

50.
KISOVO 1981
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

In the Torah portion Kisovo we learn how we are to appreciate the newness and freshness of the world, how there are always new things in the world. In fact, there are still Kedushim new things being written about our tradition all the time. How, though, can we open ourselves up to the world? What is required? The Torah teaches us that when the person brought his first fruits to the Temple he made a declaration and three words of this declaration were Vatoch Hinay Haivaisee which means literally, how behold I have brought. The Rabbis explain that there are three characteristics which are needed in order to see the wonders of the world. The first one signified by "and now" means that you have to have feelings of self-worth, that you are important, that your contributions are needed. In Judaism everyone is important. We cannot sacrifice any individual for a cause. If we could then Stalin would be right. Let a million Russians die to build a canal which will benefit 50 million. In Judaism everybody is important. Jewish law recognizes no distinction. In American law many times it is not who is more right that counts but who is more important. Unless you have a case of over \$10,000 many times you cannot sue in a federal court. In Jewish law the amount of money is irrelevant. What is important is that there is a dispute between two people and it must be settled. It does not make any difference who the people are. Each of us can do things. The second requirement is signified by the word Hinay which stands for joy. We must have a positive attitude toward the world, an optimistic attitude. Life is not a burden. The curses recounted in this Torah portion are stated explicitly to come upon the Jewish people if they do not serve G-d with joy. Joy is the whole keynote of our religion. Every important event in Jewish religion is known as a simcha. The third characteristic needed is that you have to give from your own. There are so many people who want others to give not themselves. I sit on many committees and many times people want to spend a lot of money and I am all in favor of it because if you collect charity you should spend it for charity. However, these people want everybody else to give. They feel that just because they serve on the committee they do not have to give. So many people have wrong ideas about what is necessary to open up the world to oneself. I am reminded of how once I taught school and was explaining sunsets and sunrises and why Shabbos is sometimes early and late. I asked the class why are the days longer in the summer. One of the little boys raised his hand and said, "I know, I know", and I said, "O.K., tell me". He said "The heat makes them expand". In order to open up the world we must have a feeling of self-worth, we must have joy, and we must be willing to give of our means.

To many people religion is a terribly confining thing. To these people to be religious is to be put in a strait jacket. They just cannot stand it. It chokes them. When they conceive of religion they conceive of people who have lost their vitality and sense of adventure, people who are willing to settle for a very safe and dull routine. They look at these people and say, "They might as well be in jail". In fact, I once had a mother tell me, after her son had become religious, that she would have preferred that her son had become a drug addict rather than have become religious. To her mind her son had cut himself off from life by becoming religious and she even cursed me for it.

To these people it is hard to explain that the Jewish religion is not a strait jacket, that by becoming religious you do not close but you open all sorts of worlds of intellect and feeling which you did not even know existed before. Perhaps one of the reasons for this constricted view of the Jewish religion today is because many Jews only know Judaism through translation. They take terms and concepts from other religions and cultures and apply them to Judaism. For example, they conceive of Judaism as a form of Puritanism. In Puritanism if you enjoy something you are being irreligious while if you suffer you are being religious. According to Puritanism it is impossible to enjoy anything and be religious. To Judaism's eyes this concept is ridiculous. Whether something is enjoyable or not is totally irrelevant. What determines if something is religious or not is whether it is moral. Also, since our G-d is a G-d of goodness almost always when you are doing a Mitzvah you should enjoy it. It is a Commandment from the Torah to serve G-d with joy.

In fact, in the Torah portion, Ki Thavo, where we learn about the curses that will befall the Jewish people if they do not follow G-d's Commandments,

it specifically says that these curses will come upon you because you did not serve G-d with joy and gladness. A dead religion, a religion that has no inner joy and happiness cannot sustain itself. It must end up either in perversion or hypocrisy. The Rabbis explain that when Moshe came down from the mountain with the first set of the Ten Commandments the letters flew off as he approached the people who were worshipping the Golden Calf. After the letters, the spirit of Judaism, had left the tablets, Moshe could no longer hold them. They were too heavy and he was forced to drop them. To Judaism's eyes religion is not a dour, doom and gloom thing. Almost every religious occasion in Judaism is called a simcha. Simcha in Judaism means joy.

