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Potomac Torah Study Center

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

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

This Friday, the day I send out my Devrei Torah, is Tu B'Av, one of the most joyous days of the year. (See the article below by Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau for more information about this holiday.) Since Tisha B'Av always comes during the week after we read Devarim, and Tu B'Av comes six days after Tisha B'Av, Vaetchanan is always the parsha we read closest to Tu B'Av. As one should expect, the themes in Vaetchanan and Tu B'Av are very closely related.

A central feature of Vaetchanan is the Aseret Dibrot, the ten statements, which Moshe reviews for the generation about to enter and capture Israel. Rabbi David Fohrman discusses the Aseret Dibrot extensively, especially in the two places where they appear (Yitro and Vaetchanan). After extensive discussion, Rabbi Fohrman concludes that the foundation of Aseret Dibrot is respect – for Hashem, for our parents, and for others. Respect involves recognizing the values of others. Once we have respect, we can move on to love. Moshe's third speech to B'Nai Yisrael, which starts with the Shema and V'ahavtah (6:4-9), is Moshe's lesson to the people to use the mitzvot to build a two way relationship with our Creator, to extend respect to the next step, love. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l (below), focuses on how important the love between B'Nai Yisrael and Hashem is in Moshe's speeches to the people. As Rabbi Sacks observes, the Torah uses the word "Ahavah" (love) 23 times in Sefer Devarim but rarely in the other four sections of the Torah.

Tu B'Av has historically been the day of betrothals (love between a man and woman), going back to times when restrictions on marriages between members of different tribes ended. (For details, see Rabbi Lau, below.) It is a particularly appropriate day for engagements and weddings. (For example, our son Evan and daughter-in-law Heather became engaged while attending a wedding on Tu B'Av.)

Moshe starts his discussion of marriages by reviewing the prohibition of intermarrying with other nations, an important warning as B'Nai Yisrael are about to enter Israel, where several other nations live (7:3). As Rabbi Fohrman's scholars explain, the word for marriages, "l'hitchatein," means intermingling among people. The prohibition on intermarriage really means that B'Nai Yisrael are to keep separate from other nations. The danger of intermarriage is that the family from the non-Jewish spouse will influence the Jewish spouse and his or her relatives to adopt the foreign practices, something that opens a path to idolatry. This section links back to Bereishis 34, when the son of the leader of Shechem kidnaps and rapes Yaakov's daughter Dinah, then brothers Levi and Shimon deceive the men of Shechem (to have them all circumcise themselves) and murder them while they are in pain after the surgery. Shimon and Levi take property from the people of Shechem, and that property includes idols. The message here that Moshe passes along to the people is that idolatry can contaminate the Jews should they win or lose a war, and no matter how they intermingle with neighboring nations. This danger is why Moshe repeatedly commands the people to destroy all property of other nations. Foreign influences (idolatry) can affect the Jews through many paths as long as the people live among other nations – and marriage is only the most obvious danger. While Vaetchanan and Tu B'Av celebrate marriage, it is only Jewish marriage, not intermarriage.

Several of the pieces that I selected for this week focus on the theme of respect and love. Dr. Zipora Schorr convincingly maintains that the most important midot to teach young children are respect, derekh eretz, and moral uprightness (see below). Proper manners, such as showing respect for anyone entering a classroom by standing and thanking the teacher or a visitor for any presentation, are essential steps toward chesed and love. We find these values all over the Torah and Navi, but perhaps most clearly in Micah:

It has been told to you, O man, what is good, and what the Lord does require of you: only to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God. (Micah 6:8)

Dr. Schorr's essay fits in beautifully with the important lessons of Vaetchanan, and she clearly deserves her 2013 award as Outstanding Educator in the Diaspora. If I had to recommend a single Dvar Torah on Vaetchanan and Tu B'Av, it would be her article.

During my adulthood, the lessons of respect for others and politely treating our fellows seem to have disappeared. Hate crimes, gang violence, attacks on others (especially on specific demographic groups) seem far more frequent each year. In the past few years, we have warnings not to wear kippot in certain other countries (especially in Europe) and to avoid showing overly Jewish symbols in certain parts of our country. Political parties that once respected each other now attack each other with ugly messages and vote as a block, with no members crossing party lines. The extreme positions did not exist years when I was in college and early during my adult years. Far too many people now ignore Moshe's warnings to respect others and to treat our fellows with kindness. Vaetchanan and Tu B'Av should be models for every day, not calls in the dark.

Moshe combines love and mussar (rebuke) in Sefer Devarim. My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, also combined these messages, but to his congregation, the messages of respect and love far outweighed the words of rebuke. May we live to see the day when humans treat each other properly. May we also see the day when Dr. Schorr's model of a proper school becomes widespread. May we teach our grandchildren proper respect and the foundations of finding true love in their lives. Shabbat Shalom.

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

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Yehoshua Mayer HaLevi ben Nechama Zelda, Yonatan Ophir ben Ilana, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Asher Shlomo ben Ettie, Mordechai ben Chaya, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Sharon bat Sarah, Noa Shachar bat Avigael, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, who need our prayers. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom,
Hannah & Alan

Dvar Torah: Vaetchanan: The Long Journey to the Heart

by Rabbi Label Lam © 2004

You shall know this day and take to your heart that HASHEM, He is G-d – in heaven above and on the earth below- there is none other. (Devarim 4:39)

There's a story about a man in an insane asylum in the mid-west that insisted on eating kosher food. When the hospital refused he demonstrated his sincerity by going on a hunger strike. It became an administrative nightmare but they were forced to capitulate. They had kosher food shipped from hundreds of miles away each day for this one patient. One of the Jewish doctors was making his rounds on Saturday morning and he saw this same man smoking a big cigar. The doctor was aghast. He promptly rebuked the patient, "You turn the whole hospital upside down for Kosher food and here it is the holy Sabbath and you're smoking a cigar?!" He took another big puff and said, "Doc, don't forget! I'm crazy!"

Similarly we often find it difficult to live up to what we know since we tend to act on the warmth of feelings rather than cold information alone. The ideal is when we are emotionally engaged with that which our sober intellect has confirmed true. The question remains even after we are convinced of a critical fact of life like the existence of G-d or the truth of Torah.

How does one excite the heart and make it really real? It's frighteningly possible to pass the written exam and fail in the practicum of life. That's crazy! What then is one to do?

A) Take a phrase and repeat it over and over again with more animation and emotion. Pictures, colorful and textured will begin to sprout from the words over time as they become more densely packed with meaning.
B) Koneh lechah chaver -- Acquire for your self a friend, says the Mishne in Pirke Avos. That's nice too. The word K'neh can also mean a pen. Let your pen be your friend. Sit with a blank page and ask a question on the top. What lasts? Let it flow unedited. Make lists of 25 things. How can I be a better husband/father/Jew? Let it flow. Edit later!

C) Take a media diet. Life unfolds like a soap opera. You can come back months later and find out you missed little. After a while you might begin to think your own thoughts and hear your own heart beating separate from the noise of the world.

D) Teach others. Nothing causes a person to know something more intimately than to be in a position of having to teach somebody else.

E) Do some quiet acts of goodness without the knowledge or approval of any other persons. By so doing you will have opened a private "inner-world" account and forged a deep personal relationship with HASHEM.

F) Learn Torah passionately and with a highlighter.

Reb Klonymous Kalman of Piasezcno writes, "There is a type of prophetic revelation that comes when one looks into a holy book. Not knowledge of the future, for that ceased when the Temple was destroyed. Rather, it is guidance and a call to service of G-d and the holiness of Israel. At times, we have all experienced looking into a holy book and suddenly becoming extremely moved by a certain idea. A word pierces our heart and gives us no rest for years, until it can transform us into a different person and sanctify and uplift us. What is going on? We have already heard this idea from others and seen it in books, yet we remained untouched. Yet now, the matter suddenly penetrates our heart and mind. This is a form of looking into the Breast Plate worn by the High Priest. There too, all the letters were written, yet only some of them would shine into the eyes of the Kohen; and only a Kohen with divine inspiration. Another Kohen could stand beside him and not see a thing."

Taking action on any or all, of this partial list of proven methods can help launch one of life's most exciting and yet all too neglected adventures. From a pure intellect begins the long journey to the heart.

https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5764-vaeschanan/

[ed.: Dr. Zipora Schorr's insightful article below builds on the themes that Rabbi Lam raises]

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

by Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

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

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

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

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

The commandment teaches the prohibition of giving false testimony.

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

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

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

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

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals. [emphasis added]

The Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals has experienced a significant drop in donations during the pandemic. The Institute needs our help to maintain and strengthen our Institute. Each gift, large or small, is a vote for an intellectually vibrant, compassionate, inclusive Orthodox Judaism. You may contribute on our website jewishideas.org or you may send your check to Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, 2 West 70th Street, New York, NY 10023. Ed.: Please join me in helping the Instutite for Jewish Ideas and Ideals at this time.

https://www.jewishideas.org/masks-and-realities-thoughts-parashat-va-et-hanan

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Inside Out

By Dr. Zipora Schorr *

The children now love luxury; they have bad manners, contempt for authority; they show disrespect for elders and love chatter in place of exercise. Children are now tyrants, not the servants of their households. They no longer rise when elders enter the room. They contradict their parents, chatter before company, gobble up dainties at the table, cross their legs, and tyrannize their teachers. — Socrates, over 2,000 years ago

There is nothing new under the sun. — Kohelet

And yet, in the twenty-first century, we still worry about children and about the adults they grow up to be. How is it that Orthodox Jews, people who literally live by the Torah and the Talmud, are guilty of immoral and sometimes criminal acts that should be anathema to them? Rabbi Marc Angel asks, "How can we do better? How can we go from teaching texts or sponsoring random hessed projects, to getting students to actually internalize the message and become morally strong?"

Though I am not the ultimate authority, the challenge remains an intriguing, often daunting one. Let me begin by asserting that I believe that it is possible to create an environment where middot, derekh eretz, and moral uprightness is the norm

rather than the anomaly. It is my strong belief that if we accept the premise that we are created in the image of God, then we are intrinsically good. The dilemma is how do we harness this intrinsic internal goodness in the young so that they keep it with them as they grow up? Truthfully, neither random hessed projects nor lectures about being virtuous seem to work. We have seen repeatedly that working from the outside is not effective; it hasn't worked in the past, and it won't work in the future. Recognizing that internal goodness is like a muscle, it follows that internal goodness must be exercised in order to be strengthened.

What form does that exercise take? How do we strengthen that muscle so that it becomes internally strong and will manifest itself in external goodness?

We must start at the earliest time possible. "Teach a child good manners during babyhood," advised Reb Nachman of Breslav. Most children, before culture is superimposed upon them, are basically goodhearted. Nurturing that goodness and reinforcing it constantly should be our goal. It means creating and sustaining a clear, robust, and intentional environment that, in every decision, communication, conversation, or discussion, expresses a level of concern for others. If we are truly to emulate God and do His will, we must emphasize the importance of middot and character, and model that by being kind, compassionate, and just. If even God is held to ethical standards — "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do justly?")Bereishith 18:25(— should we not hold ourselves similarly accountable?

Everything that we learn reinforces this message. God visits Abraham after his berit milah, but Abraham leaves Him to minister to the "malakhim" who arrive on the horizon. Abraham's desire to be gracious to them is greater even than his wish to commune with God.

