

**Potomac Torah Study Center**

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Rosh Hodesh Elul is Sunday and Monday

**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.**

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

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**May Hashem protect Israel and Jews everywhere. May Hashem's protection shine on all of Israel, the IDF, and Jews throughout the world. May the remaining hostages soon come home, and may a new era bring security and rebuilding for both Israel and all others who genuinely seek peace.**

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Moshe opens our parsha asking the people to Re'eh – see, absorb, and understand what God offers to them. God presents us with a choice, a tremendous gift of a very special land that He watches over constantly (if we obey His mitzvot) or curses if we disobey. This choice is not new – we have seen this choice several times before, both in Sefer Devarim as well as in Shemot and Bemidbar.

One restriction is inherent in monotheism. Moshe tells the people that they may only make offerings (olot, or burnt offerings) to Hashem at the place that He selects. One name for Hashem is "Ha Makom" – the place. The God of the entire universe is beyond any single place. No single place or building can contain God. The only "place" that works for Hashem is a site without a place or time. The Torah does not identify where Hashem's special "place" will be – when the time comes, the people will search for the correct place, and God will endorse it. For now, however, The Torah restricts all korbanot (burnt offerings to Hashem) to a single place. The primary reason for this restriction is to guarantee that there be only one way to give offerings to Hashem – to prevent multiple interpretations of Hashem's laws.

As we have seen earlier, such as in Eikev, Moshe's words link back to Avraham. When Hashem tells Avraham to take his beloved, only son on a journey to a place that He would designate, and then to offer him as a burnt offering, Avraham ends up calling the place "Hashem yeira'eh" – God will see. Note that Moshe's opening, Reeh, is the same word as "yeira'eh," and the place that God brings him is the same location as the Akeidah. This place later becomes the site that King David identifies for the Temple that God permits his son Shlomo to build.

As Avraham and Yitzhak walk to a place that Hashem will designate to them, they both realize a conflict. God had promised Avraham many children and that they would become the founders of a special nation to show other nations how to follow Hashem's path. Now God tells Avraham to sacrifice Yitzhak as a burnt offering. Neither Avraham nor Yitzhak understands how God can or will keep his promise while sacrificing Yitzhak, but they continue with complete faith that Hashem will find a solution to keep His promise and His order for the korban. At the last second, Hashem delivers His solution. An angel orders Avraham not to kill his son, and a ram suddenly appears next to the men to become the korban.

Moshe usually operates with complete faith in Hashem, with one exception. After Miriam dies and the people have no water, God tells Moshe to take his staff and ask a rock to give the people water. Moshe instead insults the people and strikes the rock. Moshe does not perform a Kiddush Hashem by showing that a rock will obey God when asked to do so –

and if the rock obeys, then so should B'Nai Yisrael. For failing to teach this important lesson to the generation about to enter the land, God tells Moshe and Aharon that they will die in the desert and not lead the people into Eretz Yisrael. Miriam would always watch and know that whatever the challenge, God would find a way to make everything work out for B'Nai Yisrael. The first crisis after Miriam's death, Moshe does not follow Miriam's teaching, and the error proves fatal for Moshe and Aharon. (The last few paragraphs rely heavily on insights of Rabbi David Fohrman.)

Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander teaches us that the relationship between Hashem and B'Nai Yisrael can only survive if both are partners in writing the Torah. The part that Hashem dictates to Moshe goes through Sefer Bemidbar. Sefer Devarim is the "Mishneh Torah," which Moshe writes with Ruach HaKodesh" (God's spirit), then Hashem approves, and Moshe finalizes. The key is that questions of Halacha (Jewish law) require input from Jews and decisions based on the Torah and prior Halachic decisions. After the times of Moshe and Yehoshua, questions of Halacha go to the Elders, then prophets, then Men of the Great Assembly, and finally to the leading Rabbis (Sanhedrin) to evaluate and decide. This process continues and ensures that Jewish law contains input from both Hashem and the outstanding religious scholars of every time period.

Some of the laws in Sefer Devarim seem extreme when reading them out of context. One example is the punishment for a city where a majority of the residents follow idolatry (13:13-18). The punishment in such a case is to kill all the residents, burn the city, and not take any items that remain after the burning. While this punishment seems very extreme, there is no record of it ever having taken place. One reason is that the legal requirement for considering the city residents guilty could never be determined. For example, a deciding court would need to find a majority of the residents guilty of idolatry. Such a finding would require two Kosher witnesses investigating each adult and determining that a majority had engaged in idolatry. This requirement reminds us of Avraham and the punishment of Sodom and Amorah. If a city is so evil that most of its residents engage in idolatry, there could not be any Kosher witnesses – no frum person would live in such a town. How, then, could two Kosher witnesses testify that they had seen a majority of adults in the town engaging in idolatry? Several other conditions are also very restrictive (see Rabbi Brander's 5781 Devar Torah below).

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, z"l, discusses the reason for Maaser Sheni, the second tithe, brought to Jerusalem every first, second, fourth, and fifth year of every seven year cycle. Maaser Sheni must be turned into food and consumed in Jerusalem. The amount of food that this second tithe would purchase tended to be far greater than any family could consume. The result, according to Rambam, was that many families could only consume all the food by inviting many people to join them for a festive meal. The delight of engaging in a joyous meal is a terrific incentive to create and solidify relationships among the Jews. In many cases, the host family would give away much of the food to the poor, widows, orphans, and immigrants. The institution of Maaser Sheni therefore is a great mitzvah for creating good will and unity among B'Nai Yisrael.

Although we no longer have Maaser Sheni, our family is engaging in a similar institution next Shabbat (Shoftim). Our oldest grandson's Bar Mitzvah will be on Shabbat Shoftim at Ner Tamid Synagogue in Baltimore. Our family – grandparents on both sides and our son and his wife – are providing a catered Shabbat luncheon for the entire congregation as well as invited guests. This Shabbat luncheon is in the tradition of Maaser Sheni, although it is not part of a Torah mitzvah. Mazel-Tov to our grandson Shlomo Fisher, his parents Dr. Evan and Heather Fisher, Shlomo's brother Yosef Fisher, grandparents Chaim and Sandra Burstyn, grandparents Hannah and Alan Fisher, and numerous other relatives and friends of the family.

Our beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, would have loved to join us for Shlomo's Bar Mitzvah. Rabbi Cahan taught Hannah and me for decades, inspired and started teaching our sons David and Evan, and attended (often officiating) at many of our life cycle events. We would not be here looking forward to Shlomo's Bar Mitzvah without his inspiration and love.

Shabbat Shalom and Hodesh Tov,

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](http://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.

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Please daven for a Refuah Shlema for Velvel David ben Sarah Rachel; Moshe Aaron ben Leah Beilah (badly wounded in battle in Gaza but slowly recovering), Daniel Yitzchak Meir HaLevy ben Ruth; Avram David ben Zeezl Esther, Avraham Dov ben Blimah; Ariah Ben Sarah, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Miriam Bat Leah; Yehudit Leah bas Hannah Feiga; Miriam bat Esha, Chana bat Sarah; Raizel bat Rut; Rena bat Ilsa, Riva Golda bat Leah, 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 and Hodesh Tov,

Hannah & Alan

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### **Mishneh Torah: The Role of Humankind in the Writings of God**

By Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander \* © 5782 (2022)  
President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone \*\*

*Ian and Bernice Charif of Sydney, Australia have dedicated the Devrei Torah from Ohr Torah Stone this week in honour of their granddaughter Kira Elison's 11th birthday .*

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

In Parshat Re'eh, we find ourselves moving towards the middle of the Book of Devarim, the fifth and final Book of the Torah. The Rabbis refer to the Book of Devarim as "Mishneh Torah." ]Midrash Sifri[

Nachmanides explains the reason why it's called Mishneh Torah: it is a review of basic precepts necessary for the Jewish People to remember before they enter the Land of Israel and create a location, Eretz Yisrael, which is really the anchor of Jewish society of Torah and mitzvot.

And therefore Nachmanides says it's called Mishneh Torah because Devarim consists of the basic ideals that are necessary when the Jewish People enter the Land of Israel. ]Introduction to Deuteronomy[.

The challenge with this wondrous idea of Nachmanides is it does not bear itself out in the list of commandments that are mentioned for the first time in the Book of Devarim. So many of them have nothing to do with the Jewish People entering the Land of Israel: the commandment to love God, the institution of marriage, to study Torah, to teach it, to recite the Shema, the responsibility of the Grace after Meals.

In our parsha, the institution of Kashrut, the idea of Shatnez, the prohibition of wearing a garment with wool and linen, the responsibility of giving charity or returning lost property. None of those things has anything to do with entering the Land of Israel.

And therefore the Talmud ]Bava Batra 88b, Megillah 31b and Tosfot's comments there )s.v. "Moshe"(, the Kabbalists ]Zohar, vol. 3 )Deuteronomy(, Parshat Va'etchanan[, the Ohr HaChaim )Rav Chaim ibn Attar( )Commentary to Deuteronomy 1:1[, the Gaon of Vilna ]cited by Ohel Ya'akov, Deuteronomy, page 20[, the Maharal ]Tiferet Yisrael ch. 43[ and so many others give a different explanation for why this final book of the Torah is called Mishneh Torah.

If the relationship between God and the Jewish People is to be guaranteed, there must be two partners in the scribing of the Torah.

The first four books of the Torah is the first paradigm of "God-speak." They are written in the third person, completely articulated by God and scribed by Moshe.

The fifth book, the final book, is "Mishneh Torah." It is literally a second Torah, a different paradigm of God-speak, in which Moshe scribes the text, God approves the text, Moshe scribes it with Ruach HaKodesh, God approves it and then Moshe finalizes the text.

The idea is that if we're going to have a relationship between God and the Jewish People, it is not just God that has to convene and bring and share with us the Torah.

There needs to be a partnership with the Jewish People in its creation, completely approved by God.

These are the five books of the Torah. They are divine books, but we need to see, as we see in Devarim, a form of contribution by Moshe on behalf of the Jewish People, a book that is not written in the third person, but in the second person.

This is an important message for each and every one of us.

If Torah is going to exist forever, if we're going to continue to guarantee its eternity, both partners have to play a role. We need to play a role. We need to understand how to bring Torah into the modern era.

Not that we should water down Torah, not that we should compromise Torah. But what makes Torah "*ki heim chayeinu ve orech yameinu*," what makes Torah eternal, is its ability to deal with contemporary situations, contemporary realities.

And the reality of the "Mishneh Torah" celebrates the human role in the scribing of the Torah. The second paradigm of God-speak.

The responsibility for each and every one of us, as we read through Sefer Devarim, is to remember that God is looking for our voice – based on the principles that God has established – to guarantee His future role in society, and to guarantee our participation in making this a more perfect society.

\* 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](mailto:ohrtorahstone@otsny.org) or 212-935-8672. Donations to 49 West 45<sup>th</sup> Street #701, New York, NY 10036.

\*\* Rabbi Brander is away, so I am using an earlier Dvar Torah: <https://ots.org.il/parsha-and-purpose-reeh-5782/> I thank Yishai Hughes, Director of Special Projects for the President and Rosh HaYeshiva, for sending this Dvar Torah to share with our readers.

## When the Torah Challenges our Engagement with God

By Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander \* © 5781 (2021)

President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone \*\*

Parshat Re'eh (Deuteronomy 11:26-16:17)

*Ian and Bernice Charif of Sydney, Australia have dedicated the Devrei Torah from Ohr Torah Stone this week in honour of their granddaughter Kira Elison's 11th birthday .*

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

Our sense of morality feels violated when we see or hear about the murder of innocents, particularly children. So what are we to do when the Torah itself, to which we turn for moral guidance, calls for that very action?

While it is tempting to gloss over these difficult encounters, and some will question why I bring this up in this parsha talk, it's important to address them head on, driven by a deep love of God and the belief in the eternal truth of the Torah.

In this week's parsha, Re'eh, we find an example of this. In Chapter 13 of the Book of Devarim, we read of the punishment for a city in which idolatry takes place. If it is established that the majority of the town's residents have rebelled against God by worshipping idols, the Torah requires that the town's population be executed, that their possessions be destroyed and that the town be burned to the ground, to remain in an eternal state of ruin, never to be rebuilt, as a reminder to the Jewish people.

We can understand why the Torah is so adamant about deterring idolatry, but in any Jewish town, there will be innocents, including spouses and children, who will be condemned to death for something they did not do. How can this be? How can the Torah of compassion and righteousness require such a terrible injustice?

Maimonides, the Rambam, based on sources from the Talmud, stresses the very limited scope in which these laws could be implemented. )Rambam [Maimonides], *Hilchot Avodah Zara / Laws of Idolatry* Chapter 4( In fact, the requirements that must be met in order for the High court to carry out the punishment are so specific that in reality, it never actually happened.

1. First, all of the negative influencers involved in perpetrating this crime must be all residents of the city, and from the same tribe, not other Jewish tribes.
2. The courts need to ascertain that the majority of the residents have been involved in idol worship. Each person in the city is judged as an individual, and there must be two kosher witnesses that testify that they witnessed each individual worship idols until you get to a majority who have worshiped foreign gods.
3. If anything less than the majority of the population has been found to have transgressed this crime, the city is not classified as an idolatrous town.
4. Even if it has been established that a majority of the town's population is guilty, a team of positive influencers are to be brought in to see if they can change the attitude of the town to try to get the residents to change their behavior. If that effort succeeds, all is forgiven.

Essentially the focus of this Torah section is on the seriousness of the event – rebellion against God – more than any possible consequence in this world. It is like the verse an “eye for an eye” )Exodus 21:24(, where such a consequence for this heinous crime of maiming someone is not possible, but the Torah refuses to limit its description to the consequence of paying different forms of financial compensation for a bodily injury. Nevertheless, the fact remains that according to Maimonides, the law could have theoretically been applied, allowing for the killing of innocent children.

One of Maimonides' contemporaries, Rav Meir HaLevi Abulafia, a highly regarded Spanish halakhic decisor and author of the sefer, *Yad Ramah*, challenges Maimonides and asks why innocents should face collective punishment. Citing a verse from the Book of Job 34:10, Rav Abulafia writes: "God forbid that He would demand such a wicked act." According to Rav Abulafia, who also has sources from within the Talmudic tradition upon which to rely, the Torah never meant to include innocents among those to be punished.

Rav Abulafia knew in the Middle Ages that with no Sanhedrin, this commandment was no longer operative and perhaps could never be implemented. Nevertheless, he debated it as a reminder that Torah scholars must challenge even halakhic giants such as Maimonides in order to ensure that interpretations of the Torah are consistent with the moral norms and values of the Torah.

And this is a call to each and every one of us that we, too, must engage with our understanding of Torah to make sure our understanding is consistent with certain deep values of human life.

While reason does not lay down the path along which the person of faith walk, when we feel that an ideal of Torah will affect our engagement with God, then we need to explore our tradition/mesorah carefully, speak to rabbis, Talmidei and talmidot chachamim/Torah scholars, and learn an approach within our tradition that speaks to us – for, ultimately:

*The ways of the Torah are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peaceful.* )Proverbs 3:17(

Shabbat Shalom

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\*\* Rabbi Brander is away, so OTS sent this earlier Dvar Torah from Rabbi Brander. Some Hebrew text omitted because of problems accurately converting Hebrew across different word processing programs.

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## Reeh: There Must Be an Anochi in Here Somewhere!

By Rabbi Label Lam © 2013 (5773)

*See I place before you today blessing and curse. The blessing if you listen to the commandments of HASHEM your G-d that I command you today, and the curse if you do not listen to the commandments of HASHEM your G-d but you turn away from the path that I command you today to go after other gods that you did not know.* )Devarim 11:26-2(

Here are the keys to the game of life in these first few words! "See!" We are told to see! Ok! See what? See that "I" – Anochi/HASHEM – am placing before you a world of choices/challenges. HASHEM is placing in the present tense. It's not a "still life" picture but an active river of real life and specially designed tests flowing your way! If we can see the Anochi – HASHEM behind and within every scene, then we can begin to see what can be seen.

Here's a scenario I heard about from a very clever individual. Imagine that you are sitting in a reception area in a fancy office on the 77th floor of the Empire State Building. Suddenly the elevator opens and a gentleman with a disheveled appearance walks over to the window, which he throws wide open. He backs up like he's readying himself to take a running leap and before he does so you are able to halt him temporarily.

You ask him, "Why are you about to do such a crazy and foolish thing?" He shows you a piece of paper with a list of 49 items that he begins to recite aloud; 1( Lost my job 2( Wife left me 3( Broke 4( Hungry 5( Dog died 6( Chronic incurable diseases 7( Homeless etc. That's just the beginning of the list, and any single item would be enough to drive the average

man over the top. He's got the worst situation you ever heard of or imagined. You're ready to agree with his morbid conclusion. What can you say to him?

Of course, you acknowledge his pain, but you might challenge him with the following question. What if on top of all the 49 things there was also a 50th, that you were also completely blind? Today you tapped your way over, pressed the 77th floor button, before tapping your way to the window and as you are about to leap, lo and behold the lights go on and you are granted vision. You can see! Would you choose to jump at that moment?

For sure the fellow will say, "NO!" "Why not!?" You would have to challenge him. He would probably answer, "I'd go around and check it all out!" So then you tell him, "You aren't blind! You can see! Use those eyes to find goodness!"

A family had twin boys whose only resemblance to each other was their looks. They were opposite in every other way. One was an eternal optimist, and the other boy was a gloom pessimist. Just to see what would happen, on the boys' birthday, their father packed the pessimist's room with lots of games and gadgets. The optimist's room, he loaded with horse dung.

That night the father passed by the pessimist's room and found him sitting amid his new gifts with a sorrow face. "Why are you sad?" the father asked. "Because my friends will be jealous and I'll have to read all these instructions before I can do anything with this stuff. I'll constantly need batteries, and my toys will eventually get broken," answered the pessimist.

Passing the optimist twin's room, the father found him dancing for joy in the heaps of manure. "What are you so happy about?" he asked. To which his optimist replied, "There must be a pony in here somewhere! Thanks for the gift Father!"

There must be an Anochi in here somewhere!

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5773-reeh/>

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### **Re'eh: Every Person Doing What is Right in His Eyes**

by Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2012

As Moshe prepares the Children of Israel to enter into the Land, he exhorts them not just to live up to individual responsibilities, but to live up to their communal ones, first and foremost. They are going to enter a new land, and they must turn it into a country. They must build the institutions, the systems, and the infrastructure to make it a well-functioning society that embodies the values of the Torah.

Step number one is ridding the land of idolatry and its artifacts, and establishing God and God's Temple as the country's focal points. There is to be just one Temple, a unified system of worship where all gather to worship. Towards the end of the parasha, we have the shift from the religious institutions to those of morality and justice. The laws of tithes and Shmita reveal that the concern for the poor is not just something to be addressed by individual acts of charity but is at the core of the structure of society.

What we have is a whole society built on the Torah. What we don't have is a focus on, or even a concern for, the individual and his or her personal religious experience. In fact, spiritual yearning could present a threat. When there was not yet a Temple, people would offer on their individual bamot, private altars. This allowed for a full subjective, personal act of worship. But it could lead to idolatry. They – the idolaters – worship *"on the high mountains and the hills and under every leafy tree"* (12:3). But you *"shall not do this to the Lord your God"* (12:4). A single God must be worshipped in a single place. On the one hand this is about numbers – multiple places lead to multiple gods. But it is also about what results from an excessive focus on one's personal religious experience. When you follow your own path, who knows where it can lead?

Chazal's phrase for this is *boneh bamah li'atzmo*, that a person will go off and build a private altar for himself (Berakhot 14a, Chagigah 26a). Now, interestingly, this phrase is not always disapproving in the Talmud. We find that if someone makes a vow and fulfills it – a personal, self-initiated religious act – it is praiseworthy and considered as if he has built an altar and offered a sacrifice on it (Nedarim 22a). This is exactly the tension – the desire to build a bamah is to give expression to one's own personal yearning. This yearning might lead to idolatry, but it might lead to the fullness of the religious experience.

This concern applies to the moral realm as well. The Torah tells us that during the period prior to the building of the Temple, and, more to the point, prior to the creating of a structured society, it was *ish kol ha'yashar be'einav*, each person doing what is right in his or her own eyes (12:8). Before the societal institutions were established, it was the Wild West. It is thus that after Moshe lays out the basis for such a society, he urges the people to do "*what is good and right, ha'tov vi'ha'yashar, in the eyes of the Lord your God*" (12:28). To do what is yasher in God's eyes, and not what is yasher in each person's eyes, can only be achieved at the collective level once the societal structures in place.

But just as there can be religious yearning, there can also be moral yearning. It is all well and good that we live in a society of laws. But what about my own sense of morality? Should I just live in the letter of the law and no more? Just as with the religious yearning, this yearning can be very good, but it can also be dangerous. What if your sense of what is right and good is at odds with God's? And yet, if channelled correctly, this yearning can also lead to a more fully moral life. For it is exactly from the verse of doing what is yasher and good in the eyes of God that the Rabbis derive that we must strive to live *lifnim mi'shurat ha'din*, not just according to the letter of the law, but its spirit. If the yearning can be faithful to what is yasher in God's eyes, then it will lead us to the most profound morality, not just of following laws, but of also being true to their values.

The tensions between societal structures and individual expression is a recurring theme both in the period of the judges and in the period of the Davidic dynasty. Before a kingship, was established, the institutions that ensure justice and morality were not fully in force. We thus hear time and again that at this time, "*there was no king in Israel, ish ha'yashar be'einav ya'aseh, each person did what was right in his own eyes.*" (Judges 17:6, 21:25). It was the time of villains, and also of heroes, it was the time of Gilad, of Samson, and of Devorah. It was a time of rugged individualism. It was a time when particular people could rise to prominence, when John Wayne could ride into town and clean up all the mess. But the society as a whole suffered. Everyone did what was right in his eyes. Sometimes what was right in his eyes was genuinely right, but too often it was what was wrong.

With kingship came a just society; with a centralized society, there was law and order. The greater good was served, albeit with some sacrifice of, and potential accomplishments of, the individual. There were no more John Waynes, but everyone as a whole was better off.

There was now also a centralized Temple, which likewise benefitted society as a whole, doing much to limit the pervasive idolatry. Yet this collective worship meant that people's personal religious yearnings were not given full expression. Thus, we find throughout the period of the Davidic dynasty, that the enduring problem was that of bamot, "*only the altars did not taken away, the people still sacrificed and burned incense on the altars*" (Kings II, 12:4, 14:4, 15:4). The mandate of our parasha was achieved – we had a society with central government, with just laws, with a single Temple – and yet, the individual's yearnings – for moral greatness, for religious heights – were somehow lost in the process.

One lesson we can learn from this is that we tend at times – particularly as Americans – to overemphasize the concerns of the individual and his or her ambitions and yearnings. Parashat Re'eh teaches that the first concern must be the collective, has to be creating a society that asks individuals to make certain sacrifices so that all of society can benefit. But the other message is that once we have those structures in place, we cannot forget the individual. There are times when it is a good thing to build a bamah – if it reinforces rather than undermines our worship of God. There are times when it is right to follow what is right in your eyes – as long as it is also right in God's eyes.

We have created a wonderful system, the system of halakha. This serves to structure our lives. It is the replacement of the structuring of society that was to take place in the Land of Israel. This is our structure for galut. But we have privatized

our religion, and are no longer concerned with the larger structuring of society. If we are to take this parasha seriously, however, we will work to change that, we will work to shape society and its institutions according to the values of the Torah, the values of justice and of righteousness.

And if we listen closely to the inherent tensions in the parasha, we will also not allow halakha to do all of our work for ourselves. We so often think that if we are living a halakhic life, then that is the sum total of our obligation. But what about religious yearnings and a life of the spirit, what about moral yearnings and a life according to the values, not just the laws of the Torah? We must find ways to give legitimate expression to these as well.

To do this, to create a just, God-centered, society, that at the same time gives room for the individual and his or her deepest moral and religious yearnings, is truly what it means to do what is right in the eyes of God.

Shabbat shalom!

From my archives.

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### **Rich or Poor – Thoughts for Parashat Re'eh**

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel \*

A member of our congregation had been a very wealthy man. He was kind, happy and charitable. His philanthropy reached many organizations, and he was often honored at dinners and other communal events.

But then his business turned sour. The more he poured money into his company and investments, the more he lost. Within a short time, he was no longer a rich man but just managed to continue at a modest standard of living. He could not be a big donor to the organizations and charities that he had supported for so many years.

He grew sullen and embittered. He told me: *"When I was rich, everyone loved me, honored me, smiled at me. Once I lost my money, they all forgot about me and looked for other philanthropists who could contribute. The only place where I continue to feel the same respect now as before is here at our synagogue."*

This man passed away many years ago but his words to me continue to resonate. His tribute to our congregation was not merely an affirmation of the fine character of our community, but was a lesson about the nature of philanthropy and life. People should be valued for who they are, not merely for what they can donate.

The Shabbat morning prayers praise God Who delivers *"the poor (ani) and needy (evyon) from one who would rob him."* The ani is one who has been poor all along. The evyon is one who was once rich but has lost his wealth. Since both the ani and the evyon are poor, why would God have to deliver them from those who would rob them? There would be little point for anyone to want to rob poor people who do not have much to rob.

**The passage is not speaking about robbing their money. It is about robbing their dignity. When they are ignored or disdained because of their poverty, they are being deprived of their honor and self-respect. We pray that God will look out for the honor of the ani and evyon because people often ignore or undervalue them. The message is: we too must be concerned for their dignity. [emphasis added]**

Jewish law and ethics stress the importance of charitable giving. Concern for the poor is highlighted in this week's Torah reading. *"There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be open-handed toward your brothers and toward the poor and needy in your land"* (Devarim 15:11). Maimonides codified levels of charitable giving, with the highest being the providing employment to the needy so they will be able to be self-sufficient. Just below that level are those who give in ways that cause no embarrassment to the recipients (Rambam, Hilkhot Mattenot Ani'im 10:7-14).

Our tradition highlights the importance of charitable giving...and charitable behavior. Offering financial support is a great mitzvah. Providing moral support is equally important. Valuing people for who they are — not for what they can donate — is a lesson for all to learn.

\* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, and rabbi emeritus of the historic Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue of New York City.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/node/3370>

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## Loving Yourself

Guest blog by Lily Chapnik (April 2016) \*

[Note: This account is a single author's experience of adopting the Jewish traditional practice of tzniut, or "modesty". She does not seek to speak for anybody else's experience with this aspect of Judaism. ]

By the time I finally bought my first bikini, I was sixteen years old. As a chubby kid who had grown into a young adult with a curvy figure, I had never felt until that time that my body deserved to be seen. I grew into a tendency to hide myself behind baggy jeans and shapeless one-piece bathing suits, until my body grew into something that I thought that society would approve of. Once it did, I felt proud to parade it around in all of its glory. After all, I had made it. I was part of the club.

A year ago, when I began to live my life in a manner which more closely followed Jewish religious observance, I immediately tweaked my dress to appear more modest. I began to scan the aisles no longer for short-shorts and miniskirts, but for knee-length black skirts and long shirts with a high neckline. Immediately, it became apparent that my feelings about the dress code were mixed. On one hand, I personally loved the way my body felt in the clothing, the way in which the clothes that I chose covered me while simultaneously flattering my figure. I also appreciated the manner in which the dress code acted as a social signifier, sending a message about my religious affiliation to other religious Jews and to society at large (especially as women traditionally do not wear kippot, the head covering which serves as the ubiquitous signifier of Jewishness amongst men).

However, there was one main challenge which nagged at me whenever I stepped out in my new manner of dress. I wish I could say that this issue was based on some lofty feminist goal which sought to challenge the innate patriarchal system inherent in Jewish standards of modesty. I wish that it bothered me more that women are perceived to have a responsibility to cover themselves up for the sake of preventing men from exciting their yetzer hara (sexual inclination). I wish I felt more guilty that I was implicit in the victim-blaming which is rampant in religious circles, by implying that I was somehow more 'holy' or 'worthy' than girls who choose to wear less.

No. I am embarrassed to say it, but my biggest issue was that I missed the gaze of men. It appears as though however much you might feel good about yourself in a knee-length skirt, no matter how much it may enrich your neshama (soul), you attract less car horns and up-and-down stares on the street. In these first few months of being religious, I felt my self-esteem plummet. In the absence of the same degree of external validation and day-to-day objectification which I had enjoyed since I began to show myself off, I was at a loss of how to love myself. I was convinced that my days of being desirable were over, and I began to make half-sincere jokes about being 'past my prime.'

My confusion climaxed one day when I burst into tears and confided in a colleague with training in mental health. He suggested that I write a letter to myself detailing the issues I was undergoing. I sat down, dried my tears, and entitled the letter: "Dear Thirteen Year-Old Me..." I wrote about how since I was that age, I hadn't felt so uncomfortable in my own body, and how I wished to regain the sense of self which I seemed to have lost.

It was at that moment that I realized that for the last seven years, I had let the patriarchy define my very self-worth. Instead of valuing myself for my wit, my intelligence, and my charm, I had let the winks and stares of random men boost my spirits. I realized that far from being an obstacle to self-love and finding validation, modest dress posed itself as an invaluable gift. Instead of relying on the lust of strangers to define myself as a desirable person worthy of love and attention, I had the power to attract people through whatever means I chose to do so. Far from causing me to lose control of my sexual power, my choice to dress modestly gave me more autonomy than ever before.

Although Jewish modest clothing norms are indeed based on a patriarchal system, many modern fashion standards are as well, because they are designed to excite the attention of the opposite sex, and thus deem its wearers worthy of sexual attention. This is why I have decided to continue following the norms associated with modest dress – because I now know that I am worthy of that attention without the 'help' of eye-catching clothing, and I shall receive it, with the help of G-d, from the right person whenever he may come into my life. I will receive this love and attention, and indeed I deserve it, because I believe that I am intelligent, funny, insightful, patient, caring, compassionate, and loving.

Oh yes, I mustn't forget...and beautiful.

\* Originally published in *The Torch*. Republished on [jewishideas.org](http://jewishideas.org) in 2016 with permission by the author.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/blog/guest-blog-modesty-feminist-choice-frum-girl%20%99s-guide-loving-yourself>

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## **Re'eh -- Miraculously Unbelievable**

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine \* © 2014

Let's say a miracle man would arrive in town. The locals would be duly impressed by his talents and expertise. But what if he started sharing a message which differed from Torah and mitzvos? I contend that the Jews would opt out. Do you know

why? Because miraculously speaking we are unbelievers.

The Torah (Devorim 13:2-5) describes a case where a "holy man" might appear and perform signs and wonders to buttress his vision to abandon Torah and belief in Hashem. The Torah warns us not to trust his miracles. We are told that Hashem might allow someone to do wonders through a variety of occult or spiritual forces, "to test you, to see if you really want Hashem as your G-d," or will you quickly excuse yourself from Him if you perceive the opportunity.

Interestingly, the Rambam (Yesodey HaTorah 8) writes that Jewish people do not believe in Judaism because of the miracles that Moshe performed. "The miracles that Moshe performed were done not for purposes of trust or faith but because of their functionality." The people needed food, so Manna was provided. The people needed to escape, so he split the sea. The source of our belief in Moshe and in the Torah he instructed us is that we were present as a people at the great revelation at Sinai when we heard Hashem speak to Moshe in our presence. We then witnessed how Moshe repeated the mitzvos to us. Our faith in Moshe's Torah is based on the truthfulness of instruction. But miracles in Judaism are not facilitators of faith.

Nevertheless, the human being craves the miraculous. We continue to describe the rags to riches dream as someone who wins the lottery, even though we know that 99% of the people who go from rags to riches and stay there for any significant period of time do not do so as a result of winning the lottery. A far more accurate picture of success is one who perseveres day in and day out until he is blessed with a few successful opportunities. But advocating perseverance and

trustworthiness, as Judaism does (Talmud, Niddah 70b), doesn't have the same flair as dreaming of a miraculous win of the lottery.

Sometimes miraculous thinking even makes its way foolishly into our daily decision making. I recall an instance where a stockbroker intern was instructed to buy shares for a customer, and accidentally mistook GE for GM, and bought the wrong stock. One would expect that he would get at least a warning for his grievous mistake. But when the stock market gyrations made his decision the better "gamble" he was applauded for his "magic fingers." Somehow, the miraculous is exotic and exciting, even if the miracle worker is actually displaying feeble judgment or skill.

This is not to say that Jews don't believe in miracles. We do. But as the Rambam describes it, we believe in functional miracles, not miracles to show us how to lead our lives. When we need G-d's help (which is all the time) we know that He cares about us, and salvation- both hidden and miraculous – come from Him.

Perhaps one reason that Jews are so skeptical about proving things from miracles is because we recognize that we ourselves are a miracle. It is said that when one Emperor asked his philosophers for a miracle that he could see, they replied, "The Jews, your majesty, the Jews." Torah and the Jewish people may not appear to be the exotic miracle that some people think of when they talk of wondrous miracles. But Torah is the permanence of a message that can carry the human being through all life cycles and through all environments both good and bad.

Perhaps, as is the case with honor, those who pursue it will find it elusive. One who strives for the miraculous will find values that are remarkably short lived. But those who say, "Miracles are functional. We get them when we need them, but our faith is not based on them," are granted miracles with such frequency that they themselves become synonymous with the imagery of miracles and with the Hand of the Divine. It is that miraculous Hand that will guide the destiny of mankind and of each individual until the end of time.

With best wishes for a wonderful Shabbos.

\* Rabbi Mordechai Rhine is a certified mediator and coach with Rabbinic experience of more than 20 years. Based in Maryland, he provides services internationally via Zoom. He is the Director of TEACH613: Building Torah Communities, One family at a Time, and the founder of CARE Mediation, focused on Marriage/ Shalom Bayis and personal coaching. To reach Rabbi Rhine, his websites are [www.care-mediation.com](http://www.care-mediation.com) and [www.teach613.org](http://www.teach613.org); his email is [RMRhine@gmail.com](mailto:RMRhine@gmail.com). For information or to join any Torah613 classes, contact Rabbi Rhine.

Rabbi Rhine is on vacation, so I am reprinting a Dvar Torah from his archives: <http://www.teach613.org/parshas-reeh-miraculously-unbelievable/>

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### Re'ey – The Secret of the Eternal Jew

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer \* © 2021

At the end of this week's parsha, Moshe discusses the laws of the Pilgrimage Festivals, Pesach, Shavuos and Succos. He concludes his teaching of Shavuos with an unexpected verse: *"And you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and you shall safeguard and do these statutes."* (Devarim 16:12) Shavuos is the holiday celebrating the receiving of the Torah. Why does Moshe leave out any reference to our acceptance of the Torah, and instead enjoin us to remember the prior event of the Exodus?

The Ramban (ibid.) explains that this closing statement was not intended as an explanation of the holiday. Rather, Moshe is explaining to us why we should take these statutes to heart. Moshe is telling us to remember that we have a national

history. We used to be slaves. We are only where we are today because G-d freed us from Egyptian bondage. Therefore, we should keep these statutes that the Master who redeemed us from the house of slavery has commanded us.

