

## Finding Blessing Through "Hagbah" (Edited Transcript)

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We have all seen hagbah done in shul, with the Torah being lifted up and held in such a way that everybody can see it. In fact, those who are close enough should try and have a look at the actual text. According to some sources, hagbah may be the most important of the aliyot.

What is so special about hagbah? What does it symbolise?

### Upholding the Torah

There is an interesting verse in this week's parsha which sheds light on these questions. The parsha describes the ceremony on Mount Gerizim and Mount Eival, where the blessings and the curses were presented to the Jewish people : (Devarim 27:26),  
?Cursed is the one who does not lift up and keep the words of this Torah.? This is phrased in the negative, but according to the Gemara, it was also said in the positive: ?Blessed is the one who lifts up the Torah and establishes it.?

The Ramban on this week's parsha quotes the Yerushalmi, the Jerusalem Talmud, which asks, what does it mean to ?lift up? the Torah? Is there such a thing as a falling Torah which needs to be lifted? According to one explanation in the Yerushalmi, this verse refers to hagbah, when we lift up the Torah in shul.

The Ramban quotes other explanations from the Yerushalmi as well. One of these is that to ?lift up? the Torah means that one has to accept and uphold the Torah in its entirety. Everyone sins at one time or another; as it says in the verse which we say at funerals,  
?There is no righteous man on earth who only does good and does not sin.? But there is a fundamental difference between a person who sins l?tei?avon, out of temptation, and a person who sins l?hach?is, who rejects the mitzvot in rebellion against G-d. For example, a person might be overcome with temptation and eat a treif burger. This is not the same as someone who says he does not accept the laws of kashrut at all because he maintains they do not need to be kept in the first place. The former is overcome with temptation; the latter's actions are the result of a calculated ideology. Thus, although on the surface these sins look the same, they are worlds apart.

We are required to accept all 613 commandments. Even though we stumble now and again in different mitzvot, we have to accept that they express Hashem's will and that they are binding on us. This is what the upcoming High Holidays are about - accepting G-d's kingship over us and repenting in all areas where we stumble. We try to improve and become better, and although we may fail occasionally, conceptually we accept the Torah in its entirety.

This is the meaning of ?Blessed is the person who lifts up the Torah.? Consequently, it can be said that Hagbah symbolises our faith in and acceptance of every part the Torah. This is why, when the Torah is lifted in shul, we say the verse VeZot haTorah asher sam Moshe lifnei Bnei Yisrael al pi Hashem b'yad Moshe, ?This is the Torah that Moshe placed before the Jewish people when G-d gave it to us.? We are acknowledging that this Torah is the very word of G-d, as revealed at Mount Sinai.

### Encouraging those who keep the mitzvot

Another explanation the Ramban offers for the verse ?who lifts up the Torah? is that it refers to promoting the Torah in the world. We do this by encouraging others to keep the Torah. We must not remain complacent, simply satisfied that we are keeping it ourselves, but must encourage others to keep it as well. According to this explanation, the verse means, blessed is the person who not only keeps the Torah himself but encourages and enables others to keep it as well, thus strengthening those around him in the performance of mitzvot and in the service of Hashem.

On a practical level, how do we promote the Torah and encourage people to keep it? How do we lift it up high such that it is the most important value in the eyes of society?

One example of this is found at the beginning of our parsha, which describes the mitzvah of bikkurim, bringing the first fruits to the Temple. The farmer had to take the first fruits and bring them to the Temple in Jerusalem. At the Temple, he would recite a short synopsis of Jewish history (which we recite in the Pesach Hagaddah as well), in which he detailed how we were slaves in Egypt, how G-d took us out of slavery and brought us to the Land of Israel, and that he was now bringing the first fruits with which Hashem had blessed him, as a declaration of gratitude and an acknowledgement that the land and its bounty come from Hashem.

