

Potomac Torah Study Center

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Note: Tu B'Av is Monday, August 19

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 more than 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his untimely death.

Devrei Torah are now Available for Download (normally by noon on Fridays) at www.PotomacTorah.org. Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah archives.

Hamas continues to manipulate the media while pretending to negotiate with Israel. Hersh Polin Goldberg, cousin of very close friends of ours and a U.S. citizen, remains a captive. Concerns are increasing that fewer than half of the hostages may still be alive. We continue our prayers for the hostages and all our people stuck in Gaza. May Hashem enable us and our people in Israel to wipe out the evil of Hamas, protect us from violence by Hezbollah and other anti-Semites around the world, and restore peace for our people quickly and successfully.

After Moshe's rebukes (Mussar) in Devarim and the tragic reminders of the Three Weeks, Shabbat Nachamu and Tu B'Av (next Monday) come as welcome relief. Moshe repeats the Ten Statements in Vaetchanan, with some changes in emphasis. For example, Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander observes that the statement about Shabbat in Shemot focuses on remembering Shabbat to commemorate the creation of the world. In Devarim, the focus of Shabbat is to extend a day of rest every week to all humans and animals, to remember the Exodus. Here the focus is on relations between each of us and fellow living creatures (humans and animals), a focus that connects with the emphasis in Tanach on caring properly with others, especially those less fortunate than we are.

Rabbi David Fohrman and his fellow scholars at alephbeta.org provide another example of how incidents in the lives of our ancestors frequently come back as mitzvot in the Torah. In chapter 7, Moshe reminds us that in Canaan, they will encounter seven larger and stronger nations (several the same ones with whom Yaakov and his family interacted). The word the Torah uses for marriages, "*I'hitchein*," means intermingling among people. The prohibition on intermarriage really means that B'Nai Yisrael are to keep separate from other nations. The danger of intermarriage is that the family from the non-Jewish spouse will influence the Jewish spouse and his or her relatives to adopt the foreign practices, something that opens a path to idolatry. This warning links back to Bereishis 34, when the son of the leader of Shechem kidnaps and rapes Yaakov's daughter Dinah, then brothers Levi and Shimon deceive the men of Shechem (to have them all circumcise themselves) and murder them while they are in pain after the surgery. Shimon and Levi take property from the people of Shechem, and that property includes idols. This danger is why Moshe repeatedly commands the people to destroy all property of other nations. Foreign influences (idolatry) can affect the Jews through many paths as long as the people live among other nations – and marriage is only the most obvious danger. While Vaetchanan and Tu B'Av celebrate marriage, it is only Jewish marriage, not intermarriage.

Yaakov is furious with Shimon and Levi – and fears that the larger nations will attack his small family. Once Shimon and Levi destroy all the spoils that they took from Shechem, Hashem puts fear of B'Nai Yisrael in the hearts of the Canaanite nations, and this fear protects Yaakov and his family. In ancient times, political marriage and intermingling of the tribes was a way to increase the strength of relatively small nations. Moshe warns B'Nai Yisrael that being a small nation is not

a reason to be afraid – when Jews follow the mitzvot, God protects the Jews. Moshe warns the people that Hashem's protection is much stronger than any protection that they could gain from intermarriage with non-Jews. This policy, which Jews have largely followed for more than 3000 years, is a key factor in the survival of Israel and Jews for so many years.

Moshe's warning and the lesson from Hashem's protection remain relevant today. Despite overwhelming odds, Israel defeated the combined Arab nations in 1948, 1956, 1967, and 1973. The inability of a hundred million Arabs to defeat Israel in these wars gave a sense of superiority to Israel – a reputation that has benefitted the country during most of the past decades. The vicious attack of Hamas on October 7 damaged Israel's reputation for top security and ability to learn in advance and counter what our enemies plan. Since October 7, we have seen an explosion of anti-Semitism in most parts of the world. Our enemies – including most of the press in the United States – claim that Israel has stolen land from the "Palestinians" and are aggressors in Gaza and other non-Jewish neighboring countries. Woke elements in the United States have been teaching young people that Israel is an evil country trying to take over land that does not belong to us. The situation on many college campuses and in graduate schools is that Jewish students do not feel safe. Indeed, a court earlier this week ruled that UCLA has failed to protect its Jewish students and must implement policies and protections to ensure the safety of Jews on campus. Similar lawsuits are in litigation against several other universities.

The situation for Jews at universities is so severe that I am reprinting an extremely important essay by Rabbi YY Jacobson, "The Arab-Israeli Conflict Is Not Territorial: Why Are We Afraid to Speak Truth?" This essay, which includes an outstanding article on Israel's right to the land by Harvard Professor Emerita Ruth Wisse, was in the Internet Parsha Sheet (parsha.net) last week for Devarim. Professor Wisse has another article on the current situation in the Wall St. Journal on August 15, 2024 (editorial section), and everyone should read that piece as well. Rabbi Jacobson and Professor Wisse explain why Israel has a legal claim to the land of Israel and why the term "Palestinian people" only came into use after Israel won the Six Day War in 1967. The people who claim to have a claim to our land as "Palestinians" never made that claim while Jordan controlled much of Israel. Jewish claims go back approximately 3500 years.

Moshe's warnings to our people are as important today as they were when Yehoshua led our ancestors into the land that Hashem had promised to our Avot. We should follow Moshe's words, increase our dedication to the mitzvot, and trust in Hashem's protection. With Hashem's help, and with Jews doing our part, we can keep Israel secure and work for a better future. We must ensure that our children and grandchildren learn and believe this message. My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, would have certainly agreed with my message this week. Hopefully he would have stated that I learned his lessons well.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah and Alan

Much of the inspiration for my weekly Dvar Torah message comes from the insights of Rabbi David Fohrman and his team of scholars at www.alephbeta.org. Please join me in supporting this wonderful organization, which has increased its scholarly work during and since the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.

Please daven for a Refuah Shlema for Hersh ben Perel Chana (Hersh Polin, hostage to terrorists in Gaza); Moshe Aaron ben Leah Beilah (badly wounded in battle in Gaza but slowly recovering), Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Yoram Ben Shoshana, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Chai Frumel bat Leah, Rena bat Ilisa, Riva Golda bat Leah, Sarah Feige bat Chaya, Sharon bat Sarah, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, and all our fellow Jews in danger in and near Israel. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom

Hannah & Alan

Va'etchanan: Rest and Resilience – The Enduring Relevance of Shabbat in Troubled Times

By Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander * © 5784 (2024)
President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone

Dedicated in memory of Israel's murdered and fallen, the refuah shlaima of the wounded, the return of those being held hostage in Gaza, and the safety of our brave IDF soldiers.

As we transition from the depths of collective mourning on Tisha B'Av to a period of consolation, signified by the haftarah's opening words 'Nachamu, nachamu ami,' the repetition of the Ten Commandments in our parsha serves as a reminder of our covenant with God; a source of comfort and renewal. Yet while the text of the repetition is mostly the same as in Parshat Yitro (Shemot 20), a number of differences stand out, particularly regarding the commandment to observe Shabbat.

In Shemot, God commands us to remember the Sabbath day as a commemoration of the creation of the world. By refraining from labor on the seventh day, we perform an act of *imitatio dei*, reminding ourselves of God's beneficence in having made the world of which we are a part.

Yet when Moshe revisits the Ten Commandments in Parshat Va'etchanan, the creation story is totally absent. Instead, we are told that all of us – including the strangers, slaves, and animals living among us – are entitled to a day off each week, in commemoration of our having been redeemed from our enslavement in Egypt. This paradigm for Shabbat observance reflects not our vertical relationship with the Almighty, but our horizontal relationships with those around us, ensuring that no one in our society is worked down to the bone. It is a reflection of a deep human need to rest our bodies and minds, to be more than our labor.

It's no accident that Va'etchanan directs our attention to the societal element of Shabbat observance. As Professor Yoni Grossman persuasively argues in his commentary on Sefer Devarim, the final book of the Torah is focused primarily on readying the Jewish people for their entry to the land, where they will shift from a nomadic lifestyle to a position of self-governance in the society they will build. And when building a just society, protecting labor rights for everyone, even the non-Jews among us, is critical. It is tantamount to remembering the very creation of the world.

But it is not just merely the opportunity for physical rest that makes Shabbat critical in a healthy society. Guaranteed time off from work also strengthens our resilience (as well as that of our workers), allowing us the opportunity to see past our work; to think thoughts and dream big.

In Shemot Rabbah 5:18, the midrash imagines how the Jews spent their Shabbatot while they were enslaved in Egypt. Each week, they would gather together, and dream of their ultimate redemption.

While we are blessed to live free in our own country, with our freedom protected by God and His IDF shlichim, we have been reminded that there is a heavy price to be paid for this freedom. Yet entering Shabbat Nachamu, we gather together our thoughts and feelings in the aftermath of this uniquely somber Tisha B'Av. We are once again called upon to join our ancestors in lifting up our heads from the dark cloud of troubles that surrounds us and to think of a better future. To use the healing and rejuvenating power of Shabbat to strengthen us. To use Shabbat to engage with family and friends, reflect on our priorities and reimagine our personal and communal life. Shabbat creates an "*island in time*" to re-engage with God and to dream and actively work to usher in the bright redemption that lies just over the horizon. It is only through this resting on Shabbat that we are able to truly embrace the goodness with which God created the world, and remember our role in the world as God's junior partners, as Shemot commands us.

Our observance of Shabbat and this mandate to guarantee rest and dignity for every member of our society will, please God, hasten the coming of '*the day that is an eternal Shabbat*.'

* Ohr Torah Stone is a modern Orthodox group of 32 institutions and programs. Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin is the Founding Director, and Rabbi Dr. Brander is President and Rosh HaYeshiva. For more information or to support Ohr Torah Stone, contact ohrtorahstone@otsny.org or 212-935-8672. Donations to 49 West 45th Street #701, New York, NY 10036.

The Arab-Israeli Conflict Is Not Territorial: Why Are We Afraid to Speak Truth?

by Rabbi YY Jacobson *

*]note: This essay, one of the most important I have read in many years, was in the Internet Parsha Sheet for Devorim. I am running it here, because every Jew should understand the important messages it contains. While this essay is much longer than I normally include, it is easy to understand and extremely important. Rabbi YY posts at: theyeshiva.net [

On a Hike

Four Europeans go hiking together, and get frightfully lost. First they run out of food, and then they run out of water.

"I'm so thirsty," says the Englishman, "I must have tea." "I'm so thirsty, says the Frenchman, "I must have wine." "I'm so thirsty," says the German, "I must have beer."

"I'm so thirsty," says the Jew, "I must have diabetes."

Israel Today

Israel today is facing a complex reality, with more varied and serious threats than we've seen before. There is the threat from Iran, Hamas, Hezbollah, the PA, and the other enemies of Israel waiting for their moment.

During such times, it is vital that we, the Jewish people, stand firm and united. First and foremost, we must articulate to ourselves — and to the world — the truth about Israel.

Not Even a Foot

In this week's Torah portion (Devarim), Moses, bidding farewell to his nation just weeks before his passing, narrates the experiences of the young nation during their forty years of wandering in the Sinai wilderness, en route to the Holy Land. Their long trek, from Egypt through the Sinai Peninsula, to the Eastern bank of the Jordan, forced them to pass neighboring countries, all of them antagonistic toward the Israelites. Moses records his instructions to the Israelites on how to treat these neighboring nations. His words are both shocking and stunning; their moral power resonates to this very day.

"G-d said to me," Moses recalls (1), "Give the people the following instructions: 'You are passing through the borders of your brothers, the descendants of Esau, who dwell in Saeir]Southeast of Israel[. Although they fear you, you must be very careful. You shall not provoke them, for I will not give you even one foot of their land. As an inheritance to Esau I have given Mount Saeir.'"

Moses continues the instruction: "You shall purchase food from them for money so that you may eat; also water shall you buy from them for money so that you may drink." From Saeir, also known as Edom, the Hebrews continue their journey

northward toward the territory of Moab, located at the East of the Dead Sea. This is Moses' message to the Jews once again:

"G-d said to me, 'You shall not distress Moab and you shall not provoke war with them. I will not give you their land as an inheritance, since I have already given Ar [the capital of Moab] to Lot's descendants as their heritage.'"

As the Jews continue their voyage up north toward the country of Ammon, today's Jordan, Moses has this to say to his people: "G-d spoke to me saying... 'You will be coming close to the Ammonites. You shall not distress them and you shall not provoke them, for I shall not give any of the land of the descendants of Ammon to you as an inheritance; to the descendants of Lot have I given it as an inheritance)2(."

These words, uttered three millennia ago)in the year 1273 BCE(, one month before Moses dies, are startling. When the world was still a moral desolate desert, a barbaric pagan society, Jews were barred from taking even a single inch from the territories of Saeir, Moab and Ammon. "I will not give you even one foot of their land," G-d declares to Israel. Not only can you not build homes on their territory, you mustn't even stand on their soil without permission. You can't enjoy a falafel without their consent. Why? Because their land does not belong to you, the Israelites; it belongs to another nation. Do not lay a finger on that which is not yours.

The Eternal Lesson

Why does the Torah record these apparently insignificant instructions of Moses concerning the Jewish encounter with the three countries of Saeir, Moab and Ammon)and Moses is sharing this with them long after the actual events happened(? What historical relevance is there in this lengthy and detailed account? Especially considering that the Torah is far more a book of moral instruction than a work of historical data. What moral message does this tale convey?

The answer is clear. The Torah is communicating to us the circumstances surrounding the ultimate Israelite conquest and settlement of their homeland, Eretz Israel, so that when the United Nations, the White House, the International Court of Justice, the European Union, CNN, the New York Times, the Universities of the US and Europe, the State Department, and all of the Arab countries will decry Israel as an apartheid state, occupying Palestinian soil and controlling land annexed from another nation, the Jewish people will be able to open their own constitution, the Torah, and present its unwavering message:

"Listen ye, defenders of morality and human rights! Do not preach to us about stolen land. At a time when most tribes and nations were slaughtering their very own children to pagan gods)3(; in a milieu when parents regularly practiced infanticide, murdering their weak newborn children; in an era when cannibalism was a routine diet, and most people lacked the slightest idea about the very notion of right and wrong -- Jewish children growing up in a desert were taught that they could not touch that which did not belong to them. They could not step foot into a territory that was not theirs.

"When your great-great grandparents were still entrenched in barbaric pagan rites, our children were studying G-d's instruction to cultivate absolute respect for the property and nationhood of others.

"This was to teach the Jewish people that the land that they were instructed to settle was theirs for eternity."

The very same G-d who instructed them not to set foot on foreign soil, granted the Land of Israel – the entire territory from the Jordanian River to the Mediterranean Sea – as His gift to the Jewish people. It is not stolen land; it is the eternal heritage of the Jewish people.

Israel became a nation in 1313 BCE, 2,000 years before the birth of Islam. Forty years later, in 1273 BCE, the Jews conquered Eretz Israel and enjoyed dominion over the land for a thousand years. Even after the Babylonians and then the Romans put an end to the Jewish sovereignty, Jews continued to reside there throughout all of their history. The Jews have had a continuous presence in the land of Israel for the past 3,300 years.

"You Are Thieves"

The great 11th-century French biblical commentator, Rashi (Rabbi Solomon Yitzchaki), one of the greatest sages in the history of the Jewish people, asks the following question in his commentary on the opening verse of Genesis. If the Hebrew Bible is a book of Jewish law, why does it begin with the story of creation, and the entire book of Genesis, and not proceed immediately to the first mitzvah given to the Jews in the book of Exodus?

Rashi, who wrote these words as Christian crusaders were attempting to purge the land from Muslim rule, presents an incredible answer. One day in the future, Rashi says, the nations of the world will turn to the Jewish people and declare, "You are thieves! You have stolen the land of Israel from non-Jewish tribes."

What ought to be the appropriate Jewish response? To answer this question, the Hebrew Bible commences its text with the story of creation of the universe, and the entire story of Genesis, in order to grant the Jew the best and truest answer to the accusation that he is a bandit. The entire universe, the Bible is saying, belongs to G-d. He created it. Every piece of land belongs to Him, and He chose to give the Land of Israel to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and their descendants. To call Israel occupiers is akin to calling France occupiers of Paris or Britain occupiers of London.

The Bible -- a book embraced by 1.5 billion Muslims and 2.5 billion Christians as the word of G-d -- states clearly hundreds of times that the entire country, including the West Bank and Jerusalem, is G-d's eternal gift to the Jewish people. In fact, our ownership of Israel surpasses that of any other nation's ownership of its country. Every other nation in the world bases its claim to its land on conquest. A people came, conquered the indigenous people, took the land, settled it, and called it by a new name.

"Might makes right" is the historical claim of almost all nations in history. With one exception: Israel, Eretz Israel. This country belongs to the Jewish people because, as the Bible states hundreds of times, G-d gave it to them as their eternal heritage. It is the most moral claim by every definition of morality.

The Truth About the Refugees

Harvard University professor Ruth Wisse wrote these wise words in The Wall Street Journal (June 16, 2003):

"Unfortunately, the Arab war against Israel is no more a territorial conflict than was al Qaeda's strike against America, and it can no more be resolved by the 'road map' than anti-Americanism could be appeased by ceding part of the U.S. to an Islamist enclave. From the moment in 1947 when Jewish leaders accepted and Arab rulers rejected the U.N. partition plan of Palestine, the Arab-Israeli conflict bore no further likeness to conventional territorial struggles. Arab rulers defied the U.N. charter by denying the legitimacy of a member state. Arab countries refused to acknowledge the existence of a single Jewish land. Arab rulers did not object to Israel because it rendered the Palestinians homeless. Rather, they ensured that the Palestinians should remain homeless so that they could organize their politics around opposition to Israel.

"At any point during the past 55 years, Arab governments could have helped the Palestinian Arabs settle down to a decent life. They could have created the infrastructure of an autonomous Palestine on the West Bank of the Jordan and the Gaza territory that Egypt controlled until 1967, or encouraged the resettlement of Palestinians in Jordan, which constitutes the lion's share of the original mandate of Palestine. Rather than fund the Palestine Liberation Organization to foment terror against Israel they could have endowed Palestinian schools of architecture, engineering, medicine and law. What Israel did for its refugees from Arab lands, Arabs could have done much more sumptuously for the Palestinians displaced by the same conflict. Instead, Arab rulers cultivated generations of refugees in order to justify their ongoing campaign against the 'usurper.'"

Every decent human heart goes out to the pain of innocent Arab children, women and men who grew up in impoverished refugee camps. Their suffering should evoke the compassion of all moral men. But let us be clear on the matter: Their suffering has absolutely nothing to do with Israel. Their profound agony is the result of the Arab and Palestinian leaders who have in a most cynical way used them as weapons in their bloody battle against Israel, robbing them of any prospect of a brighter future.

This abuse of the Arab refugees by their leaders began back in 1948. For the most part, the refugees were encouraged by Arab leaders to leave Israel, promising to purge the land of Jews. Sixty-eight percent left their homes without ever seeing an Israeli soldier.

Out of the 100 million refugees after World War II, theirs is the only refugee group in the world that was not absorbed or integrated into their own peoples' lands. Jewish refugees which numbered the same amount as Palestinian refugees were completely absorbed into Israel, a country no larger than the state of New Jersey. Yet the Arab refugees were intentionally not absorbed or integrated into the Arab lands to which they fled, despite the vast Arab territory. Why? Because cynical Arab leaders realized that the true value of the refugees was not as Arab brothers but as pawns to be used against Israel.

What About the Palestinian People?

How about the ingrained notion that the Palestinians are fighting for their ancient homeland annexed by the Jews? The truth about this matter has been so deliberately obscured that even raising the issue seems strange to many people.

Let us reflect on some undisputed historical facts.)Please read till the end and reflect on these facts before you dismiss them instinctively(. In the 1967 war, did Israel annex territory from a Palestinian nation? No. Not a single inch. Israel captured the West Bank and Eastern Jerusalem from Jordan's King Hussein and the Gaza Strip from Egypt, after they planned to destroy the Jewish State. It was only following the Six-day War in 1967 that Arab refugees living in these territories began identifying themselves as part of a "Palestinian people."

One must wonder why these Palestinians suddenly discovered a national identity after Israel won the war, but not during the "Jordanian occupation"?

If the people you mistakenly call 'Palestinians' are anything but generic Arabs collected from all over – or thrown out of -- the Arab world, if they really have a genuine ethnic identity that gives them right for self-determination, why did they never try to become independent until Arabs suffered their devastating defeat in the Six Day War?

Here are the facts, and you can check them out. There has never been a land known as Palestine governed by Palestinians. Palestinians are regular Arabs, indistinguishable from Jordanians, Syrians, Lebanese, Iraqis, Egyptians, etc., who have all lived for hundreds of years under Turkish rule, and then, after World War I, under British rule. At that time even Jews living in the Holy Land were called "Palestinians." There is no language known as Palestinian. There is no distinct Palestinian culture. There is no such an entity as a "Palestinian people."

