

KI SAVO (DEUTERONOMY 26:1-29:8)

How Could G-d Let this Happen to Me?

2003 · Rabbi Yerachmiel Sepowitz

I turned on my car radio this morning (Thursday) and heard innocent voices of youth reciting a list of names. 2,792 names, read in alphabetical order, often preceded by, “and my father, _____”, or “and my mother and my hero, _____”, or my dear uncle, _____.”

So sad. It seems like a million years ago, and it seems like only yesterday. The day the world changed forever. The day that many people said to America, “Welcome to Israel.” Now everybody knows what a fragile and volatile cocoon of a world we live in.

We have also come to appreciate what a great and noble country we are privileged to live in. 9/11, with all its hate and destruction, demonstrated the valor and bravery of regular people. It taught us to appreciate the freedoms that we all too often take for granted.

Today’s Hebrew lesson is about the word **hasagah**. Coming from the root word, נִשַּׁג, it can be translated as “reaching,” “attaining,” or “perception.” One can physically or intellectually arrive at a destination or understanding:

In Leviticus, 14:30, ...*taSIG** yado..., * literally, *his hand will REACH*, means that which he will be able to afford.

Joseph told his servant, **“Pursue the men, v’*HISAGtam -- and CATCH UP with them.”* (Genesis, 44:4)

When asked about his age, Jacob told the Pharaoh that his years **“ . . . lo *HISIGu -- didn’t REACH . . . ”* (Ibid, 47:9) the ages that his father and grandfather had reached.

In “Yeshiva vernacular” one might say, “You have no **HASAGAH** what a great time I had on my vacation!” Translation: “You have no *IDEA*. . . “, i.e., you haven’t ARRIVED at the ability to understand.

A less common translation is “challenge” or “criticism.” Mishnah Torah, the great 14-volume work on Jewish Law by Maimonides, is printed with the ****HASAGAHs -- CHALLENGES** of the Raavad, a great scholar who often strenuously objected to the rulings offered by Maimonides.

The word appears in this week's Torah Portion. Moses describes the blessings that G-d will give as a reward for following His commandments. *These *blessings will come to you, v'*HISIGucha – and they will REACH you.* (Deuteronomy, 28:2)

***HISIGucha – they will REACH you.* Moses is promising that G-d's blessings will reach us. That seems to be a reasonable translation. As I pointed out above, this verse uses the meaning of the word based on the concept of arriving somewhere.

The Gerrer Rebbe offers a different understanding. I heard Rabbi Moshe Tendler explain that the first Rebbe of Ger, Rabbi Yitzchak Meir Rothenberg Alter, of blessed memory, in his book *Chiddushei HaRim*, pointed to the other definition of *hasagah*. He understands "*These blessings will come to you, v'HISIGucha*" that the blessings will be CHALLENGES, "like the *Hasagahs*, the *Challenges* of the Raavad against Maimonides!"

Whatever does that mean? What does the Gerrer Rebbe mean, that G-d's blessings will be like the Raavad's Challenges?

You know what it's like when someone says something that is clearly wrong. You point it out and prove him wrong. The Raavad studied Torah in depth and often came to different conclusions than Maimonides. He strongly disputed many of Maimonides' decisions, and hotly challenged them in print. What does this have to do with G-d's promise of blessings?

People tend not to pay attention to a positive status quo. If everyone is healthy, business is good, and no one is crashing airplanes into office buildings, we go about our lives in peaceful equanimity. Only when things go awry do we start to take notice.

Rabbi Tendler put it this way – If G-d forbid someone discovers that he is ill, he starts to pay attention to matters spiritual. "What can I do," the person ponders, "to receive G-d's blessings to recover from this illness?" He prays a little harder and longer, studies a bit more Torah, and gives more charity, all in the hopes of finding his way back into G-d's good graces.

Why is it that we wait for things to get bad before we start paying attention? Why do we challenge G-d when we, in our infinitesimal minds think He is being too hard on us? Did anyone ever ask, "G-d, why are You so good to me? What could I have done to deserve your bountiful blessings? G-d! I'm not that good!"

These blessings will come to you, v'HISIGucha. The blessings will be challenges, like the Raavad's challenges to Maimonides. The Torah promises blessings that will be so great that we will be confounded by G-d's largess. We will wonder, "How can this be?" Our cup will overflow with Divine generosity to

such an extent that it will just make no sense.

When will this miracle day come? When will we reach that magical, mystical, miraculous time when G-d will provide us with overwhelming kindness beyond our ability to comprehend?

It happens every day.

Have a great Shabbos.

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