The Mishnah in Bikkurim (Ch. 3) elaborates on this mitzvah and says that the farmers did not arrive one by one in Jerusalem. Rather, they would go up in a group, with accompanying music, much fanfare and a whole entourage to mark the occasion. The Mishnah says further that a decree was made that all the residents of Jerusalem - the shopkeepers and all the workers? would stop their work and stand up when they saw the farmers arriving: Kol ba?alei umanuyot omdim mipneihem veshoalim bishlomam veomrim aleihem acheinu, bo?achem leshalom, ?All the workers would stand up to greet them, ask after their welfare and say, ?Our brothers, welcome to the City of Jerusalem.??

Why all the fanfare? Why did everyone stop their work when the farmers arrived?

The Gemara (Kidushin 33a) says, Bo ure?eh kama chaviva mitzvah b?sha?ata, ?Come and see how precious is a mitzvah which is performed at the right time,? because they stood up for them as soon as they entered the city, and rejoiced with them. The residents of Jerusalem, even employees, had to stop their work - though we know how strict the halacha is regarding an employee taking away work time from an employer. The halacha views work time so seriously, to the extent that an employee who uses work time to tend to personal matters - even mitzvot - is considered stealing from his employer. Yet, greeting the entourage of farmers was regarded to be such a precious mitzvah that the Mishnah says all workers stopped their work.

Furthermore, says the Gemara, it was important to encourage the farmers so that they would come back again the following year. It takes a lot of effort and faith to set aside the first fruit and make the long journey to Jerusalem, and if the farmers would arrive in Jerusalem without being treated with respect, they would never wish to come back and fulfil the mitzvah of bikkurim ever again. It was not easy, and so, to encourage them, the people stood up for them with much fanfare.

This is an example of upholding the Torah, by conveying its importance to people. This is much more meaningful than any sermon. When people carrying the first fruits enter the City of Jerusalem and everybody stands up for them and stops their work in order to pay tribute to the farmers? great mitzvah, this is a loud, resounding message of how precious the mitzvah is and how we have to encourage each other to fulfil the mitzvot. This is how we hold the Torah up high: by acknowledging, praising and encouraging one another to perform mitzvot.

### **Making G-d?s Name beloved**

There is another aspect to holding up the Torah, which is symbolised in the hagbah, and that is to stand with pride and declare the values we believe in. When the Torah is physically lifted, we should have in mind our task of promoting the Torah in the world. This is part of the mitzvah of kiddush Hashem, of sanctifying G-d?s Name, which is one of the most important mitzvot in the Torah. Sanctifying G-d?s Name means that when people hear about Torah and mitzvot they have a sense that this is something special and important. We uphold the Torah by standing up for our principles and being clear about who we are and promoting the Torah?s values with pride.

One of the most powerful ways of sanctifying G-d?s Name and thereby encouraging others in Torah observance is the way we conduct ourselves and our ethical standards. The Gemara (Yoma 86a) discusses the commandment to love Hashem, which we say in the Shema. The Gemara asks, how does one love Hashem? The Gemara answers that one of the ways to love Hashem is by making His Name beloved through our actions. People will come to love Hashem and his Torah depending on how we behave. One who

studies Torah with devotion and also deals with people in good faith and integrity and who speaks kindly and gently to people, about such a person people say, "How fortunate is he who leads a life of Torah," because they see the Torah's goodness in action. And on the contrary, one who learns Torah yet does not deal with people in good faith and integrity nor speaks kindly to others, about such a person people say, "Woe to he who has learned Torah." According to the Gemara, it is a very simple formula: if we act with integrity and decency, if we are kind and gentle, then people will come to love Hashem and His Torah.

This is one of the most powerful ways that we uphold the Torah. Ideologically, we uphold it by declaring that this is the ultimate value in the world, that this is the essence of who we are and the guiding light for everything we do. On a practical level, we convey this message and inspire people in the way that we behave. Our conduct and interaction with people will affect their attitude toward Torah. If we want people to value Torah and hold it in the highest regard, we have to show how Torah fosters refinement of character and moral integrity.