

**Potomac Torah Study Center**  
Vol. 7 #40, July 31, 2020; Vaetchanan 5780

**NOTE: Devrei Torah presented weekly in Loving Memory of Rabbi Leonard S. Cahan z"l, Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Har Shalom, who started me on my road to learning almost 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his recent untimely death.**

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**Devrei Torah are now Available for Download (normally by noon on Fridays) from [www.PotomacTorah.org](http://www.PotomacTorah.org). Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah.**

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Is there a more challenging timing in our religion than having Tisha B'Av on Wednesday night through Thursday? After breaking the fast late Thursday evening, one is often too exhausted from a 25 hour fast (with most of the day spent in prayers, kinot, and seminars) to do anything but collapse. Since many of the Tisha B'Av restrictions continue until mid day on 10 Av (Friday this year), there is little time for more than shaving, getting a haircut, putting on a load of laundry for the first time in 11 days, and preparing food for Shabbat. Those rabbis who prepare Devrei Torah on Thursday and Friday certainly do not have time to prepare and send me advance copies in time for my deadline. For this reason, much of what I have this week consists of archived material – including some insights from authors new to my collection.

Moshe repeats the Aseret Dibrot (Ten Commandments) in chapter 5, repeating (with some modifications in details) the laws that God originally gave to the generation of their parents 40 years earlier. Moshe also weaves in musar (rebukes) among frequent reminders that the people must obey the mitzvah (commandment), chukim (decrees) and mishpatim (ordinances). Moshe's speech in Vaetchanan fits in thematically with Tisha B'Av. If we fail to follow God's laws, the result ultimately will be that God will throw us out of the good land that He has set aside for us. However, if we keep the proper attitude of loving Hashem, God will assist us with the conquest of the land. We are to read the beginning and end of the mitzvah section every day. The opening is the Shema and V'Ahavta (6:4-8), and the end (in Eikev) is the second paragraph of the Shema (11:13-21). (The chukim and mishpatim unit, ch. 12-26, specific laws that the Jews were to follow upon entering the land, starts in Reeh, in two weeks. To earn the right to remain in the land, we need to follow the chukim and mishpatim as well as the mitzvah.)

As in other instances, many specific laws connect to incidents earlier in Jewish history. For example, the word for marriage in the Torah is chatan, which means inter-mingling of the families of the wife and husband. Moshe specifies that upon entering the land and encountering other nations, the Jews were to destroy them completely, not to seek a covenant with them, and not to inter-marry with them (7:1-5). The only other place in the Torah that uses l'hitchatein (the infinitive form of chatan) is in the story of Dinah, daughter of Yaakov and Leah. Shechem (a Canaanite prince) takes Dinah, consummates with her, and tells Yaakov's family that his tribe would like to welcome and inter-marry with Yaakov's. Shimon and Levi convince the men to circumcise themselves and then come on the third day, kill all the men, and take spoils. Yaakov is horrified that two of his sons have made enemies of another nation and created a bad reputation for the Jews. Yaakov tells his sons (and their families) to get rid of all the idols (apparently acquired as spoils from the people of Shechem), moves his family far away (for safety), and rebukes Shimon and Levi when blessing his sons before his death. This incident returns as commandments not to inter-marry, not to take idols from other nations, and to destroy all their places and articles of worship.

While Vaetchanan has passages of both hope and rebuke, six days after Tisha B'Av we celebrate Tu B'Av, which the Talmud considers the happiest day in our calendar (for more details, see article below by Yanki Tauber).

Moshe reminds us that God is here whenever we want Him, always waiting for us to seek a personal relationship with Him. We must learn to see God's hand in unexpected blessings that come to us. For example, I was single when I moved from California to this area. A year later, my beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, introduced me to the

niece of former congregants of his from Detroit – and Hannah and I have now been together for 44 years. I became an economist when a senior high school class I wanted was full, and the person taking class assignments suggested that I try economics, with a new teacher coming from UCLA. Economics became my college major and my career. My son Evan was single when he moved to Birmingham, AL for medical school. Orthodox families in Birmingham send their children to New York or Atlanta to look for spouses. How was Evan to find a wife in Birmingham? Fortunately, friends from Baltimore arranged for Evan to consider shidduch dating with a woman from their community. Evan and Heather started dating, became engaged on Tu B'Av, and are approaching their tenth anniversary. As Moshe repeated over and over, if we love and trust in Hashem, and if we observe His chukim and mishpatim, then He will arrange positive opportunities for us. What a wonderful message to come right after Tisha B'Av, and to lead into Tu B'Av!

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**Please daven for a Refuah Shlema for Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Eli ben Hanina, Yoram HaKohen ben Shoshana, Gedalya ben Sarah, Mordechai ben Chaya, Baruch Yitzhak ben Perl, David Leib HaKohen ben Sheina Reizel, Zev ben Sara Chaya, Uzi Yehuda ben Milda Behla, HaRav Dovid Meir ben Chaya Tzippa; Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Amoz ben Tziviah, Reuven ben Masha, Moshe David ben Hannah, Meir ben Sara, Yitzhok Tzvi ben Yehudit Miriam, Yaakov Naphtali ben Michal Leah, Rivka Chaya bat Leah, Zissel Bat Mazal, Chana Bracha bas Rochel Leah, Leah Fruma bat Musa Devorah, Hinda Behla bat Chaya Leah, Nechama bas Tikva Rachel, Miriam Chava bat Yachid, and Ruth bat Sarah, all of whom greatly need our prayers. Note: Beth Sholom has additional names, including coronavirus victims, on a Tehillim list.**

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Hannah & Alan

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**Drasha: Parshas Vaetchanan: A Mountain of Faith\***  
by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky © 1996

[Please remember Mordechai ben Chaya for a Mishebarach!]

This week the Jewish nation is told that they are held to a higher standard. The Torah commands us to heed its words and follow the Chukim (decrees), “for (those laws) are your wisdom and discernment in the eyes of the nations, who shall hear all these decrees and declare, ‘surely a wise and discerning people is this great nation.’”

The Jewish People were the founders of moral civilization. The famed apostate Benjamin Disraeli once retorted to an anti-Semitic invective by parliamentarian Daniel O’Connell, “when the ancestors of the right honorable gentlemen were brutal savages on an unknown island mine were priests in Solomon’s Temple.”

This is easily understood in the context of Mishpatim, or laws that have seemingly clear reasons. The Torah’s judicial system and codification of tort law are the blueprint for common law the world over. Yet the Torah does not emphasize observance of Mishpatim as such. It tells us that in order to be an example of wisdom and clarity unto the nations, we must observe the Chukim, laws that are difficult to comprehend even for those born as Jews.

The question is obvious: wouldn’t the open observance of the esoteric laws of Judaism bring question if not contempt to the eyes of the nations? Why are Chukim specifically rendered as the acts that will have the world look at us and say, “surely a wise and discerning people is this great nation.”

**In 1993, six years after the death of my revered grandfather, a biography, “Reb Yaakov, the Life and Times of Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky,” was printed by Mesorah Publications. Based on years of my uncle, Rabbi Nosson Kamenetzky’s research and the fine writing of Yonason Rosenbloom, it was an instant success. The book shed unseen light on a Torah giant, perhaps never known by the masses. In addition to the splendid biographical research, the book is filled with hundreds of encounters with myriad personalities who were touched by the brilliant sage. From young children to Prime ministers and United States Senators, Reb Yaakov was able to relate to each of them on their level.**

The book also relates how Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan revealed to an Orthodox publication how surprised he had been when Reb Yaakov made a prescient prediction that the Soviet Union would cease to exist.

Our Yeshiva had purchased 10,000 volumes of the book as a fundraising -educational mailer. I did not realize that the Senator's name happened to be on our mailing list until I received a beautiful letter on United States Senate stationery. After thanking me for sending the "wonderful book," the writer said, "If I may quibble with one small point in an otherwise brilliant volume, the author reports that I was surprised by Rabbi Kamenetzky's prediction of the fall of the Soviet Union.

**"Truth be told, I was never surprised by Rabbi Kamenetzky's insights. They only reaffirmed to me the age-old biblical promise that Torah knowledge is your wisdom and understanding before the nations of the world."**

**It was signed Daniel Patrick Moynihan.**

We tend to flaunt Judaism with the reasonable laws: honoring parents, charity, and all of the basic tenets of moral life. To the outside world, however, we tend not to display the more difficult issues: Kashruth, Shatnez and the like. We are afraid that they are too bold and incomprehensible; surely they cannot designate us as a light unto the nations.

This week, the Torah tells us that there is nothing farther from the truth. It specifically exhorts us that through our Chukim we will be considered as a "light unto the nations." After we have set standards of morality and honesty we earn esteem in the eyes of the world. Then no Torah law or vision will be viewed archaic or inconceivable. We can predict the collapse of the second-most powerful nation on earth in its prime. Foreign relation experts may react with shock and surprise, but deep down they will wait for the prediction to materialize.

The Torah chides us this week that there is nothing in its writings that will embarrass us. Any command, even the most complex and difficult to comprehend, when performed with faith, honesty, and commitment, will cast us as a light unto the nations.

Good Shabbos!

\*Ed. Note: during an ugly political year, I felt that this uplifting message was important to repeat.

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### **Vaetchanan: To Believe or to Have Faith**

by Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2018, 2020

The Ten Commandments open with the declaration "I am the Lord your God who brought you out of land of Egypt." This is often understood to be a mitzvah of belief. Is there such a mitzvah? And what do we mean by belief anyway? Is there a difference between belief and faith?

There are two types of belief: 'belief that' and 'belief in'. To 'believe that' is to believe or accept that a certain statement is true; to 'believe in' is to have trust in a person, and to believe in that person's trustworthiness. I believe that the world is round, not in the world being round. A child believes in her father – this is not the assertion of some fact about him that is true, it is that she trusts her father, she knows that her father will always be there for her, and she trusts that he will protect her.

The word emunah can refer to either of these two meanings, and this is reflected by two parallel words: amen and o-men (spelled אָמֵן). "Amen" is a word uttered to indicated agreement and concurrence with a statement or sentiment. It is to assert something as true. O-men is to nurture and raise, and an omanet is a nursemaid. The emunah that is connected to amen is a belief that, the emunah that is connected to o-manet is a belief in. The first form of belief is intellectual and connects to the mind, the second is emotional and relational, and connects to the heart.

What type of belief, of emunah, is our parsha most concerned with? When we are commanded to believe in God, is it a 'belief in' or a 'belief that'?

Rambam, in his famous discussion in chapter 8 of his *Yisodei HaTorah*, Fundamentals of the Torah, his first book in *Mishne Torah*, asserts that the Torah is concerned with our belief that, or belief that God exists, and that Moshe is God's true prophet. Rambam is concerned with the question of how we can know, as an absolute certainty, that Moshe was communicating the direct word of God. Rambam's answer to this is that it was not due to the signs and miracles, because "one who believes due to signs and miracles, always has some doubt in his heart, for perhaps the sign was done through some trickery." (*Yisodei HaTorah* 8:1). Thus, says Rambam, when God says to Moshe that *Bnei Yisrael* will believe because of the signs that Moshe will do (cf. *Shemot* 3:11-4:9), Moshe was troubled that this would not lead to firm belief, and thus God told Moshe that that would come when the Torah was given at Sinai, and everyone saw with his and her own eyes that God gave the Torah and spoke directly to Moshe.

For Rambam, the philosopher and the one who authored the list of the Thirteen Principles of Faith, what was and is of central importance is that the Jewish People believe that certain propositions about God and Moshe are true. Thus, Rambam also begins this book, indeed the entire *Mishne Torah*, by stating that it is a mitzvah to know that God exists. What is key is what we intellectually assert, and – better yet – what we know as fact.

Ramban – Nahmanides – disagrees. Ramban argues that we may not be commanded to believe that God exists. He notes that the first of the Ten Commandments is phrased as a statement, not an imperative. He draws our attention instead to a verse from this week's parasha, "Only take heed... lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen... but teach them thy children and thy children's children.. the day that thou stood before the Lord thy God in Horeb" (Deut. 4:9-10). We are commanded not to assert facts, but to remember. Remember that we received the Torah at Har Sinai. Remember that God was there for us when we left Egypt. It is not belief that God exists or that the Torah is from Sinai. It is belief in God and in Torah mi'Sinai. It is not about theology , but about memory.

For Ramban, our work is to cultivate this memory, individually and collectively. To relive the experiences in our mind, to be emotionally and religiously impacted by their power, and to pass this experiential reality, this lived faith – not the dry assertion of certain facts – down to our children. This active, living memory has the power to strengthen our relationship with God, to strengthen our trust in God, to strengthen a life of Torah and mitzvot. It is about faith more than it is about belief.

The Torah talks about both types of belief. *Li'ha'amin* or *li'ha'amin li...* is to believe that; *li'ha'amin b'...* is to believe in. When, in *Parshat Shemot*, God says, "*v'ya'aminu ki*" – and they will believe that [God has appeared to you], and "*im lo ya'aminu lakh*," if they don't believe you (that what you are saying is true), then "*v'he'eminu li'kol ha'ot ha'acharon*" – they will believe the evidence of the last sign (*Shemot* 4:5, 8). These are all to prove that something is true, that God has sent Moshe to redeem the Children of Israel. This is the specific concern at the beginning of the Exodus. This, however, is not the abiding concern of the Torah.

The abiding concern of the Torah, however, is not belief that, but belief in. "*V'he'eminu ba'Hashem*" – and they believed in God. The experience at the Splitting of the Sea imbued in them a faith in God, they knew that God would always be there for them, they knew that God was there to care for them. They knew that they were protected by God. It was the faith of a relationship, not the belief in a fact.

What the Torah is primarily concerned with is not that we assert certain principles as true. The Torah's concern is that we listen to God and that we believe in God. That we have a strong relationship in God, and that we trust that God will always be there for us. Sadly, much of our community focuses on Rambam's belief that, and ignores the importance of belief in. While Judaism undoubtedly has principles of faith, we cannot call ourselves truly religious if all we do is follow halakha and assert our faith principles. Religiosity, as opposed to observance, requires an ongoing relationship with God, a trust in God. This lived relationship, this trust, can be fragile, especially at a time when God is not performing regular miracles, and we are still living in the shadow of the Holocaust. It is a relationship that has been built over time – over thousands of years, but one that also needs regular nurturing.

In these difficult times of the coronavirus, when so much seems to be out of whack in the world and we may often feel that we are not able to control or direct our lives or plan meaningfully for the near future, let us work to cultivate and nurture our relationship with God, to develop our belief in God. Let us try to connect to those past experiences, to God's protective presence throughout history, to the flourishings that occurred after times of tragedy - the growth of Rabbinic Judaism after the destruction of the Temple and the establishing of the State of Israel after the Holocaust. And let us work to identify, to

notice, those moments in our own lives which allow us to feel God's presence, even now, and go back to them again and again, so that we may truly be able to trust in God, and to move forward with hope and with faith.

Shabbat Shalom!

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## **Parshas Vaeschanan -- Are you a U-Man?**

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine © 2014 Teach 613

With the fast of Tishah B'av completed, one of the most difficult times of the year is finally behind us. But the perspectives gained can propel us into the upcoming, joyous, holiday season.

The Talmud asks, "Why was the Temple destroyed?"

The Talmud answers, "Because of unjustified hatred that existed between Jews."

One wonders: How can the Talmud refer to a person's hatred or dislike as being unjustified? If that is how a person feels, he surely has a reason.

One explanation is that unjustified hatred refers to hatred resulting from jealousy. Such dislike is the result of looking at someone else's life and judging our own life by theirs. The resulting feeling of inadequacy and jealousy is unjustified and lacks in personal integrity. A person must only judge himself by himself and by the mission that G-d placed him in this world to accomplish.

**For a short while, when I was in Lakewood, I had the privilege of experiencing the hospitality of one of the local Rabbis. At his Shabbos table he was fond of telling people that he was a millionaire. When his children would look at him quizzically, ("Hey Dad, we didn't know...") he would explain. "If I lived a hundred years ago and told you that I owned a car, and a three bedroom house with two floors, carpeting, indoor plumbing, and a dishwasher, then you would certainly say that for the early 1900's I was a millionaire. The only reason that you don't see it that way is because our neighbor has even more. To claim that I am not a millionaire because my neighbor is blessed, is a perspective with which I cannot agree."**

There is a tradition that a righteous person walks with humility, and only looks in his own four cubits of space as he walks. A cubit is a measure of distance close to two feet. This places the distance that a righteous, humble person may look as he walks at about 7 feet .

As children we were taught that this is a statement that is intended to be understood entirely in its literal sense. A righteous, humble person does not lift his eyes too much as he walks. We wondered about it a bit, trying to understand. In fact, one of my classmates asked, "What happens if I need to look up to see if a car is coming?"

Perhaps our Sages were veiling a profound message in simple words (as they usually do). "Four cubits" is a code expression for "A person's rightful place." They were describing how a righteous, humble person goes through life. He keeps his eyes on his own four cubits instead of on the four cubits of other people. He does not judge his own success by the success of others. Rather he finds life satisfaction by delving within himself- discovering his own strengths and weaknesses- with great personal integrity.

I once heard of a storekeeper who was doing fairly well financially but was not deriving satisfaction from his business because of a competing store that opened not far away. His mentor advised him: Stop paying so much attention to the competitor. It is very difficult to derive satisfaction from someone else's store. For your own good, pay attention to your own store. Stop looking over your shoulder. In your own four cubits you will find satisfaction.

The Talmud refers to the hatred of jealousy as unjustified hatred because it is in fact unjustified. To define one's success by other people is an affront to one's personal integrity.

So, as we prepare for the ecstatic moments of the High Holiday Season, a time of renewed self awareness, make sure to take this lesson with you. As a Human Being define your self by who you are and not by comparing your self to others. As one great thinker explained: If I am I because of you, and you are you because of me, then I am not I and you are not you. But if I am I by the grace of G-d, and you are you by the grace of G-d, then I am I and you are you.

Best wishes to you and yours for a wonderful Shabbos, and a happy and healthy summer.

With best wishes for a wonderful Shabbos. *[Emphasis added]*

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## **Mitzvoth, Morality and Reason: Thoughts on Parashat Va'et'hanan**

by Jonathan Arking, IJII Student Summer Intern\*

One of the longest-standing debates in philosophy is that of the Euthyphro dilemma, expressed as a question by Socrates: "Is the good loved by the gods because it is good, or is it good because it is loved by the gods?" In Jewish terms, we could rephrase this question: Are mitzvoth good simply because they were commanded by God, or does God command us to do the mitzvoth because they are inherently good? This question has led to the formation of two philosophical schools, the fundamentalists and the rationalists. The fundamentalists believe that the good is only good because God deems it thus, while the rationalists believe the good is good independently of God's approval. If the fundamentalists are correct, then any endeavor to understand the taamei hamitzvoth, the reasons for divine commandments, is not only doomed to fail, but an essentially invalid religious question. On the other hand, if God's commands do not dictate, but only reflect, the good, then trying to understand taamei hamitzvoth will both shed light on our understanding of the commandments, as well as insight into how to carry them out.

Maimonides, one of the paradigms of Jewish rationalism, unsurprisingly takes taamei hamitzvoth extremely seriously, and devotes a significant portion of his Guide to the Perplexed to lay out his understanding of the rationales for the different mitzvoth. Maimonides cites a verse in this week's parasha as explicit reference to Judaism's acceptance of rationales for the commandments: "Observe the [mitzvoth] faithfully, for that will be proof of your wisdom and discernment to other peoples, who on hearing of all these laws will say, "Surely, that great nation is a wise and discerning people."

Maimonides explains: "If no reason could be found for these statutes, if they produced no advantage and removed no evil, why then should he who believes in them and follows them be wise, reasonable, and so excellent as to raise the admiration of all nations? But the truth is undoubtedly as we have said, that every one of the six hundred and thirteen precepts serves to inculcate some truth, to remove some erroneous opinion, to establish proper relations in society, to diminish evil, to train in good manners or to warn against bad habits."

According to Maimonides, the laws and statutes must both conform to reason and have a moral purpose. This is not to say that we can abrogate our observance in any way, or that we can ever be sure we know the exact rationale behind the commandments. Rather, it is necessary to ensure that our practice and understanding never run in opposition to reason and science or morality. It seems that this is part of the Jewish nation's role as an or l'goyim, a light unto the nations; by demonstrating adherence to rational and constructive laws, other nations will better recognize Jewish society and its values as ideal. In a similar vein, Maimonides asserts that in cases of clash between a surface-level reading of a biblical passage and science and reason, we must reinterpret the passage to conform to reason. He therefore allegorizes any mentions of divine corporeality, angels, and more.

But this type of prescriptive understanding does not apply to understanding the Bible alone; it applies to halakha as well. For a fundamentalist, God decides unilaterally what is good, and therefore rationales behind commandments are nonexistent. This means that when deciding halakha, considerations of values or morals are entirely irrelevant. If a halakha runs counter to one's conscience, that is of no concern. Halakha, in this sense, would be a self-contained system not dependent on any external moral standards; and those making halakhic rulings would not need to worry about the effect on any individuals or even society at large.

Yet this is clearly not the way of the halakhic system that we have inherited. We learn in the Talmud of the rabbis' concern for the aguna and the mamzer, the poor and the downtrodden. At times, they even reinterpreted biblical verses and enacted new decrees to protect disadvantaged groups. Just as Maimonides believed we are commanded to ensure the Torah's adherence to science and reason, the rabbis believed we are commanded to ensure the halakha's adherence to

morality. As Rabbi Eliezer Berkovits, a great theologian and halakhist of the twentieth century, explains: "The rabbis in the Talmud were guided by the insight: God forbid there should be anything in the application of the Torah to the actual life situation that is contrary to the principles of ethics. What are those principles? They are Torah principles, like: "And you shall do that which is right and good in the sight of the Eternal"; or, "Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace" (according to Talmudic teaching, this refers to the ways and paths of the Torah); or, "That you may walk in the way of good people, and keep the paths of the righteous."<sup>9</sup>

The Torah itself, Rabbi Berkovits argues, has provided a framework of moral principles that must guide our understanding of the law. Rationalism dictates that there are values and motivations behind the commandments. From the Bible itself we learn what these are: human dignity, righteousness, peace, and pleasantness. When we as Jews adhere to these values and create halakha with them in mind, we become a paragon of idealism for the rest of the world. However, when we resort to fundamentalist halakha, which can and does lead to outcomes at odds with these values, we not only create a hillul Hashem, a desecration of God's name, but we also diminish our standing in the eyes' of the world, acting at odds with the message laid out in this week's parasha. For our commandments to be "proof of [our] wisdom and discernment to other peoples," we must exemplify both rationality and morality. By following in the rationalist footsteps of Maimonides, may we live out a Judaism synonymous with reason and morality in accordance with the will of Hakadosh Barukh Hu, and help bring all the people of the world closer to the redemption.

\* Jonathan Arking, a grandson of Rabbi Marc D. Angel, Director of the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, Jewishideas.org, is a summer intern at IJII.

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### **Parshas Vaetchanan: Shabbos Nachamu**

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer\*

[Because of Tisha B'Av coming Wed. evening and Thurs., and because of special programming at Am HaTorah during the Nine Days, Rabbi Singer's Dvar did not reach us in time to be included this week. Watch this space for next Shabbat.]

\* Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD.

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### **Parshat Vaetchanan: Shabbos Nachamu**

By Rabbi Moshe Rube\*

[Because of Tisha B'Av coming on Wed. evening and Thurs., Rabbi Rube's Dvar did not arrive in time to be included here this Shabbat. Watch for his Dvar next week.]

\* Rabbi, Knesseth Israel Congregation, Birmingham, AL

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### **Making Love Last (Va'etchanan 5778)**

By Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks  
Former Chief Rabbi of England

Over the past few months I've been having conversations with leading thinkers, intellectuals, innovators and philanthropists for a BBC series on moral challenges of the 21st century. Among those I spoke to was David Brooks, one of the most insightful moralists of our time. His conversation is always scintillating, but one remark of his was particularly beautiful. It is a key that helps us unlock the entire project outlined by Moses in Sefer Devarim, the fifth and final book of the Torah.

We had been talking about covenants and commitments. I suggested that many people in the West today are commitment-averse, reluctant to bind themselves unconditionally and open-endedly to something or someone. The market mindset that predominates today encourages us to try this, sample that, experiment and keep our options open for the latest version or the better deal. Pledges of loyalty are few and far between.

Brooks agreed and noted that nowadays freedom is usually understood as freedom-from, meaning the absence of restraint. We don't like to be tied down. But the real freedom worth having, in his view, is freedom-to, meaning the ability to do something that's difficult and requires effort and expertise.<sup>[1]</sup> So, for example, if you want to have the freedom to play the piano, you have to chain yourself to it and practise every day.

Freedom in this sense does not mean the absence of restraint, but rather, choosing the right restraint. That involves commitment, which involves a choice to forego certain choices. Then he said: "My favourite definition of commitment is falling in love with something and then building a structure of behaviour around it for the moment when love falters."

That struck me as a beautiful way into one of the fundamental features of Sefer Devarim specifically, and Judaism generally. The book of Deuteronomy is more than simply Moses' speeches in the last months of his life, his tzava'ah or ethical will to the future generations. It is more, also, than Mishneh Torah,<sup>[2]</sup> a recapitulation of the rest of the Torah, a restatement of the laws and history of the people since their time in Egypt.

It is a fundamental theological statement of what Judaism is about. It is an attempt to integrate law and narrative into a single coherent vision of what it would be like to create a society of law-governed liberty under the sovereignty of God: a society of justice, compassion, respect for human dignity and the sanctity of human life. And it is built around an act of mutual commitment, by God to a people and by the people to God.

The commitment itself is an act of love. At the heart of it are the famous words from the Shema in this week's parsha: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might" (Deut. 6:5). The Torah is the foundational narrative of the fraught, sometimes tempestuous, marriage between God and an often obstinate people. It is a story of love.

We can see how central love is to the book of Deuteronomy by noting how often the root a-h-v, "to love," appears in each of the five books of the Torah. It occurs 15 times in Genesis, but none of these is about the relationship between God and a human being. They are about the feelings of husbands for wives or parents for children. This is how often the verb appears in the other 4 books:

Exodus	2
Leviticus	2
Numbers	0
Deuteronomy	23

Again and again we hear of love, in both directions, from the Israelites to God and from God to the Israelites. It is the latter that are particularly striking. Here are some examples:

*The Lord did not set His affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the Lord loved you ...*  
(Deut. 7:7-8)

*To the Lord your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it. Yet the Lord set His affection on your ancestors and loved them, and He chose you, their descendants, above all the nations—as it is today.* (Deut. 10:14-15)

*The Lord your God would not listen to Balaam but turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the Lord your God loves you.* (Deut 23:5)

The real question is how this vision is connected to the legal, halakhic content of much of Devarim. On the one hand we have this passionate declaration of love by God for a people; on the other we have a detailed code of law covering most aspects of life for individuals and the nation as a whole once it enters the land. Law and love are not two things that go obviously together. What has the one to do with the other?

That is what David Brooks' remark suggests: commitment is falling in love with something and then building a structure of behaviour around it to sustain that love over time. Law, the mitzvoth, halakhah, is that structure of behaviour. Love is a

passion, an emotion, a heightened state, a peak experience. But an emotional state cannot be guaranteed forever. We wed in poetry but we stay married in prose.

Which is why we need laws, rituals, habits of deed. Rituals are the framework that keeps love alive. I once knew a wonderfully happy married couple. The husband, with great devotion, brought his wife breakfast in bed every morning. I am not entirely sure she needed or even wanted breakfast in bed every morning, but she graciously accepted it because she knew it was the homage he wished to pay her, and it did indeed keep their love alive. After decades of marriage, they still seemed to be on their honeymoon.

