

PARSHAT EIKEV

16 - 22 Av 5785
10 - 16 August 2025

Torah: Duet. 7:12-11:25
Haftorah: Isaiah 49:14-51:3

PSALMS DAILY

Psalms for our brethren in the Holy Land

Psalms 117

1. Praise the Lord, all nations, laud Him, all peoples.
2. For His kindness has overwhelmed us, and the truth of the Lord is eternal. Hallelujah!

(Please say Chapter 20 daily)

SEFER HAMITZVOT

Positive Mitzvah 27 The Showbread

We are commanded to place Lechem Hapanim [known as "showbread"] before G-d [on the Table in the Temple's sanctuary]. New loaves of bread are placed on the Table every Shabbat, together with frankincense. The priests then eat the previous week's showbread.

CAN YOU BRIBE G-D?

At first blush, the answer seems to be a resounding no! Indeed, we read in the portion of Eikev: *"For the L-rd, your G-d ... will show no favor, nor will He take a bribe"*.

What does the verse even mean? How would one "bribe" the Creator anyway? G-d is an infinite being who, by definition, lacks for nothing. Moreover, is it not blindingly obvious that the only truly Perfect Being would not stoop to lowly bribery? Does this really need to be said?

And if, indeed, G-d would never accept a bribe, how do we make sense of the verse, *"He will take a bribe from a wicked man's bosom"*, which becomes even more troublesome when we read the Midrashic commentary:

"What is the bribe that the Holy One Blessed Is He takes from the wicked in this life? Repentance and good deeds. The Holy One Blessed Is He said to Israel: 'My children, return while the gates of repentance remain open, because I accept bribes in your earthly life. By contrast, once I sit in judgement when you reach the next life, I do not accept bribes...'"

So, yes bribes or no bribes? **Repentance Is Bribery, in a Good Way**

Of course, we could answer - as do several commentators - that accepting repentance for a sin is not really a bribe.

It is true, as Maimonides explains, that no number of good deeds will wipe away a bad one. If a person commits both bad and good deeds, they don't cancel each other out. Rather, reward will accrue for the good deed, and punishment for the bad ones.

That is true for regular good deeds. Repentance, though, is not just a good deed. By regretting and apologizing for one's misdeeds, they are cleansed and washed away.

If G-d were to use the person's Mitzvot in order to overlook his or her Aveirot (sins), that would indeed be a form of bribery. But accepting repentance is very different, because through Teshuva (repentance) the Aveirot cease to exist - the bad deeds are undone, not merely compensated for by good deeds.

According to this logic, then, G-d does not take bribes in the form of good deeds, and the reason He accepts repentance is because it isn't, in fact, a bribe.

If this was supposed to clear things up, it has not. If repentance is not considered a bribe, why does the Midrash call it so? In which way is accepting repentance "taking bribes from a wicked man"? And if repentance is a form of bribery, how

can we reconcile that with the verse that G-d "takes no bribes"? It seems we are right back to where we started!

Getting to the Heart of Bribery

The Rebbe offers a truly stunning insight to resolve this conundrum. What, exactly, is a bribe? If one steals money and then repays it in full, he has not "bribed" the victim, but repaired the breach he caused. Bribery, then, is when the criminal pays a relatively small sum to relevant parties in order to be let off the hook for a much larger amount that he must rightfully surrender.

There is something very special and unique about repentance, that even a modest effort on our part has a far greater impact than it should have by right. The power of Teshuva is such, the Rebbe explains, that it can secure forgiveness and erasure of our sins even if merely a token repentance is done.

Repentance is called a "bribe" because we can earn more credit from it than we genuinely deserve. G-d revealed to us that he is "susceptible" to repentance, and that he finds it quite "irresistible." Such is G-d's proclivity towards repentance that even a less-than-total repentance has the capability to wash away our sins before His eyes.

It would be reasonable to expect that in order for forgiveness to be granted, the repentance should be as enthusiastic and as fulsome as the sin itself. If people are not entirely sincere in their renunciation of the wrongdoing, or are not completely committed to never repeating those acts, why should they be granted full atonement?

G-d is very much aware of the reality that we say we are sorry, but then go on to repeat the misdeed. We say we regret committing the sin, but how truly sorry are we? If it cannot be said that we are truly a changed person, why should our expression of remorse be taken seriously? Are words alone not cheap?

Yet the mystery of teshuva is that even imperfect repentance is considered repentance - and the sin is treated as if it never happened. As long as the person fulfilled the requirements of Teshuva under Jewish law - an admission of guilt, a decision to desist from the sin, and a request for forgiveness - Divine clemency is total. It is in this sense that repentance is considered a "bribe": A little bit of repentance gets you a lot of atonement. Imperfect repentance can still get you perfect forgiveness.

But how is this fair? Shouldn't the atonement be commensurate with the penitence?

Indeed, it would appear that many times repentance is not fully sincere, given how often we return to the very

wrongdoing we foreswore. But that is how it seems from a human perspective. To our minds, how can the person truly mean their regret if they repeat the offense the next day? However, the Almighty Who sees into the depths of our character knows that when we express our remorse it comes from the soul. Despite whatever may happen later, at that moment of regret we truly meant it.