The name "Palestine" was created in the second century after the Romans committed genocide against the Jews, burnt the Temple and declared that the land of Israel would be no more. From then on, the Romans promised, it would be known as Palestine. The name was derived from the Philistines, a Goliathian people conquered by the Jews centuries earlier. It was a way for the Romans to add insult to injury.)They also tried to change the name of Jerusalem to Aelia Capitolina, but that had even less staying power.(

The present conflict between Israel and the Arabs has absolutely nothing to do with any occupation. In 1967, when there was not one Jewish settlement and no occupation, five Arab countries -- Jordan, Syria, Egypt, Iraq and Lebanon joined by Saudi Arabia -- contrived a plan to annihilate Israel and "drive the Jews into the sea." Israel fought back and won the war -- and the territories from which it was attacked. Keep in mind that in 1967 the Arabs controlled 99.9 percent of the Middle East lands. Israel represented less than one-tenth of 1 percent of the land mass. But even that was too much for the Arabs. They wanted it all. No matter how many land concessions the Israelis make, it will never be enough.

During the summer of 2000 at Camp David, Yasser Arafat was offered by Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak 98 percent of the "occupied territories" and a first time ever Palestinian State with its capital in East Jerusalem. Arafat rejected the Israeli offer and initiated three years of horrific bloodshed in Israel. Then in 2005, Israel evacuated every last Jew from Gaza, giving away Gaza exclusively to the Arabs. The result? Gaza became Chamastan, and Israel has not enjoyed a day of peace coming from Gaza. October 7th was the 'gift' Hamas gave to Israel for returning Gaza to them.

The History of the Palestinians

In Hal Lindsey's book "Everlasting Hatred: The Roots of Jihad," he traces the history of the people now being called the "Palestinians." I want to quote a few critical paragraphs.

"In the 7th century, the Muslims took control of Palestine for the first time. From 635 CE until 1917, the Muslims ruled it, with only a few interruptions by the European Crusaders. During that span of time, the land was reduced to total desolation. Many people who traveled the land in the 19th century remarked on the fact that Palestine was as desolate as the moon and very few people lived there.

"In 1867, Mark Twain remarked about his visit to the Holy Land in his book, 'The Innocents Abroad.' He lamented: 'Stirring scenes occur in the valley]of Jezreel[no more. There is not a single village throughout its whole extent – not for 30 miles in either direction. There are two or three small clusters of Bedouin tents, but not a single permanent habitation. One may ride 10 miles hereabouts and not see 10 human beings.'

"Twain described the country as 'A desolate country whose soil is rich enough but is given over wholly to weeds. A silent, mournful expanse. We never saw a human being on the whole route. There was hardly a tree or a shrub anywhere. Even the olive and the cactus, those fast friends of a worthless soil, had almost deserted the country.'

"By all eyewitness accounts of that era, Palestine was a total desolation. There were virtually no trees and no people. Because of lack of trees, the weather changed and it rarely ever rained. The irrigation systems of the once fertile valleys were all destroyed, rendering most areas into malaria-ridden swamps. The terraces of the mountainsides were torn down, causing terrible erosion that left only barren rocks. This was the condition of Palestine by the beginning of the 19th century.

"It was at this time that Jews began to flee severe persecution in Russia and Eastern Europe. In the mid-1800s, some Jews came to Palestine and, with the generous aid of some successful Jews, began to buy property from Muslim Ottoman Turks. The Muslims thought the land was worthless anyway, so they sold it to the 'dumb Jews' for extremely inflated prices.

"To everyone's amazement, the Jews were very successful at reclaiming the land. Many of them died from malaria and the rigorous life the work demanded, but they performed an agricultural miracle that made the land very productive again. As a result of their success, poor migrant workers from the surrounding Muslim countries began to flood in to work for the Jews. The Jews literally became victims of their own success – almost all of the people calling themselves 'Palestinians' today are the descendants of those migrant workers.

"When the Hashemite Tribe, who were rulers over Mecca and Medina for centuries, were driven out by the Saudis, the British gave them control over the vastly greater numbers of 'migrant workers' in Trans Jordan. The British said this would be, in effect, "The State of Palestine." Instead, the Hashemites, who make up only about 20 percent of the population, turned it into their own kingdom and called it the Kingdom of Jordan.

"When the Jordanians and Egyptians controlled the so-called West Bank and the Gaza Strip for 19 years (1948 to 1967), there was never a thought of giving the disorganized mass of 'migrant workers' a state. Why? Because they knew there were no cohesive, homogeneous people known as 'Palestinians.'

"The current efforts of Jordan and Egypt and all the rest of the Muslim Middle East nations to give these same people a state is clearly a ploy to get a foothold inside Israel. It is a strategic accommodation to establish a base from which the final assault against Israel can be made. What they couldn't do militarily is now being facilitated through the United Nations and the E.U.

"Muslims will never accept a permanent presence of infidels in what they claim is sacred Islamic soil. Especially Jewish infidels, for which the Koran reserves its most vehement condemnations. In their minds, the Koran and Allah will not let them accept Jews in what they view as their third holiest site."

The early founding fathers of modern Israel, even if they were not religious, were deeply steeped in the realization of the Jewish Biblical connection to the land. David Ben Gurion, for example, had an appreciation of the necessity of anchoring a modern, even secular, Israeli state in biblical and Jewish tradition.

Yet, tragically, this has changed dramatically in recent years. You will rarely, if ever, hear an Israeli leader state the truest and most moral justification for a Jewish presence in the Holy Land: G-d's gift to the Jewish people. I am sure our leaders are trying to do the best for their country, but the practical consequences of this policy are counterproductive.

The Arabs are protesting against Israel, saying, "You have annexed our land; you are building settlements on our soil; you are intruding into our territories." And Israel routinely responds: "Yes, you have the right to create on these territories a Palestinian state, but we have a right for self-defense." The world, we know, has embraced the Arab point of view. Condemnation of Israel as an apartheid state has become the norm.

The world is sympathetic to the Arab propaganda against Israel because Israel itself has embraced the Arab version of "truth."

Israel never refuted the core Arab claim that the territories captured in the 1967 war constitute ancient Palestinian land. Israel only states, that notwithstanding the validity of the Arab claim, she has a right for self-defense. So the world says: "OK, so defend yourself in your territories, not in theirs."

This remains Israel's most profound diplomatic and strategic error. In many of its actions, it treats the 1967 territories as though they belonged to Israel; yet in its words, Israel agrees to the Arab claim that this is Palestinian land. So the world is confused: The Arab position is clear to all; the Israeli position is shrouded in mystery. Do they believe this land belongs to them or not? If yes, let them stop saying that they consent to create a Palestinian State there. If not, why do they still maintain a presence there? The Arabs are not confused. Israel is.

And when Jews are confused about who they are and what they believe in, the world resents them. "You are the nation who heard G-d speak at Sinai; if you guys can't speak moral truth, you must be up to something really devilish." As long as the status of the entire country remains ambiguous, the terror campaign against Israel will, Heaven forbid, continue. The Arabs will view Israel's moral and political ambiguity as a green light to proceed with their aspiration to "liberate all of Palestine from the Zionist entity." And the world will sympathize with this craving for statehood and freedom. Israel must stand up and put an end to the ambivalence around Jewish ownership of the land.

Israel must state clearly that "There will be no more negotiations on even a single inch of the land of Israel. We have attempted to negotiate land for peace with our neighbors; we have offered them 98 percent of the territories and an independent state side-by-side with our state. Yet they have reciprocated by sending suicide bombers to our pizza shops, cafés, supermarkets, schools, and private homes. They have blown to pieces hundreds of innocent Jewish men and women. They have sent thousands of rockets and aim daily to murder as many Jews as possible. They have murdered, raped, burned thousands of Jews, and taken hundreds into captivity. They have vowed to do this again and again. One cannot give land to leaders who teach their followers to put children into ovens, beheads women while raping them, plays soccer with Jewish skulls, and who inculcate in their children's hearts, from infancy onward, with venomous hatred toward the people of Israel."

Israel should allow anybody who wishes to depart for another country to do so. There are 21 Arab countries in the Middle East, and one tiny Jewish country, the size of New Jersey. Israel must reclaim its permanent sovereignty over all of the territories and crush every vestige of terror. Anyone who wants to live as a guest in the Jewish eternal homeland, great. But whoever wants to murder Jews --would be dealt with in the strongest way. Jews should be encouraged to live in their entire homeland. This will save not only countless Jewish lives but also scores of Arab lives. It will once and for all purge the region from continuous bloodshed and terror. This is not occupied territory. It is the land of Israel, given by G-d to the Jewish people.

Let's set the record clear: This is Jewish land, not Arab land. Let all Jews and people of moral standing unite and encourage Israel to bring life and peace to all good people in the region, Jew and Arab alike.)4(

1(Deuteronomy chapter 2:2-6. All of the subsequent quotes are from this chapter.

2(Later on, Moses relates the story of the two kingdoms of Sichon and Og, located on the Eastern bank of the Jordan who, in response to Israel's request for peace, declared war against Israel and were subsequently wiped out.

3(When paganism ruled, it was common to see human beings sacrificed to pagan gods. Child sacrifices were common rituals of the Canaanite Baal worshipers in ancient times. Moses warned the Jews a number of times that if they would leave the Canaanite tribes in their midst, they might begin to emulate their cruel and barbaric pagan practices. This indeed transpired. It was this practice of many Jews that caused the prophet Elijah, with G-d's approval, to condemn and destroy 450 prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel)1 Kings 18:6-40(. Near Mount Carmel on the site of the ancient city of Meggido, archaeologists have discovered the remains of infants who, under the corrupt rule of the Israelite King Ahab and Queen Jezebel in the ninth century B.C.E., had been sacrificed in a temple of Ashtoreth, the goddess of Baal.

In the eighth century B.C. the corrupt King Ahaz of ancient Israel sacrificed)by burning(his own son to the Canaanite god Molech)2 Kings 16:3(. Not too long after Ahaz, another immoral monarch of Israel, King Manasseh, sacrificed his son)also by burning(in the Valley of Hinnon)2 Kings 21:6(. And during the latter part of the seventh century B.C., the prophet Jeremiah condemned numerous Israelites for sacrificing "their sons and daughters in the fire")Jeremiah 7:3 1(.

4(This essay is based on a talk delivered by the Lubavitcher Rebbe, 4 Av 5740, July 17, 1980)published in Sichos Kodesh 5740 vol. 3 pp. 704-706.(The Rebbe's opposition to ceding land for peace was not based on his belief that the sanctity of the land is more important than life. To the contrary, he often said—quoting Jewish law)Orach Chaim 329(—that this is exactly what will distance peace. The more Israel gives up land, the more bloodshed and loss of life on both sides. The enemy uses all autonomy to increase terror against Israel and simply brings the enemy closer to Israel. If anyone ever doubted the accuracy of the Rebbe's predictions, just study the case of Gaza or ANY other period when Israel gave up sovereignty over any piece of land, i.e. the Oslo Accords.

Vaetchanan: The Rosh Yeshiva Responds – Referring to Someone Named “Adonai” by Name **

by Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah **

“You shall not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain” (Devarim 5:11).

QUESTION — Oakland, CA

I met someone whose name is Adonai. Can I refer to him by name?

ANSWER

Calling him by name would be prohibited. Besides for the concern of using God's name in vain, I would find calling someone by this name a deeply problematic theological act.

I think that the best thing to do is to explain to him why this is a problem for you, and ask him if he has a preferred nickname/shortened name that you could use.

If this isn't an option, in order to get around the issue, I would say “Donai” when referring to him. This way it will sound like you are swallowing your “A.”

* Yeshivat Chovevi Torah, Bronx, NY.

** This question is taken from a WhatsApp group in which Rabbi Linzer responds to halakhic questions from rabbis and community members.

<https://library.yctorah.org/2024/08/ryrvaetchanan/>

Speak to our Hearts

By Rabbi Chai Posner *

It is one of the saddest, and at the same time one of the most heartwarming, moments in the Torah. At the very end of the book of Bereishit, Yosef's brothers are concerned that with Yaakov no longer living, Yosef will finally take the opportunity to get even with them for all they had done to him. The brothers proclaim:

What if Yosef still bears a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrong that we did him.

And so, they approach Yosef and tell him that before Yaakov died he told them:

So shall you say to Yosef, 'Forgive, I urge you, the offense and guilt of your brothers who treated you so harshly...

Rashi quotes the midrash and the gemara, which both state that Yaakov had never actually said this, but we learn that it is permitted for a person to depart from the truth in order to bring peace. The brothers' made-up conversation with Yaakov goes to show just how concerned they were for their own welfare. It is sad that even after all this time, they were still afraid of their own brother. They still believed that the peace he made with them was a cold peace. They still thought that he was just waiting for an opportunity to take revenge on them for what they had done to him years earlier. That is the sad part.

The heartwarming part comes in Yosef's response:

And Yosef wept as they spoke to him.

Yosef went on to assure his brothers that he had no ill intentions towards them. *"Fear not, for am I in the place of God... you thought evil against me, but God meant it for good."* Yosef had said similar words to his brothers years earlier when he first revealed who he was, but he obviously had been unable to convince them that he was sincere. Was it any different now? The Torah tells us clearly:

He comforted them, and he spoke to their hearts.

Yosef has comforted his brothers. This time they believe that Yosef genuinely forgives them. He has succeeded in touching their hearts and in truly offering them comfort. This moment is the moment of true reconciliation and healing. It is a moment of closeness and love, reunion and comfort. And this moment is highlighted in the midrash and repeated every single year on this Shabbat of comfort, Shabbat Nachamu.

*Comfort, oh comfort My people
Speak to the heart of Jerusalem*

The Midrash (Bereishit Rabba 100:9) noticed the similar themes that can be found in this Haftorah and in the Yosef story; themes of offering comfort and speaking to the heart. The Midrash comments:

“He (Yosef) spoke to their heart” …“He comforted them.” The matters may be inferred a fortiori: If Yosef, who spoke gentle words to the heart of the tribes, was able to comfort them so, when the Holy One blessed be He will come to comfort Jerusalem, all the more so. That is what is written: *“Comfort, comfort My people…”*

Just as Yosef comforted his brothers by speaking to their hearts, so too God comforts Jerusalem by speaking to her heart. If Yosef was able to comfort his brothers, how much more-so must God be able to comfort Jerusalem. If Yosef could forgive his brothers, how much more-so must God have the capacity to forgive us. Jerusalem is the heart of the Jewish people and when God speaks to it, God also speaks to us.

God speaks to us on this Shabbat and offers us words of comfort and consolation. Let us imagine Yosef gently and tenderly convincing his brothers that the time for reconciliation has come. It is time to move forward with love and connection. God is offering Jerusalem, God is offering us, those same sentiments on this Shabbat. May our hearts be open to hearing God’s words and may Am Yisrael, Jerusalem, and Eretz Yisrael truly find nechama on this Shabbat.

* Senior Rabbi of Beth Tfiloh Congregation, the largest Modern Orthodox congregation in the United States, and dean of Beth Tfiloh Dahan Community School.

<https://library.yctorah.org/2024/08/vaetchanan5784/>

Shema!! – Thoughts for Parashat Va'et'hanan

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

“Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One” (Devarim 6:4).

This week’s Parasha includes this clarion call of Israel’s faith. We affirm the Oneness of God and acknowledge God’s unique relationship with our People. We accept upon ourselves the “yoke of the kingdom of Heaven.”

But in referring to God as One, we also call to mind the prophecy of Zechariah (14:9): *“And God shall be sovereign over all the earth; in that day God will be One and His name One.”* A time will surely come when all the world will recognize One God and will live righteous, Godly lives.

But we don’t live in such times now. Our world is plagued with violence and war, hatred and hypocrisy, ignorance, poverty...and so many more evils. When we say the Shema, we proclaim God’s sovereignty — even though we see that so much of the world does not acknowledge that sovereignty. We envision a messianic time, but we do not live in that time.

Rabbi Yitzchak Hutner, one of the great Talmudic scholars of 20th century America, offered an explanation as to why we cover our eyes when we say the Shema. It is generally suggested that we cover our eyes in order to concentrate more fully on the words. Rabbi Hutner provided a different insight: we cover our eyes so that we don’t see the world as it is at this moment. With our eyes open, we see widespread Godlessness and evil. Reality does not reflect God’s sovereignty over humanity. We close our eyes to avoid the blatant contradiction between the world as it is and the world as it should be.

Sometimes we see most clearly when our eyes are closed! We can shut off the negative stimuli and concentrate on the ultimate truths...on faith in One God, on dreams of a messianic time, on a world where God is One and humanity is in harmony.

Reciting the Shema is a proclamation of faith in God and in the ultimate redemption of humankind. Close your eyes and think about that.

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

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<https://www.jewishideas.org/node/3263>

Nahamu, Nahamu: Thoughts on Consolation and Commitment

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

"Be comforted, be comforted My people, says the Lord...Oh you who tells good tidings to Zion, get up onto the high mountain, lift up your voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid..." (Isaiah 40: 1, 9).

During the three weeks between 17 Tamuz and 9 Av, the Jewish people experiences a period of mourning. We reflect on the tragedies of the past — the destructions of our First and Second Temples in ancient Jerusalem, the spiritual dislocation caused by prolonged exile, the physical toll of death and travail that have afflicted Jews through the centuries. We fast, we pray, we cry.

This year, the three weeks have been made heavier by the anxiety of the State of Israel being at war with Hamas terrorists, facing ongoing missiles from Hezbollah and genocidal threats from Iran. We praise the amazing heroism of the Israel Defense Forces and the great strength demonstrated by the people of Israel during these dangerous times.

The Jewish people are resilient. We haven't wended our way through 3500 years of history by accident. We have found the strength, courage and optimism to persist. One of our secrets is our ability to remember, to mourn past tragedies. Another of our secrets is our ability to think beyond tragedy and to look forward to the future.

On Tisha B'Av, we fast, we chant dirges and the book of Lamentations. But in the afternoon of this most somber day, we declare "Nahamu," be comforted. On the Shabbat following Tisha B'Av we chant Isaiah's beautiful words of consolation, and we begin a seven week period of consolation. Tragedy is part of life; but so are consolation and redemption. Sadness is part of life; but so are joy and peace. We never lose hope for a better, happier future, for ourselves and for all humanity.

Rabbi Hayyim Yosef David Azulai, a great rabbi of the 18th century, cites a rabbinic observation that the Hebrew words Nahamu Nahamu have the same numerical value as the name of Isaac (208). Our forefather Isaac is, thus, identified with the consolation of the people of Israel. What does Isaac have to do with consolation?

Rabbi Azulai refers to Shabbat 89b where the Talmud imagines a future conversation between God and our forefathers. God will come to Abraham and Jacob and tell them that the people of Israel have sinned. Abraham and Jacob seek to excuse Israel's sins and ask God to be merciful. When God approaches Isaac with the words, "*your children have sinned,*" Isaac replies boldly: "*Are they my children but not Your children?*" Isaac then negotiates with God and expresses his willingness to accept responsibility for half of Israel's sins if God will accept responsibility for the other half.

Isaac becomes identified with the consolation of Israel because he speaks out strongly for his people. He does not simply bow his head and ask for mercy. Rather, he stands tall and shows his willingness to shoulder responsibility for his people.

Because of that spiritual courage, Isaac is also identified with the quality of “*gevurah*,” heroism. He is a lion in defense of the people of Israel.

Consolation is connected to strength. Consolation calls on us to rise from mourning and declare “*Nahamu Nahamu*,” we will be consoled, and we will offer consolation. We will identify with each other with the same sense of responsibility that was demonstrated by our forefather Isaac.

An ancient rabbinic teaching has it that only those who mourn for the sadness of Jerusalem’s tragedies will ultimately rejoice at Jerusalem’s redemption. On Tisha B’Av, we cry for the tragedies that have befallen our people; but we also proclaim Nahamu Nahamu. We arise from our mourning. We cast our eyes forward to a happier and better time.

May the Almighty Who creates the harmony of the heavenly spheres bring harmony and peace to us, to all Israel, and to all good people everywhere.

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

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<https://www.jewishideas.org/node/3264>

Parshas Va’eschanan – Shabbos of Comfort

By Rabbi Mordechai Rhine * © 2014

The Shabbos which follows Tishah B’Av is known as Shabbos Nachamu, the Shabbos of Comfort. After we experienced the mourning of Tishah B’Av, our focus turns to comfort and recovery. For example, the verse from the prophet Yeshaya which is chosen to express the theme of this Shabbos is the verse: “*Be comforted, be comforted, My nation...*” Perek Shira is a fascinating work of scholarship which dates to the period of the Mishnah, c. 200 CE. In it the author declares a relationship between different plants and animals and their corresponding concepts in Judaism. The creature which Perek Shira links to Shabbos Nachamu and this verse of comfort is the bat. The commentaries suggest three connections between the bat, and the comfort which G-d offers upon the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash.

At the time that the Beis Hamikdash was destroyed (70 CE), many Jews were disheartened. The Beis Hamikdash had been a focal point for them, and the exile which occurred upon its destruction made it difficult for them to retain hope. One of the unique qualities of the bat is that it hangs upside down and continues to live. By linking the comfort with the image of a bat, the author of Perek Shira offers us a symbolic illustration of a concept. Even if the world seems upside down to you – totally changed – you will still live on.