As with all of Torah, Moshe's directive here is intended for all generations, and not only for those who were preparing to enter the land of Israel. As such, Moshe's enjoinder seems to be rather difficult to understand. If someone is struggling with celebrating the holidays in today's world, almost three and a half millennia after the Exodus, does Moshe truly expect that ancient history should change our approach to the holidays? We could understand that some recognition of our national history and heritage is appropriate and that it is important to remember who we are and where we came from. However, Moshe is asking much more of us here. He is asking us to "safeguard and do these statutes" – to study them in detail and keep all aspects of the holiday in full measure. How can ancient history alone lead me to feel responsible for every command of the G-d who redeemed us?

The Sforno *ibid.*( gives an explanation that is even more difficult to understand. He explains that in the previous verse Moshe had instructed us in the mitzvah to bring joy to those in need and to share of our wealth so they too can enjoy the holiday. Since parting with our hard-earned money is a natural challenge of life, Moshe is giving us a tool to ease the challenge and enable us to properly share our wealth. We should remember how we were once slaves and did not have any money of our own. We should therefore willingly share some of our wealth with those who need it: to find favor before G-d, Who took us out of Egypt and gave us wealth and property. The Sforno is saying that we are commanded to feel that ancient history so keenly, so as to feel indebted to G-d for our current wealth! So much changes with the course of time. So much has happened since the Exodus. Are we to emotionally connect our current situation to the Exodus?

Perhaps this Ramba'n and Sforno are providing us with part of the answer to Mark Twain's famous question, "*All things are mortal but the Jew; all other forces pass, but he remains. What is the secret of his immortality?*" Perhaps part of our secret lies in our national identity. If we consider the bondage in Egypt, we begin to realize that our mortality should have been realized before we ever became a nation. We are the bearers of an ancient legacy of G-d's love for the world and of G-d's dreams for humanity. He took us out of a bitter slavery and led us to greatness, for He saw in us the ability to bring His world to its intended purpose. Our secret, since the birth of our nation, is that G-d is, was and will be with us.

It is this legacy which Moshe exhorts us to remember. We are a nation which has existed since our birth by nothing more than the grace of G-d. We had nothing and should never have even been recorded on the pages of history. Yet, we were born and thrived since our very inception, and we have continued to do so for all time. When we recall this, even today, we can realize how we truly owe everything to G-d.

\* Co-founder of the Rhode Island Torah Network in Providence, RI. Until recently, Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD., and associated with the Savannah Kollel.

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### **Re'eh: A Blessing and a Curse (11:26-29)**

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia \*

The theme of choosing between the blessing and the curse, death and life, is central in Sefer Devarim. Obviously, no one would choose a curse over a blessing or death over life. I would like to explain the choice offered in Sefer Devarim as an incentive to consider consequences responsibly. Humans are driven by emotions and rarely stop to think logically before reacting. When we offer a logical explanation to our actions, it is usually an afterthought, a process of justification. The Torah tells us to see beyond the moment and consider the consequences. Stop and think, we are told. If you act this way now, what will happen next? Where will you be a week, a month, or a year from now? The message of the Torah should be read thus: You probably want a good life, a life full of blessings, so take a moment to stop and consider the consequences and lead yourself in the right direction.

**The Place 12:4-29(**

Sefer Devarim never mentions the location of the Temple or the Altar. The reference is always to the “Place which HaShem your God will choose to have His Name dwell there.” In several places there is an addendum: You will seek out that place and you shall go there. The yearly pilgrimage visits to the Temple were few, and they had to be meaningful. Instead of naming the place, we are told to search and find that place. This should be understood both literally and metaphorically.

### **Eating Meat )12:15-25(**

When I read the permission to eat meat which the Torah grants the Israelites, it reminds me of how my mother used to grant me permission against her will. She would say OK Haim, if this is what you want to do, go ahead and do it. I would try to get a clearer statement: but Ima, I really want to do it, do you agree? And she would say: Do. Whatever. You. Want. I should have known better back then that she was really opposed to my plans, but I only read the text and ignored the intonation. The Torah similarly tells us that we are allowed to eat meat, if we want to eat meat, if we truly desire meat, we can eat meat. The intention of the Torah is not necessarily to make us vegetarians, but rather to recommend a modest consumption of meat. We should definitely consider this admonition today in view of the toll our consumption habits take on the environment, including the effects of methane gas, deforestation, drought, and spread of diseases. Just like the warning on alcohol and tobacco, maybe the Torah would want us to add a label to meat products: consume responsibly.

### **Halakha of the week: Should I say Tahanun after Selihot?**

We will start saying Selihot this coming Tuesday ]Sephardic custom[. If you say Selihot immediately before Shaharit, saying the Viduy and the Tahanun after the Amidah should feel weird. If it doesn't, it is because we got so used to it that we barely think about the content and the message. The Viduy and the Tahanun, supplications, which follow it, are a call for confession and repentance. This is exactly what we did, tenfold, a short while before the prayers, during Selihot. We banged our chests and said the confession and read prayers and more prayers... How can we say moments later, with a straight face, that we have sinned. What did we do between the Selihot and the prayers? What crime have we committed that we have to confess and repent again?

It is difficult to bring about change at the community or the synagogue level, so at least as individuals, you can feel totally free to read a chapter of psalms or some inspirational text while Tahanun is recited.

Shabbat Shalom

\*\* Judaic faculty, Ramaz High School, New York; also Torah VeAhava. Until recently, Rabbi, Beth Sholom Sephardic Minyan )Potomac, MD(. Faculty member, AJRCA non-denominational rabbinical school(.

**Many 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.**

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### **Outreach for Jews in Tiny Jewish Communities**

In Appreciation to Rabbi Moshe Rube\*

Rabbi Moshe Rube left Birmingham, AL three years ago to become Senior Rabbi at Auckland Hebrew Congregation in New Zealand. The population of New Zealand is approximately 5.3 million. The estimated Jewish population in New Zealand is between 5000 and 10,000, or 0.1 to 0.2 percent of the population of the country. New Zealand consists of two islands )north and south(, so travel from one island to the other requires effort – I believe typically a plane ride. The Jewish community is largely in Wellington )north island( and Auckland )south island(. Auckland Hebrew Congregation )Orthodox( is the major congregation on the south island, and it has an associated Kosher deli/restaurant. )Chabad also

has a few locations in New Zealand. ( I believe that AHC serves the entire south island, although most of the Jews apparently live in Remuera, the section of Auckland where AHC is. AHC also has a husband and wife Shlachim. Rabbi Rube is moving to Australia, and AHC is welcoming Rabbi Netanel Kaszovitz and his family. Rabbi Kaszovitz will be the new Rabbi at AHC when they arrive from Nairobi, Kenya, where he has been a Rabbi until recently. Rabbi Kaszovitz, originally from Israel, received Semickha from Ohr Torah Stone.

For some insight to living in a country with a very small Jewish population, I am including a message to AHC congregants this week from Asher Summers-Gervai, who celebrates his Bar Mitzvah this Shabbat at AHC:

"Shalom, my name is Asher Summers-Gervai, and my Bar Mitzvah is on Saturday 23rd August. I am very excited to celebrate with the community and loved ones.

"Along with my Mum and Dad, Yvette and Michael, I have two older brothers, Jacob and Eli.

"I am fortunate to have experienced two Jewish communities and schools. I began my schooling journey at Kadimah preschool and primary, which my Mum attended as well, and then, at age five, I went to London and attended the largest Jewish Primary School in Europe, Sinai Jewish Primary School – it was an amazing experience to be surrounded by so many Jews.

"I returned back to New Zealand at age nine, where I realised how different it is to be Jewish in New Zealand. My diet turned mostly vegetarian pretty fast, as I keep Kosher and, as we know, kosher meat can be hard to come by. I now attend St Kent's School, where there are only a handful of Jews. I value my friends' curiosity and openness towards my religion and culture – they seem very excited about throwing candy at me on Saturday! I look forward to celebrating with both sets of Grandparents and am fortunate to have my Dad's side coming over from London. I can't wait for the celebrations to begin!"

\* Rabbi Moshe Rube is outgoing Senior Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation, Remuera (Auckland), New Zealand. Formerly Rabbi, Congregation Knesseth Israel (Birmingham, AL). Rabbi Rube will be moving to Australia to lead a new congregation. Once he settles in his new position, we hope to share new insights. I consider it useful to include some insights from congregations in communities with very small Jewish congregations.

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### Rav Kook Torah Re'eih (Psalm 132): Searching for the Temple Site

Surprisingly, the Torah never spells out exactly where the Temple is to be built. Rather we are instructed to build the Beit HaMikdash *"in the place that God will choose"*:

*"Only to the place that the Eternal your God will choose from all your tribes to set His Name — there you shall seek His dwelling place, and go there." (Deut. 12:5)*

Where is this place "that God will choose"? What does it mean that we should "seek out His dwelling place"?

#### The Hidden Location

The Sages explained that the Torah is commanding us, under the guidance of a prophet, to discover where the Beit HaMikdash should be built. King David undertook the search for this holy site with the help of the prophet Samuel.

Why didn't the Torah explicitly state the location where to build the Temple? Moses certainly knew that the Akeidah took place on Mount Moriah in Jerusalem, and he knew that Abraham had prophesied that this would be the site of the Beit HaMikdash. 1

Maimonides *(Guide to the Perplexed III: 45)* suggested that Moses wisely chose not to mention Jerusalem explicitly. Had he done so, the non-Jewish nations would have realized Jerusalem's paramount importance to the Jewish people and would have fought fiercely to prevent it from falling into Israel's hands.

Even worse, knowledge of Jerusalem's significance could have led to infighting among the tribes. Each tribe would want the Beit HaMikdash to be located in its territory. The result could have been an ugly conflict, similar to Korach's rebellion against Aaron's appointment to the position of High Priest. Maimonides reasoned that this is why the Torah commands that a king be appointed before building the Beit HaMikdash. This way the Temple's location would be determined by a strong central government, thus avoiding inter-tribal conflict and rivalry.

### **"Between His Shoulders"**

In any case, David did not know where the Beit HaMikdash was to be built. According to the Talmud *(Zevachim 54b)*, his initial choice fell on Ein Eitam, a spring located to the south of Jerusalem. Ein Eitam appeared to be an obvious choice since it is the highest point in the entire region. This corresponds to the Torah's description that

*"You shall rise and ascend to the place that the Eternal your God will choose"* *(Deut. 17:8)*.

However, David subsequently considered a second verse that alludes to the Temple's location. At the end of his life, Moses described the place of God's Divine Presence as "*dwelling between his shoulders*" *(Deut. 33:12)*. What does this mean?

This allegory suggests that the Temple's location was not meant to be at the highest point, but a little below it, just as the shoulders are below the head. Accordingly, David decided that Jerusalem, located at a lower altitude than Ein Eitam, was the site where the Beit HaMikdash was meant to be built.

Doeg, head of the High Court, disagreed with David. He supported the original choice of Ein Eitam as the place to build the Temple. The Sages noted that Doeg's jealousy of David was due to the latter's success in discovering the Temple's true location.

The story of David's search for the site of the Beit HaMikdash is alluded to in one of David's "Songs of Ascent." Psalm 132 opens with a plea: "*Remember David for all his trouble*" *(Ps. 132:1)*. What was this trying labor that David felt was a special merit, a significant life achievement for which he wanted to be remembered?

The psalm continues by recounting David's relentless efforts to locate the place of the Temple. David vowed:

*"I will not enter the tent of my house, nor will I go up to the bed that was spread for me. I will not give sleep to my eyes, nor rest to my eyelids — until I find God's place, the dwellings of the Mighty One of Jacob."* *(Ps. 132: 3-5)*

### **David and Doeg**

What was the crux of the dispute between David and Doeg? Doeg reasoned that the most suitable site for the Temple is the highest point in Jerusalem, reflecting his belief that the spiritual greatness of the Temple should only be accessible to the select few, those who are able to truly grasp the purest levels of enlightenment — the kohanim and the spiritual elite.

David, on the other hand, understood that the Temple and its holiness need to be the inheritance of the entire people of Israel. The kohanim are not privy to special knowledge; they are merely agents who influence and uplift the people with the Temple's holiness. The entire nation of Israel is described as a "*kingdom of priests*" *(Ex. 19:6)*.

### **The Waters of Ein Eitam**

Even though Ein Eitam was never sanctified, it still retained a special connection to the Beit HaMikdash, as its springs supplied water for the Beit HaMikdash. The Talmud relates that on Yom Kippur, the High Priest would immerse himself in a mikveh on the roof of the Beit HaParvah chamber in the Temple complex. In order for the water to reach this roof, which was 23 cubits higher than the ground floor of the Temple courtyard, water was diverted from the Ein Eitam springs, which were also located at this altitude.

Rav Kook explained that there exists a special connection between Ein Eitam and the High Priest's purification on Yom Kippur. While the Beit HaMikdash itself needs to be accessible to all, the purification of the High Priest must emanate from the highest possible source. Yom Kippur's unique purity and power of atonement originate in the loftiest realms, corresponding to the elevated springs of Ein Eitam.

*(Sapphire from the Land of Israel.* Adapted from *Shemu'ot HaRe'iyah* )Beha'alotecha(, quoted in *Peninei HaRe'iyah*, pp. 273-274,350-351. Shemonah Kevatzim I:745.)

#### Footnotes:

1. After the Akeidah, it says: "Abraham named that place, 'God will see'; as it is said to this day: 'On the mountain, God will be seen'" )Gen. 22:14(.

Rashi explains: "God will choose and see for Himself this place, to cause His Divine Presence to dwell there and for sacrifices to be offered here"

<https://ravkooktorah.org/RE-EIH-69.htm>

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## **Reeh: The Second Tithe and Strong Societies (5775. 5782)**

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

Biblical Israel from the time of Joshua until the destruction of the Second Temple was a predominantly agricultural society. Accordingly, it was through agriculture that the Torah pursued its religious and social programme. It has three fundamental elements.

The first was the alleviation of poverty. For many reasons, the Torah accepts the basic principles of what we now call a market economy. But though market economics is good at creating wealth it is less good at distributing it equitably. Thus the Torah's social legislation aimed, in the words of Henry George, "to lay the foundation of a social state in which deep poverty and degrading want should be unknown." ]1[

Hence the institutions that left parts of the harvest for the poor: leket, shicheha and pe'ah - fallen ears of grain, the forgotten sheaf, and the corners of the field. There was the produce of the seventh year, which belonged to no-one and everyone, and ma'aser ani - the tithe for the poor given in the third and sixth years of the seven-year cycle. Shmittah and Yovel - the seventh and fiftieth years with their release of debts, manumission of slaves, and the return of ancestral property to its original owners, restored essential elements of the economy to their default position of fairness. So the first principle was: no one should be desperately poor.

The second, which included terumah and ma'aser rishon - the priestly portion and the first tithe, went to support, respectively, the Priests and the Levites. These were a religious elite within the nation in biblical times with no land of their own, whose role was to ensure that the service of God – especially in the Temple – continued at the heart of national life. They had other essential functions, among them education and the administration of justice, as teachers and judges.

The third was more personal and spiritual. There were laws such as the bringing of first-fruits to Jerusalem, and the three pilgrimage festivals -- Pesach, Shavuot, and Succot – as they marked seasons in the agricultural year that had to do with

driving home the lessons of gratitude and humility. They taught that the land belongs to God and we are merely His tenants and guests. The rain, the sun, and the earth itself yield their produce only because of His blessing. Without such regular reminders, societies slowly but inexorably become materialistic and self-satisfied. Rulers and elites forget that their role is to serve the people, and instead they expect the people to serve them. That is how nations at the height of their success begin their decline, unwittingly laying the ground for their defeat.

All this makes one law in our parsha – the law of the Second Tithe – hard to understand. As we noted above, in the third and sixth year of the septennial cycle, this was given to the poor. However, in the first, second, fourth, and fifth years, it was to be taken by the farmers to Jerusalem and eaten there in a state of purity

*You shall eat the tithe of your grain, new wine, and olive oil, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks in the presence of the Lord your God at the place He will choose as a dwelling for His Name, so that you may learn to revere the Lord your God always.* Deut. 14:23

If the farmer lived at a great distance from Jerusalem, he was allowed an alternative:

*You may exchange the tithe for money. Wrap up the money in your hand, go to the place that the Lord your God will choose, and spend the money on whatever you choose: cattle, sheep, wine, strong drink, or whatever else you wish.* Deut. 14:25-26

The problem is obvious. The second tithe did not go to poor, or to the priests and Levites, so it was not part of the first or second principle. It may have been part of the third, to remind the farmer that the land belonged to God, but this too seems unlikely. There was no declaration, as happened in the case of first-fruits, and no specific religious service, as took place on the festivals. Other than being in Jerusalem, the institution of the second tithe seemingly had no cognitive or spiritual content. What then was the logic of the second tithe?

The Sages,<sup>12</sup> focussing on the phrase, “so that you may learn to revere the Lord your God” said that it was to encourage people to study. Staying for a while in Jerusalem while they consumed the tithe or the food bought with its monetary substitute, they would be influenced by the mood of the holy city, with its population engaged either in Divine service or sacred study.<sup>13</sup> This would have been much as happens today for synagogue groups that arrange study tours to Israel.

Maimonides, however, gives a completely different explanation.

*The second tithe was commanded to be spent on food in Jerusalem: in this way the owner was compelled to give part of it away as charity. As he was not able to use it otherwise than by way of eating and drinking, he must have easily been induced to give it gradually away. This rule brought multitudes together in one place, and strengthened the bond of love and brotherhood among the children of men.*<sup>14</sup>

For Maimonides, the second tithe served a social purpose. It strengthened civil society. It created bonds of connectedness and friendship among the people. It encouraged visitors to share the blessings of the harvest with others. Strangers would meet and become friends. There would be an atmosphere of camaraderie among the pilgrims. There would be a sense of shared citizenship, common belonging, and collective identity. Indeed Maimonides says something similar about the festivals themselves:

The use of keeping festivals is plain. Man derives benefit from such assemblies: the emotions produced renew the attachment to religion; they lead to friendly and social intercourse among the people.<sup>15</sup>

The atmosphere in Jerusalem, says Maimonides, would encourage public spiritedness. Food would always be plentiful, since the fruit of trees in their fourth year, the tithe of cattle, and the corn, wine, and oil of the second tithe would all have been brought there. They could not be sold and they could not be kept for the next year; therefore much would be given away in charity, especially as the Torah specifies (to “the Levite, the stranger, the orphan, and the widow.”) Deut. 14:29(

Writing about America in the 1830s, Alexis de Tocqueville found that he had to coin a new word for the phenomenon he encountered there and saw as one of the dangers in a democratic society. The word was *individualism*. He defined it as “*a mature and calm feeling which disposes each member of the community to sever himself from the mass of his fellows and to draw apart with his family and his friends*,” leaving “society at large to itself.”<sup>6</sup> Tocqueville believed that democracy encouraged individualism. As a result, people would leave the business of the common good entirely to the government, which would become ever more powerful, eventually threatening freedom itself.

It was a brilliant insight. Two recent examples illustrate the point. The first was charted by Robert Putnam, the great Harvard sociologist, in his study of Italian towns in the 1990s.<sup>7</sup> During the 1970s, all Italian regions were given local government on equal terms, but over the next twenty years, some prospered, others stagnated; some had effective governance and economic growth, while others were mired in corruption and underachievement. The key difference, he found, was the extent to which the regions had an active and public-spirited citizenry.

The other example focuses on the “*free-rider*” attitude. It is often tempting to take advantage of public facilities without paying your fair share (for example, travelling on public transport without paying for a ticket: hence the term “*free rider*”). You then obtain the benefit without bearing a fair share of the costs. When this happens, trust is eroded and public spiritedness declines. This is illustrated in an experiment known as the “*free rider game*,” designed to test public spiritedness within a group. We mentioned this study earlier in this year’s series, in parshat Ki Tissa.

In the game, as you may recall, each of the participants is given a certain amount of money, and then invited to contribute to a common pot, which is then multiplied and returned in equal parts to the players. So, for example, if each contributes \$10, each will receive \$30. However, if one player chooses not to contribute anything, then if there are six players, there will be \$50 in the pot and \$150 after multiplication. Each of the players will then receive \$25, but one will now have \$35: the money from the pot plus the \$10 which they originally received.

When played over several rounds, the other players soon notice that not everyone is contributing equally. The unfairness causes the others to contribute less to the shared pot. The group suffers and no one gains. If, however, the other players are given the chance to punish the suspected cheat by paying a dollar to make them forfeit three dollars, they tend to do so. The experiment demonstrates that **there is always a potential conflict between self-interest and the common good**. When individuals only act for themselves, the group suffers. When the free-riders stop acting selfishly, everyone benefits. *[emphasis added]*<sup>8</sup>

As I was writing about this in 2015, the Greek economy was in a state of collapse. Years earlier, in 2008, an economist, Benedikt Herrmann, had tested people in different cities throughout the world to see whether there were geographical and cultural variations in the way people played the free rider game. He found that in places like Boston, Copenhagen, Bonn, and Seoul, voluntary contributions to the common pot were high. They were much lower in Istanbul, Riyadh, and Minsk, where the economy was less developed. But they were lowest of all in Athens, Greece. What is more, when players in Athens penalised the free riders, those penalised did not stop free-riding. Instead they took revenge by punishing their punishers.<sup>8</sup> The conclusion drawn was that where public spiritedness is low, society fails to cohere and the economy fails to grow.

Hence the brilliance of Maimonides’ insight that the second tithe existed to create social capital, meaning bonds of trust and reciprocal altruism among the population, which came about through sharing food with strangers in the holy precincts of Jerusalem. Loving God helps make us better citizens and more generous people, thus countering the individualism that eventually makes democracies fail.

#### FOOTNOTES:

<sup>1</sup>[ “Moses: Apostle of Freedom” )address first delivered to the Young Men’s Hebrew Association of San Francisco, June 1878(.

<sup>2</sup>[ Sifrei ad loc. A more extended version of this interpretation can be found in the *Sefer ha-Chinnuch*, command 360.

]3[ See also Tosafot, Baba Batra 21a, s.v. Ki MiTzion.

]4[ *The Guide for the Perplexed* III:39.

]5[ Ibid, III:46.

]6[ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Book II, ch. 2.

]7[ Putnam, Robert D., Robert Leonardi, and Raffaella Nanetti. *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1993.

]8[ B. Herrmann, C. Thoni, and S. Gachter, "Antisocial Punishment Across Societies." *Science* 319.5868 (2008): 1362-367.

#### **AROUND THE SHABBAT TABLE:**

1. What justification do you think people sometimes give for acting as free-riders?
2. What issues do you think free-riding causes to society as a whole?
3. Do you agree with Rambam's theory that gently encouraging additional charitable-giving allows societies to strengthen as a whole?

<https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/eikev/geography-and-destiny/> 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 Devar.

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#### **Why Does the Torah Not Explicitly Mention Jerusalem?**

By Mordechai Rubin \*

In Parshat Re'eh, we find some enigmatic verses concerning the future location of the Holy Temple:

*But only to the place which the L-rd your G-d shall choose from all your tribes, to set His Name there; you shall inquire after His dwelling and come there. And there you shall bring your burnt offerings, and your sacrifices, and your tithes, and the separation by your hand, and your vows and your donations, and the firstborn of your cattle and of your sheep.*<sup>1</sup>

And a few verses later:

*And it will be, that the place the L-rd, your G-d, will choose in which to establish His Name, there you shall bring all that I am commanding you: Your burnt offerings, and your sacrifices, your tithes, and the separation by your hand, and the choice of vows which you will vow to the L-rd.*<sup>2</sup>

For some reason, this Divinely chosen place is not named — a striking omission, given how central it is to Israel's worship. Only much later is Jerusalem identified as "the city which I chose for Myself to place My name there,"<sup>3</sup> when King David purchases the land on which the Temple will be constructed — a mountain adjacent to Jerusalem.

This raises several questions: Why does the Torah not name Jerusalem outright? Was the location not yet chosen, or did G-d choose to deliberately keep it hidden? Or could it be that the verse is not referring to Jerusalem at all, but to Shiloh, the site of the Tabernacle for many years? And what does it mean to "inquire after His dwelling"?

## It Was Not Yet Chosen

Seemingly, the most basic and obvious explanation is that the location of the Temple had yet to be determined. These verses therefore outline the requirement to centralize worship somewhere in the Land of Israel, wherever that would be. Upon settling the land, the Israelites are commanded to destroy all local idolatrous altars and not to bring offerings anywhere other than “*to the place which the L-rd your G-d will choose ... to place His Name there.*” The plain intent is that there will be one sanctified site for the Tabernacle or Temple, chosen by G-d, where His Name and presence reside. However, the exact location is not mentioned as it had not yet been determined.

## Shiloh First, Jerusalem Next

This explanation is not entirely satisfactory, however, since we know that the site of the Temple was the location of several much earlier monumental events. In the words of Maimonides:

*According to accepted tradition, the place on which David and Solomon built the altar, the threshing floor of Aravnah, is the location where Abraham built the altar on which he prepared Isaac for sacrifice. Noah built an altar on that location when he left the ark. It was also [the place] of the altar on which Cain and Abel brought sacrifices. Similarly, Adam, the first man, offered a sacrifice there and was created at that very spot, as our sages said: “Man was created from the place where he would find atonement.”*<sup>4</sup>

So if the site was already set aside, why not mention it?

Rashi<sup>5</sup> cites the Midrash<sup>6</sup> and explains that this verse does not refer exclusively to Jerusalem, but to whichever centralized location G-d's service had moved to — first Shiloh and then Jerusalem. In his view, the Torah's phrase “the place which He will choose” applies generically to the one authorized sacred site at any given time. First, G-d chose Shiloh as the resting place for the Sanctuary, and later He chose Jerusalem as the permanent site of the First and Second Temples. The Torah doesn't name Jerusalem yet because, in Rashi's reading, while the final destination may have been set, it would not settle there until quite some time after the land had been settled.

## G-d Chooses, Not Us

The Kli Yakar rejects this view, arguing that “*Only to the place that G-d will choose from all your tribes to put His Name there*” refers to the permanent Temple in Jerusalem, for which contributions were collected equally from all twelve Tribes.

According to Kli Yakar, the final location was entirely G-d's prerogative. In contrast to idolaters who select sites for their natural beauty or prominence, Israel was forbidden to determine the Sanctuary's site on their own. G-d's honor sanctifies a place — not the other way around — so “*seeking His dwelling*” means pursuing His Presence, not the physical site for its own sake.

Although the ultimate location had long been set, its revelation was delayed to preserve the dignity of the temporary sanctuaries, such as Shiloh and Nob.<sup>7</sup>

## Concealing the Chosen Place

In a similar vein, Maimonides, in his *Guide for the Perplexed*,<sup>8</sup> addresses this difficulty and provides three possible explanations:

1. To prevent enemy interference: Had the nations known that this site would become the center of the highest spiritual truths, they might have seized it or fiercely fought over it to prevent Israel from sanctifying it.

2. To avoid preemptive desecration: Those who controlled the land at the time could have defiled or destroyed the site in advance. Some suggest the Jebusites in Jerusalem tried exactly that, hinted at in II Samuel 5:6, where “the blind and the lame” are said to have blocked David — possibly meaning they placed idolatry there. Aware of this risk, G d concealed the site’s true purpose.
3. To prevent tribal discord: Each of the Twelve Tribes might have claimed the honor of hosting the site, leading to rivalry and division — much like the disputes over the Priesthood — especially in the era before a united monarchy.

### **G d Wants Us to Seek It Out**

Nachmanides cites the Sifrei, who reads the verse “*you shall inquire after His dwelling and come there*” as a command to actively seek the place G d will choose, not wait passively for revelation. The Sifrei teaches: search for it yourselves, then a prophet will confirm it. Nachmanides cites King David as an example. Though guided by prophets, he personally pursued the Temple site, vowing not to rest until he found it, which he ultimately did with prophetic confirmation. Nachmanides further explains that “*His dwelling*” means G d’s very presence. Thus, the verse calls us not only to locate a physical site, but to yearn for and pursue the Shechinah itself.

The Rebbe expands on this idea, noting that the Torah calls the Temple the Beit HaBechirah (“*Chosen House*”) only after it stood in Jerusalem, not during the Tabernacle’s wanderings. He explains that Divine “*choice*” can be twofold: a negative choice — rejecting all other sites — or a positive choice — expressing an intrinsic desire for a specific site. In the case of temporary sanctuaries like Shiloh, the Torah’s emphasis is largely negative: sacrifices may be brought only there, to exclude other locations. This suggests that Shiloh was chosen chiefly to centralize worship, not out of essential love for the site itself. By contrast, the verses about the Jerusalem Temple highlight the site’s own unique sanctity — “*the place which G d will choose to cause His Name to rest there*” — indicating a positive, enduring desire.

Only Jerusalem was chosen as G d’s permanent dwelling, so much so that G d Divine Presence never departed from the Western Wall. For this reason, says the Rebbe, only the Jerusalem Temple is called the Beit HaBechirah in the fullest sense.<sup>9</sup>

In another talk analyzing Rambam’s Hilchot Beit HaBechirah, the Rebbe explains that the sanctity of the Temple site contains two distinct elements:

On the one hand, since Adam, Noach, and Avraham offered sacrifices there (ibid. 2:2), the site already possessed a degree of holiness. Yet this holiness was inherently limited, because it was bound up with the place’s natural history and therefore defined by the finite qualities of that place.

On the other hand, through G d’s choice of this location, the site attained a level of holiness that is unlimited and eternal, for it does not derive from the place’s qualities at all, but solely from the act of Divine chosenness.

Ultimately, the Temple Mount possesses both the quality of inherent holiness — rooted in its history as the site where Adam, Noach, and Avraham offered sacrifices — and the quality of eternal holiness — stemming from G d’s choice, which is unlimited and unchanging.<sup>10</sup>

In this vein, we can suggest that the verse refers to Jerusalem as “*the place which the L-rd your G d shall choose*” to highlight that the site’s most profound and essential holiness does not stem from its natural qualities or historical associations, but solely from the fact that G d chose it.

### **FOOTNOTES:**

1. Deuteronomy 12:5-6.
2. Deuteronomy 12:11.
3. I Kings 11:36.
4. *Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Beit Habechirah* 2:2.
5. Deuteronomy 12:5.
6. Sifre, Deuteronomy 12:11.
7. Kli Yakar, Deuteronomy 12:4.
8. Maimonides, *Guide for the Perplexed*, III:45.
9. Likkutei Sichot, vol. 24, p. 79.
10. *Hilchot Beit HaBechirah I'HaRambam*, Im Chidushim U'Biurim, section 6.

\* Content editor and staff writer at Chabad.org,

[https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article\\_cdo/aid/6991324/jewish/Why-Does-the-Torah-Not-Explicitly-Mention-Jerusalem.htm](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/6991324/jewish/Why-Does-the-Torah-Not-Explicitly-Mention-Jerusalem.htm)

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### **Reeh: The Basis of a Spiritual Life**

by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky

*If your brother, the son of your mother; your son; your daughter; the wife of your embrace; or your friend who is as your own soul incites you in secret, saying, “Let us go and worship other deities, which neither you nor your fathers have known.” )Deut. 13:7(*

Allegorically, all the relations mentioned in this verse are aspects of our own personalities – our intellect and emotions. Although we must make full use of our intellect and emotions in our spiritual life, we must be aware of their potential to lead us astray. The only attribute of ours that we can unhesitatingly rely upon to keep us true to our Divine selves is our fundamental bond with G-d. This fundamental bond expresses itself as our unconditional commitment to G-d's purposes and agenda, regardless of what our intellect or emotions might be whispering in our ear at any particular moment.

When we strengthen this fundamental commitment to G-d, we can be assured that our intellect and emotions will never be enticed to lead us astray. On the contrary, they will only aid us in enhancing our connection to G-d, the ultimate source of all truth.

– From *Daily Wisdom #3*

\* An insight by the **Lubavitcher Rebbe** on parshaot Va'etchanan from our *Daily Wisdom #3* by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky.

May G-d grant continued wisdom, strength, victory and peace in the Holy Land.

Gut Shabbos,

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman  
Kehot Publication Society

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# Likutei Divrei Torah

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Sponsored by Rene and Rami Isser  
in loving memory of Rene's mother,  
Devorah bat Chaim Eliyahu, a"h,  
on the occasion of her 15th Yahrzeit, (24th of Av)

Volume 31, Issue 43

Shabbat Parashat Reeh

5785 B" H

## Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

### Making Poverty History

Listen to these stories. Behind them lies an extraordinary insight into the nature of Jewish ethics:

Story 1. Rabbi Abba used to bind money in his scarf, sling it on his back, and place it at the disposal of the poor. (Ketubot 67b)

Story 2. Mar Ukba had a poor man in his neighbourhood into whose door socket he used to throw four coins every day. Once the poor man thought, "I will go and see who does me this kindness." That day Mar Ukba stayed late at the house of study, and his wife was coming home with him. As soon as the poor man saw them moving the door [to leave the coins] he ran out after them, but they fled from him and hid. Why did they do this? Because it was taught: One should throw himself into a fiery furnace rather than publicly put his neighbour to shame. (Ketubot 67b)

Story 3. When Rabbi Jonah saw a member of a good family who had lost his money and was ashamed to accept charity, he would go and say to him, "I have heard that an inheritance has come your way in a city across the sea. So here is an article of some value. Sell it and use the proceeds. When you are more affluent, you will repay me." As soon as the man took it, Rabbi Jonah would say, "It's yours to keep as a gift." (Vayikra Rabbah 34:1)

These stories are all deeply connected to the mitzvah of tzedakah, whose source is in this week's parsha: If anyone is poor among your fellow Israelites in any of the towns of the land the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted toward them. Rather, be openhanded and freely lend them whatever they need. Deut. 15:7-8

Give generously to them and do so without a grudging heart; then because of this the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to. There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your fellow Israelites who are poor and needy in

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your land. Deut. 15:10-11

What we have here is a unique and still remarkable programme for the elimination of poverty.

The first extraordinary fact about the laws of tzedakah as articulated in the Oral Tradition is the concept itself. Tzedakah does not mean "charity". We see this immediately in the form of a law inconceivable in any other moral system: Someone who does not wish to give tzedakah or to give less than is appropriate may be compelled to do so by a Jewish court of law. Maimonides, Laws of Gifts to the Poor, 7:10

Charity is always voluntary. Tzedakah is compulsory. Therefore tzedakah does not mean charity. The nearest English equivalent is social justice.

The second is the principle evident in the three stories above. Poverty in Judaism is conceived not merely in material terms: the poor lack the means of sustenance. It is also conceived in psychological terms. Poverty humiliates. It robs people of dignity. It makes them dependent on others – thus depriving them of independence which the Torah sees as essential to self-respect.

This deep psychological insight is eloquently expressed in the third paragraph of the Grace after Meals: Please, O Lord our God, do not make us dependent on the gifts or loans of other people, but only on Your full, open, holy, and generous hand so that we may suffer neither shame nor humiliation for ever and all time.