This secret of Teshuva reveals a mystery of the soul: for all our missteps and bungling errors, we are at heart pure and holy. Regardless of our mistakes and reversals, our truest self wants to do the right thing. It is when we sin that we are "faking it," impersonating a sinner for some foolish reason. When we achieve moments of clarity and choose the good path, it is then that we are being true to our real self.

By Rabbi Yossi Ives
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RABBI MORDECHAI

The story of this great man takes us back almost seven hundred years. He is so well known among all students of the Talmud that he is called The Mordechai. "The Mordechai" is the name of his great work, about which we will tell you a little later.

The story of Rabbi Mordechai ben Hillel takes us to a period in our history which was full of persecutions and pogroms; and to a land which shed more blood than any other land on earth - Germany; and to a city which became more infamous than any other city on earth - Nuremberg. For this great man died a martyr with his wife and five children in this city, which in our time became the cradle of the Nazis. Rabbi Mordechai ben Hillel was born into a family of famous scholars. (He was related to the famous Rabbi Eliezer ben Nathan, who was the ancestor of many well-known Rabbis, such as Rabbi Eliezer ben Joel Halevi, Rabbi Jehiel, the father of Rabbi Asher (Rosh), and others.

He witnessed many cruel pogroms that destroyed whole communities and centers of learning. Perhaps because of his tragic experiences he devoted his entire life to gather, record, and analyze much of the Talmudic literature which had been created in the course of several centuries before him. In this way he rendered an everlasting service to our people, for were it not for him, most of this learning would have been lost.

Like his famous relative Rabbi Asher ben Jehiel (ROSH), Rabbi Mordecai was a disciple of the great Rabbi Meir

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of Rothenburg. Rabbi Mordechai had the honor of giving his decisions in the presence of his master, a privilege given to only a few distinguished students.

Before Rabbi Mordechai joined the circle of famous scholars whose master Rabbi Meir was, he had travelled about Germany and France to gather knowledge from the greatest scholars of his day. (Among his other teachers were Rabbi Abraham ben Baruch, the brother of Rabbi Meir of Rothenburg, and Rabbi Jehiel of Paris.) After Rabbi Meir of Rothenburg was imprisoned and held for ransom, and since nothing could be done to help him at his own expressed wish, Rabbi Mordechai moved to Goslar, and then Nuremberg, in Germany.

Soon disciples from all over Europe began to flock to Nuremberg to study under Rabbi Mordechai's guidance. They came from France, Italy, Spain, Austria, Bohemia, and Hungary. To them Rabbi Mordechai handed down his great accumulation of knowledge.

For seven years Rabbi Mordechai conducted his great academy. Then a terrible catastrophe broke loose, in the wake of civil war.

It happened after the death of Emperor Rudolf of Hapsburg, when his son Albrecht had to fight against another pretender to the throne, Prince Adolf of Nassau. Lawlessness and disorder ruled the day. As usual, the defenseless Jews were the first victims. Incited mobs robbed, killed, and pillaged whole Jewish communities. The cruel 'blood libel' was always a useful excuse to start a pogrom, if other excuses were lacking. Thus, 72 Jews of the town of Sinzig were locked in a small synagogue and burned alive by a cruel mob. Rabbi Mordechai wrote Lamentations which were included in the Selichoth (Prayers said on Fast Days) to mourn the death of the martyrs.

Tragedy befell the Jews of Germany at the hands of the notorious Rindfleisch. He was a most fanatical Jew-hater who lived in Franconia, Germany. Though a member of an aristocratic family, he became the head of a mob of ruffians who left a trail of blood through the southern part of Germany in which over 100,000 Jews lost their lives.

This Rindfleisch first appeared in the town of Roettingen, in Franconia, when a rumor was spread that the Jews had desecrated a church.

He gathered a mob around him and declared that he had received a "mission from heaven" to kill all the Jews in order to avenge the "desecration." They attacked and killed the entire Jewish community of Roettingen, and they swept through the southern part of Germany, going from town to town, murdering and robbing all the defenseless Jewish communities.

The spring and summer of that year (5058, or 1298) witnessed one of the most harrowing events in Jewish history. Rindfleisch's mob grew rapidly, and it attacked large and small communities alike, since the authorities offered the Jews no protection. The Jews fought for their lives but were easily overwhelmed.

When Rindfleisch reached Nuremberg, the Jews put up a heroic defense, in which they were aided by some decent citizens. They could have won a reprieve if they had accepted the religion of their attackers, but the Jews fought heroically for their faith. When the battle was over, six hundred and twenty eight martyrs died, among them Rabbi Mordechai ben Hillel, his wife Zelda, and their five children.

Rabbi Mordechai was in his prime years when he died a martyr's death; he was not quite fifty years old. But his life's work was immortal.

