

Rabbi Eliezer Hirsch D'var Torah for the *Philadelphia Jewish Link*, Inaugural Issue

I'm honored to write the inaugural D'var Torah for *The Philadelphia Jewish Link*. I wish R' Nachi Troodler much success in this wonderful endeavor, and the merit of benefiting the community should enable him to succeed and endure.

We're now in the time period known as the *seven weeks of consolation* leading up to the High Holidays. The Hebrew word for consolation, *Nechama*, is usually translated to mean *comfort*. However, another meaning of *Nechama* is *to change one's mind*.¹ During this period of *Nechama*, we are meant to change the way we think as we prepare for Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur.

One unusual feature of Parshat *Ki Teitzei* is that the Hebrew word "*Ki*" is mentioned 47 times – more than any other Parsha in the Torah. There is a very involved question as to the meaning of the word *Ki*. The Gemara² explains that there are 4 meanings, but according to Rashi³ and other sources⁴ we can discern 7 meanings in English: *because*,⁵ *if*,⁶ *when*,⁷ *rather*,⁸ *that*,⁹ *perhaps*,¹⁰ *and is* (when it precedes a question.)¹¹ These words all share a common denominator – they can be used to denote consequences, actual or potential.

Perhaps the reason why we have this emphasis on the idea of consequences at this time of year is that it relates to the concept of *Yir'ah*, fear – which we associate strongly with Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur.¹² The Hebrew word *Yir'ah* derives from *Reiyah*, *to see*, as in *seeing the implications of one's actions*.¹³ The Rambam fittingly explains that *Avoda MeYir'ah*, serving Hashem out of fear, means that you serve Hashem out of a desire for reward and to avoid punishment.¹⁴ It would seem that he includes reward in the context of fear because ***Yir'ah means that we foresee the consequences of our behavior***, which includes reward, not simply that we feel afraid, like the more common usage of the word.

¹ See Braisheet 6:6, Shemot 32:14

² See Gitin 90a

³ For example, see Rashi Braisheet 18:15

⁴ See Rashi.com/ki-11.htm

⁵ For example, see Braisheet 18:15

⁶ For example, see Shemot 34:9

⁷ For example, see Devarim 32:3

⁸ For example, see Devarim 15:8

⁹ For example, see Bamidbar 20:29

¹⁰ For example, see Shemot 23:5

¹¹ For example, see Devarim 29:15

¹² See Rosh Hashana 32a, Maharil Minhagim, Aruch Hashulchan 581:4

¹³ See Malbim Yishayahu 51:13

¹⁴ Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Teshuva 10:1

The Parsha two weeks ago began *Re'eh, See! I place before you today (Hayom), a blessing and a curse.*¹⁵ Chazal tell us that the word *Hayom* is a code name for Rosh Hashana.¹⁶ The Rambam understands this Pasuk to mean that Teshuva obligates us to foresee the consequences of our behavior and the kind of life *path* our actions will bring us. Similarly, the Rambam explains that the mitzvah of Shofar on Rosh Hashana is intended to inspire us to do Teshuva, because it wakes us up to the fact that our thoughts and actions have implications.¹⁷

Even though *Simani Milta* (eating symbolic foods) on Rosh Hashana might seem like a superstition (for example, if you eat apples and honey, you'll have a sweet New Year). However, performing this ritual reminds us that our thoughts and actions on Rosh Hashana have tremendous implications for the new year ahead. That being the case, doing Teshuva by choosing a path of blessing for ourselves in our mind on Rosh Hashana will certainly be of tremendous future benefit to us.

Our current weekly Sidrot are reminding us that that the 10 days of Teshuva hold the promise of transforming our future and our destiny. But the commitment to change during these days is one that requires an awareness that the time has enormous ramifications for the coming year.

This is King David's insight, "*The beginning of wisdom is the fear of Hashem,*"¹⁸ as well as the Gemara's dictum, "*Who is wise? One who sees things that are going to emerge.*"¹⁹ We tend to think that fearing Hashem and seeing the future are capabilities possessed only by righteous people and prophets. The lesson we can take is that **anyone** can attain wisdom, by developing the capacity to anticipate consequences.

Perhaps that is why our Parsha uses the word *Ki* so frequently. Those repetitions are designed to reinforce the profound importance of recognizing and understanding the implications of our actions, an understanding which holds the "**key**" to a wonderful new year ahead.

Rabbi Eliezer Hirsch is the spiritual leader and founding rabbi of Mekor Habracha/ Center City Synagogue. Since its establishment over a decade ago, Mekor has made significant contributions to the Center City Jewish community and has consistently attracted a diverse membership, including large numbers of young adults. His upcoming book about the High Holidays entitled: "The Book of Life: A Fresh Perspective to Transform your High Holidays Experience" will be available on Amazon and on the Mekor Habracha website, ccshul.com.

¹⁵ Devarim 11:26

¹⁶ Midrash Iyov 2, Zohar 2:32b, 3:231a

¹⁷ Hilchot Teshuva 3:4

¹⁸ Tehilim 111:10

¹⁹ Tamid 32a