



BEIT MIDRASH ZICHRON DOV TORONTO TORAH

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Candle lighting: 8:23 pm  Havdallah: 9:30 pm (50 minutes after שקיעה)



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The curse in the Blessings

Parshat Eikev contains one of the Torah's most consistent warnings. Moshe does not fear only what will happen when the Jewish people suffer. He fears what will happen when they succeed:

"Lest you eat and be satisfied, build good houses and dwell in them... your silver and gold increase, and everything you have increases. . . and your heart becomes proud, and you forget Hashem your God... and you will say in your heart, *kochi ve'otzem yadi*—my strength and the power of my hand made this" (Devarim 8:12-17)

Throughout Sefer Devarim, the Torah repeatedly returns to this danger. Prosperity is a blessing, but it carries within it the possibility of spiritual rebellion. In Ha'azinu, Moshe describes the tragic pattern in three words: "Vayishman Yeshurun vayiv'at"—Yeshurun grew fat and kicked.

Chazal understood this not as a one-time failure, but as a recurring pattern of history. The Sifrei surveys the generation of the Flood, Sodom, the generation of the desert, the Ten Tribes and Israel in its land, and concludes: "According to their abundance, they rebel." It adds that even in the days of Mashiach, rebellion may again emerge from "eating, drinking and tranquility" (Sifrei Devarim 318).

That is a frightening thought. Even geulah does not automatically redeem us from the dangers of prosperity. When our wealth tells us that we are secure because

of our own strength. We are in control. We built this.

But the Torah's answer is not poverty. The Torah does not ask us to reject success, initiative or material blessing. The reign of Shlomo HaMelech—the high point of Jewish national strength—was marked by peace, abundance and extraordinary prosperity. The ideal is not to remain weak so that we will remain religious.

This is the deeper meaning of the Torah's response to "*kochi ve'otzem yadi*—my strength and the power of my hand made me this wealth." The Torah does not answer: You did nothing; Hashem did everything. Instead it says: "Remember Hashem your God, for He is the One who gives you strength to create wealth."

The Ran in his drashot notes that the verse does not say that Hashem simply gives us wealth. It says that Hashem gives us the capacity to create it. Human talent, judgment, creativity, discipline and courage are real. The mistake is not believing that we possess strength; the mistake is forgetting where that strength comes from and for what purpose it was given.

Rav Kook develops this into a profound understanding of bitachon. There is a simple form of trust in which a person waits for Hashem to do things to us. But there is a more constant and mature form: trusting that Hashem

will work through us.

When a person is spiritually immature, natural success can hide God. The more he accomplishes, the more he imagines that it was their actions alone. At such moments, miracles may be necessary to break the illusion of self-sufficiency. But when a person or nation has reached greater spiritual maturity, even human effort itself becomes the place where Hashem is discovered. Every idea, decision, movement and achievement requires divine assistance. Our hishtadlut does not conceal God; it becomes the language through which God acts.

A small child experiences a parent's love when the parent places food directly into his mouth. An adult experiences a deeper love when the parent gives him the tools, confidence and opportunity to build a life of his own. So too, Hashem's greatest gift may not be doing something for us, but doing something through us.

That is how we break the cycle of "Vayishman Yeshurun vayiv'at." We do not reject prosperity. We sanctify it. We build homes, institutions, communities and a flourishing Jewish society—but we build them as partners with Hashem.

True bitachon is not passivity. It is a deep sense of mission and partnership with Ratzon Hashem: the knowledge that our strength is real because Hashem placed it within us, and that our success is meaningful only when it carries His purpose into the world.



Shadchanut Fees

Question: Yesterday was Tu B'Av, often called the "Jewish Valentine's Day." My wife and I thought it would be wonderful to try to set up two of our friends and help another Jewish home be built. Someone told us that besides being a great mitzvah, it can also be a source of income because a shadchan is entitled to a fee. That got us thinking—we never actually paid shadchanut fees ourselves! Is paying the shadchan really obligatory, or is it simply a nice gesture?

Answer: First of all, kol hakavod! Chazal teach (Bereishit Rabbah, Vayeitzei) that ever since Creation, Hashem is "busy making matches." By helping bring people together, you are emulating Hashem Himself and taking part in one of the greatest acts of building Jewish families and strengthening Klal Yisrael.

The halachot of shadchanut fees are extensive, but here is a brief overview.

The concept of paying a shadchan is discussed primarily by the Rema, which suggests that it developed as a well-established Ashkenazi custom. It is not mentioned by the **Shulchan Aruch** and in practice, paying formal shadchanut fees remains far more common in

Ashkenazi communities than in many Sephardic ones.

