



From the desk of  
**MORDECHAI MALKA**  
Chief Rabbi of Elad, Israel  
Founder and President of Or Hamelech Institutions  
Member of Chief Rabbinate of Israel



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## Office of the Rabbinate of Elad, Rosh HaAyin and Herzelia

Religious Court of Elad \* Batei Hora'ah \* Religious Services \* Marriage Licensing \* Kashrut \* Mikvaot \* Eiruvim

### OHR

### Parashat Ki Tavo

### HAMELECH

#### Ups And Downs

The whole world is going through turbulent times. No one knows how to deal with this pandemic which is taking lives and destroying economic stability. It is hindering our ability to daven and learn as we would like and affects our ability to celebrate happy occasions with friends and family. No one knows how long it will last.

We can find some solace in our *parashah*. When things look very gloomy, we can look forward to a brighter future. In this week's *parashah*, we have blessings and curses. Some of them correspond to each other, such as (28:13): Hashem will place you as a head and not as a tail. You will be only above and not below, if you heed the command of Hashem your Almighty etc. The flipside (28:43) is: The foreigner in your midst will ascend upon you to great heights and you will descend to deep depths.

Now, you may wonder: why does the curse seem so much harsher than the blessing? The blessing used moderate terms of rise and descent, while the curse used stronger terms. Why is that?

It seems that Hashem has a policy of ups and downs. Quite often, when someone gets a big up, it is followed by a big down. And it goes the other way, too. After a big down, one can expect to rise. Therefore, in the *parashah*, when discussing the downside, Hashem sends the foreigner way up high, so that his descent will thereafter be imminent. And He sends you all the way down so that you will subsequently rise. But in the blessing, Hashem gives you only a moderate raise, so that you still have room to rise even higher.

#### Rabbi Akiva's Chuckle

When the great Mishnaic sage Rabbi Eliezer was seriously ill (Sanhedrin 101a), his students came to visit him. He said, "I feel very hot."

The students began crying, but one of them, Rabbi Akiva, chuckled. They asked, "Why do you laugh?"

He said back, "Why do you cry?"

They said, "The *Sefer Torah* (i.e., our dear *rebbe*) is suffering; shall we not cry?"

Rabbi Akiva explained, "That is why I laugh. Until now, *rebbe* was successful. His wine did not turn sour. His flax crop was prosperous. His oil did not spoil, nor did his honey. I said to myself, 'Oh, no. Maybe *rebbe* is receiving reward in this world instead of in the next world?!' Now that I see *rebbe* suffering, I am relieved."

Rabbi Eliezer asked, "Is there anything in the Torah which I did not fulfill?" (i.e., that I deserve punishment)

Rabbi Akiva responded, "*Rebbe* has taught us that no man is perfect (c.f. Kohelet 7)."

Rabbi Akiva had seen Rabbi Eliezer's extreme financial success and was concerned about what may follow. When he became aware of his *rebbe's* suffering, that gave him hope for a brighter future.

#### Rav Saadya and the Spider

Rabbi Saadya Gaon was very affluent. He lived in a mansion and had many servants. One year before Pesach, one servant took some nice dishes to the river for *tevillat keilim*. Just then, the river got a bit rowdy and washed them away. The distraught servant decided to make no mention of the loss. After all, there were still plenty of dishes in the home.



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One year later, the servant went again to the river for *tevillat keilim*. He saw something surprising! The river delivered the dishes which had been washed away one year before. The servant ran to tell his master the good news. When Rav Saadya heard of the miracle, he said, "Oh, no!"

The servant was quite surprised at his master's reaction.

Shortly thereafter, Rav Saadya lost all his money and began wandering from place to place, knocking on doors for handouts. He came to one place and was recognized by a *talmid* of his. The *talmid* took him in and tended to his needs.

But then Rav Saadya became deathly ill. The *talmid* continued to take care of him and found out that the only cure was a special concentrated chicken soup. The *talmid* followed the doctor's prescription and boiled the chicken soup again and again until it boiled down to one spoon of concentrated soup. He then brought the spoon to Rav Saadya's bedside. He was about to feed his *rebbe*, and suddenly a spider landed on the spoon. The medicine, which had taken so much time and effort to prepare, was no longer usable.

The host was flabbergasted, but Rav Saadya smiled. He said, "If I reached such a low, I am bound to get better." And so it was.

