

# SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

P PARASHAT EKEB

Haftarah: Yeshayahu 49:14-51:3

AUGUST 11-12, 2017 20 AB 5777 DEDICATION

DEDICATION: Le'Refuah Shelemah Elisheva Bat Esther

Happy 4<sup>th</sup> Birthday to Chantelle Bibi – One of the best birthday presents one could imagine !

To subscribe or to unsubscribe, please reply to  
[ShabbatShalomNewsletter@gmail.com](mailto:ShabbatShalomNewsletter@gmail.com)  
 Newsletter archives now at [BenaiAsher.Org](http://BenaiAsher.Org)

Daily Minyan Mon – Thurs at 979 Third Avenue, 17th Floor,  
 Artistic Frame at 4:00PM – Please join us! 212-289-2100 –  
 Mincha– The most important tefilah of the day –Give us 11  
 minutes and we'll give you the World To Come!

## The Big Things

This week when we read the portion of Ekev, many rabbis will include in their sermons the importance of not treading upon the little things in life. The question many will have is, how do we define the big things and how do we define the little things. And when we get on to the big things, we need to ask, what about the really big things? What if you or I had the opportunity to do a really big thing, keeping in mind that doing really big things requires tremendous effort and typically tremendous risk, would we do it?

Time management requires me to ignore the dozens of “you gotta see this” emails and messages I get each day with links to little videos and articles. I imagine just reading those might take up an entire day. But there's one place that always gets my attention, it is our family chat. And this evening as I was working on the newsletter, I went to answer the phone and saw a post by my daughter-in-law Lauren.

Lauren posted a very short video (see link ) which opens with the scene of an audience sitting in a large theater. Everyone in the audience suddenly rises with the exception of an older man in the front row. The video circles the man, and explains that he does not realize that everyone in the audience is there because of him and they are standing for him. Who is this man? Who are these people? And what did this man do?

The minute long video explains that the man kept a huge secret for 50 years, but suddenly that secret was revealed.

This man almost single-handedly saved 669 children from Hitler's gas chambers during the holocaust and helped them find new homes in England. Almost all of their parents would perish at Auschwitz, but the children were given the opportunity to build new lives.

The man never mentioned what he had done, perhaps haunted by those he could not save. But 50 years later his wife found a scrapbook listing everything done with the details of each and every child. His wife gave the scrapbook to a journalist.

In this short video we learn that the audience is made up exclusively of the children he saved. They never knew who was responsible. Here they all came together to say thank you. It's almost impossible to watch this without shedding a tear. Although a movie was later made and many interviews were done, I never heard of this man nor of this story and I'm sure I never heard many other stories of heroes of the Holocaust. But it is definitely important to know it and to share it and to learn of and be inspired by such people. I thank Lauren for bringing it to our attention. This truly is a big thing!

The Jerusalem Post wrote on July 3<sup>rd</sup> 2015 .... It is hard to think of a more altruistic act of kindness than Sir Nicholas Winton's heroic effort to save hundreds of Jewish refugee children from Czechoslovakia in 1939.

Winton, who died in Maidenhead, England, this week at the age of 106, had not intended to mount the urgent rescue mission. The then 29-year-old stockbroker had been looking forward to spending his Christmas 1938 break skiing in Switzerland.

That was before he received a phone call from an old friend by the name of Martin Blake, who was in Prague as an associate of the British Committee for Refugees from Czechoslovakia, asking Winton to lend a helping hand.

Seeing the desperate plight of the Jews in the German- controlled Sudetenland region of Czechoslovakia, Winton immediately set up a makeshift office in his hotel room in Prague and began receiving parents who were desperate to get their children to the safety of Britain – the only country that was willing to take in Jewish children from Nazi-ruled countries, but with several provisos. They had to come without their parents, the children – or kinder – could not be aged above 17, and a £50 guarantee, per child, was required to cover the costs of their eventual return to their country of origin when that became possible. Naturally, no one considered

the possibility that the children's parents would not still be alive at that point.

Winton applied to the Home Office in Britain for visas for the children, and when the infamous British red tape slowed things down he had the requisite papers forged.

There was much wheeling and dealing in Czechoslovakia, including with high ranking Gestapo officers, to facilitate the exit of the kinder, but eventually Winton managed to register 900 children for transfer to the UK.

In the event, 669 children got out, with the last leaving in late July 1939. One train, which was due to leave Prague on September 1, was not allowed out, since Germany had invaded Poland and World War II had started.

The failure to get the last transport out of Czechoslovakia rankled Winton and was the reason he never told anyone about his heroic exploits, not even his wife, Grete.

The story only came to light in the late 1980s, after Grete Winton discovered a box full of papers and journals relating to the rescue operation in the attic. The BBC subsequently made a documentary about the operation and Winton became a reluctant celebrity. Queen Elizabeth bestowed several honors on him, including a knighthood in 2002, and he received the Czech Republic's highest honor. The Czechs even put his name forward for the Nobel Peace Prize.

Hugo Meron, 85, who lives in Tel Aviv, was on the last "Winton train" in July 1939, together with his younger brother. All the rest of Meron's family, other than an uncle, perished.

"Nicky was an amazing person," says Meron who, like the rest of the Czech kinder, only learned of Winton's role in his survival half a century later. "I was in touch with him, and I spoke to him the last time three weeks ago. He didn't want to go on living. He had had enough. His mind was clear but he was fed up. His body had given out."

Several years after discovering the identity of his savior, Meron got together with nine other "Winton children" who had made aliya and brought Winton over to Israel with the intention of having him recognized as a Righteous Among the Gentiles by Yad Vashem.

The plan fell through because of a couple of technicalities. "We didn't know the reasons at the time, but one was not a very good one," observes Meron. "They said they do not give the award to anyone who has Jewish blood in them according to the Nuremberg rules, because his parents and grandparents were Jewish. I think his parents were baptized and changed their name to Winton in order to get work in England. The other reason Yad Vashem gave was a good one, that the Righteous Among the Gentiles award is only given to people who save Jews in areas under German occupation. In December 1938, the Germans had not yet invaded Czechoslovakia."

Ramat Hasharon resident Kurt Stern is the same age as Meron and also left Czechoslovakia on the July 1939 kindertransport. "Nicky was a real hero and truly righteous person," says Stern. "And he was so humble. I went to see him at his home in England several times and I stayed in contact with him. I cannot possibly express my gratitude for what he did for me. It's a pity there weren't another 5,000 like Nicky."