Another unique aspect of the bat is that it functions well in the night. Using echolocation, the bat can navigate itself with precision, even in the darkest of caves. Similarly, the exile is often compared to darkness. It is a time period when it is difficult to see things clearly. In contrast to redemption which is compared to daybreak, exile is a time when it is difficult to tell the difference between friend and foe, between good strategies and bad ones. The message of consolation is that even though exile means navigating in comparative darkness, we will still succeed. The symbolic message of the bat is that despite the darkness – through the “light” of Torah – we will successfully navigate ourselves until ultimate redemption.

Just as the bat uses echolocation (a sound emanating from the mouth) to “see” in the night, so do the Jewish people use the voice of Torah to maintain their bearings in the darkness of golus.

A third insight regarding the bat is that many thousands nest together in very close proximity. One reason for this is that when they are close together they help one another by warming each other and keeping the body temperature livable. This is symbolic of the Jewish people in exile. Although we are spread throughout the world, in each area that we find ourselves we stick together. Together we build Jewish communities through which we “warm” one another. Each community is complete with an education system, synagogue, mikvah, charity fund, and so much more. The bat symbolizes sticking together, a practice which is a true source of comfort to the Jew in exile.

Interestingly, the week of Shabbos Nachamu corresponds to fifteenth of Av, a day described to start an increase of Torah study. The reason that the fifteenth of Av is associated with increased Torah study is because *“the nights begin to get longer.”* With classic counterintuitive thinking, the Jewish people changed nighttime from representing darkness and exile, to representing opportunity. Nighttime is not just dark, but it is seen as a quieter time, more serene and opportune for Torah study. And so the Jewish people apparently say, *“The more night there is... the more opportunity there is to spread the light.”*

It is said that a picture is worth a thousand words. By linking the Shabbos of Comfort with the bat, the author of Perek Shira shares with us the essence of the comfort. The comfort is that despite the world turned upside down from what we knew, we will still survive. Although exile is described as dark, through the light of Torah we will navigate our way with success. And the secret of our success is to stick together, to be there for one another, as part of the unity that is the Jewish people.

Wishing you and yours a wonderful Shabbos.

Rabbi Rhine is on vacation, so I am reprinting a Dvar Torah from his archives: <https://www.teach613.org/parshas-vaeschanan-shabbos-of-comfort/>

Parshas Va’eschanan, Shabbos Nachamu

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer * © 2020

As we leave another Tisha B’Av and find ourselves still in exile, we can’t allow another Tisha B’Av to come and go without any change. Yet, as true change is so difficult, how can we make any meaningful changes worthy of ending this millennia long exile? Moreover, we know our focus must be to improve our respect for others, even for those with whom we have had a rift in our relationship. Finding room in our hearts to mend those rifts, and to respect and even love them, is one of the most difficult changes to make.

There is a Ramba”n towards the end of this week’s Parsha which sheds light on both of these questions. After enjoining us to eradicate the evil in Canaan, Moshe explains our relationship with Hashem. He says we are a uniquely holy people, chosen by G-d. We were not chosen because of our size and external significance. Rather we were chosen because of Hashem’s love for us and Hashem’s oath to our forefathers.)Devarim 7:5-8(

The Ramba”n notes that Moshe did not explain why we are deserving of Hashem’s love. The Ramba”n explains that this is because we were chosen for the obvious reason that one would be chosen. The main reason one chooses a good friend is when that person is known to be one who will bear whatever challenges that friendship may bring. This is what Hashem saw in us and why Hashem loves us. The Ramba”n illustrates the strength of our nation’s commitment through the innumerable times throughout our history that we gave our lives rather than convert and deny our relationship with Hashem.

This Ramba”n, though powerful and inspiring, is also quite difficult. While there were many in our history, who did rise to the challenge, this was not always the case. Moreover, even those who did rise to the challenge did not always live their lives in line with that commitment. When we think of ourselves, there are many times when we fall short in our commitment and do not extend ourselves for Hashem as we should. How can the Ramba”n say that Hashem’s love for us is because we are committed to Hashem no matter the situation when there are so many times and so many ways in which we falter under pressure and do not seem to maintain that commitment?

Perhaps this Ramba”n can be understood based on the Sforno’s commentary. The Sforno explains that Hashem’s love for us is because we think of His name more than other nations. In other words, Hashem’s love for us is because we are concerned with Hashem, think of Hashem, and contemplate what He means in our lives. Perhaps this is what the Ramba”n means as well. We all have limits to what we can bear, whether for ourselves or for the sake of another. The real measure of a person’s commitment is the effort one puts in to overcome challenges when they arise. Perhaps particularly after one falters is when one shows the greatest commitment. Do they simply walk away or do they continue to rehash their error and try to see how they could repair the damage? In short, do they or do they not continue to think of Hashem.

This Ramba”n begins to shed light on our responsibility now as we leave another Tisha B’Av. Our relationship with Hashem is rooted in our commitment to that relationship. To be worthy of ending the exile, the most important thing we can do is simply to take the time to think of Hashem, and think of how we can repair the damage. We need to simply try again and not give up trying to treat others as Hashem would want.

This Ramba”n also gives us a practical first step for crossing the gap and repairing the deeper rifts in our human relationships. While we may have been deeply hurt, is there truly no room for hope? We must ask ourselves, were I to somehow show that I want a relationship – even while the rift and the pain exist – would the other party respond in kind? If they would want a relationship, even if they are failing and hurting me now, that would be good enough for Hashem. If it is good enough for Hashem, is that not good enough for us?

* Savannah Kollel; Congregation B’nai Brith Jacob, Savannah, GA. Until recently, Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD. Rabbi Singer will become Rosh Kollel next year.

Vaetchanan

by Rabbi Herzl Heftner *

]Rabbi Heftner did not send in a Dvar Torah for DVaetchanan. Watch this space for his future Devrei Torah[

* Founder and dean of the Har’el Beit Midrash in Jerusalem. Rabbi Heftner is a graduate of Yeshiva University and was ordained at Yeshivat Har Etzion. For more of his writings, see www.har-el.org. To support the Beit Midrash, as we do, send donations to America Friends of Beit Midrash Har’el, 66 Cherry Lane, Teaneck, NJ 07666.

Dvar Torah for Va’Ethanah

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia *

In *The Bucket List*, Jack Nicholson and Morgan Freeman portray two strangers who meet, as patients, under totally unlikely circumstances. Upon their release from the hospital, they decide to take time to do all the things they pushed aside for family and career. I must confess that the movie caused me some discomfort as I thought of my own bucket list,

but upon reflection, one realizes that we all have our lists of things we wish we had done (or had not done). But with all the frustration that one can feel when looking back at life and seeing some missed opportunities, nothing can rival the deep emotion of loss and even destruction when the distance needed to reach the goal is measured by inches and seconds, rather than miles and years.

That brings us to Moshe, who dedicated his life to the dream of bringing the Israelites into the Promised Land, and is now standing on the other side of the Jordan, a stone's throw away from realizing the dream, and hears the following words:

Raise your eyes and look to the west, north, south, and east. Contemplate the land with your eyes, for you shall not cross this Jordan...

Just a few steps, only a couple of minutes, this is all Moshe is asking for, yet God refuses to concede. And Moshe is bitter. He tells the Israelites:

God was angry at me because of you, and He would not listen to me!

Moshe's frustration and bitterness is further illustrated in this Midrash, in which Moshe asks for the redemption of the Jewish People after the destruction of the Temple. Moshe lists all his good deeds, which according to him went unrewarded:

I was a faithful shepherd for the Israelites for forty years, and I ran at the lead like a horse in the desert. But when the time came for them to enter the land, You have decreed that my bones shall be scattered in the desert...

We empathize with Moshe's pain, and we also ask: why didn't God let him enter the Promised Land, just so he could feel that his mission was accomplished?

One possible answer is that we have to translate differently the verse mentioned above, and specifically "because of you." This phrase should be read as "for your sake" and the whole verse thus reads:

God was angry at me for your sake, and He would not listen to me!

This reading provides us with a completely different angle. God blocked Moshe from entering the Promised Land not as a punishment but as a service to him and to the Israelites. You see, if Moshe would enter the land he would then plead with God to linger a bit more to help with the conquest. Then he might have asked to stay around for the construction of the Temple, and so on. He would have never been able to walk away and let the Israelites under Joshua spread their wings. The Torah teaches us that sometimes we have to be able to pass the torch on to the next in line.

Shabbat Shalom.

* Torah VeAhava. Until recently, Rabbi, Beth Sholom Sephardic Minyan (Potomac, MD). Faculty member, AJRCA non-denominational rabbinical school. **Many of Rabbi Ovadia's Devrei Torah are now available on Sefaria:** <https://www.sefaria.org/profile/haim-ovadia?tab=sheets>. The Sefaria articles usually include Hebrew text, which I must delete because of issues changing software formats.

Devrei Torah from Rabbi Ovadia this year come from an unpublished draft of his forthcoming book on Tanach, which Rabbi Ovadia has generously shared with our readers. Rabbi Ovadia reserves all copyright protections for this material.

Vaetchanan: Comfort -- A Verb and a Noun

By Rabbi Moshe Rube *

On this Shabbat we finally get a break.

After the three weeks of mourning, culminating on Tisha B'Av, when we grieved over the loss of the Temple as well as the tragedy of October 7th, we finally read the Isaiah's Haftorah of comfort. He expresses the eponymous words of comfort, "Nachamu Nachamu Ami." Isaiah prophesies that the destruction, tragedies and bad times won't last and that we'll soon experience comfort over our losses.

But there's a hidden message in this Hebrew phrase. Grammatically speaking, "Nachamu" does not mean "be consoled." It's a command form. Isaiah is telling the Jews they must console others if they want to be consoled themselves. Nachamu is not a statement of the future, but a directive that will lead to our comfort.

If we want comfort and consolation and a road away from the times of tragedy, we must not only seek to be consoled, but do our part in consoling and comforting others in whatever way we can.

If I may put it another way, I'll quote a Broadway song, "Make someone happy, and you will be happy too."

May all of us not only be comforted but merit to comfort others in whatever way we can.

Shabbat Shalom.

* Senior Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation, Remuera)Auckland(, New Zealand. Formerly Rabbi, Congregation Knesseth Israel)Birmingham, AL(.

Rav Kook Torah

VaEtchanan: Mezuzah and Eretz Yisrael

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 Israel. 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.¹

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, “*הַיְשַׁׁבְתָּם בְּמִזְבֵּחַ*”) 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.²

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.)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.*”

)Adapted from *Da’at Kohen* 179; *Mo’adei HaRe’iyah*, pp. 517-518.(

FOOTNOTES:

1 If the renter signs a rental contract for more than 30 days, many authorities write that even outside the Land he must affix mezuzot right away.

2 We find a similar line of reasoning in other areas of Halachah. For example, the Sages wrote all fruit set aside for Shabbat must be tithed, even if “the preparatory work was not completed.” The mitzvah of eating meals on Shabbat confers upon the fruit the status of finished fruits)Beitzah 34b).

<https://www.ravkooktorah.org/VAETCHANAN-80.htm>

Vaetchanan: The Fewest of All Peoples (5474, 5481)

By Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z”l, Former Chief Rabbi of the U.K.*

Buried inconspicuously in this week’s parsha is a short sentence with explosive potential, causing us to think again about both the nature of Jewish history and the Jewish task in the present.

Moses had been reminding the new generation, the children of those who left Egypt, of the extraordinary story of which they are the heirs:

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

The Israelites have not yet crossed the Jordan. They have not yet begun their life as a sovereign nation in their own land. Yet Moses is sure, with a certainty that could only be prophetic, that they were a people like no other. What has happened to them is unique. They were and are a nation summoned to greatness.

Moses reminds them of the great Revelation at Mount Sinai. He recalls the Ten Commandments. He delivers the most famous of all summaries of Jewish faith: “*Listen, Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.*”)Deut. 6:4(He issues the most majestic of all commands: “*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.*”)Deut. 6:5(Twice he tells the people to teach these things to their children. He gives them their eternal mission statement as a nation: “*You are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be His people, His treasured possession.*”)Deut. 7:6(

Then he says this:

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

The fewest of all peoples? What has happened to all the promises of Bereishit, that Abraham’s children would be numerous, uncountable, as many as the stars of the sky, the dust of the earth, and the grains of sand on a seashore? What of Moses’ own statement at the beginning of Devarim?

“The Lord your God has increased your numbers so that today you are as numerous as the stars in the sky.” Deut. 1:10

The simple answer is this. The Israelites were indeed numerous compared to what they once were. Moses himself puts it this way in next week’s parsha: “*Your ancestors who went down into Egypt were seventy in all, and now the Lord your God has made you as numerous as the stars in the sky*”)Deut. 10:22(. They were once a single family, Abraham, Sarah and their descendants, and now they have become a nation of twelve tribes.

But – and this is Moses’ point here – compared to other nations, they were still small:

When the Lord your God brings you into the land you are entering to possess and drives out before you many nations—the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites, seven nations larger and stronger than you ... Deut. 7:1

In other words, not only were the Israelites smaller than the great empires of the ancient world. They were smaller even than the other nations in the region. Compared to their origins they had grown exponentially but compared to their neighbours they remained tiny.

Moses then tells them what this means:

You may say to yourselves, “These nations are stronger than we are. How can we drive them out?” But do not be afraid of them; remember well what the Lord your God did to Pharaoh and to all Egypt. Deut. 7:17-18

Israel would be the smallest of the nations for a reason that goes to the very heart of its existence as a nation. They will show the world that a people does not have to be large in order to be great. It does not have to be numerous to defeat its enemies. Israel's unique history will show that, in the words of the Prophet Zechariah 4:6, “*Not by might nor by power, but by My spirit,’ says the Lord Almighty.*”

In itself, Israel would be witness to something greater than itself. As former Marxist philosopher Nicolay Berdyaev put it:

I remember how the materialist interpretation of history, when I attempted in my youth to verify it by applying it to the destinies of peoples, broke down in the case of the Jews, where destiny seemed absolutely inexplicable from the materialistic standpoint . . . Its survival is a mysterious and wonderful phenomenon demonstrating that the life of this people is governed by a special predetermination, transcending the processes of adaptation expounded by the materialistic interpretation of history. The survival of the Jews, their resistance to destruction, their endurance under absolutely peculiar conditions and the fateful role played by them in history: all these point to the particular and mysterious foundations of their destiny. Nicolay Berdyaev, The Meaning of History, Transaction Publishers, 2005, p. 86.

Moses' statement has immense implications for Jewish identity. The proposition implicit throughout this year's Covenant & Conversation is that Jews have had an influence out of all proportion to their numbers because we are all called on to be leaders, to take responsibility, to contribute, to make a difference to the lives of others, to bring the Divine Presence into the world. Precisely because we are small, we are each summoned to greatness.

Y. Agnon, the great Hebrew writer, composed a prayer to accompany the Mourner's Kaddish. He noted that the children of Israel have always been few in number compared to other nations. He then said that when a monarch rules over a large population, they do not notice when an individual dies, for there are others to take their place:

*“But our King, the King of Kings, the Holy One, blessed be He . . . chose us, and not because we are a large nation, for we are one of the smallest of nations. We are few, and owing to the love with which He loves us, each one of us is, for Him, an entire legion. He does not have many replacements for us. If one of us is missing, Heaven forfend, then the King's forces are diminished, with the consequence that His kingdom is weakened, as it were. One of His legions is gone and His greatness is lessened. For this reason it is our custom to recite the Kaddish when a Jew dies.”*¹

Margaret Mead once said: “*Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.*” Gandhi said: “*A small body of determined spirits fired by an unquenchable faith in their mission can alter the course of history.*”² That must be our faith as Jews.

We may be the fewest of all peoples but when we heed God's call, we have the ability, proven many times in our past, to mend and transform the world.

FOOTNOTES:

]1[Quoted in Leon Wieseltier, *Kaddish*, London: Picador, 1998, 22-23.

]2[Harijan, 19th November 1938.

AROUND THE SHABBAT TABLE

1. How can we make a positive impact when we are such a tiny people, relative to the world?
2. Do you think the Jewish people would benefit from being a larger proportion of the world's population, or do you think it more important that we remain a small minority group?
3. Given that Rabbi Sacks says we are each summoned to greatness, how will you act?

* Note: because Likutei Torah and the Internet Parsha Sheet, both attached by E-mail, normally include the two most recent Devrei Torah by Rabbi Sacks, I have selected an earlier Dvar.

<https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/vaetchanan/the-fewest-of-all-peoples/>

Labor of Love: Life Lessons From the Parshah - Va'etchanan

By Yehoshua B. Gordon, z"l* © Chabad 2024

Love of The Land

Moses' 36-day farewell address to the Children of Israel continues in the Torah portion of Va'etchanan.

Va'etchanan, "and I pleaded," Moses reminisces.¹ After God permitted him to grant territory on the eastern side of the Jordan River to the tribes of Reuben and Gad, Moses hoped that God would reconsider His decree and allow Moses to enter the Land and continue assigning portions to the remaining tribes.

Our sages say that the numeric value of the Hebrew word va'etchanan, 515, equals the number of times Moses prayed to God to allow him to enter the Land.²

Why was Moses so insistent? Why was it so important to him to enter Israel?

Love for Mitzvot

We find a beautiful lesson in the Talmud:³

Moses' love for Torah was surpassed only by his love for the Jewish people. His pleas to be allowed into the Land stemmed from his tremendous desire to fulfill the many mitzvahs that may only be performed there. In response, God told Moses that he would be able to fulfill those mitzvahs on a spiritual level.

There are many mitzvahs that a person cannot fulfill because they never encounter the circumstances that allow them to do so. For example, the mitzvah of Levirate marriage: the Torah dictates that if a married man dies childless, the widow is to marry her deceased husband's brother. Most people will not encounter this scenario, and thus can only fulfill this

mitzvah on a spiritual level. Or the mitzvah to leave a forgotten sheaf of wheat for the poor while harvesting a field: one who never forgets a sheaf in the field cannot physically perform this mitzvah.

The very desire to perform a mitzvah that is out of reach because the situation never presents itself earns you a spiritual reward. This is what G d said to Moses concerning the mitzvahs of the Land of Israel — spiritually, it would be considered as if he had performed them.

Acting With Alacrity

When Moses realized he would not enter the Land, he rushed to fulfill the mitzvah of establishing three Cities of Refuge outside of Israel.⁴

In Biblical times, three cities in the Land of Israel proper and three cities east of the Jordan — where two and a half tribes lived — were designated as “Cities of Refuge” — where a person who accidentally killed someone could find safe haven from avenging relatives.⁵

Knowing that he would not merit to designate the Cities of Refuge in the Land of Israel, Moses jumped at the opportunity to designate the three cities outside of the Land, despite knowing that they would not actually be activated as Cities of Refuge until the Jewish people entered Israel. Such was his love for mitzvahs and his desire to fulfill as many as possible.

Moses’ approach was, *“I will not delay the opportunity to perform a mitzvah. If I have a mitzvah I can fulfill, I will act with alacrity and diligence and fulfill it now.”*⁶

This is the idea of *zerizut* — acting quickly and with alacrity to perform a mitzvah — first learned from our forefather Abraham. When G d instructed him regarding the binding of Isaac, *“Abraham rose up very early in the morning”*⁷ to fulfill that commandment. This eagerness to carry out G d’s command to sacrifice his son, setting aside all personal feelings, is a most remarkable aspect of this story and, consequently, an essential lesson for us all: if we have an opportunity to do a mitzvah today, we should do it today!

Finding Refuge in Torah

The Rebbe taught that the modern-day equivalent of the Cities of Refuge is Torah study.⁸ *“The study of Torah provides refuge,”*⁹ promises the Talmud. Where can we run to today when we commit an inadvertent sin? When we find ourselves overwhelmed and beleaguered, wanting to return to G d, but feeling that we have lost sight of our priorities and given in to temptation, Torah provides refuge, giving us energy to rejuvenate.

For thousands of years, when faced with trials and tribulations, Jews have turned to books of Torah. This practice gives us strength, vitality, comfort, and protection — the modern-day City of Refuge.

This echoes the famous teaching of the Baal Shem Tov: When the Great Flood began, and the world was about to crumble around him, G d instructed Noah, *“Enter the ark.”*¹⁰

The Hebrew word for “Ark” — *teivah* — also means “word.” G d was telling Noah — and each of us — to enter into the words of Torah and prayer.¹¹ Torah is a refuge, a place where we can find security from the floodwaters of life.

Transmitting the Love

Moses also recounts the Ten Commandments in this week’s portion, reminding the Jewish People that they only heard the first two commandments directly from G d. So frightened and overwhelmed were they by the intense holiness, that Moses stepped in and conveyed the final eight: *“I stood as an intermediary between G d and you at that time in order to tell you the word of G d regarding the last eight commandments...”*¹²

Seemingly, the word *“intermediary”* is troublesome: Does it not imply that Moses is — G d forbid — taking G d’s place?

Chassidic teachings clarify that there are two types of intermediaries. The first is an “*intermediary that divides*,” the one that says, “*If you want to communicate with G d, you have to go through me first.*” This is not good; this is unholy and not Jewish. A Jew can and should communicate with G d directly.

The second type of intermediary, however, the type Moses is talking about, is an “*intermediary that connects*.” A tzaddik, a completely righteous person like Moses, teaches, inspires, and guides us — leading us by the hand — toward a direct connection with G d. He is the intermediary who facilitates our connection directly with G d.