As a result, Jewish law focuses not only on how much we must give but also on the manner in which we do so. Ideally the donor should not know to whom he or she is giving (story 1), nor the recipient know from whom he or she is receiving (story 2). The third story exemplifies another principle:

If a poor person does not want to accept tzedakah, we should practise a form of [benign] deception and give it to him under the guise of a loan. Laws of Gifts to the Poor, 7:9

Maimonides sums up the general principle thus: Whoever gives charity to the poor with bad grace and averted eyes has lost all the merit of his action even though he gives him a

thousand gold pieces. He should give with good grace and with joy and should sympathise with them him in his plight, as it is said, 'Have I not wept for those in trouble? Has not my soul grieved for the poor?' (Job 30:25) Laws of Gifts to the Poor, 10:4

This is the logic behind two laws that are otherwise inexplicable. The first is:

Even a poor person who is dependent on tzedakah is obliged to give tzedakah. Laws of Gifts to the Poor, 7:5

The law seems absurd. Why should we give money to the poor so that they may give to the poor? It makes sense only on this assumption, that giving is essential to human dignity and tzedakah is the obligation to ensure that everyone has that dignity.

The second is this famous ruling of Maimonides: The highest degree of charity, exceeded by none, is when a person assists a poor Jew by providing him with a gift or a loan or by accepting him into a business partnership or by helping him find employment – in a word by putting him in a situation where he can dispense with other people's aid. Laws of Gifts to the Poor, 10:7

Giving someone a job or making him your partner would not normally be considered charity at all. It costs you nothing. But this further serves to show that tzedakah does not mean charity. It means giving people the means to live a dignified life, and within the Jewish value system any form of employment is more dignified than dependence.

We have in this ruling of Maimonides in the 12th century the principle that Muhammad Yunus rediscovered in our time, and for which he was awarded the Nobel Prize: the idea of micro-loans enabling poor people to start small businesses. It is a very powerful idea.

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In contradistinction to many other religious systems, Judaism refused to romanticise poverty or anaesthetise its pain. Faith is not what Karl Marx called “the opium of the people.” The rabbis refused to see poverty as a blessed state, an affliction to be born with acceptance and grace. Instead, the rabbis called it “a kind of death” and “worse than fifty plagues”. They said, “Nothing is harder to bear than poverty, because he who is crushed by poverty is like one to whom all the troubles of the world cling and upon whom all the curses of Deuteronomy have descended. If all other troubles were placed one side and poverty on the other, poverty would outweigh them all.”

Maimonides went to the heart of the matter when he said: The well-being of the soul can only be obtained after that of the body has been secured. *The Guide for the Perplexed*, 3:27

Poverty is not a noble state. You cannot reach spiritual heights if you have no food to eat, no roof over your head, if you lack access to medical attention, or if you are beset by financial worries. I know of no saner approach to poverty, welfare, and social justice than that of Judaism. Unsurpassed in its time, it remains the benchmark of a decent society to this day.

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

“You shall smite, yes smite, all of the inhabitants of that city by the sword... and you shall burn entirely with fire the city and all of its spoils to the Lord your God, and it shall be an everlasting desolation (tel); it shall not be rebuilt again” (Deuteronomy 13:16,17).

The Bible ordains the destruction of an entire city which has been seduced and deceived into practicing idolatry. And, although many sages of the Talmud maintain that such a situation “never was and was never created” (B.T. Sanhedrin), the harsh words nevertheless sear our souls.

What is even more difficult to understand are the concluding words of the Bible regarding this idolatrous and hapless city: “... [and the Lord] shall give you compassion, and He shall be compassionate towards you, and He shall cause you to increase as he has sworn to your forbearers... This is because you have harkened to the voice of the Lord your God to observe all of His commandments... to do what is righteous (hayashar) in the eyes of the Lord your God” (13:18,19).

Compassion? Righteousness? Are these fitting words to describe such an extreme punishment?

To understand the simple meaning of the Biblical command, it is necessary to explore

the actual meaning – and nature of the offense – of idolatry.

The Bible lashes out against idolatry more than any other transgression, and of the 14 verses that comprise the Decalogue, four of them focus on idolatrous worship, its evils constantly reiterated.

Moshe Halbertal and Avishai Margalit, in their penetrating study *Idolatry*, cite various commentaries as to why idolatry is presented as so repulsive in the Bible. For Maimonides the sin of idolatry is theological; for the Meiri it was the number of innocent children sacrificed to Moloch, the eating of flesh cruelly torn from living animals, and the wanton sexual orgies associated with the Dionysian rites which so incensed the Lord. Indeed, the Bible seems to support the Meiri position; to give but two examples: “You shall not bow down to their gods and you shall not serve them; you shall not act in accordance with their deeds (Exodus 23:24)”... “You shall destroy, yes destroy [the seven indigenous nations of Canaan] lest they teach you to do all the abominations which they do before their gods (Deuteronomy 20:17,18).”

The Bible never understood monotheism in terms of faith alone; from the very beginning of God’s election of Abraham who was commanded to convey to subsequent generations not only belief in one God, but rather in a God “...whose path it is to do compassionate righteousness and justice” (Genesis 18:19), belief in ethical monotheism. Moses asks for a glimpse into the Divine (Exodus 32:18). The Almighty, after explaining that no mortal being can ever truly understand the Ineffable and the Infinite, does grant a partial glimpse: “The Lord, the Lord, is a God of Compassion (rahum) and freely-giving love, long-suffering, full of lovingkindness, and truth ...” (Exodus 34:6).

Even Maimonides suggests that these descriptions, known as the 13 Attributes of the Divine, are not so much theological as anthropological, to teach us mortals – commanded to imitate God – precisely how to do so: just as He is Compassionate, you humans must be compassionate; just as He gives love freely, so must you humans...

Hence, the essence of Judaism is not proper intellectual understanding of the Divine, (which is impossible), but rather proper human imitation of the Divine traits, acting towards other human beings the way God would have us act, in compassionately righteous and just ways. And so Maimonides concludes his *Guide for the Perplexed*, written at the end of his life, with a citation from Jeremiah:

#### **Likutei Divrei Torah**

“Thus says the Lord: But only in this should one glory if he wishes to glory: Learn about and come to know Me. I am the Lord who does lovingkindness, justice and righteous compassion on earth. Only in these do I delight, says the Lord” (Jeremiah 9:22,23).

From this perspective, only a religion which teaches love of every human being, which demands a system of righteousness and morality, and which preaches a world of peace, can take its rightful place as a religion of ethical monotheism. Islam, for example, has enriched the world with architectural and decorative breakthroughs, glorious poetry, mathematical genius, and philosophical writings influenced by Aristotle. And certainly, the Kalami and Sufi interpretations of the Koran, which present jihad as a spiritual struggle, place Islam alongside Judaism and Christianity as a worthy vehicle and noble model for ethical monotheism. Tragically, however, the Jihadism, spawned from Saudi Arabia’s brand of Wahhabi Islam, the Al-Qaida culture of homicide-bomber terrorism wreaking worldwide fear and destruction – from Manhattan to Bali – and threatening anyone who is not a Jihad believing Muslim, is the antithesis of ethical monotheism.

George Weigel, a Catholic theologian and distinguished Senior Fellow at the Ethical and Public Policy Center in Washington D.C., cites a definition of Jihadism in his compelling study, *Faith, Reason and the War against Jihadism*. “It is the religiously inspired ideology which teaches that it is the moral obligation of Muslims to employ whatever means are necessary to compel the world’s submission to Islam.” He also analyzes the theology of Sayyid Qutb (d.1966), who stresses the fact that God’s one-ness demands universal fealty, that the very existence of a non-Muslim constitutes a threat to the success of Islam and therefore of God, and so such an individual must be converted or killed; other religions and modern secularism are not merely mistaken but are evil, “filth to be expunged.” The goal is Global Jihad. Such a perverted “theology” only transmutes true Sufi Moslem monotheism into hateful Wahabi mono-Satanism. The enemy of the free world is not Islam; it is Jihadism.

Let me return to our Biblical passage regarding the idolatrous city. An army hell-bent upon the destruction of innocent people, whose only sin is to believe differently than they do, enters the category of “...the one who is coming to kill you must be first killed by you.” One cannot love the good without hating the evil, ‘good’ defined as the protection of the innocent and ‘evil’ as the destruction of the innocent.

The only justification for taking a life is in order to protect innocent lives – when taking a

life is not only permitted but mandatory. Hence the Bible refers to the destruction of the murderous inhabitants of such a city as an act committed for the sake of righteousness. Just imagine the world today if the United States had not committed its forces to help fight Nazi Germany!

But even the most justified of wars wreaks havoc, collateral damage can never be completely prevented, and the soul of one who takes even a guilty human life must become in some way inured to the inestimable value of human life. Hence some of our Sages determine that such a city's destruction had never been decreed, that the Bible is speaking in theory only. Certainly all other possibilities must be exhausted before taking such a final step of destroying a city.

Nevertheless, the Biblical account – well aware of the moral and ethical ambiguities involved – guarantees that those who fight rank evil will not thereby lose their inner sense of compassion for the suffering of innocent individuals or their over-arching reverence for life. To the contrary, he who is compassionate towards those perpetrating cruelty will end up being cruel towards those who are compassionate.

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

#### **How Am I Doing?**

If your child, employee, or colleague asks you that question, you can be sure that he or she is sincere, wishes to learn, and will succeed.

The person who asks, "How am I doing?" is asking for constructive feedback. That person is expressing a need to know whether or not he is doing a good job, and if not, what he can do to correct his work.

The art of giving effective feedback is a very important one. In all human relationships, where there is mutual feedback, a relationship pattern is established which can self-adjust, advance, and thrive.

For feedback to truly be effective, it needs to be solicited. That is, the recipient of the feedback must ask the observer to tell him how he is doing. This signals a readiness to receive criticism, to modify one's behavior, and to change. Without that readiness, feedback is doomed to failure.

Feedback also needs to be specific. It is not helpful to say, "That was stupid," "You'll never be good at that," or even, "Great job!" It is helpful to say, "You turned left when you should have turned right," or, "When you softened your voice and smiled, it was easier to listen to you." The description of behavior is what is necessary, not evaluation.

Human nature is such that it is the rare person who asks for feedback, and that few of us are comfortable in delivering criticism. However constructive and well-intended, it is hard to give feedback to another person. We are afraid of confrontation, of possibly embarrassing the other, and so we avoid giving feedback even at the cost of assisting the other to change in a positive way.

And yet, there is nothing more helpful to anyone learning a new task than to have feedback delivered to him or her in a useful, nonjudgmental, constructive manner. As the Talmud puts it, "No one has ever mastered Torah study without having first erred and made mistakes." Mastery is only achieved when mistakes are pointed out to the student so that he can correct them.

In this week's Torah portion, Parshat Re'eh, we read at length about false prophets. We often mistake the nature of the mission of the prophet, assuming that it is to predict the future. But that is certainly not the mission of the great biblical prophets. Rather, their mission was, in our terms, to give constructive feedback to the people, pointing out their faults and guiding them in a more positive direction.

The false prophet not only gives false guarantees about the future, complacently predicting peace and tranquility, but assures the people that they are doing nothing wrong, that they need not change their behavior. The false prophet gives no feedback.

These words of the Book of Lamentations, which we read in the synagogue so recently on Tisha B'Av, are incomparably instructive here: "Your seers prophesied to you Delusion and folly. They did not expose your iniquity

So as to restore your fortunes, But prophesied to you oracles Of delusion and deception."

The false prophet cannot give proper feedback. He avoids telling the truth if he thinks it will offend. He is unaware of the positive value of effective feedback.

Those who follow him will never benefit from words of correction and guidance. They cannot change, they will not grow.

I encourage the reader to reflect upon his or her own experience and to recall those occasions when a few words of corrective feedback were of immense benefit. I personally remember my own first days as a teacher, when a crusty veteran colleague sat in my classroom and gave me the benefits of his experience by pointing out the numerous things that I did which were ineffective and

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suggested alternatives to me. I cannot say that I enjoyed his deflating critique at that moment, but I know that I and a lifetime of students are profoundly indebted to him.

All the more do we cherish those occasions upon which we receive positive feedback from an observer. I can never forget the times when a mentor or senior rabbi approached me after a sermon with a warm handshake, and a whispered, "Yasher koach—job well done." That was enough to teach me that I was on the right track and could confidently continue on my path.

An old Spanish proverb has it, "Self-knowledge is the beginning of self-improvement." And an old Chinese proverb says it even more incisively: "A man who knows he is a fool is not a great fool."

One of the lessons of this week's Torah portion is that the true prophet gives feedback, sometimes in a way which is hard to hear. But that prophet is extending a hand to us to bring us back to a better way of life and has instructed us in an improved set of behaviors.

As we will read this Shabbat, if we attend to the feedback of the prophet, we "will be heeding the Lord your God and doing what is right in His sight."

I've been writing this column now for a span of about fifteen years, on and off. In view of the foregoing remarks about the importance of giving and receiving feedback, I take this occasion to ask you, dear reader, "How am I doing?"

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### **Dvar Torah: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis**

If people are thirsty, should we take water to them, or should we wait for them to come and ask for it?

The prophet Isaiah in the Haftarah for Parshat Re'eh tells us 'Hoy kol-tzame lechu lamayim' – let everyone who is thirsty come to the water.

But elsewhere, Isaiah tells us as follows: 'likrat tzame heyta u'mayim' – towards the thirsty, take the water, so Isaiah tells us both things.

What sense can we make of it?

In the Gemara Masechet Taanit Daf Zayin Amud Aleph, our sages tell us that water here equals Torah. And the dilemma here is: when people are thirsting for knowledge, should we take the knowledge to them, to make them interested in learning, or should we wait for them to come forward?

In the Gemara, Rabbi Chanina bar Pappa tells us as follows: when Isaiah tells us that we

must take water to the thirsty, he's referring to those are interested and engaged.

When Isaiah tells us that the thirsty must come to the water, he's referring to those who are not interested at all.

Now I would have thought that just the opposite should be the case, because those who are already engaged can look after themselves! And those who are not need us to inspire them, to show some interest in them.

The Maharsha, a great commentator on the Gemara, gives a beautiful Perush and this is what he says: What we need to recognise is that in a world of Chinuch, of Jewish education, one of the worst things you can do is to impose knowledge on people, to try and force it down their throats.

Rather, when people are already engaged, shower knowledge upon them because they are interested, they're keen and they won't reject it, they will choose to deepen their awareness and their connectedness.

However, when people sadly are not engaged, because they don't know what they're missing out on, we need to make it appealing, we need to enable them to come forward of their own volition, so that they will engage in study.

Once they do so because they find it attractive, then there will be no looking back for the sake of their future.

In our challenging time sadly, there are so many people who are thirsty out there.

Let's adopt the right approach so that ultimately, the thirst of everyone will be quenched.

### Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

#### You Are Children to Hashem, Your God"

Dr. Zehavit Shenkolewski

Zehavit Shenkolewski This coming Shabbat, we will read Parshat Re'eh, which is typically read on Shabbat Mevarchim Elul or Shabbat Rosh Chodesh Elul of each year. One of the verses in this portion that has received extensive attention in the Mishnah, the Gemara, and among the Rishonim and Acharonim is Devarim 14:1: "You are children to Hashem, your God."

In the Gemara (Kiddushin 36), we find a debate between Rabi Yehuda and Rabi Meir regarding whether the status of being "children to Hashem" is an inherent right granted to the people of Israel at all times and under all circumstances due to their being a nation, as Rabi Meir contends, or whether it is a privilege that must be earned through worthy behavior, as argued by Rabi Yehuda.

The Gemara phrases the debate as follows: "You are children to Hashem, your God"—when you behave as children, you are called children; when you do not behave as children, you are not called children, such are the words of Rabi Yehuda. Rabi Meir says: Regardless of whether you behave as children or not, you are called children, as it is written: 'They are foolish children, [Yirmeyahu 4:22]; and as it is written: 'Children in whom there is no faith, [Devarim 32:20]; and as it is said: 'A seed of evildoers, corrupt children, [Yeshayahu 1:4] and as it is written: 'And it shall be in the place where it was said to them: You are not My people, it shall be said to them: Children of the living God. [Hoshea 2:1]

This debate also carries halachic significance. The Rashba [Rabi Shlomo ben Avraham ibn Adret] gave halachic rulings which resonate the approach of Rabi Meir. In his responsa (1:194), the Rashba writes:

A Jew who has apostatized may be lent money with interest... However, with regards to the laws of impurity, the Torah considers such a one to be an "adam" (i.e., belonging to the nation of Israel). Moreover, he is an "adam" and not an animal; his kiddushin (betrothal) is valid, and should he give his wife a get, the divorce is a valid one, and his wife is forbidden to all others until he divorces her with a get like any other Jew. He is still considered one of the children [of Israel]. ...and even though, as a general rule, Halachic rulings follow Rabi Yehuda, in this case, the halacha follows Rabi Meir, since the numerous Biblical verses [he cites] support his approach.

Rabbi Asher Weiss addresses the above notion in his halachic work titled *Minchat Asher*:

The Rambam seems to assert in three places (Sotah 3:3, Sanhedrin 10:3, and Shevuot 1:4) that the principles of halachic decision-making apply only when Tana'im and Amoraim dispute legal matters, not when they debate questions of belief or scriptural interpretation. (*Minchat Asher* on Mo'adim 1:39)

Hence, we can infer that in this particular debate the Rambam may very well have ruled in keeping with Rabi Yehuda.

However, this debate also has spiritual implications regarding the meaning and eternal nature of the bond between God and His children. Rabbi Nachum Rabinovitch addressed this dual aspect of the relationship.

In a sermon delivered on Erev Yom Kippur, Rabbi Rabinovitch explained the verse "You are children to Hashem, your God" as encapsulating the essence of teshuvah, repentance. He explored a perplexing

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statement by the Rambam in Hilchot Teshuvah 7:7:

How great is the virtue of teshuvah! Yesterday, a certain individual was separated from the God of Israel... This individual would cry out and not be answered... He would perform mitzvot, and they were thrown back in his face... But today, the same person is closely connected to the Shechinah, as it is written: 'But ye that did cleave unto the Lord your God are alive every one of you this day' [Devarim 4, 4]. And this very same person cries out and is answered immediately... He performs mitzvot, and they are accepted with joy and serenity... Moreover, God now desires his mitzvot.

Seemingly, the question arises: What was the said individual's sin in the first place? Why was he distanced from Hashem, given that he was observing mitzvot and praying to God? The answer is that this individual performed all the right action but without any deveikut – devotion!

Rabbi Rabinovitch explains that a person should approach God as a child approaches a parent, with the understanding that the parent does not wish for actions done merely for the sake of reward. Instead, the child's deeds should come from a genuine desire to bring joy to the parent. God desires His children to fulfill the mission for which He created them and to emulate His attributes. Observing mitzvot mechanically, merely for the sake of reward, is insufficient. According to Rabbi Rabinovitch, one must strive to refine oneself and one's character to truly be worthy of being called a child of God. This perspective aligns with Rabi Yehuda's approach discussed earlier.

In his book *Ner Lintivati: Derashot on Parshat HaShavua*, Rabbi Rabinovitch offers an additional, nationalistic interpretation of the verse "You are children to Hashem, your God", one which aligns with Rabi Meir's view. He writes:

The verse says, "You are children to Hashem" — you are always in the state of childhood — youthful, with your entire life ahead of you... Unlike other nations that rise onto the stage of history, mature, and then fade away... No other nation has faced such hardships and yet, against all odds, remains unbowed, its youthful spirit as vibrant as ever. Our generation has witnessed the strength within a nation that survived the sword—remnants plucked from the flames—who managed to rebuild their lives both individually and collectively through the rebirth of their land. This resilience does not stem from human nature, for naturally, people age. Yet the verse teaches us: "You are children to Hashem" – Israel is beloved because they were gifted the Torah,

and those who become children of God secure for themselves an enduring vitality (pp. 394-395).

Rabbi Rabinovitch's interpretation suggests that, in line with Rabi Meir's view, the Jewish people as a nation are eternal. They continuously renew themselves and will always remain, as stated in our parsha (Devarim 14:1-2), Hashem's children—a holy nation, His chosen people, and a treasured possession. Yet, as Rabi Yehuda posits, each individual must strive to be worthy of being called "a child of Hashem". Beyond observing mitzvot, one must seek one's purpose in the world, work to fulfill one's mission, and aspire to emulate Hashem's attributes as much as humanly possible.

In these days leading up to Rosh Chodesh Elul, the month of mercy and forgiveness, and nearly a year since the Swords of Iron war broke out, Rabbi Rabinovitch's words bring great comfort to our aching hearts. We understand that our nation is eternal, and our Father in Heaven, who cares for us like a parent for his children, will bring forth redemption, consolation, and put an end to our suffering.

Yet, during these days of repentance, we must also strive to refine ourselves to be deserving of being called God's children. May it be His will that our troubles cease, that we merit to see the release of our kidnapped brothers and the safe return of our soldiers to their homes. And may He grant comfort to the bereaved families, and healing to our wounded sons and daughters.

#### Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

##### **Rabbi Yakov Haber**

##### **Mikdash: Aspects and Aspirations**

I. But only to the place which Hashem, your G-d, shall choose from all your tribes to rest His Name there; you shall inquire after His dwelling and come there (Devarim 12:5).

And the place that Hashem, your G-d, will choose to rest His Name in, there you shall bring all that I am commanding you: your burnt offerings, and your sacrifices, your tithes, and the separation of your hand, and the choicest of vows which you will vow to Hashem (ibid. v. 11).

These verses appearing at the beginning of parshas Re'eh refer to the eventual choosing of a permanent Mikdash in which to offer korbanos. The selection of a central Mikdash would ban the offering of sacrifices on private bamos or altars (ibid. v. 13-14) [1]. The fact that the location of the Mikdash was not immediately revealed coupled with the Torah's commandment "l'shichno sidreshu - inquire after His dwelling" conveys the need to

anxiously long for the Temple before it is built and to eagerly seek out opportunities to visit it when it does exist - ultimately encountering Hashem's Presence resting there. (See Chagiga (2a).)

Several additional sections in our parsha also present mitzvos directly or indirectly related to the Mikdash. These include the bringing of the first fruits to the sanctuary and ma'aser sheini to Jerusalem (v. 6 & 17), offering the first-born animal to the kohein to bring as a korban (ibid.), redeeming a sacrifice with a defect before consuming its meat (12:15 and Rashi), offering the korban Pesach (16:1-2, 5-7), and rejoicing before Hashem three times a year while being oleh regel for the festivals (16:1 ff.).

Perhaps we can suggest that whereas last week's Torah reading, parshas Eikev, places a major emphasis on the spiritual and physical aspects of Eretz Yisrael,[2] our parsha focuses on the even more intensely sanctified areas of Yerushalayim and the Mikdash. (See Keilim 1:6 ff.) Much has been written about the interrelationship of kedushas Eretz Yisrael and kedushas haMikdash. Here, we focus on several aspects of the uniqueness of the Mikdash[3].

At first glance, Rambam and Ramban dispute the central purpose of the Mikdash. Ramban (beginning of Teruma) explains that the Mishkan and later the Mikdash was a continuation of the Divine revelation of Sinai. Specifically, the luchos and the sefer Torah housed in the aron were of course the content of the revelation of Sinai; the gold of the keruvim represented the great fire of the Sinai experience[4]. The revelation of the Torah to Moshe Rabbeinu continued at the Mishkan (see Vayikra 1:1 and Rashi there). True, a major aspect of the avodas haMishkan consisted of the offering of korbanos, but, for Ramban, this seemingly was secondary not primary.

By contrast, Rambam (Hilchos Beis Habechira 1:1) seemingly highlights the bringing of korbanos as the raison d'etre of the sanctuary. In his words:

It is a positive commandment to construct a House for G-d, prepared for sacrifices to be offered within. We [must] celebrate there three times a year...[5]

This debate seems to be further underscored by the fact that Rambam includes the construction of all of the klei haMikdash in the one general commandment of building the Mikdash (see Sefer Hamitzvos, Asei 20). By contrast, Ramban (gloss to Asei 33) maintains that the mitzvah of forming each kli is included in the commandment to perform the particular avoda

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unique to that vessel. For example, the mitzvah to build the shulchan is included in the mitzvah to place the lechem hapanim on it. Since the aron kodesh does not have a particular service associated with it, its construction, in his view, is indeed counted as a separate mitzvah. By highlighting the unique, separate commandment to build the Holy Ark, Ramban further underscores his thesis that the main thrust of the Mikdash was the continuation of the Sinai experience. Rambam who does not count the building of the aron as a separate commandment seems to have a different understanding of the purpose of the Mikdash.

However, a careful reading of Rambam leads to the conclusion that he also views the aron's role as absolutely fundamental. Rambam carefully outlines the construction of each kli of the Mikdash (Beis Habechira 1:18-3:18) but says nothing about the construction of the aron although he describes its placement (ibid. 4:1). The simple explanation for this distinction might be based on the fact that the aron of Moshe's time traditionally will never permanently be lost; consequently, there is no need to describe its construction. By contrast, the other keilim might indeed be lost or otherwise defiled and might need to be replaced.[6] But another Rambam would remain cryptic even if we accept this explanation. The Talmud (Yoma 53b) quotes a debate as to what happened to the aron at the end of the first Temple period. One opinion is that it was exiled to Babylon; another states that it was hidden directly underneath the Kodesh Kadashim. The Rambam rules in accordance with the latter view (ibid.). Why does the Rambam deem it necessary to rule concerning this matter which is seemingly only a matter of Jewish history? Rav Y. D. Soloveitchik zt"l explains that the Rambam views the aron bimkomo (in its place) as a crucial component of the very definition of Mikdash. However, the halachic tradition states, according to the aforementioned latter opinion, that there are two places for the aron: above and below the ground. Whereas in normal times its proper place is above ground in the kodesh kadashim, in dangerous times, where there was fear of enemy forces seizing the aron, its proper place was geographically in the same location but vertically under it. This approach also helps explain more fundamentally why the Rambam omits the construction of the aron even though he describes that of all the rest of the keilim. The other vessels are spiritual furniture in the Mikdash; the aron is part and parcel of the very definition of Mikdash. When the Torah commands "v'asu li Mikdash," it, in effect, is charging bnei Yisrael to create a place for the aron on which Hashem's Shechina will rest, continuing ma'amad har Sinai as Ramban states. In that Mikdash, defined by the aron, various keilim have to be constructed, all

described in turn by Rambam. Thus, when Rambam writes "It is a positive commandment to construct a House for G-d, prepared for sacrifices..." by the phrase, "House of G-d," he means that house containing the aron which defines its purpose - to house the Torah and, because of that, the Shechina. It is at that location that we serve Hashem with the various korban offerings. Thus, Rambam's and Ramban's respective positions can be viewed as essentially similar.

II. The additional prayer of nacheim is recited traditionally only at mincha of Tisha B'av, the day designated to mourn the destruction of the Mikdash specifically and, more generally, all of Jewish tragedy which is viewed as an extension of the former destruction. The Rosh challenges this custom to recite nacheim only at mincha rather than at all the prayers (see Beis Yosef 557). Ritva (*ibid.*) explains why, even though, in his view, the "nacheim" prayer should be recited in all the tefilos of Tisha B'Av, the prayer should be introduced with the word racheim (have mercy) at *ma'ariv* and shacharis; only at mincha should it begin with nacheim (console). The reason he offers, somewhat cryptically, is that the morning of Tisha B'av is similar to the period of *mi shemeiso mutal lefanav*, or the time after death but before burial. Only toward evening, at mincha time, when the Mikdash was set aflame by our enemies, does the period similar to burial begin. Nechama, comfort, is only offered after burial; similarly, the word nacheim is only relevant after the "burial" of the Mikdash[7]. Rav Chanoch Sanhedrai *shlit'a* [8] shared a deeper understanding of the words of Ritva. Before the physical destruction of the Mikdash, Hashem's Shechina, the "soul" of the Mikdash, had already left it. This is directly parallel to the process of death defined as the exit of the soul from the body, *yetzias haneshama*. Only the "body" of the Mikdash was still there. Its physical destruction toward evening was parallel to burial; hence, that is the time for nechama.

Many sources indicate that the eventual rebuilding of the Mikdash and, indeed, of all of Eretz Yisrael will follow a reverse order from that of their destruction. First, the physical edifice, the body, will be reconstructed. Only then will the neshama, the Shechina or, in the case of Eretz Yisrael, all spiritual matters, return in their fullest capacity. See the footnote for some sources on these concepts.[9]

Elsewhere, we have elaborated on the crucial avoda of longing for the building of the Mikdash and how Hashem sometimes will bring about massive unrest among the Jewish people until we do so.[10] May the seven weeks of comfort we are currently in leading up the High Holiday season together with our realization of how much is missing when

Hashem's Or Panim (radiating countenance) does not fully shine upon us as it did in the days of the Temple lead to ever increasing longing for this most-central feature of our Divine service!

[1] See Rashi on the first passuk who explains that of the two verses the former refers to Mishkan Shilo - which, although lasting several hundred years, was destined to be replaced - whereas the latter pertains to the permanent sanctuary in Jerusalem.

[2] See The Fruits of Eretz Yisrael: Outer and Inner Dimensions for further elaboration on this theme.

[3] Most of what is presented here is based on shiurim I was privileged to hear from mori v'Rabi Rav Hershel Schachter *shlit'a*. Any errors in presentation are my own.

[4] See also The Mishkan, Har Sinai, Torah and Eretz Yisrael for further elaboration upon this theme.

[5] Translation courtesy of Chabad.org from the Rabbi Eliyahu Touger edition of Mishne Torah.

[6] See Ramban (gloss to Asei 33) as to why this explanation is unsatisfying.

[7] This would also explain the common Ashkenazic custom mentioned by Rosh to say the nacheim prayer only at mincha.

[8] A dayan in Ramat Beit Shemesh.

[9] Concerning the Mikdash see Aruch Laneir (Sukka 41a); concerning Eretz Yisrael see Megila (17b-18a) and Rav Kook's "Hamisped BiYerushalayim" on the need for mashiach ben Yosef and mashiach ben David.

[10] See Thoughts on Shavuos, Corona and Coronation.

## Mizrachi Dvar Torah

### Rav Doron Perez

#### An Extraordinary People

Mediocrity, being ordinary, is the antithesis to Judaism. This is what the Maharal of Prague says in *Netzach Yisrael* chapter 14 - there is nothing ordinary about the Jewish people.

The Jewish people have such extraordinary highs, as well as extraordinary lows.

We see this idea in this week's parasha - the blessings were given on one mountain, while the curses on another. But there was no in-between.

It is against our DNA to be mediocre. Rather, we are to stand out and change the world in as best way we can.

### Rabbi Dr. Norman J. Lamm's Derashot Ledorot

#### The Lord's Children

Normally, when the Torah records a mitzvah or commandment, it does so without offering any reasons or explanations. In this morning's portion, however, we read one commandment for which no less than two explanations are offered. The Torah tells us, *Lo titgodedu* - you shall not cut any gashes in your body as a sign of mourning. It was the custom of the pagans of antiquity that as a sign of grief they would cut into their flesh until they bled. In prohibiting such disfigurement, the Torah begins by telling us *Banim atem Lashem Elokekhem*, you are children of the Lord your

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God, and then after the commandment it explains, *ki am kadosh ata*, for you are a holy people.

These two explanations - that of being a holy people and that of being children of God - were interpreted by one of our most eminent commentators (R. Yosef Bekhor Shor) as follows: It is not fitting for a member of a venerable people, possessing a proud and sacred history, to tolerate such disfigurement; in addition, every man must remember that he is a child of God. Therefore, even if he suffers excruciating loneliness because he grieves for a lost parent or other relative, he must recognize that his solitude is never absolute, for he is a child of God, and his Heavenly Father lives forever. Therefore, in addition to the dignity of being a Jew, his mourning must be tempered by the knowledge that man is never alone as long as God is there. Actually, these two motifs can serve as splendid insights into all the commandments of the Torah. All the mitzvot enhance the dignity of the Jew as a Jew; they reinforce his nationhood and endow it with a particular grace. Furthermore, in addition to the nationalistic aspect, there is a purely spiritual obligation that man owes to his Creator.

Of course, the two elements of nationalism and religion are truly universal. We need no elaboration of the prevalence of nationalism as a fact of modern experience. What is interesting is the most recent confirmation of the irrepressibility of religion as a natural inclination of man. Only this week we read how in Russia itself, on the eve of the fiftieth anniversary of the Bolshevik revolution, the Russians have discovered that the third generation born into official governmental atheism still shows remarkable signs of religious initiative. The daughter of Stalin speaks of God, the Christian sects refuse to disappear, and communist youth publications still must debate the existence of God and of religion in their newspapers.

But whereas the two facts of nationalism and religion are indeed universal, with Jews they are especially important because they are so intimately associated with each other. One category flows into the other, and one cannot exist without the other. Perhaps this is what our great Kabbalists meant when they said in a most interesting comment in the *Zohar* (to *Mishpatim*, 97b-98a): Who is a child of the Holy One? When one reaches his thirteenth year he is called *ben likneset Yisrael*, a child of the congregation of Israel; and when he is twenty years old - if he is deserving because of his obedience to Torah and the Commandments - he is called *ben leKodesha Berikh Hu*, a son of the Holy One. And that is why it is written, *banim atem Lashem Elokekhem*, you are children of the lord your God.

In other words, the nationalistic awareness and the spiritual striving are two levels of maturity that are indigenous to every Jew. He cannot attain spiritual eminence and fullness unless he is first *ben likneset Yisrael*, a loyal son of Israel; and once he has become a loyal child of his people, he is on his way to becoming a child of God.

That this is so has been amply demonstrated in recent months and years. For one example, Elie Wiesel in his *Jews of Silence* tells of his

experiences when he recently visited Russia. One of them is especially worthy of retelling. A certain Jew in Russia was known to be a mohel, which is, of course, a completely illegal profession. He did his sacred work clandestinely, at the risk of imprisonment or exile or even death. One day, this mohel heard a knock on his door and the man who opened it was a colonel of the Russian Army in full uniform. "Is it true," asked the colonel of the frightened mohel, "that you circumcise children?" The man denied it vehemently, frightened at the appearance of this army officer in full regalia. "I do not believe you," said the colonel, "and I order you immediately to get dressed, take your bag of instruments, and follow me." When the mohel did so, the colonel blindfolded him, took him by his arm out of the door and into his car. After a frightening half hour drive in which not a single word was exchanged, he was led out of the car and into a house. There his blindfold was removed, and he saw before him a woman – obviously the wife of the colonel – in bed with an eight-day old infant. "This is my child," said the colonel, "and I want you to perform the circumcision at once." After the mohel did so, he was asked for his fee, and replied that he would not charge anything at all for this mitzvah. But the colonel insisted, paid him well, gave him some gifts, blindfolded him once again – he would trust no one with the knowledge of his illegal act – and returned the mohel to his home.

Here, then, was a man born into a materialistic and atheistic society, deprived of even the most elementary Jewish education, but who nevertheless recognized himself as a *ben likneset Yisrael*, as a Jew – and this feeling translated itself into the performance of a great mitzvah, although the entire idea was so vague and alien to him intellectually. Intuitively he knew that once you seek to identify yourself as a *ben likneset Yisrael*, you already are on your way to a *ben lekudesha Berikh Hu*; every act of Jewishness, no matter how apparently inexpressive of spiritual content, is in and by and of itself at least a partial confirmation of the acceptance of the Holy One.