Aliza Tenenbaum was not a "Winton kind." She made it to England on a Kindertransport out of Vienna in 1939 and attended last year's event in London, which marked the 75th anniversary of the start of the Kindertransport operation.

Winton and the kinder in attendance were received by Prince Charles at his London residence. Tenenbaum, who organizes all the Israeli kinder reunions and other activities, had met Winton at a previous gathering, in Israel.

"When Nicky was 100 years old, the kinder in Israel organized an event for him at the Tel Aviv Cinematheque," she recalls. "It was very moving to meet him. Can you imagine, after all the wonderful things he achieved, he didn't talk about what he did in Czechoslovakia because he didn't get that last train of children out. That was a mark of the man."

### **The Power of Good - The Nicholas Winton Story The Story**

In December 1938, Nicholas Winton, a 29-year-old London stockbroker, was about to leave for a skiing holiday in Switzerland, when he received a phone call from his friend Martin Blake asking him to cancel his holiday and immediately come to Prague: "I have a most interesting assignment and I need your help. Don't bother bringing your skis." When Winton arrived, he was asked to help in the camps, in which

thousands of refugees were living in appalling conditions.

**SIDEBAR: MUNICH AGREEMENT**

*The Munich Conference was held September 29-30, 1938, following Hitler's demand to annex the Sudetenland, a region in Czechoslovakia populated largely by ethnic Germans. The resulting crisis led Britain and France, who had adopted a policy of appeasement, to pressure Czechoslovakia to accede to Hitler's demands. No Czech representative was present at the conference, and the agreement led to the destruction of the Czech state. Following the conference, Winston Churchill warned: "Do not suppose that this is the end. This is only the beginning of the reckoning."*

In October 1938, after the ill-fated Munich Agreement between Germany and the Western European powers, the Nazis annexed a large part of western Czechoslovakia, the Sudetenland. Winton was convinced that the German occupation of the rest of the country would soon follow. To him and many others, the outbreak of war seemed inevitable. The news of Kristallnacht, the bloody pogrom (violent attack) against German and Austrian Jews on the nights of November 9 and 10, 1938, had reached Prague. Winton decided to take steps.

"I found out that the children of refugees and other groups of people who were enemies of Hitler weren't being looked after. I decided to try to get permits to Britain for them. I found out that the conditions which were laid down for bringing in a child were chiefly that you had a family that was willing and able to look after the child, and £50, which was quite a large sum of money in those days, that was to be deposited at the Home Office. The situation was heartbreaking. Many of the refugees hadn't the price of a meal. Some of the mothers tried desperately to get money to buy food for themselves and their children. The parents desperately wanted at least to get their children to safety when they couldn't manage to get visas for the whole family. I began to realize what suffering there is when armies start to march."

In terms of his mission, Winton was not thinking in small numbers, but of thousands of children. He was ready to start a mass evacuation. "Everybody in Prague said, 'Look, there is no organization in Prague to deal with refugee children, nobody will let the children go on their own, but if you want to have a go, have a go.' And I think there is nothing that can't be done if it is fundamentally reasonable."

**SIDEBAR: OPERATION KINDERTRANSPORT**

*On December 2, 1938, Jewish and Christian agencies began rescuing German and Austrian Jewish children on Kindertransporten (children's transports). The "Refugee Children's Movement," a group under the auspices of the Central British Fund for German Jewry or CBF (which later became the World Jewish Relief organization), urged concerned Christians and Jews to support "Operation Kindertransport." An extensive fund-raising effort was organized and the British public responded generously, raising half a million British pounds in six months. A large portion of this money was used to care for the children who were rescued. Between December 1938 and May 1940, almost 10,000 children (infants to teenagers) were rescued and given shelter at farms, hostels, camps, and in private homes in Britain. However, this effort did not include the children of Czechoslovakia; and this is why the work of Nicholas Winton was so vital.*

Independently of Operation Kindertransport (see sidebar), Nicholas Winton set up his own rescue operation. At first, Winton's office was a dining room table at his hotel in Wenceslas Square in Prague. Anxious parents, who gradually came to understand the danger they and their children were in, came to Winton and placed the future of their children into his hands. Soon, an office was set up on Vorsilka Street, under the charge of Trevor Chadwick. Thousands of parents heard about this unique endeavor and hundreds of them lined up in front of the new office, drawing the attention of the Gestapo. Winton's office distributed questionnaires and registered the children. Winton appointed Trevor Chadwick and Bill Barazetti to look after the Prague end when he returned to England. Many further requests for help came from Slovakia, a region east of Prague.

Winton contacted the governments of nations he thought could take in the children. Only Sweden and his own government said yes. Great Britain promised to accept children under the age of 18 as long as he found homes and guarantors who could deposit £50 for each child to pay for their return home. Because he wanted to save the lives of as many of the endangered children as possible, Winton returned to London and planned the transport of children to Great Britain. He worked at his regular job on the Stock Exchange by day, and then devoted late afternoons and evenings to his rescue efforts, often working far into the night. He made up an organization, calling it "The British Committee for Refugees from Czechoslovakia, Children's Section." The committee consisted of himself, his mother, his secretary and a few volunteers.

Winton had to find funds to use for repatriation costs, and a foster home for each child. He also had to raise money to pay for the transports when the children's parents could not cover the costs. He advertised in British newspapers, and in churches and synagogues. He printed groups of children's photographs all over Britain. He felt certain that seeing the children's photos would convince potential sponsors and foster families to offer assistance. Finding sponsors was only one of the endless problems in obtaining the necessary documents from German and British authorities.

"Officials at the Home Office worked very slowly with the entry visas. We went to them urgently asking for permits, only to be told languidly, 'Why rush, old boy? Nothing will happen in Europe.' This was a few months before the war broke out. So we forged the Home Office entry permits."

On March 14, 1939, Winton had his first success: the first transport of children left Prague for Britain by airplane. Winton managed to organize seven more transports that departed from Prague's Wilson Railway Station. The groups then crossed the English Channel by boat and finally ended their journey at London's Liverpool Street station. At the station, British foster parents waited to collect their charges. Winton, who organized their rescue, was set on matching the right child to the right foster parents.

The last trainload of children left on August 2, 1939, bringing the total of rescued children to 669. It is impossible to imagine the emotions of parents sending their children to safety, knowing they may never be reunited, and impossible to imagine the fears of the children leaving the lives they knew and their loved ones for the unknown.