### Two Ladders

A man once had a dream about the king. He saw the king ascending the ladder, getting halfway up. In the morning, he took a basket of figs and went to the palace. He told the guards that he had something important to tell the king. The king was so happy with the dream that he told his servants

to take out the figs and replace them with gold coins.

The man returned home and his neighbor asked him from where he got all those coins. He related the whole story and the neighbor began to get his own "get rich quick" idea.

The next day, bright and early, the neighbor made his way to the palace with a basket of fruit. He told the guards that he had a dream about the king. He was ushered in, and wanting to outdo his friend, he said that he dreamt that the king climbed a ladder all the way up to the top. The king immediately ordered his servants to throw the man into the dungeons. Surprised and terrified, he asked for an explanation.

The king said, "Your friend dreamt that I was only halfway up the ladder, so I still have room to rise to even more greatness. You dreamt that I got to the top. From there, the only way is down."

### The Kotzker's Dismissal

When the Avnei Nezer (Rabbi Avraham of Sochachev) was young, he became very ill. His father went to the Kotzker Rav, Rav Menachem Mendel, for a *brachah*. The father pleaded, "Please pray on behalf of my son. He is young but has already achieved greatness in Torah learning."

"That you call learning?!" dismissed the Kotzker, as he waved his hand in disapproval.

The father was aghast. Here he came all the way for a *brachah*, and instead he gets a discouraging comment. He returned home distraught.

When he arrived home, he found a delightful surprise. His sick son had taken a turn for the



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better. The healthy boy asked his father what the Kotzker had said. At first, the father avoided the question. But his son insisted on hearing the exact words. Finally the father spoke out the words, not before saying, "I do not understand what he meant."

Young Avraham explained, "Father, the Rav's words remind me of the Talmud Yerushalmi in Peah. It tells that Rabbi Tarfon was ill and the Sages came to visit him. Rabbi Tarfon's mother told the Sages, "Please pray for my son. He really excels in *kibud eim*. My shoe once broke on Shabbos, as I was strolling in the yard. My son Tarfon bent down and had me walk upon his hands until I entered the house and got to my bed."

The Sages responded, "Even if he would do that a million times, he would still not reach half of what the Torah demands of a person."

One may wonder why the Sages put down Rabbi Tarfon's valiant act, especially in his time of need. We would have thought that they should pray in the merit of his righteousness?

Explained young Avraham: The Sages wanted to make it clear that as great as Rabbi Tarfon was, he still has so much more that he could accomplish. This, they felt, would be the proper argument to Heaven to have compassion for him.

So too, concluded the young Avnei Nezer, the Kotzker heard your praise of me, and did not want the Heavenly Tribunal to say, "He accomplished so much already, he may as well die." That is why he downplayed it and showed that there is so much more to accomplish and achieve. *Baruch Hashem* it worked and I am better.

### The Daughter and the Donkey

Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai (Ketubot 66b) was once riding upon a donkey in the outskirts of Yerushalayim. His *talmidim* walked after him. Rabban Yochanan saw a young lady picking out barley from between animal droppings of an Arab's animal. She noticed Rabban Yochanan and respectfully straightened her hair covering and stood up.

She said, "*Rebbi*, please help me out financially."

The Rabbi said, "My daughter, who are you?"

She responded, "I am the daughter of Nakdimon ben Guryon."

"And what happened to all of your father's wealth?" asked the Rabbi.

"You know what they said in Yerushalayim – Giving *Tzedakah* is the best wealth insurance."

"And what about your father-in-law's wealth?"

"That's lost, too."

Then she asked, "Rabbi, do you remember signing my *ketubah*?"

Rabban Yochanan turned to his *talmidim* and said, "I signed on her *ketubah*. Do you know how much money was promised to the young couple? One million golden dinarim from her father's home besides what was promised from her father-in-law."

Rabban Yochanan then wept and exclaimed, "Fortunate are you, Yisroel. When you do Hashem's will, no nation can exercise control over you. When you do not do Hashem's will, Hashem allows lowly nations to control you. Not only will you descend lower than heathen nations, you will even go lower than their animals!"



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The question is: If *Klal Yisrael* will stoop so low, why are they considered fortunate?

According to the above, once they get so low, they are sure to rise soon thereafter.

### A Clean Tumble

A mother once went shopping in a Yerushalayim supermarket. Her young child knocked over and broke open a certain expensive cleaning agent. The honest person that she was, she made sure to pick it up and pay for it, although their budget was quite tight.