The Rema (Choshen Mishpat 87:39) treats a claim for shadchanut fees like any other monetary claim. The poskim offer two primary explanations for this obligation. One view is that a shadchan is like hiring any professional who provides a valuable service and is therefore entitled to payment. Another view is based on the principle of **neheneh**—since the shadchan brought significant benefit to the couple, they should compensate the person who made that possible.

Who is responsible for paying—the parents or the chattan and kallah?

The Avnei Nezer rules that the obligation belongs to the couple themselves. He illustrates this with an interesting case: A shadchan introduced Rachel to Reuven, but the match did not work out. Reuven later realized that Rachel would be an excellent match for his brother, Shimon, and the two eventually married. The Avnei Nezer rules that the original shadchan cannot claim

payment, because his efforts benefited Reuven—not Shimon, who ultimately married Rachel.

The **Pitchei Choshen**, however, argues that in communities where parents are the ones arranging and managing shidduchim, they are effectively the ones who "hired" the shadchan and are therefore responsible for the payment.

Rav Asher Weiss explains that this disagreement may depend on the very basis of the obligation. If the fee is payment for hiring professional services, then the one who engaged the shadchan—often the parents—should pay. If, however, the obligation is based on the benefit received, then the chattan and kallah, who gained the most, would be responsible.

In your case, the best approach is to ask your local rabbi about the accepted custom in your community—whether shadchanut fees are customary, how much is generally given, and who is expected to pay. Either way, expressing gratitude to the person who helped build your home is both appropriate and meaningful. May Hashem bless you with a lifetime of happiness together, and may you merit to help establish many more Jewish homes in the future.



The Birth Pangs of Redemption

Based on Kima Kima by Rav Chaim Drukman

The road toward geulah is not free of pain. At times, the challenges facing Am Yisrael can seem so severe that they raise a painful question: can a process of redemption really unfold through such darkness and difficulty?

Chazal describe the period preceding Mashiach as **chevlei Mashiach**, the birth pangs of Mashiach. The image is deliberate. Birth pangs are painful and demanding, but they are part of the process through which new life emerges. So too, Rav Chaim Drukman explains, the return to Eretz Yisrael and the rebuilding of Jewish national life involve external enemies, internal divisions, spiritual confusion, and moments when it seems that progress has slowed or reversed.

But just as after the pain of childbirth a child is born, so too from the birth pangs of the nation emerges and is revealed the soul of the nation.

This helps explain a difficult Gemara in Sanhedrin. The Gemara tells us that Ulla said, "ייתי ולא איחמיניה" — "May Mashiach come, but may I not see him." Rabba said the same. On the other hand, Rav Yosef said, "ייתי ואזכי דאיתיב בטולא דכופיתא דחמריה" — "May he come, and may I merit even to sit in the shadow of the dung of his donkey."

These were not people who doubted Mashiach or did not want redemption. Ulla and Rabba longed for the coming of Mashiach. But they understood that the period of chevlei Mashiach would be one of immense difficulty, and they feared the suffering and spiritual tests that would accompany it.

Rav Yosef saw the same reality. He too understood the pain of the process. Yet he declared that even to be present at its lowest and most difficult stage would be a privilege. Even the smallest connection to the arrival of Mashiach was worth it.

This is an important perspective for our generation.

We do not minimize the challenges facing Am Yisrael. We do not ignore the pain of war, terror, loss, division, and the weakening of Jewish identity. These are serious matters, and they demand our tefillah, our action, and our commitment.

But Rav Drukman warns against allowing those challenges to lead us to despair. The existence of hardship does not mean that geulah has stopped. The fact that the road is difficult does not mean that we are travelling in the wrong direction.

The GRA's *Kol HaTor* teaches that we must know מראש that, in the period of ikveta deMeshicha, "מכל צרה יוצאת ישועה, והישועה באה מתוך צרה" — from every difficulty salvation emerges, and salvation itself comes through difficulty.

Chazal teach that Eretz Yisrael is acquired through yissurim. That does not mean that suffering is desirable. It means that the challenges are not proof that the acquisition has failed. They can be part of what makes the attachment to the Land real, deep, and lasting.

The response to difficulty is therefore not retreat. "חלילה לנו לסגת אחור," Rav Drukman writes. We must continue to build, strengthen Torah, deepen our connection to Eretz Yisrael, and raise children with faith in Am Yisrael and its future.

The demand is an emunah demand. When reality becomes difficult, we may not allow the difficulty to weaken our belief that we are living through a process of geulah.

The birth pangs are painful. But they are not the end of the story. They are the signs that something new is being born.