On September 1, 1939 the biggest transport of children was to take place, but on that day Hitler invaded Poland, and all borders controlled by Germany were closed. This put an end to Winton's rescue efforts. Winton has said many times that the vision that haunts him most to this day is the picture of hundreds of children waiting eagerly at Wilson Station in Prague for that last aborted transport.

"Within hours of the announcement, the train disappeared. None of the 250 children aboard was seen again. We had 250 families waiting at Liverpool Street that day in vain. If the train had been a day earlier, it would have come through. Not a single one of those children was heard of again, which is an awful feeling."

The significance of Winton's mission is verified by the fate of that last trainload of children. Moreover, most

of the parents and siblings of the children Winton saved perished in the Holocaust.

After the war, Nicholas Winton didn't tell anyone, not even his wife Grete about his wartime rescue efforts. In 1988, a half century later, Grete found a scrapbook from 1939 in their attic, with all the children's photos, a complete list of names, a few letters from parents of the children to Winton and other documents. She finally learned the whole story. Today the scrapbooks and other papers are held at Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority, in Israel.

Grete shared the story with Dr. Elisabeth Maxwell, a Holocaust historian and the wife of newspaper magnate Robert Maxwell. Robert Maxwell arranged for his newspaper to publish articles on Winton's amazing deeds. Winton's extraordinary story led to his appearance on Esther Rantzen's BBC television program, *That's Life*. In the studio, emotions ran high as Winton's "children" introduced themselves and expressed their gratitude to him for saving their lives. Because the program was aired nationwide, many of the rescued children also wrote to him and thanked him. Letters came from all over the world, and new faces still appear at his door, introducing themselves by names that match the documents from 1939.

The rescued children, many now grandparents, still refer to themselves as "Winton's children." Among those saved are the British film director Karel Reisz (*The French Lieutenant's Woman*, *Isadora*, and *Sweet Dreams*), Canadian journalist and news correspondent for CBC, Joe Schlesinger (originally from Slovakia), Lord Alfred Dubs (a former Minister in the Blair Cabinet), Lady Milena Grenfell-Baines (a patron of the arts whose father, Rudolf Fleischmann, saved Thomas Mann from the Nazis), Dagmar Šimová (a cousin of the former U.S. Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright), Tom Schrecker, (a Reader's Digest manager), Hugo Marom (a famous aviation consultant, and one of the founders of the Israeli Air Force), and Vera Gissing (author of *Pearls of Childhood*) and coauthor of *Nicholas Winton and the Rescued Generation*.

Winton has received many acknowledgements for his humanitarian pre-war deeds. He received a letter of thanks from the late Ezer Weizman, a former president of the State of Israel. He was made an Honorary Citizen of Prague. In 1993, Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II, awarded him the MBE (Member of the British Empire), and on October 28, 1998, Václav Havel, then president of the Czech Republic, awarded him the Order of T.G. Masaryk at Hradcany Castle for his heroic achievement. On December 31,

2002, Winton received a knighthood from Queen Elizabeth II for his services to humanity. Winton's story is also the subject of two films by Czech filmmaker Matej Mináč: *All My Loved Ones* and the award-winning *Nicholas Winton: The Power of Good*.

Today, Sir Nicholas Winton, age 97, resides at his home in Maidenhead, Great Britain. He still wears a ring given to him by some of the children he saved. It is inscribed with a line from the Talmud, the book of Jewish law. It reads:

"Save one life, save the world."

### The Magic Formula Rabbi Meyer Laniado

Have you ever been drawn to a book or internet ad that had as its title: "Six Steps to Losing Twenty Pounds" or "Two Strategies to Triple Your Business in Six Months"? Many people have, and that is why these strategies have sold so well. Why shouldn't you want the quick cheat sheet for life, the tips and tricks that will make you successful?

When reading these books, articles, blogs or webinars, you will find that they often state that results are not guaranteed and will vary based on effort. Some may be deterred by this fact, but most will still read or listen. What differentiates the successful from the unsuccessful is their implementation of these ideas. Those who do not fully follow the steps, skipping some or being 'creative' and making additions, blame the system when they fail. The fault, however, lies not with the system but their inability to follow it. Those who follow the system, like those taking coaching advice from an expert or medical advice from a doctor, will progress. The Torah gives us a system for success, yet many decide that they know better than the 'system.' They have decided that some *misvot* are for them, but others are not. Some people may 'do more' in one particular *misva*, but they are actually subtracting by not following the instruction of the Torah. This guide, the Torah, and the benefits of following its instruction are emphasized numerous times, and should be readily apparent to those who read the Humash<sup>1</sup>.

*Bore Olam* has promised that if we follow His *misvot*, we will, as a nation, live prosperously on the land of Israel. "And now, Yisrael, listen to the statutes and to the judgments which I teach you to do, so that you may live, and go in and possess the land which the Lord, God of your forefathers, is giving you (Debarim 4:1)." He then says clearly that one must follow the instructions, exactly as they were given, without

changing any iota of it. "Do not add to which I command you, nor diminish from it, to observe the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you (Debarim 4:2)." One who believes they know better than the Torah will make edits; one who trusts the system will follow it exactly as prescribed. Results may not show right away, but with time there will be growth. It is important to keep in mind that it is not a magic formula; it is a guide to implement with hard work and dedication.

The *mezuzah* is an example of a *misva* for which the Torah states explicitly that the reward is length of days on the land, and various *midrashim* express the protective benefits of having a *mezuzah* outside of one's home<sup>2</sup>. This seems like a magic formula. Set up the *mezuzah*, and you will gain length of days, and God will "not allow the Angel of Destruction to enter"<sup>3</sup>. Indeed, many viewed the *mezuzah* as a plug-and-play protective mechanism. That is why they 'upgraded' with images and names of angels on the *mezuzah* parchment. They presumed this would add extra security. For example, Rabbi Eliezer Metz, one of the Tosafists and the author of *Sefer Yereim*, writes the following at the end of his section of *hilkhot mezuzah*:

Besides for the halakhot...the world is accustomed to adding additional protection to the home by writing at the end of the lines images and names of all sorts of angels. This does not detract, nor is it a *misva*, but an additional security measure.

Examples of these images and names of angels being written on *mezuzot* can be found in siddurim of the 11/12<sup>th</sup> century including the siddur Mahzor Vitri. This custom became widespread and was one Rambam saw the need to eradicate. He writes in his *Mishne Torah* the following:

"... those who write names of angels or holy names, or verses, or signs on the inside, are included with those who have no share in the World to Come."