Three Expressions of Love

The portion of Va’etchanan contains the first paragraph of the Shema — one of the central prayers in Judaism — in which Moses tells us how to approach mitzvahs and how to relate to G d:

“*Love G d with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might. And these words, which I command you this day, shall be upon your heart.*”¹³

Loving G d with all your heart means endeavoring to fulfill G d’s words, not merely out of fear, but out of love. Fear of Heaven — serving G d from a place of awe — is certainly an essential component of a Jew’s service (fear of Heaven is called a “*treasure house*”¹⁴) but fear alone is not enough. We should also strive to attain a love of G d, as there is a significant difference between someone who acts out of love and someone who acts out of fear. One who acts out of love is devoted and dedicated.

The way the words “*with all your heart*” are written implies two hearts and two inclinations. Each of us has a yetzer tov and a yetzer hara — a “*good inclination*” and an “*evil inclination*,” a G dly soul, and an animal soul. The Torah is telling us to serve G d not only with our G dly souls but with our animal souls as well. We are meant to take the passions of the animal soul, the “*horsepower*” of the animal soul, and harness that energy in the service of G d.¹⁵

Alternatively, “*with all your hearts*” teaches that your heart should not be divided: Don’t serve G d only when things are good and then turn against Him when things get tough. Just as we say baruch Hashem, “*thank G d*,” when things are good, we should also have the strength to say *baruch Hashem* when things are not so good, trusting that they will become better.

Loving G d with all your soul means a Jew must be ready to sacrifice his very life — as millions have done throughout history — to serve G d and fulfill His mitzvahs.

Even if G d takes our soul — the essence of life itself — we must remain dedicated to Him in order to sanctify His name.

Loving G d with all your might means loving G d with the entirety of our means — with all the strength we use to make a living. A person invests maximum effort into plotting and planning, working and sweating, to make a living. Clearly, money is a very dear and necessary possession. In order to love G d with all of our might, meaning with all of our money, we need the greatest form of sacrifice.

The Hebrew word for “your might” — *me’odecha* — can also be read “*your attributes*.” Whichever attributes G d shines upon us — whether things are going well, or, G d forbid, not so well — we have to thank G d. This is indeed a very difficult mitzvah.

Hot Off the Press

When Moses says that these words should be kept in our hearts today, he is also informing us that with the proper love for G d, the words of Torah will remain fresh and novel in our eyes, as if they had been spoken today.

The Torah should never feel antiquated, like yesterday’s news which nobody pays attention to.

Everybody runs to hear breaking stories, but nobody is interested in yesterday's news. My mother, Mrs. Miriam Gordon, of blessed memory, would say, "Yesterday's newspaper is for wrapping fish."

Torah and the love of G d should be like brand new, exciting news, hot off the press.

From Generation to Generation

Moses goes on to tell the Jewish People that this love must be transmitted to their children. Perhaps the most critical mitzvah is the transmission from one generation to the next.

When I was growing up in New Jersey in the '50s, there were many great rabbis, and there were many G d-fearing zaydies and bubbies — grandfathers and grandmothers — who were great Jews; they were committed to their Judaism and were meticulously observant to the best of their ability at that time.

But they were unable to transmit this love and devotion to their children and grandchildren. They came from another time and another place. They had heavy Eastern European accents; they didn't get the American lingo, and couldn't communicate with the younger generation. And so slowly, their children — and even more so their grandchildren — moved away from the lifestyle and Judaism of the grandparents.

"*Veshinantam – and you shall teach them.*"¹⁶ Just as we sit at the Passover Seder and tell our children about our history, about Torah, and about mitzvahs, so must we do at all times — transmit Torah to our children meticulously and diligently.

The Hebrew word for "and you shall teach them," *veshinantam*, is from the same root word as "*to sharpen*." The words of Torah that you will teach should be sharp, clear, and ready — when your child, or anyone else for that matter, has a Torah question, you should be ready with an answer. You shouldn't have to hem and haw, but you should immediately be ready with an answer.

Moses taught us by example the proper love and commitment that a Jew should have to Torah and mitzvahs — a refuge for us and, when transmitted correctly, for our children and grandchildren. May we merit to serve G d with "*all our hearts, all our souls, and all our might*," and may we merit — young and old alike — to witness the Final Redemption, with the arrival of our righteous Moshiach, speedily in our days. Amen.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Deuteronomy 3:23.
2. Midrash Rabbah, Deuteronomy 11:10.
3. Sotah 14a.
4. Deuteronomy 4:41.
5. Numbers 35:9-34.
6. See Rashi, Deuteronomy 4:41.
7. Genesis 22:3.
8. Likkutei Sichot, vol. 24, p. 114.
9. Makkot 10a.

10. Genesis 7:1.
11. Keter Shem Tov, Hosafot 8.
12. Deuteronomy 5:5.
13. Deuteronomy 6:5-6
14. Tanya Chapter 42.
15. Tanya, Chapter 9.
16. Deuteronomy 6:7.

* Rabbi Yehoshua Gordon directed Chabad of the Valley in Tarzana, CA until his passing in 2016. Adapted by Rabbi Mottel Friedman from classes and sermons that Rabbi Gordon presented in Encino, CA and broadcast on Chabad.org. "Life Lessons from the Parshah" is a project of the Rabbi Joshua B. Gordon Living Legacy Fund, benefiting the 32 centers of Chabad of the Valley, published by Chabad of the Valley and Chabad.org.

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/6540815/jewish/Labor-of-Love.htm

Vaetchanon: Testimonies, Rules, and Ordinances

by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky *

Testimonies, Rules, and Ordinances

When your child asks you at some point in the future, saying, "What are the testimonies, rules, and ordinances that G-d, our G-d, has commanded you?")Deut. 6:20(

The Torah's "ordinances" are the commandments that human reason would dictate on its own, such as the prohibitions against thievery, murder, and so on. "Testimonies" are the commemorative commandments, such as the holidays, tefillin, and so on, which mortal intellect would not otherwise legislate but which make perfect sense once the Torah commands them. "Rules" refer to the commandments that have no rational basis (even if some lesson can be inferred from them), such as the prohibitions of mixing milk and meat, mixing wool and linen, or the rite of purification with the ashes of the red cow.

Although every commandment in the Torah falls into one of these three categories, we are bidden to fulfill every commandment in all three ways: Every commandment challenges us to understand its message to us, and in that sense is an "ordinance." Similarly, every commandment is an expression of G-d's inscrutable will, despite the fact that we can grasp some elements of its meaning, and in that sense is a "rule." Finally, every commandment testifies to our relationship with G-d, and is thus a "testimony."

— from *Daily Wisdom 3* *

May G-d grant resounding victory and peace in the Holy Land.

Gut Shabbos,

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
Kehot Publication Society

* A Chasidic insight by the Rebbe on parshat Ma'sei, selected from our *Daily Wisdom*, by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky.

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Covenant and Conversation
Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

The Power of Why

In a much-watched TED Talk, Simon Sinek asked the following question: how do great leaders inspire action?^[1] What made people like Martin Luther King and Steve Jobs stand out from their contemporaries who may have been no less gifted, no less qualified? His answer: Most people talk about what. Some people talk about how. Great leaders, though, start with why. This is what makes them transformative.^[2]

Sinek's lecture was about business and political leadership. The most powerful examples, though, are directly or indirectly religious. Indeed I argued in *The Great Partnership*^[3] what makes Abrahamic monotheism different is that it believes there is an answer to the question, why. Neither the universe nor human life is meaningless, an accident, a mere happenstance. As Freud, Einstein, and Wittgenstein all said, religious faith is faith in the meaningfulness of life.

Rarely is this shown in a more powerful light than in *Va'etchanan*. There is much in Judaism about what: what is permitted, what forbidden, what is sacred, what is secular. There is much, too, about how: how to learn, how to pray, how to grow in our relationship with God and with other people. There is relatively little about why.

In *Va'etchanan* Moses says some of the most inspiring words ever uttered about the why of Jewish existence. That is what made him the great transformational leader he was, and it has consequences for us, here, now.

To have a sense of how strange Moses' words were, we must recall several facts. The Israelites were still in the desert. They had not yet entered the land. They had no military advantages over the nations they would have to fight. Ten of the twelve spies had argued, almost forty years before, that the mission was impossible. In a world of empires, nations and fortified cities, the Israelites must have seemed to the untutored eye defenceless, unproven, one more horde among the many who swept across Asia and Africa in ancient times. Other than their religious practices, few contemporary observers would have seen

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anything about them to set them apart from the Jebusites and Perizzites, Midianites and Moabites, and the other petty powers that populated that corner of the Middle East.

Yet in this week's parsha Moses communicated an unshakeable certainty that what had happened to them would eventually change and inspire the world. Listen to his language:

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 miracles, 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 eyes? Deut. 4:32-34

Moses was convinced that Jewish history was, and would remain, unique. In an age of empires, a small, defenceless group had been liberated from the greatest empire of all by a power not their own, by God Himself. That was Moses' first point: the singularity of Jewish history as a narrative of redemption.

His second was the uniqueness of revelation: What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the Lord our God is near us whenever we pray to Him? And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today? Deut. 4:7-8

Other nations had gods to whom they prayed and offered sacrifices. They too attributed their military successes to their deities. But no other nation saw God as their sovereign, legislator, and law-giver. Elsewhere law represented the decree of the king or, in more recent centuries, the will of the people. In Israel, uniquely, even when there was a king, he had no legislative power. Only in Israel was God seen not just as a power but as the architect of society, the orchestrator of its music of justice and mercy, liberty and dignity.

The question is why. Toward the end of the chapter, Moses gives one answer: "Because He loved your ancestors and chose their

descendants after them." (Deut. 4:37). God loved Abraham, not least because Abraham loved God. And God loved Abraham's children because they were his children and He had promised the patriarch that He would bless and protect them.

Earlier though Moses had given a different kind of answer, not incompatible with the second, but different: See, I have taught you decrees and laws as the Lord my God commanded me ... Observe them carefully, for this is your wisdom and understanding in the eyes of the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people." Deut. 4:5-6

Why did Moses, or God, care whether or not other nations saw Israel's laws as wise and understanding? Judaism was and is a love story between God and a particular people, often tempestuous, sometimes serene, frequently joyous, but close, intimate, even inward-looking. What has the rest of the world to do with it?

But the rest of the world does have something to do with it. Judaism was never meant for Jews alone. In his first words to Abraham, God already said, "I will bless those who bless you, and those who curse you, I will curse; through you all the families of the earth will be blessed" (Gen. 12:3). Jews were to be a source of blessing to the world.

God is the God of all humanity. In Genesis He spoke to Adam, Eve, Cain, Noah, and made a covenant with all humankind before He made one with Abraham. In Egypt, whether in Potiphar's house, or prison, or Pharaoh's palace, Joseph continually talked about God. He wanted the Egyptians to know that nothing he did, he did himself. He was merely an agent of the God of Israel. There is nothing here to suggest that God is indifferent to the nations of the world.

Later in the days of Moses, God said that He would perform signs and wonders so that "The Egyptians will know that I am the Lord" (Ex.

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7:5). He called Jeremiah to be “a prophet to the nations.” He sent Jonah to the Assyrians in Nineveh. He had Amos deliver oracles to the other nations before He sent him an oracle about Israel. In perhaps the most astonishing prophecy in Tanach, He sent Isaiah the message that a time will come when God will bless Israel’s enemies: “The Lord Almighty will bless them, saying, ‘Blessed be Egypt My people, Assyria My handiwork, and Israel My inheritance.’” Is. 19:26

God is concerned with all humanity. Therefore what we do as Jews makes a difference to humanity, not just in a mystical sense, but as exemplars of what it means to love and be loved by God. Other nations would look at Jews and sense that some larger power was at work in their history. As the late Milton Himmelfarb put it:

Each Jew knows how thoroughly ordinary he is; yet taken together, we seem caught up in things great and inexplicable . . . The number of Jews in the world is smaller than a small statistical error in the Chinese census. Yet we remain bigger than our numbers. Big things seem to happen around us and to us.[4]

We were not called on to convert the world. We were called on to inspire the world. As the prophet Zechariah put it, a time will come when “Ten people from all languages and nations will take firm hold of one Jew by the hem of his robe and say, ‘Let us go with you, because we have heard that God is with you’” (Zech. 8:23). Our vocation is to be God’s ambassadors to the world, giving testimony through the way we live that it is possible for a small people to survive and thrive under the most adverse conditions, to construct a society of law-governed liberty for which we all bear collective responsibility, and to “act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly”[5] with our God. Va’etchanan is the mission statement of the Jewish people.

And others were and still are inspired by it. The conclusion I have drawn from a lifetime lived in the public square is that non-Jews respect Jews who respect Judaism. They find it hard to understand why Jews, in countries where there is genuine religious liberty, abandon their faith or define their identity in purely ethnic terms.

Speaking personally, I believe that the world in its current state of turbulence needs the Jewish message, which is that God calls on us to be true to our faith and a blessing to others regardless of their faith. Imagine a world in which everyone believed this. It would be a world transformed.

We are not just another ethnic minority. We are the people who predicated freedom on

teaching our children to love, not hate. Ours is the faith that consecrated marriage and the family, and spoke of responsibilities long before it spoke of rights. Ours is the vision that sees alleviation of poverty as a religious task because, as Maimonides said, you cannot think exalted spiritual thoughts if you are starving or sick or homeless and alone.[6] We do these things not because we are conservative or liberal, Republicans or Democrats, but because we believe that is what God wants of us.

Much is written these days about the what and how of Judaism, but all too little about the why. Moses, in the last month of his life, taught the why. That is how the greatest of leaders inspired action from his day to ours.

If you want to change the world, start with why.

[1]

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u4ZoJKF_VuA. [2] For a more detailed account, see the book based on the talk: Simon Sinek, *Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action*. New York, Portfolio, 2009.

[3] Jonathan Sacks, *The Great Partnership: Science, Religion, and the Search for Meaning* (New York: Schocken Books, 2012).

[4] Milton Himmelfarb and Gertrude Himmelfarb. *Jews and Gentiles*. New York, Encounter, 2007, p. 141.

[5] Micah 6:8.

[6] *The Guide for the Perplexed*, III:27.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Closeness to God, Distance from People

“And I [Moses] entreated the Lord at that time, saying, ‘let me pass over the [the River Jordan] please so that I may see the good land.’” (Deuteronomy 3:23, 25)

Moses places two entreaties before the Lord at the end of his life concerning the leadership of the Jewish people in the Land of Israel: one is right here, in which he asks that he be allowed “to cross over and see the good land beyond the Jordan River” and presumably continue to lead the Israelites. This entreaty to lead, although not made directly, is implied in God’s response: “You must command Joshua, strengthen him and give him resolve, for he shall cross before this nation and shall bring them to inherit the land” (Deut. 3:28). The second request came earlier, in the biblical portion of Pinchas, and is not at all stated by Moses directly. It is merely inferred by the sages of the Midrash, since Moses requests of God to appoint his successor right after the Bible informs us that the daughters of Tzelofchad can inherit their father (Num. 27:11).

It is then that Moses requests, “Let the Lord God of the spirits of all flesh appoint a leader over the witness assembly” (27:15–16). Listen to the words of the Midrash: What caused Moses to request his replacement after the

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inheritance of the daughters? Since these daughters inherited their father, Moses declared, “This is the right moment for me to claim my need. After all, if these women can inherit [their father] my sons should certainly inherit my glory.” The Holy One, blessed be He said to him: “The guardian of the fig tree shall eat of its fruit” [Prov. 27:18]. Your sons sat idly by themselves and were not occupied in the study of Torah. Joshua, on the other hand, served you well and extended to you much honor. He would arrive at your courthouse early in the morning and leave late at night.... Appoint Joshua the son of Nun as your successor, to fulfill the verse, “the guardian of the fig tree shall eat of its fruit.” Hence, Moses’ two requests: the explicit plea to God that he be allowed to enter the Land of Israel and, presumably, lead them himself, and the implicit plea that God appoint his sons as his successors.

Both requests are denied. The first, his children as his successors, is denied because his sons are found wanting; they did not have the necessary Torah qualifications to be religious leaders in their father’s footsteps. Very likely, Moses himself realizes their lack of worthiness and therefore does not specifically make this request verbally; he merely thinks it in his heart, and the Bible informs us of his heart’s desire by placing his request for replacement after the inheritance of the daughters of Tzelofchad. Perhaps Moses understands that he himself bears some guilt for the flaws in his children. After all, he is so consumed with his relationship with the Divine that he doesn’t seem to have the time or the patience for family. Does the Bible not record that he was seemingly too busy to even circumcise his son Eliezer, so that his life had to be saved by his wife Tzipora who performed the circumcision herself in order to save Moses from punishment for his neglect (Ex. 4:24–26)?

Moses apparently is more comfortable making the second request – that he be allowed to enter the Promised Land. It is this entreaty which opens our portion of Va’etchanan. The entire purpose of the Exodus from Egypt is to enter the Land of Israel. After all of his sacrifices and all of his difficulties with an unwilling and backsliding Israelite nation, does he not deserve to reach his life’s goal, enter the Land of Israel, and begin this new era of Jewish history with himself as their leader? But here again the request is denied: “And the Lord was angry at me because of you and He did not accept my plea...saying that I may not speak of this anymore” (Deut. 3:26). Perhaps the rejection of both requests emanates from the same source, and it is Moses who is really blaming himself. Remember that when God had originally asked Moses to assume the leadership of the Israelites and take them out,

the great prophet demurred, claiming to be “heavy of speech” (literally, kevad peh) (Ex. 4:10). And then the Bible testifies that “the [Israelites] did not listen to Moses [about leaving Egypt] because of impatience and difficult work” (6:9). Most commentators explain that the Hebrews were impatient and had no energy to resist their slavery; the hard work of servitude sapped their inner strength and prevented them from even dreaming about freedom. But Ralbag (1288–1344) explains this to mean that it was because of Moses’ impatience with his people (the Hebrews), because of his (Moses’) difficult work in making himself intellectually and spiritually close to the Divine.

Moses was into the “heavy talk” of communication with God and receiving the divine words. He did not have the interest or patience to get into the small talk, the necessary public relations of establishing personal ties and convincing Hebrew after Hebrew that it was worthwhile to rebel against Egypt and conquer the Land of Israel. He didn’t even have the patience to slowly and lovingly bring along his children and make them his deputies. He was a God-person, not a people-person, or even a family-person. He’s not blaming them, he is ultimately blaming himself. He spent his time communicating with God and receiving His divine words for all the generations; as a result, he sacrificed his ability to move his generation to accept God’s command to enter the Promised Land. A leader must join in the destiny of his people. If they could not enter the land, even if it was because of their own backsliding, he may not enter the land, because he did not succeed in inspiring them sufficiently well.

In the final analysis, why were these two prayers denied the greatest leader in Jewish history? Apparently, it is because the very source of Moses’ greatness – his lofty spirit and closeness to God – was what prevented him from getting down to the level of his congregation and family to lift them up. Moses succeeded like no one else before or after him in communicating God’s word for all future generations; but he did not do as well with his own generation. Hence his words are honest and very much to the point: “The Lord was angry at me because of you” – because I did not have sufficient time to deal with you on a personal level, to nurture and empower you until you were ready to accept God’s teachings and conquer the Promised Land.

In addition to all this, perhaps Moses’ requests were denied in order to teach us that no mortal, not even Moses, leaves this world without at least half of his desires remaining unfulfilled. And perhaps he was refused merely to teach us that no matter how worthy our prayer, sometimes the Almighty answers “No” and we

must accept a negative answer. Faith, first and foremost, implies our faithfulness to God even though at the end of the day, He may refuse our request.

Dvar Torah: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

Three weeks of sadness requires seven weeks of consolation. That’s the period of the calendar that we are in right now.

Between the fast days of Shiva Asar b’Tammuz and Tisha b’Av we have three weeks in which we contemplate so many tragedies that we experienced in our past, then for the seven weeks between Tisha B’Av and Rosh Hashana we have the ‘shiva denechamta’ – the seven weeks of consolation. These commence with that great haftarah for Shabbat Nachamu which is the shabbat of Parshat Vaetchanan, starting with the words of the prophet Yeshayahu (Isaiah 40:1),

“Nachamu, nachamu ami,” – “Comfort, comfort my people.”

Rabbi Berel Wein explains that the reason for the double ‘nachamu’ is that, having experienced tragedy, we need far more time in order to derive consolation.

That’s the reason, he explains, why for three weeks of pain and grief, we require more than double that period, seven weeks, of consolation.

Sometimes we can be fortunate and, even following deep grief and anguish, it is possible with Hashem’s help and with a positive attitude, for us to restore our regular rhythm of life and to be consoled, but often that is simply just not the case. Just as one can knock down a building in a matter of hours but it takes months, if not years, to rebuild it, in the same way following tragedy it can take an extremely long time for us to be consoled. As a nation we continue to grieve to this day after the shoah, and following the recent pandemic we can see how our society will take a long time to pick up the pieces.

So our prayer on this Shabbat Nachamu is please Hashem, ‘nachamu nachamu’, give us lots of comfort, enable us where appropriate and necessary, to rebuild our lives in a satisfactory and healthy manner because we realise that even after a long period of suffering, ultimately comfort and consolation will be there.