Without intending any precise comparison, that is what the vast multiplicity of rituals in Judaism, many of them spelled out in the book of Deuteronomy, actually achieved. They sustained the love between God and a people. You hear the cadences of that love throughout the generations. It is there in the book of Psalms: "You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you; I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you, in a dry and parched land where there is no water" (Ps. 63:1). It is there in Isaiah: "Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet My unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor My covenant of peace be removed" (Is. 54:10). It is there in the siddur, in the blessing before the Shema: "You have loved us with great love / with everlasting love." It is there, passionately, in the song, *Yedid Nefesh*, composed in the sixteenth century by Safed kabbalist Elazar Azikri. It remains there in the songs composed year after year in present-day Israel. Whether they speak of God's love for us or ours for Him, the love remains strong after 33 centuries. That is a long time for love to last, and we believe it will do so forever.

Could it have done so without the rituals, the 613 commands, that fill our days with reminders of God's presence? I think not. Whenever Jews abandoned the life of the commands, within a few generations they lost their identity. Without the rituals, eventually love dies. With them, the glowing embers remain, and still have the power to burst into flame. Not every day in a long and happy marriage feels like a wedding, but even love grown old will still be strong, if the choreography of fond devotion, the ritual courtesies and kindnesses, are sustained.

In the vast literature of halakhah we find the 'how' and 'what' of Jewish life, but not always the 'why.' The special place of Sefer Devarim in Judaism as a whole is that here, more clearly than almost anywhere else, we find the 'why.' Jewish law is the structure of behaviour built around the love between God and His people, so that the love remains long after the first feelings of passion have grown old.

Hence the life-change idea: if you seek to make love undying, build around it a structure of rituals – small acts of kindness, little gestures of self-sacrifice for the sake of the beloved – and you will be rewarded with a quiet joy, an inner light, that will last a lifetime.

#### **FOOTNOTES:**

[1] This is similar to, though not identical with, Isaiah Berlin's distinction between negative and positive freedom, in his famous essay, 'Two Concepts of Liberty,' reprinted in Isaiah Berlin, *Liberty*, ed. Henry Hardy, Oxford University Press, 2002, 166-217.

[2] This was the original rabbinical name for the book. The name Deuteronomy, from the Latin meaning "second law," was an attempt to capture the sense of the book as a restatement of the laws.

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## **Dealing Wisely with Torah**

by Dena Weiss\*

The Book of Deuteronomy is often described as Moses' review of the Torah, but in its deepest sense it is a meditation on the nature of Torah. Moses teaches some new laws and refreshes the old ones, and he argues for the centrality of the Torah and the commandments. But he also offers a nuanced perspective on the limits of Torah and how it must be approached with care and curiosity — even caution. This perspective invites us to think critically about the role of Torah in our lives as active producers of, and engagers with, the text — not just as passive recipients and obeyers.

Much of this conversation hangs on a single verb, which we first encounter in Parashat Vaetchanan.

*[V'Zot HaTorah. . . ] This is the teaching that Moses placed [sam] before the Israelites.*  
Deuteronomy 4:44

Many readers will be familiar with this verse, which is recited in many synagogues as the Torah is displayed after the public reading, but the language is a little strange. Why does it say that Moses “placed” the Torah before the people? Why didn’t he give it, or maybe better, teach it?

In the Talmud, we encounter a significant but difficult truth about the Torah embedded in this verb.

*Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: What is the meaning of that which is written: “And this is the Torah which Moses put [sam] before the children of Israel.” If one merits it, the Torah becomes a potion [sam] of life for him. If one does not merit it, the Torah becomes a potion of death for him.*  
Yoma 72b

Using talmudic wordplay, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi observes that the Hebrew word for “placed” is a homophone for the Hebrew word for “potion.” From this, he argues that the nature of the Torah is not absolute, but relative. The kind of person you are and the way that you approach the Torah determines whether or not you will find the Torah life-giving or life-taking, invigorating or exhausting. According to this teaching, the Torah is not properly thought of as something that transforms us, but rather it is we who transform the Torah — through interpretation and application, but perhaps most importantly, through our attitude. We determine the nature of the Torah based on our own nature.

The question is: How? How does one become the sort of person for whom the Torah is a blessing instead of a burden? Where does this elusive merit come from?

A mishnah in Makkot offers this answer:

*Rabbi Hananiah ben Akashia says: “The Holy Blessed One desired to bring merit to Israel, therefore He gave them much Torah [to study] and many commandments [to perform]: as it says, “The Lord desires [his servant’s] vindication, that he may magnify and glorify [His] teaching.”*  
Makkot 3:16

According to this mishnah, the Torah and the commandments provide us with opportunities to find merit. In other words, what Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi tells us can be either life-giving or life-taking based upon our merit is the very thing that Rabbi Hananiah ben Akashia says is the source of the merit itself! Rabbi Hananiah ben Akashia does not take a selective or cautious approach to the Torah. He thinks that the goal and the function of Torah is merit and that we need to take the Torah upon ourselves and approach it with confidence and joy. The trepidation and anxiety embedded in Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi’s approach seems quite far from the outlook of Rabbi Hananiah ben Akashia.

Yet perhaps both Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi’s wariness and Rabbi Hananiah ben Akashia’s confidence are necessary to approach Torah successfully. Perhaps it is precisely the belief that the Torah brings merit is what makes us the kind of meritorious people that Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi says will make Torah a positive force in our lives.

If we choose to embrace Torah completely and enthusiastically, as Rabbi Hananiah ben Akashia urges, while holding on to the full awareness that it can be both complicated and difficult, as per Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi, then and only then are we set up to derive the goodness inherent in Torah. Both perspectives are necessary to avoid the pitfalls of an unhealthy or unbalanced approach. The Torah can be distorted — or distorting, harmful even. But by recognizing this possibility, and choosing to engage with it anyway, we enter into the relationship prepared for the risks and capable of weathering whatever storms arise. It’s only when we’re unaware that something could be misapplied or misunderstood that our innocence invites us to fail. The caution of Rabbi Yehoshua enables the confidence of Rabbi Hananiah ben Akashia, while the latter’s confidence ensures the former’s followers that the risk is indeed worthwhile.

In Parashat Vaetchanan, Moses places the Torah before the people and says: Deal with this wisely. I am promising you that this is hard, that it requires careful attention and that there is a possibility that you may not succeed. But I promise you that it is worth it. I provide you with this warning so that you can be successful, so that you will be strategic as well as loving in ensuring that the Torah is a source of blessing and of life.

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## Rav Kook Torah

### Vaetchanan: The Double Shema

When we recite the Shema — Judaism's central affirmation of faith — we accept upon ourselves ohl malchut shamayim, God's kingship and authority. The Torah instructs us to recite the Shema twice a day — "when you lie down and when you rise up" (6:7).

Why isn't once a day sufficient?

#### Public and Private Domains

By contemplating and meditating on a concept, we deepen its impact on the soul.

The day has two parts. There are the daytime hours, when we interact with the outside world. And there is the evening, when we retire to the quiet sanctuary of our homes. By reciting the Shema every morning and evening, we accept malchut shamayim during both parts of the day. In other words, our affirmation of Shema guides us in our public activities in the daytime, as well as in our private lives at night.

Reciting the Shema before the day begins helps prepare us for the daytime hours, so that our social interactions and public activities will meet the Torah's ethical standards. And the Shema of the evening is meant to imbue our private lives with holiness and purity.

Both affirmations are vital. Ethical living should not be restricted to one's private life, just as it should not be limited to the sphere of one's public affairs.

This dual recital of Shema provides an additional insight. The ethical directives for society as a whole are different than those for the individual. Public life is too varied and complex to be governed by the same guidelines that guide private individuals. The Shema of the morning is therefore inherently different than the Shema of the evening.

#### The Private Service of the Kohen

This insight helps us understand a peculiar statement of the Sages. The Mishnah teaches that the evening Shema is to be recited "after the hour when the kohanim return [from the mikveh] to eat their terumah offerings" (Berachot 1:1). A kohen who became ritually impure must immerse himself in a mikveh and wait until nightfall before eating terumah. When in fact did the kohanim become pure and could once again eat terumah? When the first stars may be seen in the night sky.

Why doesn't the Mishnah mention this time explicitly? Why the digression about kohanim returning home to eat their terumah?

In fact, this is a beautiful metaphor for the evening Shema. The principal service of the kohanim takes place during the day; but their evening meal of terumah is also a form of Divine service (see Pesachim 73a). The inspiring image of a kohen entering his home to eat terumah corresponds to our own recital of the evening Shema, as we accept God's dominion in our private lives. When we recite Shema in the evening, we demonstrate that we belong to a "kingdom of priests" also in the privacy of our own homes.

#### The Shema of the Nation

This distinction between the evening and morning Shema, between our private and public service of God, has a parallel on the national level. There are times and situations in which the Jewish people must be a "people who dwells alone" (Num. 23:9) — a people separated from the other nations in order to safeguard their special heritage. On the other hand, the nation of Israel is also charged to influence and uplift the rest of humanity, to serve as "a light unto the nations" (Isaiah 42:6).

The evening Shema corresponds to the special spiritual life of Israel, a nation living its own existence in pure faith. The blessing recited after the evening Shema is "Emet va'Emunah" — "Truth and Faith." This is a time when the unique character of the Jewish people must be protected from foreign influences. It is like the kohen who returns to his home in the evening, after publicly representing the people in the Temple during the day. In the privacy of his home, the kohen separates from non-kohanim as he partakes of the holy terumah offerings.

The morning Shema, on the other hand, corresponds to our national mission to declare God's Name in the world. Therefore, the blessing recited after the morning Shema is "Emet VaYatziv." The word yatziv is simply emet (truth) translated to Aramaic. We translate the Torah's message to other languages, as this is a time when its truth should be understood by all nations of the world, inspired by Israel's acceptance of God's reign.

(Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. I, p. 173.)

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## Vaetchanan: Land and See

By Yanki Tauber\*

"Don't you see?" we insist when the person we're arguing with won't recognize the shining truth that's staring us both in the face. "Oh, I see . . ." we concede when yet another comfortable fallacy is debunked. We may have five senses with which to apprehend our world, but somehow, "I smelled it with my own nose" or even "I felt it with my own hands" doesn't carry the authority of "I saw it with my own eyes." What we "see"—whether literally or figuratively—is unequivocally, uncontestedly real.

"Let me cross over," Moses implored G d as the people of Israel camped on the eastern bank of the Jordan, "and let me see the good Land." But G d refused. We all know the tragic tale. Moses, who had taken the people out of Egypt, who had climbed Mount Sinai to receive the Torah for them and returned to teach them the word of G d, who for forty years tended to their hungers and thirsts, their doubts and complaints and rebellions—Moses was to die and be buried in the plains of Moab, and his disciple, Joshua, was to lead a new generation of Jews into the Promised Land.

But upon closer examination, Moses' prayer was at least partially answered. Moses asked to cross over and to see the Land; G d refused the first part of the request and granted the second. "Ascend to the top of the summit," G d said to Moses, ". . . and see it with your eyes; for you shall not cross this Jordan."

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Our sages note that all of Moses' achievements are eternal and everlasting. Moses liberated us from slavery, and from that moment we have been inherently, irrevocably free: nations may subjugate us physically, but no force on earth can subdue the Jewish soul. Moses gave us the Torah, and never shall the Torah depart from Israel. Even the Mishkan, the "temporary" sanctuary built by Moses in the desert, was never destroyed (as were the permanent divine abodes built by Solomon and Ezra in Jerusalem), but mysteriously hidden away in an undisclosed place, where it remains intact to this very day.

Chassidic teaching explains that this is the deeper reason why Moses was not allowed to enter the Land of Israel. If Moses would have settled us in the Land, we could never have been exiled from it. If Moses would have built the Holy Temple, it could never have been destroyed. If Moses would have established the people of Israel in their homeland as a "light unto the nations," that light could never have been dimmed.

If Moses would have crossed the Jordan, that would have been the end: the end of the struggle, the end of history.

G d wasn't ready for the end yet. So He decreed that Moses remain in the desert. But He did allow him to see the Land. And because Moses saw it, and because the effect of everything Moses did is everlasting, we too can see it.

At all times, and under all conditions, we have the power to ascend a summit within us and see the Promised Land. No matter how distant the end-goal of creation may seem, we have the power to see its reality, to know its truth with absolute clarity and absolute conviction.

We are still in the midst of the struggle. It is a difficult, oftentimes painful struggle; but it is not a blind struggle. Moses has seen to that.

## 7 [really 8] Joyous Events That Happened on the 15th of Av

By Yanki Tauber \*

### **1. The dancing maidens of Jerusalem**

Said Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel: There were no greater festivals for Israel than the 15th of Av and Yom Kippur. On these days the daughters of Jerusalem would go out... and dance in the vineyards. And what would they say? "Young man, raise your eyes and see which you select for yourself..." (Talmud, Taanit 26b)

The Talmud goes on to list several joyous events which occurred on the 15th day of the month of Av:

### **2. The dying of the generation of the Exodus ceased.**

Several months after the people of Israel were freed from Egyptian slavery, the incident of the spies demonstrated their unpreparedness for the task of conquering the land of Canaan and developing it as the Holy Land. G d decreed that that entire generation would die out in the desert, and that their children would enter the land in their stead (as recounted in Numbers 13 and 14). After 40 years of wandering through the wilderness, the dying finally ended, and a new generation of Jews stood ready to enter the Holy Land. It was the 15th of Av of the year 2487 from creation (1274 BCE).

As long as members of this doomed generation were still alive, G d didn't communicate with Moses in an affectionate manner. As soon as the last of these men died, once again G d lovingly communicated with Moses.

### **3. The tribes of Israel were permitted to intermarry.**

In order to ensure the orderly division of the Holy Land between the twelve tribes of Israel, restrictions had been placed on marriages between members of two different tribes. A woman who had inherited tribal lands from her father was forbidden to marry out of her tribe, lest her children—members of their father's tribe—cause the transfer of land from one tribe to another by inheriting her estate (as recounted in Numbers 36). This ordinance was binding on the generation that conquered and settled the Holy Land; when the restriction was lifted, on the 15th of Av, the event was considered a cause for celebration and festivity.

### **4. The tribe of Benjamin was permitted to re-enter the community.**

On this date the tribe of Benjamin, which had been excommunicated for its behavior in the incident of the "Concubine at Giv'ah," was readmitted into the community of Israel (as related in Judges 19–21). This occurred during the judgeship of Othniel ben Kenaz, who led the people of Israel in the years 2533–2573 from creation (1228–1188 BCE).

### **5. Hoshea ben Elah opened the roads to Jerusalem.**

Upon the division of the Holy Land into two kingdoms following the death of King Solomon in the year 2964 from creation (797 BCE), Jeroboam ben Nebat, ruler of the breakaway northern kingdom of Israel, set up roadblocks to prevent his citizens from making the thrice-yearly pilgrimage to the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, capital of the southern kingdom of Judah. These were finally removed more than 200 years later by Hoshea ben Elah, the last king of the northern kingdom, on Av 15, 3187 (574 BCE).

### **6. The dead of Betar were allowed to be buried.**

The fortress of Betar was the last holdout of the Bar Kochba rebellion. When Betar fell, on Av 9, 3893 (133 CE), Bar Kochba and many thousands of Jews were killed; the Romans massacred the survivors of the battle with great cruelty, and would not even allow the Jews to bury their dead. When the dead of Betar were finally brought to burial on Av 15, 3908 (148 CE), an additional blessing ("Hatov Vehameitiv") was added to the Grace After Meals in commemoration.

### **7. "The day of the breaking of the ax."**

When the Holy Temple stood in Jerusalem, the annual cutting of firewood for the altar was concluded on the 15th of Av. The event was celebrated with feasting and rejoicing (as is the custom upon the conclusion of a holy endeavor), and included a ceremonial breaking of the axes, which gave the day its name.

**8. [Editor's note]: Our son Evan and his wife Heather became engaged on Tu B'Av.**

\* Former Editor of Chabad.org. © 2019.

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## **An Insight on Parshat Va'etchanan**

By Rabbi M. Wisnefsky\*

**Moses reviewed the laws that the Jewish people had received from G-d at Mount Sinai. He began with the Ten Commandments.**

*Moses told the Jewish people, "When He gave you the Torah, G-d spoke with you at the mountain face to face."*  
(Deuteronomy 5:4)

### **Repeating the Ten Commandments**

The first account of the Ten Commandments -- in the Book of Exodus -- is the "real time" description of how this event occurred. The second account of the Ten Commandments is Moses' description of it, as part of his historical review of the Jewish people's Exodus from Egypt and their trek through the desert.

Reliving the first account of the Giving of the Torah allows us to experience G-d's presence in the Torah as we are studying it. This experience prevents us from forgetting that the study of the Torah is a spiritual encounter between G-d and us and not merely an intellectual pursuit. Hearing the second account of the Ten Commandments, couched as part of Moses' address to the people, enables us to employ our own, human intellect in the study of the Torah, in order to internalize it and absorb its message fully. In this way, the goal of making this world into a home for G-d is achieved.

– Kehot's Daily Wisdom

\* **An Insight from the Rebbe.** Note: reprinted from 5777.

Gut Shabbos,  
Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman  
Kehot Publication Society

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## **A Final Word on Tisha B'Av: From the Midrash**

By the Lubavitch Rebbe, z"l

The prophet Jeremiah who lived through the terrible time of the destruction of Jerusalem and the Beth Hamikdash, was in many respects like Moses, the "Father of the Prophets." Like Moses, Jeremiah prophesied for forty years. He, too, frequently faced danger and violence to his person. Moses was thrown into the water (in the Nile River) and Jeremiah into a pit; the former was saved by a maid (of Pharaoh's daughter), the latter by a slave. Both continually admonished the people to keep to the path of the Torah.

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Jeremiah was a priest, but the cherished priestly privilege of blessing his people was not his only duty. He wanted only to bless his beloved people with the priestly benediction ("G-d bless you and keep the..."), yet it was his duty also to admonish the people and warn them of the terrible calamity of the Destruction of Jerusalem.

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Why were the lamentations (in the Book of Echah, written by Jeremiah) composed in the order of the Hebrew Aleph-Beth? Because the Jewish people had forsaken the Torah (which is written in the Hebrew alphabet).

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On Tisha b'Av the disciples of Ben Azzai came to him and said: "Master, tell us something about the Book of Echah." Replied the sage: "Echah is spelled with an aleph (1), yud (10), chof (20) and hey (5). The very name of the book of Lamentations spells the reason for the destruction of our land and of our exile. Our people were driven from the Holy Land because they were disloyal to the One and Only G-d, broke the Ten Commandments, betrayed the Covenant of Circumcision which was given to Abraham our father in the 20th generation since the creation of the world, and did not observe the Five Books of Moses."

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Said Rabbi Joshua ben Levi: "Since the day that G-d destroyed Jerusalem and the Beth Hamikdash, He knows of no joy. Only when Jerusalem and the Beth Hamikdash will be rebuilt, and the Jews will be restored as of old, will G-d rejoice again. May that day come speedily in our time. Amen."

– from *Talks and Tales*, a 17 volume set of writings from the Lubavitch Rebbe, z"l.

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman  
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#### Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

##### Why is the Jewish People So Small?

Near the end of Va'etchanan is a statement with such far-reaching implications that it challenges the impression that has prevailed thus far in the Torah. This remark gives an entirely new complexion to the biblical image of the people Israel: "The Lord did not set His affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you are the fewest of all peoples" (Deut. 7:7).

This is not what we have heard thus far. In Genesis, God promised the patriarchs that their descendants would be like the stars of the heaven, the sand on the seashore, the dust of the earth, uncountable. Abraham will be the father, not just of one nation but of many. At the beginning of Exodus we read of how the covenantal family, numbering a mere seventy when they went down to Egypt, were "fertile and prolific, and their population increased. They became so numerous that the land was filled with them" (Ex. 1:7). Three times in the book of Deuteronomy, Moses describes the Israelites as being "as many as the stars of the sky" (1:10; 10:22; 28:62). King Solomon speaks of himself as being part of "the people You have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number" (I Kings 3:8). The prophet Hosea says that "the Israelites will be like the sand on the seashore, which cannot be measured or counted" (Hos. 2:1).

In all these texts and others it is the size, the numerical greatness, of the people that is emphasised. What then are we to make of Moses' words that speak of its smallness? Targum Yonatan interprets it not to be about numbers at all but about self-image. He translates it not as "the fewest of all peoples" but as "the most lowly and humble of peoples." Rashi gives a similar reading, citing Abraham's words, "I am but dust and ashes" (Gen. 18:27), and Moses and Aaron's, "Who are we?" (Ex. 16:7).

Rashbam and Chizkuni[1] give the more straightforward explanation that Moses is contrasting the Israelites with the seven nations they would be fighting in the land of Canaan/ Israel. God would lead the Israelites to victory despite the fact that they were outnumbered by the local inhabitants. Rabbeinu Bachya[2] quotes Maimonides, who says that we would have expected God, King of the universe, to have chosen the most numerous nation in the world as His people, since "the glory of the King is in the multitude of people" (Prov. 14:28). God did not do so. Thus Israel should count itself extraordinarily blessed that God

chose it, despite its smallness, to be His am segula, His special treasure.

Rabbeinu Bachya finds himself forced to give a more complex reading to resolve the contradiction of Moses, in Deuteronomy, saying both that Israel is the smallest of peoples and "as many as the stars of the sky" (Gen. 22:17). He turns it into a hypothetical subjunctive, meaning: God would still have chosen you, even if you had been the smallest of the peoples.

Sforno[3] gives a simple and straightforward reading: God did not choose a nation for the sake of His honour. Had He done so He would undoubtedly have chosen a mighty and numerous people. His choice had nothing to do with honour and everything to do with love. He loved the patriarchs for their willingness to heed His voice; therefore He loves their children.

Yet there is something in this verse that resonates throughout much of Jewish history. Historically Jews were and are a small people – today, less than 0.2 per cent of the population of the world. There were two reasons for this. First is the heavy toll taken through the ages by exile and persecution, directly by Jews killed in massacres and pogroms, indirectly by those who converted – in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Spain and nineteenth-century Europe – in order to avoid persecution (tragically, even conversion did not work; racial antisemitism persisted in both cases). The Jewish population is a mere fraction of what it might have been had there been no Hadrian, no Crusades, and no antisemitism.

The second reason is that Jews did not seek to convert others. Had they done so they would have been closer in numbers to Christianity (2.4 billion) or Islam (1.6 billion). In fact, Malbim[4] reads something like this into our verse. The previous verses have said that the Israelites were about to enter a land with seven nations, Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites. Moses warns them against intermarriage with the other nations, not for racial but for religious reasons: "They will turn your children away from following Me to serve other gods" (Deut. 7:4). Malbim interprets our verse as Moses saying to the Israelites: Do not justify out-marriage on the grounds that it will increase the number of Jews. God is not interested in numbers.

Notwithstanding all these interpretations and explanations, Tanach itself offers one extraordinary episode that sheds a different

light on the whole issue. It occurs in the seventh chapter of the book of Judges. God has told Gideon to assemble an army and do battle with the Midianites. He gathers a force of 32,000 men. God tells him, "You have too many men. I cannot deliver Midian into their hands, or Israel would boast against Me, 'My own strength has saved me'" (Judges 7:2).

God tells Gideon to say to the men: Whoever is afraid and wishes to go home may do so. Twenty-two thousand men leave. Ten thousand remain. God tells Gideon, "There are still too many men." He proposes a new test. Gideon is to take the men to a river and see how they drink the water. Ninety-seven hundred kneel down to drink, and are dismissed. Gideon is left with a mere three hundred men. "With the three hundred men that lapped [the water] I will save you and give the Midianites into your hands," God tells him (Judges 7:1–8). By a brilliant and unexpected strategy, the three hundred put the entire Midianite army to flight.

The Jewish people are small but have achieved great things to testify in themselves to a force beyond themselves. It has achieved things no other nation its size could have achieved. Its history has been living testimony to the force of Divine Providence and the impact of high ideals. That is what Moses meant when he said: Ask now about the former days, long before your time, from the day God created human beings on the earth; ask from one end of the heavens to the other. Has anything so great as this ever happened, or has anything like it ever been heard of? Has any other people heard the voice of God speaking out of fire, as you have, and lived? Has any god ever tried to take for himself one nation out of another nation, by testings, by signs and wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, or by great and awesome deeds, like all the things the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your very eyes? (Deut. 4:32–34)

Israel defies the laws of history because it serves the Author of history. Attached to greatness, it becomes great. Through the Jewish people, God is telling humankind that you do not need to be numerous to be great. Nations are judged not by their size but by their contribution to human heritage. Of this the most compelling proof is that a nation as small as the Jews could produce an ever-renewed flow of prophets, priests, poets, philosophers, sages, saints, halachists,

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aggadists, codifiers, commentators, rabbis, and rashei yeshivot. It has also yielded some of the world's greatest writers, artists, musicians, filmmakers, academics, intellectuals, doctors, lawyers, businesspeople, and technological innovators. Out of all proportion to their numbers, Jews could and can be found working as lawyers fighting injustice, economists fighting poverty, doctors fighting disease, teachers fighting ignorance, and therapists fighting depression and despair.

You do not need numbers to enlarge the spiritual and moral horizons of humankind. You need other things altogether: a sense of the worth and dignity of the individual, of the power of human possibility to transform the world, of the importance of giving everyone the best education they can have, of making each feel part of a collective responsibility to ameliorate the human condition. Judaism asks of us the willingness to take high ideals and enact them in the real world, unswayed by disappointments and defeats.

This is still evident today, especially among the people of Israel in the State of Israel. Traduced in the media and pilloried by much of the world, Israel continues to produce human miracles in medicine, agriculture, technology, and the arts, as if the word "impossible" did not exist in the Hebrew language. Israel remains a small nation, surrounded, as in biblical times, by "nations larger and stronger than you" (Deut. 7:1). Yet the truth remains, as Moses said: "The Lord did not set His affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you are the fewest of all peoples."

This small people has outlived all the world's great empires to deliver to humanity a message of hope: you need not be large to be great. What you need is to be open to a power greater than yourself. It is said that King Louis XIV of France once asked Blaise Pascal, the brilliant mathematician and theologian, to give him proof of the existence of God. Pascal is said to have replied, "Your Majesty, the Jews!"

[1] Rabbi Chezekiah ben Manoah; France, 1250-1310

[2] Bachya ben Asher ibn Halava; Spain, 1255-1340

[3] Ovadiah ben Yacov Sforza; Italy, 1475-1550

[4] Meir Leibush ben Yehiel Michel Wisser; Ukraine, 1809-1879

#### **Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin**

"You are a holy nation to the Lord your God... a treasured nation from amongst all the nations.... It was not because you were more numerous than all the nations... that God chose you since you are the smallest of all nations. It is rather because God loves you and because of His keeping of the oath which He swore to your ancestors..." (Deuteronomy 7:6-8)

What is the real meaning of the "election" of Israel? It cannot be because we are better than all other nations; to dispel that notion one need only to turn again to the prophetic sections we've been reading these past three Sabbaths from Jeremiah and Isaiah, railing and thundering against the Israelites because of their immorality and hypocrisy.

Nor is it because the nation of Israel was a paragon of virtue in the early days of its formation. On the contrary, during the early chapters of Deuteronomy Moses actually recounts the backsliding of our people from the wanton worship of the Golden Calf just forty days after the Revelation at Sinai, to all of the petty complaints and serious rebellions against Moses (and God!) throughout the Book of Numbers. God could not possibly have been under any illusions about the superior moral quality of this family – nation that He had "chosen."

Were we then elected because we were "the least among nations," the fewest in number and the weakest in power, as the above quoted text would suggest? Is that a reason for being chosen? What is the source of this "love" for us of which our Bible speaks? Can it be that the Creator of the Universe fell prey to a totally arbitrary and irrational love which is the Achilles' heel, the tragic undoing of so many of His mortal creatures, when love is merely an expression of emotion to the total exclusion of logic?