Indeed, the world saw this when at the capture of Old Jerusalem, many young Israelis who had never seen a picture of tefillin gladly and enthusiastically donned their tefillin at the Western Wall. Once we recognize *ki am kadosh ata*, then we are ready to approach *banim atem Lashem Elokekhem*; a child of the congregation of Israel is on his way to being a child of the Holy One.

This places upon us religious Jews a dual obligation. One is to encourage every manifestation of Jewishness, no matter how superficial and vacuous it may seem to us who are more committed. It means that every self-identification as a Jew is a spiritually precious phenomenon.

And second, it means that we ourselves must make the trek from Jewishness to Judaism, from our national consciousness to a spiritual consciousness, from being a son of our people to being, as well, a son of the Lord our God.

Indeed, this is the essence of the month of Ellul which we welcome this day. The entire summer is spent by the Jew in concern with his people, in

affirming *ki am kadosh ata*. We observe Tisha Be'Av, and mourn over the destruction of the Holy City, the Temple, and our national independence. Then we emerge into Shabbat Nahamu and the shiva denehemta, and we entertain the consolations that are promised to us in the future – and this year, thank God, we were able to experience this consolation in the present as well. And then, out of this profound awareness of each of us being a *ben likneset Yisrael*, we come to the last month of the year, the month of repentance when we reach out for God Himself. It is during this season of repentance, beginning with the new month of Ellul until the end of the High Holiday season, that we recite each day the psalm that begins with *leDavid Hashem ori veyish'i*. In it David speaks of his confidence in God despite all the enemies that beset him. And in one particularly moving verse he cries out, *ki avi ve'imi azavuni veyashem yaasfeni*, though my father and mother forsake me, nevertheless the Lord will gather me in. Even when the *ki am kadosh ata* is in jeopardy, even when my knowledge that I am a *ben likneset Yisrael* is not of much avail to me because I, together with my people, am surrounded by oppressive and cruel enemies, even then I realize that the ultimate anchorage of our people is in heaven itself. Though earthly parents abandon us, or do not understand us, or have left us orphaned, yet the Lord is our ever loving and eternal Father, and it is to Him to whom we look for our ultimate help and redemption.

That must be our special spiritual orientation on this day and for the months and season that follow. We must strive for the greater and more mature status of *ben leKudesha Berikh Hu*. And David told us how to strive for that in the verse immediately following his declaration of faith in our Heavenly Father: *Horeni Hashem darkekha, u-neheni be'orah Mishor*. Teach me, O Lord, Thy way, and lead me in the path of righteousness. Give me the strength to observe Thy Torah and commandments, and then we will have fulfilled the great and ineffable potential with which we were created – the image of god.



BS"D

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Weekly Blog :: **Rabbi Berel Wein [ZT"L]**

**A Stiff-Necked People**

5774

The Jewish nation is described in the Torah as being a stiff-necked people. In the context of that particular Torah discussion this description of the people of Israel is not necessarily a complimentary one. It refers to the stubbornness of the generation of the desert of Sinai and their rebellious nature in constantly refusing to abide by God's will and to accept Moshe's authority and rule.

Neither plagues nor wars, natural disasters such as serpents and poisonous snakes and supernatural punishments, seem to break their stubborn nature. That generation of the desert of Sinai, those who left Egypt, stood at the revelation of Torah at Mount Sinai, survived on manna from heaven and water from the rock, still never lost their attachment to the culture and slavery of Egypt.

At every turn in the desert we read that they complained and said: "Let us turn our heads round and travel back to Egypt." Part of the nature of stubbornness is the inability to admit past error and to recalculate decisions, attitudes and policies. In the case of the generation of the desert of Sinai, this trait of stubbornness led to tragic consequences.

This generation, which possessed such greatness - the rabbis characterized that generation of the desert of Sinai as being a generation of great knowledge and superior potential wisdom - somehow doomed itself to destruction because of its stiff-necked stubbornness and preconceived negative attitudes. Because of this history of Jewish stubbornness, the phrase "a stiff-necked people" has entered the Jewish lexicon as a very negative trait.

Yet, in the long view of Jewish history over the millennia of its troubles and travails, exiles and persecutions, it is clear that it is this very nature of Jewish stubbornness that has preserved us until this day. Only a stiff-necked people could have survived and retained its identity, its faith, its culture and its vision of eventual destiny over so many years and obstacles.

We are alive simply because of the fact that we are a very stubborn people. Only a stubborn people would have survived the destruction of its Temple and exile from its land and still somehow returned to build it anew after so many years of absence and distance.

A stiff-necked people refuses to succumb to passing fads and imagined political correctness. A stiff-necked people realizes that a small minority can hold correct views and beliefs while more often than not overwhelming majorities are wrong in their policies and faiths.

The great rebbe of Kotzk phrased it correctly and pithily: "Truth can never be outvoted." So the trait of stubbornness and being stiff-necked has enabled the Jewish people to survive long and bitter centuries of exile and to restore itself to its land, independence and influence. It certainly has served us well through our travels in world history.

The Jewish people, especially here in Israel have exhibited tremendous fortitude, determination and resolute stubbornness over the past few weeks of our struggle with Hamas. Innumerable rockets have fallen on the Jewish population in the Land of Israel without breaking our spirit or crippling our justified response. It is not only the Iron Dome antimissile system that has protected us, though one should be awestruck at its efficiency and abilities, but it is the iron will and stubbornness of the Jewish people that has also protected us in this hour of need.

Other civilian populations have succumbed to such bombardments. In World War II, Poland and the Netherlands were broken by the Luftwaffe. However, Great Britain survived the Blitz and later the V1 and V2 rocket attacks even though it suffered more than sixty thousand civilian casualties therefrom. But this ability is currently doubtful, at least in the eyes of this observer of the current world.

Little such fortitude remains in Western society today. There are very few stubborn people left on the globe generally. But the trait of stubbornness has survived well and healthy within the people of Israel. It is undoubtedly part of our DNA makeup. Applied correctly and in proper measure and fitting circumstances, stubbornness and being stiff-necked can be a great virtue, a most positive character and national trait.

The world looks at us as being too stubborn and unreasonable. In a culture where moral equivalency prevails and there is no right or wrong, the world is disturbed by our stubbornness and by our refusing to somehow just let things be, even when our very existence is challenged by the actions of a murderous enemy.

If our enemies and our friends as well would but look at our history and our accomplishments they would realize the positive nature of our stubbornness and respect us for it instead of criticizing us. So we will undoubtedly continue to be a stiff-necked people.

Shabat shalom

### Halachah Musings

#### Sheimot

by R. Gil Student

[In parshas Re'eh, Bnei Yisrael are commanded to destroy all idols and to destroy the names of those idols (Devarim 12:4). The next pasuk states "You shall not do so to Hashem, your G-d" (Devarim 12:4). This means that we are forbidden to destroy (erase) the name of G-d (Sifri, Devarim 61; Makkos 22a).]

What do you do with sacred books (sheimot) that become worn out or otherwise unneeded? Technology has given the question more weight. With so many newspapers, handouts and printouts, the question is more urgent now than ever. We recently discussed the custom in some place to respectfully burn them. This practice was forbidden by most authorities, with one outlier who justified it. Another possible way to deal with the plethora of sheimot is to recycle them. Even if the sheimot are treated respectfully, the deinking part of the recycling process erases the words through the introduction of chemicals. Does this constitute a forbidden erasure of sacred words?

I. What Becomes Sheimot?

Rav Shimon Ben Tzemach Duran (Rashbatz, 15th. cen., Algeria; Responsa Tashbetz 1:2) was asked about a school that did not have textbooks for children. Instead, each week the teacher would write verses on a blackboard, first erasing the previous week's verses. Is this allowed? Rashbatz begins by differentiating between the biblical and rabbinic prohibition against erasing sacred texts. The Torah says about idolatry, "and you shall destroy their name from out of that place" (Deut. 12:3) but warns "You shall not do so to the Lord your God" (ibid., 4). This applies to God's names, of which there are seven, including the Tetragrammaton, the name signifying lordship (adnus), Kel, etc. (Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Hilkhos Yesodei Ha-Torah 6:2).

Rashbatz says that the biblical prohibition applies only to these seven names. Erasing any other part of a verse or a blessing or a religious text, including parts of the Oral Torah, is forbidden on a rabbinic level. Rashbatz points out that writing texts in anything other than a biblical scroll is technically forbidden but allowed because of "eis la'asos la-Shem, it is a time to do for the Lord" (Ps. 119:126), meaning we violate the law in order to sustain the Torah in general (Gittin 60b). If so, argues Rashbatz, erasing is the same as writing and we may do so in order to teach Torah to children if the erasure is only rabbinically forbidden. Rashbatz also says that texts and commentaries in any language have the same status as Hebrew.

Rashbatz's ruling is widely cited as authoritative. Elsewhere we have discussed the debate over whether God's name in any language other than Hebrew is considered among the seven names and therefore falls under the biblical prohibition, or not and it falls under the rabbinic prohibition. (Almost universally, authorities agree that printed books have the same status as written books. See Tzitz Eliezer 3:1:20.)

## II. Pre-Publication Proofs

Already in the nineteenth century, the issue required evaluation due to technology. Before publication, authors need to review proofs of the books to correct for errors. Publishers were releasing so many new sacred books that they were overwhelmed with pre-publication proofs that qualified as sheimos. The question was asked whether these proofs could be disposed of in some way other than burial with a Torah scholar. Leading authorities debated the question.

Rav Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor (19th cen., Russia; Ein Yitzchak 1:5) permitted the respectful disposal of these sheimos for a few reasons. First, he notes that generally speaking we are dealing with sheimos on a rabbinic level (pars. 1, 22), as explained above. Additionally, Rambam (Mishneh Torah, Hilkhos Yesodei Ha-Torah 6:8) rules that if a heretic writes God's name, you may (and should) erase or destroy it because the heretic does not believe in the sanctity of God's name and therefore writes it like any other word. A heretic definitely has intent that the name is not sacred. What if the intent is neutral? This is a matter of debate. Therefore, Rav Spektor (pars. 16,38) suggests that proofs should be printed with explicit intent (said verbally) that they are not intended as sacred. Finally, he points out that the proofs are printed to be used temporarily, for checking, and not for learning Torah (pars. 13,34).

Therefore, Rav Spektor concludes, if burial is impossible, publishers may print pre-publication proofs with an explicit condition and have a child put the proof into a fire to dispose of them respectfully.

Rav Naftali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin (Netziv, 19th cen., Russia; Meishiv Davar 2:80) argues that it is permissible to destroy or erase sacred objects that are sanctified with the intent to destroy them. Pre-publication proofs are intended for proofreading and then destruction. Netziv compares this to sanctifying an animal as a sacrifice at a time when the Temple is destroyed and sacrifices cannot be brought. The Gemara (Avodah Zarah 13a-b) allows destroying such an animal but only in a way that is not disrespectful. Similarly, we should be allowed to dispose of proofs that are printed for temporary use and then destruction.

Others disagreed with this leniency. For example, Rav Yosef Zechariah Stern (19th cen., Lithuania, Responsa Zecher Yehosef, Yoreh De'ah 191) dismisses the notion of disclaiming the sanctity of the text. If you are printing it as a sacred text, even for proofreading, it is a sacred text.

However, the reputation and prestige of Rav Spektor and Netziv gave their permissive rulings lasting authority. The difference between their reasons, however, bears relevance to our question today.

## III. Indirect Erasure

Rav Shmuel Landau, son of the author of Noda Bi-Yehudah (vol. 2, Orach Chaim, no. 17) was asked about a room in a house that was used as a synagogue. Many years later, after having changed owners, can that room be used for personal uses including as a brewery for liquor. One part of the question addresses the prayers that remain written on the wall. The brewing process raises steam that would erase the writing. Rav Landau concludes that you are only allowed to indirectly erase the writing through gerama for the sake of a mitzvah, and this case does not qualify. Instead, he recommends placing a panel on top of the writing. In the course of his answer, he writes that there is no disrespectful treatment greater than erasure. I find this surprising. I would have thought that indirect erasure shows more respect than, for example, tossing words of Torah into the garbage.

The Gemara (Shabbos 120b) discusses a case of some who has God's name written on his arm. The Sages require him to cover the writing when immersing in water so the name is not erased. R. Yossi allows him to immerse normally because while we may not directly erase God's name, we may do indirectly (gerama). If gerama is allowed, this would open the door to many indirect forms of destroying sheimos. However, this ruling does not seem to be quoted by the codes. Rav Landau (ibid.) suggests that this passage is contradicted by a different Gemara (Megillah 26b) that a worn-out Torah scroll must be buried in an earthenware vessel. Why not bury it directly in the ground, since that would cause erasure/decomposition only indirectly? This passage must hold that erasure through gerama is forbidden. At the very least, gerama should only be allowed for a mitzvah, such as immersing for an obligation.

Rav Eliezer Eliyahu Grodnenski (19th cen., Lithuania), in a responsum published by his famous son-in-law and successor Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzinski (Achiezer 2:48), distinguishes between a Torah scroll and other works including a single divine name written on an arm. We are obligated to save a Torah scroll from fire, even on Shabbos. Therefore, we certainly cannot destroy it indirectly. Other sacred texts and a divine name in isolation are different. We do not save them from fire on Shabbos and therefore may erase them through gerama. According to Rav Grodnenski, we may destroy pre-publication proofs through gerama, although he recommends asking a gentile to give it to another gentile to do so. This would seem to allow recycling sacred texts (other than biblical scrolls), as well.

Rav Shlomo HaCohen (19th cen., Lithuania, Cheshek Shlomo, Shabbos 120b) disputes Rav Grodnenski's assumption that a single divine name on an arm is comparable to a prayerbook or Talmud text. Those texts have only a rabbinic prohibition. The name of God has a biblical prohibition and therefore the same status as a Torah scroll. Therefore, Rav Landau's objection stands and we may not cause any Torah texts to be erased even through gerama, unless it is for the sake of a mitzvah.

## IV. What Can Be Done to Torah Newspapers?

We saw above that Rav Spektor gave three reasons for leniency in disposing of pre-publication proofs. 1) They only constitute it sheimos on a rabbinic level. 2) You print them on condition not to sanctify them. 3) You print them for proofreading, not learning Torah. Netziv offers a different reason: 4) You print them with the intent to destroy them.

According to Rav Spektor's approach, you do not print proofs for learning Torah (#3). This does not apply to Torah newspapers and weekly readers. They are published for the specific intent of learning Torah. According to Netziv's approach, you print proofs temporarily, with the intent to destroy them (#4). We also publish weekly Torah material with the intent that they will be discarded shortly. According to Netziv, we should be allowed to discard or recycle Torah newspapers while according to Rav Spektor, we should not.

Rav Moshe Feinstein (Iggeros Moshe, Orach Chaim, vol. 4, no. 39) follows Rav Spektor's approach and allows discarding sacred texts (without God's name) that are no longer usable. However, as long as they can be used, even

if you do not want them, you must bury them. It seems that according to Rav Feinstein, when it comes to Torah newspapers, you may store them until they degrade and cannot be handled any more. Only then, you can discard or recycle them.

Rav Nachum Rabinovitch (Si'ach Nachum, no. 74) and Rav Moshe Sternbuch (Teshuvos Ve-Hanhagos, vol. 1, no. 553) compare Torah newspapers and weekly readers to pre-publication proofs. They seem to follow Netziv's approach, that publication with the intent to discard removes the prohibition. Additionally, they both argue that while the biblical prohibition is against erasing God's name, the rabbinic prohibition is only against treating sacred books disrespectfully. If you can erase or destroy them respectfully, then you do not violate the rabbinic prohibition either. Therefore, they suggest you discard them in a garbage or recycling bin where there is no garbage, wrapped respectfully in other paper or a bag. (Rav Sternbuch says that there is room to be strict and bury all sheimos.) Although recall that Rav Landau said that erasure is the ultimate form of disgrace. According to him, any form of recycling would violate the rabbinic prohibition against treating sacred texts disrespectfully. Gil Student Rabbi Gil Student is the Editor of TorahMusings.com, a leading website on Orthodox Jewish scholarly subjects, and Director of the Halacha Commission of the Rabbinical Alliance of America. He writes a popular column on issues of Jewish law and thought featured in newspapers and magazines, including the Orthodox Union's Jewish Action magazine, The Jewish Link, The Jewish Echo and The Jewish Vues. In the past, he has served as the President of the small Jewish publisher Yashar Books and as the Managing Editor of OU Press.

## Parshas Re'eh

### Chofetz Chaim on the Torah

Chofetz Chaim Al Ha'Torah is a sefer of the Chofetz Chaim's divrei Torah on the Chumash, written by his trusted talmid, Rav Shmuel Greinemann zt"l. קַיְיָ קָרְבָּנְבָּרְאָן אָוֹ תְּלַמְּדָנָן אַלְעָד אָתָּה מַקְתָּה

If a prophet or a dreamer of a dream arises among you and presents you with an omen or a wonder... {Devarim 13:2)

Citing verses, Rashi explains that he gives you "an omen" in the heavens or "a wonder" on the earth. "Even so, do not listen to him. And you may ask, 'Why does Hakadosh Baruch Hu grant him the power to produce an omen?' The answer is that Hashem, your G-d is putting you to the test (13:4)." From here we see that in times when Hakadosh Baruch Hu wants to test the Jewish People, He gives great success to those who rebel against Him - to the point that they are able to perform "omens" and wonders." If this is so, He certainly gives them worldly, material types of success.

Now, from many verses it is clear that just before the Mashiach comes, Hakadosh Baruch Hu will subject our nation to very difficult tests- It is written, for example, I will purify them as one purifies silver, and I will refine them as one refines gold {Zechariah 13:9). That is, He will test us to see whether we are truly devoted to Him and His Torah, as the verse concludes there. At that point in time, when it will be necessary to test people to show whether they truly love and the Torah with all their hearts and souls, He elevates those that have abandoned His way and gives them smashing successes in all that they do. This is a trial for those who serve Him, to see whether they remain faithful and continue to serve Him wholeheartedly despite all the successes of the blasphemers and those who hate Him. And if those who still serve Him pass this test, He will shower His love upon them and save them from the wicked. The verse, You shall destroy the evil from your midst, will be applied to the latter.

This is what is prophesied by Malachi, the last of the prophets: At that time, those who fear Hashem will speak, each man to his fellow (3:16). The reference is to the time when the evil-doers are enjoying tremendous success - as it is written in the preceding verse, Those who work wickedness are even built up, and those who test Him escape (3:15). That is when "those who fear Hashem and have regard for His Name" will gather and say to one another, "The time for the great test has arrived, and we should not resent or complain about the successes of the wicked, for Hashem is subjecting us to a trial, to

see whether we love Him with all our heart and soul. If we just withstand this trial, our redemption and salvation are near."

These prophetic words are particularly relevant to the present time, when we see the success of the wicked in destroying the world. Nevertheless, do not despair. We must not become downhearted because Hashem is testing us to see if we remain faithful to His Covenant, and if we love Him with all our heart.<sup>1</sup>

### MAASAI L'MELECH

#### Rav Shmuel Greinemann zt"l

In Vilna, at a meeting of rabbanim and roshei yeshivah about strengthening Yiddishkeit and Torah institutions, one of the rabbanim began his drashah with the aforementioned verse, At that time, those who fear Hashem will speak, each man to his fellow (Malachi 3:16). He meant, "Now is the time to meet together and search for ways to strengthen the yeshivos and Yiddishkeit."

Later, at the same meeting, when the Chafetz Chaim began his drashah, he referred to the verse that the previous speaker had opened with. The Chafetz Chaim said that since the verse begins with the word az - "At that time (those who fear Hashem will speak)" it is obvious that the verse is a continuation of something. Accordingly, let us examine the previous verses.

Previously, in Hashem's Name, the prophet says to the nation: your words have been strong against Me... You said that it is not worthwhile to serve Elokim...and now you praise the evildoers, and those who work wickedness are even built up, and those who test Him escape. The Chafetz Chaim commented, "When the evildoers and the wicked are already built up and have tested Hashem and escaped Him, only then do those who fear Hashem meet and gather to talk to one another! But this is not a time for talk! When the transgressors are already entrenched, when they have already sent down strong roots and are solidly built on strong foundations, the time for action has come - decisive, powerful action to strengthen the institutions of Torah and all of Yiddishkeit!" And so he continued for a few hours. Fortunate are those who heard him!

Tongue in cheek, one of the great rabbanim of Vilna said that he would like to offer an explanation of the Chafetz Chaim's words, and a conclusion that the Chafetz Chaim in his humility refrained from articulating. Possibly, he wanted to continue as follows: az nidbaru (then shall speak...) That is, "We at these meetings speak, but who listens?" The verse answers, Hashem listened and heard. "Only Hashem pays attention to our drashos." And a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who feared Him. The Chafetz Chaim wanted to say, "Although you can be called yirei Hashem (those who fear Hashem), you remain [as the verse continues] choshvei Sh'mo (those who think about His Name)." That is, "You are like somebody who thinks to do something, but in the end does nothing, because that's how all of our meetings end..."

At that meeting the Chafetz Chaim spoke for more than four consecutive hours! Later, as the sun dipped nearer to the horizon and the shadows grew longer, one of the rabbanim expressed concern to those at the head table that it was necessary to daven Minchah. The Chafetz Chaim, seated nearby, heard and nearly started to complain that the meeting's proceedings were being needlessly interrupted. He said, "We are dealing with how to increase Heaven's honor through support for the yeshivos, and they want to daven Minchah?" In the end, though, those who wanted to interrupt the meeting and pray were victorious, and everyone present - nearly three hundred rabbanim - davened Minchah. After Minchah the gaon Rabbi Chaim Ozer zt"/, who was the chairman of the gathering, explained the objection of the Chafetz Chaim zt"/: "It is an explicit halachah that one who is involved in a mitzvah is exempt from another mitzvah. This is especially so if the first mitzvah is Torah study or the support of Torah study, which is equal [to all the other mitzvos]. But when does this apply? It applies when the first mitzvah is being fulfilled in the prescribed manner, as the Chafetz Chaim was doing, for all his thoughts and his entire being were immersed in the matter which we all came here to discuss. On the other hand, when some participants in the meeting were more concerned about Minchah, it was apparent that they had left room in their minds for other matters. Really,

therefore, they were obligated to daven Minchah - because only someone who is [fully] engaged in a mitzvah is exempt from another mitzvah." ... Chafetz Chaim on the Torah 2 Volume (recently republished) is available at <https://israelbookshoppublications.com/products/chafetz-chaim-on-the-torah-2-volume-slipcase-set>

#### Rabbi Yochanan Zweig - Parshas Reeh

That's What Friends Are For "This is what you shall not eat...the chasidah..." (14:12,18) The Ramban teaches that the birds which we are prohibited to eat exhibit negative character traits, and therefore, consumption of those birds would infuse these traits into the person's character.<sup>1</sup> In light of this, it is difficult to reconcile the Ramban's teaching with the Talmud's explanation of the name "chasidah", one of the prohibited birds, so called for the "chesed" - "kindness" which it displays towards its friends.<sup>2</sup> How could kindness be considered a negative trait? An answer is given in the name of the Kotzker Rebbe. Since the bird only performs acts of kindness for those whom it considers to be its friends, this is a negative trait. One should be sensitive to anyone in need, not exclusively to friends. However, this answer does not completely solve the problem. According to the Kotzker Rebbe's explanation, why does the Torah define the bird by the positive acts that it does, rather than by its negative trait, the chesed which it does not do? Perhaps the Talmud is teaching us that since the bird considers that which it does for its friends to be a chesed, this is a negative trait. One should view that which he does for his friends as an expression of his commitment to the relationship, not as a charitable act. 1. See Ramban Parshas Shemini 11:13, these are birds that exhibit cruelty. 2. Chullin 63a.

#### Morals and Meanings in Re'eh

Rav Immanuel Bernstein <ravbernstein@journeysintorah.com>

Aug 21, 2025

Re'eh Will-Power

כִּי יִסְתַּחַךְ אֲחֵיךְ... לְאָמֵר גַּלְכָּה וּנְעַבְדָּה אֱלֹהִים אֶחָרִים... וְלֹא תַחַס עִינְךָ עַלְיוֹ וְלֹא מִקְלֵל לְוֹא תַכְפֵּה עַלְיוֹ.

If your brother will entice you... saying, "Let us go and worship the gods of others"... your eye shall not take pity on him, you shall not be compassionate nor conceal him.<sup>[1]</sup>

The Torah's treatment of the one who entices others after idolatry is unusually severe. No compassion is shown to him and no claims advanced by the court on his behalf, as they would be in other cases. The reason for this exceptional treatment is provided in verse 11, "בְּקַשׁ לְקַרְבָּן מְעַל ה' אֱלֹהִים – For he sought to make you stray from near Hashem, your God." That is to say, the extraordinarily harsh punishment is in response to his desire itself to cause people to stray from after Hashem, regardless of whether or not he succeeded in doing so.

Regarding this idea, R' Simcha Zissel Ziv, the Alter of Kelm, commented as follows: A well-known principle in the Torah is that "מהה טובה מרובה ממדת פורענות" – A positive measure is always more abundant than one of calamity.<sup>[2]</sup> If so, then we can learn from this parsha how great will be the reward for one who seeks and endeavors to bring people closer to Hashem, whether he succeeds in doing so or not. The very desire to connect people with their Father in heaven, and the effort expended toward that end, are in and of themselves of inestimable value, and sources of incalculable merit!<sup>[3]</sup> In addition, as we know, often the person may not be open or receptive to a Torah idea at the time, but it might resurface and reverberate at some later stage, perhaps even years later, when either life experience in general or a particular event may serve as a catalyst for the idea to impact them. A Torah idea is not always received as a ray of light that is beamed back towards us instantaneously. Sometimes it is a seed that is planted, and all we see before our eyes is it being swallowed up and disappearing into the ground. We are not always there to see when the rains come and allow it to sprout, or when the sun shines and enables it to develop.

May our portion always be among those who bring merit to the community, each of us with the unique set of talents and circumstances with which he has been blessed.

[1] Devarim 13:7-9. [2] See Sotah 11a. [3] R' Simcha Zissel Ziv of Kelm.

#### The Unique Characteristics of Kedushat Yerushalayim

Nov 3, 2017

#### Halakhic Positions of Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik

by R. Aharon Ziegler

Rav Soloveitchik expressed the idea that Yerushalayim is endowed with a unique Kedusha (holiness) that is called kedushat shechina-the holiness of G-d. Whereas the holiness of most places emerges from human energy, the holiness of Yerushalayim does not emerge from us, it comes from an external force- from G-d Himself.

The Rambam concludes (Hilchot Beit HaBechira 6:16) that just as HaShem is above any boundary of time, so too the holiness that emerges from HaShem is equally eternal. It follows, therefore, that Yerushalayim's holiness is endless and infinite. It is a Kedusha that lasts forever.

The Rav pointed out that when we first entered Eretz Yisrael in the days of Yehoshua, Yerushalayim was conquered last. The movement of conquering the land was from the periphery to the center. Hundreds of years passed between the conquest of Yericho by Yehoshua, and the building of the Beit HaMikdash by Shlomo HaMelech. Since the Land of Israel was conquered prior to Yerushalayim, Israel remained holy only as long as we maintained control of the land. Once the land was conquered by the Babylonians, the holiness departed.

However, when we re-entered the land in the days of Ezra, Yerushalayim was settled first. It follows, therefore, that whatever lands were liberated afterwards, were imbued with the spirit of Yerushalayim. Just as the holiness of Yerushalayim is eternal, so too is the holiness of the whole part of Israel. That is why the Rambam believes that even after the Roman conquest of Israel; the land retained its holiness.

The Har HaBayit and Yerushalayim are the Neshama (soul) of the Jewish people and the Neshama of the Jewish land. It is above and beyond any boundary of time, and reminds us of our proud past and of our hope and faith in a promising future.

#### Parshat Re'eh by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair -

[www.seasonsofthemoon.com](http://www.seasonsofthemoon.com) **Parsha Overview** Moshe presents to the nation the blessing of a spiritually oriented life, and the curse of becoming disconnected from Hashem. When the nation enters Eretz Yisrael, they must burn down any trees that had been used for idol-worship, and destroy all idolatrous statues. Hashem will choose only one place where the Divine Presence will dwell. Offerings may be brought only there, but not to a private altar.

Moshe repeatedly warns against eating animal blood. In the desert, all meat was slaughtered in the Mishkan, but in Eretz Yisrael meat may be shechted anywhere. Moshe lists the categories of foods that may be eaten only in Jerusalem. He warns the nation against copying the ways of the other nations. Since the Torah is complete and perfect, nothing may be added to or subtracted from it. If a so-called prophet tells the people to permanently abandon a Torah law or indulge in idol worship, he is to be put to death. One who entices others to worship idols is to be put to death. A city of idolatry must be razed. It is prohibited to show excessive signs of mourning, such as marking the skin or making a bald spot.

Moshe reiterates the classifications of kosher and non-kosher food and the prohibition of cooking meat and milk. Produce of the second tithe must be eaten in Jerusalem, and if the amount is too large to carry, it may be exchanged for money with which food is bought in Jerusalem and eaten there. In certain years this tithe is given to the poor. Bnei Yisrael are instructed to always be open-hearted, and in the seventh year any loans must be discounted, and then Hashem will bless the person in all ways. A Jewish bondsman is released after six years, and must be sent away with generous provisions. If he refuses to leave, his ear is pierced with an awl at the door post and he remains a bondsman until the Jubilee Year. This Torah portion concludes with a description of the three pilgrimage festivals: Pesach, Shavuot and Succot.

<https://aish.com/rabbi-berel-wein-influences-reflections/>

## Rabbi Berel Wein: Influences & Reflections

by Rabbi Berel Wein

April 1, 2025

One of my most vivid childhood memories is of my father taking me with him to Chicago's Midway Airport to greet Rabbi Isaac Halevi Herzog, the chief rabbi of Palestine after the Second World War. Almost all the distinguished Orthodox rabbis in Chicago came to the airport that day to welcome him. I remember him alighting from the plane and walking down the stairs in his shiny top hat, holding his cane in one hand and a Tanach (Bible) in the other. With his silver beard and aristocratic demeanor, he was a majestic presence.

We all accompanied Rabbi Herzog to the yeshiva, where he delivered a 45-minute Talmudic lecture in Yiddish. I still remember his topic, and though I was not yet bar mitzvah, I pretty much followed his discourse. After that, he addressed us in English. Having been a rabbi in Dublin, he spoke with a slight Irish brogue, which I found somewhat incongruous with his Eastern European rabbinical appearance.

Rabbi Herzog told us he had been to the Vatican and had asked Pope Pius XII to return the thousands of Jewish children entrusted to Catholic institutions in Europe by parents hoping to save them from annihilation at the hands of the Germans. The pope had flatly refused, claiming that since all the children had been baptized upon entering those institutions, they could not now be given over to those who would raise them in a different faith. Overcome with emotion, the rabbi put his head down on the lectern and wept bitterly. We were all in shock, as the enormity of the Jewish tragedy of World War II began sinking in.

Then Rabbi Herzog defiantly raised his head and looked at the young men gathered before him. "I cannot save those thousands of Jewish children," he declared, "but I ask of you – how are you going to help rebuild the Jewish People?" Afterward, when we filed by him to shake his hand and receive his blessing, he repeated to each and every one of us: "Did you understand what I said to you? Don't forget it."

All my life, Rabbi Herzog's words have echoed in my ears and soul. Numerous times in my rabbinic career, I've been discouraged and downhearted. But then I remembered his words. They have continually inspired and challenged me, shaping many of my decisions and actions.

Herman Wouk

Aside from the two very influential speeches I heard from Rabbi Herzog and Rabbi Kahaneman (the Ponivezher Rav), two addresses delivered at banquets in the 1950s impacted my life's ambitions and thoughts.

The first was by Herman Wouk, the Pulitzer Prize-winning author, playwright, and screenwriter. He was an observant Jew who had made good in the outside world – a rarity in his time. Back then, the Jewish world believed that no Orthodox Jew could succeed in American life without sacrificing Torah observance and beliefs. The prevalent assumption was that one had to blend in to the general American lifestyle and mores in order to achieve fame and fortune. Considered an anachronism, Orthodox Jews were encouraged to maintain a low profile and never rock the boat. In such an anti-Orthodox climate, Herman Wouk delivered a 45-minute oratorical gem in defense of Torah study and observance to a mainly non-observant audience. He warned that his listeners would have no Jewish descendants if they themselves did not adopt a more Jewish lifestyle. The audience was stunned, for the Orthodox rabbis of the day dared not be so blunt. For the first time in a long time, I felt that Orthodoxy had a chance to succeed in a big way in America.

I always have been grateful to Wouk for that speech and for his great book *This Is My God*. I found this work very useful in my rabbinic career; I must have given away dozens of copies to Jews who knew nothing of their faith but felt some inner pull to at least find out what they were abandoning.

The second speech, delivered at a banquet for Beis Medrash L'Torah in the early 1950s, was by Rabbi Pinchas M. Teitz of Elizabeth, New Jersey. Most European rabbis used speaking engagements to bemoan the state of American Jewry, especially in comparison to the glory days of Eastern European Jewish life. Not Rabbi Teitz. He spoke of a coming revolution in American Jewish life; of a growing and vital Orthodoxy; of the triumph of the day school and yeshiva movements. His optimism made him a heroic figure in my eyes, and he remained such over many decades. I had much to do with him later in life, and he was of great help to me in numerous rabbinic matters. Every rabbi needs a hero to help guide him, and Rabbi Teitz played that role for me in many areas of Jewish public life.

Supporting the Donor

Rabbi Kahaneman, the Ponivezher Rav, enlisted me to be his driver a few mornings a week as he raised funds for his yeshiva. Just being in his company was an honor and a joy. I learned a great deal from him about people, life, fundraising, and – above all – Torah knowledge and values. He loved all Jews (no easy task), and they loved him back. He taught me that one must accept personal insults and slights for the sake of

Torah. I witnessed many "miraculous" feats of fundraising. He could get money from a stone.

During those years, I knew a wonderful man in my congregation. He was a widower without children, though he had nephews and nieces. He was quite wealthy, but at only 55 had suffered two heart attacks and survived cancer. His doctors advised him to live out his few remaining years in the Florida sunshine rather than the frost and snow of northern New Jersey. So he retired to Miami Beach, where he became a leader in our community. Mindful of his physicians' predictions, he dutifully purchased an annuity plan that would provide him with a generous income until age ninety. He fully expected to die before then.

But the Lord thought otherwise, and this fellow reached his 90th birthday fully well, still productive, and active. But now he had no income, and he rapidly used up his savings. No bank would advance him a mortgage due to his age. So I organized deliveries of food and other necessities to him.

The man had been a staunch supporter of the Ponivezher Yeshiva, giving Rav Kahaneman a sizable donation every year. One day, the Rav instructed me to take him to this man's house. I told him that his former supporter had no money now and that our visit under these circumstances would embarrass him. Nevertheless, the Rav insisted.

We arrived and sat down in the man's living room. The Rav announced in his mellifluous voice, and with that wonderful smile on his face, "Until now, you have generously helped the yeshiva in its times of need. Now the yeshiva is going to repay you in kind. Every month the yeshiva will send you the amount of your monthly annuity check, and I want you to continue living as you always have." Offsetting the man's protests, he added, "After 120 years, you and I will straighten out this matter between us."