In this same Torah portion, Ki Thavo, we learn how the Jewish people were to take up their first fruits to Jerusalem and to thank G-d for the opportunity to live in Israel and practice their religion. There are three words here that are used, V'ato Hinay Havaisee which the Rabbis explain to mean that a ~~person is to at this present time immediately~~ bring from ~~his own~~ with joy to ~~thank G-d~~. All of us have the capacity to act. All of us have the capacity to be joyful, and all of us have the capacity to make our mark in the world. Our religion helps us act, helps us be joyful and helps us make our mark by allowing us to see the many possibilities in this world.

We are not just animals. If we would be just animals then those people who conceive of religion as a terribly confining experience would be right, but we have a spiritual nature as well. Hard work and discipline are needed to achieve our spiritual nature. How glorious is music, one of the greatest spiritual powers available to man, but in order to appreciate music we have to work at it. In order to play an instrument we have to practice for hours. If we want to just listen or dance to

music we must still develop our ear. This practice and self-discipline liberates us. It does not confine us because it opens a whole new world to us. It helps us develop our potential. This is what Judaism does, also. It opens before us worlds of the intellect and the mind that people do not even know are there unless they study our tradition. The great pleasure and joy that comes from hearing a new inspiring idea, from seeing the world from a different perspective is many times exhilarating beyond compare. The deepening and developing of human relations in family and among friends, too, opens other worlds of understanding. They cannot even be comprehended by people who only believe man is an animal.

Many words that we use today in English also reinforce a negative image of Judaism. The word repentance in English means to pen up. When cattle break through a fence you must repent them. We all know the expression pent-up emotions. In Judaism there is no word repentance. There is a word Teshuva which means to reply. In Judaism this concept is entirely different from repentance. You are not supposed to constrict your activities, your worlds. You are supposed to expand them. In Judaism great people, great Rabbis who never did anything wrong, who never stole or killed or cheated have to do Teshuva, too. What do they have to do Teshuva for? They do not have to repent for anything, but what they have to do is to acknowledge that they have not lived up to their full potential. Teshuva in Judaism means, "G-d, I know You gave me the opportunity to glimpse and to see and to achieve in many worlds. I have not fulfilled all my potential. There is so much more I could have learned, so many more good deeds I could have done, so many other people I could have touched, so much more of Your Torah I could have learned". That's why these great Rabbis need to do Teshuva. They have not replied to all the challenges they could have. That, too, is one of the main meanings of the Shofar.

The Shofar, usually the way it is used throughout the Torah, is a symbol of strict justice. When Barak surrounds a city of cowards who refused to send their troops to help fight against the Canaanite enemy he blows 400 Shofars. Joshua blew the Shofar and the walls came tumbling down. However, we are told that when we blow the Shofar on Rosh Hashonna G-d moves from the seat of strict justice to the seat of mercy. How can this be since we have learned every other place in the Tanach that the Shofar signifies strict justice? How can it now have the capacity to change strict justice to mercy? The Rabbis answer that it all depends upon who blows the Shofar. If the Shofar is blown against you from someone outside of you then it signifies strict justice, but if you blow the Shofar, if you realize that you have not opened up all the worlds that are open to you, if you realize you have not reached your full potential, if you realize that you have not touched and helped and developed relationships with all those you could have, then it truly is a symbol of mercy because it allows us to renew ourselves.

Judaism is not a confining religion. It is a religion which believes in growth and self-development. The Rabbis interpret the phrase that we are all created in G-d's image, Teselem Elocheem, to mean that we are created as a shadow of G-d, and that it is our job to flesh out this shadow. The word Tsel in Hebrew means shadow. Anyone who becomes a drunkard or a drug addict or a compulsive gambler or a nymphomaniac or even a perpetual procrastinator or one who has a fear of self-discipline limits themselves. They cannot see or even achieve the great worlds of the spirit that are there for us to appreciate, enjoy and add to. None of us is perfect. None of us has ever reached up to all our potential but we all must strive to do so. Judaism does not seek the easy way. It does not say go into a monastery, avoid the world. It says that approach

is wrong. We must live in the world and we must grow in the world and we must fulfill our potential in the world, but in order to achieve spiritual greatness we need self-discipline. We want people to have joy in life, to have a sense that they can make their mark in the world, and that they can act. Life is wonderful. Our toast is always L'Chaim, to life. Judaism enhances life, all of life, the spiritual as well as the physical. It does not constrict it. May G-d give us all such an enhanced life in the coming year.