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

“Shema Yisrael – Hear O Israel”

Rabbi Yishai and Einat Gottlieb

Family Ozer “Hear, O Israel: the Lord is our God, the Lord is one” is one of the most famous verses in the entire Torah – so much so

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that it was inserted into the traditional prayers and requires special intent when uttered.

But what is the meaning of this verse?

Sefer HaChinuch defines Shema Yisrael as one of the positive mitzvot, signifying the “unification of Hashem”, the belief in the oneness of God:

“The commandment of the unification of God: That we were commanded to believe that God, may He be blessed — Who is the Mover of all existence, the Master of everything — is One without any combination, as it is stated (Devarim 6:4), “Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one.” And this is a positive commandment, not [just] a statement. And the understanding of “Hear” is: “Accept from me this thing, and know it and believe in it — that the Lord, Who is our God, is one. And the proof that this is a positive commandment is their [our Sages], may their memory be blessed, constantly saying in Midrash, “On the condition of unifying His name”; “in order to accept the yoke of the kingdom of Heaven upon himself” — meaning to say, the acknowledgement of unity and faith.” (Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzvah 417)

The Rambam finds philosophical grounds for the uniformity of God in addition to the mitzvah of the “unification of Hashem”:

“This God is one. He is not two or more, but one, unified in a manner which [surpasses] any unity that is found in the world; i.e., He is not one in the manner of a general category which includes many individual entities, nor one in the way that the body is divided into different portions and dimensions. Rather, He is unified, and there exists no unity similar to His in this world. If there were many gods, they would have body and form, because like entities are separated from each other only through the circumstances associated with body and form. Were the Creator to have body and form, He would have limitation and definition, because it is impossible for a body not to be limited. And any entity which itself is limited and defined [possesses] only limited and defined power. Since our God, blessed be His name, possesses unlimited power, as evidenced by the continuous revolution of the sphere, we see that His power is not the power of a body. Since He is not a body, the circumstances associated with bodies that produce division and separation are not relevant to Him. Therefore, it is impossible for Him to be anything other than one. The knowledge of this concept fulfills a positive commandment, as [implied by Devarim 6:4]: “[Hear, O Israel,] the Lord is our God, the Lord is one.” (Hilchot Yesodot HaTorah Chapter 1, Halachah 7)

In light of the above exegesis, Rashi's commentary on this verse is somewhat surprising, since it deviates from the literal meaning of the text:

"[On the words] 'The Lord is our God, the Lord is one – 'The Lord who is now our God and not the God of the other peoples of the world, He will at some future time be the One (sole) God..."

Rashi irons out the wrinkles of the verse, as it were, by adding words that lend it a prophetic meaning. Rashi then goes on to quote Biblical verses that support this interpretation of the verse:

"As it is said, (Tzephaniah 3:9) 'For then I will turn to the peoples a pure language that they may all call upon the name of the Lord', and it is further written, (Zechariah 14:9) 'On that day shall the Lord be one and His name one'."

Why does Rashi add the words "and not the God of the other peoples of the world" and "at some future time" to the verse in question? In order to understand Rashi's commentary, let us also refer to the commentary offered by three other exegetes.

The Ibn Ezra asks why the name of Hashem is mentioned twice in the verse, rather than the more succinct phrasing " –The Lord our God is one". And thus he writes:

"That which the ancients [Sages], of blessed memory, transmitted regarding the reading of the shema is true, and there is no need for further investigation. Note that the glorious name (YHVH) is a noun. This being the case, why is it said a second time? The answer is that the word is a noun as well as an adjective..."

In other words, the answer he gives is that the first time God's name is mentioned it refers to God's special name (which is a noun), while the second mention is an adjective, referring perhaps to the name of YHVH signifying that God exists in the past, present and future – haya, hoveh v'yihyeh.

The Ramban gives another explanation as to why Moshe uses this special phrasing, which highlights the grammatical object of the verse:

"Now you must contemplate [the fact] that Scripture changed [the normal usage] here by saying "our" God and did not state "thy" God as it says everywhere else, for example: 'Hear, O Israel: thou art to pass over the Jordan this day... Know therefore this day, that "thy" God etc.'; 'Hear, O Israel, ye draw nigh this day unto battle... for "your" God is He that goeth with you...' And such is the case in all sections where [Moshe] spoke to Israel, he

uses "your God" or "thy God," and even here [in this section] he said, 'And thou shalt love "thy" God'. However, in this declaration of the unity [of God] Moshe said "our" God because God Himself had done great and awesome things with Moshe to make for Himself a glorious name.

Owing to the great importance of this declaration, Moshe did not wish to exclude himself from the people, and uses the formulation of "our God" in chapter 5, verse 2 as well, right before he repeats the Ten Commandments: "The Lord our God made a covenant with us in Chorev".

The Rashbam takes the word "one" to mean "exclusive" rather than "unified", and writes as follows:

"Hashem alone is elokeynu ["our God"]; there is no other kind of divinity which is a partner to Him."

After examining the interpretations provided by the three exegetes above, let us look again at Rashi's interpretation:

"The Lord who is now our God and not [Ramban] the God of the other peoples of the world, He [Ibn Ezra] will at some future time be [Rashbam] the One (sole) God..."

In other words, since Moshe uses a unique phrasing " –our God" – instead of [the more common] "thy God" or "your God", one might interpret it as a particular call [meant for the People of Israel only] "and not the God of the other peoples of the world", as explained by the Ramban. As to Rashi's words "will at some future time", these are very much in keeping with the interpretation given by the Ibn Ezra, who explains that the second mention of the name of God (YHVH) is an adjective denoting God's existence at all times – past, present and future – much like Moshe's description of God to the Israelites [when he first approached them in Egypt]: "Ehyeh ["I am"] has sent me unto you" (Shemot 3:14). "God is One" – in the sense that He alone will be recognized as a Divinity.

Rashi supports his reading of the verse by quoting other Biblical verses

"For then I will turn to the peoples a pure language that they may all call upon the name of the Lord" (Tzephaniah 3:9) and "On that day shall the Lord be One and His name one" (Zechariah 14:9). These verses attest to the fact that when the other nations accept the Divinity of God, He alone shall be King.

There is an essential difference between the Rambam's approach and that of Rashi. The Rambam views the Shema Yisrael verses as a

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philosophical attestation to the presence of God in the world (in a sociological-cultural sense), which all humans must acknowledge, as expressed in the Midrash Targum Yonatan [originally in Aramaic]:

"It was, when the time came that our father Yaakov should be gathered out of the world, he was anxious lest there might be an idolater among his sons. He called them, and questioned them: Is there such perversity in your hearts? They answered, all of them together, and said to him: 'Hear Israel our father, the Lord our God is One! Yaakov made response, and said: 'Blessed be His Glorious Name for ever and ever.'"

Put more simply, Yaakov's sons turn to him by name [Yisrael] and declare that they acknowledge the presence of God in the world.

Rashi, on the other hand, sees the Shema Yisrael as expressing a national-historical calling, i.e., one disseminating the idea of the oneness of God (by the People of Israel) among all peoples until the ultimate goal is achieved in the End of Days. In other words, Moshe's words to the People of Israel should be read in the following manner: "Hear O [People of] Israel – observe and understand (to use the words of Sforno on the verse) – the Lord is our, God the Lord is One – your role is to fulfill this mission."

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Mordechai Willig

The Certainty, Divinity, and Eternity of the Torah

I. Take heed and guard your soul exceedingly lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen and lest they be removed from your heart all the days of your life, and make them known to your children and your children's children, the day that you stood before Hashem at Chorev, when Hashem said to me "Gather the people to me and I will let them hear My words, so that they may learn to fear Me all the days that they live on earth and teach their children accordingly" (Devarim 4:9,10).

The critical and everlasting message of these pesukim is noted by our greatest Torah commentators, medieval and modern alike. Their prescient words resonate in troubled and turbulent spiritual eras.

The Ramban writes that one violates a lo ta'ase, a Torah negative commandment, if he forgets ma'amad Har Sinai (the revelation at Sinai) or fails to transmit it to his children and grandchildren. On his list of lavim that the Rambam omitted in Sefer Hamitzvos (no. 2), he cites the words of the Rambam (Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah 8:1), "We believe in the Torah because we witnessed the revelation." Hashem said (Shemos 19:9) to Moshe "Behold

I am coming to you in a thick cloud, so that the people will hear when I speak to you, and then they will believe in you forever." Any prophet who denies the words of Moshe is known to be a liar (8:3). So, too, one who says that the mitzvos are no longer binding is a false prophet, because he denies the eternity of the words of Moshe (9:1). The Ramban agrees, and adds that the Gemara (Kiddushin 30a) which reads "You should teach your children and grandchildren" as referring to teaching Torah, does not contradict his interpretation, as "teaching the belief in Torah is teaching Torah."

In our parsha (Devarim 4:9) the Ramban explains that before Moshe repeated the Ten Commandments that were given at Sinai (5:6-18), he forbade us from forgetting the revelation and removing it from our hearts forever. Moreover, he commanded a mitzvah aseh to tell our descendants in every generation all that transpired at Sinai, that we saw and heard. As it is not counted separately, it is presumably part of the mitzvah to teach Torah, as the Ramban explained in Sefer Hamitzvos (R. Chavel). After citing the idea of the Rambam (fn 43), he adds: when we tell our children, they will know that it (the revelation) is undoubtedly true, as if they saw it, in every generation. For we would not testify falsely to our own children or bequeath to them vain and useless ideas. They will not doubt at all our testimony. Rather, they will believe for sure that all of us saw with our own eyes all that we told them.

In sum, the Rambam and the Ramban teach that the revelation is the proof of the divinity and immortality of the Torah. The unbroken transmission from generation to generation is a mitzvah which is indispensable for the eternal faith in, and observance of, the mitzvos as given by Hashem to Moshe at Sinai.

II. The rapid secularization of European Jews in the nineteenth century impelled intrepid and inspired Torah leaders and commentators to reiterate these themes. Rav S. R. Hirsch writes (4:9):

"Everything rests upon this one basic fact: that the nation itself witnessed the Divine revelation of the Law. Thus, the nation has a direct guarantee that this Law is indeed Divine and that God is a personal and supernatural Being. Hence it is, before all else, this basic historic fact, the revelation of the Law at Sinai, proven by the evidence of our own physical senses, that must remain alive forever in our hearts and minds and must be handed down to our children so that they, too, may take it to heart and pass it on to future generations. A personal experience, perceived simultaneously by an entire nation, is an unparalleled, unique foundation for the historicity of the revelation,

and the fact that the entire nation communicated it from one generation to the next represents a similarly unique, unparalleled preservation of that experience in the basic awareness of all future generations.

In the midst of a world caught up in notions developed from incomplete premises, you are to maintain your own spiritual independence. If you were to accept their notions, which are erroneous because they are founded on defective premises and therefore yield false conclusions, you would run the risk of forgetting that very personal experience of those realities from which alone the truths of life and existence can be derived. Therefore, take heed lest you forget the facts that your own eyes have beheld.

But above all, "guard your soul exceedingly...". The un-Jewish view of nature and history may all too easily gain a dangerous advocate within your own heart. Once God has vanished from nature, man's physical life, the sensual aspects of his existence will be deified, and once the historic significance of God's Law is denied, the seat of sovereignty is prepared for self-seeking human brutality. Both these notions will appeal only too readily to your nefesh, to your sensual and intellectual nature and aspirations. They hold out the promise of liberating the sensual aspects of your life from their subordination to the standards of moral sanctity, and the historical aspects of your existence from their subordination to the demands of justice and loving-kindness that the Law has brought to you, on Mount Sinai, from God. Therefore, even as you must guard against un-Jewish influences from without, so, too, above all, guard your own inner being against insinuations that may appeal to your sensuality and your selfishness so that you don't forget the facts that vouch for the existence of God and the authenticity of His Law. And above all, guard the spiritual aspect of your nature, so that you do not lose sight of the facts that your own eyes have beheld.

And make them known to your children and your children's children. You must now see to it that the truths which you have come to know through your own experience and which, by virtue of this personal experience, have become the granite foundation for all of your thoughts and actions, become the "knowledge" - not merely the "belief" - of your children and your children's children. Let your children know what you yourself have seen. Hand it down to them with all the resoluteness and certainty born of personal experience, in such a manner that this experience of yours will become the basis for the knowledge attained by all your descendants. Such is the tradition received by an entire national entity and handed down by each generation to an entire

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national posterity. This is the only way in which historic fact can remain authentic even in the minds of the remotest descendants. For in the final analysis, the authenticity even of written records rests on the facts that their contents have been handed down collectively by all the fathers to all the sons and are therefore considered true beyond doubt."

Rav Hirsch wrote in Germany at a time when most Jews had abandoned scrupulous Torah observance. He recognized the danger to his observant readers of the non-Jewish influences. Without spiritual independence, based on remembering the revelation's divinity and immortality, we can succumb to the non-Jewish zeitgeist. This can lead to apologetics, or worse, abandonment of Torah law.

The prescient reference to "liberating the sensual aspects of your life from their subordination to the standards of moral sanctity" has played out in our time and place in a manner that even Rav Hirsch did not anticipate. In the last 60 years, intermarriage increased from a single digit rarity to a significant majority of American Jews. Apologetics for, or denial of, the Torah's view of sexuality and marriage, have, sadly, been espoused even by some Orthodox Jews.

The faithful must take up the call of Rav Hirsch for unapologetic "spiritual independence" based on the unbroken tradition passed through the generations from Sinai. We must teach our children, emphatically and continuously, that the Torah's laws and values are certainly divine and eternal, notwithstanding what they hear and read from non-Jewish or non-strictly Orthodox sources.

III. The Malbim fought a similar battle against secularism and Bible criticism in Eastern Europe. In his commentary (4:9), he refers to the attribution of non-Jews of the Torah's brilliant laws to the Jewish intellect and wisdom (4:6). Such a thought endangers both body and soul, the dual warning in 4:9: "hishamer lecha u'shmor nafschecha me'od." A non-Torah lifestyle can harm one's body, but a greater shemirah (me'od) is needed to guard the soul from harm.

We may not forget what we saw, as what we see remains in our memory longer than what we hear. Even if we don't forget, it can be removed from our hearts if we think that the Sinaitic commandments are only temporary and changeable.

The Malbim (4:10) adds that the ability of the masses to apprehend the revelation without the extensive preparation needed for prophecy was itself a great miracle, comparable to the creation of heaven and earth ex nihilo. This great miracle was necessary to prove that

Hashem, the Creator, is still in direct contact with mortal human beings, an idea others considered impossible. "So that they may learn to fear Me" required this direct revelation, a proof of Providence (Hashgacha), the deniers of which have no fear of a Creator who they believe has no knowledge of their misdeeds.

Secondly, it was necessary in order to assure that their children will maintain loyalty to the Torah in future generations and disregard those who deny its divinity or eternity. Hashem appeared to us face to face, despite our lack of preparation so that we overcome challenges to our faith for all generations (Shemos 20:17, Devarim 12:2-4).

These challenges have claimed many souls in our time, including, sadly, some who affiliate as Orthodox. The words of the Malbim, Rav Hirsch, and the Ramban are our only way to overcome the challenges for ourselves and our children and grandchildren.

IV. "Console, console, My people" (Yeshayahu 40:1), thus begins the eponymous Haftorah of Shabbos Nachamu, this year following hard on the heels of Tisha B'av. One reading the valiant battles of Rav Hirsch and the Malbim, and their many illustrious successors, against secularism and assimilation can become despondent as these phenomena have only increased despite their best efforts.

In the absence of prophets, Rabbinic leaders must console Hashem's people. Do not despond! Hashem has promised that even in a generation that mocks Him and violates His covenant, the Torah will never be forgotten (Devarim 31:20,21).

Indeed the proliferation of secularism, assimilation and even intermarriage in American Jewry has been matched by the exponential growth of Yeshivos and Chassidic institutions. Hashem has made one corresponding to the other (Koheles 7:14). This, together with the parallel flourishing in Eretz Yisroel since World War Two, is a measure of consolation for Hashem's people after the unspeakable horrors of the Holocaust.

The vanishing American Jew, who assimilates and is lost to the Jewish people is not without precedent. Even in our first national redemption, only twenty percent of Bnei Yisroel went out of Egypt (Rashi, Sehmos 13:18). This minority experienced the revelation and their progeny has observed and transmitted the Torah despite numerous difficulties over the generations, to this very day.

As we read the recounting of the revelation at Sinai, we must emphasize, internalize, and transmit to our children and grandchildren the

certainty, divinity, and eternity of the Torah. As Rav Hirsch wrote: "Everything rests upon this one basic fact." It is not only a mitzvah as the Ramban teaches. It is the only way to preserve our holy heritage forever.

As we begin the seven Haftorahs of consolation, let us strengthen our resolve to remain among the faithful to Hashem and His Torah, together with our children and grandchildren. May we merit the fulfillment of the final Haftorahs of consolation, the final redemption and the next revelation.

Mizrachi Dvar Torah

Rav Doron Perez

How to Truly Listen

In many ways, Judaism is about one word – arguably, the most famous word and verse in the Torah – "SHEMA Yisrael Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Echad," "HEAR, O Israel, the L-rd our G-d, the L-rd is One." It is the first thing we say on a daily basis – about listening to what G-d wants from us – and the last thing we say at night. It is the first pasuk we teach to a young child, and, G-d forbid, the last thing a person says before they pass away.

The first word of this most important pasuk is "Shema", and this word is one of the most difficult to translate. It can mean 5 or 6 things in English – it can mean to listen, to physically hear, to concentrate more, to understand, to internalize, and to empathize. All of these English words and ideas are encapsulated in one Hebrew word – "Shema." The first thing G-d wants us to do is truly listen. To listen in a way that we are, at the same time, hearing what is being asked of us, internalizing it, and deeply empathizing with it.

It is all about connection – the most important relationships, including that with G-d, are those we are deeply connected with, making another person feeling truly heard. Not that you just physically heard them, but that you have put yourself in their place and that that have been truly heard. Stephen Covey, in his famous book The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People, has a powerful paragraph called "Seek first to understand, and then to be understood." In life we have to be empathetic people, he writes how the single-most difficult quality there is in interpersonal relationships is knowing how to truly listen.

When we listen, we often have autobiographical responses – we are not really listening, we are reading ourselves into the conversation, trying to advise people, trying to evaluate and judge – but they are not the basis of empathetic listening, where you cancel your own autobiography and truly make yourself into a person able to take on what the other person is saying. May we always be able to listen in an empathetic way, so we are really

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listening to the other person, connecting with them, making them feel that they are truly heard.

Rabbi Dr. Norman J. Lamm's Derashot Ledorot

The Mechanics of Consolation

In their commentaries on today's special Haftorah, the Rabbis (in their Yalkut) tell us of the following imaginary yet very real conversation:

ישעהו אמרו ישראל לישעיהו, חנינא בר פפא אמר ר' רבינו תאמיר שלא באת לנחם אלא לאוות הדור שחרב כל הדורות באתי, אמר להם ק בימי'הה אמר און כתיב כאן אלא אמר אלוקים. אמר אלוקים.

Israel said to Isaiah: Isaiah, our Teacher, would you say that your consolations were directed only to that generation in whose days the Temple was destroyed? Said Isaiah to them: No, I have come to console all the generations. For it is not written, "comfort ye, comfort ye, my people, said your God," but it says "comfort ye, comfort ye, my people, sayeth (or: will say) your God."

Consolation, then, is not an act in isolation. It is a process, and it applies not only to one specific time, but it is relevant to all times. It is therefore worth pondering: what does this subtle yet powerful psychological transformation consist of? What are the mechanics of this profound personal redemption which we call nechama?

I ask this not only as an abstract or rhetorical question. There are practical consequences. People are caught up in the depths of despair and grief. What should or can consolation mean to them? Or, the menachamim, those who go to console the mourners: very often they are at a loss, they do not know how to translate their good wishes into acceptable words. That is why they often do the wrong thing, why the task of offering condolences is often so difficult, why otherwise intelligent people are frequently reduced to silly prattle.

Furthermore, in the history of our people we are the great Generation of Nekamah. We are the generation that has gone from the depths of Auschwitz to the heights of the State of Israel. We have experienced consolation. Therefore, it behooves us to understand it, so that we can better understand ourselves and the times in which we live.

The answer to our question, the key to the nature of this phenomenon called consolation, may be found in our Haftorah, that beginning with the immortal words, Nachamu, nachamu ami. Let us adumbrate several items that emerge from a deeper study of this Haftorah.

First, in order to console properly, you must never underestimate or underestimate the extent of the pain and the grief. To be the proper menachem, you must acknowledge the depths and singularity of suffering. At bottom, all suffering is highly individual.

When Isaiah and the Prophets are told to console Jerusalem, they are told for Jerusalem has-- כִּי לְקַחְתָּה מִדְּךָ כְּפָלִים בְּכָל חַטָּאתֶךָ, speak to the heart of Jerusalem, 'Roshelim', received punishment from God, double the amount her sins warranted.

