang fool that boy is. How many times did I tell him — plant corn this year! Not wheat. The rains came late. The frost was still on the ground in April. Any man worth his salt knows wheat wouldn’t grow no good that way. Corn. Corn. Corn! I says to him, If only he’d a listened to me…”

And the farmer can’t help but feel a sense of pride. After all, it was his wisdom that led him to choose corn, not like that fool of a guy next door who planted wheat.

The farmer, as naive as he is, understands that he didn’t bring the rain. It wasn’t his acumen that stopped the pestilence. And it wasn’t he who made the sun shine bright in the sky, providing the warmth and energy the corn needed. Nevertheless, he feels smug because it was he who made the wise decision that brought him to where he is.

**The One Area Where They Could Have Taken Credit**

This seems to be the answer to the Targum. This was the *dor de’ah*, the generation that knew HASHEM. They experienced the splitting of the sea. They lived in the desert surrounded by miracles. They saw HASHEM on a daily basis, and they understood that He runs the world. As such, they couldn’t possibly take credit for “growing the corn.” They knew that if their flocks increased, it was HASHEM’s blessing. If their crops flourished, it was because HASHEM willed it to be.

The one area for which they could take credit was their wisdom. “It was my decision to purchase gold and not wood.” “I thought about it and realized that cattle feed would do well.” “I came to the conclusion that water rights would be valuable.”

The Targum is telling us that this is the only mistake they could have made. Of course, everything is from HASHEM — that was never a question. Yet they still could become arrogant, thinking it was their wisdom that brought about their success. The *pasuk* says to them, “Remember: those thoughts were brought to you by HASHEM. The reason you made that choice is because HASHEM guided your thinking.” The Torah is telling us to recognize that even our ideas are directed by HASHEM.

**Seeing HASHEM in Our World**

This concept is very relevant to us. As *ma’aminim* (believers) we recognize that we don’t control market conditions. One worldwide depression and we’re all out of a job. So that isn’t a test for us. The challenge is the area that *seems* to be in our control — the decisions we make, the choices we opt for. Real estate or oil? Treasury bonds or mutual funds? Should I buy short? Should I invest in gold now?

The Torah is teaching us that this too is in HASHEM’s control. He guides our thinking, putting thoughts into our minds that bring us to where we are supposed to be. It is hard to know why sometimes we have a good feeling about a business opportunity, and sometimes we don’t. It is difficult to define why certain people find favor in our eyes, and some don’t. Ask a young man who is dating why one woman catches his fancy and another doesn’t. Granted some of it is natural attraction, but there is far more going on. Often a more attractive, more presentable girl will not sway him, yet “somehow” the other one did.

One of the ways that HASHEM runs this world is by putting opinions, ideas, and attitudes into our minds. While we are still free to listen or not, we are greatly influenced by that input. Identifying this phenomenon and seeing it in action is part of learning to see HASHEM in our world.

*Reprinted from this week’s website on TheShmuz.com This is an excerpt from the [Shmuz on the Parsha book](https://theshmuz.com/product/shmuz-on-the-parsha-book/).*

**The Importance of**

**A Jew’s Performance**

**Of the Simplest Mitzvot**

**From the Talks of the Lubavitcher Rebbe**

**Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, Zt”l**



This week's Torah portion, Ekev, opens with an unusual expression: "And it will be that 'ekev' ('if' or 'because') you listen to these laws..." Instead of the more common word "im" to denote "if," the Torah uses the word "ekev," which means "heel." Our Sages note that this word has two opposite connotations.

According to Rashi, "ekev" alludes to the "simple mitzvot which are usually trampled underfoot." Others interpret the word as alluding to the "very end" of the Jew's performance of mitzvot -- the reward he receives at the conclusion of his service of G-d.

In the first instance, the Torah speaks of a Jew who must be encouraged to perform even the simplest of the commandments. The second example, however, involves a Jew on a very high spiritual level, one who has already performed all the mitzvot and is ready to receive his reward.

This contradiction is also found in the term describing the period in which we now find ourselves -- "ikveta d'Meshicha" -- "the heels of Moshiach."

**“Heel” Denotes a Lowly Level**

On the one hand, "heel" denotes a lowly level, for the heel is the least perceptive limb. Like the insensitive heel, this era is characterized by an inability to perceive G-dliness in the world.

On the other hand, "ekev" also denotes Moshiach's footsteps, and that they can already be heard approaching. This second meaning suggests the most exalted spiritual level, when Moshiach's influence in the world can be felt and one can sense the impending Redemption.

This discrepancy is resolved when one considers the connection that exists between the highest and lowest spirituals levels, and between the beginning and the end of our service as Jews:

Performing the simplest mitzvot in a conscientious manner leads to the perfection of our service; likewise, observing the Torah's commandments even when our spiritual level is not what it should be allows us to attain ever higher levels of spirituality.

**The Period Right Before Moshiach’s Arrival**

The same principle holds true on the larger scale as well. It is precisely because the period right before Moshiach's arrival is so dark that we are able to hear his footsteps coming closer; furthermore, the self-sacrifice we must have nowadays in order to live as Jews is the vessel to contain the greatest revelation of Divine light which will occur with the coming Redemption.