Furthermore, why refer to this particular Sabbath as Shabbat Nahamu, the Sabbath of comfort? Historically, the Israelites continued to fast in memory of the destruction of the First Temple throughout the period of the rebuilt Second Temple and renewed Jewish sovereignty in Jerusalem. We know this from a variety of sources, including Zechariah 7,8, from Josephus, 2nd Commonwealth historian, as well as from the legalist- philosopher Maimonides (Interpretations of the Mishnah, Rosh HaShanah 18). After all, even our miraculous survival and subsequent rebuilding cannot begin to remove the pain of the righteous adults and innocent children who lost their lives in the period of destruction, or erase the force of the agonizing question, Eicha?! Can our generation's remarkable return to our promised homeland provide any kind of reasonable response to the piercing question mark which arises from the smokestacks of Auschwitz and Buchenwald? So, from whence comes our comfort?

Rabbi Eliezer Berkovits, in his masterful work Faith after the Holocaust, cites a bold and startling passage of the Talmud (B.T. Yoma 69b) which sheds light on this issue:

"Said R. Yehoshua ben Levi (a survivor of the Second Temple devastation): Why was our Judicial synod called the "Men of the Great Assembly"? Because they restored the (Divine) crown to its pristine glory.

#### **Likutei Divrei Torah**

Moses came and countered, 'the great, powerful and awesome God' (Deut. 10)

Jeremiah came and declared, 'The Gentiles have undermined the infrastructure of His Temple; where is His awesomeness?' And he (Jeremiah) deleted (the word) awesome (from God's praises in the Amidah).

Daniel came and cried out, 'The Gentiles are subjugating His children; where is His power?'

And he (Daniel) deleted (the word) powerful (from God's praises in the Amidah).

They (the Men of the Great Assembly, who formulated our prayers) came and restored, saying, 'The very opposite is the truth! Herein lies the power behind God's power: that He conquers His instinct (to set evil off at the pass before it wreaks its damage) and has patience for the wicked (to wait for them to repent and repair the world). And herein lies His awesomeness: were it not for the awesomeness of the Holy One Blessed be He, how could one (paltry) nation withstand and survive the (powerful) nation's roundabout.'

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi's message is indubitably clear. God has created an imperfect world of freedom of choice, a seemingly absurd and lawless world in which individuals will do even that which the Almighty would not want them to do (the Kabbalistic notion of tzimtzum, the willful "contraction" of the goodness and justice of the Creator of the Universe, as it were, in order to leave room for a world of free choice). As the prophet Isaiah (45:7) declares, "Creator of light and Maker of darkness, Doer of peace and Maker of evil (sic), I am the Lord, the Doer of all these things." God has confidence – and even guarantees – that eventually the wicked will repent, that human beings will eventually succeed in repairing and perfecting this world in the Kingship of the Divine, that there will eventually be a messianic period of world peace and well-being (Isaiah 2, Micah 4, Zechariah 7-9). Hence God allows the world to proceed in accordance "with its customary way," without preventing stolen seed from taking root in the ground, or withering the hand uplifted to smite an innocent human. Hence, "there is not reward for commandments in this world;" only in the other, eternal world of souls and spirituality will there be proper rewards for deeds well done (B.T. Kidushin 39).

Israel plays a pivotal role in this drama. We are God's "holy nation and priest-teachers" to the world (S'forno, ad loc), the descendants of Abraham who chose God before God chose him (Maimonides, Mishneh Torah Laws of Idolatry 1, 1-3), guaranteed by God of eternal progeny who would eventually live in the Land of Israel and teach ethical monotheism to the entire world (Genesis 12:1-3)

Those who opposed ethical monotheism, relying on might rather than right, brute violent power rather than love and morality, have all too often ruled the world – from Pharaoh the totalitarian despot of Egypt, to Nazi Hitler to radical Wahabi Islam. The very survival of Israel, our miraculous ability to remain alive despite Egyptian enslavement and holocaust conflagration with horrific exiles and persecutions in between, – regardless of the fact that we are the most paltry in number and the weakest in power of all nations of the world (indeed, for almost 2000 years we were completely stateless and army-less), – makes us God's witnesses, adat HaShem, testifying that God is indeed a God of love and morality, a God of right over might, a God of morality over brute force.

This is God's power, this is God's awesomeness, and this is the source of our great comfort: God chose you since you are the smallest (weakest) of all nations, because God loves you" – not because you are perfect but because you are morally better than your enemies, and because your very survival testifies to the existence and eventual triumph of a God of Justice, morality and peace.

#### **The Person in the Parsha** **Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb**

##### **A Sabbath of Consolation**

I was very fortunate as a young boy, and in one particular way I knew it. Very few of my friends had living grandparents. Their families had recently arrived in America, and their grandparents remained behind in Eastern Europe and were consumed in the fires of the Holocaust.

I, on the other hand, had all four of my grandparents and was even privileged to have known one great-grandparent, my mother's mother's mother, Yitta Leah Kriegel, may she rest in peace.

However, I did not immediately realize then just how fortunate I was. That, I discovered much later, when I reached early adolescence. It wasn't until then that I became informed about the Holocaust. It slowly dawned upon me that I was born just months after Hitler invaded Poland.

The image that continues to haunt me today first emerged then into my mind's eye. It is the image of many cousins being buried alive, their tiny bellies punctured by storm troopers' bayonets, their bodies incinerated, reduced to ash.

It was only then that I came to understand how fortunate I was to have been born in Brooklyn, NY, and not in Kolomay, Poland.

My great-grandmother was the impetus for my life-long preoccupation with the Holocaust, its history, and its horrors. Somehow, although others claimed that they were then unaware of what was transpiring in distant Europe, she

knew what was happening to her family there. Not only did she know, but she responded.

"Responded?" you ask incredulously. Of what sort of response was she capable? She was ninety years old, frail, of meager means, and spoke no English to boot.

Her response was prayer; prayer and fasting. She fasted every Monday and Thursday from dawn to dusk, and spent those days entirely in prayer, tearfully but silently reciting Psalms. If my childhood memories serve me correctly, she recited the entire Book of Psalms each day that she fasted.

I do not know, and to this day have had no way of ever knowing, when she began this pious spiritual practice, but I know for certain when she concluded it. I know this for certain, for I was with her on that summer day in 1950 when she passed away.

The image of my great-grandmother has, by now, mostly faded from my memory. But every year, as this coming Shabbat approaches, that image is revived. For one thing, it is close to the date of her passing on the 22nd of Tammuz.

But what brings it back to me even more forcefully is another image, this one from this week's Torah portion, Parashat Va'etchanan (Deuteronomy 3:23-7:11). It is the image of Moses, days before his demise, praying urgently and repeatedly that the Almighty grant him permission to enter the Promised Land.

There are many differences between Yitta Leah's prayers and those of Moses. She was praying for the lives, and eventually for the souls, of others, six million others. He, on the other hand, was praying for himself.

Yet in so many ways, their prayers were similar. They both prayed silently, as a Jew should. They both prayed desperately and repetitively. We are told that Moses uttered 515 prayers, and Yitta Leah's prayers were certainly no fewer. Both prayed in solitude.

Sadly, the prayers of neither were answered. Except for those who were already in America, great-grandmother's extended family had but one survivor, and Moses never set foot into the Promised Land.

It is partly for this reason that this week's parasha calls to mind the theme of unanswered prayers.

But there is another reason. This Shabbat inevitably follows the somber day of Tisha B'Av, a day whose very essence is the theme of unanswered prayers: "You have screened Yourself off with a cloud, so that no prayer may pass through" (Lamentations 3:44). This verse expresses the feeling of every faithful Jew as he or she struggles to cope on Tisha

## **Likutei Divrei Torah**

B'Av with the recollection of the multitudes of unanswered prayers that characterized the long list of the catastrophes of Jewish history.

It is thus so very apt that our tradition designates this Shabbat as the Sabbath of Consolation, Shabbat Nachamu. There can be no greater consolation than the hope for "answered prayers" and the promise that they will be answered.

It was only as a little boy that I knew my great-grandmother. But even then, I knew her well enough to understand that in her current heavenly abode, she finds her prayers answered. For one thing, we believe that the Almighty's mysteries are revealed to the righteous in the Afterlife. Moreover, she has undoubtedly found consolation in the knowledge that so many of her descendants are faithful to her life's example and now tell her story to their own great-grandchildren.

And Moses too has found consolation in the knowledge that his People are returning to the land for which he yearned. Joel Cohen, in his beautiful book Moses: A Memoir, poignantly describes Moses' last moments and imagines him saying these words:

"For better than allowing me to walk with my people in the Promised Land, He has indulged me to see the beauty and magnificence of His continuum and how, despite all, He has loved them so..."

Both our parasha itself and its haftarah, the reading from the Book of Isaiah which accompanies it, encourage such hope and herald such promise: "For what great nation is there that has a god so close at hand as is the Lord our God whenever we call upon Him?" (Deuteronomy 4:7)

And,  
"Comfort, oh comfort My people...  
Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,  
And declare to her  
That her term of service is over,  
That her iniquity is expiated..." (Isaiah 40:2)

#### **Dvar Torah**

##### **Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis**

##### **Loving Hashem isn't meant to be simple...**

Is it fair to insist that a person should love someone or something? I guess your instinctive reply will be absolutely not. But isn't that the important mitzvah which we have in parashat Va'etchanan, which we are all familiar with? 'V'ahav-ta et Hashem Elokecha B'chol l'vav'cha uv'chol nafsh'cha uv'chol m'odecha- You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might!

We don't have a love button that we can press as a result of which we begin loving God. So as important as it is to love the Almighty – surely it's unfair of him to insist that we do so?

There are those who explain that love is the culmination of knowledge and experience. I come to either love something or someone, or not, as a result of what I know about them, and also the experiences that I have had with them – and as a result I either have that sensation or feeling of love, or I don't.

Therefore, it is incumbent upon us to know Hashem, to study everything we can about Him, and also to purposefully have spiritually uplifting experiences through which we will come to love Him. So, as opposed to some mitzvot which can take just a few minutes to perform and then you've done it – loving Hashem is a lifelong aspiration.

The Rambam was perhaps sensitive to the question we are asking. That is why in his 'Sefer Ha'mitzvot' when he codifies the mitzvah of loving Hashem – he actually declares that there is no such precept to love God. He explains 'v'ahavta' to be in the causative. Not 'you must love', but rather you must cause God 'to be loved' – with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your might.

The Rambam essentially is telling us that we are all the ambassadors of Hashem. Wherever we go and through whatever we do – people don't judge us and notice what we are doing, but through our deeds, they are judging our faith, our religion, our people and most of all Ha'Kadosh Baruch Hu. Therefore it is appropriate that we should always strive to be 'makedesh shem shamayim' – to sanctify the name of God, and never to desecrate it.

Therefore, in our fulfillment of this all-important mitzvah, let us continually strive to gain knowledge of Hashem, and through our experiences of Him, grow to deeply appreciate his kindness, his benevolence, his greatness so that we will love him with all our hearts, with all our soul and with all our might – and at the same time, let us always guarantee that we will be able and responsible representatives of the Almighty on earth.

#### OTS Dvar Torah

##### The Right Path to Loving God

###### Rabbi Dr. Michael Ben Admon

How can we ask a person to relate to God through love? How can a person translate the dedication, self-nullification, and sensual vigor felt toward the opposite gender into sentiments appropriate for the expression of love of Hashem? A trap may have been set for us, one that might lead to a tremendous explosion in the name of religion.

Sometimes, when we pray, we stop the constant stream of words bursting into our mouths from our siddurim, prayer books, to look here or there for a verse, or a word, that we find personally inspiring. In doing so, we appropriate the siddur, truly allowing prayer to occur. This is a very personal process. My prayers differ from those of my neighbor's,

though the text is identical. On every Friday evening, during the prayers ushering in Shabbat, I read the verse "those who love Hashem, hate evil!", and feel inundated with thoughts and emotions. Inexplicably, even to myself, the verse causes me to wonder, to contemplate, and to anticipate. Yet it also makes me feel despondent and exasperated at the thought of our world, one in which acts of savagery are committed, all in the name of loving God. How have we stooped from this religious and pedagogical ideal to misanthropy, creating such a skewed personality?

Part of the answer lies in the awkwardness we experience trying to understand one verse in this week's parsha that we read three times a day: "And you shall love Hashem, your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might." The quandary is well-known and deeply felt: How can we ask a person to relate to God through love? How can a person translate the dedication, self-nullification, and sensual vigor felt toward the opposite gender into sentiments appropriate for the expression of the love of Hashem? A trap may have been set for us, one that might lead to a tremendous explosion in the name of religion.

I'd like to propose that the commentators had grappled with this dilemma, and had suggesting various ways of observing the commandment of loving Hashem. I would like to describe several types of "God-lovers" based on various exegetical positions, which we encounter in contemporary Israeli society. By examining the paradigms they propose, I would like to try to highlight the advantages and disadvantages of each position. This is therefore a socio-exegetical discussion of the role of the love of God in Israeli society, in light of idealistic paradigms. I won't disqualify any method. I will, however, try to identify the way love is understood and brought to fruition in each method. Furthermore, I have no interest in fleshing out the details of each commentator. Rather, I will suffice in describing several paradigms for loving Hashem.

We'll begin with Sefer Hachinuch, which tries to provide concrete halakhic guidance on loving Hashem, as it does for every other area of halakha:

... It is fitting for a person to put all of his thought and all of his effort towards the love of God; and he should always evaluate in his heart that all that there is in the world – of wealth, children, power and honor – it is all like null and void compared to love for Him, blessed be He..." (Commandment DXVIII)

The author of Sefer Hachinuch suggests that we enumerate all of the loves a person experiences (such as a person's love for family, money, honor, etc.), and methodically nullify them in favor of the love for Hashem that he or she anticipates.

#### Likutei Divrei Torah

If so, we learn that love for Hashem is exclusive and can't coexist with other loves, certainly not at the same level. In this paradigm, the totality of loving conduct doesn't leave too much room for other loves. I would even add that they jeopardize their very existence. This illustrates a love of Hashem that may lead to misanthropy, if the love for other human beings is seen as a stumbling block preventing this love of Hashem from materializing. In its extreme form, this position is dangerous and sets the stage for religious fanaticism. Fantasizing about living with a love of Hashem could fundamentally tip the scales between interpersonal commitments and religious commitments, creating a religious monstrosity. This reading of the words "with all of your heart, and with all of your soul, and with all of your might" might feed into this position. This presents a clear and present danger: a love of Hashem, devoid of any love toward other human beings.

We often encounter people who express their love of Hashem by strictly adhering to the precepts of Jewish law. This love is fulfilled through the cautious observance of the commandments, and under no circumstances may one stray from this path. Here, too, we run the risk of totality that can sometimes blind a person, preventing those people from lifting up their heads so that that can solve the problems that cross their paths. One can become caught up in overzealous adherence to Jewish law while ignoring what halakha requires in other contexts. Truth be told, sometimes, halakha serves as a safe haven for the disturbed. It's easy to hide away within a halakhic system that converts the emotion of love into ritual. Religion is present, but what about genuine piety?

The replacement of love with ritual can also occur in another category of human religious practice which is less strict about adhering to Jewish law. In this paradigm, pure adherence to religious law doesn't define the religiosity of its adherents to the same extent as tradition does. One the one hand, the impression we get is that this religious position allows an open dialog with the Creator of the Universe and forging a connection to Him, more so as a father figure than as a lawmaker. Here, the verbal and emotional channel with Hashem is more open, and doesn't pass through an intermediary like Jewish law or Torah study. On the other hand, love is disproportionately expressed toward sanctified objects that adherents associate with magic powers. Love of God is now a blend of observance of Torah commandments and superstition, and some would suggest that in this case, the game isn't worth the candle.

Other commentators advance the idea that one can't speak of love with relation to Hashem. Therefore, they suggest channeling love to something that can express the emotion of love. This approach is spearheaded by

Maimonides. In several instances, he points out that:

...according to that knowledge will that love be; if it be small, the love will be small; if it be abundant, the love will be abundant. It is, therefore, necessary for man to dedicate himself to understand and acquire intelligence in the sciences and reasonings which make known to him his Owner, in the measure of power that man possesses to understand and attain it... (Mishne Torah, The Laws of Repentance, 10:6)

It seems to me that what Maimonides is after is shaping a personality in love with wisdom and Torah, who wishes to become more knowledgeable, sensing that knowledge is always lacking, and that this lack leads to suffering. Sometimes, this opinion will lead a person to loving Hashem, but the medium that most of that person's energy must be directed to is knowledge. In this case, therefore, love of Hashem is an intellectual pursuit. The quintessential proponent of this approach is the scholar who delights in his studies (Sefer Hamitzvot, Positive Commandment 3), and even if people with other views have other experiences resulting from having delved into the study of wisdom, they are certainly a minute minority. From this, we can conclude that the obsessiveness associated with love is directed toward study and self-nullification in the face of a treasure hoard of wisdom.

One very commonplace form of new-age Hassidism gaining a foothold in national-religious circles takes the love of Hashem in a different direction, trying to entrench it (even if it does so rather partially) in the sayings of Rabbi Tzadok Hacohen. According to this view, one can only speak of the love of Hashem after having become familiar with and loving oneself. By working on their souls and their character traits, people can learn about their strength and weaknesses, and this can form the underpinnings of their love of Hashem.

When we accept ourselves and our frail existence, we have fulfilled a central tenet of this school of thought: to love Hashem "with all of your heart", i.e., with your two inclinations, the good inclination, and the evil inclination. Weaknesses and failures are even a precondition for discovering the potential magnitude of a person's love for Hashem, since only by facing the difficulties of life can a person advance toward the "authentic spiritual plane". This type of personality, which is more self-aware than Maimonides' intellectual, eventually reaches the same outcome, however – a personality cult. This is because ultimately, that person's basic energies are directed toward himself or herself, and this might produce an "ego cult" disguised as love for Hashem. Even if these things don't appear in writing, the danger with this approach is that we will be left with a godless love of man.

Between the love of Hashem that leads to fanaticism and the one that leads to a godless love of man, there is another option – the one embodied by "Lovers of Hashem – hate evil!". The Talmudic interpretation of the commandment to love God is wonderfully simple, and it extricates us from the danger of becoming fanatics or being obsessed with ritual:

And you shall love the Lord your God", which means that you shall make the name of Heaven beloved. [One should do so in that he should] read Torah, and learn Mishna, and serve Torah scholars, and he should be pleasant with people in his business transactions. What do people say about such a person? Fortunate is his father who taught him Torah, fortunate is his teacher who taught him Torah, woe to the people who have not studied Torah. So-and-so, who taught him Torah, see how pleasant are his ways, how proper are his deeds... (Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Yoma 86a)

The basic assumption is that a person can't keep the commandment of loving Hashem without an intermediary. The commandment can only be observed when another person is present, one who is trying to understand the reasons for his friend's proper conduct. Here, love of Hashem is portrayed as a religious view that takes other human beings into consideration, and this leads to a love of fellow man. This is, first and foremost, a form of activism. Actions are performed honestly and responsibly. We take responsibility for educating the next generation, an allusion to "you shall educate your sons and daughters". Our world is in need of this type of love of Hashem, one that doesn't turn people into fanatics or cause them to ostracize themselves from society. One that adds to peace and light in the world.

#### Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

#### Rabbi Eliakim Koenigsberg

#### The Dance of Tu B'Av

In the haftorah of Shabbos Nachamu, the navi Yeshaya is commanded to offer words of comfort to Klal Yisrael on the loss of the Beis HaMikdash and the suffering they have endured in exile. But the message he gives them does not seem to be one of consolation. First, he is asked to proclaim, "All flesh is like grass... Grass withers and blossoms fade, but the word of G-d stands forever" (40:6-8). Then the pesukim describe Hashem's greatness. "Who measured the waters in His palm; who arranged the heavens?... From whom did He seek counsel; who gave Him insight?... It is He who sits on top of the earth, with its inhabitants like grasshoppers... It is He who turns leaders into nothingness... If He were just to blow on them, they would wither (40:12-24)." And then the haftorah concludes, "Lift your eyes and see Who created these things (the heavenly bodies); He calls to each of them by name; by the abundance of His power and by the vigor of His strength, not one is missing. (40:26)" What is the navi's message? And how is it a source of comfort?

## Likutei Divrei Torah

The Mishna (Ta'anis 4:8) quotes the statement of R' Shimon ben Gamliel, "The Jewish people never had such joyful days as Yom Kippur and Tu B'Av (the fifteenth of Av); on these days, the girls of Yerushalayim would go out with beautiful borrowed linen garments so as not to embarrass those who did not have (and young suitors would come to make matches with them)." The Gemara (30a) asks: what is so special about Tu B'Av? It is understandable why Yom Kippur should be singled out as an exceptionally joyous day of the year because it is the day that we are cleansed from our sins and we get to start fresh with a clean slate. But what is so special about Tu B'Av? And what is its connection to Yom Kippur?

The Gemara gives several answers to explain what exactly happened on Tu B'Av. The first answer is that Tu B'Av is the day that the different shevatim were allowed to intermarry with each other. The Torah at the end of Parshas Masei (36:6-9) describes how the daughters of Tzelafchad, who received their father's portion in Eretz Yisrael, were told they could marry only men from their own shevet Menashe so that their land would not pass to a different shevet. This caused a certain sense of estrangement in Klal Yisrael.

On Tu B'Av, a source was found which indicated that after the generation of the midbar, the intermarriage of the different shevatim should be permitted. This brought great joy to Klal Yisrael because now even a girl who inherited land from her father could marry a man from a different shevet. But it also took sacrifice on the part of the shevatim, because with this change, they were opening themselves up to the possibility that they might lose some of the land that had previously belonged to their shevet. That is why Tu B'Av is such a special yom tov, because it commemorates not only the reunification of Klal Yisrael, but the ability of the shevatim to sacrifice their own interests for the benefit of a young girl's shidduch prospects.

What is the connection of Tu B'Av to Yom Kippur? The answer is that what makes Yom Kippur such a joyous day on the Jewish calendar is not simply the fact that we are forgiven on that day, but rather, that by neglecting our physical needs and our own self-importance on Yom Kippur, we are able to more fully appreciate the value of the people around us. As we say in the piyut after the avodah, Yom Kippur is "a day for increasing love and friendship, a day for abandoning jealousy and competition." It is a day to reorder our sense of priorities, to think less of our own interests and more of the interests of our fellow Jews. By fasting, we separate from physicality, and that allows us to acquire a more appropriate perspective on life.

This idea can give new meaning to the rest of the Mishna as well. The tanna describes how the young Jewish girls would go out on their

shidduch quest wearing borrowed fancy clothing so as not to embarrass those who could not afford their own. Why mention this point? It certainly adds a sweet dimension to the story. But is there some deeper message? The tanna might be alluding to the fact that this kind of behavior - showing sensitivity for others - is especially appropriate on Yom Kippur and Tu B'Av because these are days when we remember how important it is to be caring of others even when that caring comes with sacrifice. And that is precisely what the wealthy girls were doing, because by sharing their garments, they were leveling the playing field for everyone and seemingly putting themselves at a disadvantage.

This might be the deeper meaning behind the statement of the Mishna that there was no greater yom tov for Klal Yisrael than Tu B'Av. Chazal tell us that the second Beis HaMikdash was destroyed because of sinas chinam - baseless hatred (Yoma 9b). A person acts with hatred when he is self-centered, when he is not willing to put himself in someone else's shoes and see things from the other person's perspective. The young girls who lent their clothes to their poor friends demonstrated that they understood the importance of thinking about someone else. Perhaps this is what the tanna meant to say, that what made Tu B'Av such a special yom tov is the very fact that the young girls cared so much about each other. What a fitting response to the sinas chinam which brought us the mourning of Tisha B'Av in the first place!

How does a person learn to think and care about others? One way is by developing a sense of humility. When a person appreciates that every individual is special because each one of us has a unique role to play in the world, there is no room for arrogance or competition. If we are all equal in Hashem's eyes, reaching out to others will not put us at a disadvantage because Hashem will ensure that we receive exactly what we deserve.

This is the message of consolation the navi shares with Klal Yisrael: the way to reconnect with the Ribono Shel Olam is by developing a proper sense of self-worth. On the one hand, man is like withering grass compared to Hashem's omnipotence and grandeur. But at the same time, Hashem cares about each and every individual creation - "He calls to each of them by name." Since life is fleeting, we should not get involved in petty arguments and momentary pleasures. Each one of us has a mission to fulfill and we should not be distracted with trivial pursuits. Instead, we should try to serve Hakadosh Boruch Hu in everything we do and strengthen our relationship with Him. Moreover, we should never belittle someone else because in Hashem's eyes each one of us is special. By appreciating the value of each and every Jew,

and living constantly with an awareness of the Ribono Shel Olam, we draw closer to Him, and we can feel comforted by the knowledge that Hashem is as close to us as we allow Him to be.

### Torah.Org Dvar Torah by Rabbi Label Lam

#### Infinitely More Meaningful

Your eyes have seen what HASHEM did at Baal Peor, for every man who went after Baal Peor, HASHEM your G-d has exterminated from your midst. But you (ha-dvekim) who cleave to HASHEM your G-d are alive, all of you, this day. (Devarim 4:3-4)

You have been shown, in order to know that HASHEM He is G-d; there is none else besides Him. (Devarim 4:35)

What do these words mean, "Ain Od Bilvado- There is none other besides Him!"? This is a very deep subject. Don't you and I exist!? Is the world really real? There answer is "yes" and "no"!

Every Friday Night before making Kiddush I make the same declaration. I can see my children from the corner of my eye mimicking the words and saying it like a parrot along with me. That's OK! It's exactly what I am aiming for. The Rav Bartenura comments on the phrase in Pirke' Avos, "Hu Haya Omer- He used to say". It means "He said it all the time."

It was not something stated once at an inaugural address, "Ask not what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country..." and it was recorded for posterity. No! It was something he repeated frequently, a constant refrain.

There's great wisdom in that. If he would have said it only one time perhaps no one would remember or think about it again. However, if he repeats it often, then even though they are rolling their eyes in the back of their head, saying to themselves, "here we go again", after 120 years they will cry big tears when they recall that statement, now understanding it well, they will declare, "You know what my father used to say...?"

Every Friday Night I say in differing ways, "We are remembering now that HASHEM made the world YEISH M'AYIN- Something from nothing." Meaning that before HASHEM decided there was to be a world there was nothing. HASHEM created everything, small and large particles, energy, gravity, human nature, you name it. It's all the precise and explicit work of HASHEM.

That's only the first declaration. Now the second statement goes something like this, "From a physical standpoint HASHEM created the world YEISH M'AYIN- Something from

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Nothing, but from a spiritual vantage point HASHEM created the world AYIN M'YEISH – Nothing from Something!" That statement is crying out for an explanation!

Before the BEIS of Breishis, prior to the Big Bang or the Big Beis, what was there? What comes before BEIS? The Aleph of "Adon Olam Asher Malach B'Terem Kol Yetzir Nivra, Master of the Universe Who was King before the world was created". HASHEM Who is real existed, exists, and will exist. This is ultimate reality. The Zohar refers to HASHEM as OHR AIN SOF- An endless light! Infinity is beyond our finite minds. We can at best comprehend that we don't comprehend it!

Everything in the world that HASHEM created is temporal. It has a clock attached to it, like a burning candle. It is beginning to disappear from the moment it comes into existence, destined to disintegrate. The only entity that outlasts everything is HASHEM. This world is as King Solomon described it, "Emptiness of emptiness... everything is emptiness!"

The Mesilas Yesharim writes, "When you look further into the matter, you will see that only (ha-dvekos) cleaving with G-d constitutes true perfection, as King David said (Tehillim 73:28), "But as for me, the nearness of G-d is my good," ...For this alone is the true good, and anything besides this which people deem good is nothing but emptiness and deceptive worthlessness."

