

## Walk through the Parsha by Rabbi David Walk

### Heads Held High

This week we read one of the two sections of the Torah called TOCHACHA - warning, containing potential rewards and punishments for our national behavior. One can learn a lot about Judaism and Jews by noting that in this week's rendition we have 11 verses of blessings and 30 verses of curses. This scenario is similar in the D'varim version, where there are 13 verses of blessing and a whopping 51 verses of curses. I think that with all these declarations of doom, we Jews can be forgiven for being a bit cynical at times. Remember, it's the Jewish pessimist who says, 'Oy, things can't get worse.' To which the Jewish optimist replies, 'Sure they can!' While growing up, I thought all comedians were Jewish. I loved Groucho Marx, Jack Benny, George Burns, but my favorite was Bob Hopestein. We had to become jokesters; the alternative was to spend all our time crying.

To make matters worse, the curses are quite explicit and detailed. For example: 'your land will be desolate', 'I will scatter you among the nations', and 'you will be destroyed among the nations', But the blessings are less clear. After descriptions of agricultural fertility, there's material about God dwelling amongst us and walking with us. These tidings sound good, but I'm

not sure exactly what they mean. This week's blessings end with God reviewing past glories, 'I am the Lord your God: who has brought you out of the land of the Egyptians, that you should not serve them, and who have broken the bands around your necks, that you might walk upright (Vayikra 26:13).' Will God reprise these circumstances in the final redemption, or are these reassurances about God's ability to deliver the goods? Not sure, however I like option 1.

But I really want to discuss that last phrase, 'walk upright', which in Hebrew is OLECH ETCHEM KOMEMIYUT. Most translations render it 'upright'. Literally, it describes an animal or a person who has had a yoke removed from their shoulders and can now stand tall. It sounds a little like an anthropologist describing homo erectus. Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan z"l says 'led you forth with your heads held high.' There are Christian translations which go with 'walk proudly', 'live in freedom', or 'live with dignity'. I'll stick with Rabbi Kaplan.

What does this closing for the blessings signify? It's an allusion to how the former slaves left Egypt. Back in Sh'mot the description was that our ancestors left B'YAD RAMA, which literally means 'with a high hand'. It has been variously translated as defiantly, confidently, boldly, proudly, triumphantly and fearlessly. Are these expressions identical? I'd like to think that KOMEMIYUT describes a greater sense of well-being and confidence than YAD RAMA, which seems more limited. The former is all encompassing; the latter

seems confined to that specific action.

Our liturgy agrees. Every morning before we declare our perfect faith in our God and in monotheism (SH'MA), we say: Bring us back from the four corners of the earth and lead us KOMEMİYUT to our land. This has become an integral ingredient of our Messianic vision. Some have explained this prayer to mean, 'God, please, let us come home under our own power and not, God forbid, like Yosef came home.'

Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik in 1956 delivered a famous address which contained the explanation for our term which for me has become definitive. On Yom Ha'atzmaut 1956, the Rav delivered his remarkable Kol Dodi Dofek speech to the World Mizrahi conference. There was so much in that presentation, but let's stay focused on the last part, known as the Six Knocks. In chapter 5 of Shir haShirim the Beloved comes in the night and knocks on the door of the lover. Tragically the door isn't opened and the Beloved goes away. The Rav explains that the establishment of the Medina is God knocking on our door and that there are Six Knocks.

Here's the description of the Rav's Fifth Knock: The period of hester panim in the 1940s brought confusion among the Jewish masses and especially, Jewish youth. Assimilation increased, and the urge to flee from Judaism and the Jewish people reached its apex. Fear, despair, and ignorance caused many to forsake the Jewish community and 'climb aboard the ship', to flee to

Tarshish from the presence of the Lord (Yona 1:3), just as Yona sought to flee God's presence. A seemingly unstoppable tidal wave stood over us and threatened to destroy us. Suddenly, the Beloved began to beckon to the hearts of the perplexed, and His beckoning, the establishment of the State of Israel, at least slowed the process of flight. Many who were once alienated are now bound to the Jewish State with ties of pride in its mighty accomplishments... This phenomenon is extremely important for Jews who are afflicted with self-hatred and want to turn away from Judaism and run for their lives... Listen! My Beloved Knocks!

The Rav is explaining that the establishment of the State of Israel has given Jews everywhere the ability to again walk with head held high, KOMEMİYUT. Our 'blood is no longer cheap', we don't have to listen to our daughter religions claim that God has forsaken us, and we don't have to think about Final Solutions to the Jewish Problem, because we have a place to go, a refuge, a home. Can't you hear God knocking on your door?

Reb Avraham ibn Ezra, who was never one to mince words, says, 'Only the empty headed say that the curses outnumber the blessings, but they're not correct, because the curses are specific while the blessings are general, and anyone who looks closely will know that I'm right.' Each blessing describes a whole range of circumstances, and walking KOMEMİYUT describes many phenomena to the true, proud believer.

Back in the States, people used to talk about Israel's War of Independence, but here we call the '48 war, Milchemet Komemiyut. The war which allows us to hold our heads high. 🗡️