As we left the bewildered old gentleman, the Rav told me, "A yeshiva is also obligated to perform acts of kindness and mercy to others." And that is exactly what he did. For the next four years, until the man passed away, the yeshiva sent him a monthly check. Upon his death, he left his house in Miami Beach to the yeshiva.

It's All Your Fault

During my years as rabbinic administrator, I flew a lot. Interesting things always seem to occur on my travels, providing me with lots of airplane stories. In early 1974, when the Arab oil embargo of America was in full force, I was seated on a plane next to a very well-dressed businesswoman. In mid-flight, without warning, she turned to me and said, "You know, all this trouble we're in is your fault." America was suffering from a major gasoline shortage, with long lines at every gas station, bringing much latent anti-Semitism to the fore. Yet I was taken aback by the nature and tone of her words.

Somehow, I very calmly answered her, "No, madam. It may be because of me, but it is definitely not my fault." We said nothing more for the rest of the flight.

Remember: Much may happen in human society and history for which the Jewish People may be the catalyst, but in no way does that make us at fault for what occurs. This crucial subtlety underpins all intelligent appraisals of Jewish history.

Teach Them Diligently: The Personal Story of a Community Rabbi by Rabbi Berel Wein is published by Maggid Books, a division of Koren Publishers Jerusalem. It is available online and at local Jewish bookstores.

<https://mishpacha.com/voice-of-history/>

## Voice of History

By Gedalia Guttentag | August 19, 2025

**Rabbi Berel Wein:** An unquenchable love for the greatest saga of all — the survival of his people

For Rabbi Berel Wein, the historical narrative wasn't just about the past, but about the present and future — about life itself, woven with the dramatic chronicle of unshakable Jewish faith. Yet his scholarly and rabbinic achievements rested on the foundation of his early life, growing up in Chicago among the previous generation's gedolim — and on an unquenchable love for the greatest saga of all: the survival of his people

If you walked into Rabbi Berel Wein's Rechavia apartment in recent years, chances are you caught a glimpse of something rare: the sight of real thinking.

Not the mere brain activity that most of us engage in, but sustained, active thought. Head in hand, withdrawn from the surroundings, pondering something deep — that was my first impression of Rabbi Wein a few years ago, when I asked for some time to discuss a Jewish history project.

When I entered, I beheld a legend. The larger-than-life rabbi, rosh yeshivah and raconteur who'd placed volumes on all of our shelves, and Jewish history on the Orthodox world's curriculum. There he sat, his sight failing but his penetrating vision ranging through the Jewish ages.

What I discovered in that first conversation was that for Rabbi Wein, history wasn't about the past for its own sake. It was about the present and future — about life itself.

The way he made sense of the world was by unlocking the treasure-houses of what had already been. The conviction with which he lived — what drove him through a career of unusual variety and creativity — were those thousands of years of Jewish history. History undergirded his sense of netzach Yisrael, the call of the Torah ranging across time, the awareness of Jewish destiny.

Shaped by Lithuania Rabbi Wein, who passed away last Shabbos at 91, was born in 1934 into a house with a pedigree of greatness. His father, Rabbi Zev Wein, was a talmid of Rav Shimon Shkop in Grodno, and later of Rav Kook in Yerushalayim, who emigrated to Chicago and served in its rabbinate until the 1970s.

That lineage afforded Rabbi Wein junior a second-hand encounter with the masters of the prewar yeshivah world. Those impressions were reinforced by his rebbeim at Hebrew Theological College, later known as Skokie Yeshiva, founded by his maternal grandfather, Rabbi Chaim Tzvi Rubenstein.

Rabbi Rubenstein — whom Rabbi Wein described as his “hero” — was no ordinary personality either. He had been a chavrusa in Volozhin Yeshiva of the famous Meitscheter Illui, Rabbi Shlomo Polacheck. It was he who set his grandson on the path to lifelong Torah scholarship.

He urged young Berel’s parents to remove their son from public school when he was 11 and place him in a class of 16-year-olds in the yeshivah. Until then, Mrs. Wein used to review her son’s school lessons with him every day, telling him what he should ignore.

The milieu that Rabbi Wein was raised in was that of Litvaks transplanted to American soil — an environment that was inhospitable to Orthodoxy until the great rise of the postwar yeshivah world. It manifested the complexity of Jews who came from a storied past, yet struggled with observance in the present.

“I can still summon up the atmosphere in my father’s shul on Rosh Hashanah,” Rabbi Wein said in an interview for this magazine. “During the Shemoneh Esreh, one could feel the intensity and that we were truly hanging between life and death, chayim u’maves. And many of those who davened in his shul felt compelled to work on Shabbos.”

The Midwest’s first yeshivah featured an all-star set of roshei yeshivah who were some of the finest minds of the Eastern European Torah world. One was Rav Chaim Kreiswirth, an illui who had been close to Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzinski in Vilna. Later a legendary chief rabbi in Antwerp, he became Rabbi Wein’s main rebbi. Other strong influences there were Rav Mordechai Rogow and renowned mechanech Rav Mendel Kaplan.

The affinity for old-world greatness nurtured under these teachers meant that Torah leaders as diverse as the Ponevezher Rav and the Satmar Rav saw Rabbi Wein as a figure of stature.

World of Books Beis Medrash L’Torah, as Skokie Yeshiva was officially called, possessed a magnificent library, with 30,000 volumes, which were housed in a separate building. Since Berel’s classmates were much older and taller than him, instead of playing basketball with them during lunch break, he wandered into the library building.

There he nurtured his natural love of books. The librarian, Mrs. Mishkin, whose husband was head of the Vaad Hachinuch of the Associated Talmud Torahs of Chicago, would hand the young boy books to read, most of them on Jewish history. The first was a biography of the Rosh. Over a lifetime of voracious reading, Rabbi Wein would devour countless volumes.

Blessed with a sharp mind and phenomenal recall, his research on any given topic was informed by the library that he’d ingested.

In 1955, Rabbi Wein married Yocheved (Jackie) née Levin, whose father Rav Eliezer was a product of Kelm and a leading member of the Detroit rabbinate.

An education spanning Skokie Yeshiva, Yeshiva University, and then law school, meant that when he left the legal world, he entered his first rabbinic position at Beth Israel in Miami Beach in 1964 with an unusually diverse skillset. He was a leader, educator, and writer all rolled into one.

Given his background and clear aptitude for rabbinics, why did he practice law at all? In an interview with Mishpacha, he explained that the realities of the time dictated his career choices.

“When I graduated college at 18, my father took me aside and spelled out the facts of life. We had little money. The number of shuls in Chicago was in rapid decline, and the chances of securing a pulpit were slim. A relative told my father that he would bring me into his small firm if I passed the bar.

I was accepted at the University of Chicago Law School, one of the country’s best, but I wanted to continue in the semichah shiur at HTC, and so I went to DePaul Law School at night.”

In the tussle between parnassah and purpose, the latter eventually won out — helped along by a dose of disenchantment with the law as a profession.

“In the practice of law, you tend to see people at their worst, and since most of my clients were Orthodox Jews, I found that extremely disheartening,” Rabbi Wein said. “Rav Chaim Kreiswirth, who had been my rosh yeshivah, often told me on his frequent visits to Chicago that there were enough Jewish lawyers. And indeed, I

eventually started a tool-and-die business to enable me to get out of the practice of law.

“One day, as I was closing the business, I found my old friend from yeshivah Rabbi Aryeh Rottman waiting for me.

“I’m leaving my shul in Miami Beach, and Rabbi Kreiswirth says you should be my successor,” he told me.

“I replied that I wasn’t interested, but Rabbi Rottman was not someone who took no for an answer, especially when on a mission from his rosh yeshivah. Eventually, he prevailed on me to go for a trial, and I was offered the job after a very narrow congregational vote. Fortunately, by the time I left nine years later, I think I would have won a unanimous or near unanimous vote.”

Practice and Preaching Sometimes, lost in the hindsight of his writing career was the very practical and multifaceted nature of decades of previous work. From 1964 to 1972, Rabbi Wein served as Executive Vice President of OU Kashrus, a period in which the organization attained its global prominence thanks to Rabbi Wein’s work. The OU position came about through a connection formed in Miami Beach. Rabbi Alexander Rosenberg, the director of the OU Kashrus Division, appointed Rabbi Wein as a mashgiach at various nearby food producers. Over the course of two decades, Rabbi Rosenberg built the Kashrus Division from 40 mashgichim, certifying 184 products of 37 companies, into an organization with 750 mashgichim, 2,500 products, and 475 companies. The two rabbis struck up a close relationship, which paved the way for Rabbi Wein to enter the OU’s top ranks.

The next stop in 1972 was Suffern, New York, where Rabbi Wein became rav of Bais Torah Congregation in Rockland County.

Over the next 25 years, he had a transformative effect on the community. He founded Yeshiva Shaarei Torah, developed chessed institutions, and attracted young families to settle and build Jewish life.

During those years, congregants were exposed to the signature blend of Torah, history, and dry humor that later became famous worldwide.

That groundbreaking combination of erudition and style burst into cars and living rooms across the Jewish world in the 1980s. Rabbi Wein would retell the encounter in Yerushalayim in which he concluded that — as good as his chiddushim as a rosh yeshivah in Monsey were — others could do that job.

His own calling was to tell the story of Am Yisrael. That fateful encounter led to the Destiny series of tapes, books, and movies on Jewish history.

Within a few years, his coffee-table edition trilogy Herald of Destiny, Triumph of Survival, and Echoes of Glory adorned homes and shuls across the English-speaking world. The publishing process turned Rabbi Wein and Artscroll general editor Rabbi Nosson Scherman — who edited many of his books — into good friends.

“The relationship was far deeper than merely professional,” says Rabbi Scherman.

“Although Reb Berel was a genius and an excellent writer, he welcomed suggestions and editing. He valued accuracy over ego. It was not only an education, but a pleasure to work with him.”

The landmark 4-volume history series presented the story of the Jewish people across the centuries, leavened by his acute observations, constructive cynicism, and gentle humor.

“He was a master at combining Jewish and general history and showing how our people were affected by, and coped with, the powers and events that surrounded and often subjugated them.”

Along the way were flashes of his trademark wit, Rabbi Scherman remembers. “An interviewer asked him how he arrived at the title, Herald of History. He replied, ‘Harold is a Jewish name, isn’t it?’”

Past Forward His feat was to transform history — to many, a dusty discipline — into the dramatic narrative of Jewish faith that it should be. The pre-eminent popular Jewish historian, he knew how to retain the grand sweep of a saga, while retaining the accuracy demanded of history as a discipline.

Always focused on the Jewish future, Rabbi Wein believed firmly that the post-Holocaust revival that had two great centers — Israel and America — would tilt ever more firmly in the favor of the Holy Land.

“Every exile ends, and that end is not usually a happy one,” he said. “I can well imagine an America in which the government tells religious Jews what they can and cannot teach in their schools, and in which religious liberty is gradually whittled away. By contrast, in Israel, I have witnessed over the last 30 years, that the society as a whole has become more and more Jewish. That can easily be missed if we focus too much on the day-to-day religious battles and ignore the long-term trends.”

“But the one absolute principle of Jewish history is that Jewish communities only flourish when there is a strong core of Torah learning and mitzvah observance.”

Given those beliefs in the Providential rise of Eretz Yisrael as the focus of Jewish history — now rushing toward its conclusion — it’s no surprise that Rabbi Wein chose to put his money where his abundant words were.

That’s where he and his wife directed themselves in 1997, where Rabbi Wein — pulpit rabbi, historian, and visionary — attained the prestigious podium of the Beit Knesset Hanasi in Rechavia.

From that leafy Yerushalmi neighborhood, his prolific output continued to flow, the Torah of destiny emanating from Tzion continuing beyond his own petirah in the form of yet to be published writings.

So prolific was his output — both print and oral — that a standard tribute is largely unnecessary, since Rabbi Wein was himself his own biographer. What follows are tributes from family, students, and colleagues. They paint a picture of a unique rabbi — one who followed his inner calling to amplify the Bas Kol, the booming Heavenly Voice that resonates out of Jewish history.

Mishpacha, Issue 1075

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from: The Rabbi Sacks Legacy <info@rabbisacks.org>

date: Aug 21, 2025

subject: The Politics of Freedom (Re'eh)

COVENANT & CONVERSATION

**The Politics of Freedom**

**RE'EH**

**Rabbi Jonathan Sacks zt"l**

written by Rabbi Sacks in 2012

Having set out the broad principles of the covenant, Moses now turns to the details, which extend over many chapters and several parshiyot. The long review of the laws that will govern Israel in its land begin and end with Moses posing a momentous choice. Here is how he frames it in this week's parsha:

See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse - the blessing if you obey the commands of the Lord your God that I am giving you today; the curse if you disobey the commands of the Lord your God and turn from the way that I command you today by following other gods, which you have not known.

Deut. 11:26-28 And here is how he puts it at the end:

"See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil... I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live."

Deut. 30:15, Deut. 30:19 Maimonides takes these two passages as proof of our belief in freewill (Hilchot Teshuvah 5:3), which indeed they are. But they are more than that. They are also a political statement. The connection between individual freedom (which Maimonides is talking about) and collective choice (which Moses is talking about) is this: If humans are free then they need a free society within which to exercise that freedom. The book of Devarim represents the first attempt in history to create a free society.

Moses' vision is deeply political but in a unique way. It is not politics as the pursuit of power or the defence of interests or the preservation of class and caste. It is not politics as an expression of national glory and renown. There is no desire in Moses' words for fame, honour, expansion, empire. There is not a word of nationalism in the conventional sense. Moses does not tell the people that they are great. He tells them that they have been rebellious, they have sinned, and that their failure of faith during the episode of the spies cost them forty extra years of delay before entering the land. Moses would not have won an election. He was not that kind of leader.

Instead he summons the people to humility and responsibility. We are the nation, he says in effect, that has been chosen by God for a great experiment. Can we create a society that is not Egypt, not empire, not divided into rulers and ruled? Can we stay faithful to the more-than-human hand that has guided our destinies since I first stood before Pharaoh and asked for our freedom? For if we truly believe in God — not God as a philosophical abstraction but God in whose handwriting our history has been written, God to whom we pledged allegiance at Mount Sinai, God who is our only sovereign — then we can do great things.

Not great in conventional terms, but great in moral terms. For if all power, all wealth, all might belong to God, then none of these things can rightfully set us apart one from another. We are all equally precious in His sight. We have been charged by Him to feed the poor and bring the orphan and widow, the landless Levite and non-Israelite stranger, into our midst, sharing our

celebrations and days of rest. We have been commanded to create a just society that honours human dignity and freedom.

Moses insists on three things. First, we are free. The choice is ours. Blessing or curse? Good or evil? Faithfulness or faithlessness? You decide, says Moses. Never has freedom been so starkly defined, not just for an individual but for a nation as a whole. We do not find it hard to understand that as individuals we are confronted by moral choices. Adam and Eve were. So was Cain. Choice is written into the human condition.

But to be told this as a nation — this is something new. There is no defence, says Moses, in protestations of powerlessness, in saying, We could not help it. We were outnumbered. We were defeated. It was the fault of our leaders or our enemies. No, says Moses, your fate is in your hands. The sovereignty of God does not take away human responsibility. To the contrary, it places it centre-stage. If you are faithful to God, says Moses, you will prevail over empires. If you are not, nothing else — not military strength nor political alliances — will help you.

If you betray your unique destiny, if you worship the gods of the surrounding nations, then you will become like them. You will suffer the fate of all small nations in an age of superpowers. Don't blame others or chance or ill-fortune for your defeat. The choice is yours; the responsibility is yours alone.

Second, we are collectively responsible. The phrase "All Israel are sureties for one another" is rabbinic but the idea is already present in the Torah. This too is radical. There is no "great man" theory of history in Judaism, nothing of what Carlyle called "heroes and hero-worship." The fate of Israel depends on the response of Israel, all Israel, from "the heads of your tribes, your elders and officers" to your "hewers of wood and drawers of water." This is the origin of the American phrase (which has no counterpart in the vocabulary of British politics), "We, the people." Unlike all other nations in the ancient world and most today, the people of the covenant did not believe that their destiny was determined by kings, emperors, a royal court or a governing elite. It is determined by each of us as moral agents, conjointly responsible for the common good. This is what Michael Walzer means when - in his recent book, *In God's Shadow: Politics in the Hebrew Bible* - he calls biblical Israel an "almost democracy."

Third, it is a God-centred politics. There was no word for this in the ancient world either, so Josephus had to coin one. He called it "theocracy."

However, this word has been much abused and taken to mean what it does not, namely rule by clerics, priests. That is not what Israel was. Again an American phrase comes to mind. Israel was "one nation under God." If any single word does justice to the vision of Deuteronomy it is not theocracy but nomocracy, "the rule of laws, not men."

Biblical Israel is the first example in history of an attempt to create a free society. Not free in the modern sense of liberty of conscience. That concept was born in the seventeenth century in a Europe that had been scarred for a century by religious wars between Catholics and Protestants. Liberty of conscience is the attempt to solve the problem of how people with markedly different religious beliefs (all of them Christians, as it happened) can live peacefully with one another. That is not the problem to which biblical Israel is an answer.

Instead it was an answer to the question: how can freedom and responsibility be shared equally by all? How can limits be placed on the power of rulers to turn the mass of people into slaves — not necessarily literally slaves but as a labour force to be used to build monumental buildings or engage in empire-building wars? It was the great nineteenth century historian Lord Acton who rightly saw that freedom in this sense was born in biblical Israel:

The government of the Israelites was a Federation, held together by no political authority, but by the unity of race and faith, and founded, not on physical force, but on a voluntary covenant... The throne was erected on a compact, and the king was deprived of the right of legislation among the people that recognised no lawgiver but God... The inspired men who rose in unfailing succession to prophesy against the usurper and the tyrant, constantly proclaimed that the laws, which were divine, were paramount over sinful rulers... Thus the example of the Hebrew nation laid down the parallel lines on which all freedom has been won.[1]

It is a beautiful, powerful, challenging idea. If God is our only sovereign, then all human power is delegated, limited, subject to moral constraints. Jews were the first to believe that an entire nation could govern itself in freedom and equal dignity. This has nothing to do with political structures (monarchy, oligarchy, democracy – Jews have tried them all), and everything to do with collective moral responsibility.

Jews never quite achieved the vision, but never ceased to be inspired by it. Moses' words still challenge us today. God has given us freedom. Let us use it to create a just, generous, gracious society. God does not do it for us but He has taught us how it is done. As Moses said: the choice is ours.

[1] Lord Acton, *Essays in the History of Liberty* (Liberty Press, 1985), 7

<https://vinnews.com/2025/08/21/the-new-ai-powered-hearing-aids-and-shabbos/>  
**The New AI-Powered Hearing Aids and Shabbos**

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**By Rabbi Yair Hoffman**

**WARNING:** The following long article is not meant to be a *Psak*. The issues addressed here are merely an overview and a guide to the *Marei Mekomos* where the *Psakim* of the *Gedolim* of the previous generation may be found. If someone needs a *Psak* one should seek guidance from his own *Rav* or *Posaik*. Some of the topics may also fall under the purview of a “*Velt Shailah*” and require the ruling of today’s *Gedolei HaPoskim*. Please keep this in mind throughout the article and whatever comments you may have. For the sake of brevity, and for keeping to the attention span of the reader, the article was kept to below 5000 words.

**Understanding Modern AI Hearing Aids**

Today’s hearing aids are much smarter than the ones bubby and zaidy used to use. Modern hearing aids use AI – artificial intelligence – which means that they can think and learn like a computer brain. These devices don’t just make sounds louder – they can actually figure out what sounds are important and what sounds are just noise. Companies such as Starkey, Phonak, ReSound, Oticon, Signia, and Widex now make AI powered hearing aids that cost between about \$2,700 and \$3,300 a pair, but they do much more. They employ MLT, DNNT, and CES. This article will try to explain these three and the issues of *Hilchos Shabbos*, so please *DoNN’T MeLT* down and *CuS*. [With apologies, but it can perhaps be used as a mnemonic.]

**Deep Neural Network Technology (DNNT)**

DNNT is a highly advanced type of AI in hearing aids. Deep Neural Network attempts to copy how the brain normally hears sounds. Companies train these systems using millions of real-world sounds. For example, Oticon uses over 12 million sound samples to teach their hearing aids how to work more effectively.

**Machine Learning Technology (MLT)**

Machine learning means the hearing aid can learn from what you individually do. If the volume is always turned up in an environment where noisy restaurant background noise is heard – the AI powered hearing aid remembers this type of noise and automatically adjusts.

**Constant Environmental Scanning (CES)**

These hearing aids always check what is happening around you. Some models scan the environment 700 times each second. They can figure out if you are in a quiet room, a noisy restaurant, or outside in the wind. They then automatically adjust to help you hear better in each situation.

**Major AI Hearing Aid Models**

Starkey Edge AI and Genesis AI (\$3,198 per pair)

Starkey was the first company to make AI hearing aids in 2018. The newest model, the Edge AI, makes over 80 million sound adjustments each hour. The device can also count steps, detect if one has fallen down, and can even translate words into over 70 different languages.

The Edge AI has something called “Edge Mode Plus” that can be turned on by tapping the hearing aid twice or using a phone app. When this mode is on, the hearing aid works extra hard to help the wearer understand speech in very noisy places, but it also uses up the battery faster. One must check with one’s own *Rav*, but it is this author’s view that these two models are questionable.

**Phonak Sphere Infinio (\$3,298 per pair)**

Phonak makes hearing aids that scan the environment 700 times every second. Their newest model, the Sphere Infinio, has two computer chips instead of one. The extra chip is just for AI processing, which means it can do more advanced sound processing. The Sphere Infinio has a feature called “Spheric Speech Clarity” that helps you hear voices even when there’s a lot of background noise. Phonak says this provides 10 times better hearing in noisy places compared to older hearing aids.

**ReSound Vivix (\$2,798 per pair)**

ReSound’s newest AI hearing aid, the Vivix, is the smallest AI hearing aid made by a major company. Like the Phonak, it has two computer chips. The AI chip can do almost 5 trillion operations every day to help one hear better.

The Vivix has something called “Intelligent Focus” that automatically finds the voices you want to hear and reduces background noise. The battery lasts up to 30 hours on one charge, or 20 hours if using the AI features.

**Oticon Intent (\$2,898 per pair)**

Oticon makes hearing aids with “4D Sensor technology.” This means the hearing aid pays attention to four different things: the sounds around you, how you move your head, how your body moves, and whether you are having a conversation. It uses all this information to automatically adjust the sound.

The Intent hearing aid has something called “MoreSound Intelligence 3.0” that can reduce background noise by up to 12 decibels. That’s makes it easier to understand speech in noisy places.

**Signia Pure Charge&Go IX (\$2,698 per pair)**

Signia makes hearing aids that can track multiple people talking at the same time. Their IX hearing aids split sounds into separate streams, so they can process speech and background noise separately. This makes it easier to follow conversations when multiple people are talking.

These hearing aids also track your health by counting steps, measuring physical activity, and monitoring how much you interact with other people socially.

**Widex Allure (\$2,798 per pair)**

Widex uses AI differently than other companies. Instead of doing all the AI processing automatically, Widex hearing aids let you choose between two different sound options. The AI learns which option you prefer in different situations and then automatically makes those choices for you in the future.

**Understanding the Basic Halachic Issues**

Before we can understand the implications of the new AI hearing aids, we need to understand the underlying halachic issues of the old hearing aids on Shabbos.

**The Issue of Boneh (Building)**

The most serious D’oraisah concern regarding the old hearing aids was Boneh, which means “building.” This is one of the 39 types of work forbidden on Shabbos. When any electrical device is used, it may complete an electrical circuit, which some poskim consider a form of building because you are creating a new functional pathway.

The Chazon Ish was particularly strict about this. He believed that completing any electrical circuit on Shabbos violates the Biblical prohibition of Boneh. This is why the fact that the Chazon Ish allowed hearing aids was so significant – even though he was machmir about electricity, he made an exception for hearing aids when they were left on from before Shabbos. In Bnei Brak, the Poskim and the residents try to follow the Chazon Ish’s position on electricity, and thus for these Poskim, the new AI-powered hearing aids may present more of a halachic challenge.

**The Issue of Increasing Electric Current**

Another problem is whether increasing the flow of electricity through a device counts as forbidden work. When one turns up the volume on a hearing aid, more electricity flows through the circuits. Some poskim think this is a problem, while others allow it. The AI chips do cause more electricity to flow, and it seems to this author that some of the Bnei Brak Poskim may take issue with this.

**The Issue of Making Sound (Hashma’as Kol)**

There is also a question about whether making electronic sounds on Shabbos is forbidden. Some poskim worry that when you speak to someone with a hearing aid, you’re causing the device to create electronic sounds, which might be problematic. This is called *Avusha Milsa* or *zilusa d’shabsa*.

**The Issue of Muktzah**

Muktzah refers to things one may not move on Shabbos. It is said that the Vilna Gaon once passed out just because he inadvertently touched Muktzah – where he did not even move it. Some poskim argued that hearing aids should be muktzah because they contain batteries, similar to how one may not move a lit candle on Shabbos.

**The Issue of Hotza’ah – Carrying**

Some hearing aids have parts that go in the pocket connected by wires to parts that go in your ear. In places without an *eruv* (a special boundary that allows carrying), wearing such a device might count as carrying, which is forbidden on Shabbos.

**The Issue of Tikkun Manah (Fixing a Device)**

When a hearing aid is not working properly and you fix it, that’s called *tikkun manah*. Changing from T-mode (for telephones) back to M-mode (for microphones) might count as fixing the device, which would be forbidden. Remember, before proceeding with any specific application, one must consult with one’s own *Rav* or *Posaik*.

**Poskim Who Allowed the Old Hearing Aids**

Rav Moshe Feinstein zt”l paskened (Igros Moshe OC IV §85) that people who are nearly deaf or hard of hearing may use hearing aids on Shabbos, but the hearing aid must be turned on before Shabbos starts. He understood that once the device is on, using it doesn’t create new electrical circuits.

Rav Henkin zt”l also allows hearing aids on Shabbos in *Gvuros Eliyahu* (vol. 1 §98:8, §102–103:1), but only if they are turned on before Shabbos in a way where one cannot accidentally change the settings during Shabbos. He recommended sealing the hearing aid controls to prevent accidental adjustments.

The Chazon Ish zt"l gave permission for hearing aids as long as they stay on from before Shabbos, as cited by Rav Unterman zt"l (see Shevet M'Yehuda Vol. II §35). This was remarkable because the Chazon Ish usually forbade any electrical activity that completed a circuit. However, he distinguished between turning on a device (which creates new circuits) and using a device that's already on.

Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt"l was the most meikil – lenient. In Shmiras Shabbos K'Halchosah (34:28), he is cited that one may even adjust the volume on your hearing aid if needed. This is because he believed that increasing electric current in an already functioning device does not violate Boneh nor the other D'oraisahs that other Poskim invoked. He explained that very rapid electrical changes, like those that happen when sound waves are converted to electrical signals, happen too quickly to count as completing circuits in a halachically significant way.

#### Addressing the Muktzah Concern

Several poskim, including Rav Moshe Heinemann shlita and lbc"l Rav Ovadia Yoseph (Yechaveh Daas vol. II §49), ruled that hearing aids are not muktzah. They explained that since the normal way of using a hearing aid is by wearing it on the body, the fact that it contains a battery does not make it like a lit candle that one cannot touch.

#### Addressing the Carrying Issue

For hearing aids with battery packs that go in the pocket, Rav Henkin suggested sewing the battery pack into the pocket before Shabbos so it becomes part of your clothing. However, other poskim like Rav Shlomo Zalman Braun disagreed and said this isn't necessary, comparing it to a person with a glass eye who does not need to worry about carrying the prosthetic.

#### The Basic Rules

There is a concept in halacha called, pok chazee mah amah d'bar – go out and see how the nation conducts itself, which Rav Yisroel Belsky zt"l once told me b'shaim Rav Moshe Feinstein zt"l, still applies today. Almost all poskim agreed on the following basic rules for the old hearing aids:

You can wear and use a hearing aid that was turned on before Shabbos. You cannot turn on a hearing aid on Shabbos because this violates a d'oraisah. You cannot change the batteries in a hearing aid on Shabbos because this is like rebuilding the device. If you forgot to turn it on before Shabbos, you can ask a goy to turn it on for you because a hard-of-hearing person has the status of a choleh she'ain bo sakanah (a sick person whose life is not in danger), which allows certain leniencies. Disagreements About Speaking to Hearing Aid Users

This is where poskim have some disagreements that will be very important for AI hearing aids.

#### The Lenient Position (Rav Shlomo Zalman zt"l)

Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach ruled (Minchas Shlomo vol. 1 §9) that you can speak directly to someone using a hearing aid on Shabbos. His reasoning had several parts: First, increasing electric current on Shabbos is permitted according to his understanding of the relevant halachos. Second, since only the person wearing the hearing aid hears the amplified sounds, it does not violate derabanan decrees against creating sound on Shabbos. Third, the electrical activity in hearing aids happens so quickly (thousands of times per second) that even the Chazon Ish would agree it doesn't constitute Boneh, since these are temporary circuits that open and close rapidly.

#### The Stricter Position

Rav Nissim Karelitz zt"l (Chut Shani Shabbos vol. 1 p. 205) and Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv (see Orchos Shabbos vol. III 26:23) ruled that you should not speak directly to someone wearing a hearing aid. They allowed talking to someone else within earshot of the hearing aid user, but not direct conversation.

Their concern is that the speaker's voice directly causes electrical activity within the hearing aid device. When speaking to someone with a hearing aid, your voice creates sound waves that the microphone converts to electrical signals, which then get amplified and processed. They view this as purposely causing electrical activity, which violates the prohibition of increasing electric current.

#### The Middle Position (Rav Feinstein)

Rav Moshe Feinstein zt"l took a middle position (Igros Moshe Orach Chaim vol. 4 §85). He maintained that optimally one should not speak directly to a person wearing a hearing aid on Shabbos, but in times of great need, there are reasons to be lenient. Rav Aharon Felder zt"l reported in Reshumei Aharon (vol. 2 OC §340:2) that Rav Moshe meant if you must speak directly to someone with a hearing aid, you should be careful not to speak directly into the device. [This is a game-changer in understanding Rav Moshe]

#### The Status of a Hard-of-Hearing Person in Halacha

An important principle underlying the kalah among many Poskim is that a person who is hard of hearing has a special status in halacha. Many poskim classify a hard-of-hearing person as a choleh she'ain bo sakanah – a sick person whose condition is not life-threatening. One must consult a Posaik for the particular person's status. This status allows certain leniencies on Shabbos that would not be permitted otherwise.

For example, most Poskim hold that you can ask a goy to turn on a hearing aid for someone who forgot to do it before Shabbos. You can even ask a non-Jew to change batteries if the hearing aid stops working during Shabbos.

#### Human Dignity (Kavod HaBriyos)

Many Poskim hold that the principle of kavod habriyos (human dignity) also supports leniencies for hearing aid use. Rav Eliezer Yehudah Waldenberg zt"l explained (Tzitz Eliezer vol. VI §6:6) that even though allowing hearing aids might make people think other electrical devices are similarly permitted, we cannot institute new decrees of maris ayin (appearances of wrongdoing) in our generation.

#### Applying These Principles to AI Hearing Aids

Now that we understand all the underlying halachic issues, we can analyze how they may apply to AI hearing aids.

#### The Boneh Issue and AI Processing

The fundamental question is whether the millions of electronic operations that AI hearing aids perform constitute prohibited circuit completion.

According to Rav Shlomo Zalman's approach, these rapid electronic changes would likely also be permitted. He explained that electrical activity happening at the frequency of sound waves doesn't constitute Boneh because it happens too quickly and temporarily. AI processing, which happens even faster than basic sound processing, would likely fall under this ruling.

Even according to the Chazon Ish's strict approach, AI processing might be permitted when the device is turned on before Shabbos as a complete unit. The Chazon Ish allowed hearing aids because the circuits were completed before Shabbos, and for many of the devices – operation during Shabbos doesn't create new circuits. AI processing that happens within an already-activated system would follow the same logic. But we need further guidance from the Gedolei HaPoskim.

#### The Electric Current Issue and Machine Learning

Machine learning algorithms constantly adjust the hearing aid's electronic settings, which means they're constantly changing the flow of electric current through different parts of the device.

Rav Auerbach zt"l would likely permit this because he allowed adjusting current flow in hearing aids. In fact, machine learning adjustments are even more automatic than manual volume adjustments, so they would be more clearly permitted.

Other poskim who are concerned about increasing current might rule stringently, but even they may perhaps permit automatic adjustments that happen without user intervention when configured before Shabbos.

#### The Muktzah Issue and Multi-Function Devices

Modern AI hearing aids don't just amplify sound – they also track health, count steps, monitor heart rate, detect falls, and perform other functions. This raises the question of whether they're primarily hearing aids or primarily electronic health devices.

It is hard to tell at this point, but a view may emerge that these are primarily hearing aids with additional features, similar to how a digital watch with multiple functions is still primarily a watch. As long as hearing amplification remains the main purpose, the additional AI features may not necessarily change the muktzah status – but the issue must be presented to Gedolei HaPoskim. [Preferably by a person who can present the issue without his own hearing issues.]

#### The Carrying Issue and Wireless Connectivity

Unlike older hearing aids with wires connecting ear pieces to battery packs, modern AI hearing aids are typically wireless and self-contained. This eliminates most carrying concerns. However, some AI hearing aids can connect wirelessly to external devices like smartphones or remote microphones which may be a problem.

\*\*\*A Yesoma is getting married soon. If anyone wishes to donate toward the chasunah please click here. <https://shulspace.org/yeshiva-of-kings-bay/donationForm?CN=1487>

For Shabbos use, any wireless connections to external devices would need to be disabled before Shabbos. The hearing aids themselves, being self-contained units worn on the body, may not necessarily present carrying issues. Once again, before making determinations about specific AI features, one should consult with their Rav or Posaik.

#### Analysis by Type of AI Feature

When AI hearing aids automatically recognize that you are in a noisy shul that talks (a topic beyond the scope of this article) versus a quiet room and adjust accordingly, this involves:

Electronic sound analysis happening thousands of times per second Automatic adjustments to amplification, noise reduction, and directional microphones Electronic storage and retrieval of learned preferences Since these are automatic functions that happen as part of the device's normal operation when turned on before Shabbos, most poskim would probably permit them. The electronic activity is similar to basic sound amplification but more sophisticated.

The constant electronic adjustments might cause concern for poskim who forbid increasing current, but since the adjustments are automatic and the device is configured before Shabbos, even strict poskim may likely permit basic AI functions.

#### Deep Neural Network Processing

DNN processing involves millions or billions of electronic operations per day, attempting to mimic brain function in processing sound. Single-chip systems (like Starkey Edge AI, Oticon Intent) may perhaps be treated like advanced versions of regular hearing aids. The neural network processing happens within the device's normal operation. Dual-chip systems (like Phonak Sphere Infinio, ReSound Vivix) have a separate processor dedicated to AI functions. However, since both chips are activated together before Shabbos as parts of one integrated device, this may not necessarily create additional halachic issues.