Take the largest number and multiply by zero and it produces a zero. This world unto itself is a zero. There is none other than HASHEM. However, if one utilizes this world to help him and others to cleave to HASHEM, by performing a Mitzvah, then the equation changes dramatically. Take any number and multiply it times infinity and the result will be infinity. Now that single supernal factor serves to makes everything in the universe infinitely more meaningful.

### Bar Ilan University: Dvar Torah

#### The Shape of the Tablets

##### By Rabbi Dr. Ari Tzvi Zivotofsky\*

This week's reading describes the Theophany on Mount Sinai, in which the Holy One, blessed be He, orally relayed the ten pronouncements, known today as the Decalogue or Ten Commandments. These pronouncements were written on two tablets, first mentioned in Exodus 24:12 and 31:18, and at greater length in the narrative of the golden calf, when Moses was about to shatter them. There it says: Thereupon Moses turned and went down from the mountain bearing the two tablets of the Pact, tablets inscribed on both their surfaces: they were inscribed on the one side and on the other. The tablets were Gd's work, and the writing was Gd's writing, incised upon the tablets. (Ex. 32:15-16)

After Moses broke the tablets at the base of the mountain, the Holy One, blessed be He, commanded him to prepare new tablets (Ex. 34:1). Moses did so forthwith (Ex. 34:4), and on these tablets the Decalogue was inscribed (Ex. 34:28). In Exodus the tablets are always referred to as the "Tablets of the Pact (*Brit*)," whereas in Deuteronomy they appear as the "Tablets of the Covenant (*Edut*)."

Today the tablets are a symbol of Judaism found just about everywhere. There are paintings or wood engravings of tablets in many synagogues, and they adorn all sorts of Judaica. One could say it is the most commonly encountered symbol of the Jewish religion. This is notwithstanding the fact that the Sages (*Berakhot* 12.1) ceased recitation of the Ten Commandments as part of the prayers. According to *Magen Avraham* (1.9), even writing out the Ten Commandments on a special plaque in the synagogue was viewed dubiously.

The tablets had a special appearance. Scripture describes them as formed and incised by the Holy One, blessed be He. The broken tablets and the whole ones were among the few objects to be found in the Holy of Holies. The tablets were also unique in that they were created in the six days of Creation (*Avot de-Rabbi Nathan B*), just at twilight of the sixth day (*Avot* 5.5). All the same, surprisingly we find no description of what the tablets looked like or how they were shaped. This fact gives added poignancy to the question of precisely how they looked, given the absence of any explicit reference to the matter. Today, in many synagogues the tablets are represented as two abutting rectangles, rounded on the top, each bearing five letters, or with abbreviated commandments on each of the tablets.

Today's commonly accepted notion of rounded tablets was apparently taken from Christian art, which presented the tablets in various ways in different times and places. For example, in the Byzantium and the East the tablets were represented as a scroll, contradicting the verse in Exodus 31:18. In Italy, in various art works and paintings until the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the tablets were represented as two rectangular shapes. Certain features almost always appeared together, attesting to the source for the rounded tablets.

When they are represented as rectangular, for the most part the tablets are separate. A fine example of this is provided by Cosimo Rosselli's "Handing over the Tablets of the Law," in the Sistine Chapel at the Vatican (painted 1481-1483). When the tablets are rounded on the top, for the most part they are side by side or joined together, and sometimes they are enclosed in a frame.

These are all familiar forms of the *diptych*, an ancient writing tablet consisting of two hinged leaves, in use in various forms during the Middle Ages. The most ancient Jewish representation of the tablets that I could find appears in the midrashic work *Lekah Tov*

(Florence manuscript, 12<sup>th</sup> century). There the tablets appear as a rectangle with protrusions at the bottom, similar to the handles of an Ashkenazi Torah scroll.

Tablets with a rounded top are so prevalent that some scholars have sought a Jewish source for this form. Shlomit Perlman (*Shabbat be-Shabbato*, intermediate Sabbath of Passover, 17<sup>th</sup> of Nisan 5759 [1999]) has suggested that the rounded part is related to the *midrash* cited by Rashi (Ex. 34:1), where the Holy One, blessed be He, instructs Moses, "Carve [pesol lkha] two tablets of stone": "The chips [pesolet] shall be yours; from this Moses became rich" (Exodus Rabbah 46.2). Perlman suggests that this *midrash* refers to fragments of stone that remained from rounding the tops of the tablets. Rabbi Hayyim Friedlander suggests that the tablets, resembling a heart, represent the heart of man.

In traditional sources the shape and size of the tablets is often related to the dimensions of the ark, and hence the tablets are described as rectangular, three dimensional objects without a rounded portion. It says in the *gemara* (*Bava Batra* 14.1) that when all the objects stored in the ark were placed there, it was completely filled. It follows from this that the tablets were rectangular, without a rounded top. The *gemara* deduces that each tablet was six handbreadths high, six wide, and three thick.

Due to the surmised non-Jewish origin of rounded tablets, the *Admor* of Chabad, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, strongly objected to representing them as rounded. He did not permit any such portrayals in his institutions, and emphasized that the shape of the tablets should not be viewed as a trifling matter, but rather as highly significant.

Not all halakhic authorities have agreed with the explanation that the tablets were not rounded. Lacking any definitive information, the few available sources can be interpreted various ways. Rabbi Yisrael Yaakov Fischer (1928-2003), the *Av Bet Din* of the Haredi community, maintained that the tablets were indeed rounded. In a *responsum* (*Even Yisrael* 57.8), short and to the point, in defense of an artist who painted the tablets as rounded, he maintained that the tablets were indeed rounded. First he rejects the argument that they had to fill the ark completely, noting that according to some approaches the ark also contained a Torah scroll, and that surely was round. Next, he cites two different aggadic sources in support of the view that the tablets were rounded.

The Mishnah, *Pirkei Avot* (5.6), says that the tablets were created in the six days of Creation, and the Jerusalem Talmud in several places says that no square-shaped objects were made in the six days of Creation. In addition, Rabbi Fischer wonders why someone who thinks the tablets were square should be bothered by them being viewed as rounded; after all, according to the *halakhah*, it is

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forbidden to make copies of objects that were in the Tabernacle or the Temple.

In the opinion of Rabbi Eliyahu Katz (1916-2004), Rabbi of the city of Beersheba and head of the Rabbinical Court there, the *gemara* in *Bava Batra* says explicitly that the tablets were rectangular (even though he requires a lengthy exposition to prove his point) and holds that the rounded upper portion was undoubtedly the work of Christian artists. Alternatively, he suggests that the rounded part was not considered part of the tablets, rather a sort of crown for the tablets. That is how the tablets were portrayed among oriental Jews. Accordingly, a line must divide the rectangles from the half-circles. He provides further evidence that the tablets were rectangular.

Rabbenu Bahya (on Ex. 31:18) writes that the tablets were 108 square handbreadths (6 x 6 x 3). Had they been rounded, the area would necessarily have been smaller. As for the evidence brought by Rabbi Fischer, he notes that the Jerusalem Talmud (*Ma'aserot* 5.3) says, "Rabbi Simeon ben Gamaliel taught that there is nothing square from the six days of Creation... Rabbi Simeon ben Gamaliel's remark was only with reference to creatures," meaning the living creatures made in the six days of Creation, not the inanimate things. On the basis of his conclusions he instructed the Beersheba rabbinate to change its emblem so that the tablets would be rectangular, not rounded.

The trend in recent years has been to portray the tablets as rectangular, not rounded. Even though this appears to be the prevalent view, it is not universally accepted. It is not surprising that the precise shape of the tablets is unknown. No one has set eyes on them for over 2,500 years. What is important is the message inscribed on the tablets. This text is read in public in every synagogue three times a year, so that the text be well-known and its message thoroughly understood. *Translated by Rachel Rowen*



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from: Rabbi Sacks <[info@rabbisacks.org](mailto:info@rabbisacks.org)>

date: Jul 29, 2020, 12:37 PM

subject: The Infinite Game (Va'etchanan 5780)

### **The Infinite Game (Va'etchanan 5780)**

#### **Rabbi Jonathan Sacks**

The popular author and TED lecturer Simon Sinek recently published a book entitled *The Infinite Game*.<sup>[1]</sup> Based on the distinction first articulated by James P. Carse,<sup>[2]</sup> it is about the difference between two types of enterprise. One, a finite game, has a starting and ending point. It obeys rules, recognises boundaries, and has winners and losers. Most sports are like this. So, often, is politics: there are campaigns, elections, rules and regulations, successful and defeated candidates. Businesses can be run this way, when they focus on quarterly profits, share price, market share and the like.

But there are also infinite games. These have no starting point or finishing line, no clear winners and losers, no agreed rules or boundaries. Art is like this. So are music and literature. Beethoven didn't win. Bach didn't lose. Great artists change the rules. That is what Beethoven, Schoenberg and Stravinsky did; so too did Van Gogh, Cézanne and Picasso. Politics can be like this when it rises above opinion polls and sets its vision on larger issues of justice, equality and the moral health of society. Education is a finite game when it focuses on exam results and qualifications, or it can be an infinite game when it is about breadth and depth of understanding and character development.

Finite games are played to win. Infinite games are played for their own sake. Finite games are usually performed in front of an audience of some kind. Infinite games are participative. We engage in them because we are changed by them. Van Gogh did not need to sell paintings to regard art as worthwhile.

Beethoven was not seeking popularity when he wrote his late sonatas and quartets. James Joyce was not aiming at a bestseller when he wrote *Ulysses*. Infinite games are not a means to an end: winning the championship, beating the market, victory in an election. Instead they are what psychologists call autotelic, that is, they contain their purpose within themselves. We do them because the activity is inherently creative, demanding, uplifting and ennobling.

It should be clear by now that these are not simply two types of game. They are two different ways of playing a game. If, in any country at any time, politics is treated as a finite game in which all that matters are popularity ratings and election results, then it quickly becomes superficial, trivial, uninspiring. The quality of leadership declines. The public becomes cynical and disillusioned. Trust is eroded and the social bond becomes frayed. When politics is lifted by a sense of history and destiny on the part its leaders, when it becomes not the pursuit of power but a form of service-to-others and social responsibility, when it is driven by high ideals and ethical aspiration, then leadership becomes statesmanship and politics itself a noble calling. This is not to denigrate finite games. We need them, because in many spheres of life we need rules, boundaries and time limits. But we must also have space for infinite games because they are among the highest expressions of the human spirit.

These reflections are prompted by two verses in today's parsha: Be sure to keep the commandments, decrees, and laws that the Lord your God has enjoined upon you. Do what is right and good in the sight of the Lord... (Deut. 6:17-18)

The problem here is that the first verse seems to cover all 613 of the Torah's mitzvot. They are commandments, decrees or laws. Why then does the Torah add, "Do what is right and good in the sight of the Lord"? Surely doing what is right and good is no more and no less than keeping God's commands, decrees and laws. Are these not two ways of saying the same thing?

However, as the Talmud<sup>[3]</sup> explains: "And you shall do that which is right and good in the eyes of the Lord" means that one should not perform an action that is not right and good, even if they are legally entitled to do so. This is the basis of an important law in Judaism, *dina debar metzra*, "the law of the adjoining property." When a landowner comes to sell a tract of land, the owner of the adjacent land has the right to buy it. If it is sold to someone else, the buyer must return the land to the neighbour who then reimburses them for the price they paid for it.

This law is not about land ownership as such. In general, a landowner has the right to sell to whomever they choose. It is about doing "the right and the good" – what people sometimes call *menschlichkeit*. To the neighbour, the purchase of the land is an immense good. They can expand without dissipating their landholdings in different locations. To the outsider, losing this purchase is not a significant loss because they can acquire other fields elsewhere. The law of *bar metzra* departs from the usual principles of law in order to achieve a moral end: helping one's neighbour.

Rashi, basing himself on this Talmudic passage, says that doing the right and good in the eyes of the Lord means "compromise, acting beyond the strict demands of the law."<sup>[4]</sup> Ramban agrees with this but goes on to make a fascinating and fundamental point:

And the intention of this is that from the beginning God said to keep God's commandments, testimonies, and laws as God has commanded them. And now, it says: even regarding what God did not command, pay attention to do what is good and right in God's eyes, because God loves goodness and righteousness. This is important because it is impossible to mention in the Torah all the details of people's behaviour with neighbours and friends, or business conduct or local ordinances. The Torah mentions many such laws, such as: "Do not gossip", "You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge", "You shall not stand idly by the blood of your neighbour", "You shall not insult the deaf", "You shall rise before the aged", and so on. Now it states generally that one should do what is good and right regarding everything, including compromise and acting beyond the strict demands of the law.<sup>[5]</sup>

Ramban seems to be concurring with Rashi, but actually he is making a somewhat different point. Rashi is saying: keep the law and go beyond it. Ramban is saying that there are some things that cannot be specified by law: "because it is impossible to mention in the Torah all the details of people's behaviour." The Torah gives us specific examples: don't gossip, don't take revenge and so on. But the rest depends on the situation, the circumstances, and the person or people you are dealing with.

In the terms we encountered at the beginning of this essay: not all the Torah is a finite game. Much of it is. There are rules, commands, decrees and laws. There is the halachah. There are boundaries: milk, meat, public domain, private domain. There are beginnings and endings: the earliest time to say the morning Shema and the latest time. There are successes and defeats: either one does or doesn't complete the counting of the Omer. All of this is finite even though it is dedicated to the One-who-is-Infinite.

Ramban's point however (made also by the Maggid Mishneh[6]) is that there are significant areas of the moral life that cannot be reduced to rules. That is because rules deal in generalities, and human lives are particular. We are all different. So is every situation in which we find ourselves. Good people know when to speak, when to be silent, when to praise, when to challenge. They hear the unspoken word, sense the concealed pain, focus on the other person rather than on themselves, and are guided by a deeply internalised moral sense that leads them instinctively away from anything less than the right and the good. The "right and the good in the sight of the Lord" is about the part of the moral life that is an infinite game.

There is a fine account of such a person in Psalm 15: "One whose walk is blameless, who does what is righteous, who speaks the truth from their heart... who does no wrong to a neighbour, and casts no slur on others;... who keeps an oath even when it hurts, and does not change their mind... Whoever does these things will never be shaken."

I believe that we make a fundamental error when we think that all we need to know and keep are the rules governing interactions bein adam le-chavero, between us and our fellows. The rules are essential but also incomplete. We need to develop a conscience that does not permit us to wrong, harm or hurt someone even if the rules permit us to do so.[7] The moral life is an infinite game which cannot be reduced to rules. We need to learn and internalise a sense of "the right and the good."

Shabbat Shalom

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### **The Mastery of Submission**

#### **Rabbi Yaakov Neuburger**

Rosh Yeshiva, RIETS; Rabbi, Congregation Beth Abraham, Bergenfield, NJ  
Rabbi Dr. Ari Berman, in his inaugural address as the new president of Yeshiva University, placed "Toras Emes" - the Torah of Truth - as the unparalleled pillar of the Yeshiva University enterprise I am honored to be asked to describe this principle as part of our celebration of the appointment of President Berman, and the chapter of Jewish leadership and scholarship that will be his. I humbly do so with my deepest prayers that Hashem continues to bless our new president with strength, wisdom, good counsel and good health as he steers us forward l'hagdil Torah ul'ha'adirah, to grow Torah and glorify it

I can best describe the educational philosophy inherent in the phrase "Toras Emes" by sharing two vignettes of the Rav zt"l. Both are vivid in my mind and continually orient me.

The first one repeated itself many a time. The Rav would fall silent during a shiur, in the middle of developing an idea. My fellow talmidim and I remember it well. Sometimes the silence lasted but a few moments as he simply searched for the most accurate phrase, the most rigorous presentation. Sometimes it seemed well over 10 minutes, hard as it is to imagine so many years later. Often the silence was interrupted with what would become the first nusach, the initial iteration of his idea, only to be refined with greater

precision following further moments of reflection. Sometimes it was a question that gave him pause. Most often, he soundlessly deliberated in order to weave together, with absolute consistency, the many texts on his mind, for which he had inestimable reverence. There was to be no daylight between the responsibilities of the posek, who had to arrive at an actionable halachic conclusion and the teacher who had to present Torah with accuracy and excitement.

The clock was never of consequence. That was the same clock that may well explain the readiness of the young students to gloss over the Rav's concern, but that readiness carried no weight.

It was during those silences, offered with no apology, that I learned to appreciate the yiras Shamayim (fear of Heaven) that demands rigor and integrity in understanding Torah, its texts, laws and precepts. Those moments of undisturbed reflection became the "Rashi," the commentary, to the way we begin our days, "reishis chochma yiras Hashem" — the beginning of wisdom is the fear of Heaven (Tehillim 111:10).

At first glance, we may find this experience inconsistent with another vignette frozen in my mind, as it was the first time I merited to hear the Rav. It was 1975, and the RCA membership convened on our campus to hear the Rav reflect:

"... the study of Torah is an act of surrender. That is why Chazal stress so many times the importance of humility, and that the proud person can never be a great scholar, only the humble person. Why is humility necessary? Because the study of Torah means meeting the Almighty, and if a finite being meets the infinite, the Almighty, the Maker of the world, of course this meeting must precipitate a mood of humility, and humility results in surrender. What do we surrender to the Almighty? We surrender two things: first, we surrender to the Almighty the everyday logic, or what I call mercantile logic the logic of the businessman or the utilitarian person, and we embrace another logic — the logic m'Sinai. Second, we surrender the everyday will, which is very utilitarian and superficial, and we embrace another will — the will m'Sinai." [ <http://arikahn.blogspot.com/2013/03/rabbi-soloveitchik-talmudtorah-and.html> ]

The obvious deliberateness with which the Rav chose the word "surrender" portrayed submission, with the attendant rejection of attractive and meaningful intellectual alternatives. To be charged by the author of The Lonely Man of Faith, who conceived of "majestic man," to surrender all of that divinely gifted majesty, became an enduring lesson in yiras Shamayim and the immutable truths of Torah.

Throughout the years, we would watch the Rav bring his powerful intellect to the fore to elaborate with unmatched clarity and from that elevated peak, humbly surrender to the requirements of halacha and mesorah. On the one hand, we are enjoined to use the keenest powers of human intellect to uncover G-d's truths. On the other hand, we are expected to submit that same intellect to truths revealed. Indeed, it is that ultimate acquiescence that validates and animates our tireless pursuit to comprehend the will of Hashem, in all its depth and complexity.

Thus, the Rav explained, the importance of the Rambam's statement: The section containing Sh'ma Yisrael is read first because it contains the uniqueness of G-d, love for Him and study of His Torah, which is the main principle that everything is dependent on. Rambam, Hilchos Kieras Sh'ma 1:2

Why does the Rambam include the study of Torah as part of the mitzvah of kieras Sh'ma? The Rav explained that sparing no effort in the pursuit of an accurate interpretation is an act of kabbalas ol malchus Shamayim — acceptance of the yoke of Heaven. To do so knowing that we will embrace the truths of Torah, irrespective of the discomfort or sacrifice or countercultural position that they may impose, is an expression of the "ol," the yoke of kabbalas ol malchus Shamayim.

The concept of Toras Emes appears in the berachos that are recited during Kieras HaTorah, but after, not before reading that parsha of the Torah. Why is that? The public reading of the Torah was never the opportunity to engage in the rigor of Torah study. Therefore, it is not introduced with la'asok

b'divrei Torah, to toil in the words of Torah, but rather with our grateful recognition of the singular chosenness expressed through matan Torah. Nevertheless, as we step away from the public presentation of a parsha, we recognize that we embrace that parsha without compromise or apology, and hence recite v'nasan lanu Toras emes, He gave us a Torah of Truth. The mindful pursuit of Toras Emes that lies ahead is as vital as it is daunting. All indications are that the minds of the future will be shaped or conditioned by a culture that has little patience for true curiosity or for the rigors of painstaking deliberation. All indications are that the hearts of the future will judge only by the unanchored standards of their prevailing culture. The bais hamedrash of Toras Emes will challenge all of that and continue to nurture the robust tzalem Elokim, image of G-d, with all of its magnificent discussion, noisy debate and silent reflection. The bais hamedrash of Toras Emes will test many millennials as it demands to be the center around which all else will be valued without apology or concession. It may well be that the excitement of inquiry and the utter joy of discovery will only be found in that bais hamedrash. It is certainly the only address for experiences, which genuinely resonate with the Jewish soul.

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### **Weekly Parsha VA-ETCHANAN**

#### **Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog**

The Shabbat immediately after the sad fast day of 9 Av is called Shabbat Nachamu – the Shabbat of comfort and consolation. This Shabbat draws its name from the first two words of the prophet Yeshayahu, and this series of prophetic readings continues for seven weeks with a message of hope and contentment.

The prophetic readings leading up to the ninth of Av were only three in number, but the message of consolation is more than twice that in number. The prophet himself notes that the comforting message will be granted in a double manner (Nachamu Nachamu), and we receive seven weeks of comfort to counterbalance the three-week messages of doom and destruction. We are all aware that there are many varied and valid reasons and motives for Jewish customs and traditions. All of these customs regarding the readings of these specific Haftorot and the reasons for them should not be treated lightly, and one should not dismiss them in a cavalier fashion simply because it may no longer seem to be appropriate to the situation.

Human life and behavior are too complex to attribute it to just one motive and reason. This is true regarding all details and aspects of Jewish tradition as well. There are ample examples in past and present Jewish society, how the abandonment of certain customs that modernists felt to be anachronistic eventually led to violations of explicit Torah commandments and values themselves. Judaism should never be observed and viewed in a simplistic, superficial manner. It is too grand for such treatment.

There is a profound and important lesson to be derived from the fact that the prophecies of destruction required only three weeks of public reading while the prophecies of hope and consolation mandated a seven-week period of time on the Jewish calendar. Destruction requires far less time and effort to achieve its sad and nefarious goal. When the end comes, it does so with inevitably and swiftness. Great empires and powerful countries can exist for centuries but are consigned into the dustbin of history in only a few decades or even a few years. It is so much faster and easier to slide down than to attempt to rise and rebuild and struggle forward.

Rebuilding is a process, and it is never accomplished in an instantaneous and easy manner. There are many ups and downs that rebuilding will engender, disappointments, frustrations and even reversals. It will take much more time for the effort to comfort the Jewish people in its continuing effort to rebuild itself anew in its ancient homeland currently. The Jewish world

was almost destroyed in a few years in the past century. It will take time to rebuild it. It is a continuing process along a very bumpy road. We should be comforted realizing that the process has begun and is underway. There are many weeks and years ahead of us, as we continue our quest to be comforted. But we are already blessed with the knowledge that we have reached the season of comfort and consolation.

Shabbat Shalom  
Rabbi Berel Wein

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**Shabbat Shalom: Va'etchanan (Deuteronomy 3:23-7:11)**

#### **By Rabbi Shlomo Riskin**

Efrat, Israel – “You are a holy nation to the Lord your God... a treasured nation from amongst all the nations.... It was not because you were more numerous than all the nations... that God chose you since you are the smallest of all nations. It is rather because God loves you and because of His keeping of the oath which He swore to your ancestors...” (Deuteronomy 7:6-8)

What is the real meaning of the “election” of Israel? It cannot be because we are better than all other nations; to dispel that notion one need only to turn again to the prophetic sections we’ve been reading these past three Sabbaths from Jeremiah and Isaiah, railing and thundering against the Israelites because of their immorality and hypocrisy.

Nor is it because the nation of Israel was a paragon of virtue in the early days of its formation. On the contrary, during the early chapters of Deuteronomy Moses actually recounts the backsliding of our people from the wanton worship of the Golden Calf just forty days after the Revelation at Sinai, to all of the petty complaints and serious rebellions against Moses (and God!) throughout the Book of Numbers. God could not possibly have been under any illusions about the superior moral quality of this family – nation that He had “chosen.”

Were we then elected because we were “the least among nations,” the fewest in number and the weakest in power, as the above quoted text would suggest? Is that a reason for being chosen? What is the source of this “love” for us of which our Bible speaks? Can it be that the Creator of the Universe fell prey to a totally arbitrary and irrational love which is the Achilles’ heel, the tragic undoing of so many of His mortal creatures, when love is merely an expression of emotion to the total exclusion of logic?

Furthermore, why refer to this particular Sabbath as Shabbat Nahamu, the Sabbath of comfort? Historically, the Israelites continued to fast in memory of the destruction of the First Temple throughout the period of the rebuilt Second Temple and renewed Jewish sovereignty in Jerusalem. We know this from a variety of sources, including Zechariah 7,8, from Josephus, 2nd Commonwealth historian, as well as from the legalist- philosopher Maimonides (Interpretations of the Mishnah, Rosh HaShanah 18). After all, even our miraculous survival and subsequent rebuilding cannot begin to remove the pain of the righteous adults and innocent children who lost their lives in the period of destruction, or erase the force of the agonizing question, Eicha?! Can our generation’s remarkable return to our promised homeland provide any kind of reasonable response to the piercing question mark which arises from the smoke-stacks of Auschwitz and Buchenwald? So, from whence comes our comfort?

Rabbi Eliezer Berkovits, in his masterful work Faith after the Holocaust, cites a bold and startling passage of the Talmud (B.T. Yoma 69b) which sheds light on this issue:

“Said R. Yehoshua ben Levi (a survivor of the Second Temple devastation): Why was our Judicial synod called the “Men of the Great Assembly”? Because they restored the (Divine) crown to its pristine glory.

Moses came and countered, ‘the great, powerful and awesome God’ (Deut. 10)

Jeremiah came and declared, ‘The Gentiles have undermined the infrastructure of His Temple; where is His awesomeness?’ And he (Jeremiah) deleted (the word) awesome (from God’s praises in the Amidah). Daniel came and cried out, ‘The Gentiles are subjugating His children; where is His power?’

And he (Daniel) deleted (the word) powerful (from God’s praises in the Amidah).

They (the Men of the Great Assembly, who formulated our prayers) came and restored, saying, ‘The very opposite is the truth! Herein lies the power behind God’s power: that He conquers His instinct (to set evil off at the pass before it wrecks its damage) and has patience for the wicked (to wait for them to repent and repair the world). And herein lies His awesomeness: were it not for the awesomeness of the Holy One Blessed be He, how could one (paltry) nation withstand and survive the (powerful) nation’s roundabout.’

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi’s message is indubitably clear. God has created an imperfect world of freedom of choice, a seemingly absurd and lawless world in which individuals will do even that which the Almighty would not want them to do (the Kabbalistic notion of tzimtzum, the willful ‘contraction’ of the goodness and justice of the Creator of the Universe, as it were, in order to leave room for a world of free choice). As the prophet Isaiah (45:7) declares, ‘Creator of light and Maker of darkness, Doer of peace and Maker of evil (sic), I am the Lord, the Doer of all these things.’ God has confidence – and even guarantees – that eventually the wicked will repent, that human beings will eventually succeed in repairing and perfecting this world in the Kingship of the Divine, that there will eventually be a messianic period of world peace and well-being (Isaiah 2, Micah 4, Zechariah 7-9). Hence God allows the world to proceed in accordance ‘with its customary way,’ without preventing stolen seed from taking root in the ground, or withering the hand uplifted to smite an innocent human. Hence, ‘there is not reward for commandments in this world;’ only in the other, eternal world of souls and spirituality will there be proper rewards for deeds well done (B.T. Kidushin 39).