Often we try to show the mourner that others have suffered more or at least equally. In one sense, this is helpful, for it lets the mourner feel that he is not completely alone, that he is part of the community of the miserable. But never, never must this be overdone. For to try to show the sufferer that his suffering is not really that bad denies him the uniqueness of his loss. And ultimately it is futile too, because it makes a mockery of the particular misfortune that only he knows so intimately and that no other can fully share.

Hence the first rule of consolation is to show that you identify with the sufferer insofar as possible, that you appreciate the sharp edge of grief, both its extent and its incommunicable singularity, and that you understand the sense of void and emptiness, the loss and the pain. That is what we usually mean by the word "empathy."

Second, successful consolation requires confidence or faith. In order to receive nechamah, you must believe that it will or at least can come. It is not at all necessary to understand how it will take place--the true mourner usually believes that it can never take place through natural, rational means. Let it be so. But he must believe that it can happen, even if the means are irrational or supernatural. Thus does Isaiah say to his disconsolate people: קֹל קוֹרָא בְּמִדְבָּר, a voice cries out in the desert, כל גַּיא יִנְשָׁא וְכָל הָר וְגַבְעָה יִשְׁפָלֶל, every valley will be raised and every mountain and hill will be leveled.

What is Isaiah trying to tell his people by these geographical lessons? It is, I believe, this: even as when they look at a mountainous region they cannot imagine it to be straight and level, so when they consider the peaks of their pain and the depths of their despair, they cannot believe that these can level out into normalcy. Yet they must believe! For the voice cries out in the desert of the heart and the wilderness of the soul, that if the Lord God wills it, it will happen.

In this sense, the source of nechamah is in the mourner himself. The menachem, the one who offers his condolences, can only assist. The consoler is at most a midwife of restoration and consolation, one who presides at its

emergence from the depths of the heart of the one who sits in grief.

Third, where grief is the result not of accident or nature, but of defeat in a struggle, in an ideological contest or in spiritual strife, there nechamah derives from the sense of vindication. If one has gone down for the sake of an ideal, then his survivors can be consoled only when those ideals are justified in the course of time.

Thus does the Prophet say to his people, having suffered defeat not only physically and politically, but spiritually as well: 'וְגַלְלָה כָּבֵד הַדָּבָר, וּרְאוּ כִּי בָּשָׂר יְהוָה כִּי פִּי הָרָב', and the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all flesh together will see that the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it. The martyrs of Israel will have been vindicated when their pagan antagonists will bow their heads and accept the truth of the Lord God of Israel who reveals Himself to all men, justifying the martyrdom and the sacrifices of the holy ones of Israel.

Today, our nechamah as a people will be incomplete as long as the enemies of Israel prosper, as long as anti-Semitism is rampant--even if it be disguised as anti-Zionism, whether of the right or the left, especially the New Left, whether White or Black, whether by non-Jew or by Jew...

Finally, the fourth element we may detect in this Haftorah as to the mechanics of consolation is this: nechamah implies the replacement of the loss to the extent that it is possible.

Indeed, there can never be complete restoration for a human being. This is so, because each human being, created in the Image of God, is unique, and that which is unique cannot, by definition, be replaced.

But if there can be no complete restoration, the void can be filled subjectively, at least partly. A parent or a mate has passed on; a home can be rebuilt and a measure of nachas can still come into life.

When our mother Sarah died, her son Isaac was grief-stricken. Not until he met and married Rebecca did the situation change. Then we read: יְזַחֵק אַחֲרֵי שִׁירָה אָמַר, that Isaac was consoled after Sarah his mother. After the sense of desolation and loneliness and emptiness,

Rebecca -- as our Rabbis tell us -- brought back light and a sense of family and companionship into the bereft home. Rebecca could never replace Sarah, any more than Sarah could replace anyone else. But she could fill the void in the heart and in the life of Isaac. That is consolation.

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So our Haftorah tells us of consolation. Those who were destroyed cannot be brought back to life. No one can fully take their place. But in the life of our ongoing people, nechamah means the return to Zion, the upholding of the desolated land, the new dignity possessed by our people after the humiliation of defeat and exile.

We Jews today know that the six million martyrs of the Holocaust are irreplaceable. No Jewish state, no prosperity, no new-found respectability, can ever, ever make up for the horrendous loss that we suffered. But to the extent that it is possible without Messiah (or even with him), the State of Israel is our nechamah. It is our only consolation, the only thing left we have to hang on to after we have reached the very bottom of the pit of despair.

Therefore, Israel is everything we have. Hence, any danger to the State of Israel is a threat to our only source of consolation and evokes from within the heart of every Jew an immediate response: that the demons of Auschwitz are coming to life again. Take away this consolation of ours, and we are back in the depths, the unplumbed depths of avelut such as the world has never known. If any Jew wants to know the source of Jews' loyalty to the State of Israel, he must know that our loyalty is powered by the past of having experienced Auschwitz. Zvi Kolitz was one-hundred percent correct when he stated in this Synagogue this past year, that the secret of the success of Israel's army is not that Israeli soldiers knew what they were fighting for, but that they know what they are fighting against.

The current cease-fire, just begun by American initiative, is the only break in the escalating crisis that has gripped Israel since the 1967 victory. But, as we all know, it is not an unmixed blessing. It is as much danger as it is opportunity. It is something which holds the most serious consequences for all Israel and all world Jewry.

We must hope and pray that our Government will support Israel in the full measure it deserves. We should like to be proud as Americans in knowing that Israel is being helped by America in ways that the world does not know yet. But whatever may happen, American Jews must support Israel in its resistance to Egyptian trickery and Russian treachery--and what, Heaven forbid, may yet become American betrayal.

American Jews must not be found wanting. For this is our particular responsibility today. Israel is our nechamah. Without it, chalilah, we are back in the pit of anguish. I do not believe the time has come to take with any immediate urgency the words of Menachem Begin in the Knesset, that American Jews must take to the

streets to demonstrate. But we may yet be called upon to act politically and economically and socially. Then we shall have to take to the streets indeed, despite our bourgeois respectability and self-restraint, even if it means incurring the wrath of the Government and the population. We shall have to pay any price in order to stand at the side of Israel, our consolation.

נְחַמּוּ הָעָלִיּוֹנִים: In commenting on the double verb, nachamu nachamu, the Rabbis said .let the upper world console, let the lower world console ,
נְחַמּוּ הַחֲתֹנוֹנִים

Permit me to give my own contemporary interpretation of that Midrashic comment. If we want Almighty God from His Olamot Ha-elyonim (His Upper Worlds) to offer us comfort, if we want to be able to look forward to an undisturbed life, to a peaceful existence for our children and children's children, to a continuation of our people and an opportunity for them to thrive without threat and anguish and danger--then, nachamu tachtonim, we who inhabit this lower world must first offer our comfort to the State of Israel, we must first preserve and enhance this sole source of nechamah that has been given to us at this juncture of history. Only if we are successful in offering nechamah to the State of Israel can we look forward to nechamah for us from the Higher Worlds of Almighty God.

It is our hope and prayer that true peace will emerge from the present critical state. But no matter what happens, we are bound to act fully, with Jewish honor and resolve, to preserve this sole consolation which has filled the void in our lives after the Holocaust.

May we be successful in offering that nechamah, our support. And may we, in turn, receive nechamah from God on High, the kind of consolation that will bring peace to all of mankind.



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Rabbi Michael Rosensweig

Cultivating an Intimate Bond with Hashem Through Tefillah

Cultivating an Intimate Bond with Hashem Through Tefillah

The pesukim that precede and introduce the second rendition of the aseret ha-dibrot in Vaetchanan understandably focus on the unique bond that defines the relationship between Hashem and Benei Yisrael. Examining these pesukim rigorously affords an indispensable opportunity to better illuminate the dynamic of that bond, and to more effectively facilitate its attainment.

The Torah twice utilizes the term "mi goy gadol" to convey Am Yisrael's singular status that justifies this sui generis link. While the second use of this expression (Devarim 4:8) explicitly develops the role of the Torah, the legal and spiritual constitution of Klal Yisrael, as the foundation of this inimitable bond - "u-mi goy gadol asher lo chukim u-misphatim tzadikim ke-kol ha-Torah hazot asher anochi notein lifneichem ha-yom", the first application (4:7), which actually projects the intimacy of the relationship - "ki mi goy gadol asher lo Elokim kerovim eilav ka-Hashem Elokeinu bekol kareinu elav" is decidedly ambiguous.

It is noteworthy, that Ramban (4:6-8, see also Kli Yakar) strikingly perceives both verses as a testament to the inherent and profound impact of Torah law - "ve-amar ki be-chukim u-be-mishpatim toalot gedolot...ve-od she-heim toelet gedolah she-ein kemotah she-Hashem yiyeh karov lahem be-kol keraam eilav...". However, most of the parshanim projected distinctive themes for these two pesukim. While there were commentators (Rashbam, Ibn Ezra, Chizkuni, see also Rav Hirsch) who emphasized Hashem's general responsiveness to the laments, requests, needs, and wants of Am Yisrael, Chazal (Rosh Hashana 18a, Yerushalmi Berachot 9:1), Unkelos, Yonaton

ben Uziel (Devarim 4:7), and Rambam (Introduction to Mishneh Torah, after the minyan ha-katzar) focused specifically on the vehicle and institution of tefillah.

The Talmud (Rosh Hashana 18a, Yevamot 49b) cites our verse to prove that notwithstanding the more selective implication of the pasuk in Yeshayah - "dirshu Hashem be-himazo" (which begins the minchah haftorah of a tzom and that defines the period of Aseret Yemei Teshuvah) - the fate of Am Yisrael is never beyond repair - "gezar din shel tzibur...af al pi shenechtam nikra". Thus, our intimate bond ("ki mi goy gadol asher lo Elokim kerovim eilav ka-Hashem Elokeinu") is not only attested to by past successes in prayerful petition ("bekol kareinu eilav"), but also constitutes an ongoing havtachah, an eternal binding commitment! [It is noteworthy that the "kirvah" and "keriah" in our pasuk resonates in the very next verse in Yeshayah - "kerauhu bilihoto karov"!] The Griz (al ha-Torah) invokes our pasuk and the Talmudic passage in Rosh Hashana to underscore the difference between Jewish and non-Jewish prayer. [However, he specifically emphasizes the very concept of a communal entity and communal prayer - "de-inhu lav tzibbur". See also Rinat Yitzchak on Devarim 4:7 regarding Taanit 8a - "ein tefilato shel adam nishmaat ela im kein meisim nafsho bekapo". In my view, the special status of tefilat Yisrael, reflected by the principle and singular status of tefillah be-tzibur, also reflects upon individual prayer and differentiates it, as well, from the petition of other peoples and nations. The status of prayer during Aseret Yemei Teshuvah requires clarification but reinforces this theme, as well. I hope to elaborate this theme elsewhere.] Yerushalmi Berachot (9:1) invokes our pasuk to declare that while the distance between heaven and earth is vast indeed, it constitutes no impediment to the efficacy of even silent (individual) prayer ("adam nichnas le-beit hakeneset u-mitpalel be-lachash ve-Hakadosh Baruch Hu ma'azin tefilato").

Targum Unkeles and Targum Yonaton ben Uziel explicate the focus on tefillah. The typically terse Unkeles is exceedingly expansive in this context. He doubles his reference to prayer. Not only do the words "bekol kareinu eilav", a testament to the singular relationship, signify tefillah - "bekol idan de-anachnu metzalyan kadmohi", but the very methodology and manifestation of bonding with Hashem - "kerovim eilav" - is itself identified as through the medium and vehicle of crisis prayer - "le-kebala tzelotei be-idan akteih"! [The emphasis on tefillah be-eit tzarah is reminiscent of Rambam's comments in Hilchos Ta'anit 1:1-2 and Ramban's view in Sefer Hamitzvos (aseh no. 5) that only crisis prayer is biblically obligated.] [On Unkeles's view, see also his comments on Bereishit 48:22 - "be-charbi ubekashti" - which he renders "be-tzeloti u-be-vaoti". Meshech Chochmah op. cit. posits that these represent routine and crisis prayer respectively. Based upon the paradigms of cherev and keshet, he speculates that greater intention and focus is required for crisis prayer! See also Unkelos' perspective on tefillah referred to in my TorahWeb article on Beshalach 2024. I hope to broaden my presentation on Unkelos' position elsewhere.] Rambam's view of the prominence of this verse and the eternal promise of prayer is particularly significant and expansive. [One may speculate whether the polar opposite presentations of Rambam and Ramban regarding the connection of prayer to this pasuk is related to their debate in Sefer Hamitzvos, aseh no. 5.] In his introduction to the Yad (post minyan mitzvot ha-katzar), he asserts, based upon our pasuk, that Hashem's intimate presence and particularly Divine salvation is always accessible to Am Yisrael ("vehayah karov le-shavateinu"). [This assertion is linked to and exemplified by a brief analysis of the rabbinic mitzvah of keriat ha-megillah. I think it is conceivable that Rambam may also have been inspired to link these themes by the comment in Megilah 11a- "Rav Masna patach pitcha le-parshata de-megillah mikra 'ki mi goy gadol...'] He meaningfully adds that this receptivity to our urgent needs, embodied by the imperative to publicly read Megillat Esther, tasks us with thanking, blessing, and praising Him ("kedai le-varcho, u-lehalelo"), but also further demands that we publicize and educate future generations regarding this authentic tenet rooted in our verse in Vaetchanan ("u-kedai lehodia le-dorot habaim she-emet mah she-

hivtachtanu ha-Torah 'ki mi goy gadol...be-kol kareinu eilav"). [See Chidushai ha-Grim, Devarim 4:7 for a similar assessment of Rambam's view.]. It is unsurprising that Rambam both codifies the passage in Rosh Hashana 18a (Hilchos Teshuvah 2:6) and praises Uneklos' interpretation of "kerovim eilav" ("beur sheimot kodesh ve-chol", see Torat ha-Rambam on Devarim 4:7, p. 92).

It is self-evident that the prominence and efficacy of tefillah is a major theme on Tisha B'Av. The pesukim in Eichah, the content of the kinnot, the tefillot and keriat ha-Torah on this day repeatedly underscore Hashem's eternal commitment to Am Yisrael, notwithstanding grim circumstances and grave disappointments. Divine accessibility and receptivity to repentance and tefillah is axiomatic, it stands at the center of our efforts during this extended period of aveilut yeshanah u-derabim (Yevamot 43b) - mourning the past, lamenting the present, but confidently aspiring to a maximalist future. On the pesukim (Eichah 3:20-21) "zachor tizkor ve-tashuah alai nafshi; zot ashiv el libi al kein ochil", Meshech Chochmah explains that while it is foolish to shed tears on a lost cause, confidence in the rebuilding of the Beit Hamikdash and Yerushalayim, embodying the restoration of maximal Jewish life, an eternal principled promise, is always worth prayers and tears. Moreover, he further notes that precisely the capacity to shed tears over the churban is itself a catalyst to ensure and speed the renewal of national halachic life. [See my TorahWeb article on Tisha B'av as a "moed" for a potential explanation of this theme.] This additional, singular dimension is encapsulated by the statement (Ta'anit 32b) "kol ha-mitabel al Yerushalayim zocheh ve-roeh be-simchatah" and numerous other rabbinic aphorisms. Thus, Eichah Rabbati (1:23) asserts "amar Hakadosh Baruch Hu le-Yisrael be-sechar otah habechiyah ani machnis galuyoteichem". In this respect, the proper perspective on tears and petition actually galvanizes hope and confidence- "al kein ochil". We may suggest that our verse in Va'etchanan, highlighting prayer and reliance on Hashem as both the expression and foundation of our intimate Divine "kurvah" bond, accounts for this acute impact.

We are presently deeply ensconced in a national eit zarah, in which the tefillah and tachanunim have been particularly accentuated. While the multifaceted structure and complex process of tefillah, characterized by the triad of praise, petition, and thanksgiving (shevach, bakashah, hodaah - see Rambam beginning of Hilchos Tefilah) is essential to its aspirational efficacy, the emphasis on petition that bares our vulnerability, promotes true introspection, and that underscores our absolute dependence and reliance upon Divine providence, is particularly crucial. This focus has facilitated a critical dimension of clarity that has enabled us to maintain our emotional, spiritual, and halachic equilibrium in a climate of crisis. Recognizing that ein lanu lehishaein ela al avinu shebashamayim, that our eternal, intimate relationship with Hashem is the exclusive foundation of our individual and national lives, has provided stability and direction as we focus on constructive ways to contribute to a successful national outcome, to the attainment of a confident and maximalist halachic future for Am Yisrael. The principle of "kerovim eilav" attested to and accomplished by "be-kol kareinu eilav", a timeless formula, remains an enduring linchpin of our personal and national identity, a source of inspiration and an effective program for spiritual success.

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Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks ZT"ל

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The Idea that Changed the World

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks ztz"ל

It is one of the great stories of all time, and Moses foresaw it three thousand years before it happened. Here he is speaking in this week's parsha:

See, I have taught you decrees and laws as the Lord my God commanded me, so that you may follow them in the land you are about to entering and

possess. Take care to keep them, for this will be your wisdom and understanding in the eyes of the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people!" For what other nation has decrees and laws as just as this Torah that I am setting before you today? Deut. 4:5-8

Moses believed that there would come a time when the idea of a nation founded on a covenant with God would inspire other nations with its vision of a society based not on a hierarchy of power but on the equal dignity of all under the sovereignty and in the image of God; and on the rule of justice and compassion. "The nations" would appreciate the wisdom of the Torah and its "righteous decrees and laws". It happened. As I have argued many times, we see this most clearly in the political culture and language of the United States.

To this day American politics is based on the biblical idea of covenant. American presidents almost always invoke this idea in their Inaugural Addresses in language that owes its cadences and concepts to the book of Devarim. So, for instance, in 1985 Ronald Reagan spoke of America as "one people under God, dedicated to the dream of freedom that He has placed in the human heart, called upon now to pass that dream onto a waiting and hopeful world."

In his Inaugural in 1989, George Bush prayed:

"There is but one just use of power, and it is to serve people. Help us to remember it, Lord. Amen."

In 1997, Bill Clinton said:

"The promise we sought in a new land we will find again in a land of new promise."

George W. Bush in 2001 said:

"We are guided by a power larger than ourselves who creates us equal in His image."

In 2005, as he commenced his second term as President he declared: "From the day of our Founding, we have proclaimed that every man and woman on this earth has rights, and dignity, and matchless value, because they bear the image of the Maker of Heaven and earth."

In 2009 Barack Obama ended his speech with these words:

"Let it be said by our children's children that when we were tested we refused to let this journey end, that we did not turn back nor did we falter; and with eyes fixed on the horizon and God's grace upon us, we carried forth that great gift of freedom and delivered it safely to future generations."

This is explicitly religious language, without parallel in any other democratic society in the world, and it reads like a sustained Midrash on Deuteronomy. How did it happen? It began with the invention of printing by Johannes Gutenberg in Mainz in 1439, followed in England in 1476 by William Caxton. Books became less expensive and more accessible. Literacy spread. Then in 1517 came the Reformation, with its emphasis on the individual rather than the Church, and on sola Scriptura, the authority of "Scripture alone."

Then came the translation of the Bible into the vernacular. We tend to forget that the Hebrew Bible is a subversive work. It is not a book that preaches submission. It speaks of prophets unafraid to challenge kings, and of Saul who lost his throne because he disobeyed the word of God. So the authorities had good reason for the Bible not to be available in language people could understand. Translating it into the vernacular was forbidden in the sixteenth century. In the 1530s the great Tyndale translation appeared. Tyndale paid for this with his life: he was arrested, found guilty of heresy, strangled, and burned at the stake in 1536.

However, as contemporary tyrannies have discovered, it is hard to stop the spread of information that new technologies make possible. English Bibles continued to be printed and sold in massive numbers, most notably the Geneva translation of 1560 that was read by Shakespeare, Cromwell, Milton, and John Donne, as well as by the early English settlers of America.

The Geneva Bible contained a commentary in the margin. Its comments were brief but sometimes explosive. This applied in particular to the story of the Hebrew midwives, Shifra and Puah (Exodus chapter 1) - the first recorded instance of civil disobedience, the refusal to obey an immoral order. Pharaoh

had instructed them to kill every male Israelite child, but they did not. Commenting on this, the Geneva Bible says “their disobedience in this was lawful.” When Pharaoh then commands the Egyptians to drown male Israelite children, the Geneva Bible comments: “When tyrants cannot prevail by deceit, they burst into open rage.” This was nothing short of a justification for rebellion against a tyrannical and unjust king.

The Tyndale and Geneva Bibles led to a group of thinkers known as the Christian Hebraists, of whom the most famous - he has been called Renaissance England’s Chief Rabbi – was John Selden (1584-1654). Selden and his contemporaries studied not only Tanach, but also the Babylonian Talmud, especially tractate Sanhedrin, and Maimonides’ Mishneh Torah, and applied Judaic principles to the politics of their day.

Their work has been described in a fine recent study, *The Hebrew Republic*, by Harvard political philosopher Eric Nelson. Nelson argues that the Hebrew Bible influenced European and American politics in three ways. First, the Christian Hebraists tended to be republican rather than royalist. They took the view – held in Judaism by Abarbanel – that the appointment of a king in Israel in the days of Samuel was a (tolerated) sin rather than the fulfilment of a mitzvah.