He then goes further:

For those fools not only do away with the *misvah*, but they take a great *misvah*, which contains the unity of God's name and the concepts of loving and serving Him, and they make it into a good luck charm for their own benefit, based on whatever foolishness enters their hearts that they think will help them with the futilities of the world (*Hilkhot Mezuzah* 5:4).

Rambam not only sees these additions as subtracting from the *misva* of *mezuzah*, he sees them as

<sup>1</sup> Some examples include Debarim 4:40, 5:25, 5:29, 6:18, 8:1, 11:9, 11:21, 12:28

<sup>2</sup> Mekhilta 11, tBavli Menahot 33b

<sup>3</sup> Mekhilta 11

detrimental to a person's *nefesh*. These behaviors are an outgrowth of living in a false reality and believing that one can manipulate existence through incantations, drawings, and other rituals invoking the powers of the supernatural. It is not a 'nice thing to do,' but rather extremely harmful, placing oneself at risk of losing his portion of *olam haBa*. This person no longer serves *Hashem*, but serves his own interest, doing what he imagines is best above and beyond the instruction of God. He takes a vehicle for serving *Bore Olam* and developing *ahavat Hashem* and *emuna*, and turns it into an amulet for his personal benefit.

In contrast, the *mezuzah* can offer protection, as the *Hakhamim* have indicated, but through allowing oneself to absorb the content, the message, contained in the *mezuzah*. Many follow the custom noted in the *Rema* and place their hand on the mezuzah and say: "God, guard my going out etc." This is a *tefilla*, directly to God, asking for His protection. One is clearly recognizing Him and expressing his *emuna* in Him as his protector.

Similarly, Rambam writes:

"each time that one enters and leaves [his home] he should concentrate on the Oneness of the Name of the Holy One, Blessed be He, and remember His love, and be aroused from his sleep and his mistaken [involvement] in the meaningless use of time. And one must know that the only thing which lasts forever is the knowledge of God (Hilkhot Mezuzah 6:13).

The focus is on the message of the content, not on the shape, sound, or order of the letters or words. The protection the *Hakhamim* refer to is from living a life with the knowledge of *Yihud Hashem* as stated in *Shema, Hashem ehad*, God is one. Additionally, as we recite in the rest of the first paragraph of *veAhabta* as well as in the second paragraph *veHaya*, being dedicated to Him and His *misvot*. It is the internalization of these messages and living a life in the path of *Hashem* that will offer us the protection the *pasuq* is referring to.

Rabbi Hirsch articulated this well:

Only in as far as the contents of the mezuzah achieve an effect on the minds and feelings of the household so that it does regulate their lives in consonance with those contents, can they expect protection and support in all the vicissitudes of domestic life from God, the Supreme "All-sufficing One" with which Name custom has adorned the outside of the mezuzah (Debarim 6:9).

The *mezuzah* indeed does help a person find protection. It helps him guard himself from transgressing. Every time a person enters or exits his home, or even a room in his home, he will be

reminded of *Hashem* and separate himself from wrongdoing. He will be reminded that his behavior should be proper both in the streets when he leaves his home and in his house when he is in private.

The *mezuzah*, along with other *misvot*, are reminders of *Hashem* and our purpose on this earth. A life lived with *Hashem* in mind at all times is one with *hashgaha peratit*, divine providence. As stated in Tehillim: "For he yearns for Me, and I shall rescue him; I shall fortify him because he knows My name (Tehillim 91:14)." The *mezuzah* and the following of other *misvot* will be responded to by *Bore Olam* with long life, prosperity, and protection, but that is only if one follows them as instructed and internalizes the messages, with the intention to serve *Bore Olam*<sup>4</sup>.

### Rav Kook on the Perasha

Eikev: Four Blessings After Eating

"When you eat and are sated, you must bless the Lord your God for the good land that He has given you." (Deut. 8:10)

The Torah does not specify the exact text of Birkat Hamazon, the blessing recited after eating a meal. The Talmud, however, informs us that it comprises four blessings, authored over a period of a thousand years:

Moses composed the first blessing, Ha-Zahn ("the One Who provides sustenance for the entire world"), when the manna fell in the desert.

Joshua composed the second blessing, Al Ha'Aretz ("For the Land"), when the Jewish people entered the Land of Israel. David and Solomon composed the third blessing, Boneih Yerushalayim ("the One Who rebuilds Jerusalem"). David, who established Jerusalem as his capital, wrote, "Your people Israel and Your city Jerusalem." And Solomon, who built the Temple, added, "The great and holy Temple." The Sages of Yavneh<sup>1</sup> composed the final blessing, HaTov ve-haMeitiv ("The good King and Benefactor"), to commemorate the miracle that occurred with the dead of the city of Beitar. These Jews were killed by the Romans during the failed Bar Kochba revolt of 135 C.E. For months, the Roman authorities refused to let them be buried, but miraculously, their bodies did not rot.

The Order of the Blessings: Is there a pattern to the order of these four blessings? Rav Kook explained that the blessings follow a clear progression: from the

<sup>4</sup> Kesef Mishne Hilkhot Mezuzah 5:4

needs of the individual to those of the nation; and from our physical needs to our spiritual aspirations.<sup>2</sup>

The very act of eating contains a certain spiritual danger. Over-indulgence in gastronomic pleasures can lower one's goals to the pursuit of sensual gratification and physical enjoyment. The Torah therefore provided a remedy - a special prayer to be recited after the meal. Birkat Hamazon is "a ladder resting on the ground yet reaching the Heavens," a spiritual act that enables us to raise ourselves from petty, self-absorbed materialism to lofty spiritual aspirations.

In order to attain this higher awareness, we must climb the 'ladder' step by step:

The first rung of the ladder relates to our own personal physical welfare.

On the next rung, we express our concern for the physical welfare of the nation.

On the third rung, we focus on the spiritual well-being of the nation.

Lastly, we aspire to be a "light unto the nations," a holy people who influence and uplift all who were created in God's image.

This progression is accurately reflected in the blessings of Birkat Hamazon. First, we recite the blessing of "Who sustains the world," composed when the manna fell. This prayer corresponds to the physical needs of each individual, just as the manna-bread sustained each Israelite in the barren desert. The manna also provided loftier benefits, as it spiritually uplifted all who witnessed this miracle. But its primary function was to provide for each individual's physical needs.

The second level — concern for the physical welfare of the entire nation — is the subject of the second blessing, "For the Land." When Joshua led the people into their own land, the Land of Israel, he set the stage for the establishment of a nation with all of the usual national assets: security and defense, self-government, agriculture, economy, natural resources, and so on.