That is the message educators at every level must drive home, creating environments where we model behavior that is kinder and gentler. We say "good morning" to a custodian, "please" to a secretary, "thank you" to a cafeteria worker. When we see a person struggling with a task, we ask if we can help. At our school, each class has a greeter who welcomes guests, and children rise in respect of that guest, no matter who the guest. We take children's internal goodness and animate it, concretize it. By encouraging the inner goodness to express itself in tangible action, we reinforce the goodness that is within. The goal? To create a school environment that makes it almost impossible for a child not to externalize what is internal and internalize what is external.

We live in an age of self-absorption and self-centeredness. As educators, our job is to help children focus on others, moving away from the self-interest that characterizes a young child. But making the process intentional and focused is certainly not easy.

We try so hard to satisfy our children's desires, mollify their anxieties, and ameliorate their pain. "Helicopter parents" have given way to "snowplow parents," who try to smooth the way for their children, plowing over their mistakes and challenges and focusing on their immediate gratification. And this is where I believe we begin to go wrong. In our schools today — and in our lives in general — emphasis has shifted to that which is cerebral, performance-oriented, and ritual-bound, but devoid of character development. In too many of our schools, there is such a strong emphasis on academics, on intellectual rigor, that we sometimes forget that the goal of our learning of the mitzvoth is, as the Rambam says to refine us so that we can have a positive impact on others. We end up without a sense of authenticity in terms of what a Jew is supposed to be. When we celebrate the "mitzuyanim" or those who are "better" or "stronger" or can learn more Gemara, we are not modeling moral behavior; we are rewarding acquisition of knowledge.

Rav Ezra Bisk points out that

> *]T[here are no mitzvoth that reflect merely the will of God, without any logic or reason or goal. The goal of all mitzvoth is always, according to the Ramban … human-oriented. The goal of God in commanding the mitzvah is not to increase His own glory, which is irrelevant to Him, not to somehow do something for the majesty of God, but is to improve and to correct, to develop the person who is observing the mitzvoth.*

Educators cannot lose sight of this. The true outcome of knowing that Torah is truth — is to live by it.

In "Is there a Disconnect between Torah Learning and Torah Living?," Aharon Hersch Fried tells the sad story of a very good student in a yeshiva high school who chose two strong fellow students to learn with for two "sedarim," and a weaker one to learn with during the third "seder." His magid shiur berated him for choosing to learn with and help the weaker

student, saying, “You can learn a lot more with a stronger havruta.” When it comes to choosing partners for Torah learning, the Rebbe explained, the operative principle is — your life takes precedence over any considerations of helping and learning with another possibly weaker student. He concluded by saying, “There is no hessed when it comes to Torah!” Fried responds to the story by remarking,

> *I don’t know what the source for this attitude would be. In fact, I’ve heard that gedolim of the previous generation … taught the precise opposite. Reb Chaim told his talmidim that doing hessed in Torah will grant one the Heavenly assistance needed for success in Torah. But even if there was a basis for the other approach, should we not be worried that teaching such an “every man for himself” approach to Torah will result in an “every man for himself” approach to life, and will contribute to our developing a selfish “dog-eat-dog” society?!*

Dr. Hayim Soloveitchik raises similar concerns in “Rupture and Reconstruction: The Transformation of Contemporary Orthodoxy”:

> *Zealous to continue traditional Judaism unimpaired, religious Jews seek to ground their new emerging spirituality less on a now unattainable intimacy with Him, than on an intimacy with His Will, avidly eliciting Its intricate demands and saturating their daily lives with Its exactions. Having lost the touch of His presence, they seek now solace in the pressure of His yoke*.

Avidly following laws and rules without understanding the underlying rationale for them is fruitless. Should we not be teaching, “Derekh eretz kadma laTorah,” Derekh Eretz comes before the acquisition of Torah knowledge?

Derekh eretz is an element of religiosity that we often do not emphasize. If you ask the question, “How do you define a religious Jew?” chances are the response will reference Shabbat, kashruth, and dress. But if our children do not describe a religious person as a kind, compassionate, and caring person, we haven’t done our job as educators, because we need to see character and kindness as religiosity:

> *Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before Him with burnt-offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? It hath been told thee, O man, what is good, and what the Lord doth require of thee: only to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God.*)Micah 6:8(

If you’ve completed a segment of Mishnah or Talmud but in the process mistreated a fellow human being, I would submit that God is not so happy to take that learning as an offering. If we are truly believers, we will realize that interpersonal mitzvoth must be at least as important as ritual mitzvoth between us and God. What God wants from His chosen people is not just study, but actualization of that study, gemilut hassadim, deeds of lovingkindness. “Bring no more vain oblations; it is an offering of abomination unto Me; New moon and Sabbath, the holding of convocations — I cannot endure iniquity along with the solemn assembly”)Isaiah]RA1[(. You are not devout if you don’t have character. Offerings are in vain if they are empty of virtue, compassion, and kindness.

Under this scenario, all of our schools should be designed to create an environment in which students of every age engage in acts of kindness. They should be taught to help one another. The pictures on the walls should not be only of “gedolim” but of children helping other children, people actually doing something for someone else. Schools should be places where everyone assists the child or adult who falls, in reality and metaphorically. Goodness should be an expectation, not an aberration.

In an ideal school system, good character would be the norm. If someone does something hurtful or cruel, the response would be consistently: “Something is wrong. That’s not how we act.” We would create spaces where everyone was expected to be kind, where peer pressure would not encourage others to be cruel or supercilious but rather to be thoughtful and caring. It sounds simplistic but there’s nothing superficial about helping children and young adults understand what the truly important values of Judaism are.

My ideal school system would be founded on a belief in the sanctity of each member of the school community, created in the image of God and therefore deserving of compassion and respect. Everyone — teachers, fellow students, staff, administrators — would be valued for the unique contributions they bring to the schools. From an early age, students

would be taught the importance of honorable and respectful behavior toward others. From preschool to high school, students would embrace the value of being a person of integrity and honor, who treats others well. "One must behave before others as one must behave before God," we are told in Shekalim. This would be our school system's motto.

Children emulate the behaviors they see around them. If we look askance at a child who does not treat others well, conformity and peer pressure become forces for good rather than evil. In my school)and in my hypothetical school system(, students thank teachers for their lessons. We begin every program by saying "toda raba" loudly and collectively, thereby teaching children that it's not just about them. The famous story is told of the Baal HaTanya, who came knocking at the door of the Mezritcher Maggid. "Who is it?" asked the Maggid. "Ich. It is I," said the Baal HaTanya. "Who?" the Maggid asked once again. And once again the answer was "Ich." "'Ich,' you said?" said the Maggid with a tormented sigh. "'Ich'? I have worked for 20 years to eradicate the 'Ich' from you, and you come brazenly to my door and say 'Ich'?" The goal of our moral pedagogy is to remove our "Ich," and embrace the centrality and importance of others, not ourselves.

But it's not just about giving children opportunities to exercise the goodness muscle. You create goodness by doing good and believing in the premise. Moral education must be systemic and systematic. Educators must set the goals and the stage at the very outset, and keep coming back to them and reinforcing them. Children often do not listen to what we say because our words are drowned out by what we do. Right from the beginning, children see the difference between what they experience at school and what they experience in the world around them. So moral education cannot stop at the boundaries of the schoolyard. It must also reach into the home, helping parents understand our common language, giving them a lexicon that can be used to reinforce these principles. Derekh eretz must be extended into all aspects of students' lives. All of the adults in a child's life must model it and look askance at behavior that is antithetical to it. The home as well as the school and the synagogue must model, reinforce, and help children do good — with their bodies not just their words)help at a soup kitchen, visit a person in the hospital, make a shiva call(so that they understand that kindness and compassion are not theoretical — they are real, actionable, concrete.

"Torah is meant to be a living Torah, a guide for life," writes Dr. Fried, emphasizing that we must connect learning to living. He stresses that true moral education recognizes that cognition, the understanding of morality, is not sufficient; that teaching sensitivity is important and that "understanding the role of emotion is crucial and requires teaching empathic distress, fostering intuitive judgment and seeing derekh eretz as frumkeit." He sums up, "We must teach our children sensitivity to the feelings of others, and make them aware of the feelings of others, and immerse them in a web of communal and familial experiences that foster growth in this area." These are the principles that would guide my ideal educational system.

True educators respect the humanity of their students, just as they expect their students to respect the humanity of others. We are reminded of this in so many places. In Mishlei Yehoshua we read, "It is better to know well than to know much." In Pirke Avot)3:13(we read, "The crown of a good name is greater than the crown of learning." In the Talmud)Menahot 110a(we read, "Study is worth as much as ritual sacrifice." As moral educators, who joyously affirm the beauty, timelessness, and sanctity of Jewish life, we must follow the example of Aaron haKohen: loving others and bringing them closer to Torah. Only through showing unconditional love for our students, respecting their tzelem Elokim and intrinsic goodness, and sharing with them our love of Torah and our commitment to derekh eretz, can the principles, guidelines, and mitzvoth of Torah become actualized throughout their lifetimes.

* Director of Education at Beth Tfiloh Dahan Community School in Baltimore. A Covenant Award winner)2003(, Dr. Schorr was named Outstanding Educator in the Diaspora by the World Council for Torah Education)2013(. This article appears in issue 33 of Conversations, the journal of the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

https://www.jewishideas.org/article/inside-out

NOTE: Rabbi Angel has a fascinating article on how an incident from King David led to issues involved in the later destruction of the Temple. You can find this article at the following link: https://www.jewishideas.org/article/david-and-mephibosheth-being-overly-%E2%80%9Ceven-handed%E2%80%9D

Parshas Va'eschanan -- Can you do it?

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine * © 2015

Following the remarkable revelation at Sinai, Hashem offered to continue communicating directly with the entire people. It was the chance of a question if do itlifetime.But the people turned it down.

Looking back at that moment, Moshe declares, "You turned me into a woman." What did Moshe mean by that?

When we consider the partnership between parents and a Rebbe, the mother in particular symbolizes the nurturing of the child so that the child has the capacity to do great things. The mother imbues the child with the capacity to love, to trust, and with the confidence to succeed. Once the child has developed these capacities, the Rebbe or mentor can guide the student to greatness.

Sometimes, the development of a child is dramatically delayed. The student may never have developed the capacity to love, for example. He may truly believe that love is something we experience with pizza or ice cream. The Rebbe or mentor will encounter a formidable challenge in guiding a student to love a fellow student or to love Hashem if the child has simply never developed the capacity to love. Similarly, if a child was not nurtured in a trusting environment, they will have trouble processing ideas of trust in interpersonal or religious applications.

Moshe was a great believer in personal potential. On a personal level, Moshe ascended to the level of personal communication with Hashem. As a leader and as a mentor of the Jewish people he believed they could do it too. Yet, when the offer came, they cried to Moshe that they couldn't do it. They felt they needed Moshe to be the conduit of Hashem's Word. Of that moment Moshe declared, "You turned me into a woman," meaning, "I thought you had already been imbued with the capacity to grow, to become great, and to believe in your potential. I thought that my task was to guide you to that greatness. But now I see you do not have confidence in yourselves. I feel like I have to start from the beginning. I need to be your mother; I need to give you the confidence that you can succeed."

I recall at one time I started an advanced Mishnah Berurah shiur in a certain community. Although it was well advertised, and the people who came were very pleased with class, very few new people were willing to join.

One day when I invited a certain man to join, I got a phenomenal insight. When asked to join the class, he replied, "Listen Rabbi, its not that I am not committed. And it is not that I am not interested. I just can't imagine that I would be able to understand the Mishnah Berurah plus the contemporary rulings of Rabbi Auerbach, Rabbi Elyashiv, and Rabbi Karelitz. You don't really expect me to come to a class that I won't understand?!"