Second, they placed at the heart of their politics the idea that one of the tasks of government is to redistribute wealth from the rich to the poor, an idea alien to Roman law.

Third, they used the Hebrew Bible – especially the separation of powers between the king and the High Priest -- to argue for the principle of religious toleration.

It was this historic encounter between Christians and the Hebrew Bible in the seventeenth century that led to the birth of liberty in both England and America. The Calvinists and Puritans who led both the English and American revolutions were saturated in the politics of the Hebrew Bible, especially of the book of Devarim.

In fact, the modern world offers as near as history comes to a controlled experiment in liberty. Of the four revolutions that mark modernity, two, the English (1640s) and American (1776), were based on the Hebrew Bible, and two, the French and the Russian, were based on secular philosophy, Rousseau and Marx respectively. The first two led to liberty. The second two ended in the suppression of liberty: in France in the Reign of Terror (1793-94), in Russia in the form of Stalinist Communism.

Appreciating the contribution of the Hebrew Bible to liberty, John Adams, second President of the United States, wrote:

“I will insist that the Hebrews have done more to civilize men than any other nation. If I were an atheist, and believed in blind eternal fate, I should still believe that fate had ordained the Jews to be the most essential instrument for civilising the nations.” John Adams’ letter to François Adriaan van der Kemp (16 February 1809)

The irony is, of course, that there is nothing like this in the political discourse of the contemporary state of Israel. The politics of Israel is secular in its language and ideas. Its founders were driven by high ideals, but they owed more to Marx, Tolstoy or Nietzsche than to Moses. Meanwhile religion in Israel remains sectarian rather than society-building.

To be sure, there are those who fully realise the significance of Sefer Devarim and the politics of covenant for the present State. The pioneer was the late Professor Daniel Elazar, who devoted a lifetime to rehabilitating Judaic political theory. His work is continued today, by among others, the scholars of the Shalem Center.

The significance of this cannot be sufficiently emphasised. Whenever in the past Jews lost their religious vision, or when religion became a divisive rather than a uniting force, eventually they lost their sovereignty also. In four thousand years of history there has never been, in Israel or outside, a sustained secular Jewish survival.

How ironic that the political culture of the United States should be more Judaic than that of the Jewish state. But Moses warned that it would be so. Keep the Torah’s laws carefully, Moses said, “for this is your wisdom and understanding in the eyes of the nations.” Moses knew that Gentiles would

see what Jews sometimes do not see: the wisdom of God’s law when it comes to sustaining a free society.

Israeli politics needs to recover the vision of social justice, compassion, human dignity and love of the stranger, set forth by Moses and never, in all the intervening centuries, surpassed.

Previous

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks ztz"l

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks ztz"l was a global religious leader, philosopher, the author of more than 25 books, and the moral voice for our time. Until 1st September 2013 he served as Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth, having held the position for 22 years. To read more from Rabbi Sacks, please visit www.rabbisacks.org... Show more

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THE GREATEST SOURCE OF COMFORT

Around the Year with Reb Meilech by Yisroel Besser

Shabbos Nachamu is a Shabbos that brings comfort. Each and every year, as the period of bein hametFor more info see <http://www.artscroll.com> and Tishah B’Av comes to an end, the voice of Hakadosh Baruch Hu rings out once again. “Nachamu, nachamu ami,” He calls out, His voice bringing comfort and hope, now as then. But how do we actually take comfort, if the reality that caused us to mourn has not changed? We cried because the Beis HaMikdash was destroyed, and now, after Tishah B’Av, it has not yet been rebuilt. What is the source of this burst of simchah and comfort? The pasuk addresses this, says the Sfas Emes. “From where will you take comfort, My people? From the fact that this comes from Me, Elokeichem, your God. The awareness that it is He and only He Who plans, decides, and acts, that all sorrow and anguish are also a result of His precise, perFor more info see <http://www.artscroll.com>fect, compassionate design — this brings comfort.

The word “nachamu” is doubled, because there is one measure of comfort one takes in the awareness that even difficult situations come from Him, but there is a second porFor more info see <http://www.artscroll.com> of nechamah that comes from the assurance that whatever He does is for our ultimate good. Yes, we still see churban, but a deeper look allows us to reflect upon where it all comes from, and to take heart in this: It is from our loving Creator, Who seeks only to benefit us.

This knowledge itself brings comfort and joy. Reb Shmuel Munkes was one of the close chassidim of the Baal HaTanya, a spirited man of great depth. He came into the beis medrash one morning and announced that a fire had consumed his house, deFor more info see <http://www.artscroll.com>stroying all his possessions. Somehow, he had scraped together a few coins and gone to buy a bottle of mashFor more info see <http://www.artscroll.com>keh, whiskey, which he put on the table. He invited the assembled chassidim to join him in drinkFor more info see <http://www.artscroll.com> l’chaim, and they looked at him oddly. He had just lost all his possessions, yet he was clearly in high spirits. He poured a l’chaim for each of the chassidim and then started to dance, singing a niggun to the words, “shelo asani goy.” Reb Shmuel’s friends wondered if the tragedy had affected him — perhaps he had lost his grip on realFor more info see <http://www.artscroll.com>ty and he didn’t realize what had happened to him? Reb Shmuel saw the expresFor more info see <http://www.artscroll.com>sions on their faces and he exFor more info see <http://www.artscroll.com>plained his joy. “Imagine I was not a Yid,” he said. “Just imagFor more info see <http://www.artscroll.com>For more info see <http://www.artscroll.com> this would have happened to me. I would have lost everyFor more info see <http://www.artscroll.com>thing, every possession and every object, and if my god was material, then it too would have been consumed. But thankfully,” Reb Shmuel’s face brightened, “I am a Yid, my God is alive and well, and no fire can affect Him. He remains as powerful and good today as yesterday, and therefore I dance, shelo asani goy!” This is the nechamah we receive on this Shabbos. Yes, the Beis HaMikdash still lies in ruins, but ElokeFor more info see <http://www.artscroll.com>hem, the King and Creator Who made us His and gave Himself to us, is as present and primary as ever. The moment of greatest connection between the Ribono Shel Olam and us

came at Har Sinai, when He presented Himself to us with the word Anochi (Shemos 20:2): Anochi Hashem Elokecha, I am Hashem, your God. Later in the Torah, Hashem speaks of times of great concealment using that very same word, v'Anochi astir hastir panai bayom hahu, And I will surely have concealed my face on that day (Devarim 31:18), teaching us that the light and darkness are conFor more info see htppnected, two perspectives of the very same reality. Therefore, the Navi tells us, in the name of HashFor more info see htppem, Anochi, Anochi Hu minachemchem, I, only I, am He Who comforts you (Yeshayah 51:12), using the same word twice. It is the awareness that it is the very same Anochi, at times of great revelation and at times of great conFor more info see htppcalment, that is the greatest source of comfort

from: Daryl Michel <daryl@bircas.org>

date: Aug 15, 2024, 7:43 AM

subject: Parshas V'eschanan 5784

PARSHAS V'ESCHANAN 5784

THE ULTIMATE EMUNA

By Rabbi Moshe Krieger, Yeshivas Bircas HaTorah

Be careful and guard yourself very much, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. Make them known to your children and children's children. The day that you stood before Hashem, Your G-d, at Chorev... (Devarim 4:9-10). The Ramban (ibid.) states that this verse imparts to us one of the most fundamental principles of Judaism, that every Jew saw Hashem face to face as He gave the Torah at Mt. Sinai. The verse goes on to warn that we must never forget this awesome revelation, and we must pass it on to our children. The Rambam (Yesodei HaTorah 8:1) writes that the ultimate proof that Moshe was a true prophet was at Mt. Sinai, where every Jew saw that Hashem gave Moshe the Torah. Even after all the miracles Moshe had done during the Exodus and at the Red Sea, there was still room for skepticism. After Mt. Sinai, their faith was free of any doubts. Moshe Rabbeinu told the nation that from the revelation at Sinai, they could reach a level where the fear of Hashem will be on your faces and you will never sin (Shmos 20:17). Harav Aharon Kotler asks that if Matan Torah is so important, why are there no mitzvos to remind us of it? For example, we have a mitzvah to speak about the Exodus from Egypt every day. In addition, many mitzvos remind us of the Exodus. We have Pesach, and the Pesach seder in particular. The parshiyos inside our tefillin speak about the Exodus. The mitzvah to redeem the first born reminds us that Hashem redeemed our first-borns on the night that the Egyptian first-borns died. But why isn't there a command to speak about Matan Torah every day? Even if it is one of the Six Remembrances (that appear in most siddurim at the end of Shacharis), there is no command to actually say these words. And why aren't there mitzvos to serve as a reminder of Matan Torah? There is the Shavuos festival, but in commanding this festival, the Torah makes no mention of Matan Torah. Harav Kotler answers that the Giving of the Torah requires no special reminders because Hashem put this power of reminding into the Torah itself. Toiling in Torah gives us all the light and revelation that we received at Sinai. Torah study imparts to us crystal clear faith. The Ibn Ezra (Tehilim 19:8) explains that this is the intent of Dovid Hamelech's words: The Torah of Hashem is perfect, it restores the soul. What does Torah restore to the soul? It restores emuna. Toiling in Torah over time will remove any doubts one may have in emuna. Such a person needs no other demonstrations of the truth of the Torah. Rav Moshe Sternbuch notes, however, that this power of the Torah to affect a person applies only when he learns Torah with the understanding that these are the words of Hashem. As the sages state (Brachos 22), just as the Torah was given amid awe and fear, so too it should be learned in this way. If we learn Torah with the recognition that these are Hashem's words and they possess intrinsic holiness, this should arouse in us a sense of seriousness toward our learning. To the extent that we do this, we merit the awesome effect that the Torah had at its Giving on Mt. Sinai. Learning Torah with this awareness is a tikun for one of the sins that

led to the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash. The sages say that people were not careful then about the brachos said before learning Torah (Nedarim 81a). Their neglect of these brachos was because they did not sufficiently realize that they were learning the words of Hashem (see Ran, ibid.). In these days, this should be our tikun. Rav Sternbuch adds that when the noted Rav David Freedman of Karlin would learn Torah, he would place a sign before his eyes with the words, Sh'visi Hashem knegdi tamid (I have placed Hashem before me at all times). Rav Freedman would say that it is forbidden for one studying Torah to forget for even a moment that he is studying the very words of Hashem. Harav Moshe Shapira was known as a giant in all sections of Torah, and an indefatigable speaker who gave shiurim before diverse audiences, teaching subjects that ranged from the revealed to the hidden secrets of the Torah. In addition, he taught groups of Jews from the former Soviet Union who had little or no background in Torah study. He was often asked why he devoted so much time to teaching these Jews, who were only at the beginning of their development in Torah. It seemed as though he was vastly overqualified for teaching such basic subject matter. Wouldn't his time be better spent teaching subjects that very few had mastered as well as he? In most of the shiurim I give, he would answer, I'm not sure if people understand me, and there are probably others who don't need me at all. When it comes to Jews who lack the most elementary background in Yiddishkeit, I know that my teaching can make the proper effect. When I face my final judgment, I know that this will be appreciated. When these Jews would come to him with questions about emuna, he would always reply: First, let's learn Gemara. These are the words of Hashem and we'll get connected to Him. Afterwards, if there will be any questions in emuna, we can deal with them. May our Torah study bring us to crystal clear faith!

Rav Kook on Va'etchanan:

Prolonging Shema Rabbi Chanan Morrison <chanan@ravkooktorah.org> Thu, Aug 15, 4:19 AM (21 hours ago) Rav Kook Torah Va'etchanan: Prolonging Echad זְהָא יְהָא לְאֵלָה הַאֲלֹהִים עַמָּה. Judaism's most important prayer is the Shema, the declaration of faith that encapsulates the essence of our belief. At its heart is the word זְהָא (echad) - "God is one." The Sages provided detailed instructions how to pronounce this pivotal word: "All who prolong the word echad will have their days and years prolonged. Rabbi Acha bar Ya'akov taught: One should prolong the final letter, the 'א' (Dalet). Rabbi Assi added: Provided that one does not slur over the middle letter, the 'ה' (Chet)." (Berachot 13b) Why should the word echad be stretched out? And what is the significance of the letters Dalet and Chet? God's Reign Over All Events The Talmud instructs us to pronounce the word echad long enough that we can mentally picture God's reign over the entire cosmos: all that is above, all that is below, and the "four sides of the heavens." When we declare God's oneness in the Shema, we acknowledge His complete control of the universe. While His reign may be expressed in a spatial sense, we can also cultivate a deeper awareness of God's providence as it is present in every event that takes place in the world. We may divide up the universe into three functional categories: The initial causes that set the myriad actions and events of the world in motion. The final goals that are the fulfillment of the original causes. The intermediate means and processes that lead from the initial causes to the final outcomes. God's reign encompasses all three categories. He rules over the heavens, the realm of initial causes. His control extends to the earth, where these causes find their completion and fulfillment in the realization of Divine purpose. And Divine rule also includes the intricate network of intermediate means and events. The Sages referred to these means as "the four sides of the heavens," since they form an intermediate stage connecting the heavens (the initial causes) with the earth (the ultimate goals). This is a profound message of the Shema. By recognizing this underlying unity, we acknowledge that all of the various events in the world - even though they appear to be dispersed and disconnected, like the four sides of the heavens - are in fact part of a single, Divine purpose. Everything is directed toward a higher goal, toward that which is ultimately good and elevated. Emphasize the Dalet, but Remember the Chet Why should we prolong the pronunciation of the letter Dalet when

reciting the Shema? The significance of the letter Dalet lies in its numerical value (Gematria), which is four. Dalet symbolizes the four directions, the diverse intermediate means in the universe. By emphasizing the Dalet, we reflect on how these means are not random or disconnected, but integral parts of a greater purpose, connected to the unified goal of creation. Still, the 'heavens' and the 'earth' should not be ignored. To truly appreciate the intermediate means, we must contemplate the profound Divine counsel that directs all events toward their purpose. And we should consider the value of the ultimate goal, as it unfolds and is revealed in all its splendor. Thus, the letter Chet needs to be articulated clearly. Chet has a numerical value of eight; it corresponds to the seven levels of heaven (shiv'ah reki'im) together with the earth. These eight levels represent the various stages, from the initial cause to its final, practical fulfillment. To "swallow up" the Chet would be to overlook the importance of the initial cause and the final goal. In doing so, the intermediary events would lose their true significance, necessary steps in the fulfillment of a higher purpose. (Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. I p. 71; Olat Re'iyah vol. I, p. 245)

Ksav Sofer - It's All One Inbox Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein

<ravadlerstein@torah.org> Thu, Aug 15, 11:36 AM (13 hours ago) to targumim Top Banner logo Ksav Sofer By Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein To Dedicate an Article click here Parshas Vaeschanan It's All One print I am Hashem Elokecha who has taken you out of the land of Mitzrayim.[1] A medrash finds the origins of the Shema in this opening pasuk of the Aseres Hadibros. Hashem opened, by saying, "Hear Yisrael! Hashem Elokecha took you out of Egypt." The Bnei Yisrael responded with, "Hashem is One!" Moshe reacted with, "The Name of the kavod of His kingship is forever!" What could this possibly mean? We can find the answer in the gemara[2] that contrasts our reaction to disturbing news in present times and in the future. In our day, when we hear such tidings, we pronounce the berachah of dayan ha-emes. We accept Hashem's din, and justify it. We cannot always understand it, but we are confident that He never acts unjustly. After our future redemption, however, we will react to such news the same way we do to joyful news. We will praise Him for His goodness, and His sharing that goodness with us mortals. We will fully understand that everything He does is not only just, but is for the good. Another way of looking at this is that the apparent difference between Hashem's din and His rachamim will disappear. We will fully understand that it is all rachamim. Today, we can utter the words as fact, but we certainly can't process the bad times as a Divine favor. In our pasuk, "Hashem Elokecha" invokes Names of both rachamim and din. The Bnei Yisrael felt the brunt of din for many long years in Mitzrayim. In their redemption, they experienced His rachamim. Both din and rachamim played a role. How did the Bnei Yisrael react to Hashem's pointing to both of His midos? They said, "Hashem echad!" Hashem is truly One. There is no difference between these seemingly opposite manifestations. The pain and suffering were actually a chesed. Through them, they were refined, purified, turned into a people who were capable of receiving the Torah a short seven weeks after the Exodus. Moshe reflected on their reaction. If they can understand that there was no essential difference between Hashem and Elokim, then the true Name of the kavod of His kingship – the four-letter Name of rachamim – can be declared forever. We can see this thought reflected in our haftorah. "Nachamu, nachamu ami." A person who suffered terribly will often be comforted with the passage of time. His consolation, however, is not complete. Memories of his past prevail still trouble him; the sting is not fully eliminated. Yeshayah here tells the people that they can expect a two-fold consolation in the end of days. With the dawn of redemption, they will be consoled for the horrors of millennia of galus. Moreover, they will come to understand the purpose of that exile, and how it was necessary for their survival as a people. They will grasp its role in addressing their sins. Without the kapparah that galus brought, their sins would have demanded their extinction. Thus, the navi continues: "Proclaim to her that her time of exile has been fulfilled, that her iniquity has been fully discharged." Why? Because the travail of galus was "received from the hand

of Hashem." People can be punished in two different ways. One kind of punishment is a targeted one. Hashem sends some onesh to the transgressor. A second kind does nothing of the sort. It merely leaves the sinner to his own devices, to contend with the myriad dangers that are part of human existence. Hashem removes his special assistance in dealing with these challenges. It is only a matter of time before one of the vicissitudes of life catch up with him. The first kind is preferable, because it brings kapparah to the sinner. It was specially designed to expiate the sin. Surviving the second kind, however, does not bring kapparah, since the specific experience the sinner endured was a matter of happenstance. Yeshayah stresses that the sins of Klal Yisrael have been paid up in full, because the punishment that it endured was directly from Hashem's hand. He continues, "double for all her sins." Because galus was visited upon us directly from His hand, He has given Klal Yisrael a double nechamah. We will be overjoyed at the coming of redemption, and even able to make peace with the long road that preceded it. Nachamu, nachamu ami. Devarim 5:6 ↑ Berachos 54a ↑ Ksav Sofer © 2023 by Torah.org.

<https://www.yutorah.org/lectures/>

Halachik Man... and Beyond Rabbi Moshe Taragin

Our people are facing a gut-wrenching decision and an unimaginable dilemma. There are currently 116 hostages imprisoned in Gaza, who have suffered through over 300 days of unspeakable cruelty and torture. They are citizens of our state, and we have a national and moral responsibility to bring them home. It appears as if the only way they can be released is through a ceasefire agreement with Hamas murderers. The only path to their release is a treaty with monsters whose hands are stained with the blood of thousands of Israelis. On the other hand, if we don't finish this just and moral war, these maniacs will regroup, re-entrench themselves, and recover their capacity to attack us. We have invested far too much effort and suffered far too much loss of life to leave this incredibly important job unfinished. Our survival depends upon it. There have been countless shiurim delivered surrounding the halachot of pidyon shevuim (redeeming captives) and how it impacts our difficult dilemma. Of course, each shiur concludes in the same manner: the conventional or typical halachik guidelines of pidyon shevuim are not applicable to this situation. There are broader issues at play such as the morale of the country which would be lifted by freeing hostages after their prolonged suffering. Improved national morale is a strategic asset, especially after such a long and draining war. Alternatively, a hostage release will cause deep anguish to families of fallen soldiers for whom anything less than total victory makes their sacrifice feel hollow. The long-term effects of a hostage exchange are also frightening, as any deal will release hundreds if not thousands of murderers who will execute future attacks. Of course, international opinion must also be factored in as we desperately need the support of our allies, many of whom demand a hostage exchange. None of these factors appear in the gemara in Gittin which discusses releasing captives, and these issues are similarly absent from the ensuing discussion in the Rishonim and Acharonim. Ultimately the sheer diversity of complicating factors renders the direct application of the halachot impossible. In 1976 when initially asked about releasing Israeli hostages held in Entebbe, HaRav Ovadia Yosef concluded that there was no indisputable halachik mandate and that the decision must be taken by military and political experts. Whatever these experts felt was best for our country would be halachikally mandated. Of course, Hashem provided a miracle and liberated our hostages through the heroism of the IDF. The very fact, however, that there are so many shiurim being delivered about the halachot of pidyon shevuim, even though the halachot are "inapplicable", reflects a broader phenomenon. We are becoming more committed to halachik observance, but less sensitive to employing non-halachik reasoning. Our default and sometimes only response is halachik assessment. Sometimes halacha has little to say and we must apply different analysis. Halacha-Ization of Religion Over the past several decades halachik observance has b'h spiked in the Orthodox community. More people are keeping halacha more strictly than in previous generations.