Concern for the spiritual well-being of the Jewish people is the theme of the third blessing, which deals with the spiritual center of the Jewish people: Jerusalem. King David composed the first part, "For Your people Israel and Your city Jerusalem," expressing our prayers for the spiritual state and unity of the Jewish people.

King Solomon added, "For the great holy Temple." This reflects the highest goal: the spiritual elevation

of all humanity. When dedicating the Temple, Solomon prayed that this holy building — "a house of prayer for all nations" — would ensure "that all the peoples of the world will know that God is the Lord, there is no other" (I Kings 8:60).

In this way, Birkat Hamazon bestows profound spiritual value to our private meals — a prayer that guides us, step by step, to a holier world.

### The Promise of Beitar

One might become discouraged, however, when faced with the bitter reality of the exile and the current state of the Jewish people. Therefore, the rabbis of Yavneh, following the destruction of the Temple and the failed Bar Kochba revolt, composed the final blessing, "The good King and Benefactor."

With the fall of the great city of Beitar, the last hopes for Jewish independence were crushed for thousands of years. Nonetheless, the Sages saw tremendous significance in the fact that the dead did not decompose, and were eventually given a proper burial. This was a Heavenly sign that even if the nation of Israel appears to be lifeless, struck down by the sword of our enemies, we nonetheless retain our spiritual essence, like an inner fire smoldering imperceptibly inside a black piece of coal, cool to the touch. We are confident that we will yet attain our highest aspirations, despite the many years we may have to wait. Just as those who sleep in the dust will return to life in the appointed hour, so too, the Jewish people will rise to national greatness in the end of days.

(Sapphire from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. II, p. 218)

1 Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai transferred the Sanhedrin from Jerusalem to Yavneh after Jerusalem's destruction at the hand of the Romans in 70 C.E.

2 A similar progression may be found in the requests of the Amidah prayer.

### Summary of the Perasha

There is a fundamental pasook in this week's parasha that I would like to point out. Hashem/Moshe tells Benei Israel "ve'yadata yim lebabecha (you should know in your heart) kiy ka'asher yeyaser ish eht beno (just like a parent disciplines his child), Hashem Elokecha meyasereka (that is how Hashem disciplines us)". Just like a parent disciplines his child out of love and concern for his child, because he only wants what is best for him, so too that is how Hashem disciplines us. When a 3 year old runs in the street and the parent hits his child, it is not because

he is mad at the child. It is not a punishment. He doesn't want to hit the child. But he has to show the child that the street is bad for him. The child has to know the street is dangerous. And so the parent hits the child to cause him to stay away from a path that is bad for him. So too, that is how Hashem disciplines us. When, lo alenu, someone has a difficulty in business or in life in general, the Torah is telling us that this is Hashem trying to guide us and direct us down the right path in life. This is our loving father bringing us closer to him so he can give us good in the end.

Ekev - Moshe recounts the sin of the egel and tells Benei Israel if we follow the mitzvot we will have beracha in the land

1- Moshe reminds Benei Israel that if we keep our covenant with Hashem we will have beracha, destroy our enemies, and inherit a great land

2- Moshe warns Benei Israel that they will have success in Israel and forget Hashem and that if they forget Hashem and worship other Gods they will get destroyed.

3- Moshe goes on to rebuke Benei Israel because they angered Hashem many times including the sin of the egel

4- The events following the egel. Moshe goes up to ask for forgiveness and receive the new luchot.

5- Moshe again tells Benei Israel to make sure to fear Hashem, love him, and follow in his ways, particularly because they personally witnessed the miracles of Hashem.

6- The 2nd parasha of shema (we will only see beracha from the land if we listen to the mitzvot).

7- Moshe again says that if we follow the mitzvot Hashem will drive out the nations of Kenaan and make the nations of the world fear us.

#### FROM THE RABBIS OF THE JERSEY SHORE

"And to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul." (Debarim 10:12)

Rashi explains in the first paragraph of the Shema, "With all your soul: even if He takes your soul." Sometimes a person can show his love of Hashem when he is being taken to die. This was done many times in our history.

R' Avraham Obstfeld endured the Gehinom known as Auschwitz for two long years. In the camp, it became routine for inmates to be called out each day by their numbers. Those who were selected were instructed to line up the next morning to be sent to the gas chambers, never to be heard from again.

One day his number was called. A shiver went down his spine. As he went to sleep that night there was a prayer on his lips. He prayed to be saved, while preparing himself for the inevitable.

The next morning as he stood in the death lineup, he reached into his pocket and felt something. It was a piece of bread. He clutched the precious food, which was spotted by a fellow inmate in line.

"Please," begged the man, "give me the bread. I'm starving. Give it to me please."

R' Avraham decided, with just minutes to live, here was an opportunity for him to perform one final misvah. He even recited a berachah, "Asher kideshanu bemisvotav vesivanu al misvat sedakah." As the final words emerged from his mouth, he handed the piece of bread to his fellow inmate.

The men began to head toward the gas chambers, when a Nazi guard suddenly appeared and stopped the group. He announced that an urgent job had just come up and men were needed for the task. He began to select men for this group, choosing R' Avraham among them. This, it turned out, ultimately led to his liberation. He never made it to the dreaded gas chambers.

His escape from the clutches of death, he would say, was in the merit of what he thought was his final act of sedakah. He left a legacy for his family and a lesson that even at death's door, salvation is possible. Shabbat Shalom. Rabbi Reuven Semah

"And you will remember that it is Hashem who gives you the strength to do this great deed." (Debarim 8:18)

Whenever a person accomplishes anything, he may be tempted to think that he was responsible for his success, so the Torah tells us that it is Hashem who gave you the strength to succeed. The Targum adds a very important word to the verse. He says, "You shall remember that it is Hashem Who gives you the idea which leads you to succeed."

This teaches us an amazing lesson. Even the idea itself which sets off an entire chain reaction, and ultimately leads to accomplishments is from Hashem. How many times are we in a tough situation looking for answers when all of a sudden, an idea "pops into our head" which gives us a way out? Every time a person thinks of something to do or remembers something important, he should thank Hashem for the idea itself for it is He who gives us the thought with which to succeed. Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

#### RABBI ELI MANSOUR

Visit [DailyHalacha.com](http://DailyHalacha.com), [DailyGemara.com](http://DailyGemara.com),  
[MishnaBerura.com](http://MishnaBerura.com), [LearnTorah.com](http://LearnTorah.com)  
Putting Life Into Our Berachot

Moshe Rabbenu tells Beneh Yisrael in Parashat Ekev (10:12), "Ve'ata Yisrael, Ma Hashem Elokecha Sho'el Me'imach..." – "And now, Israel, what does Hashem ask of you..."