Israel plays a pivotal role in this drama. We are God’s ‘holy nation and priest-teachers’ to the world (S’forno, ad loc), the descendants of Abraham who chose God before God chose him (Maimonides, Mishneh Torah Laws of Idolatry 1, 1-3), guaranteed by God of eternal progeny who would eventually live in the Land of Israel and teach ethical monotheism to the entire world (Genesis 12:1-3)

Those who opposed ethical monotheism, relying on might rather than right, brute violent power rather than love and morality, have all too often ruled the world – from Pharaoh the totalitarian despot of Egypt, to Nazi Hitler to radical Wahabi Islam. The very survival of Israel, our miraculous ability to remain alive despite Egyptian enslavement and holocaust conflagration with horrific exiles and persecutions in between, – regardless of the fact that we are the most paltry in number and the weakest in power of all nations of the world (indeed, for almost 2000 years we were completely stateless and armyless), – makes us God’s witnesses, adat HaShem, testifying that God is indeed a God of love and morality, a God of right over might, a God of morality over brute force.

This is God’s power, this is God’s awesomeness, and this is the source of our great comfort: God chose you since you are the smallest (weakest) of all nations, because God loves you” – not because you are perfect but because you are morally better than your enemies, and because your very survival testifies to the existence and eventual triumph of a God of Justice, morality and peace.

Shabbat Shalom!

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### VaEtchanan: Mezuzah and Eretz Yisrael

#### Rav Kook Torah

The Torah commands us to affix mezuzot to the doors of our houses. This mitzvah would not seem to have any particular connection to the Land of Israel. After all, the obligation applies equally anywhere in the world. Under certain conditions, even a boat on the high seas must have mezuzot! The Talmud in Menachot 44a, however, does make a distinction when performing this mitzvah in or outside the Land of Land. While homeowners are obligated to affix mezuzot as soon as they move in, renters may wait thirty days. Yet this grace period of thirty days only applies outside the Land.<sup>1</sup>

Why is that?

The Talmud writes that a person renting a home in the Land must immediately put up a mezuzah because of yishuv Eretz Yisrael, the mitzvah to settle the Land of Israel.

#### Yishuv Eretz Yisrael

According to Rashi, the Sages wished to encourage people to live in the Land. If a person spends money on mezuzot – and the obligation to install mezuzot falls on the renter, not the owner – then he will be less likely to leave his residence in Israel. The renter has already put money in the apartment, and usually one is not allowed to remove mezuzot upon vacating the premises.

Additionally, even if the renter does leave, the apartment will be more attractive to other Jewish renters, as it is already outfitted with mezuzot. Rav Kook had trouble accepting this explanation. Are mezuzot so expensive that this will determine where someone will choose to live?

Tosafot suggested that, on a Biblical level, only homeowners are obligated to affix mezuzot. As the verse says, ‘Write them on the doorposts of your houses and gates’ (Deut. 6:9). The rabbis extended the obligation to renters, on condition that they live in the house for more than thirty days. Why thirty days?

Rabbeinu Manoach (cited by Beit Yosef, YD 286) wrote that only a true ‘dweller’ is obligated to affix mezuzot. Until thirty days, the renter is still considered a ‘temporary dweller’ – a traveler who may decide to leave for another location – and is exempt from observing the mitzvah.

But renting in the Land of Israel is different. A person fulfills the positive mitzvah of yishuv Eretz Yisrael with any type of dwelling in the Land – even renting. As the verse says, ‘הַבָּנֶה מִקְרָבְתְּךָ’ (Num. 33:53). Rav Kook reasoned that since renting is deemed ‘dwelling’ in terms of the mitzvah of yishuv Eretz Yisrael, it is also considered ‘dwelling’ for the mitzvah of mezuzah.<sup>2</sup>

#### Children of Zion

Rav Kook called attention to this Halakhic ruling – that Jews living in Eretz Yisrael immediately acquire full residency – to the British High Commissioner.

Despite Britain’s promises to establish a national home for the Jewish people, the British government imposed strict limits on Jewish immigration. The authorities were deporting illegal immigrants, and Rav Kook requested that the deportations be halted.

The High Commissioner was surprised. ‘I know that you respect law and order,’ he noted. ‘After all, the Talmud teaches dina d’malkhuta dina — one must obey the law of the land. These people have violated the law by entering the country illegally. How can you argue in their favor?’

‘The law refers to new immigrants,’ Rav Kook replied. ‘But these people are not new immigrants; they are returning citizens.

‘Our Sages explained that a Jew who was born in Zion, as well as one who looks forward to seeing her, are both considered to be children of Zion. ‘בְּנֵי זִיּוֹן’ (Ketubot 75a). In other words, a person who was born outside the country, yet yearns to see Zion and Jerusalem — he or she is also a child of Zion.

‘Spurred by great yearnings for Zion, these new arrivals took great risks and traveled by circuitous routes to come here. As the rabbis wrote, these Jews are ‘children of Zion.’ They are not new immigrants, but returning citizens!'

Rav Kook concluded warmly, "Our country should receive them with open arms, like an overjoyed mother welcoming home children who return, after long years spent wandering in distant lands."

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From the teachings of the Rosh Yeshiva  
Ha-Rav Shlomo Aviner Shlit'a

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*Ha-Rav answers hundreds of text message questions a day. Here's a sample:*

Leaving Torah Class to Use the Restroom

Q: Ha-Rav published in a text message in the name of Prof. Nechama Leibowitz that one should not leave a Torah class in the middle to use the restroom. But isn't it forbidden to "hold it in"?

A: Yes, it is an explicit Gemara in Yevamot (64b) that the students of Rav Huna did not use the restroom in the middle of a Torah class and their health was negatively affected. And see Terumat Ha-Deshen (#16). But this is not our case. Rav Huna's classes were extremely long, while ours are relatively short, and one can use the restroom before and after the class. Furthermore, when I served in Tzahal, I sat in ambush for 10 hours and did not use the restroom. I planned ahead and did not drink much water beforehand.

Messiah without Knowing

Q: Can a person be the Mashiach without knowing that he is the Mashiach?

A: No. See Rambam, Hilchot Melachim 11:4 for the list of criteria to know if someone is the Mashiach.

Tefillin during Musaf

Q: I accidentally Davened Musaf of Rosh Chodesh with Tefillin. Did I fulfill my obligation?

A: Certainly. This is not a negative but a positive. It seems that in the past, when they wore Tefillin all day long, they did not remove them during Musaf on Rosh Chodesh. In our days, Yemenite Jews wear them during Musaf on Rosh Chodesh.

Recording from the Radio

Q: If there is a Torah class on the radio, is it permissible to record it for myself?

A: Yes. It seems that the Rabbi and the radio station would allow it as long as it is not for commerce or public use.

Tefillin on Person in Coma

Q: Is it permissible to put Tefillin on a person who is in a coma?

A: There is no obligation, but it is permissible. Perhaps he will feel it.

Bringing Ketubah on Vacation

Q: When a family goes on vacation, does the wife have to bring her Ketubah with her, since she should have it available at all times?

A: No, since there is a fear that it will be lost (The Satmar Rebbe answered in the same way, and added that it is better to leave it at home in a safe place, and to always know its exact location. In the book "Nitzotzei Tomer" volume 1, p. 453).

Who is Greater – Vilna Gaon or Chatam Sofer

Q: Who was greater – the Vilna Gaon or the Chatam Sofer?

A: Both were among the greatest of our Rabbis in Halachah, in holiness and in purity (The Admor Imrei Sofer of Erlau once related that a grandson of the Vilna Gaon asked his father, the Yad Sofer [a grandson of the Chatam Sofer], who was greater – the Vilna Gaon or the Chatam Sofer? The Yad Sofer did not want to answer, and place his head between the two great mountains which where these Rabbis. The questioner did not give up and would keep asking from time to time. One time the Yad Sofer finally "broke" and gave an answer. On that very day, the Yad Sofer was walking in the street and was struck by a bike and broke his hand. The Yad Sofer saw his injury as a punishment for his brazenness in commenting on the

greatness of these two towering figures. Someone later asked the Imrei Sofer: Did you ever ask your father what he answered? He responded in surprise: After he told me what happened to him because he expressed his opinion about it, would I dare to ask him this question?! In the book "Be-Mechitzat Zekeini", pp. 216-217).

Running to Shul

Q: It is a Mitzvah to run to Shul, but it looks weird!

A: One should run in a normal manner and not cause a Chilul Hashem (Piskei Teshuvot 90:18). By the way, one should also run to the Beit Midrash and to any Mitzvah.

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*Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Va'etchanan  
For the week ending 1 August 2020 / 11 Av 5780*

*Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com*

*Parsha Insights*

*Why Was I Created?*

*"Now, O Yisrael, listen to the decrees and to the ordinances that I teach you to perform..." (4:1)*

One of the privileges of having been associated with Ohr Somayach for the last thirty is that I've met, and in some cases been close to, several human beings who were clearly living on a different level than the rest of mankind. One of them (who will, of course, remain nameless) is a genius in the art of human relationships. He once distilled the essence of one's relationship with one's fellow into three principles. I'll try to present the first of these principles this week, and, G-d willing, the other two in the weeks to come. His first principle is, "I was created to serve others, and no one was created to serve me." This may sound a little extreme. What, my entire existence is for other people? Ostensibly, this sounds to be beyond the "letter of the law." But Hashem wants us to go beyond the letter of the law. When we keep to the letter of the law, we treat the mitzvahs like a business transaction — you do this for me and I'll do that for you. Unlike a business transaction, Hashem doesn't want or need our mitzvahs. What use does He have for them? If we are very righteous, what does that give Him? What Hashem wants is our heart. When you get a present from someone you love, you're getting the person you love wrapped up inside the present. When you get a present from someone you don't care about, you're getting something you like — delivered by a delivery boy.

So, really, to go beyond the letter or the law is the essence of our relationship with Hashem. However, upon deeper examination it could be that, "I was created to serve others and no one was created to serve me" is indeed the letter of the law, and not an exceptional level of righteousness.

The Talmud in Shabbat (31a) says, "Rava said: After departing from this world, when a person is brought to judgment for the life he lived in this world, they say to him ... Did you conduct business faithfully? Did you designate times for Torah study? Did you engage in procreation? Did you await salvation? Did you engage in the dialectics of wisdom and understand one matter from another?

The Reishit Chochma, quoting from Mesechet Chibut Hakever, says that in addition to these questions, a person is asked, "Did you crown Hashem as King over you, morning and evening?" Meaning, did you say the Shema morning and evening. And, "Did you crown your fellow over you by giving him/her pleasure (nachat ruach)?

*"Now, O Yisrael, listen to the decrees and to the ordinances that I teach you to perform..."*

And so is it when the Torah speaks of decrees and ordinances. Just as the questions in masechet Shabbat are of the essence, so too, "I was created to serve others and no one was created to serve me" is an essential duty — and not a level of saintliness.

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### Rabbi Buchwald's Weekly Torah Message

#### ***The Mandate for Parental Involvement in Jewish Education*** (updated and revised from *Va'etchanan* 5761-2001)

In this week's parsha, parashat Va'etchanan, we encounter two fundamental declarations of the Jewish faith: the Ten Commandments (Deuteronomy 5:6-18), and the Shema prayer (Deuteronomy 6:4-9), "Hear O Israel, the L-rd our G-d, the L-rd is one."

The first paragraph of the Shema prayer begins with the words: **אֶלְךָ תִּתְחַנֵּן אֶת הַשָּׁם** **בְּלִבְבָּךְ**. This verse calls on every Jew to love G-d with all one's heart, all one's soul and all one's might.

The Sh'ma prayer continues: **אֲשֶׁר־יְהִי־בְּלִבְבָּךְ יְהִי־הַקְּבָרִים** **אֲשֶׁר־יְהִי־בְּלִבְבָּךְ** **יְהִי־בְּלִבְבָּךְ** **יְהִי־בְּלִבְבָּךְ** **וְשָׁנְתָה** **בְּלִבְבָּךְ**, and these words which I command you today shall be upon your heart, **וְשָׁנְתָה** **בְּלִבְבָּךְ**, and you shall teach them to your children, and you shall speak to them diligently, **וְשָׁנְתָה** **בְּבָבֵבָּךְ**, **וְשָׁנְתָה** **בְּבָבֵבָּךְ**, when you sit in your home, and when you go on your way, when you lie down and when you rise up.

Let us focus on the phrase, **וְשָׁנְתָה** **בְּבָבֵבָּךְ**, which serves as the Torah's mandate requiring Jews to educate their children. (It is fascinating that there is no direct Mitzvah in the Torah for a Jew to study Torah, other than studying Torah in order to be able to teach one's children!)

Of all the 613 mitzvot of the Torah, perhaps the most vital for the continuity and continuation of the Jewish people is the mitzvah of **לְבִנְךָ תִּשְׁנַחַת**, and you shall teach your children. Jewish education is the lifeline and the lifeblood of Jewish life. After all, it is Jewish education that has proven, throughout Jewish history, to be the most effective method of educating large numbers of people, over long periods of time, to ethical and moral living.

Furthermore, more than 3300 years of Jewish history confirm that there is absolutely no chance of Jews surviving as Jews for the next generation, without our people's intense and passionate commitment to Jewish education.

An analysis of the words **וְשָׁנְתָה** **בְּבָבֵבָּךְ** reveals a host of profound insights. The root of the word, **שָׁנַחַת**, can be traced to the word **שָׁנַחַת**, which, like the Hebrew word **שָׁנַחַת**—two, means to repeat, over and over, implying that Jewish learning and rituals must become habitual and constant in a Jew's life, and become ingrained into the very essence of the Jew. This statement underscores, that for continuity, real continuity, there needs to be a sincere commitment to the practices and rituals of Jewish life.

An alternate root of the word **שָׁנַחַת** may be the root-word **שָׁנַחַת**, shin nun nun, which means sharp. Jewish education must be intense, sharp, meaningful, exciting, and cutting edge.

But, perhaps most of all, the verse boldly declares: **וְשָׁנְתָה** **בְּבָבֵבָּךְ**, you shall teach your children! Most parents today pass off their children's education to professionals—professional teachers, tutors, schools, yeshivot, day schools. With this verse, the Torah underscores that the fundamental, bottom line, obligation of the parent is **וְשָׁנְתָה** **בְּבָבֵבָּךְ**, you shall teach your children. Even though parents may rely on professional teachers, the buck ultimately stops with the parent. In fact, the Hebrew term for parent, **הָוֶרֶחֶת**—“horeh,” is derived from the Hebrew word **מֹרֶה**—“moreh”—to teach. A parent is a teacher—the primary teacher!

Consequently, if a school fails to properly educate, the school is not at fault, the parent is at fault. If the teacher fails to teach properly, the responsibility lies with the parent, not the teacher. It is the parent's responsibility to be on top of the educational services provided by the school, to be well informed about the effectiveness of their children's teachers, and to correct the “miseducation” that often takes place in school settings. While it is certainly true that children spend many hours in formal educational settings, the

“quality time” spent at home with parents is of far greater value in terms of “real” education.

The Midrash Rabbah has a fascinating comment on Genesis 27:22, that recalls the story of Jacob deceiving his father to receive the blessing. All the idolaters gathered about Avnemus of Gadara (a first century non Jewish philosopher) and asked him: Can we defeat the nation of Israel in battle? Avnemus replied: Go out and make the rounds of all their synagogues and houses of study. If you find children in them, chirping away (while studying Torah) you will be unable to defeat them. For this is what their father [Isaac] promised them (Genesis 27:22): “The voice is the voice of Jacob”—as long as the voice of Jacob is found in the synagogues (and houses of study), the hands will not be the hands of Esau. But if not, “The hands are the hands of Esau,” and you will be able to defeat them.

There's no such thing as overdosing on Jewish education. There's no such thing as being too passionate or too extreme concerning the value and importance of Jewish education. I have often said regarding the challenges of raising Jewishly-committed children in today's environment, that if parents aspire for their children to be “passionate” about Judaism—due to the blandishments and distractions of secular society, they will be fortunate to wind up with moderate children. If parents aim for their children to be moderate about their Judaism, they'll wind up casual. And, if the parents themselves are casual, they might wind up with, G-d forbid, Episcopalian grandchildren! One never outgrows the need for Jewish education, it must be perpetually enhanced. Jews must always be in the “Growth mode.”

Of course, it is crucial for parents to serve as educational role models for their children. Even parents who have personally had a limited Jewish education, it is never too late to learn. Nothing can be more impactful than for a child to see his/her parents eagerly attending Torah classes. With the abundance of classes available today, both online and in actual class settings, there is simply no excuse not to participate. “Do as I say,” is not nearly as powerful as “Do as I do.”

For those who are not fortunate enough to be in a position to send their children to an intensive Jewish educational setting, which is absolutely basic today, keep in mind the Torah's admonition: **וְשָׁנְתָה** **בְּבָבֵבָּךְ**. Take ten, fifteen minutes, out of your busy schedule, twice or three times a week, to discuss Jewish issues and Torah issues with your children. Even if your child is away at college, call and discuss Jewish or Torah-related issues, so your child will clearly recognize how important these values are to his/her parents. This practice, of course, can enhance the commitment of those children who obtain strong Jewish educations as well.

Please, do not compromise on Jewish education. The alternative is very much Jewish oblivion.

*Please note: The observance of the fast of Tisha b'Av, marking the destruction of both the Jerusalem Temples, starts on Wednesday night, July 29th and continues through Thursday night, July 30, 2020. Have a meaningful fast.*

*The Shabbat after Tisha b'Av is traditionally known as Shabbat Nachamu, in deference to the first of a series of seven Haftarat (prophetic messages) of consolation, drawn from the book of Isaiah, that are read between Tisha b'Av and Rosh Hashana. “Nachamu, nachamu amee,” be comforted My nation, are the opening words of Isaiah 40.*

*This year, the joyous festival of Tu b'Av, the fifteenth of Av, is celebrated on Tuesday night and Wednesday, August 4th and 5th, 2020. Happy Tu b'Av. May you be blessed.*

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**Shema Yisrael Torah Network**  
**Peninim on the Torah - Parshas Va'eschanan**  
**פְּרִשְׁתָה וְאַתְּחָנָן תְּשִׁפְאָה**  
**וְאַתְּחָנָן אֶל 'ד ... אַעֲבָרָה נָא וְאֶרְאָה ... וַיַּתְעַבֵּר 'ד' בֵּי לְמַעֲנָכֶךָ**

**I implored Hashem at that time... Let me now cross and see... But Hashem became angry with me because of you. (3:23,25,26)**

Moshe *Rabbeinu* prayed and prayed. *Chazal* say that the word, *va'eschanan*, I implored, implies that Moshe prayed 515 times, which its numerical equivalent. The word, *va'eschanan*, is derived from *chinam*, free, alluding to the nature of this prayer. Being one of the ten terms of prayer, it is used when one seeks an undeserved favor from Hashem. Why did Moshe use this term? Surely he was deserving. The righteous never feel that they have a claim on Hashem's favor. His mercy is reserved for those who feel "worthy" of it. The righteous and the humble feel that Hashem owes them nothing.

The *Midrash* (*Rabbah* 87:10) relates the following dialogue that ensued between Moshe and Hashem. Hashem said to Moshe, "You are grabbing the rope from both ends. (In other words, you cannot go forward, since you are pulling from both sides.) If you want to fulfill, 'Let me now cross and see,' then you cannot ask Me to forgive the nation. If you insist that I forgive them, then you cannot enter into the Land." This *Midrash* begs elucidation. How would the nation's forgiveness affect Moshe's entering the Land and vice versa?

*Horav Moshe Bick*, *z'l*, explains that Moshe's request that the nation be absolved for the sin of the spies and their unwarranted, inappropriate reaction to the misinformation they received ran counter to his request that he be granted entry into the Land. There is a rule that *tzaddik gozeir v'HaKadosh Baruch Hu mekayeim*, the righteous decree and Hashem carries out their wish. Hashem would, therefore, have listened to Moshe's request concerning the nation. This rule applies, however, only under such circumstances that the *tzaddik* does not derive personal benefit from his plea. If he has a vested interest, either directly or even indirectly, the plea will not be effective. The reason for this is that the *tzaddik* serves as a *tzinor*, pipe, conduit, through which Hashem delivers His beneficence. For the *tzaddik* to be a conduit, no obstruction can prevent the smooth delivery of the Heavenly blessings. Thus, *Chazal* (*Berachos* 17b) say that the entire world is sustained through the merit of Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa, because he needed nothing. He was able to survive on a measure of carobs the entire week. Thus, once the *tzaddik* takes for himself, the conduit becomes obstructed, and his decree is less effective.

When Moshe prayed to Hashem to allow him to enter the Land, it was a personal plea, a personal prayer. This precluded his speaking on behalf of the nation. Thus, Hashem told him: If you go, they cannot, and, if they go, you cannot. In order for Me to grant them absolution, you must defer entering *Eretz Yisrael*. This is why Moshe asked for a *matnas chinam*, an undeserved favor, a "free" gift from Hashem. He knew that if he used his merit, it would hurt the nation's chances. Therefore, he told the nation, "Hashem became angry with me. I lost out because of you. The only reason that I did not enter the Land was that, had I gone, you would not." This is but one other case in which Moshe, our quintessential leader, sacrificed for the nation.

**יִאמֶר־דָ' אֱלֹהִים לְךָ אֶל־תָּסַב דָּבָר אֱלֹהִים בְּדָבָר הַזֶּה**

**Hashem said to me, "It is too much for you! Do not continue to speak to Me further about this matter." (3:26)**

The *Midrash Tanchuma* (*Va'eschanan* 4) relates that Moshe *Rabbeinu* said to Hashem, "Ribon HaOlamim, You referred to me as Moshe, My servant (*Bamidbar* 12:7). I truly am Your servant. You also wrote in Your Torah (*Shemos* 21:5) that the *eved Ivri*, Hebrew bondsman who refuses to leave servitude after the prescribed six years goes through a process and *avado l'olam*, he remains in servitude until *Yovel*. Thus, Hashem, I ask to be allowed to remain in my position as an *eved* and continue serving You." Hashem replied, "Rav lach, it is too much for you. It has already been decreed that you are to die." The *Rambam* (*Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah* 10:4) writes that when a *Navi*, prophet, prophesizes a punishment (i.e. an event such as death, hunger or war), even if it does not come to pass, it is no indication that the prophet is not truthful. Hashem is merciful and the person (people) might have repented, so Hashem may have absolved him (them). If the *Navi* promised that something good would occur, however, and it does not materialize, he is deemed to be a *Navi sheker*, false prophet. Anything

good that emanates from Hashem, any decree for good which Hashem decrees (which is what the *Navi* claimed would happen) must occur. Otherwise, the *Navi* is a false prophet.

The *Brisker Rav*, *z'l*, applies the *Rambam* to explain Moshe's appeal to Hashem to allow him to live and lead the nation into *Eretz Yisrael*. The Almighty had the power to change His decree from bad/destruction to good, thus permitting him to enter the Land. Hashem responded that, in theory, Moshe was correct. He had told him, however, to refrain from speaking to/leading the nation, because Yehoshua's "turn" had come. Part of the *gezeirah*, decree against Moshe, was that he would no longer lead the nation, and that the reins of leadership would hence be transferred over to Yehoshua, his trusted student. The *gezeirah* thus includes "good" (Yehoshua's leadership). This cannot be rescinded. The "good" must materialize, even at the expense of Moshe's continued life.

We see from here that it is not always as we see it through our eyes of flesh and blood. Indeed, Hashem renders all decisions precisely because His sweeping vision sees everything at once. Avraham *Avinu* died five years earlier than Yitzchak *Avinu*, so that he would not be witness to his grandson, Eisav, going off the *derekh*, leaving the path, and becoming the paradigm of evil that he became. Now, let us imagine that Yitzchak and Rivkah *Imeinu*, who waited twenty years for their twins, would have been blessed with progeny right after the wedding. This is why I say, *Baruch Hashem*, the Almighty makes the decisions. What we do not know is for our own good.

**רָאָה לִמְדֹתִי אַתָּכֶם חִוִּים וּמְשִׁפְטִים כַּאֲשֶׁר צוִּיתִי אֶלָּךְ**  
**See, I have taught you decrees and ordinances, as Hashem, my G-d, has commanded me. (4:5)**

*Chazal* derive an interesting *halachah* from this *pasuk*. Moshe *Rabbeinu* enjoins the nation to observe his manner of teaching the law to the nation. Just as he performed his mission gratis, likewise, when a Jew teaches Torah to his fellow Jew, he should not do so for remuneration. Does that mean that the thousands of *rebbeim*, *moros*, *roshei yeshivah*, *rabbanim*, *roshei kollel*, *menahalim*, anybody who teaches and disseminates Torah, should relinquish payment? Does this indicate that their profession is a "non-profession"? You get what you pay for. The salary one commands indicates the significance and value of the position. If one does not command much of a salary – or worse, does it for nothing – is this an indication that the endeavor in which he is engaged is of little consequence and even less significance?

Clearly not. In *Yalkut Meam Loez*, *Horav Yaakov Culi*, *z'l*, offers the following analogy to illuminate us concerning the incalculable value of Torah. A man was very close with the ruler of a small country. The ruler was a brilliant man who kept to himself, disinterested in becoming involved in the everyday strife and petty issues that plague other rulers. This ruler had his close circle of friends of which this man was one. He had enormous wealth; thus, he was satisfied to rule over his small country in a benevolent manner.

One day, the friend paid a visit to the ruler. He gave his friend an in-depth tour of the country and the palace. The two friends feasted together and had a great time enjoying one another's company. As a parting gift acknowledging their abiding relationship, the king gave his friend a sword. In those days, a sheathed sword was part of one's apparel, his daily uniform. The king's sword was comparable to his scepter; no one could ever wear it. This sword was made completely of the finest, purest gold, its hilt inlaid with diamonds and precious jewels. The material value of this sword was beyond a "king's ransom." This is the extent to which the king valued his relationship with his friend.

Effusive with expressions of gratitude, the friend bid the king farewell as he began his journey home. All went well, as the king presented his friend with the sword and returned to the palace. All the king's ministers stood in awe, observing the beauty of the sword. One of the ministers, himself a wealthy man, was envious of the friend who had received this impressive gift. He, too, wanted such a sword to call his own. He went to an artisan and commissioned an exact replica of the king's sword for his personal use. Once he received it in his hands, he was a new person, his envy ameliorated.

Weeks passed, and the minister took a trip outside the country's borders. When he came to the border, he was asked if he had anything to declare. He proudly displayed his sword, for which they assessed a heavy tax. The minister was beside himself with anger. "How dare you charge me taxes on my sword?" he complained. "Did you collect a similar tax a few weeks ago when the other person (the king's friend) with a similar sword passed through?" They replied that they had not. "Why is his sword any different than mine?" he railed at them.

"His sword is the sword that belonged to the king. Apart from its material value of gold and precious stones, it is part and parcel of the king's uniform, part of his honor and glory. We are unable to appraise such a sword. It is priceless! To place a premium on the sword would, by extension, impugn the honor of the king. What belongs to the king is above and beyond estimable value. We cannot say the same for your sword."

For those who have toiled in the vineyard of Torah, who have dedicated themselves and their families to a life of excellence in Torah, both in learning and dissemination, the value of Torah has never been a question. One cannot possibly place a price on Torah. To study it is our obligation; to teach and disseminate it is our privilege. How can anyone put a price on the prime entity that connects us with the Creator? A Torah educator receives remuneration for the time he expends during which he could have engaged in other, more lucrative, pursuits. No one receives payment for teaching Torah, because we are unable to assess this endeavor.

שמע ישראל ד' אלקינו ד' אחד

**Hear, O' Yisrael: Hashem is our G-d, Hashem is the One and Only. (6:4)**

Judaism's seminal verse, the *pasuk* that accompanies us as we end our sojourn in this world is: *Shema Yisrael: Hashem Elokeinu, Hashem Echad*; "Hear, O' Yisrael, Hashem is our G-d, Hashem is One." The *Tur Orach Chaim* 61 rules that one places his hand over his eyes when he recites the *Shema*. What is the significance of *Shema*, and why does one cover his eyes upon reciting it? In his preface, the *Kol Arye* observes that two of Hashem's *Sheimos*, Names, are seemingly contrary to one another. The name *Elokim/Elokeinu* is the Name that represents the Almighty's, *middah*, attribute, of *Din*, Strict Judgment. The Name 'Hashem', on the other hand, represents *Rachamim*, the *middah* of Mercy. To the casual observer, mercy and strict judgment are incompatible with one another. If this is the case, when we say Hashem *Elokeinu*, Hashem is our G-d, we seem to be making a statement that is, at best, ambiguous.