Indeed, I didn't want him to come to a class that he wouldn't understand. But first I would have to play the symbolic role of mother, to nurture him with the confidence that he could succeed, and that he would be able to understand the class.

For parents it is important to nurture children in basic life skills and values. Love, trust, and confidence in personal potential are qualities that are prerequisites for success. For mentors it is necessary to realize that if a student is presented to us who does not yet have such a foundation, we must be willing to take a step back and provide the mother's touch of encouragement and guidance that will make future success possible.

With best wishes for a good Shabbos and Tu B'Av.

Rabbi Mordechai Rhine is a certified mediator and coach with Rabbinic experience of over 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 and www.teach613.org; his email is RMRhine@gmail.com. **For information or to join any Torah613 classes, contact Rabbi Rhine.**

http://www.teach613.org/vaeschanan-can-you-do-it/ Note: Rabbi Rhine is on vacation for a few weeks, and he has authorized me to reprint selected Devrei Torah from his archives during this period.

SEED Program for Av: Devarim *

Am HaTorah Congregation * © 2020

The first Pasuk in this week's Parsha says that Moshe spoke to B'nei Yisroel about several of the places where they had camped. Rashi explains that Moshe was preparing to talk to them about the things they had done wrong in these places and how they had rebelled against Hashem. However, he didn't want to mention their rebellions openly because of their honor. He, therefore, only mentioned the locations where they had rebelled, hinting at what they had done. Moshe was talking to the generation that would be going into Eretz Yisroel, warning them to learn from the previous generation's mistakes. Why wasn't Moshe willing to say the actual mistake, if he wasn't talking to the people that actually had rebelled? Why was it necessary for their honor to only hint to it? We see a very powerful lesson from here. Even though they hadn't rebelled, since it was B'nei Yisroel that had rebelled, the nation which they are a part of, it would be insensitive to mention the rebellions explicitly. The Torah is showing us how much we have to think about what we say and how it could affect people.

Daniel Feldman

In this week's Parsha, Moshe spends time rebuking the B'nei Yisroel about the events that occurred throughout the years in the desert. He focuses on the sin of the B'nei Yisroel accepting the report of the spies. Look how appropo this Torah reading is for the upcoming week! It takes place on the Shabbos proceeding Tisha b'Av. Our sages teach us that because the B'nei Yisroel cried in despair on Tisha b'Av after accepting the negative report about Israel, Hashem set Tisha b'Av for all time as a day of crying until we reach our destiny. The two Temples were destroyed on Tisha b'Av and many more tragic events. In addition, our sages tell us that all pain and tragedy nowadays is partially a retribution for the sin of accepting the report of the spies! Look at how careful we must be not to get anywhere NEAR Lashon Hara)negative speech about someone(. Because of our work in this area, may we all see the redemption in a speedy manner and the end of all world tragedies.

Akiva Meir Katz

In this week's Parsha, Moshe recalls how he had reassured the Jewish People that Hashem would help them in conquering Israel, the same way He had miraculously carried them out of Egypt and through the desert until this very moment. According to the Or HaChaim, Moshe then rebukes the Jewish People for not believing in these miracles, even though they themselves had experienced them. The Zohar compares this to a father who is carrying his son on his shoulders, and when they meet someone, the son asks the stranger if he has seen his father. Even as Hashem continuously carried the Jewish People, they didn't believe in the miracles He had previously performed for them. The verse alludes to this by saying "]G-d[who is walking before you etc," highlighting that even with the continued miracles, they denied G-d was guiding them and watching over them. We see from here the power of the evil inclination to lead a person even deny open miracles he had personally experienced. So long as a person wishes, one can always excuse the proofs of G-d's Providence, even when it plays out openly in front of him in his personal life.

Aryeh Singer

Have you ever wondered, why do my actions matter? Why should I bother? What worth do my actions have? This logic is completely incorrect, as we find in this week's parsha. The Torah tells us a law which applies to the two nations of Ammon and Moav, but with one significant difference between them. The law is that the Jews can't provoke these nations by starting a war. Additionally, the Jews can not even provoke Ammon for non-war purposes, which does not apply to Moav. Rashi states that the reason for this difference is that the ancestors of these nations, Lots' daughters, made two different decisions. After the destruction of Sodom, they thought the entire world had been destroyed and that they and their father were the only survivors. Thinking they needed to preserve humanity, they each lived with their father and bore a child. When they gave birth, one daughter named her child Moav)from my father(while the other daughter named her child Ammon)the word comes from Imi, from me(. Since the second daughter was more circumspect, she merited that her descendants should be protected from any provocation, even for non-war purposes. We see the impact of our actions, and how even generations later, our offspring can be affected by our choices.

Shua Katz

* Am HaTorah runs a two week SEED program featuring yeshiva students from Chofetz Chaim Yeshiva the week before and after Tisha B'Av. These insights come from the 5781 program. The 5781 insights were not ready in time for my deadline.
Rabbi Yehoshua Singer is presenting highlights from the yeshiva student presentations in lieu of his normal Dvar Torah during the two weeks of this program.

* Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD. Am HaTorah has moved. The new address is 5909 Bradley Blvd., Bethesda, MD 20814.

Parshat Vaethanan: The Gifts of the Torah

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia *

> *Observe and practice*
>
> *For it is your wisdom and intelligence in the eyes of the nations*
>
> *Who, upon hearing all these laws*
>
> *Will say "this great nation is wise and intelligent."*

This brief paragraph stands out from amongst all the words of encouragement and admonition the Torah uses to convince the stubborn Israelites to observe its laws. There is no mention here of great rewards and horrible punishments, and no mention of the covenant between God and the people, though they do appear in the larger context. This paragraph, read independently, delivers a powerful message which has withstood the test of time: there is immense wisdom in the Torah, and it will grant Israel a special status among the nations.

Before I continue to explore this idea, I would like to say that this should also be how we understand the concept of the chosen people, a ubiquitous element of our prayers and philosophy. There are no intrinsic talents, no physical or mental DNA, which set us apart from others. Rather, we have changed gradually, over millennia, to form a better society based on the teachings of the Torah, which we were chosen to receive. Interestingly enough, the adherence to the teachings of the Torah did cause a genetic difference between Jews and other religions, and that has to do with one of the greatest values heralded by the Torah: learning!

למד – the Hebrew word for both learn and teach, appears in Deuteronomy seventeen times, and the central celebration in the Jewish calendar, Pesah, revolves around a dialog with the next generation, an exchange of information and knowledge which still fascinates Jews today, thousands of years after the exodus. The final command to Moshe before his death is to teach the Israelites the poetic beauty of the Torah, and there also appears a call for the study of history:

> *Ask your father, he will tell you, your elders, they will recount…*

While other nations had a clear division of roles between workers, free men, scholars, with education reserved only for clergy, nobility, and royalty, the Israelites saw education as an obligation. Already in the book of Judges (8:14) we read about a young lad, randomly picked by Gideon, who was able to write the names of seventy-seven men. Around the time of the destruction of the Second Temple, the first public school system was established in Israel, and for centuries to follow, the academies in Israel, Babylonia, Spain, Germany, and Provence, were the power centers of the exiled nation, accessible to anyone thirsty for knowledge. Meanwhile, in the Non-Jewish world, public education had all but disappeared, and monks were the only ones who were required by monastic rule to read, as Stephen Greenblatt writes in The Swerve (p. 24):

> *For long centuries monasteries had been virtually the only institutions that cared about books. Even in the stable and prosperous times of the Roman Empire, literacy rates, by our standards at least, were not high. As the empire crumbled, as cities decayed, trade declined, and the increasingly anxious population scanned the horizon for barbarian armies, the whole Roman system of elementary and higher education fell apart… schools closed, libraries and academies shut their doors, professional grammarians and teachers of rhetoric found themselves out of work. There were more important things to worry about than the fate of books.*

Meanwhile, in the Jewish world, literacy was celebrated and prized, and in a famous medieval court case, two Jewish merchants fight over the right to use books. The relegation of scholarships to monasteries had an unforeseeable impact on the Christian world. As the best and brightest were encouraged to choose life of celibacy, their DNA was systematically

removed from the genetic pool, while in the Jewish world, those who possessed similar intelligence were sought after by matchmakers and were even granted support to be able to sustain a family.

But learning and scholarship mean nothing if they have no practical application, and here also, the wisdom of the Torah is shown. The Torah and the Tanakh appreciate hard work and engagement in all aspects of the physical world, and at the same time eschew greed and envy. The Torah does not call for a life of asceticism and deprivation, but rather wants people to be prosperous and use their wealth and talents to help others. The social system of the Torah, with its emphasis on supporting the poor, the needy, the orphans, the widows, and the sojourners, is unparalleled, and as it would be clear to anyone who reads Adam Grant's fabulous book, *Give and Take,* it is the secret of the financial success of Jews.

There are more wise benefits in learning, knowing, and observing the Torah: we are taught that we are created in the image of God, an idea that fills us with pride but also calls upon us to strive for higher grounds, morally, emotionally, and intellectually. It is a concept that warns us against discrimination and that has yet to be fully grasped by all humanity, Jews included. The Torah's insistence on purity and cleanliness, even during military campaign, has driven further the notion of human dignity and has helped Jews develop a sensitivity towards the suffering and tribulations of others, because they understood the basic principle of human dignity.

The idea of a universal rest day, the abolishment of physical punishment for monetary damages, the creation of a robust judicial system, and the social justice advocated by the prophets are some of the other gifts of the Torah to us and to all humanity.

Let us keep an eye, when we read the Tanakh and when we study the history of the Jewish People, for those gifts, and let us ask how can we use them to benefit the whole world.

* Torah VeAhava (now SephardicU.com). Rabbi, Beth Sholom Sephardic Minyan (Potomac, MD) and faculty member, AJRCA non-denominational rabbinical school). **New: Many of Rabbi Ovadia's Devrei Torah are now available on Sefaria: https://www.sefaria.org/profile/haim-ovadia?tab=sheets** Hebrew quotes from the Torah, omitted here, are in Rabbi Ovadia's orginial, most available in Sefaria.

https://www.sefaria.org/sheets/423221?lang=bi [Hebrew in the original not kept here because of software issues]

The Equalizing Myth

by Adam Cohen *

In March 2020, a theory emerged that many people loved. By April 2020, it had been completely shot down. I am talking about the idea that coronavirus, or life in lockdown, had an equalizing effect. It did not discriminate against anyone! Whether you were rich or poor, whatever job you had, wherever you lived in the world, it did not matter. We were all being made to suffer from this virus and we all had to come together to fight it.

The issue is that, in many ways, that is the opposite of the truth. It is when you are locked down at home that the differences in quality of life really emerge. As a teacher at school, I could not tell which kids were richer or poorer and who could afford nicer clothes (I am British and they all wore school uniforms). I could not tell who has food provided to eat comfortably at the dinner table and who struggles to put food on the table. I could not tell who has better living conditions or who has a nicer family dynamic. It is all hidden. These students can escape those differences when they go to school. As can all people when they go to work and are busy with their daily lives. Yet when we are all stuck at home, that is when differences really start to emerge.

We often hear that Shabbat also supposedly has this equalizing effect. We read this week that Shabbat was instituted after the Jews left Egypt (Devarim 5:15) This is because, whether you are a slave or a master, the way of getting true freedom is through a concept like Shabbat. Slave or master, high in society or low in society, these differences are immaterial on Shabbat. Society is put on hold, and everyone is equal. As Rabbi Sacks writes, "above all else, Shabbat is covenantal time, the working out of Judaism's vision of a society of equal dignity and hope." (Rabbi Sacks – A Letter in the Scroll, p. 138.)