The Gemara in Masechet Menahot (43) tells of incident that took place during the time of King David, which relates to this Pasuk. A devastating plague ravaged the country, killing one hundred people every day. No medical cause could be found for the disease, and the situation seemed hopeless. David, with his Ru'ah Ha'kodesh (prophetic insight), came up with a solution. He enacted a requirement that is still observed even today – to recite one hundred Berachot each day. The people obeyed the new law and made a point of reciting one hundred Berachot on a daily basis, and the plague came to an end.

The Gemara adds that David found a Biblical source for this requirement – the aforementioned verse in Parashat Ekeb. The word “Ma” (“What”), the Gemara says, should be read as “Me’a” – “one hundred.” Once we read “Ma” as “Me’a,” the Pasuk reads, “And now, Israel, Hashem asks of you one hundred...” God asks us for “one hundred,” that we recite one hundred Berachot each day, and the Torah here thus alludes to the law enacted by King David in response to the deadly plague.

The question arises, what right do we have to add a letter to the word “Ma” to produce “Me’a”? The word “Ma” is spelled Mem, Heh, and the word “Me’a” is spelled Mem, Alef, Heh. Thus, in order to read “Ma” as “Me’a,” we need to add the letter Alef. How can we add a letter to a word in the Torah?

Furthermore, it seems from this account that Beneh Yisrael did not recite Berachot until King David's enactment. How could that be? Weren't Berachot being recited already during the time of Abraham, Yishak and Yaakob? One answer is that people were reciting Berachot, but David instituted the requirement to recite one hundred Berachot. But there may also be a much deeper explanation.

True, the people had been reciting one hundred Berachot each day. But they were reciting Berachot without proper Kavana, without concentration. The Sages teach us that a prayer without Kavana is like a body without a soul. The Berachot being recited were “lifeless,” they had no spiritual force, because they were recited quickly, robotically, without any attention or feeling. And David realized that these one hundred “dead” Berachot recited each day were the cause of the one hundred deaths the nation suffered each day. He therefore enacted that the people should ensure to recite Berachot with feeling and concentration, to counteract the effects of their “dead” Berachot.

The letter Alef, which has the numerical value of 1, represents God, who is one. The letter is therefore

formed by a slanted Vav with a Yod extending from the bottom and another from the top. The combined numerical value of these three letters – Vav, and two Yods – is 26, the numerical value of the divine Name of “Havaya.” This letter, then, signifies God. David wanted to introduce this letter into “Ma,” a word which denotes nothingness. His goal was to infuse the Berachot which were characterized by “Ma” – emptiness and lack of substance – with the people's spirit, their soul, which is a piece of God Himself. This is what the Gemara means when it says that David read “Ma” as “Me’a.” This is precisely what he enacted – that the people should inject their otherwise lifeless Berachot with life and feeling, by reciting Berachot not only with their lips, but also with their souls, with the piece of Hashem within them. This injection of life and spirit into Berachot has the power to transform death to life, to avert catastrophe and save ourselves and our nation from harm.

All Torah observant Jews recite Berachot. On most days of the year, we don't even have to think about this requirement of one hundred Berachot, because we automatically reach this total through our prayer services and blessings before and after eating and drinking. Too often, however, these Berachot are lifeless, recited by rote, mechanically, without concentration. We mumble the words without thinking what they mean, and sometimes in our haste we fail to even enunciate the words properly. If we truly believed the power of a Beracha recited properly, how Kavana brings life and blessing to the world, our Berachot would be much different.

It does not take long to recite a Beracha properly. It takes just a few moments to pause, think about what we're saying, and enunciate each word correctly. These few moments are the difference between a “dead” Beracha and a Beracha with life and power. We must ensure to invest a part of our souls into our Berachot, and then, like in the times of David HaMelech, Hashem will protect us from harm and grant us life and prosperity, Amen.

**VICTOR BIBI  
SOD HAPARASHA**

**Will be distributed under a separate list  
If you want to receive this article every week,  
please let us know and we will add you to that list**

**Rabbi Wein**

**HISTORIC TRUTHS**

The Jews cannot agree among themselves regarding propriety of place and behavior at the Western Wall in Jerusalem. Muslims and Jews cannot agree about security measures necessary on

the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, let alone agree about the ownership and control of the area itself. On the surface, one may be led to believe that these are arguments about turf and territory, conflicting power and control. But in reality these issues have a far deeper and much more fundamental base.

They are arguments and disagreements about historical truths and the narratives derived from them. The Muslim world in our time has denied all of Jewish history. They deny that the Jewish people even exist. Their narrative is that today's Jews are Khazars or Tartars or Gypsies and that the remnants of the ancient Hebrews who once lived in the Middle East have long disappeared.

They deny there ever was a Temple on the Temple Mount. Abbas write a doctoral dissertation in effect denying the Holocaust. And they deny the right of the Jews to establish a national homeland in the predominantly Moslem Middle East. Historical fact has been changed and perverted to fit a predetermined faith narrative that encourages violence, hatred and willful and meaningless terror.

The issue of control over security on the Temple Mount is about the Muslim narrative of history, theirs and ours. They simply cannot afford to give in on any issue, no matter how slight and inconsequential it may appear to be for doing so will indicate that their historical narrative is badly flawed and dangerously false. And so the struggle continues lurching from one incident to the next one.

A similar analogy can be drawn regarding the disputes ongoing regarding the Western Wall. Both the Reform and Conservative movements in Jewish society were founded on the premise that traditional Jewish life, behavior and values were not sustainable in the modern era. Because of this fundamental belief, Judaism was completely changed as a way of life. Basic belief in the words of the Torah was first reinterpreted, then the text itself was edited and finally the whole holy book was in fact discarded.

Reform jettisoned Hebrew, Zion and Jerusalem, but was forced to rethink those matters and reverse their position after the Holocaust showed them that Berlin was not to be its new Jerusalem. Ravaged by intermarriage and a birthrate that is unsustainable for future growth or even maintenance, it now fights for survival through lawsuits and false publicity while continuing to decline in numbers and relevance.