At present we are experiencing the climax of this dichotomy, for although all signs clearly indicate that "Behold, Moshiach is coming," the full Redemption has not yet occurred. We therefore implore the Alm-ghty with the cry of "Till when?", which will prompt Him to end all contradictions forever with the establishment of the Messianic Era.

*Reprinted from the Parshat Eikev 5755 edition of the Lubavitch Youth Organization. Adapted from Sefer HaSichot of the Rebbe, Devarim 5751.Vol. 2.*

**Wanting Mashiah,**

**Wanting to be Better**

**By Rabbi Joey Haber**



Parashat Vaet’hanan begins with Moshe’s plea to Hashem, begging to be given the privilege of entering the Land of Israel.  Hashem had decreed that Moshe would die across the river, and not proceed into the land, and Moshe pleaded with Hashem to change the decree.  Hashem denied His request.

The Gemara raises the question of why Moshe so desperately wanted to enter Eretz Yisrael. “Did he need to eat its fruits?!” the Gemara asks.  It was clear and obvious that a righteous man like Moshe did not beg to go into the Land of Israel so he could enjoy Israel’s luscious produce.

**The Gemara’s Explanation of Moshe’s Desire**

Rather, the Gemara explains, Moshe wanted to enter the Land of Israel so he could perform all the *mitzvot*.

Some *mitzvot* apply only in the Land of Israel.  There are numerous obligations relevant to produce grown in Israel, which are not relevant to produce grown elsewhere.  Moshe wanted to enter the land so he could fulfill all the *mitzvot* – even those which can be performed only in the Land of Israel.

Moshe was already a great man, quite obviously.  He was very accomplished.  He had many, many *mitzvot* to his credit.  *But he wanted more.*  He wanted to be better.  He wanted to be even closer to Hashem.

**A Person is Always Eager for More Money**

When it comes to money and property, we never have enough. No matter how wealthy a person is, he is always eager to receive more. We all wish we had more, that we had nicer homes, nicer cars and nicer clothes, and we could go on nicer vacations.

Moshe had that same feeling about *kedushah* (holiness). He was already spiritually “wealthy.” But he wanted more. It wasn’t enough.

We just completed the period of mourning for the *Bet Ha’mikdash*. The Gemara teaches that one of the questions each of us will be asked after we leave this world is, ציפית לישועה – “Did you long for salvation?” We have a *religious obligation* – and a vitally important religious obligation – to long for *Mashiah*. Why?

Because we are to long for *kedushah*, for greater closeness to Hashem.

Yes, we are already fine, upstanding, observant Jews. We do many *mitzvot* that we should be proud of. But we are to relate to holiness and spirituality the way people relate to money. We should always want more. We should never be satisfied. *We need to long for Mashiah because we need to long for a greater connection to Hashem.*

**What is Your Priority in Life**

The question of ציפית לישועה is the question of, “What was your priority in life? What did you set out to accomplish each morning when you started your day? What did you strive for – more money, or more *kedushah*?”

This is, of course, a very high level. We all get caught up in our day-to-day struggles, and it is very difficult to long for spirituality the way we long for material success.

But we need to try. We need to try to refocus, to try to have our priorities straight, to try to make it our most important goal in life to be better people and better Jews, and to build a deeper connection with Hashem.

And if this is our goal, then we will really, really want *Mashiah* – because we will really, really want to make ourselves better.

*Reprinted from the Parashat Vaetchanan website of iTorah.com*

**Conversing with the Satan**

**By Rabbi Eliezer Ginsburg**



One of the great tzaddikim who lived during the years of Tach-V’Tat (1648) was Rav Shimshon of Ostropoli. Reportedly, he was of such righteous stature that he was even capable of speaking to the Satan. One such documented conversation occurred as he walked down the street during the month of Elul and noticed the Satan making his way as well down the street, yet he looked very broken.

“What’s the matter?” asked Rav Shimshon to the Satan.

**The Satan’s Explanation**

“What do you mean?” retorted the Satan. “Throughout the whole year, I entice people to sin and I gather together bundles of sins. Yet when Elul arrives, everyone is repenting and wiping their sins away and turning them into merits.”

After Yom Kippur, Rav Shimshon met the Satan and this time he was smiling and looked in a good mood. “Why are you in a good mood?” asked Rav Shimshon. “We just went through Yom Kippur, we all repented, and all of our sins turned into merits! You should be broken.”

“I made a deal with Hashem,” replied the Satan. “A ship will be docking at the port, and it is filled with Lulavim and Esrogim for Sukkos. I received permission to poke a hole in the ship, and water will fill it entirely and ruin everything!”

During the middle of Sukkos, Rav Shimshon met the Satan again, and now the Satan looked depressed.

“What now?” asked Rav Shimshon. “I thought you received permission to make a hole in the ship!”