#### Constant Environmental Scanning

AI hearing aids that scan the environment hundreds of times per second and make automatic adjustments might be permitted for the same reasons as basic machine learning. The frequency of scanning doesn't change the halachic analysis – Rav Auerbach's principle about rapid electrical changes may even apply more to very frequent scanning.

#### Health and Fitness Tracking

Step counting, activity monitoring, heart rate tracking, and other health features operate through sensors that are part of the hearing aid hardware. Since these features operate automatically and hearing amplification remains the primary purpose, they may perhaps eventually be permitted according to the lenient view. The sensors function passively without requiring user activation during Shabbos.

Fall detection might also be permitted, and perhaps eventually be permitted due to pikuach nefesh (life-saving) considerations. Once again, this requires a psak from a Rav or Posak.

#### Interactive AI Features

**App-Controlled Features:** Using smartphone apps to control AI hearing aids would likely be forbidden according to all poskim, as it involves operating electronic devices on Shabbos without a Pikuach Nefesh heter. **Manual AI Mode Activation:** Features like Starkey's "Edge Mode+" that can be activated by tapping the device would likely be forbidden because they involve actively turning on additional electronic functions during Shabbos since there is no Pikuach Nefesh element. **Internet-Connected Features:** Translation services, transcription, or any features requiring internet connectivity would likely be forbidden as they involve telecommunications and remote electronic operations. **Speaking to People with AI Hearing Aids** This is where the pre-existing disagreement among poskim becomes more complex with AI technology.

When you speak to someone with an AI hearing aid, your voice triggers:

Millions of neural network calculations per second Real-time environmental analysis and adjustment Machine learning algorithm updates Much more intensive electronic processing than traditional hearing aids Rav Auerbach's Approach Applied to AI Following Rav Auerbach's reasoning, speaking to someone with an AI hearing aid may be permitted because:

The electronic activity, while more intensive, still happens automatically as part of the device's normal operation The rapid electronic changes occur at frequencies that don't constitute halachically significant circuit completion Increasing electronic current and processing is permitted when it's part of the device's intended function Since Rav Auerbach explicitly permitted speaking to people with traditional hearing aids, and AI processing is just more advanced versions of the same electronic sound processing, he would likely have permitted speaking to people with AI hearing aids as well.

#### Strict Approaches Applied to AI

Poskim who were concerned about the electronic activity caused by speaking to traditional hearing aid users might be more concerned about AI hearing aids because: The electronic processing is more intensive The electronic activity extends beyond basic amplification to complex computational processing However, even the stricter poskim might permit it because the AI processing is automatic when configured before Shabbos.

#### Practical Considerations

For most people following the halachic approaches that have emerged in the past few decades, speaking normally to someone with an AI hearing aid would likely be permitted. The AI processi operates on the same basic principle of automatic electronic sound processing that many poskim already permit.

Those following stricter approaches to electricity on Shabbos might want to consult with a posek who understands AI technology, since the electronic processing is significantly more intensive than what earlier poskim were considering.

#### Special AI Features

Some AI hearing aids can translate foreign languages or transcribe speech to text.

These features typically require internet connectivity and cloud processing.

Internet-based translation would likely be forbidden according to all poskim because it involves telecommunications activity, remote server processing, potential commercial transactions (data usage), and operating complex electronic systems beyond the basic hearing aid function.

Local translation that works entirely within the hearing aid's processors might be more analogous to permitted automatic AI functions, but it would still involve significant new electronic activity beyond sound amplification.

#### Voice Assistants and Smart Features

Integration with Siri, Google Assistant, or similar systems would clearly be forbidden as it involves internet connectivity and operating external electronic systems.

#### Health Emergency Features

Fall detection and emergency calling features present an interesting case because they involve pikuach nefesh considerations.

Fall detection that operates through motion sensors would be permitted and probably required because it could save lives. Automatic emergency calling would also be permitted when it activates automatically in response to detected emergencies, since pikuach nefesh overrides Shabbos restrictions.

User-activated emergency features (like pressing a button to call for help) would also be permitted under pikuach nefesh principles.

#### Practical Guidelines for Different Approaches

**For Followers of the More Lenient View (Rav Auerbach, Rav Feinstein, Rav Henkin)** AI hearing aids with automatic functions would be broadly permitted when: The devices are turned on and fully configured before Shabbos All AI features operate automatically without user intervention during Shabbos Internet connectivity and smartphone apps are disabled Battery life is sufficient for the entire Shabbos period Special boost modes that drain batteries quickly are avoided before Shabbos Speaking to people with AI hearing aids would likely be permitted, and the intensive AI processing would be viewed as an advanced form of the permitted electronic sound processing.

**For Followers of Stricter Positions (Rav Karelitz, Rav Elyashiv)**

Even strict poskim may perhaps permit:

Basic AI processing when the device is turned on before Shabbos as a complete unit Automatic environmental adaptation and sound processing Health monitoring sensors operating passively Fall detection due to pikuach nefesh considerations They might prefer:

Avoiding the most intensive AI processing modes Speaking to someone else within earshot rather than directly to the AI hearing aid user Consulting with a posek about specific AI features that go significantly beyond traditional sound amplification Universal Prohibitions Across All Positions

All poskim would likely forbid:

Using smartphone apps to control hearing aids during Shabbos Manually activating AI boost modes or special features Using voice commands to control the devices Accessing internet-connected features like translation or transcription Changing batteries or charging devices during Shabbos Any active electronic troubleshooting or device management Each person should clarify with their own Rav or Posak which approach to follow.

#### Preparing AI Hearing Aids for Shabbos

##### Technical Preparation

Turn on all desired automatic AI features before Shabbos begins Ensure battery levels are adequate for extended use, considering that AI processing consumes more power Disable or disconnect internet-based features and smartphone app connectivity Set the devices to automatic operation mode rather than manual control modes Test that all automatic functions are working properly Some users may want to put tape over manual controls to prevent accidental activation, following Rav Henkin's approach for traditional hearing aids.

##### Understanding Your Device's AI Features

Before Shabbos, users should understand which of their hearing aid's features operate automatically and which require manual activation. Features that work automatically when the device is on (like environmental scanning, basic noise reduction, and health monitoring) would generally be permitted. Features that require activation during use (like special boost modes, voice commands, or app-based adjustments) would be forbidden.

##### Battery Management for AI Hearing Aids

Since AI processing uses significantly more battery power than traditional hearing aids, battery management becomes more critical for Shabbos observance.

For rechargeable hearing aids, ensure full charging before Shabbos. For battery-powered models, consider changing to fresh batteries before Shabbos if current batteries are not at full capacity. Avoid using power-intensive AI modes before Shabbos if battery life is a concern.

##### Questions About Multi-Day Yom Tov

When Shabbos is combined with Yom Tov for multiple consecutive days, AI hearing aids present additional challenges due to their higher power consumption.

For multi-day holidays, users need to ensure their hearing aids can operate for the entire period without charging or battery changes. Some poskim permit asking a non-Jew to charge devices or change batteries on Yom Tov (though not on Shabbos) when necessary for a choleh she'ein bo sakana.

The power-intensive nature of AI processing makes planning even more important for extended holiday periods.

For specific guidance on multi-day holiday situations, consult with your Rav or Posaik.

#### Future Developments and Halachic Considerations

##### Emerging AI Technologies

Future AI hearing aids may include even more sophisticated features like:

Individual voice recognition that learns to identify specific family members or friends

Advanced health monitoring that can detect medical emergencies beyond falls

Integration with smart home systems for automated environmental control More sophisticated language processing and communication assistance Halachic Framework for New Technologies

The basic framework established by poskim for hearing aids and applied to AI features will likely continue to apply:

Automatic functions that operate as part of the device's normal operation when turned on before Shabbos will generally be permitted Features requiring active user control during Shabbos will be forbidden Internet connectivity and external device control will remain problematic Health and safety features will benefit from pikuach nefesh considerations

##### The Need for Ongoing Consultation

As AI hearing aids become more sophisticated, the technology may go beyond what current poskim have considered. Users of advanced AI hearing aids should maintain contact with poskim who understand both the technology and the relevant halachic principles.

The rapid pace of technological development means that new features may require fresh halachic analysis, building on the established framework but considering new technological capabilities.

##### Conclusion: Technology in Service of Human Dignity

AI hearing aids represent a remarkable advancement that can dramatically improve people's ability to hear, communicate, and participate fully in family and community life.

Rav Waldenberg's insight that we cannot create endless new restrictions for technological advances (Responsa Tzitz Eliezer vol. 6 §6:6) remains relevant. The sophisticated AI processing that makes modern hearing aids so effective may serve the same fundamental purpose as traditional hearing aids – restoring the ability to hear and participate in human communication, but this needs to be addressed by Gedolei haPoskim.

The key is understanding the technology well enough to distinguish between automatic functions that operate as part of the device's intended purpose and interactive features that require active control. When AI hearing aids are properly configured before Shabbos and used only in automatic mode, they can possibly provide remarkable benefits while respecting the framework of Shabbos observance.

As Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach's approach demonstrates, rapid electronic activity that happens automatically as part of a device's intended function does not necessarily constitute prohibited melachah on Shabbos. This principle, established for much simpler hearing aids, may extend naturally to the sophisticated AI processing that makes modern hearing aids so effective.

For anyone considering AI hearing aids, consultation with both hearing healthcare providers and knowledgeable poskim is essential. As with all complex halachic matters, final decisions should always be made in consultation with one's own Rav or Posaik.

Remember to always ask your own Rav. May we all be zocheh to hear the great Shofar blast of the Geulah soon!

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#### Tidbits • Parshas Re'eh 5785 In Memory of Rav Meir Zlotowitz zt"l

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Parshas Re'eh • August 23rd • 29 Av 5785

This week is Shabbos Mevorach Chodesh Elul. Rosh Chodesh is Sunday & Monday, August 24th-25th. The molad is Motzaei Shabbos at 11:26 PM and 6 chalakim.

The first opportunity for Kiddush Levana is Tuesday night, August 26th. The final opportunity is Motzaei Shabbos, September 6th.

Although it is Erev Rosh Chodesh, most lein the haftarah of Aniya So'ara, continuing with the third of the seven haftaros of consolation, and do not lein the haftarah of Machar Chodesh. Some add pesukim from the haftarah of Machar Chodesh as well. Tzidkas'cha is omitted at minchah.

As Rosh Chodesh begins on Motzaei Shabbos, one who extends his seudas shelishis eating past sundown is in a quandary as to whether to say Retzei, or Ya'aleh Veyavo, or both, in bentsching. Some are careful not to eat bread after tzeis hakochavim (for this purpose 35-40 minutes after shekiya) and then only say Retzei. Speak to your Rav.

On the second day of Rosh Chodesh, we begin adding LeDavid Hashem Ori at the end of davening. Nusach Ashkenaz adds LeDavid at Maariv and Shacharis and will begin on Sunday night during Maariv. Nusach Sefard adds LeDavid at Shacharis and

Minchah and will begin with Shacharis on Monday. The Shofar is sounded along with LeDavid at Shacharis on weekdays. LeDavid is added through Shemini Atzeres. Many Sefardim begin saying Selichos on the second day of Chodesh Elul.

Pirkei Avos: Perek 5

Daf Yomi - Shabbos: Bavli: Avodah Zara 66 • Yerushalmi: Pesachim 86. The Siyum on Yerushalmi Pesachim is Shabbos Parshas Re'eh. Yerushalmi Shekalim begins next • Mishnah Yomis: Zevachim 11:7-8 • Oraysa (coming week): Moed Katan 21a-23a • Kitzur Shulchan Aruch: 203:3-204:5

Make sure to call your parents, in-laws, grandparents and Rabbi to wish them a good Shabbos. If you didn't speak to your kids today, make sure to connect with them as well!

Rosh Hashanah begins on Monday evening, September 22nd.

Yom Kippur begins on Wednesday evening, October 1st.

Succos begins on Monday evening, October 6th.

RE'EH: The blessings for those who keep the mitzvos and the curses for those who reject them • Upon entering the land, you must accept the mitzvos upon yourself at Har Gerizim and Har Eival, and recognize their accompanying reward and punishment

• Drive out the nations and destroy their gods • In a designated place [the Beis Hamikdash] you will serve Hashem • Laws of Korbanos • Do not practice idolatry • Keeping kosher • Laws of a Jewish slave • Firstborn animals • Yomim Tovim • See Taryag Weekly for the various mitzvos.

Haftarah: The haftarah (Yeshaya 54:11-55:5) relays the promise that Hashem will one day redeem us from exile. During all the years of exile He will safeguard us from the spiritual and physical oppression brought by other nations.

Parshas Re'eh: 126 Pesukim • 17 Obligations • 38 Prohibitions

1) Destroy avodah zarah. 2) Do not destroy holy items. 3) Fulfill vows for korbanos or bedek habayis on the first chag after the vow is made. 4-5) Bring korbanos to the Beis HaMikdash; do not bring korbanos elsewhere. 6) Blemished korbanos should be redeemed and purchased anew. 7-9) Do not eat Ma'aser Sheini outside of Yerushalayim. 10) Do not eat a Bechor animal outside Yerushalayim. 11) Do not eat Kodashim outside their designated place. 12) Do not eat from a korban olah. 13) Do not eat meat of a korban before the sprinkling of its blood. 14) Do not eat Bikkurim prior to placing them in the Temple Courtyard. 15) Do not withhold the Levi'im's gifts. 16) Perform Shechitah prior to eating meat. 17) Do not eat Eiver Min Hachai (meat from a living animal). 18) Bring korbanos personally to the Mikdash. 19-20) Do not add or subtract mitzvos from the Torah. 21) Do not listen to a prophet of avodah zarah. 22-26) Do not heed or befriend a meisis (one who influences others to sin); do not absolve your hatred for him; do not save his life or defend him in judgment. 27) Do not missionize for idolatry or become missionized. 28) Review witnesses' testimony. 29-31) Burn down an idolatrous city; do not rebuild it or benefit from its spoils. 32-33) Do not cut yourself or pull-out hair in grief. 34) Do not eat disqualified Kodashim. 35) Check birds for signs of kashrus. 36) Do not eat flying insects. 37) Do not eat Neveilah. 38) Separate Ma'aser Sheini. 39) Give Ma'aser Ani. 40,42) Do not collect a debt after shemittah, rather consider it dismissed. 41) Collect debt from a non-Jew promptly. 43-44) Do not withhold charity or kindness from any Jew; give charity generously and graciously. 45) Do not refrain from lending before shemittah. 46-47) Do not send away a servant or maid-servant empty handed; rather, provide them with gifts. 48-49) Do not work with a korban animal or shear its wool. 50) Do not eat chametz after midday on Erev Pesach. 51) Do not leave over meat from the Korban Chagigah. 52) Do not sacrifice a Korban Pesach on a private bamah. 53) V'samachta B'chagecha. 54-55) Go up for Aliyah L'regel and do not come empty handed.

"לְלֹה אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים אֲשֶׁר אֲלֹהֵינוּ" Let us seek foreign gods whom are foreign to us and serve them (Devarim 13:3)

Rav Chatzkel Levenstein zt"l would explain that this pasuk admonishes an idol worshiper: Aside from the gravity of the sin, a lack of focus and basic "seichel" caused him to overlook the obvious and serve a powerless idol and an entity with no real power. Man's greatness is seen in his ability to override his inclination and desires and act according to his intellect. A deficiency in this regard displays animal-like behavior, and a lacking in the greatness of man.

Rav Chatzkel would comment that upon beginning the month of Elul, one must contemplate the absurdity of coming before Hashem on the upcoming holiday of Rosh Hashanah to ask of Him continued blessing without contemplating and making an accounting of his deeds and activities. Only after stopping and thinking what one can offer Hashem is it possible to ask Him for a sweet new year.

**In memory of Rav Avraham Pam ZTL's Yarhzeit today Friday 28 Av**, I am including this from next week's parsha Shoftim, re Hakaras Hatov, which was a theme that Rav Pam mentioned often. CS

**The Measure of A Person Is His Sense of Gratitude**

Parshas Shoftim Posted on August 23, 2017 (5777) By Rabbi Yissocher Frand I Series: Rav Frand I Level: Intermediate This dvar Torah was adapted from the

hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes Good Shabbos!

The Torah admonishes judges not to show favoritism, not to corrupt justice, and not to take bribes "for bribes will blind the eyes of the wise and will pervert the words of the righteous" [Devorim 16:19]. No person is immune from the temptations of a bribe.

Bribes attack a person's ability to judge fairly. Even if a person is righteous and even if he is extremely wise — he is not above falling prey to the power of a bribe.

The Gemara in Kesuvos [105b] states: "It goes without saying that monetary bribes are forbidden, but the Torah is coming to teach us that even 'verbal bribes' are forbidden."

Flattery, kind words, and so forth can all affect a person's judgment. The Gemara lists several incidents demonstrating how particular Amoraim of the Talmud acted regarding rejecting bribes.

Shmuel was having difficulty crossing a rickety bridge. A certain person stuck out his hand and helped him cross the bridge. Shmuel asked what brought him to the bridge right then. The person told Shmuel that he had a case to be heard in Shmuel's court for adjudication. Shmuel disqualified himself from being a judge in the case since he had just received a favor from this person.

Similarly, Ameimar was sitting in court and a feather flew on top of his head. A fellow came over and removed the feather. When he told Ameimar that he was there to have his case heard, Ameimar disqualified himself from hearing the case.

A third Amora related incident involved Mar Ukva. Someone spat in front of Mar Ukva and another person came along and covered up the saliva. Mar Ukva disqualified himself from hearing the case of the person who did him the favor of covering up the saliva. A final case involved Rav Shmuel b'Reb Yossi and his sharecropper. The sharecropper who normally delivered produce to Rav Shmuel b'Reb Yossi every Friday showed up early one week and delivered the produce on Thursday because he had to be in town that day for a Din Torah. Rav Shmuel b'Reb Yossi disqualified himself from hearing the case, lest he be "bribed" by the favor of the early delivery that week. Rav Pam, zt"l, asked a question about this narration: Are we to infer that these Amoraim were so fickle that the slightest favor could influence them? What's the big deal about any of these matters? Did these Amoraim have such little backbone that they could be swayed by trivial and incidental matters? Rav Pam said that the lesson of this

Gemara is not so much about judicial integrity or the corrosive nature of bribes. The major lesson that this passage of Talmud teaches is the concept of Hakaras HaTov [gratitude]. This Gemara teaches us how indebted each of these Amoraim felt to anyone who did them even the slightest favor. Such matters would be insignificant to us. As a result of our insensitivity to the proper attribute of Hakaras HaTov, such favors do not even register on our radar screens as necessitating any gratitude on our part. We do not even consider them favors. However, people who are highly sensitive to the attribute of showing gratitude do consider these kindnesses to be favors, worthy in fact of favors in return.

Rav Pam explains that many of the problems in our society indeed stem from the lack of appreciation of one's obligation for Hakaras HaTov. Husbands take the kindnesses that wives do for them for granted and wives take for granted the things that husbands do for them. Everybody has expectations of the other party in a marriage because "that's their job!" "Why should they get 'Extra credit' for merely doing their job?" If each spouse would see the things done for them as a favor which needs to be recognized, marriages would be far happier and far more stable. The same is true in employer-employee relationships and in virtually all other relationships as well!

Posted on August 23, 2017 (5777) By Rabbi Yissocher Frand I Series: Rav Frand I Level: Intermediate

This dvar Torah was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion. Good Shabbos! The Torah admonishes judges not to show favoritism, not to corrupt justice, and not to take bribes "for bribes will blind the eyes of the wise and will pervert the words of the righteous" [Devorim 16:19]. No person is immune from the temptations of a bribe. Bribes attack a person's ability to judge fairly. Even if a person is righteous and even if he is extremely wise — he is not above falling prey to the power of a bribe. The Gemara in Kesuvos [105b] states: "It goes without saying that monetary bribes are forbidden, but the Torah is coming to teach us that even 'verbal bribes' are forbidden." Flattery, kind words, and so forth can all affect a person's judgment. The Gemara lists several incidents demonstrating how particular Amoraim of the Talmud acted regarding rejecting bribes.

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Rav Pam explains that many of the problems in our society indeed stem from the lack of appreciation of one's obligation for Hakaras HaTov. Husbands take the kindnesses that wives do for them for granted and wives take for granted the things that husbands do for them. Everybody has expectations of the other party in a marriage because "that's their job!" "Why should they get 'Extra credit' for merely doing their job?" If each spouse would see the things done for them as a favor which needs to be recognized, marriages would be far happier and far more stable. The same is true in employer-employee relationships and in virtually all other relationships as well! Rav Pam notes: If parents and alumni would have the proper sense of Hakaras HaTov to the institutions that educated them and their children, Yeshivos and Beis Yaakovs and Day Schools would not be in the sorry state of financial distress in which they find themselves today. All too often, the attitude is "I paid my tuition. I did my job. You did your job. Do not bother me anymore!" If they had a feeling for the proper sense of gratitude to these teachers and institutions, their ongoing gifts would be far more generous!

Rav Kook, when yet a Rav in Europe, before moving to Eretz Yisrael spent time in the summers on the Baltic seacoast in Latvia, as was the custom of many European Rabbonim. There was a hall there where they made minyanim. Rav Reuvin Bengas happened to be there one evening and had Yahrtzeit. There were only nine people in the hall, so one of the people in the hall went outside looking for a tenth Jew for the minyan for Rav Reuvin's Yahrtzeit. Meanwhile, outside there was a certain fellow also trying to form a minyan and he had an exact minyan. The person from the hall did not realize this and pulled one person from the outside group into the hall for the inside minyan. Although this was all unintentional, the person who organized the minyan outside stormed into the hall and started yelling at Rav Bengas and heaping insults upon him. Rav Kook, well-known for his great Ahavas Yisrael for every Jew, nevertheless went to the person who was berating Rav Bengas and slapped him across his face for embarrassing a Talmid Chochom. The slapped person got so furious at Rav Kook that he decided to take him to the secular court for assaulting him. A whole commotion developed. A number of people asked Rav Kook to just apologize so that the matter would not go any further. Rav Kook refused. He said if this was just for my honor I could apologize, but this involves the honor of Rav Bengas who was shamed. I am not sorry I slapped him. I had to stand up for the honor of a Talmud Chochom. Let this person take me to court! A few days passed, however, and the fellow had a change of heart. He came into Rav Kook and apologized and told him he was not going to take him to court. Seemingly that was the end of the story. Years later, Rav Kook came to America and he was approached by the person who he had slapped years earlier in the Latvian seacoast town. He told Rav Kook "I cannot thank the Rabbi enough. I owe you a great debt of gratitude." He then took out a gold watch and gave it to Rav Kook. He explained that after Ray Kook slapped him, his life became miserable in Europe. As a result of that tumultuous incident, he became notoriously known as the Jew who yelled at Rav Bengas and the Jew who was slapped by Rav Kook. He had no choice but to leave Europe and go to America where no one knew him. In America, he became a millionaire! He felt his good fortune was all the result of the slap of Rav Kook and wanted to show Hakaras HaTov to him. Sometimes we should feel gratitude even for a slap in the face! Likewise, the Amoraim felt a super sensitivity for gratitude even for trivial matters. The same is true of righteous Jews in every generation. The Chofetz Chaim was a Kohen and could not attend funerals. A woman who had once donated a window to his Yeshiva in Radin died. (This was a simple window — not a fancy stained glass window.) Even though the Chofetz Chaim could not enter the cemetery and despite his old age, he walked a long distance behind

the casket to the cemetery to accompany the body to burial, as Hakaras HaTov for the donation of the window. If only we would recognize the obligation to recognize favors — however small — the world would be a far better place! Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem DavidATwersky@gmail.com Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD dhoffman@torah.org This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit <http://www.yadyechiel.org/> for further information

#### Rabbi Yochanan Zweig 5774

Body And Soul "You are children to Hashem, your G-d - you shall not cut yourselves..." (14:1) The Torah juxtaposes the statement "**banim atem laHashem**" - "you are children to Hashem" to the prohibition "lo sisgodedu" - "you shall not lacerate yourselves". Rashi explains that since we are Hashem's children we should not deface our bodies.<sup>1</sup> The Talmud teaches that there are three partners in the creation of a human being, the father, the mother and Hashem. Parents supply the child with physical characteristics and Hashem supplies the child with a soul.<sup>2</sup> Why does the verse describe our relationship with Hashem as His children in the context of safeguarding our physical form? From the expression "lo sisgodedu" the Talmud derives the prohibition against separate factions observing divergent Halachic practices within the same community ("aggudos" - "groups").<sup>3</sup> Since the prohibitions against lacerating ourselves and having separate factions are both derived from the same expression, a unifying thread between them must exist. What do they have in common? In the first paragraph of the Shema we are commanded to teach our children Torah, "veshinant levanecha".<sup>4</sup> Rashi comments that "your children" refers to "your students" for a person's students are considered as his children. To support this notion Rashi cites our verse in Parshas Re'eh, "**banim atem laHashem**" - "you are children to Hashem".<sup>5</sup> How does this verse indicate that a person's students are his children? It is apparent from Rashi's comments that he understands that through the study of Hashem's Torah we become His students, and can therefore be referred to as His children. The Mishna teaches that a person is obligated to return his teacher's lost object prior to returning an object lost by his father, for his father provides him with a finite existence while his teacher offers him an infinite existence.<sup>6</sup> The Torah taught by his teacher not only guarantees the soul an infinite existence, but also elevates the body given to him by his father from a physical and finite state to a spiritual and eternal state. Although Hashem is clearly the source of the soul, Torah study enables the body to be perceived as a product of the same source. This message is punctuated by the commandment against lacerating our bodies because we are Hashem's children; through Torah study we become His students and thereby His children, body and soul. The reconciliation between body and soul is the ultimate proof that we emanate from one source. Since only the Torah is able to accomplish this reconciliation, it is of the utmost importance that the Torah itself be viewed as emanating from one source. Any action distorting this truth undermines the efficacy of the Torah to unite and reconcile all apparent divergent forces in creation. It is therefore self-evident that separate factions observing divergent Halachic practices within the same community cannot be tolerated. 1.14:1 2.Niddah 31a 3.Yevamos 13b 4.6:7 5.Ibid 6.Bava Metzia 33a

**Bonim Atem Lamakom** - You are children to Hashem, your G-d." (Reeh 14:1).

<https://thebjh.com/we-are-hashems-children/>

Rabbi Avrohom Sebrow

This time of year is designated for teshuva. We really should be paralyzed with fear because of the impending judgment. Yet, there is a contradiction. On Rosh Hashana, we enjoy festive meals. Nice clothing should be worn. Haircuts are taken in preparation for the holiday. How could there be rejoicing when facing an intense court case, where life and death hang in the balance? HaRav Shaya Cohe, shlit'a, Rosh HaYeshiva Yeshivas Zichron Aryeh, often explained this dichotomy with a parable. A prisoner is shaking uncontrollably with fear. He is being brought into court to hear his fate. Charged with capital crimes, the prisoner fears for the worst. Yet, when the doors to the courtroom open, he is astonished to see that the judge is his own father! Immediately, a sense of relief envelopes him. True, he still faces judgment, but he knows his sentence will be meted out with compassion. During this time of year, we all face judgment. However, Hashem is the Av HaRachaman, the Most Merciful Father. Knowledge of this allows us to feel some measure of confidence in the graciousness of the judgment. The pasuk states, "You are children to Hashem, your G-d." (Devarim 14:1). It is with immense love that Hashem considers us to be His children. There is a caveat, however. Rebbe Yehuda states that the Bnei Yisrael are only called Hashem's children when they are following the proper path (Kiddushin 36a). Yet, Rebbe Meir vehemently disagrees. He states that even when Klal Yisrael sin, they are still called Hashem's children. He cites a verse in Yirmiya (4:22), "They are foolish sons." Even when Klal Yisrael acts foolishly, they still have the appellation of Hashem's children. More so, even when Klal Yisrael is considered wicked, they are

still deemed Hashem's children. As proof, Rebbe Meir cites the verse, "Sons in whom there is no faithfulness" (Devarim 32:20). Even when Klal Yisrael worships idols, which is considered a brazen sin, they are still considered Hashem's children. Proof of this can be found in the verse, "A seed of evildoers, sons who deal corruptly" (Yeshaya 1:4). Rebbe Meir cites one more verse to bolster his position, but it isn't readily clear what his intent is: "And it shall come to pass that, instead of what was said to them: You are not My people, it shall be said to them: Sons of the living G-d" (Hoshea 2:1).

Rashi notes that in the first few verses cited, Klal Yisrael are indeed called sons, but they have negative descriptors appended to their titles. They are called foolish sons, faithless sons, and corrupt sons. Can the relationship be repaired? What can Klal Yisrael do to regain their original glorious appellation of simply "Hashem's children"? The answer is teshuva. Teshuva is so powerful that even if Klal Yisrael sinned grievously, the relationship with their Creator can still be repaired. As proof of this fact, Rebbe Meir cites the verse, "Sons of the living G-d." Klal Yisrael can regain their good name. HaRav Yosef Trani, the Maharat (1568–1639), is at a loss to explain Rashi. While Hashem's acceptance of teshuva is a magnificent act of kindness and charity, it is no secret. Indeed, even Rebbe Yehuda, who disagrees with Rebbe Meir, would nevertheless concede this point. Rebbe Yehuda would likewise say that Klal Yisrael can regain their good name by doing teshuva. Why did Rebbe Meir feel the need to support the power of teshuva from a new verse? Elsewhere, the Gemara cites many different verses to demonstrate the power of teshuva. Why does the Gemara seem to suggest that Rebbe Yehuda would argue on this point? The Maharat offers a different interpretation of the final step in Rebbe Meir's exposition. Even before Klal Yisrael does teshuva, they are still called wonderful sons! At the same time that they are called corrupt, foolish, and faithless, they are also still called simply "Hashem's sons." This demonstrates the intense love that Hashem has for us that even when we sin grievously, we are still his beloved sons. The Maharat is an Acharon, albeit an early Acharon, and he is nevertheless arguing with a Rishon. Yet support for his position can be found in the words of another Rishon, the Rashba. The Rashba is of the opinion that the graves of idolaters do not transmit tumah via ohel. (Other Rishonim disagree. Fascinatingly, part of the debate is based on the question of whether Eliyahu Hanavi was a Kohen or did he come from a different shevet, perhaps Gad or Binyamin?) Therefore, the Rashba was asked if a Jew renounced his religion R'L, and adopted pagan beliefs, does his grave still transmit tumah via ohel, or is his grave considered like one of an idolater's?

Among other sources, the Rashba cites our Gemara. Rebbe Meir is of the opinion that even if a Jew practices idolatry, he would still be called Hashem's son! The person who died is likewise called Hashem's son, and his grave would transmit tumah via ohel. The Rashba cited the entire Gemara to bolster his proof. Apparently, he is of the opinion that the entire Gemara, even the last verse, is discussing a person's moniker before he does teshuva. Therefore, he ruled that the grave of the person who died before he did teshuva still transmits tumah via ohel. Even though generally, the halacha follows Rebbe Yehuda when he argues with Rebbe Meir, that rule doesn't apply in this case. The halacha accords with Rebbe Meir that we are called Hashem's sons even when we sin. According to the Rashba, we are even called beloved sons before doing teshuva. This is a powerful lesson that we should have in mind during these days. The Yetzer Hara may want to convince us that we are worthless in the eyes of Hashem; we are simply beyond redemption. That is simply untrue. Hashem loves us even in the state we are in and looks forward to our teshuva.

Rabbi Avrohom Sebrow is a rebbe at Yeshiva Ateres Shimon in Far Rockaway. In addition, Rabbi Sebrow leads a daf yomi chaburah at Eitz Chayim of Dogwood Park in West Hempstead, NY. He can be contacted at [ASebrow@gmail.com](mailto:ASebrow@gmail.com).

<https://heichalhanegina.blogspot.com/2007/05/rabbi-meir-baal-haness-rabbi-yehuda-bar.html>

#### RABBI MEIR BAAL HANESS

Pesach Sheini is and the yahrzeit of two veritable giants of the Mishna – Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Yehuda. And as we mentioned last year, we have begun, in our counting of the Omer, the Sefira of Hod. The Zohar says that during this week, the "gates are open." Many Chassidim don't say Tachanun this entire week!

The entrance to the Shul and the Tziyon of Rabbi Meir in Tiveria

Many of us know that a "stam" Mishna, a Mishna without the name of its author, is that of Rabbi Meir. And while we know that he is called Rabbi Meir Baal HaNess ("the Master of the Miracle"), do we know why? The Gemara relates the following story:

Rabbi Meir was married to Bruria, the daughter of Rabbi Chanina ben Tradyon, one of the ten martyrs. The government ordered Rabbi Chanina and his wife executed for teaching Torah publicly. They decreed that his daughter - Bruria's sister - should live a life of shame. She was placed in a brothel. Bruria asked her husband to save her sister. Rabbi Meir took a bag of gold coins and said to himself, "If she has remained chaste, a miracle will occur for her, and if not, there won't be a miracle." He then went to the brothel disguised as a Roman horseman, and asked her to sleep with him. She refused,

claiming she was in the midst of her menses. When he offered to wait until it was over, she said, "There are many other women here that are more beautiful than I." He then realized that she used this tactic whenever she was approached, and deemed that Bruria's sister had kept her chastity. Then he offered the gold coins as a bribe to the guard. The guard replied, "When my supervisor comes, he will notice one missing and kill me."

Rabbi Meir answered, "Take half the money for yourself, and use the other half to bribe the officials." The guard continued, "And when there is no more money, and the supervisors come - then what will I do?"

Rabbi Meir answered, "Say, 'The G-d of Meir - answer me!' and you will be saved."

### **Elaka D'Meir Aneini**

The guard asked, "And how can I be guaranteed that this will save me?"

Rabbi Meir replied, "Look - there are man-eating dogs over there. I will go to them and you will see for yourself." Rabbi Meir walked over to the dogs, threw a clump of dirt at them, and they ran at him to tear him apart. He cried, "G-d of Meir - answer me!" and the dogs retreated. The guard was convinced, and he gave him the girl.

When the group of supervisors came, the guard bribed them with the money.

Eventually, the money was used up, and it was publicized what had happened. They arrested the guard and sentenced him to death by hanging. They tied the rope around his neck and he said, "G-d of Meir - answer me!" The rope tore, much to everyone's amazement. He told them the incident, and they went after Rabbi Meir. The guard was saved.

The Romans then engraved Rabbi Meir's likeness on the gates of Rome and proclaimed that anyone seeing a person resembling it should bring him in. One day [some Romans] saw him and ran after him, so he ran away from them and entered a harlot's house. [So as not to be identified as Rabbi Meir, who naturally would not enter such a place.]

Others say he happened just then to see food cooked by goyim [heathens], and he dipped in one finger and then sucked the other. [He appeared to be eating it, even though he didn't].

Others again say that Eliyahu HaNavi [Elijah the Prophet] appeared to them as a harlot who embraced him. "G-d forbid," they said, "if this was Rabbi Meir, he would not have acted like this!" [and they left him]. He then arose and ran away and came to Bavel [Babylon].

[Source: Avoda Zara, 18a-b]

\*\*\* From then on, we have a tradition that when a Jew finds himself, Heaven forbid, in any sort of trouble or crisis, he should give charity, and dedicate it in the memory of Rabbi Meir Baal HaNess. He should then say simply the phrase, **אללה דמאיר ענני** - "Elaka d'Meir aneini" - three times, which means, "G-d of Meir - answer me!"