Any Jew can find a place to pray that will accommodate them at the Western Wall. It is simply sad that so few Reform and even Conservative Jews

choose to do so. The historical truth is that traditional Jewish life in Israel and even in the Diaspora has not disappeared. On the contrary, it has grown stronger and gained many new adherents. The basic premise of these movements, that traditional Jewish life could not survive in the modern world, has been disproved. The false historical narrative has lost all meaning.

The historical narrative of Eastern European Jewry was severely affected by the Holocaust. After this most tragic of all events, an historical narrative has been reconstructed. But it is basically a fanciful one and greatly flawed. It attempts to remake the past world to coincide with the norms and societal mores of a present, far different world.

By ignoring what are, in fact, historical truths, these consequences are harmful to Jewish society. Our educational methods and societal norms suffer because we are trying to make a world that never existed. And in striving to do so, we have lost the sense of contentment and normalcy, in spite of poverty and persecution, which was the hallmark of Jewish life for centuries.

In attempting to reach the impossible we have often neglected the opportunity to achieve what is necessary and possible for our time and situation. We have much to learn from our past history. But if it is a false and distorted one, it becomes a negative instead of a positive for us. Pretending that all was always perfect and that our present problems are because of current and recent villains is an illusion that costs us dearly. We should never fear historical truth and accuracy. It will always prove us right.

### **Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks Why Civilisations Fail (Eikev 5777)**

What is the real challenge of maintaining a free society? In parshat Eikev, Moses springs his great surprise. Here are his words:

Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God... Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery... You may say to yourself, "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me."... If you ever forget the Lord your God... I testify against you today that you will surely be destroyed. (Deut. 8:11-19)

What Moses was saying to the new generation was

this: You thought that the forty years of wandering in the wilderness were the real challenge, and that once you conquer and settle the land, your problems will be over. The truth is that it is then that the real challenge will begin. It will be precisely when all your physical needs are met – when you have land and sovereignty and rich harvests and safe homes -- that your spiritual trial will commence.

The real challenge is not poverty but affluence, not insecurity but security, not slavery but freedom. Moses, for the first time in history, was hinting at a law of history. Many centuries later it was articulated by the great 14th century Islamic thinker, Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406), by the Italian political philosopher Giambattista Vico (1668-1744), and most recently by the Harvard historian Niall Ferguson. Moses was giving an account of the decline and fall of civilisations.

Ibn Khaldun argued similarly, that when a civilisation becomes great, its elites get used to luxury and comfort, and the people as a whole lose what he called their *asabiyah*, their social solidarity. The people then become prey to a conquering enemy, less civilised than they are but more cohesive and driven.

Vico described a similar cycle: "People first sense what is necessary, then consider what is useful, next attend to comfort, later delight in pleasures, soon grow dissolute in luxury, and finally go mad squandering their estates."

Bertrand Russell put it powerfully in the introduction to his *History of Western Philosophy*. Russell thought that the two great peaks of civilisation were reached in ancient Greece and Renaissance Italy. But he was honest enough to see that the very features that made them great contained the seeds of their own demise:

What had happened in the great age of Greece happened again in Renaissance Italy: traditional moral restraints disappeared, because they were seen to be associated with superstition; the liberation from fetters made individuals energetic and creative, producing a rare fluorescence of genius; but the anarchy and treachery which inevitably resulted from the decay of morals made Italians collectively impotent, and they fell, like the Greeks, under the domination of nations less civilised than themselves but not so destitute of social cohesion.

Niall Ferguson, in his book *Civilisation: the West and the Rest* (2011) argued that the West rose to dominance because of what he calls its six "killer

applications": competition, science, democracy, medicine, consumerism and the Protestant work ethic. Today however it is losing belief in itself and is in danger of being overtaken by others.

All of this was said for the first time by Moses, and it forms a central argument of the book of Devarim. If you assume – he tells the next generation – that you yourselves won the land and the freedom you enjoy, you will grow complacent and self-satisfied. That is the beginning of the end of any civilisation. In an earlier chapter Moses uses the graphic word *venoshanem*, "you will grow old" (Deut. 4:25), meaning that you will no longer have the moral and mental energy to make the sacrifices necessary for the defence of freedom.

Inequalities will grow. The rich will become self-indulgent. The poor will feel excluded. There will be social divisions, resentments and injustices. Society will no longer cohere. People will not feel bound to one another by a bond of collective responsibility. Individualism will prevail. Trust will decline. Social capital will wane.

This has happened, sooner or later, to all civilisations, however great. To the Israelites – a small people surrounded by large empires – it would be disastrous. As Moses makes clear towards the end of the book, in the long account of the curses that would overcome the people if they lost their spiritual bearings, Israel would find itself defeated and devastated.

Only against this background can we understand the momentous project the book of Devarim is proposing: the creation of a society capable of defeating the normal laws of the growth-and-decline of civilisations. This is an astonishing idea.

How is it to be done? By each person bearing and sharing responsibility for the society as a whole. By each knowing the history of his or her people. By each individual studying and understanding the laws that govern all. By teaching their children so that they too become literate and articulate in their identity.

Rule 1: Never forget where you came from.

Next, you sustain freedom by establishing courts, the rule of law and the implementation of justice. By caring for the poor. By ensuring that everyone has the basic requirements of dignity. By including the lonely in the people's celebrations. By remembering the covenant daily, weekly, annually in ritual, and renewing it at a national assembly every seven years. By making sure there are always prophets to remind

the people of their destiny and expose the corruptions of power.

Rule 2: Never drift from your foundational principles and ideals.

Above all it is achieved by recognising a power greater than ourselves. This is Moses' most insistent point. Societies start growing old when they lose faith in the transcendent. They then lose faith in an objective moral order and end by losing faith in themselves.

Rule 3: A society is as strong as its faith.

Only faith in God can lead us to honour the needs of others as well as ourselves. Only faith in God can motivate us to act for the benefit of a future we will not live to see. Only faith in God can stop us from wrongdoing when we believe that no other human will ever find out. Only faith in God can give us the humility that alone has the power to defeat the arrogance of success and the self-belief that leads, as Paul Kennedy argued in *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (1987), to military overstretch and national defeat.

Towards the end of his book *Civilisation*, Niall Ferguson quotes a member of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, part of a team tasked with the challenge of discovering why it was that Europe, having lagged behind China until the 17th century, overtook it, rising to prominence and dominance.

At first, he said, we thought it was your guns. You had better weapons than we did. Then we delved deeper and thought it was your political system. Then we searched deeper still, and concluded that it was your economic system. But for the past 20 years we have realised that it was in fact your religion. It was the (Judeo-Christian) foundation of social and cultural life in Europe that made possible the emergence first of capitalism, then of democratic politics.