But is that always the case? When we see someone in shul, they are equal with us in that snapshot moment of Shabbat, while we are in shul together…but what happens when we leave the shul gates and head home? What happens for the rest of Shabbat? Are they stuck at home with a bad family dynamic or without having proper food on the table? Can we bring them to a social gathering or invite them over to join our family for a Shabbat meal? We need to be the ones who fulfill the vision Rabbi Sacks describes. We need to step up and take action if we are to truly partner with HaShem in making Shabbat that equalizing experience.

Shabbat shalom!

* Rabbinic student, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, Riverdale, NY. Adam Cohen has studied and worked for Jewish organizations in the United Kingdom, Israel, Australia, and the United States.

https://library.yctorah.org/2022/08/the-equalizing-myth/

Vaetchanan and Tu B'Av

by Rabbi Moshe Rube *

[Rabbi Rube is unable to send a Dvar Torah this week. We look forward to his resuming his column soon.]

* Rabbi, Knesseth Israel Congregation, Birmingham, AL.

Rabbi Rube is busy with Knesseth Israel moving to a new location, 3793 Crosby Dr. During this disruptive period, he is unable to write a Dvar Torah each week.

Rav Kook Torah
Va'etchanan: In Mind and Heart

The Aleinu prayer, recited at the conclusion of every prayer service, contains the following verse:

> *"Know it today and ponder it in your heart: God is the Supreme Being in heaven above and on the earth below — there is no other."* (Deut. 4:39)

What is the difference between "knowing it" and "pondering it in our heart"?

Two Stages of Acceptance

Sometimes, people admit that there is a gap between what they know intellectually and what they are ready for emotionally. They will say, "Yes, this makes sense. This is a better way, a healthier way, a truer way. Still, it's not for me. It's too hard; I cannot do it."

Therefore, the Torah emphasizes the importance of two steps. First, we need to recognize the truth. This is the initial cognitive stage of "know it today."

This stage is critical, but it is still only on a theoretical level. It must be followed by the second step: to internalize that which the mind comprehends. We need to accept emotionally the ramifications of this understanding and be willing to act upon it. That is the second stage, "ponder it in your heart."

The second stage of practical acceptance should be rooted in the initial step of intellectual comprehension. As the Sages taught (Berachot 13a), "First accept the kingdom of Heaven, and then the yoke of practical mitzvot."

Above and Below

The verse continues by stating that God is supreme in both "the heaven above and on the earth below." What does this

mean?

This does not refer to God's unity in the universe, but to our own inner unity when we accept His reign. "Heaven" and "earth" are metaphors for our two major faculties: the mind and the heart. We need to be consistent so that how we act is not detached from what we believe.

In summary, we should accept God's kingship on both levels:

To understand intellectually — in the "heaven above" — using our minds, in cognitive thought and belief.
And to act upon that wisdom on a practical level — "on the earth below" — with our hearts and our will, by implementing our intellectual understanding in the realm of deed and action.

(Gold from the Land of Israel. pp. 299-300. Adapted from Olat Re'iyah vol. I, pp. 324-325.)

https://www.ravkooktorah.org/VAETCHAN58.htm

Making Love Last: Vaetchanan (5778)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We can see how central love is to the book of Deuteronomy by noting how often the root a-h-v, "to love," appears in each of the five books of the Torah. It occurs 15 times in Genesis, but none of these is about the relationship between God and a

human being. They are about the feelings of husbands for wives or parents for children. This is how often the verb appears in the other 4 books:

Exodus	2
Leviticus	2
Numbers	0
Deuteronomy	23

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

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

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

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

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

That is what David Brooks' remark suggests: commitment is falling in love with something and then building a structure of behaviour around it to sustain that love over time. Law, the mitzvoth, halakhah, is that structure of behaviour. Love is a passion, an emotion, a heightened state, a peak experience. But an emotional state cannot be guaranteed forever. We wed in poetry but we stay married in prose.

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

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

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

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

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

FOOTNOTES:

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

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

* Note: because Likutei Torah and the Internet Parsha Sheet, both attached by E-mail, normally include the two most recent Devrei Torah by Rabbi Sacks, I have selected an earlier Dvar.
https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/vaetchanan/making-love-last/

In Good Times and Bad

By Yossy Goldman * © Chabad 2022

Times have changed. We all know that. But what about people? Are humans any different today than they were in ancient times? Has human nature evolved over the millennia, or are we, basically, the same kind of people we always were?

Some five weeks before his passing, Moses begins a series of sermons that can be described as his ethical will. He foresees the future and tries to spare his flock the tragedies that may arise from their potential errors of judgment in the years ahead.

He speaks of the good times and the bad, and addresses the people's possible responses to the fortunes and misfortunes they may face.

> *And it will be, when the L rd, your G d, brings you to the land He swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give you, great and good cities that you did not build, and houses full of all good things that you did not fill, and cisterns that you did not hew, vineyards and olive trees that you did not plant, and you will eat and be satisfied. Beware, lest you forget the L rd, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage*.1

Moses understood human nature all too well. Forty years of leading his people had taught him all anyone could ever hope to know about the human psyche.

He realized that in times of wealth and success, his people might well forget the Great Provider of their blessings.

And so, he cautions them to remember Who it was that gave them their freedom in the first place: The Almighty, who took them out of Egyptian bondage and fed them manna from heaven, would also give them victory over the Canaanite nations and, eventually, a land of their own, he promised.

He also understood that it was all too likely that it would take a change of fortune for them to remember the source of their blessings.

> *When you are distressed, and all these things happen upon you in the end of days, [only] then you will return to the L rd your G d and obey Him*.2

Was he wrong? When do we cry out to G d? When we are distressed. When we experience tsuris. When times are tough. That's when we return to Him and His way of life.

So, I ask you: Has human nature really changed? Is it any different today from the days of Moses?

When do people run to synagogue, to the rabbi, to the graves of the righteous, or to the Western Wall? In times of trouble. When does the Siddur suddenly inspire our most articulate, eloquent expressions of appeal to the Almighty? When do we cry out to Him with our deepest, most genuine sincerity, if not when asking Him to save us from our worries and woes?

And you know what? That is entirely appropriate. Where else should we turn? To whom should we direct our prayers and our cries for help, if not Him?

But what Moses is teaching us is to remember G d as the source of our good fortune, too, not only in our hours of hardship.

We may be clever, work smart and hard, but still, success and failure are not necessarily in our own hands. "There is no bread for the wise,"3 said King Solomon, the wisest of all men. Indeed, I know plenty of very smart people who never "made it" and some less intellectually endowed folks who became great successes. Clearly, there is a heavenly hand at work here.

Moses's message is just as relevant to us as to his own generation over 3,000 years ago. So, indeed, it appears that human nature has not changed one bit.

On more than one occasion, the Rebbe lamented that he had too many "tsuris chassidim," referring to those who only turned to him when times were tough. He even remarked that, sometimes, the only way he realized people's problems had been solved was when he didn't hear from them again.

And I once heard that the Rebbetzin commented how grateful she was when a certain individual from London made the trans-Atlantic trip to New York just to give a personal "thank you" to the Rebbe for his sage advice and blessings which had helped him tremendously.

In my community of Johannesburg, we are currently involved in a campaign to build a new girls' high school. The project was given a huge lift-off when a prosperous donor was approached by one of my rabbinic colleagues to contribute. During their conversation, the rabbi asked the businessman, "Has G d not been very good to you?" The man's honest and humble response? A multi-million contribution!

May we all experience only good fortune and never forget where it came from.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Deuteronomy 6:10.

2. Deuteronomy 4:30.

3. Ecclesiastes 9:11.

***** Founding director of the first Chabad in South Africa (1976). Since 1986, rabbi of the iconic Sydenham Shul, where he is now Life Rabbi Emeritus. He is also president of the South African Rabbinical Association**.**

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/5589555/jewish/In-Good-Times-and-Bad.htm

The Meaning of Tu B'av

by Yisrael Meir Lau * © 2020

Six events occurred on Tu B'Av, the 15th of Av, making it a festive day in the Jewish calendar.

The Mishnah tells us that: "No days were as festive for Israel as the 15th of Av and Yom Kippur." (Tractate Ta'anit) What is Tu B'Av, the 15th of the Hebrew month of Av? In which way is it equivalent to Yom Kippur?

Our Sages explain: Yom Kippur symbolizes God's forgiving Israel for the sin of the Golden Calf in the desert, for it was on that day that He finally accepted Moses' plea for forgiveness of the nation, and on that same day Moses came down from the mountain with the new set of tablets.

Just as Yom Kippur symbolizes the atonement for the sin of the Golden Calf, Tu B'Av signifies the atonement for the sin of the Spies, where ten came bearing such negative reports which reduced the entire nation to panic. As a result of that sin, it was decreed by God that the nation would remain in the desert for 40 years, and that no person 20 or older would be allowed to enter Israel. On each Tisha B'Av of those 40 years, those who had reached the age of 60 that year died – 15,000 each Tisha B'Av.

This plague finally ended on Tu B'Av.

Six positive events occurred on Tu B'Av:

Event #1 - As noted above, the plague that had accompanied the Jews in the desert for 40 years ended. That last year, the last 15,000 people got ready to die. God, in His mercy, decided not to have that last group die, considering all the troubles they had gone through. Now, when the ninth of Av approached, all the members of the group got ready to die, but nothing happened. They then decided that they might have been wrong about the date, so they waited another day, and another...

Finally on the 15th of Av, when the full moon appeared, they realized definitely that the ninth of Av had come and gone, and that they were still alive. Then it was clear to them that God's decree was over, and that He had finally forgiven the people for the sin of the Spies.

This is what was meant by our Sages when they said: "No days were as festive for Israel as the 15th of Av and Yom Kippur," for there is no greater joy than having one's sins forgiven – on Yom Kippur for the sin of the Golden Calf and on Tu B'Av for the sin of the spies. In the Book of Judges, Tu B'Av is referred to as a holiday (Judges 21:19).

In addition to this noteworthy event, five other events occurred on Tu B'Av:

Events #2 and 3 - Following the case of the daughters of Zelophehad (see Numbers, chapter 36), daughters who inherited from their father when there were no sons were forbidden to marry someone from a different tribe, so that land would not pass from one tribe to another. Generations later, after the story of the "Concubine of Giv'ah" (see Judges, chapters 19-21), the Children of Israel swore not to allow their daughters to marry anyone from the tribe of Benjamin. This posed a threat of annihilation to the tribe of Benjamin.

Each of these prohibitions were lifted on Tu B'Av. The people realized that if they kept to their prohibition, one of the 12 tribes might totally disappear. As to the oath that had been sworn, they pointed out that it only affected the generation that had taken the oath, and not subsequent generations. The same was applied to the prohibition of heiresses marrying outside their own tribe: this rule was applied only to the generation that had conquered and divided up the land under Joshua, but not future generations. This was the first expression of the merging of all the tribes, and was a cause for rejoicing. In the Book of Judges it is referred to as "a festival to the Lord."

Over the generations, this day was described in Tractate Ta'anit as a day devoted to betrothals, so that new Jewish families would emerge.

Event #4 - After Jeroboam split off the kingdom of Israel with its ten tribes from the kingdom of Judea, he posted guards along all the roads leading to Jerusalem, to prevent his people from going up to the Holy City for the pilgrimage festivals, for

he feared that such pilgrimages might undermine his authority. As a "substitute," he set up places of worship which were purely idolatrous, in Dan and Beth-el. Thus the division between the two kingdoms became a fait accompli and lasted for generations.