<https://www.gruntig.net/2024/06/joey-newcomb-bonim-lamakom.html>

### **Joey Newcomb - Bonim Lamakom**

Last winter, I went on a ski trip with Reb Aryeh Weiss and the boys from Waterbury. While we were farbrenging in the mountains of Utah, Reb Aryeh shared a vort that mamish resonated with me deeply. He mentioned the inyan of saying "**Elaka D'Meir Aneini**" to have our tefilos answered. But why invoke Rebbi Meir specifically, rather than any other tzadik?

Reb Aryeh explained that in the Gemara Kiddushin, there's a machlokes involving Rebbi Meir. R' Yehuda holds that the Yidden are only considered children of Hashem when they are behaving like His children, keeping His Torah and fulfilling His mitzvos. However, Rebbi Meir argues that whether a Yid is performing well in their spiritual avoda or not, they are - and always will be - a child of Hashem. L'maisa, the halacha is like Rebbi Meir.

Reb Aryeh pointed out that often, people come before Hashem with a tefilah, but they might not be in the best place in their ruchniyusdik'e journey and feel unworthy of having their tefilos answered. By mentioning Rebbi Meir, who teaches that we are always Hashem's children regardless of our current state, we affirm that a child will always receive a response from his Father, no matter how far he's strayed.

I had my guitar with me and immediately started playing, inspired by this idea. Within a few minutes, we had a song worked out. Later, when I was in Eretz Yisroel, I shared this song with the boys at Yeshivas Beis Dovid (R' Avi Wiesenfeld's yeshiva) during a farbrengen. We sang it for a good ten minutes straight, and R' Wiesenfeld remarked that this song truly encapsulates the essence of his yeshiva.

I asked the boys if they would help me film a music video for the song at Rebbi Meir's kever in Teveria, and Thank You Hashem they agreed.

I hope you enjoy the song, as it represents the special Father-son relationship we're all zoche to have with Hashem.

Bonim Atem Lamakom (Devarim 14:1) - Reb Meir Omer Bein Kach u'Vein Kach

Atem Kruyim Banim (Kidushin 36a) Elaka D'Meir Aneini (Avodah Zara, 18a)

## **PARSHAT RE'AY**

To our surprise, the city of Jerusalem (by that name) is never mentioned in Chumash. However, the underlying concept of that eternal city emerges as a major theme in Parshat Re'ay.

In the following shiur, we uncover the 'foundations of Jerusalem' in our study of the Torah's repeated use of the phrase: "ha'makom asher yivchar Hashem" [lit. the site that God will choose], and its thematic significance.

### **INTRODUCTION**

When we speak of Jerusalem, we usually relate to either one of its two aspects:

- a) its geographic **location**
- b) its **function** as the national center of the Jewish Nation.

Even though Chumash never informs us in regard to its precise location, its function as a 'national center' for the Jewish Nation unfolds as a fundamental theme in Sefer Devarim.

To understand how and why, we must begin our shiur by returning to our analysis of the **CHUKIM & MISHPATIM** section of the main speech of Sefer Devarim.

Recall from our introductory shiur on Sefer Devarim that the main speech of Sefer Devarim (chaps. 5-26) discusses primarily the mitzvot that Bnei Yisrael must keep when they enter the land (see 6:1), to establish themselves as an "am kadosh". This speech divides neatly into two distinct sections:

- I - "Ha'MITZVA" (6:4 - 11:31)
- II- "Ha'CHUKIM v'ha'MISHPATIM" (12:1 - 26:19)

The **MITZVAH** section, we explained, contains primarily mitzvot and repeated reminders ("tochaychot") regarding the proper **attitude** towards God ("ahavat Hashem"/ e.g. 6:5,10;12,11:22), while the **CHUKIM & MISHPATIM** section contains the more **practical** laws that Bnei Yisrael must keep when setting up their nation in the Land.

These 'practical laws' begin in Parshat Re'ay (see 12:1) and continue all the way until the laws of "bikurim" in Parshat Ki-tavo (see 26:1-15). As this section is the Torah's largest corpus of laws, we should expect for its manner of presentation to be significant. As we shall now discuss in greater detail, the very first primary topic of this section just so happens to be "ha'makom asher yivchar Hashem". Therefore, we begin our study with an analysis of how the Torah first presents these laws:

### **HA'MAKOM ASHER YIVCHAR HASHEM**

Let's read the opening psukim of the CHUKIM & MISHPATIM section, noting the progression of the commandments and the development of its main topic:

**"THESE** are the 'chukim & mishpatim' which you must observe in the **LAND WHICH HASHEM IS GIVING YOU**... :

\* You must totally destroy all the sites where the nations worshiped their idols... on the high hills and mountains... you must **ERADICATE THEIR NAMES** from this place.

\* **DO NOT WORSHIP YOUR GOD IN THIS MANNER** (in multiple places of worship/ read carefully!).

\* Rather, at the **SITE WHICH GOD WILL CHOOSE** -

**HA'MAKOM ASHER YIVCHAR HASHEM** - amongst all your tribes, - **LASUM ET SHMO SHAM**; -

"l'shichno t'dRSHU u'ba'ta shama"

\* **THERE** you must bring all of your offerings and tithes etc. Eat and rejoice there in front of your Lord...

\* ... After you cross the Jordan and enter the Land and find rest from your enemies and enjoy security, then - **HA'MAKOM ASHER YIVCHAR HASHEM L'SHAKEYN SHMO SHAM** - bring **THERE** everything I command...

\* Be careful not to offer your sacrifices anywhere that you want, rather at **HA'MAKOM ASHER YIVCHAR HASHEM**, only THERE may you bring your offerings...  
(see 12:1-14)

Note that the first commandment - to destroy all places of idol worship in order to eradicate the **NAMES** of other gods from your land - serves as a 'pre-requisite' for the commandments that follow: to establish a central **SITE IN WHICH GOD'S NAME WILL DWELL**.

This obligation - to transform Eretz Canaan into a land in which God's Name (i.e. reputation) becomes known - emerges as the first topic of this section. This goal is accomplished not only by ridding the land of the names of **OTHER** gods (12:2-3), but also by establishing a national religious center - i.e. **HAMAKOM ASHER YIVCHAR HASHEM L'SHAKEYN SHMO SHAM** - a vehicle through which this goal can be realized.

In relation to the framework of the main speech, this opening commandment is quite appropriate, for Bnei Yisrael are about to enter and conquer the Promised Land in order to establish God's special nation. Therefore, it is significant that the opening commandment be to rid the land from the names of other gods, while establishing a site in which God's **NAME** will become known.

### **A RECURRING THEME**

Not only is - **HAMAKOM ASHER YIVCHAR HASHEM** - repeated several times in the opening "parshia" (i.e. chapter 12), this phrase is mentioned some **TWENTY** times throughout the entire **CHUKIM & MISHPATIM** section of the main speech (chapters 12-26)! As illustrated in the following table, not only is it the **FIRST** topic of this section, it also develops as a recurring theme.

The table below summarizes each mention of the phrase "ha'makom asher yivchar Hashem" together with its related topic:

<b>PEREK:/pasuk</b>	<b>TOPIC</b>
12:5,11,14,18,21,26	The place to bring all "korbanot"
14:23,24,25	The place to eat "maaser sheni"
15:20	The place to eat "bchor b'heyma"
16:2,6,7,11,15,16	The site for "aliya l'regel" on the holidays
17:8,10	The seat of the Supreme Court
18:6	The service of the Leviim
26:2	The place to bring one's 'first fruits'

### **A NATIONAL CENTER**

A quick glance at this table immediately shows that the purpose of this site is not only to offer 'korbanot'; rather it emerges as a National Religious Center. These mitzvot in Sefer Devarim facilitate the establishment of this center, for in order to fulfill them, one must frequent this site on numerous occasions during the course of the year!

First and foremost, every individual is obligated to make a pilgrimage to the site on the three agricultural holidays ("aliyah l'regel" / chapter 16). Moreover, one is obligated to visit this site whenever he must offer a "korban" (be it "n'dava" or "chovah").

The farmer must bring there not only his first fruits ("bikurim"), but also 10% of his harvest to eat and share at this site ("maaser sheni"). Likewise, the shepherd must bring not only the first born animals ("bchor"), but also 10% of his entire flock ("maaser b'heyma")! Furthermore, the Supreme Court for all judicial and halachik judgment must be located at this site.

Thus, this site - **HAMAKOM ASHER YIVCHAR HASHEM** - is much more than a location to bring "korbanot". It unfolds as the National Center of the Jewish people.

What is the purpose of this center? How should it function?

One could suggest that the establishment of this site would greatly facilitate the development of Am Yisrael as God's special nation. The establishment of this center, and the obligation of every individual to frequent this site, ensures the unity of the people and of the religion. Without such a center, within several generations it would be more likely that we would find twelve different religions rather than twelve tribes.

This center was to serve as a center not only for gathering and

offering "korbanot", but also for justice, judgment, Torah education, and culture - a site that would enhance the spirituality of each individual.

To prove this point, let's take a closer look at the mitzvah of "maaser sheni":

"You shall set aside every year a tenth of the yield of your field. And you should eat this tithe in the presence of your Lord "baMakom asher yivchar Hashem l'shakeyn shmo sham"... **IN ORDER THAT YOU LEARN TO FEAR GOD** forever..." (14:22)

The Torah commands us to tithe ten percent of our produce, and eat it (or share it) within the confines of that center - an act that we are told will teach us to fear God.

But why should simply 'eating food' at this site cause one to fear God? To understand why, we must conjecture as to how this site was to develop.

### THE SITE / THE TEMPLE / AND JERUSALEM

Even though it is not explicitly stated, it is implicit that the Bet Ha'Mikdash [Temple] was to become the focal point of this national center - for the simple reason that Devarim commands us to bring our "korbanot" there. [These are obviously the same korbanot as described in Sefer Vayikra.]

However, "maaser sheni" itself is produce, and not an animal offering (i.e. it doesn't require a mizbayach). Nevertheless; the Torah demands that we eat this "maser" at this site. This implies that there must be an additional area surrounding the Mikdash where this "maser" can be eaten (which Halacha defines this as the area within the walls of the **CITY** that surrounds the Bet HaMikdash - the same law that applies to eating the meat of the "korban shlamim".]

But when one eats his "maser" within the walls of this city, other people will be there as well. Let's review who else should be in this special city on a daily basis. First of all, the Torah designates 'civil servants' who are to officiate and administer the Bet Ha'Mikdash - i.e. the "kohanim" and "leviim" - whose entire lives are dedicated to the service of God. There will also be the judges and scholars of the supreme court system, populating this 'holy city' surrounding the Temple, infusing it with an atmosphere of "kedusha" (sanctity).

Therefore, the experience of eating "maaser sheni" in this 'holy' city, mingling there with the kohanim, leviim, and Torah scholars, while sharing one's food together with family and the needy (see 14:25-27), would create an environment that enhances one's "yirat shamayim" - the fear of God.

Note how Chizkuni's interpretation of the pasuk re: "maser sheni" reflects this same idea:

"...when you will go up [to this site] to eat your maser sheni, you will see the priests officiating and the levites singing... and the Sanhedrin sitting in judgment and teaching laws..., and thus learn [from them] how to fear your God." (14:23, see also Seforo)

### A PROOF FROM HAKHEL

This obligation to frequent **HAMAKOM ASHER YIVCHAR HASHEM** culminates every seven years with the "Hakhel" ceremony, where the entire nation - including the women and children - gather to hear the Torah at this very same site. Here, once again, we find "yirat Hashem" - the fear of God - as the primary purpose:

"... every seventh year... when all Israel gathers before Hashem "ba'Makom asher yivchar", you shall read this Torah (Sefer Dvarim) in the presence of all Israel. Gather ("hakhel") the people, men, women and children and the strangers, that they may hear and so learn **TO FEAR THE LORD** and to observe... Their children too... shall hear and learn **TO FEAR GOD** as long as they live on the Land..." (see Devarim 31:10-13)

Not only do we find once again the site "hamakom asher yivchar Hashem", we also find the purpose of this gathering to instill the fear of God in those who gather. As you review the above psukim, note as well the similarities to Ma'amad Har Sinai. This beautifully supports Ramban's interpretation that the underlying purpose of the Mikdash was to perpetuate the Sinai experience (see Ramban on

Shmot 25:1 /and TSC shiur on Parshat Terumah).

To conclude our discussion of the 'function' of this site ["hamakom asher yivchar..."], we return to Torah's special use of the word "makom" in a very similar context in Sefer Breishit.

### BACK TO SEFER BREISHIT

Review the story of Yaakov's dream at the beginning of Parshat Va'yetze (i.e. Breishit 28:10-22), noting not only the word ha'makom" (five times) but also its theme. At the conclusion of this episode, Yaakov vows that upon his return to this site ["ha'makom"], he will establish a Bet Elokim - a House for God. Here, we already find a thematic connection between the word "ha'makom" and the Mikdash.

Similarly, in the story of the "akeyda" (see Breishit chapter 22) the Torah uses the word "makom" to describe that site. [See 22:2,3,4,9,14.] Recall as well how Avraham Avinu names this "makom" - "Hashem yireh" (see 22:14), a site that Chazal later identify as the very same mountain where the Bet Ha'Mikdash was built in Yerushalayim. In fact, in Divrei ha'yamim we are informed that Shlomo ha'melech built the Bet ha'Mikdash on Har ha'Moriah, the site of the "akeyda" (see II D.H. 3:1-3).

Even though it is not clear where Yaakov's dream took place, the Torah's use of the word "makom" in both stories, and their common theme certainly support Chazal's conclusion that both events happened at the same site (see Rashi 28:11), which later became the Bet ha'Mikdash in Yerushalayim.

### HOLY GROUND OR HOLY PURPOSE

Our analysis thus far demonstrates how the Torah puts more emphasis on the 'function', than the location, of this site. In fact, the Torah appears to be rather evasive in regard to where this site is actually to be located (see below).

However, this very point may be very fundamental towards our understanding of Jerusalem. The site is special because of its function - to serve as a national center, to promote the reputation of God's Name ["shem Hashem"] among all mankind.

This emphasis is important, for man is very vulnerable towards focusing on the holiness of a site rather than the holiness of its purpose. [Sort of like dovening TO the "kotel" instead dovening AT the "kotel", or saying tehillim TO "kivrei tzadikim" instead of AT "kivrei tzadikim".]

For this reason, most all of the later prophets rebuke the people for misunderstanding the Temple in this manner. Take for example Yirmiyahu chapter 7 (in case you are not familiar, read 7:1-28, see also the first chapter of Yeshayahu). This rebuke does not imply that there is no value to holy sites. Precisely the opposite, the physical location is important for it provides a vehicle to promote its purpose. Yet, it always remains cardinal not to allow the holiness of the site to override the holiness of its purpose.

[For a nice perspective on the balance between these two ideas, see Tehillim 51. I realize that this is a 'touchy topic', so I'd rather you base your conclusions of David ha'Melech's explanation, rather than my own.]

### JERUSALEM / SEEK AND FIND

As we have shown, Sefer Devarim never specifies the precise geographic location of where this site is to be, i.e. where the permanent Bet HaMikdash is to be constructed. Instead, the site is consistently referred to as "the one which God will choose" ("HaMakom asher yivchar Hashem").

However, in Parshat Reay we do find a very obscure hint regarding how we are to find this site: "l'shichno ti'drshu, u'bata shama" - (see 12:5)

God will only show us the site if **WE** look for it. This 'hide and seek' type relationship is reflective of every Divine encounter. To find God, man must **SEARCH** for Him. According to these psukim in Parshat Re'ay, this principle applies to the nation in same manner as it applies to the individual. [As we say in the daily Ashrei: "karov Hashem l'chol kor'av" - God is close to those who call out to Him.]

When Am Yisrael as a nation, begins a serious search for God, then God will show them the proper location to build the Mikdash.

The generation of Yehoshua, despite their military conquests, did not succeed in establishing the permanent Mikdash (after conquering the Land). Instead, they erected the temporary Mishkan in Shilo. There it remained, quite neglected, during the entire time period of the Judges. After the city of Shilo was destroyed by the Philistines (during the time of Eli / see Shmuel chapters 4-6) both the Mishkan and the "aron" wandered from site to site. It was only during the time period of David ha'melech that Bnei Yisrael actively aspired to build the Mikdash.

For example, when David became king over all of Israel (see II Shmuel 5:1-9), his first act was to conquer the city of Jerusalem. His next project was to gather the nation in order to bring the "aron" (the holy ark) to his new capital city (see II Shmuel chapter 6). Note how Divrei ha'yamim describes how David explained his plan (and the reason) to the nation:

"David said to the entire congregation of Israel: If you approve, and this is from God (the events of David's rise to power), let us go forward and invite all our brethren in the land of Israel, together with the **KOHANIM** and **LEVIIM** and gather together, **IN ORDER TO BRING BACK** to us God's **HOLY ARK** - 'ki lo **DRASH'NU'HU** b'yamei Shaul' - for during the time of Shaul **WE DID NOT SEEK IT**" (I Divrei Hayamim 13:2-3)

[Note the use of the shorash "d.r.sh." here and in Devarim 12:5]

David Ha'melech notes how the "aron" had been neglected during the generation of Shaul at the national level. In contrast to Shaul, David ha'melech considered bringing the "aron" to Yerushalayim as his highest national priority.

After the "aron" finally arrived in Jerusalem, the next step in David's master plan was to build a permanent house for the "aron", i.e. the Bet Ha'Mikdash in Yerushalayim:

"When the King was settled in his palace and God has granted him safety from his enemies [he'niach lo m'kol oyvav m'saviv], the King said to Natan the prophet: Here I am dwelling in a **HOUSE** of cedar wood, while the 'aron' is dwelling only in a **TENT!**" (see II Shmuel 7:1-2)

[Note again the textual parallel to Devarim 12:10-11]

Even though God informed David that Am Yisrael would have to wait another generation before the Temple could be built (in the next generation by his son Shlomo, see II Shmuel chapter 7), its precise site was already designated in David's own lifetime (see I Divrei Ha'yamim 22:1). In fact, David ha'melech himself prepared all the necessary building materials (see the remainder of that chapter).

If you read the above sources carefully, you'll see that the underlying reason for God's decision to delay its construction for one more generation stemmed from the need to wait until its 'function' - to make a Name for God - could be properly fulfilled.

## JERUSALEM TODAY

As we have seen in our study, according to the guidelines of Sefer Devarim - 'Jerusalem' is destined to become more than just the city that houses the Temple. Ideally, Jerusalem should become the National Cultural and Religious Center of the Jewish people, while making a Name for God. This aspiration is found in the prophecies of most all of the later prophets. For example:

"For Jerusalem will be called the city of Truth ("ir ha'emet"), and the mountain of the Lord of Hosts -"har ha'Kodesh" (see Zecharia 8:3).

"For out of Zion will come forth Torah and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem" (see Isaiah 2:3).

Today, be it for halachic, technical, or political reasons, we are not permitted to rebuild the Bet HaMikdash. Until the proper time comes, this aspiration remains our national dream and an everlasting prayer. Nonetheless, to rebuild the city of Jerusalem as our National Center - a city of Truth, Justice, and Sanctity - is not only permitted, it is our duty. In our own generation, God has opened for us a historic opportunity. The achievement of this goal remains our national responsibility.

shabbat shalom,  
menachem

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## FOR FURTHER IYUN

A. Even though the chagim have already been presented in Parshiot Mishpatim, Emor, and Pinchas, they are repeated again in Dvarim chap 16. Read this chapter carefully.

1. What laws are added which we did not already learn from the earlier sources?
2. What would you say is the primary topic of this perek? (which key phrase repeats itself many times?)
3. Attempt to explain this perek as an expansion of Shmot 23:14-17!
4. How does all this relate to the above shiur?
5. Why aren't Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur mentioned in this parsha?

## B. "LO TA'ASUN KEYN L'HASHEM ELOKEICHEM" (12:4)

In the above shiur, we explained that this pasuk implies that we are commanded not to worship God in multiple places of worship. This is "pshat" of the pasuk based on 12:2 and 12:5, For just as they worshiped their gods on the high places and under mighty trees etc. (12:2) you should not, rather - only in the place which God chooses ("ha'makom..."). That is, at **ONE** place and not at many places.

Note the two explanations given by Rashi. The first follows this reading according to "pshat". The second is a Midrash Halacha. Do these two pirushim contradict each other, or can they both be correct? Use your answer to explain the nature of Midrashei Halacha.

## C. MIKRA BIKURIM - THE FINALE

Note the final mitzvot of the chukim & mishpatim are Mikra Bikurim and vidduy maaser (perek 26), again focusing on **HA'MAKOM ASHER YIVCHAR HASHEM** - (note 27:1 also).

1. Does this parsha belong in Parshat Ki-tavo, or do you think that it would be more fitting to Parshat Reay? Relate to the parsha of maaser sheni (14:22-29)! Why do you think it was chosen to conclude the main speech? Relate your answer to the purpose of this speech, and the content of "mikra bikurim" and to Breishit perek 15.

D. Even though Sefer Breishit does not mention Jerusalem by name, it does mention the city of 'Shalem' (see 14:18) in relation to Malki Tzedek (note the significance of his name) and Mount Moriah (see 22:2,14), the site of the Akeyda', as Hashem YIREH. Together YIREH -SHALEM, may allude to the final name of this city - YERU-SHALAYIM.

## PARSHAT RE'AY - Part Two

Bad influences? Surely we should stay away from them, but how do we identify them? In Parshat Reay, we find an example of how the Torah deals with this problem, as Bnei Yisrael prepare to enter the land.

## INTRODUCTION

Our previous shiur on Parshat Re'ay, discussed how "ha'makom asher yivchar Hashem" - emerged as its primary topic. Even though this holds true for chapters 12 and 15, chapters 13 and 14 appear to form a digression from this topic.

To illustrate how the topic of 'bad influences' is sandwiched with the topic of "ha'makom asher yivchar", the following table summarizes the main topics of the Parsha:

### \* HA'MAKOM ASHER YIVCHAR HASHEM

12:1-19 - Establishing the Bet ha'Mikdash as the national center  
12:20-28 - Permission for eating meat outside of that center

### \* BAD INFLUENCES

12:29-31 -Don't seek after the gods of the nations of Canaan  
13:2-6 - Don't follow the instructions of a false prophet  
13:7-12 - Don't follow a family member who may lead you astray  
13:13-19 -Ir ha'nidachat - when an entire city goes astray  
14:1-21 - Misc. dietary laws (what one cannot eat)

### \* HA'MAKOM ASHER YIVCHAR HASHEM

14:22-27 - Eating "maaser sheni" (there) in years 1,2,4,& 5  
14:28-29 - Giving this "maaser" to the poor in years 3 & 6  
15:1-18 - The laws of "shmittah" for the 7th year  
15:19-23 -Bringing the 'first born' to "ha'makom asher..."  
16:1-17 - Celebrating the "shalosh regalim, ba'makom asher..."  
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As you most probably have guessed by now, in our shiur we will search for a theme that ties all of these topics together.

#### **FOUR 'BAD EXAMPLES'**

To begin our shiur, we must first explain why we categorized all of the topics in chapter 13 as 'bad influences'.

Note how each topic relates to a certain warning that 'somebody else' will not lead you astray towards following other gods.

First we find a warning against following the gods of your 'non-jewish' neighbors (12:29-31). Then we are warned not to follow a charismatic leader (be he a 'prophet' or 'dreamer'), even if he performs a miracle, should he suggest that we worship a different god (13:2-6). Afterward, we are warned against following a family member or close friend who may secretly suggest that we worship a different god. Finally, as a society, we are warned not to allow an entire town to go astray; and if so, that entire town must be destroyed.

Note how we find examples of influences from:

- a) society at large, i.e. our global community
- b) our leaders, either religious or lay
- c) our family and close friends
- d) our city, i.e. our local community

These laws are followed by a lengthy list of dietary laws in 14:3-21. Note however that the reason for keeping these laws is given both at the beginning and end of this unit, in 14:2 and 14:21 - for you are an "am kadosh l'Hashem elokecha" - a designated [holy] nation for your God - hence you must separate yourselves from them.

Even though the Torah does not explain HOW these laws accomplish this goal, we know quite well from our daily life how the laws of "kashrut" severely limit our cultural contact with people of other religions. Therefore, we find yet another example of how the laws of the Torah protect us from the influences of those who may lead us towards following other gods.

With this in mind, we must now consider the connection between this unit of 'bad influences' and the primary topic of "ha'makom asher yivchar Hashem".

#### **INFLUENCES - GOOD & BAD**

When we consider the purpose of "ha'makom asher yivchar Hashem", i.e. the establishment of the city of Yerushalayim and the Bet ha'Mikdash as the nation's vibrant cultural and religious center, we find yet another example of what will influence the society of Am Yisrael, this time from the positive aspect.

In other words, Parshat Re'ay discusses all types of influences that will shape the nature of society (as Bnei Yisrael prepare to enter the land). First and foremost, by the establishment of "ha'makom asher yivchar Hashem" and the requirement that every jew frequent that site and eat his "maaser sheni" in Yerushalayim, we assure the proper development of Am Yisrael as an "am kadosh l'Hashem".

By warning against bad influences, the Torah attempts to make sure that the fabric of that society won't crumble.

In Parshat Shoftim, we will find additional examples of what will provide a 'good influence' upon the nation. The Torah will discuss the judicial system, the priesthood, and the various other institutions of political leadership in their ideal form.

Till then,  
shabbat shalom  
menachem

## Parshas Reeh: Sons and Brothers

By Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

[Boldface emphasis added]

### I. OVERVIEW

As we outlined in a previous shiur in Sefer D'varim, the Sefer is made up of three distinct sections:

- \* Historical Recounting (Chapters 1-11)
- \* Laws (Chapters 12-26)
- \* Re-covenanting Ceremonies (Chapters 27-33)

(Mosheh's death (Chapter 34) is an epilogue to the Sefer).

Until now, we have presented this tripartite division, focusing on the content and implications of the "history-sermon" which is the content of the first three Parashiot of the Sefer. Our assumption was that, beginning with Parashat R'eh (a few verses in - since the first 7 verses are a completion of the history-sermon), we have moved cleanly and totally into the "Law Compendium" of D'varim.

We will see, during the course of this shiur, that this "clean" division is not nearly as sharp as originally presented (and as conventionally understood). Before proceeding, it is prudent to point out that the "nickname" of Sefer D'varim presents us with some difficulties. Each of the Humashim is known by at least one alternative name, found in the literature of the Talmudic/Midrashic period and in that of the Rishonim.

\* B'resheet is also called "Sefer Y'tzirah" (Book of Creation), for reasons that are somewhat obvious.

\* Sh'mot is called "Sefer haG'ulah" (see Ramban's introduction to Sefer Sh'mot for a beautiful explanation of this) or, alternatively, "Humash haSheni" (the second Humash - see Netziv's introduction to Sh'mot for an insight on this term).

\* Vayyikra is known, throughout Rabbinic literature, as Torat Kohanim (a more or less literal rendering of "Leviticus" - the laws affecting the Kohanim).

\* Bamidbar is called, as early as the Mishnah, "Homesh haP'kudim" (the Humash of the censuses).

\* D'varim is called - at least as early as Rabbinic literature - "Mishneh Torah" - (either "a repetition of the Torah" or "a second Torah"). It may be that the Torah is referring to Sefer D'varim when the king is commanded to write a Mishneh Torah (D'varim 17:18).

The conventional understanding of "Mishneh Torah" is "repetition", the notion being that Mosheh was presenting the new generation with a "recap" of the Mitzvot found in the first four Humashim. As Rav Menachem Liebtag has pointed out in one of his insightful Parashah shiurim, if the goal of Sefer D'varim is to serve as a repetition/review of the Mitzvot and/or narratives found in the first four books (as seems to be Rambam's intent in his explanation of his naming his Code "Mishneh Torah" - see his introduction there), it seems to fail its purpose - see Rav Liebtag's shiur for a full treatment of this problem.

The upshot of the problem is that there are some Mitzvot which are repeated from earlier Humashim - (e.g. the list of non-Kosher animals, pilgrimage festivals), some which are not repeated here (e.g. Kohanic restrictions, offerings, Rosh haShanah and Yom haKippurim), some which are new to us in D'varim (e.g. marriage and divorce, certain components of juridical procedure) and some which are "repeated" but from a distinctly different perspective (e.g. Sh'mittah - compare Vayyikra 25:2-7 with D'varim 15:1-6). What are we to make of this Law "Review"? As a "recap", it falls short of the mark - yet it does not contain all new information. We will try to answer this by assessing the goal of Sefer D'varim in general - thereby understanding the inclusion of some of the Mitzvot here (and the sequence in which they are presented).

For purposes of this shiur, we will limit the analysis to those Mitzvot which appear in Parashat R'eh - such that this shiur will only answer part of the question.

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### II. PARASHAT R'EH: THE BRIDGE FROM MITZVOT TO MISHPATIM

In earlier shiurim, we noted that the catchall word "Mitzvot", which is literally translated as "commandments", is utilized in Sefer D'varim with a unique meaning. As we can see from 6:1, 11:13 and other instances, "Mitzvot" are the general attitudinal approaches to God which comprise the telos of the covenant. Loving God, fearing Him, cleaving to Him, imitating His ways etc - these are the "Mitzvot". When Mosheh completed his "lessons" in the "history sermon" of Chapters 1-11, he had brought us well beyond the demand to observe a series of obligations and restrictions - we were asked to fear God, to walk in His ways, to cleave to Him, to love Him... (see 10:12-13). As we noted in our shiur on Parashat va'Et'hanan, this was the ultimate lesson of Mosheh Rabbenu - leading us into a constantly growing relationship with God.

Whereas the Law Compendium which begins at 12:1 has been traditionally understood as an entirely new piece of Mosheh's speech, it seems that the selection of laws (and the order of presentation) suggests a different understanding.

A quick look at the first series of laws in Chapter 12 will give us some insight:

**You shall surely destroy all of the worship-sites where the nations who you are uprooting worshipped, atop the high mountains and the hillocks and underneath every tree. You shall take apart their altars, you shall destroy their worship-pillars, their Asherot (worship-trees) you shall burn by fire and you shall break their idols - and you will erase their name from that place. You shall not act thusly with Hashem your God" (12:2-4)** The appositional phrase - you shall not act thusly may be understood several ways (see Ramban ad loc.); however, any way it is interpreted, the Torah is making a demand of us which is quite extraordinary. **We are called to behave with great passion and aggression towards the worship-sites of the pagans** - and to promote and keep opposite characteristics regarding the worship-site and Name of God. The Torah (like other religious disciplines) incorporates the full range of emotional characteristics and traits into required behavior.

Even our calendar reflects this range - from the unbridled celebration of Sukkot to the solemnity of Yom haKippurim (without mentioning the hilarity of Purim and the anguish of Tish'a b'Av - both Rabbinically mandated commemorations). We find, in most cases, that people who find Tish'a b'Av "easy" to observe have a difficult time celebrating Purim properly. There are "Simchas Torah Yidin (Jews)" and "Tish'ah b'Av Yidin" - but there aren't a lot of people who are capable of putting their full energies into the proper moods of both types of commemorations. This is because people generally have a particular disposition and those celebrations and rituals which "fit" their emotional makeup are the ones towards which they exuberantly run to participate.

The Torah here is demanding an aggressive approach to pagan sites - to uproot, destroy and erase. There are people who would find this type of behavior easy, as it fits their general emotional makeup. To ask of these same people - who found uprooting and destruction so easy - to treat God in the exact opposite manner is not such a simple task. Conversely, those who "naturally" show the utmost respect and concern for the sanctity of God's Name may find it difficult to act with vigor and determination in destroying a pagan worship-site.

The ability to act with this emotional dexterity is grounded in motivation. If someone is able to participate in the sadness of Tish'ah b'Av because he is a naturally dour person - Purim will be very difficult to celebrate. If, on the other hand, he is sad on Tish'ah b'Av because he has a tremendous love for God and for the Jewish people and is so distraught over the loss of His holy place and the destruction of His people - then he will find it just as easy to celebrate the sanctification of His Name and the salvation of His people on Purim.

In the same way, for someone to be able to uproot and destroy one place while demonstrating the necessary respect for another Place - he must be motivated by more than just natural tendencies and personal character traits. If he is motivated by an overwhelming love for God and a desire to promote God's Name in this world, he will be as zealous in his protection of God's holy place as he will in his readiness to destroy pagan places. **This first series of Mitzvot is an actualization of the ultimate lesson taught by Mosheh Rabbeinu - to love God.** Following this analysis of the first series of Mitzvot, we will then assay the rest of the Mitzvot in Parashat R'eh, viewing them as a bridge between the lessons of Mosheh and the more "legalistic" Mishpatim found in the next two and a half Parashiot (through Chapter 26).

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### III. THE SECOND DISTINCTION: A CENTRAL WORSHIP-SITE

Much has been made of the relationship between the "novelty" of centralized worship in D'varim and the Sefer Torah found by Hilkiah hoKohen (II Melakhim 22) and the subsequent reform by Yoshiyah to remove all other worship sites, bringing all worship into the realm of the Beit haMikdash. The claims of the bible critics (who maintain that D'varim, or at least this section, were enacted by Yoshiyah in order to strengthen the capitol city) aside, it would be helpful to find an association between the centrality of worship (first mentioned in 12:4-14) and the preceding section.

Following our thesis that the particular restrictions and obligations presented in this first part of the Law Compendium represent expressions of the ideal relationship with God that we are to develop, we can understand the stress on centralized worship in a new light. The pagan nations of K'na'an had multiple worship-sites; although this may have been born of convenience, it certainly fit with their polytheistic approach. **Multiple "gods" can be served in multiple places.** The opening line of Mosheh's "ultimate lesson" (see our earlier shiur on Parashat va'Et'hanan) is Hashem is our God, Hashem is One. In other words, **the overwhelming and consuming love which we are to have for God (see Shir haShirim 8:7) is predicated on His singularity and uniqueness.** This unique nature of God is mirrored in the unique selection of 'Am Yisra'el (see BT B'rakhot 6a-b in the passage about "God's T'fillin"), as well as in the unique selection of one worship-site (and the uniqueness of Eretz Yisra'el - but that belongs to a different shiur). We can now understand the association between the various "relationship-Mitzvot" and the "new" (actually, newly presented) command to maintain a centralized worship locale.

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### IV. INTERNALIZING A DIVINE ASTHETIC

Along with the promise of God's broadening our boundaries, such that we will not be able to bring all meat to the "place where He shall choose to place His Name" (12:20-28), the Torah expresses a concern that we will want to "adopt" pagan worship-styles for the worship of God (12:29-13:1). Following Ramban's explanation, the concern is that the B'nei Yisra'el will associate the destruction of the pagan nations with the object of their worship (they backed a losing horse) as opposed to the method of their worship. Therefore the Torah warns us not to make this mistake; indeed, "every manner of abomination which Hashem loathes did they do in worship of their gods..." (12:31). In other words, besides having a misguided approach to worship (worshipping nothingness as deities), **the methods they used (including, as the verse states explicitly, child sacrifice) were hateful to God.**

**This warning is immediately followed by the injunction against adding to - or diminishing from - God's commands.** (Note that the Christian-based division of chapters reads this command as the beginning of a new section whereas the MT [Masoretic Text] sees this as the end of the section above. While the other division is understandable, the MT break is much more reasonable; since it follows the warning to be careful in our worship of God by not introducing foreign elements into that worship.)