Only faith can save a society from decline and fall. That was one of Moses' greatest insights, and it has never ceased to be true.

FROM COMMUNIT MAGAZINE - SECRETS OF THE FOOD INDUSTRY REVEALED

By: Dave Gordon - dave@landmarkreport.com

The Surprising Truth About What is in the Food You Eat

When you order a plate of sushi at a restaurant, you

expect to get what is advertised on the menu. You believe, for example, that a red snapper roll will be made with red snapper. As it turns out, however, that may be far from the truth.

In actuality, your food may be made of something else entirely, because someone wanted to save money.

According to a nationwide study done by Oceana, sushi – as well as other fish varieties ordered at restaurants – may be “swapped” up to 87 percent of the time. Cod may be swapped with catfish, and white tuna may be escolar, a fish that is not kosher.

Just seven of the 120 samples of red snapper purchased nationwide were actually red snapper - and six out of ten times the “tuna” was not in fact tuna, DNA tests showed.

In the two-year study that began in 2010, Oceana collected more than 1,200 fish samples from 674 retail outlets in 21 states. Forty percent of fish analyzed in New York State were mislabeled. In the first four months of 2017 alone, West Palm Beach, Florida's State's Division of Hotels and Restaurants discovered “hundreds” of violations for mislabeling or misrepresenting food, reports NBC News. Tuna and red snapper were the fish most often swapped out in favor of other kinds.

Larry Olmsted, author of *Real Food/Fake Food*, has written a number of pieces in *Forbes* about the issue of misrepresented food. He claims that every snapper sample tested in Seattle, Washington, and Washington, D.C. was mislabeled. Southern California had the highest mislabeling rate at nearly sixty percent. In Chicago, every sushi restaurant sampled had at least one mislabeled fish. That sure sounds fishy to me!

What secretly occurs in the food industry isn't limited to swapping seafood. Other shady practices include mixing in hidden ingredients, or infusing additives that aren't publicized to consumers.

What is Really in Your Rice and Vegetables?

With his vast knowledge of industrial food preparation in both in Israel and New Jersey, mashgiah Rabbi David Condiotti has learned some frightening facts.

“Going into a vegan restaurant sounds fine, right? You might think, ‘what could go wrong?’ Lots! If they use broccoli, they're not going to give it a kosher wash, and bugs could be hiding in it by the dozens,” he exclaimed. “Want to add just a little Balsamic vinegar to your salad? It's made out of non-kosher wine. Care to have some tomato sauce with plain

pasta? Pasta sauces can have cheeses or meats in them, and even infested (non-kashered) herbs.”

Items that might seem fine on the surface may not be fit for kosher consumption, after all. “In addition, some restaurants might cook with chicken stock water to add a little flavor to a given dish, such as rice or vegetables,” Condiotti said. What is also quite common, he explained, is for large food factories to contain some kosher, and some non-kosher items that look similar. This can be confusing to the kosher consumer. He cites Wishbone dressing as an example. “The Italian version of it is certified kosher, but the French and Caesar dressing is not. Because a lot of these dressings contain non-kosher cheese, such as Ranch,” he noted.

Yet another example is the Snapple beverage. “Unbeknownst to many, there are a few flavors that are not kosher – and they can easily be mistaken for the kosher varieties. The company decides what’s going to sell in the kosher market and what will not,” Condiotti declared.

**What Goes On Behind the Scenes:** Executive Chef of The Prime Cut Caterers, Raymond Tawil, shares similar anecdotes, revealing some behind-the-scenes information gleaned from his four years at Johnson and Wales Culinary University. He saw “crazy things, that were really regular every day ways people prepare their food in the real world.”

Examples include using bacon fat, duck fat, or beef fat instead of olive oil to make eggs, biscuits, and collard greens.

“The pastas we made in classical European class all started with beef broth, chicken broth, or a seafood broth. Rice are all made in a broth; no one uses water in the kitchen,” noted the chef, who holds a B.S. in

**Culinary Nutrition and Food Science:** Other surprises included fish sauces as a “big ingredient” used in stir-fry recipes or vegetable dishes; sauces with a wine base; and gelatins (formerly animal bones) used in salad dressings and mousses.

But it’s not just the food itself that’s the issue.

“Places that use cast iron to cook food is a big problem for us. Cast iron is the most absorbent material you can find in the kitchen,” Chef Tawil explained. “Besides the fact that you never really wash a cast iron pan with soap and water, chefs don’t clean them at all. They call them seasoned pans... wait about two minutes and you’ll see the oils and

juices of the last dish coming out of the pan. They use this to cook the next dish and give it added flavor.”

Therefore, any item cooked in a cast iron pan is questionable, for it could have been in previous contact with an untold number of foods over the course of hours.

**Not So Simple:** Even a vegetable that appears to be seasoned with ‘simple ingredients’ could be problematic. Kimchi, the Korean staple, is a cabbage-based food that contains white radish and spices. Mainstream kimchi’s flavorings include shrimp brine. And contrary to popular belief, nori, which is used in sushi, poses a unique kashrut obstacle, even if it contains “100% seaweed.” Unbeknownst to many, seahorses, which are not kosher, as well as various non-kosher fish eggs, become intermingled with the seaweed and must be filtered out in order for the seaweed to be deemed kosher. This process is not performed at non-kosher manufacturing plants.

**Rabbi Binyomin Y. Edery,** the mashgiah of Kosher Japan, explained that kosher nori requires a special procedure, as well as rabbinical supervision, despite its being a vegetable from the ocean. The way the kosher world compensates, said Edery, is by harvesting the seaweed in a certain two-hour window prior to daybreak, when the waters are coldest and the creatures are less likely to swim into the seaweed.

**Careful Consumption:** Long gone are the days in which you could feel sure of the food you were buying. As the industry becomes more complicated and the science of flavoring more sophisticated, it gets increasingly tough to know how much your food has been tampered with before you eat it.

One thing is for certain: Before a food gets as far as your plate, it has gone through manufacturing processes with chemicals, additives, and flavorings. And even if a food appears as if it came straight from the farm or ocean, any number of problems could be associated with eating it.

So, before you take your next bite at a restaurant or choose the next item off a grocery store shelf, make sure a reputable source has vouched for the food’s authenticity. Mashgiahs are hired to ensure that food meets kosher standards and restaurant owners and chefs should not hesitate to answer any one of your questions. The next time you shop and certainly the next time you dine, be a conscious consumer, aware of exactly what you are putting into your body.