His work, Sefer HaMordechai (Book of The Mordechai), was published after his death by his disciples. Two groups were formed which published the work of their master in two different editions, known as the Rhenish and Austrian versions respectively. The Rhenish is the shorter one of the two. Together with extracts from the Austrian Mordechai (edited by Rabbi Samuel ben Aaron of Schleastail) it was eventually included in the first printed Talmud (Soncino, 1482). Leading Talmudists and codifiers, including Rabbi Joseph Caro and Rabbi Moses Isserless, drew heavily upon it in their decisions and interpretations of the law. Many commentaries were written on The Mordechai, of which the most famous is Gedulah Mordechai (the Greatness of Mordechai) by Rabbi Baruch ben David.

To this very day, The Mordechai is an inexhaustible source of knowledge to all Talmud scholars.

By Rabbi Nissan Mindel OBM

EIKEV IN A NUTSHELL

The name of the Parshah, "Eikev," means "because," and it is found in Deuteronomy 7:12. In the Parshah of Eikev ("Because"), Moses continues his closing address to the children of Israel, promising them that if they will fulfill the commandments (Mitzvot) of the Torah, they will prosper in the Land they are about to conquer and settle in keeping with G-d's promise to their forefathers.

Moses also rebukes them for their failings in their first generation as a people, recalling their worship of the Golden Calf, the rebellion of Korach, the sin of the spies, their angering of G-d at Taveirah, Massah and Kivrot Hataavah ("The Graves of Lust"). "You have been rebellious against G-d," he says to them, "since the day I knew you." But he also speaks of G-d's forgiveness of their sins, and the Second Tablets which G-d inscribed and gave to them following their repentance.

Their forty years in the desert, says Moses to the people, during which G-d sustained them with daily manna from heaven, was to teach them "that man does not live on bread alone, but by the utterance of G-d's mouth does man live."

Moses describes the land they are about to enter as "flowing with milk and honey," blessed with the "seven kinds" (wheat, barley, grapevines, figs, pomegranates, olive oil and dates), and as the place that is the focus of G-d's providence of His world. He commands them to destroy the idols of the land's former masters, and to beware lest they become haughty and begin to believe that "my power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth."

A key passage in our Parshah is the second chapter of the Shema, which repeats the fundamental Mitzvot enumerated in the Shema's first chapter, and describes the rewards of fulfilling G-d's commandments and the adverse results (famine and exile) of their neglect. It is also the source of the precept of prayer and includes a reference to the resurrection of the dead in the messianic age.

IN JEWISH HISTORY

Sunday, 16 Av 5785 - 10 August 2025

Sir Moses Montefiore (1885)

Sir Moses Montefiore was a religious philanthropist who worked tirelessly on behalf of his brethren worldwide, and especially in the Land of Israel. He dispensed large sums toward charitable causes and founded numerous establishments and institutions. Sir Montefiore traveled far and wide to visit Jewish communities and interceded on their behalf before rulers such as Queen Victoria, Czar Alexander the Second, the Ottoman Sultan, and the pope. He lived to the ripe old age of 100, passing away on 16 Menachem Av 5645 (1885).

Monday, 17 Av 5785 - 11 August 2025

Hebron Massacre (1929)

Sixty-seven Jewish men, women and children were slaughtered, and scores wounded, raped, and maimed, by their Arab neighbors in the city of Hebron, who rioted for three days amid cries of "Slaughter the Jews." The killings began on Friday

afternoon, 17 Av 5689 (1929), and most of the victims lost their lives on Shabbat, 18 Av. The survivors were forced to flee to Jerusalem, and the ancient Jewish community of Hebron, which had lived in relative peace in the city for hundreds of years, was not revived until after the liberation of Hebron in the 5727 (1967) Six Day War.

Tuesday, 18 Av 5785 - 12 August 2025

Western Lamp Extinguished (c. 578 BCE)

Every evening, the priest would kindle the seven lights of the Menorah in the Holy Temple. Miraculously, although six of the seven candles would burn out, the western lamp would remain lit until the following evening. During the reign of the idolatrous Judean King Ahaz (father of the pious King Hezekiah), this miracle discontinued. The first time the western lamp was found to have extinguished was on 18 Av (or, according to other versions, 17 Av), in around the year 3183 (578 BCE).

Thursday, 20 Av 5785 - 14 August 2025

Passing of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak Schneerson (1944)

20 Av is the Yahrzeit (anniversary of the passing) of the 7th Lubavitcher Rebbe's father, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak Schneerson (5638-5704, or 1878-1944), in Alma Ata, Kazakhstan. Rabbi Levi Yitzchak was Chief Rabbi of Yekaterinoslav (now called Dnepropetrovsk), in Ukraine, and was arrested and exiled to Kazakhstan by the Stalinist regime because of his work to preserve Jewish life in the Soviet Union.

Shabbat, 22 Av 5785 - 16 August 2025

Passing of Rabbi Mordechai ben Hillel (1298)

Rabbi Mordechai ben Hillel was a prominent scholar who lived in Nuremberg, Germany. He authored a famous halachic compendium known as Mordechai, which is now included in all standard printings of the Talmud. Rabbi Mordechai, his wife, and five children were killed in the notorious Rindfleisch massacres on 22 Av, 5058 (1298).