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KI SOVO 1981

In the Torah portion Ki Sivo we learn about a ceremony that was filled with pageantry. We learn how when the first fruits were to be brought up to Jerusalem this was done with great ceremony. When a first fruit was spied on a tree a string or a piece of straw was tied around it and it was saved and all the first fruits were brought up to Israel. They would be met by the notables of Jerusalem and there would be singing and dancing, the oxens would be wreathed and their horns covered with gold, there would be a great ceremony. This is indeed strange because the whole monetary value of the first fruits was almost nil. In Judaism we are told we have to give a lot of charity. I do not think Reagan would have liked conditions in Israel because before you even paid government taxes you had to give 25% of your crop to charity. 10% went to the Leviites, 2 to 3% went to the priests, another 10% you gave to the poor or you took it up to Jerusalem and spent it on food and drink for your family and friends and the poor, and another 2 to 3% was on gifts, but there was no big ceremony when you gave this charity. It is important to give charity because G-d is our silent partner. Every farmer knows you can work from dawn to dusk and do everything right and still fail. There could be no rain or too much rain, war could come, there could be too good crops and your crops are not worth anything, etc. G-d is our silent partner. Today He does not demand 50%. He only asks that we give 10% to the poor. In ancient Israel 25% of your crop had to be given away, but no big ceremony was made. The Leviite just came and took his share, but here for the first fruits a big thing is made. Why should this be so? It seems to me that the Torah is telling us something very important and that is that we are always to see the new and fresh in life. Life should never be stagnant or dull. There is so much beauty, so many worlds that can be opened up to us. We just have to learn how to see them. The first fruits remind us of this. The world is filled with so many exciting things. I once had a teacher who said I would never understand anything if I could not understand the beauty of a drop of water under a microscope. The wonderful shapes of water

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under a microscope, the laws of physics and chemistry that it exemplifies, there is great adventure in a drop of water. If we will but learn how to discipline ourselves to see all these wonderful worlds that are there for us. Take music. How glorious is a symphony, a concerto, even rock music. We have to develop our ear to appreciate them. Jewish study is different than secular study. In secular study when you are given a problem you solve it and then you go on to the next problem. In Jewish study when you are given a problem you do not stop when you solve it. You are supposed to see if there are any other solutions not just one. We do not need alcohol or drugs to dull our senses. The world has so many challenges. We Jews have always known that and stressed that. That's why even though there are fewer Jews than there are people in Texas, one-third of all the Nobel prize winners have been Jewish. There are only 13 million Jews in the whole world. The world is filled with wonders. We should not be afraid of committing ourselves because we will see wonderful things. There are so many challenges in the world. It is our job to see them. The story about the professor who spent 30 years figuring out why professors are absentminded. When he finally got the results he forgot them. Life is beautiful and interesting. We just have to open our eyes to it.

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Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

In the Torah portion, Ki Savo, we learn about the ceremony of bringing the first fruits, and we also learn about the terrible curses which would come upon the Jewish people if they did not fulfill G-d's commandments. We also learn about a special ceremony which took place when the Jewish people entered the land of Israel. It seems that these elements have nothing in common and it is hard to see why they were all brought together in this Torah portion. However, if we look carefully at this Torah portion we can see a thread which runs through it. The Torah teaches us here that the curses would come upon the Jewish people because they did not serve G-d with joy, with happiness. It says "because you did not serve the Lord your G-d with joy and with gladness of heart when you had everything". This theme of joy is emphasized in the ceremony the Jewish people performed when they crossed the Jordan "and you shall sacrifice peace offerings and you shall eat there and you shall be happy before the Lord your G-d". It also says about the ceremony of the first fruits "and you shall be happy with all the good which was given to you by the Lord your G-d". Happiness, joy, is the condition which Judaism wants its adherents to have. In fact, almost every Jewish religious occasion is called a simcha, a joy. One of the reasons why Judaism is withering in America is because Jews no longer feel that it is a great joy. Instead, they feel that it is a burden. They say "Shevair Suzine Ayid", "It's hard to be a Jew". Once the joy and happiness go out of Judaism it is hard to maintain it. In this Torah portion we learn about the bringing of the first fruits. A big ceremony was made of this. When the first fruit came out straw was tied around it and great processions went into Jerusalem and there was great singing and dancing and the priests met the people. It is hard to see why this should be such a big thing. We Jews believe in paying taxes. In ancient Israel even before you paid your government taxes you had to give 25% of your crop away. We do not believe in supply side economics. We say everybody has to have a floor. After that there can be free economics, but people should not be left to starve. We had to give 2% to the priests, 10% to the Leviites, another 10% to the poor. You also had to leave the corners of your field for them, etc. These first fruits were very minor. Why was such a big deal made of it? The answer, I believe, is because