**A Few Lulavim and**

**Esrogim Were Valid**

“I’ll tell you,” replied the Satan. “The top layer of the Lulavim and Esrogim did not get ruined, because the water rose throughout the ship, but didn’t reach the top deck. Those few Lulavim and Esrogim which remained on the top were valid, and a number of Jews gave away their wealth just to purchase their Lulav and Esrog. And not only that, but when they came to shul with their one Lulav and Esrog, everyone lined up and waited for the chance to shake it. They delayed their Yom Tov meal just to shake the Lulav and Esrog! These Jews beat me; they defeated me.”

What we are experiencing right now is a decree from Heaven. The Satan has received permission to take a small virus, something which we cannot even see, and spread it throughout the world. It has caused havoc and turmoil.

**What We as Jews Can**

**Do to Defeat the Satan**

But we, as the children of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, what do we do? We gather together in prayer, we make efforts to learn Torah in every which way we can, and we increase in our chessed.

We can be sure that as we continue strengthening ourselves with teshuva, Torah study, tefilla and chessed, the Satan is saying, “These Jews beat me; they defeated me…”

*Reprinted from the Parshas Mattos-Masei 5780 email of the Torahanytime.com Newsletter as* Compiled and Edited by Elan Perchik.

**Meraked - Sifting**

**By**[**Menachem Mendel Wineberg**](https://www.chabad.org/search/keyword_cdo/kid/22904/jewish/Wineberg-Menachem-Mendel.htm)



Sifting, the *av melachah* of *meraked* is forbidden on Shabbat.[1](javascript:doFootnote('1a4817714');) *Meraked*is similar to the *melachahs* of*borer* and *zoreh,* in that they all achieve the same result: separating items from undesired things with which they are mixed or attached.

The Talmud explains that since each was considered a unique step in the construction of the Mishkan they are counted individually, even though they all could have technically been included in one *melachah*.

*Meraked*specifically involves using a utensil, like a sieve, to separate foods or liquids from undesired things mixed with them. Although *zoreh*also involves the use of a utensil, i.e. pitchfork, it’s really the wind doing the separating; the pitchfork is just used to throw the produce into the wind.[2](javascript:doFootnote('2a4817714');)

**Toladot**

*Meshamer*, straining, is a common *toladah*of *meraked*.[3](javascript:doFootnote('3a4817714');) Only liquids which would not be consumed unless strained, are included in the biblical prohibition.[4](javascript:doFootnote('4a4817714');) For example, using a filter to separate granulated coffee from the coffee liquid, since one would not drink the coffee otherwise.

If, however, the drink is fully satisfactory as it is, filtering it is permitted. For example, one may remove the pulp from a bottle of orange juice by pouring it through a mesh filter since the juice can be enjoyed just as well with its pulp.

The logic behind this is that when the mixture is usually drunk without being filtered, it is considered one entity, and straining it is merely removing one part of the whole. When, however, the impurities are usually removed, the mixture is viewed not as one whole, but as a mixture of two different things, and removing one from the other is a bona fide *melachah.**[5](javascript:doFootnote('5a4817714');)*

**Meraked in the Mishkan**

Flour was sifted to make the *[lechem hapanim](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/2974301/jewish/The-Showbread-The-How-and-Why-of-the-Temple-Bread-Offering.htm" \o "The Showbread: The How and Why of the Temple Bread Offering)* (showbread), which was baked in the Mishkan.[6](javascript:doFootnote('6a4817714');) Others explain that herbs were crushed and sifted before being made into dyes used in the Mishkan.[7](javascript:doFootnote('7a4817714');)

**Common Activities to Avoid**

Straining salad dressing from the vegetables

Using a slotted spoon to serve a watery salad

Making coffee using a french press

Making matzah meal by pouring crushed matzah through a sifter

**FOOTNOTES**

[1.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/4817714/jewish/Meraked-Sifting.htm" \l "footnoteRef1a4817714) Shabbat 73a; See Torat Hamelachot Meraked note 2, where the issue of whether *meraked*only applies to things that grow from the ground is discussed.

[2.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/4817714/jewish/Meraked-Sifting.htm" \l "footnoteRef2a4817714)See Eglai Tal, Zoreh 3:3.

[3.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/4817714/jewish/Meraked-Sifting.htm" \l "footnoteRef3a4817714)There is a disagreement in the Talmud Shabbat 138a as to whether *meshamer* is forbidden under the *melachah*of *zoreh* or also *borer*. Shulchan Aruch Harav follows the view of the Rambam, who writes that *meshamer* can be included in both.

[4.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/4817714/jewish/Meraked-Sifting.htm" \l "footnoteRef4a4817714)If the mixture is sometimes consumed without filtering, doing so is only rabbinically forbidden.

[5.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/4817714/jewish/Meraked-Sifting.htm" \l "footnoteRef5a4817714)Ran and Rashba to Shabbat 139: See Torat Hamelachot Note 7 where this is discussed at length.

[6.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/4817714/jewish/Meraked-Sifting.htm" \l "footnoteRef6a4817714)This is the opinion of Rav Hai Gaon

[7.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/4817714/jewish/Meraked-Sifting.htm" \l "footnoteRef7a4817714)Rashi Shabbos 73a

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