The last king of the kingdom of Israel, Hosea ben Elah, wished to heal the breach, and removed all the guards from the roads leading to Jerusalem, thus allowing his people to make the pilgrimage again. This act took place on Tu B'Av.

Event #5 - At the beginning of the Second Temple period, the Land of Israel lay almost totally waste, and the wood needed to burn the sacrifices and for the eternal flame that had to burn on the altar was almost impossible to obtain. Each year a number of brave people volunteered to bring the wood needed from afar – a trip which was dangerous in the extreme.

Now, not just every wood could be brought. Wood which was wormy was not permitted. And dampness and cold are ideal conditions for the breeding of worms in wood. As a result, all the wood that would be needed until the following summer had to be collected before the cold set in. The last day that wood was brought in for storage over the winter months was Tu B'Av, and it was a festive occasion each year when the quota needed was filled by that day.

Event #6 - Long after the event, the Romans finally permitted the bodies of those who had been killed in the defense of Betar (in the Bar Kochba revolt) to be buried. This was a double miracle, in that, first, the Romans finally gave permission for the burial, and, second, in spite of the long period of time that had elapsed, the bodies had not decomposed. The permission was granted on Tu B'Av.

In gratitude for this double miracle, the fourth and last blessing of the Grace After Meals was added, which thanks God as "He Who is good and does good." "He is good" – in that the bodies had not decomposed, "and does good" – in that permission was given for the burial.

To this day, we celebrate Tu B'Av as a minor festival. We do not say Tahanun on that day, nor are eulogies rendered. By the same token, if a couple are getting married on that day (and, as we will see below, it is the custom for the bride and groom to fast on their wedding day), neither fasts.
Beginning with Tu B'Av, we start preparing ourselves spiritually for the month of Elul, the prologue to the coming Days of Awe. The days begin to get shorter, the nights get longer. The weather, too, helps us to take spiritual stock: the hectic days of the harvest are over for the farmer, and the pace has slowed down considerably. Even on a physical level, the heat of the summer makes it hard to sit down and think things out, and now that the days and nights are cooler, it is easier to examine one's actions.

In earlier times, it was the custom already from Tu B'Av to use as one's greeting "May your inscription and seal be for good" (ketiva vahatima tova), the same blessing that we today use on Rosh Hashana. Those who work out the gematria values of different expressions found that phrase adds up to 928 – and so does the words for "15th of Av."

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Vaetchanan: We are the Least of All the Peoples

An Insight by the Lubavitcher Rebbe *

"G-d did not delight in you and choose you because you are more numerous than any other people, for, on the contrary,you are the least of all the peoples." (Deuteronomy 7:7)

The least of all the peoples

Among the nations of the world, the Jewish people have almost always been a minority; among the Jewish people themselves, those Jews who have scrupulously fulfilled the commandments have always been a minority; and even the

most religious of us succeed in dedicating only a minority of our time to explicitly holy pursuits such as prayer and Torah study.

This objective reality may prompt us to wonder how this minority can be expected to hold its own against the majority, and even if it can, what's the point, since it seems doomed to remain the minority? Furthermore, as time progresses and assimilation and war erode our numbers while the demands of modern life leave us both less and less time for spiritual pursuits and with less and less sensitivity to them, this question becomes increasingly trenchant.

The decisive answer to this question has been discovered only in modern times. As science has learned to unleash the power of the atom, the world has learned that size is not always an indication of power. What matters is knowing how to access the energy latent in the smallness; once that knowledge has been discovered, even the smallest particle of matter can release incredible amounts of force.

The basic process used to release this force is nuclear fission, in which the atom is broken down into smaller components. As Jews, this teaches us that the key to releasing our latent, infinite potential is by breaking our egos, allowing our inner, Divine essence to shine through.

The better we master this "spiritual technology," the less we need be intimidated by being an apparently insignificant minority among the world's populace, by being the relative few among our people who are seriously devoted to the Torah's teachings, or by having only limited time and energy to devote to holy endeavors. Within us lies the power to change the entire world for the good!

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Covenant and Conversation
Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

The Infinite Game

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

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

Finite games are played to win. Infinite games are played for their own sake. Finite games are usually performed in front of an audience of some kind. Infinite games are participative. We engage in them because we are changed by them. Van Gogh did not need to sell paintings to regard art as worthwhile. Beethoven was not seeking popularity when he wrote his late sonatas and quartets. James Joyce was not aiming at a bestseller when he wrote Ulysses.

Infinite games are not a means to an end: winning the championship, beating the market, victory in an election. Instead they are what psychologists call autotelic, that is, they contain their purpose within themselves. We do them because the activity is inherently creative, demanding, uplifting and ennobling.

It should be clear by now that these are not simply two types of game. They are two different ways of playing a game. If, in any country at any time, politics is treated as a finite game in which all that matters are popularity ratings and election results, then it quickly becomes superficial, trivial, uninspiring. The quality of leadership declines. The public becomes cynical and disillusioned. Trust is eroded and the social bond becomes frayed. When politics is lifted by a sense of history and destiny on the part its leaders, when it becomes not the pursuit of power but a form of service-to-others and social responsibility, when it is driven by high ideals and ethical aspiration, then leadership becomes statesmanship and politics itself a noble calling.

This is not to denigrate finite games. We need them, because in many spheres of life we need rules, boundaries and time limits. But we must also have space for infinite games because they are among the highest expressions of the human spirit.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[1] Simon Sinek, The Infinite Game, Portfolio Penguin, 2019.
[2] James P. Carse, Finite and Infinite Games, Free Press, 1986.
[3] Baba Metzia 108a.
[4] Lifnim mishurat hadin actually means "within" not "beyond" the strict demands of the law. The meaning is: I have certain rights in law but I may decide not to exercise them because someone else's welfare may be damaged if I do. "Within" means "I do not go up to the boundary in pressing my legitimate claim. I choose to forego my right."
[5] Ramban Commentary to Deut. 6:18; see also his commentary to Lev. 19:2 where he makes a similar case.
[6] See Maggid Mishneh to Rambam, Hilchot Shechenim 14:3.
[7] Ramban developed for this and similar cases the idea of naval bi-reshut ha-Torah. See His commentary to Lev. 19:2.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

"And we dwelt in the valley, opposite the Temple of Peor" (Deuteronomy 3:29) The contents of the final book of the Pentateuch, Deuteronomy, are almost sandwiched between two curious references to a detestable idol: Baal Peor. At the conclusion of the first part of Moses' farewell speech to the Israelites, the text informs us that when Moses relinquished the baton of Jewish leadership to Joshua, "the Israelites had settled in the valley, opposite the Temple of Peor" (Deuteronomy 3:29). Then at the closing of the book, in a poignant passage summarizing Moses's life, the text reads: "And He [God] buried [Moses] in the valley in the Land of Moab opposite the Temple of Peor; no human being knows his burial place until this day" (Deut. 34:6).

Is it not strange that the only real landmark by which to identify Moses's grave is "opposite the Temple of Peor"? What makes these references especially startling is the disgusting manner in which this idol was served: by defecating in front of it! What kind of idolatry is this? And what type of repulsive individuals would it be likely to attract?

Furthermore, the Sages of the Talmud (B.T. Sanhedrin 106a) suggest that when Balaam advised the Moabites on how to vanquish the Israelites, he suggested that they bring Moabite women to entice the Israelites and then assimilate them into their culture. In effect, Balaam was explaining that, although no external soothsayer or prophet could get the Almighty to curse Israel, the Israelites could in fact curse themselves out of existence through sexual licentiousness with gentile women. And so, "the Israelites dwelt in Shittim, and began to engage in harlotry with the daughters of Moab" – but God was not angry at them. It was only when "they became attached to Baal Peor that the wrath of God flared up against them" (Numbers 25:1-3). Sexual immorality led to idolatrous worship of Peor – and it was this idolatry that would ultimately ruin Israel.

What is it about Peor that is not only abominable but also so dangerous? Balaam's advice causes the Israelites to degenerate to lower and lower depths and the sexual debauchery becomes interchanged and intermingled with the worship and joining "together" with Peor. At this point, God tells Moses to take all the leaders of the nation and to slay them under the rays of the sun; but no sooner does Moses give this command than an Israelite (Zimri ben Salou, a prince of the tribe of Simeon) cohabits (joins together with) the Midianite princess Cosbi bat Zur – a flagrant and disgustingly public act of rebellion against Moses, his teaching and his authority. It appears as though Jewish history was about to conclude even before it had a chance to begin – when Phinehas steps in and saves the day.

Phinehas seems to have been the antidote to Balaam, who, as we know from our text, was the son of Beor, strikingly similar to Peor (and in Semitic languages "b" and "p" can be interchangeable). It clearly emerges from the Talmudic discussion (B.T. Sanhedrin 64a) that Peor is the nadir – the lowest depth – of idolatrous practice. Is defecating before an idol the worst expression of idolatrous behavior?

The first two chapters of the Book of Genesis begin with two stories of the creation of the human being. Rav Soloveitchik describes these as two ways of looking at human personality: the first he calls homo natura, natural man, the human being as an inextricable part of the physical and animal world. This is mechanistic man, scientifically predetermined and pre-programmed, devoid of freedom and so (ironically) freed from responsibility.

The second aspect of the human personality is introduced in the second chapter of Genesis with God's breathing the breath of life, a portion of His very essential self (as it were), His soul, into the clay body He has just formed. This results in homo persona, a vitalistic and free human being, responsible for his actions and charged with the obligation to perfect, or complete, God's imperfect and incomplete world.

And God created homo persona! Homo persona is given the command to refrain from eating the forbidden fruit, to control his physical drives and impulses, to recreate himself as well as the world around him.

Peor says that man must give back to God his animal and physical excretions, that man cannot be expected to rise above his nature and become God's partner. Moses taught, on the other hand, that man can and must enable, uplift and sanctify his material being until he can truly see himself as "only a little lower than God, crowned with honor and glory."

Moses and Phinehas are the antithesis of Balaam and Peor, and so Moses is buried opposite Peor.

The Person in the Parsha
Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

"What, Me? Worry?!"

I am a worrier. My friends and family tease me about it. I sometimes worry about personal matters, and sometimes about professional concerns. More often, I worry about things that are going on in the community or in the world.

I worry about the economy, and I worry about Iran's development of nuclear weapons.

Because of my background in psychology, I sometimes compare my worrying to the thoughts of patients who suffer from obsessive compulsive disorder. Like them, I sometimes have one worry on my mind and can think of nothing else. But I long ago decided that my worrying, though it may seem obsessive, is far from an indication of mental illness. Many people worry.

It is only very recently that I came to consider the possibility that, although my worrying was not a sign of a psychological disorder, it might be a sign of a theological disorder, a spiritual fault.

What prompted that consideration was a passage in the writings of Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin, the late 19th century head of the Yeshiva of Volozhin, in Eastern Europe. In the introduction to his commentary on

Deuteronomy, Rabbi Berlin, or the Netziv, as he is known, makes a remarkable statement:

"Reading carefully the words of instruction contained in this book, Deuteronomy, words which were divinely inspired and uttered by Moses our teacher, each person will find 'milk and honey' in accordance with his spiritual level... Therefore, each person should read it contemplatively, according to his ability, and he will find a straight path upon which to walk… So let this book be a source of illumination for one's life journey…"

I decided to heed the Netziv's counsel in reading this week's Torah portion, Parshat Va'etchanan, (Deuteronomy 3:23-7:11). But I immediately found myself facing a dilemma. Among the many themes and topics in this week's Torah portion are some strong words prohibiting idolatry. "Do not act wickedly and make yourself a sculptured image in any likeness whatever... You must not be lured into bowing down to them or serving them." (Deuteronomy 4:15, 19)

How does this apply to me? What "milk and honey" can I find in proscriptions against idol worship? When was I last tempted to make for myself a graven image, or to bow down to the sun or moon or stars?