it teaches us what joy is all about. It teaches us that we are to see the new and the beautiful in things. The fruits that come up this year may be like last years. There is always something interesting and new to see in life. Life is not just an endless repetition of the same experience. People believe that there is nothing new in the world. They lost joy and hope. There is always something new and fresh to see in the world. The world is like a sea. On the surface it looks level, but beneath there are many depths that cannot be determined on the surface. In life by the time you are 20 or 21 or by the time you get married you have already had all of life's experiences, but there is a depth to experiences. Unfortunately, many of our young people do not realize this. That's when marriage can be so beautiful because you can grow in it. You can get a great depth or experience from it. Many young people are coming to me today to get divorced. They tell me that they are bored. I say, "Don't you fight?" They say, "No, we are just bored". I say, "Maybe you should fight. Then you would not be bored". Boredom is one of the curses of the modern world. That's why young people are turning to drink and drugs. The word for happiness in Hebrew, simcha, is composed of three letters and tells us how to be happy. The first letter stands for shir, or song. Each of us should have a song in our hearts. A young married couple should have goals and want to work together for the future. The next letter is a mem which stands for maseh, deeds. You cannot say you love somebody and then not be willing to do anything for them. A parent who says, "Oh, I never see his ballgames or go to his recitals, or help with his homework or talk to him, but he knows I love him" is fooling himself. In order to be happy you have to do things, especially do things with someone you love. Sitting and not doing anything is one of the main signs of depression. Finally the ches stands for warmth. You should be warm, open, willing to take a chance that you might even be hurt. Cold, aloof manners only invite despair and boredom. One of the problems with the Western world is that you are not allowed to sing and dance or cry because you should not show your emotions. You are only allowed to do it if you drink. You should be able to sing, to cry, to laugh. You have to be able to do these things if you are to be happy. The young couple should always be happy.

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We hope that they will realize what happiness means, and that they will always have a song in their hearts, that they will do things for each other and be warm. The story is told about one of the Rothchilds who went to a country province. He went up to one of the farmers and he bought two eggs. The farmer said it would be 100 francs. He said, "100 francs, are eggs so scarce in these parts?". The farmer looked at him and said, "No, just Rothchilds". Each of us should be precious to each other always finding new things and never being bored.

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In the Torah portion, Ki Savo, we learn about the special prayer that was said when each household brought their first fruits. We also learn about the blessings and the curses that will come upon the Jewish people if they do or do not follow the rules of the Torah. Immediately after the curses we learn an interesting thing. It says, "and Moshe called to all the children of Israel and he said to them 'you saw all which G-d did to your eyes in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land, and G-d did not give you a heart to know or eyes to see and ears to hear until this day!'. From here the Rabbis base their saying that not until a person reaches the age of 40 does he understand all the events that transpire around him. It was now 40 years since the people had left Egypt. It was 40 years since they had received the Torah on Mount Sinai. Even in America we recognize the fact that until a person is almost 40 he does not acquire wisdom. Presidents of the United States have to be 35 before they can assume office. It is true so many times people do not appreciate what they have for many years. In fact, many times it happens to me when I visit a house of mourning or I am at the cemetery that people will tell me, "I didn't realize what I had until it was too late". Sometimes it is only after we lose something that we appreciate its worth. Sometimes only after curses befall us can we understand how much something means to us. In this same Torah portion we learn about the first fruits. We learn how a big ceremony was made when these first fruits were taken up to Jerusalem, how there was a ceremony that was conducted that was filled with pageantry and pomp. Why should this be so? After all, the amount brought up was almost insignificant. A Jew had to give 25% of his crop even before he paid taxes. He had to give 2% to the priests, 10% to the Levites, another 10% to the poor or to take up to Jerusalem, and an additional 3% by leaving the corners of his field, by designating his firstborn, etc. The Rabbis, though, tell us that the first fruits ceremony was so important because it taught us how to appreciate life, how to always see the new and the beautiful in it. After all, the budding of crops is an old process. The individual bud is just a new manifestation of this old process. We are to see the new and the exciting in the world. So many times you hear the phrase, "I am bored, what can I do with myself?" A Jew should never feel this way. He should