In part, the stiffening of halachik standards was a reaction to the rupture in our masorah caused by 19th and 20th century secularization and by the Holocaust. Professor Chaim Soloveitchik claimed that traditionally, halachik information was delivered through a mimetic tradition whereby practices and teachings were passed down through generations by example and through oral transmission. Mitzvot and minhagim were learned through observation and participation. When this mimetic transmission ruptures halachik practice is reconstructed through books and texts in a more formalized and codified manner. The widespread availability of seforim and effortless exchange of information facilitated by the internet, have each contributed to the surge in halachik commitment. Yet, primarily because halacha has been centered, other forms of religious calculus have become neglected. There are questions which lie beyond the domain of strict halachik categories. Rabbi Soloveitchik authored a landmark philosophical sefer entitled “The Halachik Man” describing a religious Jew as someone who approaches life through the lens of Halakha, allowing it to shape their worldview, ethics, behavior, and decision making. It was a supremely important work when first published in 1959 and articulates crucial and timeless elements of Jewish faith and practice. However, 75 years later it is fair to question whether we have become imbalanced “Halachik Men” who ignore or even stifle other forms of religious processing. Moral Instinct Parshat V’etchanan describes the value of “lifnim mishurat hadin” or preserving the moral spirit of halacha, not just the legal mandates: ס.ה נייע בוטחו רשותה תישע... Though we are commanded to adhere to a comprehensive system of 613 mitzvot many issues transcend the boundaries of strict halachik parameters. The value of lifnim mishurat hadin demands that we don’t just consider what we are obligated to do but also ponder what we ought to do morally and ethically. Hashem imbued us with ethical spirit and inner moral compass, and He wants us to employ them to navigate issues which halacha doesn’t directly address. The Flagpole and the Plumbing Forty years ago, as a young semicha student at Yeshiva University I walked home one wintry evening as the flagpoles high above the street were swaying dangerously in the wind. A young boy rushed over to me asking whether he had a chiyuv or a halachik obligation to notify the police. I responded that I didn’t know whether he had a chiyuv but it was certainly a good idea. Not every good idea is grounded in halachik demands. Fast forward about 35 years later, when I visited a community for Shabbat which, evidently, was struggling with plumbing complications in their shul, caused by paper towels and wipes being flushed down the toilet. In response, the bathrooms were plastered with signs warning that disposing non-flushables is considered theft or gezeilah as it would clog the pipes and require costly maintenance. I remember how disappointed I was that the signs implored proper behavior based upon avoiding gezeilah rather than because of common courtesy and decency. As halachik commitment has increased, the halacha-ization of Orthodox Judaism has also increased, sometimes obscuring other important forms of religious reasoning such as moral instinct and menschlichkeit. Halacha and Geulah This halacha-ization of Judaism has also impacted the way we analyze the redemptive process. Redemption is a new experience about which we have little tradition or masorah to guide us. Simply defaulting to halachik concepts to process the mysteries and demands of geulah is insufficient. Mori V’Rabbi HaRav Amital was staunchly opposed to conditioning our love for Israel and our commitment to settling the land upon the existence of a mitzvah to live in Israel (the Ramban asserts a mitzvah whereas the Rambam omits mention). Hypothetically, if there weren’t a mitzvah to settle Israel would living in Israel be less important? At this stage of history our relationship with Israel and with Jewish history can’t be reduced to purely halachik calculus. More is demanded of us, and it lies beyond halacha. I am similarly disappointed when the discussion surrounding Yom Ha’atzmaut is pitched entirely around the halachot of reciting hallel. The micro question of hallel is important and should be analyzed through halachik processing. However, there are many who choose not to recite Hallel who still deeply identify with Israel and its redemptive potential. You cannot quantify participation in our joint historical project

through halachik calculation. Navigating redemption requires different compasses. Halacha can’t always guide us. Sensitivity to Jewish history comes from our ability to hear the silent music of past generations, its gentle strains resonating within every Jewish heart and our newly established homeland. Contraction or Expansion The gemara in Berachot (8a) claims that **תיב בבחש סמי' הכליה לש הומא עררא אלא ולמולעב אה' רוב שודקהל ול' ויא' שדקמה** **דכלב**. After the destruction of the Mikdash, Judaism retreated into the insular study halls of Torah and the bracketed performance of mitzvot. Fortunately, Torah and mitzvot are vast, infinite, and self-sufficient. For centuries we constructed a rich and robust religious experience based solely upon that “small” but vast world of the Beit Midrash. Not only is halachik commitment foundational to religious experience but without strict and unflinching halachik observance we would not have survived, nor would we have retained our national identity. We would not have outlasted exile without passionate devotion to halacha. Now that we have returned to Israel, even though we haven’t fully returned to a Mikdash-like state, many Jews, particularly in Israel, are experimenting with religious expression outside of Torah study and formal mitzvot. What role does commitment to land and history play within religious consciousness? Now that we live in a broader Jewish society, what role does music and art play in amplifying the Jewish spirit and, ultimately, in enriching

Meshech Chochmah on Vaeschanan Rav Immanuel Bernstein
 <ravbernstein@journeysintorah.com> Thu, Aug 15, 6:59 AM (18 hours ago)
MESHECH CHOCHMAH Vaeschanan Shabbos and Yetzias Mitzrayim
 זכרות כי עבדת קיימך הארץ וצאתך וברעננויה על צוק ה' ז' שברך מכם ביד תקקה וברעננויה על צוק ה' אלך לך לשבתו את יום השבת אלך לך לשבתו את יום השבת. And you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and Hashem, your God, took you out from there with a strong hand and an outstretched arm; therefore, Hashem, your God, has commanded you to make the Shabbos day. (5:15) Many mefarshim raise the question: In what way is the day of Shabbos a remembrance of our leaving Mitzrayim? As we know, and as the Aseres Hadibros state explicitly in Parshas Yisro,[1] Shabbos commemorates the fact that Hashem created the world in six days and rested on the seventh. That is something which preceded all of history, including our redemption from Mitzrayim! Creation and Supervision The Meshech Chochmah explains. The full meaning of remembering that Hashem created the world is recognizing that He continues to control it and to supervise the actions of those that He created. This is the basis of Torah, reward and punishment, for which reason one who publicly and deliberately desecrates Shabbos is considered as one who has abandoned all of Torah.[2] However, all of this brings us to a simple question. Given that awareness of Hashem as Creator and Supervisor of the world is of relevance to every human being, why is it that only the Jewish people have been commanded to keep the Shabbos? Evidence and Experience The answer, says the Meshech Chochmah, is that since keeping Shabbos represents testimony that Hashem created the world, it was entrusted to the Bnei Yisrael; for they themselves are the testimony! All the miracles which accompanied the Jewish people upon their leaving Mitzrayim – from the ten plagues to the splitting of the Yam Suf to their miraculous sustenance in the wilderness with the manna and water from Miriam’s well, surrounded by the Clouds of Glory – all this provided graphic evidence of Hashem’s mastery of the world, which is in turn testimony to Him as its Creator. Therefore, our pasuk states that we should remember that we were slaves in Mitzrayim and the wondrous way in which Hashem brought us out; for the principles to which this bears testimony are the reason Hashem has commanded us – alone – to keep the Shabbos. Shabbos and Yom Tov With the above idea in mind, we will appreciate that although both Shabbos and Yom Tov are kept exclusively by the Jewish people, it is not for the same reason. The Yamim Tovim of the Torah commemorate things which relate exclusively to Jewish history, hence, they “naturally” belong exclusively with the Jewish people. Shabbos, on the other hand, relates in principle to all of mankind, yet was given only to the Jewish people. This is the intent of the statement of Chazal that Hashem said to Moshe, “I have a good gift in My treasure house, it is

called Shabbos.”[3] The selection of the Jewish people alone to be the recipients a gift which could have been given to other nations as well gives it the designation of a “good gift” to them. This basic difference between Shabbos and Yom Tov expresses itself in a number of ways, for since Yom Tov is based on the experiences and relationship between the Jewish people and Hashem, their mark can be found in those days in a way which is inappropriate for Shabbos. Thus, for example, the very designation of the seventh day of the week as Shabbos both precedes and exists independently of the Jewish people, while the designation of which day is Yom Tov, through determining which day the new month begins, is in the domain of the Beis Din. Likewise, although all melachah (creative labor) is forbidden on Shabbos, those melachos which are required for food – and by extension, to related needs – are permitted on Yom Tov. Since Yom Tov receives its sanctity from Yisrael who have themselves been sanctified by Hashem, their basic food requirements also supersede the sanctity of the day. This is not so with regards to Shabbos, which has been sanctified directly by Hashem. Non-Jews and Melachah With this in mind, the Meshech Chochmah presents a fascinating answer to a question that may be raised on a statement of Tosafos. The halachah states that if a Jew passes away on Shabbos, he cannot be buried on that day, even by a non-Jew, as this involves melachos which are forbidden on Shabbos. Tosafos[4] explain that even though, as rule, a non-Jew may perform melachah for a Jew if it is for purposes of a mitzvah, nevertheless, when it comes to the question of burial, we are sensitive to another concern – respect for the deceased, and it is degrading for someone to be buried through the violation of Shabbos, even if done by a non-Jew. Asks the Meshech Chochmah: If a person passes away on Yom Tov, the halachah states that he needs to be buried that day by a non-Jew.[5] Why, in that case, are we not concerned for the degradation that comes with being buried through the violation of Yom Tov, exactly as Tosafos told us we are concerned regarding Shabbos? The answer lies in the fact that the central idea of Shabbos, i.e. recognizing Hashem as Creator and Controller of the world, relates in principle to all nations of the world, as we have discussed. Therefore, even though it has been “gifted” to the Jewish people, and a non-Jew has no personal obligation whatsoever to refrain from melachah, it nevertheless remains a degradation for a person to be buried through melachah performed by anyone on that day, even a non-Jew. The ideas of the Yamim Tovim, on the other hand, have no relevance whatsoever for a non-Jew nation, even in principle. Accordingly, if a non-Jew performs melachah as part of the burial, there has been no infraction of Yom Tov on any level and hence, there is no element of degradation at all for the Jew over having been buried through melachah on Yom Tov. [1] Shemos 20:11. [2] Chulin 5a. [3] Beitzah 16a. [4] Bava Kama 80b s.v. omer. [5] Beitzah 6a.

from: Alan Fisher <afisherads@yahoo.com> date: Aug 15, 2024, 7:38 PM
 subject: **Potomac Torah Study Center:** Devrei Torah for Shabbat
 Vaetchanan 5784 Potomac Torah Study Center Vol. 11 #45, August 16-17, 2024; 12-13 Av 5784; Vaetchanan; Shabbat Nachamu Note: Tu B'Av is Monday, August 19 Devrei Torah are now Available for Download (normally by noon on Fridays) at www.PotomacTorah.org. Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah archives. Hamas continues to manipulate the media while pretending to negotiate with Israel. Hersh Polin Goldberg, cousin of very close friends of ours and a U.S. citizen, remains a captive. Concerns are increasing that fewer than half of the hostages may still be alive. We continue our prayers for the hostages and all our people stuck in Gaza. May Hashem enable us and our people in Israel to wipe out the evil of Hamas, protect us from violence by Hezbollah and other anti-Semites around the world, and restore peace for our people quickly and successfully.

After Moshe’s rebukes (Mussar) in Devarim and the tragic reminders of the Three Weeks, Shabbat Nachamu and Tu B’Av (next Monday) come as welcome relief. Moshe repeats the Ten Statements in Vaetchanan, with some changes in emphasis. For example, Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander observes that the statement about Shabbat in Shemot focuses on

remembering Shabbat to commemorate the creation of the world. In Devarim, the focus of Shabbat is to extend a day of rest every week to all humans and animals, to remember the Exodus. Here the focus is on relations between each of us and fellow living creatures (humans and animals), a focus that connects with the emphasis in Tanach on caring properly with others, especially those less fortunate than we are. Rabbi David Fohrman and his fellow scholars at alephbeta.org provide another example of how incidents in the lives of our ancestors frequently come back as mitzvot in the Torah. In chapter 7, Moshe reminds us that in Canaan, they will encounter seven larger and stronger nations (several of the same ones with whom Yaakov and his family interacted). The word the Torah uses for marriages, “l’hitchein,” means intermingling among people. The prohibition on intermarriage really means that B’Nai Yisrael are to keep separate from other nations. The danger of intermarriage is that the family from the non-Jewish spouse will influence the Jewish spouse and his or her relatives to adopt the foreign practices, something that opens a path to idolatry. This warning links back to Bereishis 34, when the son of the leader of Shechem kidnaps and rapes Yaakov’s daughter Dinah, then brothers Levi and Shimon deceive the men of Shechem (to have them all circumcise themselves) and murder them while they are in pain after the surgery. Shimon and Levi take property from the people of Shechem, and that property includes idols. This danger is why Moshe repeatedly commands the people to destroy all property of other nations. Foreign influences (idolatry) can affect the Jews through many paths as long as the people live among other nations – and marriage is only the most obvious danger. While Vaetchanan and Tu B’Av celebrate marriage, it is only Jewish marriage, not intermarriage. Yaakov is furious with Shimon and Levi – and fears that the larger nations will attack his small family. Once Shimon and Levi destroy all the spoils that they took from Shechem, Hashem puts fear of B’Nai Yisrael in the hearts of the Canaanite nations, and this fear protects Yaakov and his family. In ancient times, political marriage and intermingling of the tribes was a way to increase the strength of relatively small nations. Moshe warns B’Nai Yisrael that being a small nation is not a reason to be afraid – when Jews follow the mitzvot, God protects the Jews. Moshe warns the people that Hashem’s protection is much stronger than any protection that they could gain from intermarriage with non-Jews. This policy, which Jews have largely followed for more than 3000 years, is a key factor in the survival of Israel and Jews for so many years. Moshe’s warning and the lesson from Hashem’s protection remain relevant today. Despite overwhelming odds, Israel defeated the combined Arab nations in 1948, 1956, 1967, and 1973. The inability of a hundred million Arabs to defeat Israel in these wars gave a sense of superiority to Israel – a reputation that has benefitted the country during most of the past decades. The vicious attack of Hamas on October 7 damaged Israel’s reputation for top security and ability to learn in advance and counter what our enemies plan. Since October 7, we have seen an explosion of anti-Semitism in most parts of the world. Our enemies – including most of the press in the United States – claim that Israel has stolen land from the “Palestinians” and are aggressors in Gaza and other non-Jewish neighboring countries. Woke elements in the United States have been teaching young people that Israel is an evil country trying to take over land that does not belong to us. The situation on many college campuses and in graduate schools is that Jewish students do not feel safe. Indeed, a court earlier this week ruled that UCLA has failed to protect its Jewish students and must implement policies and protections to ensure the safety of Jews on campus. Similar lawsuits are in litigation against several other universities. The situation for Jews at universities is so severe that I am reprinting an extremely important essay by Rabbi YY Jacobson, “The Arab-Israeli Conflict Is Not Territorial: Why Are We Afraid to Speak Truth?” This essay, which includes an outstanding article on Israel’s right to the land by Harvard Professor Emerita Ruth Wisse, was in the Internet Parsha Sheet (parsha.net) last week for Devarim. Professor Wisse has another article on the current situation in the Wall St. Journal on August 15, 2024 (editorial section), and everyone should read that piece as well. Rabbi Jacobson and Professor Wisse explain why Israel has a

legal claim to the land of Israel and why the term “Palestinian people” only came into use after Israel won the Six Day War in 1967. The people who claim to have a claim to our land as “Palestinians” never made that claim while Jordan controlled much of Israel. Jewish claims go back approximately 3500 years. Moshe’s warnings to our people are as important today as they were when Yehoshua led our ancestors into the land that Hashem had promised to our Avot. We should follow Moshe’s words, increase our dedication to the mitzvot, and trust in Hashem’s protection. With Hashem’s help, and with Jews doing our part, we can keep Israel secure and work for a better future. We must ensure that our children and grandchildren learn and believe this message. Shabbat Shalom, Hannah and Alan

Peninim Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

Parashas Va’eschanan

ששת ימים תעבד ועשית כל מלאכתך ויום השביעי שבת ל’ אליקך

Six days shall you labor and accomplish all your work. But the seventh day is Shabbos to Hashem, your G-d. (5:13,14)

The group of friends with whom one surrounds himself speaks volumes about his true character. Such friends often share similar values, interests and beliefs. By observing the dynamics in these relationships, we are able to gain insight into a person’s priorities and attitudes. Furthermore, friends significantly influence a person’s priorities and actions. This impact can be either positive or negative. The litmus test of a person’s true identity may be determined by his circle of friends. With this idea in mind, the Bais Av (Horav Elyakim Schlesinger) explains the verse we recite in the Friday night zemirots, K’challah bein reiousehah meshubatzah, “Like a bride bedecked among her companions.” All brides appear to be the same. They are all bedecked in similar garb, white gown, veil, tiara. How does one determine if the kallah, bride, is a common girl of average background, means and outlook, or if she is a remarkable young woman whose values and demeanor are extraordinary, whose yiraas Shomayim, fear of Heaven, is special? Look at her friends. Observe the other young women in her inner circle, and you will have an idea concerning the kallah’s true character. The proof is in the friends.

A similar idea applies to the observance of Shabbos Kodesh. Everyone is dressed in his Shabbos finery. Whether the suit is black, blue or none at all, everyone appears different on Shabbos. How does one determine the true character of one’s beliefs concerning Shabbos? How does one know if the superficial Shabbos observance one sees is authentic, if his religious demeanor is genuine, or a cover that camouflages his true character? Look at his demeanor during the weekdays preceding and following Shabbos. Are his weekday activities both mundane and religious, consistent with his Shabbos portrayal? Is he sincere? Genuine individuals typically exhibit congruence between their weekday actions, values and beliefs and those of Shabbos. If one wants to determine authenticity – check the “before and after” to ascertain the true character of the “during.”

While I typically select a story that coincides with the dvar Torah, the following story which demonstrates both adherence to shemiras Shabbos and genuine commitment to mitzvos, was too good to pass up. The Rav of one of the shuls in Petach Tikvah, Horav Aharon Beifus, zl, was an outstanding talmid chacham, whose brilliance in Torah was matched by his gentile spirit and genuine love for all Jews – regardless of their background or level of religious observance. The Beifus’ had a home that manifest Torah and yiraah, fear of Hashem. The harmony that reigned was an example for others to emulate. Sadly, their home lacked the noise that young children growing up provide, since Hashem had not blessed them with their own biological progeny. The Rav’s many talmidim and friends served as his larger family.

The Beifus’ sincerity in serving Hashem had a positive effect on those around them. Their genuine desire to be close to Hashem served as an example for the most secular Israeli to emulate. Thus, when one of their neighbors, a liberal, non-practicing Israeli, decided to do some carpentry in

his apartment one Shabbos morning, it troubled Rav Beifus greatly. The sound of the drill was shattering the peaceful quiet that should prevail during Shabbos day.

The Rav was unable to tolerate the blatant chillul Shabbos, so he walked up four floors to the man’s apartment and knocked on the door. When the man answered the door, the Rav began with “Shabbat shalom.” He then continued in his signature sweet voice and respectfully asked if there was any way the man could refrain from publicly desecrating Shabbos, “People are going back and forth, and the sound of the drill on Shabbos disturbs its sanctity. It is offensive to anyone who is observant.” The sweet, sincere tone of the Rav impacted the man, and he agreed to put away his drill until after Shabbos. Indeed, the man was so impressed by Rav Beifus’ demeanor that he decided to go to shul the following Shabbos – and the Shabbos after that. This about-face continued progressively until the man and his family became fully observant – all because the Rav was sincere, genuine and respectful.

Now, for the rest of the story. Rav Beifus’ Rebbeztzin passed away several years before her

husband, leaving him to fend for himself. As difficult as it was at first, it became even more complex when the Rav became physically ill and also began to suffer from mild, cognitive impairment. In his last weeks on this world, his physical health deteriorated considerably, and his nephews took turns sitting by his bed as he came in and out of consciousness. The end was clearly nearing, as his breathing became more and more labored. Suddenly, completely out of the blue, the Rav struggled to sit up straight and declared, Ich hub gekoift kartlech far di proste concert, “I purchased tickets to the immodest concert.” As soon as the words left his mouth, he lay back down, closed his eyes, and returned his holy neshamah to its Source.

The nephews were clueless as to the meaning of their uncle’s parting words. They were certain it was significant, but, since people might not understand and attribute it to his declining health, they decided to remain mum about it. Somehow the story leaked out and spread quickly – everyone hypothesizing about the meaning of the Rav’s words.

One Rav with whom Rav Beifus had been close explained the meaning of his last words. Several years earlier, the city of Petach Tikvah was hosting a massive concert featuring a world-famous celebrity, whose crude stage antics bordered on the lewd. Obviously, he was catering to an audience that would appreciate his raunchy behavior. Unfortunately, when impurity invades an area, it impacts everyone – secular and observant. The thought that thousands would attend this public chillul Hashem, a venue which would remain with them, impairing their sense of decency, was too much for the Rav to tolerate. He immediately ran to the ticket office and used up every penny of his savings to purchase all the tickets to the show!

Shortly afterward, Rav Beifus visited the Steipler Gaon, zl, and confessed to (what he thought might have been) the “crime.” After all, he had purchased all the tickets to an event that breached every boundary of the laws of tznius, moral modesty. The Steipler listened and replied, “Those tickets are your entrance to Gan Eden!”

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Shiurim in Chumash & Navi by Menachem Leibtag

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 shma (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 you 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, Ya'akov, 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 Rabbenu 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'uvan, 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 35 (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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