This is specifically what we are underscoring when we say *Shema Yisrael*: Hashem/Mercy and *Elokeinu/Din* are one and the same. True, at times Hashem appears to us as acting with mercy and, at times, He comes across as manifesting judgment, but we believe that everything – both what appears to be merciful and what appears to be harsh judgment – all emanates from the Name 'Hashem,' which represents Mercy.

We now understand why this verse has such overriding significance. It is our way of confirming that everything that Hashem does is inherently good – even if at the moment of our declaration it does not appear that way. As Yaakov *Avinu* was about to descend to *Mitzrayim*, Egypt, he was filled with a sense of trepidation. At that point, Hashem appeared to him and comforted him, saying, "I shall descend with you to Egypt and I shall surely bring you up, and Yosef shall place his hand on your eyes" (*Bereishis* 46:3,4). Concerning the last words, *V'Yosef yoshis yado al einecha*, the *Zohar HaKadosh* says, *Da raza d'krias Shema*, "This is the secret of *Krias Shema*." The *Kol Aryeh* explains that since *Krias Shema* expresses the *achdus*, unity, of Hashem, and *Elokeinu*, expresses His Mercy and Judgment, it is a concept that is often difficult to accept. In moments of serious travail, when one is going through a frightening, painful experience, believing that what he is seeing is an act of Justice, it is best that he cover his eyes and not look. Just believe. Our model is Yosef *HaTzaddik* who experienced one *tzarah*, adversity, after another. In the end, Hashem demonstrated that it all fit together to produce a happy ending.

Everyone has his/her own personal *Shema Yisrael* story in which what appeared to be adverse actually acted as the segue to comfort and joy, similar

to the *Chevlei Moshiach*, the birth pangs of *Moshiach*. We are living in a time – the last century – that has witnessed the greatest cruelty and pain that the Jewish Nation has experienced from time immemorial. Even today, I write this *dvar Torah* as I am sitting isolated in my house, due to the raging virus that is decimating innocent people. We wonder why. We ask when it will all end? We understand that these are the birth pangs of *Moshiach*, but what does that mean?

The following "story" related by *Horav Yisrael Chortkover, zl*, to a delegation of Jews, *chassidim* from Germany, who turned to him for a message of hope and reassurance, as the Nazis were beginning their reign of terror, illuminates this concept: "There were once two powerful kings who fought and conquered the entire world until each dominated half of the world. Veritably, they each would have continued fighting against one another, but each always harbored a fear of defeat that deterred them from launching an offensive. One day, one of the kings had a son; the other had a daughter. Let the two royals marry, and the child born to them would one day rule the world.

"Great idea, once the couple would have a child. Unfortunately, the dreams of the two prospective grandfathers did not materialize, since the young couple remained childless. The finest doctors were summoned to find a cure to whatever was preventing the couple from producing an heir or heiress to the throne. Finally, one brilliant doctor promised a cure, but he identified one danger: the potential mother might die to the complications that were likely to arise in the course of the pregnancy.

"Understanding that their child was the whole point of the marriage, the couple acquiesced to the risk. The princess conceived and, during the course of the pregnancy, the doctor was called a number of times when a crisis arose. He succeeded each time in preventing a tragedy from occurring. Once the princess entered her ninth month, her pains increased in earnest, until they became almost unbearable. Panicking, she called for the doctor, 'You must do something,' she cried in agony. 'Anything, as I cannot take this pain any longer!' This time the doctor said, 'I am terribly sorry. I am unable to help alleviate the pain. These pains are different than your previous ones. These pains are the real thing, the pangs of childbirth. The only panacea to your pain will be the birth of your child. You must suffer these pains if you want to give birth to your child.'"

The *Rebbe* looked at the delegation and sighed, "Do you understand the message? These are the birth pangs of *Moshiach*. They will subside when he arrives. May Hashem protect those who survive."

*Shema Yisrael* connects us as a people. Jews estranged from Torah and *mitzvos* know that the *Shema* is our clarion call of unity. In one of the secular *kibbutzim* (*Shomer Ha'Tzair*), one of the girls "rebelled" against her family and somehow became a *baalas teshuvah* and returned to her religious heritage. She became engaged to a *ben Torah*, and together they decided to celebrate their wedding in the *kibbutz*. During the wedding, one of the senior guests, a member of another anti-religious *kibbutz*, asked one of the *kibbutzniks* who knew the bride and had seen her grow up, "How did you raise such a 'flawed, shameless' girl, who would humiliate all of you by attaching herself to such a foreign way of life?" The man replied, "It all began years ago when my daughter was but eight years old. My wife noticed a strange thing happening every night when she went to sleep. She would sit in bed, recite a few words, and go to sleep. This continued nightly for years. Finally, we asked our daughter what she was doing. She explained that one of her friends from the *kibbutz* had discovered an old book in her grandmother's house. It read, 'Whoever recites *Shema Yisrael*, Hashem, Who is the Creator of the world, will be protected.' The friend convinced not only my daughter to read this nightly before she went to sleep, but, all in all, girls from sixty families began doing this! Now, if you want to know who is my daughter's friend who catalyzed this whole revolution: Tonight's bride is the one!"

והיו הדברים האלה אשר מנצח היום על לבך ושוננתם לבניך

**And these matters that I command you today shall be upon our heart. You shall teach them thoroughly to your children. (6:7)**

The *Alshich HaKadosh* writes: "If these matters will penetrate deep into your heart and not simply be superficial, then your words will be able to penetrate into the hearts of your children/students." The *Sefer HaYashar* (Rabbi Zerachyah or *Rabbeinu Tam*), expresses a similar thought, "Anything that emanates from the heart will enter into the heart (of the listener)."

Whatever the mouth simply expresses will not get past the ear. In other words, only one who accepts upon himself the yoke of Torah, who makes it a part of himself, can effectively transmit that Torah to others.

*Horav Shraga Grossbard, zl*, taught that a *mechanech*, Torah educator, must be prepared to give everything up for the sake of his students' learning. Furthermore, each *talmid*, student, must know this. He should feel that his *rebbe* is his *rebbe*, not just when life is good, when he is doing well, but even when he is under extreme pressure, when the learning does not come easily, when there are issues at home, both material and spiritual. A student should feel that he is uppermost in his *rebbe*'s mind. The student can only sense this when the *rebbe* as a person and as an educator manifests this attitude. One might suggest that this occurs when the *rebbe* cares about his vocation; thus, his student is paramount in his mind. According to the *Alshich*, it might be the other way around. It is because the Torah is so important to him that it is engraved on his heart, that he views its transmission as being of the greatest consequence. If one does not love the subject matter, it is difficult to demonstrate the proper passion in transmitting it to others.

#### *Va'an Tefillah*

שככל עת ער ובקר ובצהרים – *She'b'chol eis – erev vaboker v'tzaharaim*. (For Your miracles and favors) that are with us every season, evening, morning and afternoon.

At first glance, this *tefillah*, prayer, thanks Hashem for the many miracles and favors that He provides for all of us all of the time. For this, we express our gratitude thrice daily in the accompanying prayer. *Horav Shimon Schwab, zl*, takes it a step further, offering an alternative practical and insightful meaning. *Erev, boker* and *tzaharaim* refer to the moods or circumstances in which one finds himself. One may be in an emotional state of *erev*, evening, darkness, melancholy. It could be caused by age, lack of *mazel*, poor health, family issues; it is always something and, as a result, he is down. Or, he could be experiencing the exact opposite. Life is great: it is daylight, the sun is shining, and everything seems to be going his way. Last, it could be afternoon: the sun appears to be shining, then it begins to get cloudy, and the sun begins to set. Darkness is setting in and beginning to overwhelm the sunshine. We thank Hashem for guiding us through these periods/circumstances. We might become depressed in darkness, haughty in sunshine, and filled with ambiguity as the sun begins to set and the sunshine is waning. Nonetheless, we know that Hashem is always present. For this, we express our gratitude.

"טוב שם ממשן טוב..." וכתר שם טוב על גביהן  
לה"ג ר' יעקב זאב בן ר' יהודה אריה ז"ל - נפטר ר' אב תשנ"ה  
By his children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren  
Rabbi Yudie & Chaya Sarah Fogel, Nussie & Esther Fogel, Shalom & Ettie Fogel, Yosie ל"ט Bryndie Fogel, Rabbi Dovid & Sheila Jenkins, Liz Jenkins, Rabbi Yitzie & Bryndie Fogel, Rabbi Avi & Suri Pearl and their families

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**Pesukei Dezimra: Fulfilling Hashem's Only Desire**  
**By Rabbi Yirmiyahu Kaganoff**

Ron Goldstein, who is seeking to find his way into observant Judaism, is having a casual conversation with Yosel Schwartz, an Orthodox accountant who invites him over often for Shabbos. As usual, Ron is peppering Yosel with questions:

"Recently, I began praying daily, and I have even begun to attend synagogue occasionally. I have many questions regarding both the prayers and the practices I see there."

Of course, Yosel is more than happy to answer Ron's questions.

"I would really appreciate it if you could provide me with background to some of the prayers. I see that there is a lot of structure and that various sections of the prayer are very dissimilar from one another. Some parts are consecutive blessings, others include extensive Biblical passages; some are praises, others are straightforward supplications. I have been told that the two most important parts of the morning and evening prayers are the Shma and the Shemoneh Esrei, and I have been reciting these parts for a few months now. But at this point I would like to understand some more about some of the other parts of our prayer. Could you help me?"

"Certainly; where would you like to start?"

"I am really curious to know more about the Psalms we read towards the beginning of the prayers. Psalms are really inspiring. But I also know that the Book of Psalms is fairly large. Why do we always recite the same ones every day; why not just read consecutive passages each day, as an introduction to the prayer? This would familiarize people with the whole, beautiful book." It is interesting that Ron noticed the beauty of the Psalms David Hamelech bequeathed to the Jewish people. Indeed, it seems that David Hamelech was aware of the tremendous responsibility Hashem placed upon him to provide a link between Man and Hashem. This is evidenced in the following verse: "For an eternal covenant He placed in me" (Shmuel II 23:5). Although most commentaries explain that this verse refers to the eternity of his royal dynasty, which will soon return with Moshiach, it certainly also alludes to David's unique role as the Psalmist of mankind.

Tehillim Each and Every Day, makes Certain we do not Stray

Yosel points out to Ron that the Psalms have, indeed, been organized into daily readings that enable one to complete them every week or month. Ron sounds interested in making this a regular practice; certainly, a laudatory observance. Yosel points out that the purpose in reciting parts of Tehillim during davening is not to create familiarity with the entire book, but something else altogether. In Yosel's own words:

"To answer your question, I need to provide you with some background to this part of the prayer, which is called Pesukei Dezimra, Verses of Song. Two Talmudic references provide the earliest basis for this part of our daily prayer. One source teaches that reciting Psalm 145 every day guarantees one a share in olam haba, the World to Come (Berachos 4b)." (Yosel is aware that an alternate reading [girsah] of this Gemara attributes the reward to someone who recites this psalm three times every day. This is why we recite Ashrei, which includes this Chapter of Tehillim, three times a day, twice in Shacharis and once during Mincha. Yosel did not want to sidetrack the conversation with this information.)

Hashem Provides for All, even those without Wherewithal.

"What is unique about this Psalm that its recital merits such a special reward?" Ron inquired.

"The Gemara explains that this Psalm includes the verse beginning with the words Posayach es yodecha, which praises G-d Who opens His hands to provide for all creatures. One must make sure to recite this verse with much focus (Tur, Orach Chayim 51), as we thereby internalize the fact that Hashem supervises all his creatures and provides all their needs.

"In addition, the alphabetical acrostic of this Psalm demonstrates that King David intended that it be easily memorized and utilized by all of mankind (Rav Hirsch, Tehillim 25:1).

"The verses of this chapter that follow Posayach es yodecha, also include many basic tenets of Judaism. They note that Hashem's deeds are justified; and that He is close to all who seek him truthfully, fulfills their desires, and protects them. It is critical to recite these passages with full focus on their significance. One who recites the verse Posayach es yodecha without thinking about its meaning is required to read it again, since he has missed the message of the passage. Some authorities conclude that if he completed

the Psalm, he should repeat from the words Posayach es yodecha to the end of the Psalm (Mishnah Berurah 51:16)."

Begin the Day with G-d's Praise, so that we Merit the Sun's Rays

Ron replied: "This is really a nice, meaningful passage, and it certainly sets the tone for devotion and interacting with G-d, which is one of the beauties of Judaism. However, according to my references, this is only one Psalm among several others that we read."

Yosel continues his explanation: "True. In another Talmudic passage, the great scholar, Rabbi Yosi, mentions his yearning to receive the special reward granted to those who recite the Pesukei Dezimra daily (Shabbos 118b). Also, reciting these praises with the proper awareness guarantees that our subsequent prayer will be accepted (Abudraham)."

"The early authorities dispute how many Psalms Rabbi Yosi included in his Pesukei Dezimra. While Rashi mentions only Psalm 148 and Psalm 150 (presumably in addition to 145), the Rambam includes all of the last six Psalms of Tehillim as the kernel of Pesukei Dezimra. Accepted halachah follows the Rambam (Tur, Orach Chayim 51), and therefore we recite all six Psalms, but in extenuating circumstances we follow Rashi's opinion. For example, someone with insufficient time to recite the entire Pesukei Dezimra with the tremendous focus it deserves and still be ready to begin the Shemoneh Esrei together with the congregation may omit the three extra Psalms that the Rambam includes and rely on Rashi's opinion. We actually rule that one may delete even more sections of Pesukei Dezimra to enable one to begin the Shemoneh Esrei together with the congregation."

Together we shall Pray, and then look Forward to a Wonderful Day!

"Why is it so important to begin the prayer together with everyone else?"

"Unfortunately, but realistically, we sometimes do not focus when we recite our prayers. In reality, prayers recited without proper thought should accomplish nothing and may even be harmful. Imagine someone who has the opportunity for an audience with a human king and arrives late, out of breath, and distracted. If his conversation is unfocused, he will probably be thrown into a dungeon for his disrespect! How much more so when talking to the King of kings!"

"When our prayers fall short of what they should be, we deserve to have them rejected. There is one consolation, however. When a community prays together, G-d always accepts their prayers (Berachos 8a)."

Concentrate on Ashrei, and we will Focus while we Pray

"I now understand why Ashrei is an important prayer," said Ron, "But I see in my Siddur that besides Psalm 145, that the Ashrei prayer also includes three other verses from Psalms, two before Psalm 145 and one after."

"I see you've been paying a lot of attention to the prayers."

"The Siddur I use notes the Biblical source of every prayer, so it does not really involve a lot of paying attention. Praying the way you are describing does require a lot of concentration. But I am eager to try. After all, for many years G-d meant little in my life – now that I understand how important He is to me, I am trying to pray daily, with meaning. I truly enjoy these six Psalms, because each one emphasizes a different aspect of G-d's magnanimity. But, could you explain why we begin with the verse Ashrei, which is 'borrowed' from elsewhere in the book?"

"The Halachah recommends spending some time in quiet meditation, prior to praying (Berachos 30b). This makes it easier to focus on the essence of prayer and what we are trying to accomplish. The source cited for this law is the verse Ashrei, usually translated as 'Happy is he who dwells in Your house; he will continually be able to praise You.' I would note that Rabbi Hirsch, a great nineteenth century scholar, explains the word Ashrei a bit differently. According to his explanation, the verse means: 'He who dwells in Your house is constantly striving forward in his life; providing his life with more meaning.' Either interpretation emphasizes the importance of not racing into our prayer, but spending time meditating over the smallness of man and the greatness of G-d, before we approach Him with our daily requests."

Pesukei Dezimra Every Day and one's Concerns will go away.

"My own experience is that involving oneself in Pesukei Dezimra not only helps one daven the entire tefilah on a completely different level, but also rouses one's sense of bitachon. In David Hamelech's own words "The G-d of Yisroel told me... the righteous will rule over man; he will prevail through his fear of Hashem" (Shmuel II 23:3)."

"In modern Hebrew, bitachon means security or defense; and bituach means insurance. Both of these uses cloud the issue:

Yisrael Betach BaHashem, the Jewish people can trust only in Hashem. Only through arousing our sense of Hashem's power and providence can we possibly find any comfort. In the words of the Chovos HaLevavos, 'He who does not trust in Hashem, places his trust in something else.'"

"I certainly identify with this, perhaps more so, since I am so familiar with the way people live 'out there.' I find these Psalms extremely powerful."

Baruch She'amar – A Song of Desire

Ron is ready with his next question: "I notice that while the Pesukei Dezimra contains only Biblical quotes, my Siddur notes no Biblical quotes in the introductory passage."

"Because these passages are so important and comprise their own special mitzvah of praising G-d, we introduce and conclude with special blessings, just as we recite blessings before and after eating, and before performing mitzvos. The introductory prayer, which begins with the words Baruch She'amar, begins by blessing G-d 'who said and made,' a quality unique to Hashem. He both says and performs, whereas all else in the world either orders or acts (Avudraham). Baruch She'amar includes hints to all of Creation, by alluding to the Ten Statements with which Hashem made the world. To quote the Tur (Orach Chayim 51): 'One must recite Baruch She'amar with song and sweetness, because it is a beautiful and desirous song.'

The concluding blessing of Pesukei Dezimra begins with the word Yishtabach. In order to avoid any interruption between these berachos, one may not interrupt from the time one recites Baruch She'amar until the end of davening (Shulchan Aruch 51:4). The Medrash reports that when the verse speaks of someone 'who is afraid because he has sinned', it refers to a person who spoke during Pesukei Dezimra."

Singing David's Song will keep us from Steering Wrong

Ron notes that while Baruch She'amar states that we use the songs of David, Your servant, to praise Hashem, not all the verses in Pesukei Dezimra come from Psalms.

"Although a few passages in Pesukei Dezimra are from other authors, the vast majority were written by King David. Even the two sections taken from Divrei Hayamim (Chronicles) are quotes of King David that appear in those books.

"Among the notable exceptions is the very end of Pesukei Dezimra, where we recite Az Yashir, the Song that the Jewish people sang after miraculously crossing the Red Sea. This epic is considered the song of praise of the Jewish people and, therefore, merits its special place in the daily Pesukei Dezimra. It is singled out as such a special praise that halacha requires one to sing it daily, as if one had personally experienced this miraculous manifestation of G-d's presence.

"Notwithstanding all its wondrous virtues, there is still some halachic controversy whether it should be recited as part of Pesukei Dezimra or not."

"How so?"

"The Rambam, perhaps the greatest scholar of the last thousand years, mentions the recital of Az Yashir after Yishtabach, not before. Apparently, since King David did not author Az Yashir, the Rambam feels that it should not be included between the two blessings; only passages that are authored by King David should be included. I am personally unaware of any community that currently follows this practice."

Hodu – Before Baruch She'amar or After?

Ron is ready with his next question: "I have noticed that some congregations begin Pesukei Dezimra with Baruch She'amar, while others begin with a different passage. What is the rationale behind these two different approaches?"

“King David taught this song to be sung on the day that the Aron, which held the Ten Commandments, was brought to the City of David, in the city of Jerusalem (Divrei Hayamim I 16). Later it was sung to accompany the daily offerings in the Mishkan, the Tabernacle, until the Beis Hamikdash was built (Seder Olam, Chapter 14). Thus, this praise is directly associated with the offerings of the Jewish people and, at the same time, it reflects the early history of the Jewish nation.

The question is whether we should recite it as part of the regular Pesukei Dezimra, albeit closer to the part of the prayer when we discuss the offerings, or whether it is a sequel to korbanos and prior to Pesukei Dezimra. Ashkenazic practice follows the first approach and Sefardic, the latter – two old customs, both cited by early authoritative sources (Tur).”

#### Pesukei Dezimra: Fulfilling Hashem’s Only Desire

“Could you sum up in a few words what we have learned today?”

“Rather than my words, I will cite a great early scholar, the Ramban: ‘All that Hashem desires from this world is that man should thank Him for creating him, focus on His praise when he prays, and that the community pray together with concentration: Mankind should gather together and thank the Lord who created them, broadcasting: We are your creations!’” (Ramban, Shemos 13:16).

To this, Ron replied: “You just mentioned that the community should recite the praises together. In my visits to different synagogues, I have noticed that in the Sefardic community the entire congregation recites these prayers in unison. In many other synagogues, someone begins and ends each passage aloud, so that everyone can read from the same place. It seems, from your description, that this is the proper way one should recite these prayers.

“However, in some shuls that I frequent, the prayers seem far more chaotic. Although these shuls are, thank G-d, very crowded and well attended, people arrive at different times, and each person starts praying by himself. No one leads the services until after Pesukei Dezimra is complete, and they are certainly not said in unison. I must admit that I do not find this part of the services very attractive. It certainly does not fit the beautiful description you just gave me.”

Yosel shifted uncomfortably, realizing that Ron is absolutely correct. “It is embarrassing to admit that we are not doing what we should,” he began.

“Your criticism is extremely well founded. Would you be willing to come with me and speak to the Rabbi of our congregation about the problem? I admit that the problem has bothered me for a while, but I have not had the gumption to do anything about it. Perhaps you can help me?”

Ron realized that he had turned the tables. He had come as an outsider sharing something that bothered him. He did not expect to be the person Yosel would appeal to for help in what appeared to be some type of crusade. But Yosel’s face indicated that he was sincere in his request. Not knowing the rabbi, Ron was uncertain what to expect, but at the meeting, he found the rabbi more than accomodating.

“I have wanted to introduce this in the shul for a long time,” the rabbi said after listening to their complaint. “The old minhag, in all communities, always included someone leading the services from the very beginning of Berachos. Why and when this practice changed is not for our discussion now, but I would like your help in changing the practice in our shul.”

#### In Conclusion, the Congregation’s Resolution

Ron became a very active member of the shul, although his attire initially looked fairly dissimilar from to that of most other members. His input, as an “outsider”, was happily accepted.

And as Ron morphed into Reuvein and learned how to use the Hebrew Siddur fluently, his unflagging enthusiasm for Pesukei Dezimra spurred major change, not only in himself and in his good friend Yosel, but also in Congregation Bnei Torah. Ultimately, his enthusiasm and initiative spiritually permeated the entire world.

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## **Masks and Realities: Thoughts for Parashat Va-et-hanan**

Some years ago, Woody Allen made a film called *Zelig* about a man who constantly changed his appearance to blend in with the people around him. Who was *Zelig*? Did he have a personality of his own? Was he simply an inveterate copycat who thought his survival depended on losing himself in the crowd?

During the course of a lifetime, any human being might play the role of *Zelig*. A person may wear many masks. In order to curry favor with others, one adopts their attitudes, opinions, styles and behavior patterns. In the process, a person becomes inauthentic, a play actor rather than a real person true to who he/she really is. One wears a mask and adopts a false pose; and then, when that game is over, one puts on another mask and assumes another role...and on and on with a lifetime of masks.

Much human misery is the result of people betraying themselves by adopting artificial personae. They are so anxious to impress or blend in with others that they lose their own selves in the process. Even worse, they come to believe that they actually are what their masks portray them to be. For them, falsehood becomes truth. They no longer have the ability to distinguish between who they are and who they are pretending to be.

This week's Torah reading includes the commandment: You shall not bear false witness (*eid shav*) against your neighbor. This echoes the commandment as recorded in *Shemot* 20:13, where the phrase used for false witness is *eid sheker*.

The commandment teaches the prohibition of giving false testimony.

However, the wording suggests a different and deeper meaning as well. The word for testimony is "eidut," and that would have been the expected word to find in this commandment. But instead of "eidut" (testimony), we find "eid" (witness). The Torah, thus, is putting a spotlight not on the testimony—but on the person giving the testimony. The commandment might be understood to include the message: You shall not be a false person; false people give false testimony; false people are not trustworthy. False people lie to themselves and lie to others.

In his novel, "Elmer Gantry," Sinclair Lewis portrays the life of a highly "successful" preacher, a charismatic evangelist who attracts many church members and raises lots of money. He is a gifted orator and a clever manipulator of people. The only thing wrong with Elmer Gantry is that he is essentially a phony. His beliefs and behaviors do not coincide with his preachments. He pretends to be a faithful and moral spiritual leader: but he is in fact not faithful or moral. He is able to deal with the dissonance between who he is and who he pretends to be, because he is so successful in attracting large audiences. He gains a feeling of power when he can control large groups of followers. As long as people applaud him and gratify his ego, he doesn't need to reflect too carefully about how false his life actually is.

To the public, Elmer Gantry seems successful and happy. To himself—at least for much of the time—Elmer Gantry seems successful and happy. But perceptive people see right through Elmer's masks, and know that he is a fraud. Success and happiness bought at the price of authenticity is too high a price. Indeed, such "success" and such "happiness" are fundamentally tainted.

The world is full of *Zeligs* and Elmer Gantrys. The world is full of mask-wearers and pretenders and con artists. We must be wise enough to see through these shams...and wise enough not to put on masks of our own.

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By:

Rabbi Marc D. Angel

[Angel for Shabbat](#)



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**for PARSHAT VA-ETCHANAN & EKEV**

The first two parshiot of 'kriyat shema' surround us each and every day of our lives. In the following shiur, as we begin our study of the main speech of Sefer Devarim, we'll explain why these two 'parshiot' are so important, [This shiur will also serve as a continuation to our introductory shiur on Sefer Devarim, as it discusses in greater detail the overall structure of the main speech.]

### INTRODUCTION

Our introductory shiur on Sefer Devarim discussed how the first 26 chapters of Sefer Devarim divide into two speeches:

#### 1. The introductory speech (chapters 1-4);

- explaining why forty years have passed, followed by a short 'pep-talk' to prepare the nation for their conquest of the land, and the laws that they'll need to keep.

#### 2. The main speech (chapters 5-26);

- in which Moshe reviews the actual set of laws (originally given at Har Sinai) that Bnei Yisrael must keep as they establish their nation after they conquer the Land, adding some 'rebuke' as he reviews them.

The following shiur will focus more directly on the internal structure of this main speech, showing how and why its commandments neatly divide into two distinct sections:

### SETTING THE FRAMEWORK

Recall how Moshe Rabbeinu began his main speech with the story of how and when these mitzvot (which he is about to teach) were first given (see 5:1-28). In that story, we find an important detail that will help us understand why this speech divides into two sections.

As you review that story, pay careful attention to God's response to the people's request that Moshe should teach them laws, instead of hearing them directly from God:  
"Go say to them: 'Return to your tents', but you [Moshe] remain here with Me and I will transmit to you:  
- the **mitzva** & the **chukim u'mishpatim** -  
which you shall teach them..." (see 5:27-28).

Note the key phrases "**ha-mitzva**" & "**chukim u'mishpatim**" in this pasuk. As we continue our study of Sefer Devarim we will show how often these two phrases are repeated, and how they will introduce the two key sections of main speech:

- A) - **ha-mitzva** [chapters 6 to 11]
- B) - **chukim & mishpatim** [chapters 12-26]

To see how this develops, we must carefully follow the continuation of Moshe's speech (from this point).

Now that Moshe has told the story of how he received these laws, he is now ready to teach them, but first - he interjects a few words of encouragement concerning their importance:  
"You shall keep [these laws] to do them as God has commanded you....in all the way which God has commanded you, in order that you may live and be well, and prolong your days in the land which you shall possess" (5:29-30).