The only answer I can find to resolve this dilemma is to profoundly redefine the meaning of the prohibition against idolatry for our day and age.

Idolatry in ancient times was a process by which primitive men identified a single object to worship. They turned away from the vastness of the universe and its complexity and isolated either a heavenly body or some artifact of their own making, and came to believe that it, and only it, was worthy of their adulation. They became fixated upon a small fraction of reality. They became obsessed with one thing, and that thing was far from representative of the whole picture.

In more modern times, the process of idolatry took a different turn. Instead of fixating upon an object, human beings fixated upon an ideology. They came to believe that the vastness of the universe could be reduced to a set of ideas. Those ideas included the Enlightenment, nationalism, scientism, socialism, fascism, and communism. Those are but several of the idolatries of more recent history.

What they all have in common is a fixation or obsession with one set of ideas, as if that is all there is to life. That is where my nasty habit of worrying comes into play. The worrier becomes consumed with one fear, which may be trivial or may be monumental, but which is only a small part of the totality of existence.

When worrying is conceived of in this manner, it becomes apparent that worrying itself may be a form of idolatry. When one is consumed by worry, the person is limiting his or her attention to one idea, or fear, or concern. Such individuals are ignoring the fact that there is a big world out there with a lot going on. They are certainly forgetting all the positive blessings that probably surround them.

Admittedly, this is a novel interpretation of idolatry, but it is one that fits our modern circumstances much better than sun worship or offering animal sacrifices to a totem.

This redefinition allows for a deeper understanding of another passage in this week's Torah portion, the Shema. "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One". Only the Lord is One, because only He is all-encompassing. Nothing else is One in that sense – not the sun or moon, and not the currently popular ideology. They are all but parts of the greater whole.

Only of God is it said, "He is the place of the world, and the world is not His place." He contains the world; the world does not contain Him.

This is the real meaning of monotheism. Not that there is one God, but that God is One. Only He is big enough, complete enough, total enough, to be worshipped. Everything else is partial, fragmentary, and fractional. Everything else, including our worries, are mere idols which do not deserve the devotion we give them.

Perhaps the cynical Alfred E. Neumann of the comic books of my childhood was making a profound theological statement when he said, "What, me? Worry?!"

OU Torah

Being Commanded to Love*
Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm

The entire book of Deuteronomy, when compared to the first four books of the Torah, is found to have a unique character, a personality all its own. Whereas in the other books of the Pentateuch the laws of Judaism are expressed in more or less direct legal form, and where the accompanying narrative is factual in nature, this fifth Book of Moses is noted for its sweeping sentimentality, for its appeal to the heart and to the soul. The words lev (heart) and nefesh (soul) appear more often here than in all the other books combined. We are charged to uplift our hearts and souls, to give of ourselves emotionally, to experience Torah ecstatically, to feel it personally and intimately.

In fact, the one word most characteristic of the book of Deuteronomy is ahava (love). We are to do more than obey God and follow Him. We must also love Him, we must experience His presence with our deepest emotions. We read, "Listen O Israel, the Lord your God is One. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your might" (Deuteronomy 6:4-5). And we are later again told to love the Lord our God (11:1), and that He asks of us to love Him (10:12).

But lest anyone here this morning believe that this is merely gaudy sentimentalism, a sort of fatherly advice, let that person be corrected quickly. The Halakha insists that love of God is a mitzva, a commandment. And as such it is a guiding principle of Jewish life. We are commanded to love God.

And yet, this very idea, the idea that we are commanded to love, is a most perplexing notion. Maimonides and other Jewish philosophers were puzzled by it. They ask a simple, but a pointed question: How can you possibly "command" someone to love? Love is an emotion, a deep emotion, and as such is above, independent of, and detached from volition or will. You can command me to do or give or act or walk, and I can obey, but you cannot possibly command me to love or hate and expect me to obey, no matter how much I want to. I either love or I do not love. Many a parent has learned that lesson the hard way! How, therefore, do you account for terming the love of God a mitzva, a commandment?

Perhaps one of the most beautiful answers given to this question is the one offered by the author of Sefat Emet, the renowned Gerrer Rebbe. It is answer which bespeaks ahavat Yisrael, and which gives us a key to understanding the entire book of Deuteronomy. The Gerrer Rebbe maintains that the question itself offers a clue to the answer. Since you cannot command love where it does not already exist, he says, and since the Torah does command such love, then the only logical conclusion is that there is ingrained in every Jewish heart a deep and abiding love for God and for Torah. There exists in every Jewish heart, as he calls it, a nekuda, a "dot" or spark of love for things Jewish. Sometimes that nekuda is too small to be of value, it is covered up with superficial rust, it is hidden by material desires and pursuits – but it's there. And the commandment to love God is the command to each and every one of us to be conscious of it, to develop that nekuda, to nurture it and express it. But the initial spark, the nekuda, is already there. Every Jew has it, whether he knows it or not. It is just that sometimes we must get rid of the dross and the drapes to be able to see it and appreciate it.

The story is told of the famous sculptor, Michelangelo, who was at work on his great statue of Moses. As he was working, someone who was observing him was moved to remark, "How wonderful to watch a master at work. Here you take a mere slab of stone and make a Moses of it." But the artist turned to him and said: "You're mistaken. What happens is that I see Moses inside the stone, and I merely chip away the unnecessary parts of the stone so that you can see clearly what I saw in there before." So it is with the nekuda of love for Torah – it already exists in every Jewish heart.

But we must strive to chip away the hard rock that so frequently encases it. For the love of God, we must do it.

Our modern thinkers have come to adopt the same technique. Educators no longer browbeat a child into learning something for which he has almost no natural aptitude. Instead they look for his possibilities, for his capacities, for his nekuda, and work on that, try to develop it and give it direction and expression. They don't beat it into the child; they pull it out of him. Psychology, too, under the influence of Freud and psychoanalysis, speaks of a nekuda, of a basic desire in every human being which reaches out in love. They call it the libido. That is the desire for love and affection which exists in every human being. In a child it is expressed as love for parents, then as love for playmates, and finally as love for a life-long mate. Judaism merely goes one step further and maintains that in addition to this libido, with its physical and sexual ramifications, there is also a spiritual libido – the nekuda of ahavat Hashem and ahavat Torah.

With this in mind we need never despair of the future of Torah Judaism either here or in Israel. Prophets of gloom have forecast the demise of Torah Judaism as much as two thousand years ago when the Pharisees were regarded as "done for." Assimilation was then supposed to win the field. Now we are told that we are all done for, and that "Canaanism," a primitive form of Near East jingoism that has caught the fancy of some unhappy young sabras, will replace Judaism and Torah altogether. Perhaps from a superficial analysis they are right. But so were the Sadducees right two thousand years ago, from a superficial analysis. The trouble is that they fail to reckon with the nekuda. It's only a dot, that bit of love for Torah – but oh, can it grow! How often have we seen people seemingly infinitely far from Torah return with a love and emotion that were amazing to behold. Who knows when the nekuda will break out, when the spark will be fanned into great flames of ahavat Hashem and ahavat Torah. The nekuda is unpredictable – but it's always there.

But, having gone this far and ascertained that in every Jewish heart there exists this nekuda of ahavat Hashem, let us proceed joyfully to the next happy thought. No matter how stern God is with us, no matter how strict and demanding He may seem at different times in history, He – so to speak – always has his nekuda – and that divine nekuda is ahavat Yisrael. God loves Israel, and shall someday prove it even more obviously, even as Israel loves God. For does not the Talmud (Berakhot 6a) relate that just as Jews put on the tefillin that contain verses professing our love for God, so does God, figuratively speaking, put on divine tefillin, in which is written, "Who is like your people Israel, a nation alone in the earth" (I Chronicles 17:21).

Yes, there is a nekuda in God too. And insofar as we develop the nekuda of love for Torah within us, does God develop the nekuda of love for Israel within Him. But whatever may be – the spark is there. And it is that which has insured our survival.

Nowhere can we find this lofty idea more beautifully expressed than in the inspiring words of Isaiah (49:14), with which we begin next week's haftara: "And Zion said, the Lord has forsaken me, and God has forgotten me." Israel despairs of ever gaining God's love – but Zion has forgotten about the nekuda. For it is an eternal "dot," and it is the nekuda of God's guardianship over and love for Israel. "No more than a mother can forget her child, the fruit of her womb, can God forget Israel; for even if these be forgotten, I will remember you" (v. 15).

For as long as Israel lives there will burn in every Jewish heart and soul the nekuda of love for God. And for as long as there exists for God the nekuda of love for Israel will Israel live. And may that be forever. [*Excerpted from Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm's "Derashot Ledorot: A Commentary for the Ages – Deuteronomy"]*

Dvar Torah: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

Moshe seems to have done something which was totally unnecessary. In Parshat Va'etchanan we are told (Devarim 4:41), "Az yavdil moshe shalosh arim." Just before he was to pass away, Moshe, who was on the eastern side of the river Jordan because he couldn't enter into the Holy Land, separated off three cities there.

Of course, two and a half tribes were to be dwelling there, and these three cities were separated to be 'arei miklat' – cities of refuge, in order that any person guilty of manslaughter could flee there for the sake of their protection.

Now Moshe knew that these cities would only become active once three additional cities were inaugurated for this purpose in the Holy Land itself, which would not happen until well after his death, so why did he do this? It seemed to be for no purpose whatsoever.

The Kli Yakar explains that the key to understanding this is the very first word 'az'. "Az yavdil moshe," – "Then Moshe separated."

He was inspired to do this because of something which had happened just before. So let's look at the previous verse. There Moshe reminds the people of how Hashem instructed them to keep the word of Hashem (Devarim 4:40),
"asher yitav lecha ulevanecha achereicha," – "in order that it should be good for you and for your children after you."

You see it was there that Hashem told him that we should do what is responsible in life not just for our own sake – it's also for the sake of our children and future generations who will come after us. That is what inspired Moshe to recognise that even though he personally, and those around him, were not going to benefit from the setting aside of the cities, it was his responsibility to start to do this for the sake of those who would be living thereafter.

We have here a powerful Torah message about our purpose in life. We're not just here for our own sakes and those around us. We are here to invest responsibly in the future of our earth. That is why, when placing man in this world, Hashem said to us, "l'ovda uleshomra," – 'l'ovda' – you must work in this world, you must be productive and creative, but at the same time, 'uleshomra' – you must guard and protect it.

This is so very relevant for us right now with regard to climate change. Until quite recently many people just weren't taking the whole issue of climate change seriously but now it is abundantly clear to us all that in just 50-100 years' time, the very lives of our grandchildren and great grandchildren could be endangered unless we act now for the sake of our environment.

Let us therefore take a leaf out of the book of Moshe to guarantee that what we do now will be the right thing not just for us but also for the generations to come.

Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel
Encyclopedia of Jewish Values*

Parents and Children

In our Torah portion the Ten Commandments are repeated, almost word for word, by Moses. But in only two of these commandments (Shabbat and Honoring One's Parents) does Moshe add the phrases "as I (God) have commanded previously". Why only these two? ALL the commandments were given previously. What is different about these two? While the commentaries struggle with this question, Rashi famously answers that only these two were given prior to Mount Sinai, at Marah. But Aruch HaShulchan goes in another direction. Rabbi Epstein explains (Aruch HaShulchan I, 1:13) that every society set up rules and laws to force workers to take off one day a week from work, in order to give them a chance to refresh, and also laws had to be set to properly treat the previous generation, to ensure that the elderly will be taken care of when they cannot take care of themselves. Rabbi Epstein says that by adding this phrase, God is emphasizing that God specifically gave these two commandments, not because they are practical and somewhat resemble laws of other societies, but because they are uniquely Jewish, and very different conceptually from the values of other societies. We will concentrate on honoring one's parents. What are the laws that make this Mitzvah-commandment uniquely Jewish? How does a

Jew's obligation to parents go beyond a non-Jew's responsibility?

When adults are asked what causes their greatest source of pain in life, they often answer "the children." When they are asked what is their greatest pleasure in life, the very same respondents also frequently answer "the children." No single endeavor involves more time and effort on the part of an adult than the raising of children. The nuclear family unit, slowly disintegrating in many Western countries, is central to Jewish life (see the chapter on Family, vol. 2). Why do children cause parents so much heartache and vice versa? What are the specific responsibilities of a child to his or her parent? How much can a parent demand of a child and vice versa? The sources tell us much in helping to answer these important questions that also elucidate and explain Jewish attitudes.

Importance of Respecting One's Parents - Respecting one's parents is a bedrock of Judaism. According to the Jerusalem Talmud (Jerusalem Talmud, Peah 3b), it is even more important than respecting the Almighty Himself. The Midrash (Midrash Tanchuma, Kedoshim 15) also demonstrates how important and unique this particular Mitzvah-commandment is. In regard to the observance of all other commandments, God will sometimes deny reward for a Mitzvah to a wicked person, if his or her overall conduct is unworthy. However, a very wicked person who honors his parents will always receive his reward. Thus Esau, who, despite his terrible wickedness, dutifully honored his father Isaac, was generously rewarded.

In addition to its importance, Judaism recognizes how difficult it is to honor one's parents and to perform this particular Mitzvah (Midrash Tanchuma, Eikev 2), calling it the most difficult Mitzvah of all. Perhaps that is why regarding honoring parents, it is only one of two places stated in the Torah that promises a specific reward for its performance -- a long and good life (Deuteronomy 5:16) – in our Parsha. Rabbi Yossi expands the Torah's words (Jerusalem Talmud, Kiddushin 22b) and states that for the performance of this one Mitzvah, a person will not only have his or her life lengthened but will also inherit the Land of Israel. Unlike all other commandments, the Code of Jewish law (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 240:1) uses the phrase "be very careful and diligent" in fulfilling this particular commandment of honoring one's parents, echoing the same words of Rabbi Judah in the Talmud (Ketuvot 103a). The Midrash (Midrash, Yalkut Shimoni, Vayigash 153) states that a person's father is like his king, implying that the respect for a parent should be no less than the respect of a king. It is quite clear, then, that observance of this Mitzvah stands out in its particular importance.

Why is Respect for Parents so Important? - Sefer HaChinuch (Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzvah #33) explains that the basis of respect for parents is the fundamental concept in Judaism called Hakarat Hatov, acknowledging goodness that someone did for you, that you could not do yourself. It is an easily understood idea and accepted concept that if one person saves another person's life, that the saved person will and should be eternally grateful and thankful to the saver. How much more grateful should every child be to parents who gave that child life to begin with? It is certainly no less than saving a life that already exists. And, yet, unfortunately, most children do not acknowledge or feel the same emotion of indebtedness to parents than an individual feels to anyone who saves his or her life. Judaism encourages a person to try to experience, through fulfilling the Mitzvah-commandment of respecting and honoring one's parents, which feeling of gratitude for giving the great gift of life.

That is why it is the obligation of a child to sit Shiva and fully mourn a parent who died, even if the child never met that parent or even if the parent was evil and not very nice to the child (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 241:4). The gift of life itself merits a sense of indebtedness, regardless of other considerations. Even a convert, who has no remaining legal ties to his non-Jewish parents (he is legally considered a newborn in Judaism and has no relatives), still must show a degree of respect to biological parents because only they provided him with physical life (Maimonides, Hilchot Mamrim 5:11). Why is this concept of indebtedness so important in Judaism?

Hakarat Hatov – Acknowledging the Goodness Of Others - By nature, man resists the idea of Hakarat Hatov. Man desires to be independent, and it is difficult for anyone to admit that he or she is dependent on another human being for anything (that is why begging for charity is so undignified). To feel a sense of indebtedness to parents, all a child (of any age) needs to do is to imagine the amount of time and effort involved in parenting required during only the first five years of life. If normal, that child would then automatically be forever grateful. The thousands of diaper changes and numerous sleepless nights parents endure when infants are ill or babies who just cry, should instill a lifetime of respect and being grateful for parents. In addition, the cost of raising a child in the United States from birth to age 18 has been estimated to be at least $400,000 Yet, somehow it is normal for children not to appreciate their parents or their efforts (perhaps God intentionally arranges this, in order to insure a child's free choice to respect or not respect his or her parents). Therefore, the emphasis on Hakarat Hatov in Judaism for parents must help internalize this idea in every Jewish child.

By understanding the need to acknowledge and appreciate the efforts of one's parents, people should eventually translate this feeling to the Almighty as well. This is one of the reasons that the commandment in our Torah Portion to honor one's parents is specifically the fifth of the Ten Commandments. The first Tablet, the first five Commandments, are Man to God commandments, while the second Tablet, the last five commandments, are Man-to- Man Mitzvot. However, the fifth commandment, honoring one's parents, while ostensibly a Man-to-Man act, indeed encompasses aspects of both man to man and Man to God concepts. Therefore, it was placed fifth as a transitional commandment between the two Tablets. Like a parent, God gives life to each person. And, like a Parent, a child would not survive if God or the parent did not nurture the child daily. In fact, the Talmud states (Kiddushin 30b) that there are three partners in creation of a human being, the two parents and God. We refer to the Almighty very often as Father, both in the Scripture (Deuteronomy 8:5) and in the prayers (In the Ahava Rabbah prayer recited each morning before the Shema, God is referred to as "Our father, merciful father" and on each fast day the Avinu Malkeinu prayer (Our Father, Our King) is recited). The Talmud (Kiddushin 30)clearly states that honoring one's parents also honors God.

Defining Honoring One's Parents - The classic Torah texts outlining the specific requirements to fulfill this commandment are "Honor your father and mother (Exodus 20:12)" and "You shall fear your mother and father (Leviticus 19:3)." The specifics explaining what each text signifies can be found in the Talmud (Kiddushin 31b). "Fear" is defined as not sitting or standing in a parent's designated place and not contradicting a parent, while "honor" is defined as feeding parents, clothing parents, and helping them come in and out. On the face of it, it does not seem that making sure parents are fed or clothed is truly honoring them. These seem like acts of charity, usually reserved for homeless or poor people. How can this be called honor? The Hebrew word in the Torah verse regarding parents, Kavod, does not, then, really translate as “honor,” which is the standard, but inadequate, English translation, given the Talmudic requirements of fulfilling this verse. In another Talmudic statement (Berachot 19b), this same word in the verse, “Kabed-Kavod” is used to say that human dignity (in Hebrew Kavod Habriyot) is extremely important. Therefore, the true meaning of the word Kavod is dignity, not honor. Thus, the actual Torah Mitzvah is to dignify one's father and mother, i.e., to keep their dignity. We can now understand the specifics mentioned in the Talmud as logical extension of this commandment. A child who ensures that a parent clothed and fed when they can no longer do so for themselves, indeed retains their dignity. Similarly, helping them in and out of the house preserves their dignity. The other term, Morah, does not really mean fear or awe as is usually translated, but this is the actual word for honor and respect in the traditional sense. We show respect and honor by not interrupting them or sitting in their seat.

The idea of keeping a parent's dignity as the essence of the Mitzvah is borne out by a passage in the Jerusalem Talmud (Jerusalem Talmud, Peah 1:1), which says that it is possible to feed one's parent succulent hens and still inherit Hell, while a person can make his parent work on a grindstone and still inherit Paradise. The passage continues to explain that the child who gives a father great food, but when the father asks where the food is from, the son answers "Quiet old man. A dog eats quietly, so you eat quietly." This son inherits Hell. However, the second case involved the son who worked at the grindstone. When the king summoned grindstone workers to the palace to endure even greater back-breaking work, the son told the father to change places at the grindstone and work, so not to suffer or be treated in an undignified manner before the king. This son inherits Paradise. Therefore, it is clear that if the context diminishes the dignity of a parent, any action in this regard is worthless, and violates the spirit and intent of Jewish law. Similarly, even if an act seems demeaning objectively, if it preserves a parent's dignity, it is to be praised. This is also the reason one may not curse a parent even after his or her death (Maimonides, Hilchot Mamrim 5:1). Although the parent will not hear it and suffer because of the curse, the parent's dignity is still being compromised even after death, and is therefore, forbidden.

Thus, maintaining dignity is often centered about the tone of one's voice and attitude, rather than about a specific substantive action. A child is obligated to maintain the parent's dignity and respect at all times, even when disagreeing. That is the essence of Kavod. This is proven in the laws regarding a parent who does not observe a commandment. A child should point out to a parent if he or she is committing a sin. However, Maimonides codifies how a person should address a parent who violates the Torah (Maimonides, Hilchot Mamrim 6:11). One may not say "Dad, you are wrong and doing a sin," but rather "Let's look up the law together and see what it says." Shulchan Aruch (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 241:6) codifies this as well, quoting Maimonides almost word for word, but then adds an explanation "in order not to embarrass the parent." Therefore, even when disagreeing with a parent, even when a child often has a right to do, he or she must do so in a dignified manner, to preserve the parent's dignity.

Issues Which All Agree a Child Need Not Listen to Parents - One area in which all authorities agree a child may not listen to a parental request is when a parent asks a child to violate a Torah law. If a parent asks a child to become intentionally ritually impure, for example, he or she need not listen (Yevamot 6a). The basis for this concept is the very Torah verse about Morah that ends off with the command to observe the Sabbath. The Talmud (Bava Metzia 32a) asks why these two concepts were put in the same verse, and answers that it teaches us that though a parent must be listened to, this does not include any Torah precept which both the child and the parent are commanded to obey. Maimonides (Maimonides, Hilchot Mamrim 6:12) extends this idea even to a Rabbinic law, which a child should also not violate at the parent's request. However, it should be stressed, once again, that even in legitimately disobeying a parent in this instance, it must be done in a way that preserves the parent's dignity and not to ignore the parent's request in a disrespectful manner.