In other words, as S'forno explains, **we should not bring our own methods of worship - whether the result of our own creative thinking or adopting the behavior of other nations - into the worship of God.** We won't know if those behaviors will be acceptable to God within the context of worship. (There are certainly other ways to understand the role of creativity within Avodat Hashem; Rabbi Michael Rozensweig of RIETS wrote a comprehensive article on the subject in the first issue of the Torah uMada Journal.)

There is a curious assumption implicit in our distancing ourselves from that which God abhors - and which is re-addressed at the end of Chapter 13 (v. 19). There seems to be an expectation that we will internalize the aesthetics and values of God, such that we will learn to distance ourselves from that which He hates and we will know how to do that which is upright in His eyes (13:19).

This is yet another step in the development and actualization of the "v'Ahavta" ("and you shall love God") relationship: To learn what God finds acceptable and what He loathes - and then to internalize those sensitivities, such that doing that which is right (or Right) and avoiding that which is abhorrent becomes "second nature".

[note: There is much to be written on this subject; as it seems to fly directly in the face of the statement of our Rabbis: A person should ideally desire non-Kosher food, but resist it simply because of the command of God. We have treated this subject in an earlier shiur.]

This point is the tie which connects the three parashiot which make up Chapter 13 - the prophet who threatens to lead us astray (vv. 2-6); the "Meisit" who attempts to seduce people to worship foreign gods (vv. 7-12) and the "Ir haNidachat" - the city which has "gone over" to idolatry. In each of these cases, not only are we commanded to resist the respective temptation, we are also commanded to focus our approach in a way which is the opposite of the usually desired direction:

Do not listen to that prophet... (v. 4)  
(as opposed to loyalty to a prophet)

Do not have compassion... (v. 9)  
(as opposed to acting compassionately)

Utterly destroy that city... (v. 16)  
(as opposed to maintaining concern for our fellows' property)

**The Torah is again giving us direction on what should motivate our feelings - not by "natural tendencies", rather by our love for God.** Although we are generally called to compassion, loyalty, respect for elders etc., there are situations where a greater value - love for God - "overrules" the other values.

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## SUMMARY

The first part of our Parashah is a series of obligations and restrictions which help guide us into actualizing the love for God which is the raison d'être of the Law. First, we are to demonstrate that our passions are not guided by "natural tendencies", rather by a commitment to promoting God's Name in the world. Next, we are shown how to demonstrate the singular nature of God - via centralized worship. Finally, we are given the charge to internalize the Divine system of values and aesthetics which will help us determine the Right from the Wrong.

So far, we have discussed the first half of the Parashah. Although we have not explained why Sefer D'varim is called "Mishneh Torah", we have suggested why particular Mitzvot were mentioned specifically here.

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## V. YOU ARE THE CHILDREN OF GOD

Chapter 14 begins with this powerful banner statement

Banim Atem l'Hashem Eloheikhem you are children unto your God.

What is the implication of this statement and its purpose specifically at this point in the Law Compendium?

If we follow the next part of the verse - that which seems to be the direct consequence of the Banim Atem avowal - we find a particular and somewhat peculiar ritual prohibition:

[At this point, it is prudent to note that we will find a number of "repetitions" of laws from earlier Humashim; however, they will, at least in some cases, be presented in a different manner than the earlier version.]

You are children of Hashem your God. You must not lacerate yourselves or shave your forelocks for the dead. For you are a people holy to Hashem your God; it is you Hashem has chosen out of all the peoples on earth to be His people, His treasured possession.

What is the connection between our being children of God and not participating in the self-mutilation mourning rituals endemic to the pagan cults of K'na'an?

Rashi answers that since we are the children of God, it is appropriate for us to look dignified and noble - something which would surely be violated by self-mutilation.

Ramban points out that if that were the reason, the violation would not be limited to mourning rituals, it would apply to any circumstance of self-mutilation. If so, why does the Torah specifically say laMet- "for the dead"?

S'forno provides an alternative to Rashi which both satisfies Ramban's challenge and is the key to understanding the rest of the Parashah:

For it is inappropriate to exhibit ultimate anxiety and sorrow over a relative who dies if there remains a more dignified relative alive; therefore, [since] you are "children of God" Who is your father and is eternal, it is never appropriate to exhibit ultimate mourning for any death. In other words, **since we are God's children and He is always with us, there is never an instance of death which we should experience as total devastation - for even when all seems lost, our Father is still there.**

**This command is immediately followed by a further explanation - For you are a holy people to God...**

If we look at the end of the next series of laws, we find the exact same phrase (v. 21) - thus bookending this section. What is the content of this section which sits between the markers of "You are a holy people to Hashem your God"?

As mentioned above, along with laws which were never mentioned before and laws which were mentioned from a different perspective, Sefer D'varim includes some instances of laws which are nearly "cut-and-paste jobs" from earlier Humashim.

Chapter 14, verses 3-21, is a prime example of this type of "repetition". The list of acceptable and unacceptable animals - along with the guiding characteristics - is almost a repeat of the listing found in Chapter 11 of Vayyikra (Parashat Sh'mini). In other words, the section which is identified by the tag "You are a holy people..." is the laws of Kashrut. Why these laws specifically?

The Midrash Halakhah states:

R. Elazar b. Azariah said: From whence do we know that a man should not say: 'I cannot tolerate wearing Sha'atnez, [or] I cannot tolerate eating pork, [or] I cannot tolerate illicit relations'--Rather that he should say: 'I am capable and willing, but what can I do, my Father in Heaven decreed thus' [that I avoid these things]? Therefore Scripture states: 'I have separated you from the Nations to be Mine' --thus, he avoids the sin and accepts God's Sovereignty." (Sifra Parashat Kedoshim) RABD's reading and comments here seem to strengthen the challenge: "Therefore Scripture states: 'To be Mine'"--in other words, practice this law for My sake and not due to your own consideration. (commentary of RABD, ibid.) Although we certainly do not apply this type of reasoning to those areas of Halakhah which build the ethical self - e.g. proper social interaction and respectful behavior towards others and their property - there is room for it within the corpus of Halakhah. To wit, there are some areas of Halakhah where the sole motivation for observance is commandment. Unlike the integration and internalization of Divine values, outlined above, the laws of Kashrut (along with some other areas of Halakhah) should be driven by - and result in - a conscious and deliberate awareness of God's direct role as Lawgiver and Commander.

**If the first consequence of the banner statement: Banim Atem... is the awareness of God's constant presence in our lives, the second is the method by which we maintain that closeness - by separating ourselves and preserving a unique relationship which is "To be Mine".**

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## **VI. SONS AND BROTHERS**

As surely as "You are children of Hashem your God" implies a close and special relationship with God, it also implies a special bond within that family of children. If we are all children of the One God, we are also all brothers and sisters to each other. The rest of the Halakhot presented in Parashat R'eh are expressions of that relationship - the second prong of "Banim Atem". Let's survey them:

[note: for purposes of brevity - and due to space considerations - I will highlight the phrase in each section which points to the general thread which ties these Halakhot together.]

\* Ma'aser Sheni (Second Tithe) (14:22-27)

Note v. 27: As for the Levites resident in your towns, do not neglect them, because they have no allotment or inheritance with you.

\* Ma'ser 'Ani (Tithe for the Poor) (14:28-29).

V. 29: the Levites, because they have no allotment or inheritance with you, as well as the resident aliens, the orphans, and the widows in your towns, may come and eat their fill so that Hashem your God may bless you in all the work that you undertake.

\* Sh'mittah. (15:1-6).

As mentioned above, here is an example of a law which is presented in D'varim and which appears earlier - but the presentation in D'varim is from a different perspective. In Vayyikra, Sh'mittah is oriented towards agricultural "resting"; here, it is focused on "Sh'mittat K'safim", the cancellation of all debts on the seventh year. This is driven by the statement -

Of a foreigner you may exact it, but you must remit your claim on whatever any member of your community owes you. There will, however, be no one in need among you... (vv. 4-5).

\* Tzedakah (15:7-11).

Note v. 11: Since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth, I therefore command you, "Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor in your land."

\* Ha'anakah (gifting the Hebrew slave when he leaves your employ) (15:12-18)

Note v. 15, the justification for this gift: Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and Hashem your God redeemed you; for this reason I lay this command upon you today.

\* B'khor Ba'al Mum (Sanctification of the first-born of the flock or herd and the result of its having a permanent blemish) (15:19-23).

This one does not seem to fit the group so easily; however, note verse 22: ...within your towns you may eat it, the Tamei (unclean) and the Tahor (clean) alike, as you would a gazelle or deer.

\* Pesach (16:1-8) This section is itself a bit strange, as it comes at the beginning of three parashiot, each devoted to one of the pilgrimage festivals. What is odd is that unlike the latter two, there is no explicit Mitzvah of rejoicing by which we are enjoined here. One additional "oddity"; this is the only place where the Torah refers to Matzah as Lechem 'Oni- the bread of poverty or affliction. We will return to this section at the end of the shiur.

\* Shavuot (16:9-12) Note v. 11: Rejoice before Hashem your God - you and your sons and your daughters, your male and female slaves, the Levites resident in your towns, as well as the strangers, the orphans, and the widows who are among you - at the place that Hashem your God will choose as a dwelling for his name.

\* Sukkot (16:13-17) Note (again) v. 14: Rejoice during your festival, you and your sons and your daughters, your male and female slaves, as well as the Levites, the strangers, the orphans, and the widows resident in your towns.

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## SUMMARY

What we see throughout these last 9 parashiot of R'eh is a series of Mitzvot where the motivation - and performance - focuses on mutual responsibility for each other's welfare and inclusion. This is, indeed, the second implication of the tenet: Banim Atem l'Hashem Eloheikhem - "You are children unto Hashem your God".

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## VII. POSTSCRIPT PESACH AND LECHEM 'ONI

As mentioned above, Shavu'ot and Sukkot are both highlighted by explicit commands to rejoice - and Pesach has no such command (although Halakhically there is a Mitzvah of Simchah on Pesach, it is inferred from these others by analogy).

If we consider the "Banim" relationship as it affects our interactions with other Jews, we find yet another motivation for treating each other with such consideration - especially in the realm of financial welfare and sustenance. Besides the theologically-driven argument of fellowship by virtue of a "common Father"; there is a historically-driven argument based on the common experience of slavery. Much more than common success, shared oppression serves to forge a people - as did happen for us in Egypt. It is the commemoration and

constant awareness that, although today some of us are more comfortable and financially secure than others, we all were slaves, with nothing to call our own.

This is the commemoration of Pesach - it serves as a second reason to treat each other with consideration without regard (or perhaps with excessive regard) for class distinctions. This is why the Matzah is called Lechem 'Oni specifically here - because we are to utilize the experience of Pesach to remind ourselves of common oppression - to motivate us to common concern and mutual responsibility.

Note that the section about Pesach is "bookended" by a reminder of our being slaves - once in the section of Ha'anakah (15:15) and once in Shavu'ot (16:12) - these bookends serve to highlight the place of Pesach within the larger schema of the Mitzvot appearing in the second half of R'eh. These Mitzvot are all methods of expressing and fortifying the theme: You are all children of God.

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## PARASHAT RE'EH

by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

### SOME QUICK DERASH:

Parashat Re'eh begins with instructions about a peculiar ceremony to be enacted once the people reach Eretz Yisrael: they are to "place the blessing" on one mountain and "place the curse" on a mountain opposite it. Later on, Moshe will explain that the two mountains and the valley between them will be the scene for a covenant ceremony. There, the people will affirm the "blessing" and "curse." What does the Torah mean by "blessing" and "curse"? What good things does "blessing" entail, and what evil does "curse" connote?

### DEVARIM 11:26-28 --

"See that I place before you today BLESSING and CURSE; the BLESSING: that ["asher"] you obey the commands of Y-HVH, your God, which I command you today. The CURSE: if you do not listen to the commands of Y-HVH, your God, and stray from the way which I command you today, to go after other gods, which you have not known."

The Torah's formulation of "the blessing" is strange. Instead of telling us what great things are in store for us, the Torah tells us that the blessing is "that you obey the commands of Y-HVH, your God . . ." Unlike Parashat Eikev, which spends so much time spelling out exactly what rewards Hashem will shower upon us for our obedience, Parashat Re'eh promises a lot but then refuses to give us details!

Reading further in the section above, we find that the Torah's formulation of "the curse" is also strange. Instead of telling us what evil awaits us for flouting Hashem's will, the Torah tells us that we will merit "the curse" if we disobey: ". . . if you do not listen to the commands of Y-HVH, your God . . ." Why does the Torah bring up blessing and curse but refuse to define them?

Perhaps the Torah actually *\*has\** spelled out the blessing and the curse! The blessing is not what "goodies" we can expect for doing the mitzvot, it is the very *\*state\** of observing the mitzvot; the curse is not what punishments we will suffer if we ignore and violate the mitzvot, it is the *\*state\** of ignoring and violating the mitzvot.

If you read Parashat Eikev, you come away understanding that obeying Hashem brings physical and spiritual rewards, while disobeying Hashem brings physical and spiritual punishment. Eikev posits a system of extrinsic reward and punishment. If I make Kiddush on Shabbat, for example, Hashem is 'pleased' and rewards me with, say, a new car, a good day at the office, a vacation with my spouse. If I spend Shabbat planting asparagus, on the other hand, Hashem is 'upset' (since planting is one of the chief categories of forbidden creative work) and punishes me with, say, tripping on a rake a few weeks later and fracturing my hip (God forbid!). So much for Eikev.

But Parashat Re'eh communicates another aspect of the scheme of reward and punishment, an intrinsic one. From this perspective, the greatest reward for the mitzvot is that we are in a state of observing the mitzvot themselves; the greatest punishment for averot (sins) is the state of having done averot. The ideal of human perfection is to achieve the stance of a servant of Hashem, an obeyer of His will. We do the mitzvot not in expectation of the "goodies" promised by Parashat Eikev, but solely for the purpose of standing before Hashem as His faithful servants. We obey Hashem's will because that is our highest value, not because we expect that he will do our will (i.e., make us happy by giving us things we want). This is the ultimate stance of the Jew, "the blessing": to respond to Hashem's command, to stand before Him and say, "Hineni," "Here I am." On the other end, disobeying Hashem is "the curse" not because of the extrinsic punishments it may bring, but for the position it represents in our stance before Hashem: we face the other way, giving Him our backs, disengaged, standing not before Hashem but merely by ourselves. This is the ultimate failure of human purpose, "the curse": to ignore Hashem's command, to stand before Him and say nothing in response to His command, or worse, to counter His will with our own.

These two aspects of reward and punishment, that of Eikev and that of Re'eh, are steps on the spiritual ladder. The conception which should guide us is that of Re'eh, while the conception of Eikev is there to encourage or warn us when our more lofty mode of interaction with Hashem becomes weakened. We do the mitzvot "Lo al menat le-kabel peras," as Pirkei Avot tells us -- not in order to earn reward -- but simply because we accept that obeying Hashem's will is the ultimate religious stance (exemplified best, probably, in the Akeida).

### NOW FOR SOME 'PESHAT': THE LAY OF THE TEXTUAL LAND:

Our parasha opens with Moshe's command to the people to enact a covenant ceremony on Har Gerizim and Har Eival when they enter the Land. Blessing will 'sit' on one mountain, curse on the other, and the people will accept Hashem's mitzvot under the terms of the blessing and curse. The command by Moshe to enact this ceremony constitutes an "opening bookend": it signals the beginning of a huge halakhic section which will continue from here (perek 11) to the beginning of perek (chapter) 27. Chapter 27 contains the "closing

bookend": it tells us once again about this blessing/curse covenant ceremony, this time in greater detail. Following this "bookend" is a lengthy section of blessings which we will merit for obeying Hashem and curses we will suffer for disobeying, Heaven forbid.

The long section between the "bookends" is halakhic (legal) material which covers just about all the bases the Torah has been to already in earlier sefarim (books) -- ritual law, interpersonal law, theological law, national institutional structure, and other categories of law and procedure. Many mitzvot which appear earlier in the Torah are repeated here, some with elaboration or modification; some mitzvot appear for the first time. It is typical of the Torah (and legal codes or parts of codes which have come down to us from Ancient Near Eastern sources) to find a section of law (halakha) followed by blessings and curses to reinforce the laws. This is a structure we see in the Torah in several places: Shemot 23 -- which comes after the halakhot of Parashat Mishpatim, the first major legal unit in the Torah -- contains mostly blessings (and some curses); a better example is VaYikra 26, a long section of blessings and curses which follows the huge section of solidly halakhic material which comprises the meat of Sefer VaYikra (pun not intended).

Our job in the series of parshiot ahead is not only to understand each of the mitzvot which Moshe commands, but also to extract from the flow of the text a sense of the underlying themes. Even at this early point, it is already clear that it will often be difficult to understand the sequence of the mitzvot, which tend to swing from one type of law to another without much warning and without an obvious organizing principle. When we cannot make sense of the connections between the various sections of halakhot before us, we will at least focus on the mitzvot of each section to deepen our understanding of them.

### THEMES OF RE'EH:

Parashat Re'eh brings together many themes. We will focus briefly on the following themes:

1. Centralization of worship in the "Chosen Place."
2. Worship of other gods (avoda zara) as an "interpersonal" crime.
3. Mitzvot in a communal context.

### THE CHOSEN PLACE:

Parashat Re'eh introduces the idea that once we enter the Land, it is no longer appropriate to serve Hashem in our backyards. Instead of sacrificing offerings to Hashem on our private altars (or on multiple public altars), we are commanded to bring all korbanot (offerings) to the "place Hashem will choose," the location of the Mishkan (portable Temple) or Beit HaMikdash.

Our parasha devotes a lengthy section to this theme of centralization and its reinforcement. But the opening words of the section seem at first to be about another topic: "You shall certainly destroy all of the places where the nations served . . . their gods, atop the high mountains and on the hills . . . you shall smash their altars, break their offering-pedestals; their asherim [trees used in idol worship] you shall burn with fire, and the idols of their gods you shall cut down." The Torah seems to be instructing us to eradicate avoda zara, not to focus our service to Hashem at one place.

But then comes a turn in the text: "You shall not do in this manner to Y-HVH, your God." Hazal interpret this pasuk (verse) to mean, "Although you should destroy all manifestations of idol worship, you are forbidden to destroy manifestations of the worship of Hashem." For example, according to Hazal, this pasuk would forbid destroying any part of the Beit HaMikdash, where Hashem is worshipped. But in context, the pasuk is not telling us to spare Hashem's sanctuary, it is telling us not to worship Hashem all over the place, as the Cana'anites worshipped their gods. The next pasuk confirms this reading: "You shall not do in this manner to Y-HVH, your God. Instead, TO THE PLACE WHICH HASHEM, your God, SHALL CHOOSE from among all of your tribes, to place His Name there, ONLY HIS DWELLING should you seek and come to there." The Torah goes on to command us to bring all offerings to Hashem to the Chosen Place instead of offering them to Him wherever we may be.

It seems, then, that the command to destroy the numerous outposts of idol worship is not so much a command to eradicate existing idol-worship centers as it is part of the effort to centralize all worship. It is not simply that we are to avoid worshipping the old idols ourselves -- even if we do not worship them, we must destroy every local temple, every neighborhood worship site. If we allow the local idol parlor to remain, we might be tempted to worship even Hashem there, which would defeat the effort to centralize His worship in the Beit HaMikdash.

The theme of centralization threads through the parasha and beyond. Some examples within the parasha:

- 1) Later on in the parasha, in instructing us how to handle ma'aser sheni, the "Second Tithe," the Torah commands us to bring it to the "Chosen Place" and eat it there.
- 2) Further in the parasha, we are commanded to bring all first-born animals to the "Chosen Place" for sacrifice.
- 3) Towards the end of the parasha, the Torah presents a Parashat Ha-Mo'adim, a section on the major holidays. Each holiday -- Pesah, Shavuot, and Succot -- is accompanied by a separate mention of the command to celebrate the holiday at the "Chosen Place." We are to sacrifice the Korban Pesah there and celebrate the harvest festivals of Shavuot and Succot there. After the Torah concludes its

exposition on each of the three "Regalim" ("feet," so named because part of the essence of these celebrations is making the pilgrimage to the Chosen Place), it moves to a slightly different theme: not only are we to bring the Korban Pesah to the Chosen Place on Pesah, not only are we to celebrate the harvest there on Shavuot and Succot, but we (I should say all males, "kol zekhurekha") are commanded to "appear" there before the "Face of Y-HVH." We are to make the pilgrimage not only to offer sacrifices and celebrate, but also to stand in the Presence of Hashem.

Why is centralization such a big deal? What difference does it make where we worship Hashem? Sure, it seems appropriate to have a main center of worship, but why is it necessary to outlaw worship at any other place? Several possibilities:

1) Although we suggested above that the purpose of destroying the many outposts of Cana'nite idolatry is to aid in the worship centralization process, and not to prevent us from worshipping the idols left behind by the Cana'mites, we could turn this theme on its head: perhaps the entire purpose of centralization is to prevent idol worship! Ideally, it would be nice to allow worship of Hashem everywhere. But worship of Hashem can easily deteriorate into worship of other things. If today I can bring an offering to Hashem in my backyard, ten years from now I may decide to bring an offering to the sun, which is, after all, a loyal servant of Hashem and might be understood to represent Hashem's power, His radiance, or His provident benevolence. Fifty years from then, I will have forgotten about Hashem and established a sun-worshipping cult.

If this seems far-fetched, check Rambam, Sefer Ha-Madda, Hilkhot Avoda Zara, Chapter 1, where Maimonides describes exactly this process -- not as a hypothetical possibility, but as history! Adam knew Hashem, and so did his descendants, but once they began to worship Hashem's intermediaries (e.g., stars) and creations, it wasn't long before the intermediaries became the focus and Hashem was forgotten.

That centralization is aimed at preventing avoda zara is hinted by a pasuk in the section on bringing ma'aser sheni to the Chosen Place: "You shall eat, before Y-HVH, your God, in the Place He shall choose to rest His Name there, the tithe of your grain, your wine, and your oil, and the firstborn of your flocks and cattle, SO THAT YOU SHALL LEARN TO FEAR Y-HVH, your God, for all days" (14:23). What does eating all of this stuff in the Chosen Place have to do with fearing Hashem "for all days"? If we see the centralization drive as a brake on avoda zara, it makes sense that requiring us to ascend to the Chosen Place to celebrate before Hashem will contribute to our continuing to worship Hashem and not deteriorating into corruption back home.

2) One other possible rationale for centralization: to achieve national unity in worshipping Hashem. Considering the potential for distant relationships between the tribes, each of which has its own land, each of which is required to inmarry (until somewhat later on), each of which has its own defense forces and leaders, some structures are needed to bring the nation together, to bring the "states" into a "federal union." Besides the monarchy (which has its own problems), one of these structures is the Beit HaMikdash and its status as the center of worship of Hashem. Later in Sefer Devarim, we will see that the Beit HaMikdash unifies the people in another way: it is also the judicial center, the seat of the Sanhedrin, the Supreme Court.

3) Finally, centralization creates the opportunity for pilgrimage, which entails two elements: the journey and the arrival. The journey itself may be seen as more than simply instrumental: imagine the drama of leaving home and property behind, not to vacation or for business, but for \*religious\* reasons! When was the last time you went on a pilgrimage? Imagine the entire nation dropping everything, packing up, and hitting the road, headed for Hashem's House. The second element is the arrival, the experience of standing with all of Yisrael before the Face of Hashem, offering our gifts to Him and bowing before Him in submission and love. Neither the journey nor the arrival could be duplicated by a trip to the local synagogue (if you disagree, I'd love to hear about your shul!).

### **AVODA ZARA AS AN "INTERPERSONAL" CRIME:**

Usually, we conceive of avoda zara as a theological crime, a failure to achieve one of our most fundamental purposes as humans: to recognize Hashem and worship Him. Particularly if you believe, like some rationalists, that the goal of human existence is to cognize correct ideas about Hashem, to understand Him to the deepest degree possible, it is hard to imagine a greater misappropriation of our godlike potential than to accept and worship a false god. Avoda zara is not only a capital crime, it is also one of the "big three," the all-time cardinal-sin hit parade: avoda zara, gilluy arayot ("revealing nakedness," the cardinal sexual crimes), and shefikhet damim (murder). We are commanded to surrender our lives to avoid committing these sins. (There is a lot of halakhic detail involved in this issue; "consult your local Orthodox rabbi.")

But there are many indications in the Torah that there is another dimension to avoda zara, one we usually overlook and which I have termed (with considerable license) the "interpersonal" dimension. By this I do not mean that we somehow harm other people by worshipping avoda zara (although some forms of avoda zara, such as human sacrifice, can be hazardous to the health of other people), but that we 'harm' Hashem in ways we usually think of as interpersonal.

Although there are hints to this theme all over the Torah, we will look at only the few that appear in our parasha (if you are interested in pursuing this, I can provide a more complete list):

Perek 13 presents three scenarios and prescribes our reactions to them:

a. A prophet appears, proves his or her authenticity by performing some sort of sign (usually making a prediction, which then comes true), and then delivers to us a command to worship gods other than Hashem. In response, we are to execute the prophet. The Torah's formulations in this context are critical: why does Hashem allow the prophet to make a true prediction, which creates the potential for us to be fooled into following him or her? The Torah explains: "For Hashem is testing you, to know IF YOU \*\*LOVE\*\* Y-HVH, your God, with all your HEART and all your SOUL." In other words, Hashem is testing not our theological fidelity, but the strength of our EMOTIONS: do we love Him? If we do love Him, worshipping any other would be inconceivable, literally adulterous. (Indeed, Tanakh takes full advantage of the metaphor of avoda zara as adultery, portraying Bnei Yisrael in times of idolatry as a woman who has rejected her husband and embraced other lovers in His place.)

The Torah's formulation of the false prophet's call to avoda zara is also revealing. The prophet calls, "Let us go after other gods ["elohim aherim"]" -- the Torah interjects, "WHICH YOU DO NOT KNOW" -- and the prophet continues, "and serve them." Not only are these "other gods," but they are gods that until now "you do not know." This phrase -- "you do not know" -- appears with startling frequency through the Torah and Tanakh as a characterization of the false gods we are warned not to embrace. Not only are they not true gods, but we have only heard of them today. So what? The point is that the true God is One we "know" so deeply, so intimately He is the God to Whom we as a people owe everything: as the Torah points out in the false prophet section, "he [the prophet] spoke untruly of Y-HVH, your God, who TOOK YOU OUT OF THE LAND of EGYPT and REDEEMED YOU FROM THE HOUSE OF SLAVERY . . ." This is the God we have rejected for some other God, as casually as if we were changing to a new toothpaste or trying a new flavor of ice cream. We forget what He has done for us and wipe clean the slate of our relationship to make room for something new and attractive. The "interpersonal" crime here is catastrophic ungratefulness, terminal insensitivity to our pre-existing relationship with Hashem. It is a failure of love.

b. The next section in Perek 13 presents a different tempter to avoda zara: "If he shall tempt you -- your brother, the son of your mother, or your son, or your daughter, or the wife of your bosom, or your friend who is like your own soul -- in secret, saying, 'Let us go and serve other gods,' WHICH YOU HAVE NOT KNOWN, YOU AND YOUR FATHERS." Here again, the other gods are described not simply as meaningless and empty vanities, but as \*foreigners\* to an existing relationship; neither we nor our fathers have known them. Again, the Torah commands us to reject the temptation and, incredibly, to execute the tempter -- our own brother, child, spouse, or best friend. Here it is love versus love: whom do we love more, Hashem or the tempter? Hashem, the Torah reminds us once again, is "the One who took you out of Egypt, the house of slavery."

c. The last scenario described in Perek 13 is the "ir ha-nidahat," a city in Eretz Yisrael which has turned as a whole to idolatry. Not surprisingly, we are to execute the inhabitants for following the gods described once again as gods "which you have not known." Why such fury? Here again, the "interpersonal" appears: the Torah describes the wayward city as "one of your cities which Y-HVH, your God, gives to you." Hashem gives us a city, and we thank Him very much, forget Him, and take the city He gave us and turn it into a den of avoda zara. This is not simply theological error, it is profound ingratitude. What happens to the city itself, once the inhabitants have been destroyed?

"All of its booty [property], you shall gather to the midst of its street, and you shall burn in fire the city and all its booty completely ["kalil"] \*TO\* Y-HVH, your God . . ."

The language the Torah uses is unmistakable: the city is being offered to Hashem as a korban, a sacrifice. It is burned not simply to destroy the scene of sinful disaster, it is burned "to Hashem," offered to Him. The word "kalil," "completely," adds to the picture: the same word appears in six other places in the Torah (to my knowledge). In every single instance, the context is a "cultic" one: "kalil" always appears in reference to the Mishkan and its appurtenances. Three of these six appearances refer to the completely blue color of draperies of the Mishkan's utensils, while the other three match our "kalil" exactly: they are references to completely burning a korban to Hashem (VaYikra 6:15, 6:16, Devarim 33:10). The wayward city, given to us by Hashem but then dedicated to the worship of a foreigner, is now being "rededicated" to Hashem through the smoke it offers to Him.

A look back at Devarim 4:19 deepens the theme of avoda zara as ungratefulness. Moshe delivers a warning about worshipping the heavenly bodies: ". . . Lest you lift your eyes heavenward and see the sun and moon and stars, all of the host of heaven, and you shall go astray and bow down to them and serve them - [those things] which Hashem, YOUR GOD, apportioned to ALL OF THE NATIONS under the entire heavens. BUT YOU, Y-HVH took you [the Torah here hints to marriage with the word 'lakah'], and HE TOOK YOU OUT of the iron melting pot, Egypt, TO BE FOR HIM A TREASURED NATION . . ." What does Moshe mean here, that Hashem "apportioned to all of the nations under the entire heavens" the sun and moon and stars? It seems clear from the next phrases, which are set in opposition: the sun and moon and stars have been apportioned to the nations, but you, Bnei Yisrael, Hashem chose you to be His nation, to worship Him alone, and He therefore rescued you from the death-house of Egypt. Now that He has done all this for you, you 'owe' Him your allegiance.

Rashi, Rashbam, and Hizkuni all confirm the above interpretation of the pasuk -- Hashem does not really care all that much if the other nations worship the sun and stars and moon, but He certainly does care if you, Bnei Yisrael, reject His selection of you and forget what He has done for you. Our responsibility to serve Hashem flows not simply from recognition of theological truth, but from a profound sense of gratitude.

## MITZVOT IN A COMMUNAL CONTEXT:

Moshe takes Sefer Devarim as an opportunity not only to strengthen, chastise, and remind us of the mitzvot, but also to introduce the integration of mitzvot with the concept of community. Even the most careless reading of our parasha turns up an incessant preoccupation with the idea of mitzvot in the communal-social context. In the course of discussing mitzvot which seem completely unconnected to the idea of community, Moshe seems to never fail to say the "c" word. Moshe is trying to communicate that serving Hashem does not happen in a vacuum, it takes place in the context of a community, with all of its entanglements, complexities, and problems.

In commanding us to bring all offerings to Hashem only in the Chosen Place and to celebrate there, Moshe adds, "You shall celebrate before Y-HVH, your God, you, your sons, your daughters, your servants, your maidservants, and the Levi in your gates, for he has no portion [of land of his own] among you." Just when we thought we had left the community (and perhaps the family as well) behind to go and serve Hashem in the rarefied holiness of the Chosen Place, Moshe, so to speak, shleps the entire mishpaha and community along with us, using the code word for home city -- "sha'areikhem," "your gates." In case we missed the point, Moshe repeats the whole list of relatives a few pesukim later and specifically warns us to take care of the landless Levi.

The same reminders appear slightly later, in Perek 14. Not only are we to bring ma'aser sheni to the Chosen Place, we are to enjoy it there along with "our household" and, of course, the hapless Levi (I am taking this a little personally since I, as a Kohen, am a member of Levi and get no land). But not only is he a hapless Levi, he is "the Levi in your gates [bi-sh'arekha]" -- he is part of your community, so you are connected with him as with your family.

The very next section picks up and amplifies the same theme. We are to make the ma'aser of the third year available to the Levi (again described as landless) and to the stranger [ger], orphan, and widow, all of whom are "bi-sh'arekha." They are in our gates, so they are ours. Not only are we obliged to support the disadvantaged, we are to involve them in our mitzvot.

The Torah continues with the laws of Shemita, the seventh year, in which all debts owed by Jews to Jews are canceled. Despite the approach of Shemita, we are to continue to generously lend money to the poor, who are not simply our brothers, they are also "be-ahad she'arekha" -- they are within our gates. We are made responsible not just for luckless individuals, but for members of a community to which we and they belong. There will always be poor people, after all, and they will be poor within our communities: "Ki lo yehdal evyon mi-kerev ha-aretz," poor people will never disappear from THE MIDST OF THE LAND. We are therefore commanded to open our hands to our poor brothers -- "in your land."

When we ascend to the Chosen Place on Shavuot and Succot to celebrate, the Torah reminds us again to include our families and the disadvantaged -- the Levi, stranger, orphan, and widow, who are "among you" and "in your gates." We are responsible for our communities, especially responsible to include the powerless and downtrodden in our celebration. Our mitzvot are not crafted to raise us up out of involvement with the 'messy' aspects of life, they are crafted to raise up the community as a whole, bringing happiness to the weak and a spirit of generosity to the powerful.

The community appears in the parasha in the most surprising places. The Torah instructs us not to eat "neveila," meat from an animal which is improperly slaughtered. Instead, we are to give the meat to the "ger asher bi-sh'arekha," the stranger "in our gates," the non-Jew who lives temporarily among us and for whom the Torah makes us responsible.

Even in instructing us to punish sinners, Parashat Re'eh keeps the community in mind. The false prophet does not simply appear, he or she appears "in your midst," "be-kirbekha." When the prophet is executed, we are not simply punishing a sinner, we are acting for the good of the community -- "you shall remove the evil from your midst," "mi-kirbekha." This phrase, "u-vi'arta ha-ra mi-kirbekha," is so common in Sefer Devarim that it is almost a cliche of the Sefer.

Mitzvot are not only personal. We are responsible not only to perform "prescribed actions" for our own growth or edification, but to create and support community in doing so. Failing to achieve this second element is not just leaving the icing off the cake, it compromises the very fulfillment of the 'personal' mitzvah itself:

RAMBAM, HAGIGA 2:14 --

When one sacrifices holiday offerings and celebration offerings, he should not eat with just his children and his wife alone and imagine that he has done a complete mitzvah; he is REQUIRED to bring joy to the poor and the disadvantaged . . . .

RAMBAM, YOM TOV 6:18 --

. . . But one who locks the doors of his courtyard and eats and drinks, he and his children and wife, and does not give food and drink to the poor and the embittered of soul, this is not the joy of a mitzvah, it is the joy of his belly . . . .

May we maintain a focus always on Hashem, the "Makom" wherever He is, and build communities of mitzvot with sensitivity to those who need assistance.