At this point, Moshe is finally ready to 'tell over' those laws which he received on Har Sinai, as he explained in 5:28. Note Moshe's next remark:

"ve-zot ha-mitzva, ha-chukim ve-hamishpatim..."

"And **this** is the **mitzva** and the **chukim u-mishpatim** that God had commanded **me to teach you** to observe on the land which you are about to inherit" (6:1).

Compare this pausk with 5:28, noting how Moshe refers once again to this very same phrase- '**ha-mitzva, chukim & mishpatim**'. Clearly, 6:1 serves as the introduction [note the word 'zot'] to the mitzvot that he will now teach.

Even though the mitzvot should begin in the next pasuk, Moshe once again grabs this opportunity to explain their importance:

"[Keep these laws] so that you will fear the Lord your God, to keep **all** His statutes and commandments, which I command you... so that your days may be prolonged. Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe them - so that you will prosper... as God has promised you - in the land flowing with milk and honey" (see 6:2-3).

### THE OPENING STATEMENT

With these introductory comments finally complete, Moshe is now ready to begin the mitzvot themselves - which begin with the famous pasuk of:

"shema Yisrael, Hashem Elokeinu, Hashem echad" (6:4).

Now we can appreciate why this pasuk is so important, for it serves as the opening statement that begins that entire set of laws that continues through chapter 26.

Even though we all know this pasuk by heart, it's not so simple to translate - for it is not clear whether it is making two points, i.e.

- (1) Hashem is OUR God [and nobody else's]
- (2) Hashem is ONE - i.e. He is the ONLY God

Or, if it is making only one point, that:

- (1) Hashem WHO is our God - He is the ONLY God

The difference between these two translations is immense. The first implies that 'our God' is the best; sort of like - we have the true God, and every other religion is wrong. The second implies that the God who we have a special covenant with - He is the only God - hence it becomes incumbent upon us to represent him properly.

In the context of Sefer Devarim, the second understanding makes much more sense - for this opening statement of the law section is thematically linked to Moshe Rabbeinu's introductory statement - at the beginning of this speech:

"**Hashem Elokeinu** karet imanu brit b'Chorev"

[Hashem, our God make a covenant with **us** at Mount Horev /=Mount Sinai] (see 5:2)

Therefore, it makes sense that "Hashem Elokeinu" (in 6:4) relates to that same theme. If so, then Moshe is prefacing the laws that will follow with an important statement explaining why it is so important for the nation to keep these laws. The God with whom Am Yisrael has joined in covenant [to represent Him as a nation] - He is the only God - and hence, these laws must be kept meticulously.

Recall as well that Moshe had made a similar statement - relating to this same theme - earlier in his first speech (in chapter four), when he explained their underlying purpose:

"See [comprehend] that I am teaching you [in the speech that will follow] **chukim u-mishpatim** that God had commanded **me to teach you** to observe on the land which you are about to inherit [compare with 6:1]

Observe them & keep them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the eyes of other nations, so that when they hear all these laws, shall say: 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' For what great nation is there, that had God so close to them, as Hashem our God when ever we call upon Him... (see 4:5-8)

## THE FIRST LAW

This most basic principle of faith and purpose - of "Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Echad" - is followed by one of the most important mitzvot - for it is a law that relates to one's overall attitude toward serving God and keeping His laws:

"And thou shalt love the **Lord** thy God with all your heart, and all your soul... And these words [i.e. the laws of the main speech] which I command thee this day, shall be upon thy heart. And you shall teach them repeatedly to your children, and speak about them..." (see 6:5-7).

[Review 6:4-6, noting how they introduced by 6:1-3.]

From this point on, we find a complete set of laws, interspersed with many words of rebuke, which continue all the way until the end of chapter 26.

[This overall structure was discussed in last week's shiur, but it is recommended that you take a few minutes to scan through chapters 6 thru 26 to verify this point.]

## THE TWO SECTIONS

These laws cover a wide range of topics; however, we will now show how they divide into two distinct sections. To explain why, let's return to the key phrase, which was repeated in 5:28 and 6:1, that sets the stage for this division.

"ve-zot ha-mitzva, ha-chukim ve-hamishpatim..."

"And **this** is the **mitzva** and the **chukim u-mishpatim** that God had commanded me to teach you..." (6:1).

We posit that this entire speech divides into **two** sections, corresponding to these two headers:

A) the **Ha-mitzva** section - chapters 6-11  
[Parshiot Va-etchanan thru Ekev]

B) the **Chukim & Mishpatim** section - chapters 12-26  
[Parshiot Re'eh, Shoftim, Ki Tetze, & Ki Tavo]

To explain how this division works, let's start with the unit that is easy to identify.

## 'HEADERS' & 'FOOTERS'

Towards the beginning of Parshat Re'eh, we find a short introduction to a specific set of laws that is clearly referred to as '**chukim u-mishpatim**'. To verify this, review these psukim: "For you are about to pass over the Jordan to go in to inherit the land which God is giving you... [There] you shall observe to keep all these **chukim & mishpatim** that I set before you this day" (see 11:31-32).

"**These** are the **chukim & mishpatim** that you are to keep in the land which God gave to your forefathers..." (see 12:1).

As you review chapter 12, note how this opening pasuk (12:1) **introduces** a lengthy list of laws that Bnei Yisrael must keep upon entering the land - which continues on all the way until the end of chapter 26!

To 'balance' this 'header', towards the end of the speech we find another special pasuk that forms a very appropriate summary (what we refer to as a 'footer') for this entire unit:

"On this day, God is commanding you to keep these **chukim & mishpatim**, keep them with all your heart..." (see 26:16).

[Again, if you have time, scan chapters 12 thru 26, noting how there are no 'new headers' in the interim. Note also how many parshiot begin with the word 'ki' [when/if] and 'lo' [do not...], typical for a set of laws (just as we found in the set of laws in Parshat Mishpatim)!]

It was rather easy to identify this matching 'header' and 'footer' for the "**chukim u-mishpatim**" section. Now, we must work 'backwards' to identify the less obvious 'header' & 'footer' for the '**ha-mitzva**' section.

Let's start by taking a closer look at the pasuk that opens the mitzvot of the main speech (as we explained above, i.e. 6:4): "Hear o Israel, the Lord is our God... and you shall **love** God with all your heart and all your soul... and **these** instructions which I '**metzaveh**' [command] you today, teach them to your children..." (see 6:4-6).

This paragraph certainly sounds like an introduction to a set of mitzvot. But to understand what makes this unit special, we consider its opening commandment - to love God ['ahavat Hashem' / see 6:5].

Recall that the Torah refers to this unit as "**ha-mitzva**" - which implies **the** mitzva - or possibly **the** most important mitzva! [In Hebrew grammar, this type of 'heh' is known as 'heh ha-yedi'a' - which stresses the word that follows.]

We posit that the Torah refers to the commandment of 'ahavat Hashem' as - **ha-mitzva** - for it is **the** [most important] mitzvah.

Note as well how the phrase that follows the mitzva of ahavat Hashem is: "ve-hayu ha-devarim ha-eileh asher anochi **metzaveh** etchem..."

Thus, we conclude that the 'header' for the **ha-mitzva** section is 'shema Yisrael... ve-ahavta...'; now we must locate its 'footer'.

As we would expect to find the 'footer' before the next section begins, let's take a look towards the end of chapter 11.

At the conclusion of Parshat Ekev we find a very 'worthy candidate' for a closing pasuk for this section:

"If, then, you faithfully keep – **ha-mitzva ha-zot** - that I command you, to **love** God... to follow His laws and to attach yourselves to Him. Then I will help you conquer the Land..." (see 11:22-25, noting its context!).

Here, not only do we find our key word – **ha-mitzva**, but the same context as well in regard to ahavat Hashem - loving God. Furthermore, this section serves as an appropriate summary, for here the Torah promises should Bnei Yisrael keep the proper attitude of ahavat Hashem, then God will surely assist them with the conquest of the Land.

[As you review 11:26-30, notice how these psukim form a small 'buffer' between these two sections, as the chukim u-mishpatim clearly begin with 11:31-32 which lead right into 12:1. / Note as well how the chapter division seems to have missed this rather obvious point.]

Up until now, we have found textual support for dividing the mitzvot of the main speech into two distinct sections. Now, we must find the primary theme of each section by examining their contents.

## SECTION #1 - HA-MITZVA: 'Ahavat Hashem'

The theme of the **ha-mitzva** section is quite easy to identify, for its opening pasuk - as the famous pasuk of 'Shma Yisrael' says it all:

"**Shma Yisrael**... and you shall **love** the Lord your God with all your heart and soul... and these laws which I "**metzaveh**" - command you this day..." (see 6:4-6).

Note how this general theme of 'to love God in every walk of life' continues in each subsequent parshia which follows.

For example:

\* Upon conquering the land, you may inherit an entire city with houses already built and vineyards already planted, etc. Don't let this affluence cause you to forget God... (6:10-15).

\* When your children (who did not go through the desert experience) will ask you **why** we have to keep all these mitzvot, remind them and teach them about all the events of Yetziat Mitzrayim... (6:20-25).

\* When you conquer your enemy, don't intermarry! etc. (7:1-5).

- \* If you become fearful of your enemy, don't worry, remember what God did to Mitzrayim, He can help you as well. (7:17-25).
- \* Don't act in a rebellious manner as your forefathers did in the desert (see chapters 8-10).
- \* As Eretz Canaan does not have a constant water source (like the Nile in Egypt), you will be dependent on the rainfall in this new land. Therefore, recognize that it is God who gives you rain (and not any other god / see 11:10-15).

In fact, when we examine this unit more carefully, we find that these mitzvot simply apply this theme of "ahavat Hashem" [the love of God] to the various situations which will arise as Bnei Yisrael will enter the land. To verify this, see 6:10,18; 7:1,13,16,22; 8:1,7; 9:1,4-6; 11:10-12,13-17, & 22-25!

Furthermore, note how the concluding parshia of this section promises Bnei Yisrael with a reward, should they indeed follow God with the proper attitude:  
 "If, then, you faithfully keep – **ha-mitzva ha-zot** - that I command you, to **love** God.... to follow His laws... then God will help you **conquer** these nations... every foot step that you take will become your land [to its widest borders]. No man shall stand up against you..." (see 11:22-25).

This promise forms an appropriate conclusion to this **ha-mitzva** section, as God promises Bnei Yisrael His assistance in their conquest of the land, should they indeed keep the proper attitude towards Him.

And for a finale, the final psukim of chapter 11 (see 11:26-30) conclude this section by promising a **blessing** or a **curse** on the land, depending if Bnei Yisrael will continue to keep this "ha'mitzvah", once they settle the land.

[Note how the topic of this buffer section in 11:26-30 continues in chapter 27 (after the main speech is over); iy'h, we'll deal with this structure in the shiur on Parshat Ki Tavo.]

## KRIYAT SHEMA

With this background, we can better appreciate Chazal's choice of the first two parshiot of kriyat shma.

Recall that the opening parshia of the **Ha-mitzva** section was none other than the **first parshia** of kriyat shema (6:4-9). Recall also that this section ended with the 'concluding psukim' in 11:22-25.

With this in mind, note now how the 'parshia' which precedes these finale psukim is none other than the **second parsha** of kriyat shma - 've-haya im shamo'a...'. [To verify this, review 11:10-22.]

In other words, the first two parshiot of kriyat shma form the **bookends** of the **ha-mitzva** section, for it begins with 'Shma Yisrael... ve-ahavta' (6:4-8) and ends with 've-haya im shamo'a..' (11:13-21).

This could explain why Chazal chose that we read **both** these parshiot to fulfill our daily obligation of Torah study [which is based on 6:6 - 've-hayu ha-devarim ha-eileh asher anochi metzaveh...'].

Based on this pasuk alone, one could conclude that we are required to read the entire **ha-mitzva** section on a daily basis. However, since this section is too lengthy, it is sufficient if we recite only its opening and closing parshiot. However, by reading these two parshiot, it is as though we have read (and hopefully internalized) all of the mitzvot included in this entire section. [The Mishna at the end of the seventh perek of Masechet Sota arrives at a similar conclusion in regard to reading Sefer Devarim at the **Hakhel** ceremony (see Sota 41a). There, instead of reading the entire speech, the custom was to read the first parsha of **Shema** (6:4-8) and then skip to the last parsha of **Shema** (11:13-21).]

## SECTION # 2 - THE CHUKIM & MISHPATIM UNIT

Review once again the concluding psukim of chapter 11, noting the smooth transition from the **mitzva** section - to the **chukim** u-mishpatim section, noting the key phrases and theme: "... Now that you are crossing the Jordan to inherit the Land... keep these **chukim & mishpatim** that I am teaching you today" (11:31-32).

With this transition, we flow right into the opening pasuk of **section # 2**, which details these laws (see 12:1):  
**"These are the chukim & mishpatim that you are to keep in the land which God gave to your forefathers..."**

The many chapters which follow this opening pasuk contain numerous laws that Bnei Yisrael must keep upon entering the land. However, in contrast to the laws relating to proper attitude in the **ha-mitzva** section, the laws in Section #2 are more specific in nature. For example, here we find laws concerning when and where to build the permanent bet ha-mikdash (chapter 12), dietary laws (chapter 14), laws of 'aliya la-regel' on the Holidays (chapter 16), laws about appointing judges and political leaders (chapter 17), and a full assortment of civil laws (see chapters 19-25). This list continues until the end of chapter 26. [Recall, that chapter 27 begins a new speech.]

As we should expect, this unit also contains a very appropriate conclusion:

"God commands you today to keep these **chukim & mishpatim**, keep them with all your heart and soul. You have affirmed this day that the Lord is your God, that you will walk in His ways... The Lord has affirmed this day that you are, as He promised, His **am segula**... and you shall be, as He promised [at Har Sinai] a **holy** nation to the Lord your God" (see 26:16-19).  
 [The shiurim to follow will discuss the nature of this unit in greater detail.]

In summary, we have identified the two very distinct sections of the main speech of Sefer Devarim and explained the nature of their distinction:

(A) The **Ha-mitzva** section (chapters 6 thru 11) contains several mitzvot and various rebukes that encourage Bnei Yisrael to keep the proper attitude toward God as they conquer the land.

(B) The **Chukim & Mishpatim** section (chapters 12 thru 26) contains an assortment of more specific laws that Bnei Yisrael must follow once they inherit the land.

Now, we can suggest a reason for this manner of presentation.

## THE PROPER BALANCE

So which section is more important? The **ha-mitzva** section - which deals with proper attitude [sort of like a **musar** sefer], or the **chukim & mishpatim** section - which details the specific mitzvot that one must keep [sort of like a **Shulchan Aruch**]?

[Any 'yeshiva bachur' faces this dilemma every time he sets up his daily schedule. How much time to dedicate to **musar** and how much time to **halacha**.]

The summary pasuk of Section #2 (quoted above) alludes to the proper balance between them:

"This day, God commands you to keep these **chukim & mishpatim**, and you should keep them with **all your heart** and all your soul..." (26:16).

This 'finale' closes not only the **chukim & mishpatim** section, but also beautifully relates it back to the **ha-mitzva** section. These chukim u-mishpatim must be kept **with all your heart and soul** - 'be-chol levavcha u-vechol nafshecha'.

[Note once again the textual parallel between this closing pasuk and the opening pasuk of the first section:

"ve-ahavta et Hashem Elokecha - be-chol levavcha u-vechol nafshecha" - and you shall **love** God with all your heart and all your soul..." (see 6:5, compare with 26:16)].

This obvious parallel stresses how the specific laws of the **chukim u-mishpatim** section must be kept with the proper attitude of "**ahavat Hashem**", as explained in the first section!

Only with the solid base of "**ahavat Hashem**" is it possible to fulfill the more specific laws in the proper manner. And only with a comprehensive set of specific laws is it possible to maintain "**ahavat Hashem**" as a daily way of life.

shabbat shalom,  
menachem

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## FOR FURTHER IYUN

### A. BACK TO HAR SINAI

To better appreciate this entire unit and its concluding remarks, we must recall that the mitzvot of this main speech should actually be considered an integral part of Ma'amad Har Sinai. [Recall from last week's shiur that God's original intention was to give these mitzvot directly to Bnei Yisrael immediately after the Ten Commandments!]

With this in mind, carefully read the final psukim of the speech, noting their thematic (and textual) parallel to the Torah's description of Ma'amad Har Sinai in Sefer Shmot (especially Shmot 19:3-6).

Note how these psukim reflect the covenant made between God and Bnei Yisrael at Har Sinai:

"... You have taken upon yourselves today that **He will be your God** and that you will follow His ways and laws..."

- God has affirmed on this day that **you will be His special people- 'am segula'**... as He spoke to you [at Har Sinai (see Shmot 19:5-6)]. And to set you above all nations to be His glory and Name (reputation)... that you shall be an "**am kadosh**" as He spoke to you [at Har Sinai]" (26:16-19).

Considering that these mitzvot are an integral component of Ma'amad Har Sinai, it is only fitting that Moshe concludes this speech by summarizing the most basic elements and purpose of that covenant.

### B. SOME 'ADDITIONS'

Go through the **Ha-mitzva** section of Sefer Devarim (i.e. chapters 6-11) and try to determine which parshiot were 'added' now by Moshe in the fortieth year and which parshiot seem to be a word for word repeat of what God had first commanded him on Har Sinai forty years earlier.

1. Note that many mitzvot sound as though Moshe Rabbeinu is speaking to Bnei Yisrael as they left Egypt, and as though they themselves went out of Egypt and witnessed the plagues etc.

Does the above distinction explain this?

See 6:16, why is 'masa' the only or best example of a rebellion against God? When did this rebellion take place? Wasn't here a more recent rebellion? (e.g. Mei meriva...)

Compare 7:7-11 to 9:4-7, use the above observation to explain the apparent discrepancy between these psukim.

Why is chapter 8 clearly an 'add on'? Does this 'add on' fit in thematically to the main topic of the **Ha-mitzva** section?

### C. TWO TYPES OF 'YIR'A' - A mini-shiur

As we discussed in last week's shiur, chapter 5 details the events which took place at Ma'amad Har Sinai when Bnei Yisrael were overcome with fear. In Sefer Shmot (see 20:14-18), we find what appears to be a parallel account of the same event. Let's compare them.

We begin with the account in Sefer Devarim, when Bnei Yisrael request that Moshe Rabbeinu act as an intermediary immediately after the completion of the Ten Commandments: "Let us not die, then, for this fearsome fire will consume us; if we hear the voice of God any longer, we shall die! For what mortal ever heard the voice of the living God speak out of the fire, as we did, and lived? You go closer and hear all that Hashem says;

then you tell us everything that Hashem tells you, and we will listen and do it" (5:22-24).

God concedes to this request [note the positive aspect attributed to this fear]:

"I have heard the plea that this people made to you; they did well to speak thus. **May they always be of such mind**, to revere Me and follow all my Commandments..."

Sefer Shmot records a very similar incident that took place immediately following the Ten Commandments, which according to some commentators (see Ibn Ezra) describes the same event: "All the people saw the thunder and lightning..., and when the people saw it, they fell back and stood at a distance and asked Moshe: You speak to us and we will listen, but let not God speak to us, less we die. Moshe answered them: **Be not afraid**, for God has come only in order to test you, and in order that the fear of Him may be with you forever..." (Shmot 20:15-17).

Although Rashi and Ramban explain that this event (in Shmot) took place either before or during the Ten Commandments, for the purpose of this mini-shiur, we will follow Ibn Ezra's shitta which understands that both accounts describe the same event.

There is one major discrepancy between these two accounts: In Sefer Shmot, Moshe is not pleased with this fear, while in Sefer Devarim, God praises it!

It seems as though Moshe prefers that Bnei Yisrael confront God directly during Ma'amad Har Sinai, while God Himself endorses a more distanced relationship. Could this discrepancy reflect a dispute between Moshe and God regarding the value of fearing God?

An understanding of the two forms of 'yir'at Hashem' - the fear of God - can help us appreciate this controversy.

#### TYPE I: Positive (or Constructive) Fear

When one recognizes God's infinite greatness, even though he may be enthralled with the possibility of encountering the Almighty, out of humility he feels that it be improper to confront Him directly. This fear is commendable, for it reflects an ideal balance between possible closeness and necessary distance.

#### TYPE II: Negative Fear

On the other hand, a person not interested in any relationship with God would view a divine encounter such as Har Sinai as a nuisance, for it is meaningless to him. Fearful of its inherent danger, he prefers distance and limited responsibility. This type of fear of God, like a 'child running away from school', can ruin a relationship.

#### THE MACHLOKET

It seems that Moshe Rabbeinu, based on his experience with Bnei Yisrael since the time of the Exodus, is concerned that the people's fear stems from the latter reason. Therefore, he is unhappy with Bnei Yisrael's request that he act as their intermediary. He encourages them to stay at Har Sinai.

God, on the other hand, aware of the nature of man's haughtiness, stresses the positive aspect of this fear. He agrees with Bnei Yisrael's request, sends them to their tents, and gives the mitzvot to them thru Moshe instead.

Nonetheless, when the mitzvot of the main speech actually begin, we find a beautiful resolution of this conflict.

Because God is indeed aware of Moshe's worry that there is a danger of the distance caused by yir'at Hashem, God chooses to begin the mitzvot, which He gives via Moshe to Bnei Yisrael with the commandment of **ahavat Hashem** - the love of God! "Shema Yisrael... and you must love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might" (6:4-5). To counter this potential danger of 'too much **yir'a**', God begins with the mitzva of **ahavat Hashem**! The love of God and the

proper appreciation of His laws assure that one's fear will strengthen his relationship, rather than weaken it.

## **PARSHAT VA-ETCHANAN - shiur #2**

On his final day, why is Moshe Rabbeinu eager to see Lebanon?

And when he ascends the mountain for a final view, why does God show him a view of Saudi Arabia?

And why do Chazal interpret all of this as Jerusalem?

In this 'mini shiur', we'll attempt to answer these questions as we uncover the very first 'virtual' Jerusalem!

### **INTRODUCTION**

In the opening psukim of this week's Parsha, Moshe Rabbeinu begs God to allow him to cross into the Holy Land (see 3:23-26). However, note how the manner in which he states his request is rather peculiar:

"Let me pass over and see this good land that is on the other side of the Jordan, this good mountain **and the Lebanon**" (3:25).

We can understand why Moshe wants to see the 'good land', for that seems to imply the Land of Israel - as it was described in 'spy-report' by Yehoshua and Kalev:

"The land that we have passed to scout it, the land is very very **good**" (see Bamidbar 14:7).

[Note also 'asher avarnu'; compare 'evra na' in 3:25!]

But why does Moshe express interest to see Lebanon as well? True, Lebanon is located on the northern border of Eretz Canaan, but Moshe doesn't ask to see any of the other borders. Furthermore, why is Moshe only interested in seeing mountain ranges? What about the Negev, the Shefeila, and the coastal plain?

In fact, when he is shown the land (as recorded later on in Devarim 34:1-4), God shows him the Negev, the mountain ranges, and even the Mediterranean. Yet, in those psukim, Lebanon is not even mentioned!

In the following shiur, we attempt to explain deeper motivation behind Moshe Rabbeinu's request.

### **A GREAT VIEW**

As we all know, God does not grant Moshe's request. Instead, he instructs Moshe to climb to the top of a mountain to get a glimpse of the land that he is not permitted to enter. However, here we find yet another difficulty. Note the directions that God tells Moshe to look:

"Climb to the top of the mountain, and **lift up** your eyes to the **west, north, south** and **east** - and see with your eyes, for you will not cross the Jordan" (3:27).

Recall that Moshe now stands on Mount Nevo in the Moabite Mountains, directly east of Eretz Canaan. Hence, it makes sense that he should look towards the west, and even to the north and south, for that could be understood as northwest and southwest; but why would he look to **east**? After all, to the east, the only area in sight would be wide plains and desert areas of modern day Jordan, Iraq and Saudi Arabia.

So why does God tell Moshe to look to the East?

The answer can't be that God wanted to show him the fullest borders of the Land of Israel, for Moshe had already seen them in his battle against Sichon, and furthermore, Moshe's request dealt specifically with the **other** side of the Jordan.

To answer these questions, we must note an interesting parallel between these psukim and similar psukim in Sefer Breishit.

### **THE SAME TOUR GUIDE**

In our study of Sefer Breishit, we discussed the centrality of Bet El in Avraham Avinu's first journey to the Land of Israel.

His arrival in Canaan from Aram climaxed with his building of a **mizbeach** in Bet El, where he called out in God's Name (see Breishit 12:1-8). Similarly, upon Avraham's return to Canaan from Egypt, he ascended once again to his **mizbeach** in Bet El - to call out in the Name of God.

At that same time, Lot had decided to leave him, choosing instead the Jordan valley. After Lot's departure, God appeared to Avraham once again in Bet El, and reiterated His promise that this Land will one day become the homeland of his offspring.

However, note the special preface that God adds to this promise, and its similarity to our pasuk in Sefer Devarim: "And God said to Avram after Lot had left him: **Lift up your eyes** and **SEE** from the place where you are - to the **north** and **south**, **east** and **west**, for this land that you see I will give to you and your offspring" (see Breishit 13:14-16).

Note how God tells Avraham to lift up his eyes and look in all **four** directions from Bet El, just as He later tells Moshe Rabbeinu to look in all four directions from Har Nevo.

Of course, this parallel could simply be incidental, for this is usually the directions that one looks when he is on a high place. However, we find one additional instance where these four directions are mentioned, and once again in relation to Bet El.

### **THE FIRST BET ELOKIM**

Recall when Yaakov Avinu was running away from Esav on his way to Aram, he stopped overnight at Bet El. There, God appeared to him in a dream, confirming that Yaakov would be the inheritor of His covenant with Avraham. In that blessing, note how we find once again all four directions:

"...And your offspring will [numerous] be like the dust of the earth, and you spread out to the **west** and **east**, **north** and **south**, and through you will be a blessing to all the nations on the earth" (see Breishit 28:10-15).

Here once again we find all four directions, and in fact these three sources are the only times in Chumash where these 'four directions' are found. However, this source concerning Yaakov is most significant, for when he awakes from his dream Yaakov makes a special promise concerning this site.

"And Yaakov awoke in the morning and took the rock that was by his head and erected it as a monument and anointed it with oil. Then he named this spot **Bet El**... and he vowed that when he returns... this monument will become a **Bet- Elokim** [House for God]..." (see 28:18-21).

These psukim establish a connection between this special site of Bet El and a House for God - a **Bet Elokim**. [In case you didn't notice, that's why it is called Bet El.]

This site was destined to house the bet ha-mikdash - that would become the symbol of the very purpose of God's choice of the Jewish nation. A site where man will be able to focus on perfecting his connection [through prayer] to God.

### **VIRTUAL JERUSALEM**

With this background, we can suggest an alternate reason for both Moshe's request and for God's response.

Surely, Moshe wants to see the land, but not simply as a tourist; rather Moshe wants to see the achievement of the ultimate goal for Am Yisrael, as reflected in Yaakov's dream at Bet El and Avraham's vision from Bet El. When Moshe requests to see 'ha-har ha-tov' - the **good mountain** (3:25), one could suggest that he wants to 'see' the Temple Mount [note 'tov' in Breishit 1:4,10,12 etc.], and when he requests to see Ha-**Levanon** - he may be hinting not only to that northern mountain range, but to the bet-ha-mikdash that will one day be constructed

from the wood of the cedars of Lebanon (see I Melachim 5:16-32!).

In a similar manner, we can now understand God's response to Moshe. He instructs Moshe to climb to the highest mountain and to look out in all four directions, just as Avraham Avinu had done at the dawn of Jewish History. Moshe wishes to see the dream of God's promise to Avraham Avinu fulfilled, and God allows Moshe an experience that would reflect its fulfillment.