Once they got home, she noticed on the label that anyone who purchases this item may enter a raffle. Being that a pre-paid postage envelope was attached, she filled in her details and mailed it off. Sure enough, a few weeks later, they received a notice in the mail that they won a free weekend vacation in a hotel. The woman called the company, thanked them and explained that this type of prize did not suit their family; perhaps instead they could receive some of the company's products?

The next day, they got a knock on the door. Two delivery men carried in four large boxes full of cleaning agents which lasted them several years.

### Life-Saving Tefillin

Here's another good one. Mr. Ploni lived in Yerushalayim and worked as an accountant in Tel Aviv. He had a tight morning schedule. Each day he would *daven* at a certain *minyán* and catch a certain bus to get to work on time.

One evening, he went to sleep late. So the next morning, guess what? He woke up late. He had an important meeting at work, so he decided to take

his *tefillin* with him. On the bus, he saw that he would not have time to *daven* upon arrival, so he put on his *tefillin* and *davened* on the bus. The young man sitting next to him introduced himself and expressed curiosity regarding the *tefillin*. The accountant explained a bit about *tefillin* to the irreligious university student, who then asked if he could have an opportunity to do the mitzvah. The accountant thought to himself, "Maybe this is why I overslept; to allow another Jew to put on *tefillin*."

After helping his seatmate don the *tefillin*, he offered him a *siddur* and showed him what to say. The accountant, still tired, dozed off, and woke up finding himself at the last stop with no sign of the student nor his *tefillin*.

Now these were very special *tefillin*. They had been his grandfather's and had been written by an expert Heaven-fearing *sofer*. His father had warned him to take good care of them. And now they were gone.

After work, he made his way to the university but could not track down any student with that name. Reluctantly, he returned home and ordered a new pair of *tefillin*.

That student who had stolen the *tefillin* dressed up in them next Purim, pretending to be a *Baal Teshuvah*. One of his friends, whose father collected Judaica, asked if he could have them and add them to his father's collection. The thief agreed.

Some twenty years later, the accountant became ill. He had a tumor near his brain and was advised to arrange for emergency surgery abroad. He really had nowhere near the necessary amount of money to fund such an operation. The family tried to come



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up with some money, but they only amassed about twenty percent of the astronomical figure.

The accountant's wife said, "We have to go. We have to do what we can to save your life."

So they flew and landed and tried to get an appointment with the surgeon. The surgeon was so busy that he did not even have time to give them an appointment. The accountant's wife found out the surgeon's daily schedule. She knew when he goes to his car in the hospital's parking lot. Not giving up so fast, the couple went to the surgeon's car and when he appeared, the woman began explaining the situation and begged him to fit her husband into his busy schedule.

The doctor said coldly, "I already told you I have no time."

At that, Mr. Ploni opened his mouth to utter a plea for his life. He said but a few words and the doctor changed his whole demeanor.

"Do you recognize me?" asked the doctor.

"No," said Mr. Ploni.

"Were your *tefillin* stolen by a university student some twenty years ago?" asked the doctor.

Mr. Ploni thought for a minute. "Yes, they were," he finally said.

"Well, I'm the thief," confessed the doctor. "I was a young carefree student and acted irresponsibly, getting a good laugh with my friends. Since then I've matured and regretted that lowly act, but I had no way to track you down. Now you came here and I feel that it is only right that I help you out. I must have caused you great aggravation. Now I want to pay back in some way. First of all, I will most

certainly fit you into my schedule. Second, I will charge you only twenty percent of the fee. Third, I will see if I can track down the *tefillin*."

Sure enough, the operation took place two days later, and it was immediately discovered how life-saving that was. The tumor had been about to spread to the brain and then it would have been too late.

Some time later, the doctor came to Eretz Yisroel, contacted his former friend and the *tefillin* were returned. The accountant got back his *tefillin* and his life as well!

At the time of the theft, he must have felt miserable and humiliated at being deceived. In retrospect, he realized that the stealing of the *tefillin* saved his life years later!

### Going Down to Rise Up

Yes, we all have ups and downs in life. Let us realize that Hashem is always in charge and the darkness is often the cause of great light. Living with this outlook will give us strength to endure many a difficulty.

We are living through an experience the world over has not previously known. Let us hold on tight. We know it is for our best. Hopefully we will soon see the arrival of the ultimate redemption.

**Shabbat Shalom U'mevorah**

**Mordechai Malka**