Moshe looks in all four directions for God has 'virtually' placed him in Jerusalem. With that vision, he can proceed to charge Yehoshua, for he will lead Bnei Yisrael into the land (see Devarim 3:28), and it will be his responsibility to make Moshe's dream come true.

Not only is this week's Haftara ('Nachamu') most fitting for the shabbat after Tisha Be-av, so too are its opening psukim of the Torah reading from Parshat Va-etchanan.

shabbat shalom,  
menachem

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#### FOR FURTHER IYUN

**A.** See Rashi on Devarim 3:25. Note how our shiur attempts to explain the pshat of the drash that Rashi quotes!

See also Chizkuni on 3:25. How is his peirush different? How does he explain the connection between Levanon and the bet ha-mikdash (based on Yoma 39b!).

**B.** In your opinion, does Moshe also want to remain the leader of Bnei Yisrael, or does he just want to enter as [sort of a] 'rabbi emeritus', while allowing Yehoshua to lead the nation?

Which possibility does 3:28 support?

Relate your answer to Bamidbar 20:12 [& our conclusion in regard to this topic in our shiur on Parshat Chukat.]

Does God explain to Moshe why His answer is no?

If so, what is that answer? [Does it relate to 1:36?]

If not, can you explain why He doesn't?

**C.** Note the use of the 'shoresh' ayin.bet.reish. in both 3:25, 3:26 and 3:28. Does this shoresh have the same meaning in each of these psukim, or different meanings? Explain.

Now read Bamidbar 27:12-14 (see also 27:15-23).

In your opinion, is this the same story or a different one?

[How do these two accounts complement each other?

See Rashi & Chizkuni on 27:12.]

Now, note the name of the mountain that Moshe is instructed to ascend - 'Har Ha-avarim'. Note again the shoresh ayin.bet.reish!!

What is the 'real name' of this mountain - see Devarim 32:49!

Based on the above questions, why do you think that the Torah refers to it as Har Ha-avarim instead of Har Nevo?

Is there a geographical reason as well for this name?

See Ramban 27:12.

[Note also the use of ayin.bet.reish. in Bamidbar 27:6-11!]

Note also the use of verb 'latet' - to give - both in 27:7 and 27:12! (cute?)

Relate your answer to this question to the above shiur.

## PARASHAT VA-ET'HANAN

by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

This week's shiur will be unusually brief.

Usually, our discussions of the parasha pose analytical questions and work toward analytical answers. This is because the messages of the Torah are often not explicit. When the Torah tells us stories, it usually does not pause to give us the moral of the story as well. It is our job to make meaning of the events the Torah reports. Similarly, the Torah does not often provide rationales for the mitzvot it legislates; it is our job to speculate educatedly on what values lie behind the Torah's commands (always remembering that our rationale for a particular mitzva may be incorrect and therefore should not affect our performance of the mitzva) and to try to internalize those values.

In general, in the four sefarim (books) through which we have already learned, the Torah addresses primarily us, the readers, and expects us to take the time and trouble to unpack the narratives and mitzvot for their meaning. We assume the Torah is a text packed with complex meaning: why does the Torah tell Story A or Story B the way it does? Why does it include details X and Y but leave out detail Z? What key words appear with significant frequency in this or that account? What does Hashem want us to understand when He commands us to "be holy"? Is there some way we can grasp the point of the korbanot (sacrifices), or the status of tum'a (impurity) and tahara (purity)?

Most of Sefer Devarim, on the other hand, primarily addresses Moshe's listeners. We, later readers of the text of Moshe's speeches, are a sort of secondary audience. Because Moshe means for his listeners to quickly understand what he is saying as he says it, he does a lot of the "work" for them. Instead of simply recounting the few events he thinks are important for the people to reflect on, he recounts the events *\*and\** often explicitly gives them meaning. Often, his goal is to remind the people of past failures in order to warn them against repeating these mistakes, or to remind them of critical national experiences which they might forget. Recountings of these types fill our parasha. What, then, is there to think about in these parshiot?

One tactic is to compare Moshe's version of the stories he tells to the original version as reported in earlier sefarim. We have used this approach in considering the story of the appointment of judge-officers and the story of the meraglim (spies). This approach could also keep us busy this week, comparing the Aseret Ha-Dibberot (Decalogue) as reported here by Moshe to the original version in Parashat Yitro. But we will not be focusing on that issue.

Another tactic -- quite different than the comparison strategy described above -- is to focus on the particular textual characteristics of Sefer Devarim. Much of the material of this week's parasha and the adjacent parshiot is not fully encompassed by the kind of analytical scrutiny to which we normally subject the week's parasha. These parshiot present us with aspects which do not bear much analysis or explication: the aesthetic, literary, and affective characteristics of the text. These aspects are best discerned not by reading short sections of text, or even whole parshiot -- they become most apparent when you read quickly through really large sections of the text of Sefer Devarim, particularly from 1:1 to 11:32. (This occurred to me the first time I acted as a Ba'al Korei -- Torah reader -- for these parshiot. Practicing the reading, which forced me to cover large sections of text rapidly, made me aware of the "flow" of the text on a large scale.) From 12:1, Moshe's speech becomes much more halakhic, and although his style in this halakhic section bears similarities to the more exhortatory section which begins Sefer Devarim, the literary features are perhaps less noticeable there.

Nehama Leibowitz often said that teachers should never ask students to "repeat what Rashi is saying in your own words." The student would not be made to think and would simply restate -- in worse Hebrew -- what Rashi had said coherently. The same, it seems to me, applies here. I could give you examples of what I mean about the aesthetic, literary, and affective characteristics of the text in our parasha, but I would do a much poorer job than the Torah itself. So there is nothing for it but to grab a Humash and see for yourself.

Let me just give you an idea of the kind of reading I'm referring to. You are standing with your family and friends among a crowd of hundreds of thousands. Moshe Rabbeinu stands on a makeshift platform before the crowd, his voice rising majestically above the throng. Behind him, in the distance, you can see the rising peaks beyond the Jordan, the river you are soon to cross without Moshe. You listen as he speaks passionately, reminding you of where you have been and what you and your parents have done, both good and bad. He warns you of the dangers you will face -- the lure of idolatry, the weakness of cowardice, the arrogance of self-sufficiency -- and drives home again and again that the most important thing of all is to remain faithful to Hashem. He delivers Hashem's promises of reward, reminds you of what Hashem has done and will do for you . . . with deep pathos, he reveals his overpowering desire to enter the Land and Hashem's almost cruel refusal to entertain his request. "But you -- you are going to the Land! You will cross the Jordan and merit the one thing I desire above all else."

Moshe tells the people of Eretz Cana'an, its physical beauty and bounty and its intimate connection with Hashem's providence through rainfall. He repeats many times that the Land is given to the people only so long as they remain faithful to Hashem; if not, exile.

Moshe is engaged, above all, in an effort to convince: Keep the Torah. Be faithful to Hashem. You owe it to Him. It will be good for you. The other nations will admire you for it.

(See? I said I wouldn't paraphrase, and then I went and paraphrased. But only to show you how poorly my summary encompasses the original: go and read it through yourself in one sitting.)

### **LOYALTY TO HASHEM:**

Being "loyal" usually does not imply anything very specific. In some contexts, loyalty does take on specific connotations -- a "loyal" or "faithful" spouse, for example -- but usually, loyalty means being supportive and faithful in general terms. In describing the kind of loyalty that Hashem demands of us, Moshe specifies both specific and general loyalty. With relentless frequency, Moshe urges us to be faithful to Hashem by keeping halakha, Hashem's laws:

4:1 -- "Now, Yisrael, hear the LAWS and STATUTES which I am teaching you to do . . . ."

4:5 -- "See, I have taught you LAWS and STATUTES, as Hashem, my God, commanded me, [for you] to do in the Land to which are going to inherit it.

4:14 - "Hashem commanded me at that time to teach you STATUTES and LAWS, to do them in the Land to which you shall pass to inherit it.

4:40 -- "You shall keep His STATUTES and COMMANDMENTS which I command you today . . . ."

5:1 -- "Listen, Yisrael, to the STATUTES and LAWS which I speak in your ears . . . ."

5:28 -- "You shall guard, to do as Hashem, your God, COMMANDED you . . . ."

6:1 -- "This is the COMMAND, the STATUTES and the LAWS which Hashem, your God, commanded . . . ."

There are many more such examples, but these should demonstrate the point. Being loyal to Hashem does not imply only a general faithfulness to Him (or to the "golden rule"), it means, quite particularly, obeying everything He has commanded us. It does not mean just a commitment to justice, or social justice, or kindness, or charity, or national unity, or morality, or equality, or to any other value, however important. It does not mean having concern for spirituality, holiness, sanctity, piety, or anything else. It means doing the mitzvot, plain and simple, not just because they contain and express positive values which are "right," but simply because Hashem has commanded them and we are His loyal servants.

It follows that you cannot violate the mitzvot as an individual or as part of a group and be a loyal

servant of Hashem. You cannot create (as some groups have) a Jewish religious structure which abrogates Hashem's laws and still consider yourself loyal to Hashem. If there is one message of this week's parasha, it is that Judaism is not a "do-it-yourself" religion. We don't replace the Torah's expression of Hashem's will with what we feel is right, because Judaism is not only about values, it is about serving Hashem. Certainly, human beings are meant to participate in deciding what the halakha should be, but they are meant to do so with a deep and across-the-board acknowledgment of the absolute binding nature of Hashem's law. One of the highest praises accorded to people in Tanakh is "eved Hashem" -- "the servant of Hashem." An eved Hashem is not just someone who does the right thing, he does it as a faithful, loyal servant of Hashem, submitting to His will. This appellation is accorded to only a select few: Moshe, Yaakov, David, and several others -- including the Messiah.

The other side of loyalty to Hashem is the general, non-halakhic meaning of the word: faithfulness, fealty, support. This is expressed by Moshe in our parasha in several formulations. One of the most common expressions of this sort of fealty is Moshe's frequent warnings about serving false gods. Interestingly, avoda zara ("worship of strange gods," or "strange worship") is often formulated as a form of ingratitude, not simply as a theological falsehood:

4:19-20 -- "Lest you lift your eyes heavenward, and see the sun, the moon, and the stars, all the host of heaven, and you shall be misled, and bow down to them, and serve them . . . but Hashem took you and brought you out from the iron furnace, from Egypt, to be to Him a people of inheritance."

Our rejection of Hashem and embrace of false gods is not simply foolish and false, it is ungrateful: Hashem has chosen us as His nation, bringing us out of slavery and granting us a homeland. We are bound to remain faithful to Him in return.

# Parshas Vaeschanan: V'ZOT HATORAH, THIS IS THE TORAH

By Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

## I. BACK TO SINAI

As we discussed in last week's shiur, the first third of Sefer D'varim (Chapters 1-11) is essentially a historic retelling of some of the major events which happened to the previous generation - the generation of the Exodus (Dor Yotz'ei Mitzrayim). In the first three chapters (Parashat D'varim), Mosheh Rabbeinu recounts some of the military and conquest data, including those which this new generation - the generation of Conquest (Dor Ba'ei ha'Aretz) - had experienced.

Over the course of the next 8 chapters (4-11), Mosheh intersperses a long speech relating to the Stand at Sinai with exhortative and inspirational instruction, commonly called Mussar. Although we would certainly expect the Revelation to play a central role in his retelling, the style and method of that recitation raises several questions.

[The reader is strongly encouraged to have a Tanakh open for the rest of the shiur].

Note that there is not one seamless account here; rather, we have several descriptions of the Stand at Sinai, as follows:

- 1) 4:9-15
- 1') 4:32-36
- 2) 5:2-29
- 3) 9:7-10:11

This division is accurate if we look at the specific verses which are direct explications of the Sinai experience. If, however, we look at each description through a wider lens, we can divide them into larger speeches. In order to do so, we need to note that each description is prefaced with necessary introductions (as will be clarified below) as well as the implications of the Stand at Sinai, which reverberate through many more verses than those outlined. I would like to suggest that there are three description-sets here, as follows:

- 1) 4:1-40
- 2) 5:1-6:3
- 3) 9:7-10:11

[Again, I suggest that the reader follow each section with a Tanakh in hand; these divisions will become apparent at first inspection. Not only are the Parashiot broken up this way in the text, but the speeches flow rather seamlessly within these divisions. There is yet another "text-clue" which points to this division - but more on that later.]

## II. 'AREI MIKLAT: (CITIES OF REFUGE)

For purposes of our shiur, we will direct our analysis to the two speeches in Parashat Va'Et'hanan - 4:1-40 and 5:1-6:3. Note that these two descriptions are interrupted with a brief narrative about Mosheh's activities - he assigns the three 'Arei Miklat (cities of refuge) on the East Bank of the Jordan. Why are Mosheh's speeches interrupted with this narrative?

In addition, there is a peculiarly significant verse placed in the middle of the 'Arei Miklat narrative. Significant because it is a broad statement about Torah and Mosheh's rule in teaching Torah to the Jewish people. Peculiar because of its location:

Then Mosheh set apart on the east side of the Jordan three cities to which a homicide could flee, someone who unintentionally kills another person, the two not having been at enmity before; the homicide could flee to one of these cities and live: Bezer in the wilderness on the tableland belonging to the B'nei Re'even, Ramoth in Gilead belonging to the B'nei Gad, and Golan in Bashan belonging to the B'nei Menasheh.

V'Zot haTorah Asher Sam Mosheh liPh'nei V'nei Yisra'el

(And this is the Torah that Mosheh placed before the B'nei Yisra'el)

These are the decrees and the statutes and ordinances that Mosheh spoke to the Israelites when they had come out of Egypt, beyond the Jordan in the valley opposite Beth-P'or, in the land of King Sihon of the Amorites, who reigned at Heshbon, whom Mosheh and the Israelites defeated when they came out of Egypt. They occupied his land and the land of King Og of Bashan, the two kings of the Amorites on the eastern side of the Jordan: from Aroer, which is on the edge of the Wadi Arnon, as far as Mount Sirion (that is, Hermon), together with all the Arabah on the east side of the Jordan as far as the Sea of the Arabah, under the slopes of Pisgah. (D'varim 4:41-49)

Why is this central verse (which we declare every time the Sefer Torah is raised for us to see) placed in the middle of a Parashah about 'Arei Miklat?

## III. SH'MA YISR'AEL

Before responding to our questions - two more are in order. We are all familiar with what is perhaps the most famous and central verse in the Torah - Sh'ma Yisra'el, Hashem Eloheinu, Hashem Echad (6:4) Note that this verse comes immediately after the second "Sinai speech". What is the significance of its placement here? Moreover, what is the meaning of the two introductory words - Sh'ma Yisra'el?

...and one final question. Note that the beginning of each of the "Sinai-speeches" begins with a curiously similar phrase (one which

shows up a number of times in D'varim - and only in D'varim):

4:1 - So now, Yisra'el, give heed (Yisra'el Sh'ma) to the statutes and ordinances that I am teaching you to observe, so that you may live to enter and occupy the land that Hashem, the God of your ancestors, is giving you.

5:1 - Mosheh convened all Yisra'el, and said to them: Hear, O Yisra'el (Sh'ma Yisra'el), the statutes and ordinances that I am addressing to you today; you shall learn them and observe them diligently.

Why does each speech begin with the familiar Sh'ma Yisra'el (albeit in inverted fashion in the first instance)?

## SUMMARY

In all, we have asked seven questions regarding Mosheh's speeches and the one narrative in our Parashah:

- \* Why are the two major speeches both about the Stand at Sinai?
- \* Why is that speech divided into two via the 'Arei-Miklat interruption?
- \* What is the import of the 'Arei Miklat narrative here?
- \* Why is the "banner-verse" v'Zot haTorah... placed in the middle of the 'Arei Miklat narrative?
- \* What is the rationale behind the placement of the "famous" Sh'ma Yisra'el... section?
- \* What does Sh'ma Yisra'el mean?
- \* Why does each of the first two Sinai-speeches begin with Sh'ma Yisra'el?

## IV. MOSHEH "RABBENU" IN ACTION

In last week's shiur, we discussed the job of a Rabbi and how Mosheh earned his reputation as "Mosheh Rabbenu" (Moses our Teacher), his eternal title, when he brought the past into the present for the second generation. This was, as we described, the first task of a Rabbi - to bridge generational gaps and to bring the students back to Sinai. Mosheh began this mission in Parashat D'varim with his educationally sophisticated history lesson.

The second job of a Rabbi - is to be the "Shadchan" between his students and haKadosh Barukh Hu. He must inspire his charges to seek out their own relationship with God and he must continue to guide them in the development of that relationship.

After Mosheh established the bridge between the Dor Yotz'ei Mitzrayim (generation of the Exodus) and Dor Ba'ei ha'Aretz (generation of the Conquest), he began to instruct the people about their personal (and individual) relationships with God.

This process, however, can never be accomplished in one single lesson. There are various sophisticated steps which must be taken to guide others to the Ribono shel Olam (Master of the Universe) - and each of them is a lesson in and of itself. This is as true about Mosheh and his students as it is today.

Just like any relationship, the person endeavoring to enter into an interaction with God must learn about two things - the nature of the "Other" (in this case, God) and the medium of that relationship (in this case, Mitzvot).

With one introductory hypothesis, we will see how these lessons are presented by Mosheh in an educationally sequential format.

## V. SH'MA YISRA'EL: INTRODUCTION OF A LESSON

The hypothesis is as follows: The phrase Sh'ma Yisra'el which introduces each of the three major speeches in our Parashah, is indeed an introduction - of a new lesson. This explains the unique relationship between this phrase and Sefer D'varim, which is (as we explained in last week's shiur), a session in Mosheh Rabbenu's Beit Midrash. This also explains the division of the various lessons in our Parashah, as follows:

### THE FIRST LESSON: Hashem IS THE ONE TRUE GOD

The first Sinai-speech (4:1-40) is about the Revelation - as an explanation of the Nature of God (as much as can be understood). True to the "negative theology" popularized by Rambam (in which all that we can know about God is what we can negate about Him - e.g. He is not weak etc.), most of this Parashah is a warning that we should not confuse any of the manifestations we experienced at Sinai with God Himself:

Since you saw no form when Hashem spoke to you at Horeb out of the fire, take care and watch yourselves closely, so that you do not act corruptly by making an idol for yourselves, in the form of any figure - the likeness of male or female, the likeness of any animal that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the air, the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the water under the earth. And when you look up to the heavens and see the sun, the moon, and the stars, all the host of heaven, do not be led astray and bow down to them and serve them, things that Hashem your God has allotted to all the peoples everywhere under heaven. (D'varim 4:15-19)

Indeed, the end of this speech is a reminder of God's singular and unique existence and that He alone is the one God:

To you it was shown so that you would acknowledge that Hashem is God; there is no other besides him...So acknowledge today and take to heart that Hashem is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other. (4:35,39)

The focus of this speech is about who God is, as it were, and who He is not. [Note how Rambam, in the beginning of Hilkhot Avodah

Zarah (Laws of Idolatry), outlines the "history" of idolatry.]

## THE SECOND LESSON: THE VALIDITY OF MOSHEH'S PROPHECY

Reading through the second Sinai-speech (5:1-6:3), we see that the implications of the Revelation are not about the essence of God and the dangers of idolatry attendant upon confusion arising from that Revelation; rather, it is a retelling of the people's reaction in response to that great moment:

[Immediately after the "review" of the Decalogue...] These words Hashem spoke with a loud voice to your whole assembly at the mountain, out of the fire, the cloud, and the thick darkness, and He added no more (or He never ceased - see Rashi). He wrote them on two stone tablets, and gave them to me. When you heard the voice out of the darkness, while the mountain was burning with fire, you approached me, all the heads of your tribes and your elders; and you said, "Look, Hashem our God has shown us his glory and greatness, and we have heard His voice out of the fire. Today we have seen that God may speak to someone and the person may still live. So now why should we die? For this great fire will consume us; if we hear the voice of Hashem our God any longer, we shall die. For who is there of all flesh that has heard the voice of the living God speaking out of fire, as we have, and remained alive? Go near, you yourself, and hear all that Hashem our God will say. Then tell us everything that Hashem our God tells you, and we will listen and do it." Hashem heard your words when you spoke to me, and Hashem said to me: "I have heard the words of this people, which they have spoken to you; they are right in all that they have spoken. If only they had such a mind as this, to fear me and to keep all my commandments always, so that it might go well with them and with their children forever! Go say to them, 'Return to your tents.' But you, stand here by me, and I will tell you all the commandments, the statutes and the ordinances, that you shall teach them, so that they may do them in the land that I am giving them to possess." You must therefore be careful to do as Hashem your God has commanded you; you shall not turn to the right or to the left. You must follow exactly the path that Hashem your God has commanded you, so that you may live, and that it may go well with you, and that you may live long in the land that you are to possess. Now this is the commandment... (D'varim 5:22-6:1)

As is readily seen, the focus of this speech is the people's reaction to the Revelation (fear) and their appointment of Mosheh as their "go-between" to receive the rest of God's commandments.

This established Mosheh as the "Lawgiver" (Mehokek - see D'varim 33:21) - and enabled him to then instruct the B'nei Yisra'el regarding all of the other Mitzvot (besides the Decalogue) which they had not directly heard from God.

In summary, we have two lessons in our Parashah, each based on the experience at Sinai - and each introduced with the Sh'ma Yisra'el formula.

The first lesson is about God - and the second is about Torah. In other words, the first introduces the B'nei Yisra'el to the object of their relationship, while the second describes the vehicle for that relationship.

Why then is the narrative regarding 'Arei Miklat placed between these two speeches?

## VI. THE "HIDDUSH" (NOVELTY) OF 'AREI MIKLAT

We take it for granted that intention (Kavvanah) plays a central role in religious behavior - that our attitude and focus while performing Mitzvot affects the spiritual impact (and, in some cases, the Halakhic consequences) of those actions. There is, however, very little indication of this central religious component in the first four books of the Torah. The one exception is in relation to the Mishkan - specifically in the world of Korbanot (offerings). Outside of this, we only find out about prohibited actions (e.g. stealing, eating Hametz on Pesach) and obligations (returning a theft, eating Matzah on Pesach) - but we do not hear very much about the role of intent in Halakhah.

The one powerful exception to this is the rule of manslaughter, as outlined in Bamidbar 25 (although it is alluded to in Sh'mot 21:13 - see Rashi ad loc.). In case someone intentionally murders a fellow, he is liable for death. On the other hand, if it is an unintentional act ("manslaughter"), the killer has the benefit of the protection of the city of refuge - and the blood relative may not go there and exact vengeance for his dead relative.

The laws of murder/manslaughter are complex and demand a serious investigation, to understand the various shades of intent and how they apply to the case before the Beit Din.

The reason that, with this exception, the first four books of the Torah do not address the issue of intent is that they are the "instructions" about our relationships with each other and with God. Sefer D'varim, on the other hand, is Mosheh's instruction on HOW to relate to God - not just which actions to take, but which attitudes should accompany them.

Mosheh, therefore, interrupts his lessons about that relationship and does what every great teacher does - he demonstrates (instead of just preaching) how to put this lesson into action.

This is a critical piece of Torah - Mosheh has just taught a philosophical piece about the nature of God. Yet Judaism is not just philosophic speculation and meditation - it demands action. Therefore, Mosheh acts to demonstrate this component. Yet - the Mitzvah he chooses to demonstrate shows us the integration of intent/attitude and action.

And...Zot haTorah - "This is the Torah". In the middle of his lesson, Mosheh stops to perform a Mitzvah which demonstrates, better than any other, the complementary nature of action and attitude - and this is, indeed, the Torah. To borrow from Hillel - all the rest is commentary. In other words, the lesson of 'Arei Miklat is a lesson about the entire Torah.

After teaching this valuable lesson (by example), Mosheh goes on to teach that Torah (the Decalogue) and now, instead of introducing God, he introduces the Mehokek - himself!

Mosheh is now "set up" to teach them how to fully develop their relationship with God.

## VII. SH'MA YISRA'EL: THE TELOS OF TORAH

Now we come to the third lesson - the "famous" Sh'ma Yisra'el. What is the essence of this lesson?

Sh'ma Yisra'el: Hashem is our God, Hashem is One. You shall love Hashem your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart.

We are commanded to do more than follow a series of actions - and obey restrictions - ordained by God. We are called to be in a relationship with God, a relationship of love, commitment, constancy and much more. The next 6 chapters are replete with Mosheh's reminders to love God, to fear Him, to cleave to Him, to swear by His Name etc. None of this was mentioned anywhere earlier in the Torah - again, Mosheh is acting as the consummate Rabbi, bringing his students into the full sense of the relationship with God.

This is the third lesson - once we have been "introduced" to God and to his lawgiver (who can accurately convey His commands), we are taught about the ultimate goal of these commands - to love God, to fear Him, to walk in His ways etc.

We can now go back to our original questions and answer:

\* Why are the two major speeches both about the Stand at Sinai?

- each teaches us about a different implication of that experience; the first teaches us about WHO God is, the second about the vehicle for entering into a relationship with Him (Torah) and the "Shadchan" (Mosheh Rabbenu).

\* Why is that speech divided into two via the 'Arei-Miklat interruption?

- as above, each teaches a distinct lesson.

\* What is the import of the 'Arei Miklat narrative here?

- Mosheh Rabbenu is teaching, by example, the importance of integrating intent/attitude with action in fulfilling Mitzvot.

\* Why is the "banner-verse" v'Zot haTorah... placed in the middle of the 'Arei Miklat narrative?

- this is a central lesson of Torah - that action alone is not enough and that the consequences of a person's actions depend on the approach with which he acts.

\* What is the rationale behind the placement of the "famous" Sh'ma Yisra'el... section?

- after teaching us about God and about the vehicle for entering into a relationship with Him, Mosheh teaches us about the ultimate goal of those Mitzvot.

\* What does Sh'ma Yisra'el mean?

- it is the introduction of a new "lesson"

\* Why does each of the first two Sinai-speeches begin with Sh'ma Yisra'el?

- as above, each is a lesson in and of itself.

### **VIII. POSTSCRIPT**

One question which remains is about the order of these lessons - wouldn't it have been more appropriate to teach about the "love" for God before our commitment via Mitzvot? Aren't we motivated to action because of our feelings for the one (or One) on whose behalf we are acting?

I once heard a beautiful explanation of this - albeit in a slightly different context - from Mori haRav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik zt"l. The Rov compared the two statements of Hazal regarding "Imitatio Dei":

A) "Just as He is gracious, you should be gracious; just as He is compassionate, so should you be compassionate etc." (BT Shabbat 133b)

B) "Just like He comforted the bereaved, so you comfort the bereaved; just as He visited the sick, so you visit the sick etc." (BT Sotah 14a)

He noted that in the first statement we are called to imitate Divine characteristics, as it were. The second statement, on the other hand, challenges us to imitate Divine actions, so to speak.

Instead of seeing these as either contradictory or parallel (but unrelated) statements, the Rov explained that the two of them are linked in series.

Unlike the way that the "world" thinks, that we act on behalf of someone because we care about them, the Torah is teaching us how to develop that compassion - by acting on their behalf. We do not develop good character by being born with it or waiting for it to come to us - we become compassionate by behaving compassionately. The second statement, imitating Divine actions (which the Torah mandates - see MT Evel 14:1), comes first, as it were. The second mandate, imitating Divine character, is the result of fulfilling the first.

In the same way, we understand why the Torah prefaced the "emotional" connection with God with the "mechanical" one. We come to love and fear God (and desire to cleave to Him) not as a motivation for fulfilling Mitzvot - rather as the result of that fulfillment.

We can also see this in the Parashah of K'riat Sh'ma:

Sh'ma Yisra'el: Hashem is our God, Hashem is One. You shall love Hashem your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart.

(and how do we come to this intense level of commitment and love?)

Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

(See Sifri Va'Et'hanan #8, where the command to study is seen as a method for achieving love for God)

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