Another area in which a child may disagree with a parent is in Torah learning. The Talmud (Megillah 16b) and Shulchan Aruch (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 240:13) state that learning Torah is more important than respecting one's parents. Therefore, if a child feels that he or she can better learn Torah elsewhere, and a parent asks the child to remain at home to learn, the child may indeed leave home, in order to learn Torah (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 240:25). A third area where a child may disobey his or her parents is in settling the Land of Israel. If a child wishes to make Aliyah to Israel and a parent forbids it, the child may settle in the Holy Land against the parent's wishes. The Talmud records a case where Rabbi Assi left his elderly mother (against her wishes) to settle in Israel (Kiddushin 31b and see Maharsha commentary). The very first words uttered by God to the first Jew, Abraham, was to leave his parents and settle in the Land of Israel (Genesis 12:1). Rashi (Rashi commentary on Genesis 11:32) explains that the reason the death of Terach, Abraham's father, was mentioned in the wrong chronological place in the Torah (much earlier) is that the reader should not be upset at Abraham for leaving his elderly father in order to obey God's word and settle in the land. If Terach's death had been mentioned in its proper chronological place, Abraham's absence might have highlighted his lack of taking care of his father might have been more noticeable, which the Torah tried to avoid. The final area where a child need not listen to his parents is in the area of choosing a spouse. If parents disapprove of a potential husband or wife and the child wishes to marry anyway, it is his or her right to do so (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 240:25, Rema). However, later commentaries discuss if it makes a difference or not if the parent points out a specific reason why he or she objects. A child is certainly encouraged to hear the parent out, since the parent does have more experience, is not "blinded" by love, and may have a better perspective, but the final decision remains in the hands of the child.

However, it should be emphasized that in each situation where a child may disobey, as well as in all the day-to-day conversations with parent, the dignity of the parents must be upheld.

*** This column has been adapted from a series of volumes written by Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel "*The Encyclopedia of Jewish Values*" available from Urim and Amazon. For the full article or to review all the footnotes in the original, contact the author at nachum@jewishdestiny.com**

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Yakov Haber - Longing for the Coveted Land - Past and Present

Twenty years ago, I had the merit of writing a devar Torah on parshas Va'Eschanan portraying the centrality of Eretz Yisrael in facilitating complete fulfillment of the Torah, Hashem's masterplan for His beloved people.[1] This is highlighted beginning with Moshe Rabbeinu's fervent prayer for entry into the Holy Land at the very beginning of our parsha continuing throughout the parsha with its repeating refrain - anticipating the imminent entry of the Jewish people into the Land - of the performance of all the mitzvos, even those not dependent on the land, specifically in Eretz Yisrael. This clearly indicates that this land is the main epicenter of the performance of all of them. Since there are many additional ideas I believe worthy of developing, and, in my humble opinion, many international events have occurred recently highlighting the timeliness of these themes, I, with considerable trepidation, write the following thoughts in the hope of inspiring greater love for the Holy Land and fostering additional interest of more families in building their homes in Eretz Yisrael.

The Holy Land is endowed with a dual sanctity: a Divinely-bestowed one, and a humanly created one. The first is reflected in the Land being called "the land of Hashem"(Hoshei'a 9:3) Hashem Himself being referred to as the "G-d of the land" (Melachim II 17:26), in the increased Divine providence present in the Land, and in the Land being the focal point of the direction of prayers and the location from which prayers throughout the world soar heavenward (Berachos 30a). These themes and many other unique aspects to the Land have been presented majestically by many, among them the Ramban, in his commentary on Chumash.[2] The second, a more technical one, is affected by conquest or possession of the Land (see Rambam, Hilchos Beis Habechira 6:16). This generates the Torah obligations of most mitzvos hateluyos ba'aretz - agricultural commandments.[3] [4] This duality, reflecting an oft-occurring theme in Jewish life - a fixed Divine component and a human variable component, seems to indicate the Divine Will of maintaining an active partnership with mankind in bringing about a more perfect reality.[5]

The motivations for aliyah to Eretz Yisrael can be divided into several categories: 1) the pragmatic, 2) the mitzvah based, 3) the idealistic, and 4) the messianic. On the pragmatic level, many have immigrated to Eretz Yisrael as refugees - among them refugees from the periods before, during and after the Holocaust, those banished from multiple Arab lands after the foundation of the State of Israel, and many fleeing persecution or economic hardship in the former Soviet Union. The Land of Israel served as a place of refuge

for all of them.[6] To be sure, many among this group - even if historical events had not forced them to flee - were still filled with love of the Land and viewed their immigration there as a great fulfillment of Torah concepts and even Biblical prophecies, but, nonetheless, the main motivation was escape. Some even find better employment opportunities for their particular field of work or cheaper housing and education as well in Israel. These motivations are primarily practical, not spiritual.

On the other hand, many have made aliyah convinced that living in the Land is a mitzvah, whether obligatory as indicated by the simple reading of Ramban and others or optional but still constituting the fulfillment of a Divine commandment (mitzvah kiyumis) as might be the view of the Rambam and was the view of Igros Moshe and Rav Y.D. Soloveitchik zt"l. Some maintain that even if living in the Land does not fulfill a specific Divine command but comprises the Will of Hashem.[7] This latter viewpoint was expressed poignantly by Rav Sholom Gold shlit"a:[8]

The story is told of a Diaspora Jew who studied in depth the whole range of opinions about yishuv haAretz and then called and made an appointment with R. Shlomo Zalman Auerbach. The appointed day came; he arrived at the airport, took a cab to Shaare Chesed, made his way up the steps and soon found himself in the Rosh Yeshiva's presence. He proceeded to begin to pour out all the knowledge he had committed to memory, when R. Auerbach said softly in Yiddish, "Es iz nisht vichtig" - "It is not important." Our Diaspora hero was devastated - but nevertheless pressed on until he heard again, "It's not important." In his desperation he asked, "What does the Rosh Yeshiva mean, it's not important?" To which R. Shlomo Zalman replied, "Just open up a Chumash and read and you will see that ratzon Hashem (G-d's will) is that Jews should live in Eretz Yisroel."

Many have been inspired or could be inspired based on idealism to build up the land agriculturally, economically, and spiritually. As one example, Rav Moshe Ze'ev Katz zt"l, a prominent, energetic Rabbinic personality, came to Beit Shemesh in the 1970s when it was a spiritual wasteland. Singlehandedly, he built up a network of Torah centers and inspired hundreds to return to Torah observance. It might be fair to say that the foundation of the entire Ramat Beit Shemesh (now, Baruch Hashem, comprising Aleph, Bet, Gimmel and Dalet and more!), with its thousands of families and growing each year, all rode on the coattails of this initial investment of mesirus nefesh, if not through direct cause and effect but at least on a spiritual level. Furthermore, on a klal Yisrael level, every religious family's aliyah increases the spiritual nature of the entire yishuv. In the powerful words of one of the great Torah giants of the last century, Rav Yechiel Michel Tikutchinksy zt"l, calling to us now (and perhaps even more so!) as when they were written over half a century ago: What of today? How easy travel is to Eretz Yisrael! From America to [Israel] is only 36 hours (!)... All the roads are paved, water and other food staples are not lacking, electricity [and] fuel. Those who control the land is the government of Israel; the gates of the land are open wide. There is no remnant of the [certificate system]...

What is lacking today? That strong yearning which burned in the hearts of the faithful of Israel of previous generations in chutz la'aretz. Had travel and entry to Eretz Yisrael been so easy one hundred years ago or if all of the faithful of Israel in our era been drawn by the same soul-strings to our Holy City and Land, Eretz Yisrael would have been settled by a solid majority of shomrei Torah u'mitzvos. On the seats of the Knesset would be sitting authentic Jews who know and feel what Eretz Yisrael means and the intensity of the bonds which connect [the Land] and [the people]. Eretz Yisrael would then have an entirely different character. The Knesset laws would be based on the Torah of Israel; there would be no question in Israel about keeping Shabbos... and certainly there would no freedom for missionaries to proselytize Jews. No perikas 'ol, no desecration of Jewish values, no war of the mundane over the sanctified, no youth educated wantonly, degrading human life.

All this would occur if the faithful of Israel in chutz la'aretz were drawn to the land. They could save the Jewish religion and the sanctity of the Land from its desecrators and its enemies. True, even today, most of them feel a great connection to our holy Land; they pray toward it... raise its mention above all of their joy. Even today, they support the Jewish yishuv no less than in the past, but they still embrace dwelling in Exile. Many view their domicile there in the future [as well].

It is incumbent upon all shomrei Torah u'mitzva, especially all of our Rabbanim, to learn a lesson from the previous aliyot who entered Eretz Yisrael with great self-sacrifice and desired to take refuge in the chatzros Hashem and to release the land from its defilers. ברצות ד' דרכי איש גם אויביו ישלימו אתו, and Israel will dwell securely from its external enemies, and the Jewish people in Eretz Yisrael would shine in splendor as in days of old. We would then draw near, day by day, to our complete redemption and our hoped-for destiny. (Sefer Eretz Yisrael, end of Chapter 27)

Additionally, many have been inspired by messianic yearnings. In past centuries, it is a well-documented fact of history that many aliyot of hundreds of families were inspired by messianic hope.[9] Some were anticipatory: based on passages in the Zohar, messianic speculation was rife in the years 1740 and 1840. Some were proactive. Many students of the Gaon of Vilna and many Chassidim made aliyah at the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th centuries to jumpstart the process of the spiritual awakening of the Land hopefully to be met with Divine favor; the Master of History would then hopefully take the redemptive process to the next step. Rav Tzvi Hirsh Kalischer zt"l (see his Derishas Tzion) even thought that, in addition to the founding of agricultural settlements, we must bring korbanos even before the Mikdash is built (following the pattern of the Shivas Tzion in the days of Zerubavel and later Ezra) in order to awaken Divine mercy to hasten the redemption. Many have seen or currently see within either the Balfour declaration, the San Remo conference, the 1947 United Nations vote, or, more recently, the explosion of the Jewish yishuv to over six million (kein yirbu!) a fulfillment of at least a pekida, the first step of the redemptive process to be followed by the zechira, the last step.[10] The pekida step of redemption during the Shivas Tzion leading up to the second Mikdash began with the call of Coresh, king of Persia, "Who among you of all His people, may the Lord his God be with him, and he may ascend!" (Divrei Hayamim II 36:23). Many believe our era is directly parallel to that one. Recently, inspired and perhaps frightened by the global pandemic of COVID-19 and now the more recent Delta variant, as well as the on-again, off-again closing of most air travel to Eretz Yisrael, rising anti-Semitism, and additional security concerns, some have been talking of mashiach's imminent arrival even pronouncing, "We better go now before the gates close totally!" Understandably, many Rabbinic personalities past and present have forcefully objected to some or all of these movements. One claim advanced is that such speculation, especially if advanced by Rabbinic scholars, if not met by fulfillment of the messianic expectation would be followed by lessening the stature of Rabbinic viewpoints in the eyes of the Jewish people. An additional concern is that the disillusionment of the final redemption not coming when expected would lead to spiritual malaise or even worse, as unfortunately has happened often in our tragic history in the aftermath of false or misguided messianic movements.

In my humble opinion, although the second motivation for aliyah based on ratzon Hashem seems to be the most basic, pure motive as well as the third motive of idealism both of which indeed have led to many thousands of current residents of the Promised Land uprooting from their former domiciles,[11] all the motivations have their proper place as well. Perhaps an analogy can be drawn to the various inspirations to teshuva. Rabbeinu Yona in his crucial work Sha'arei Teshuva (Sha'ar 2) outlines several motivations to repent, among them ideal and non-ideal ones. But as Chazal (Pesachim 50b) tell us and even recommend[12] "לעולם יעסוק אדם בתורה ובמצוות אף על פי שלא לשמה, שמתוך שלא לשמה, בא לשמה" - "a person should constantly engage in Torah [study] and [the performance of] the commandments even for ulterior motives, for from these ulterior motives will sprout pure ones." If even an ulterior motive inspires the person to act properly then it can be viewed positively. But one has to be certain that the person does not make the desirable activity dependent solely on the motivation. The motivation is exactly that - a motivation, not

the essence of what is being done. I believe that the same can apply to messianic motivations. If the person is motivated to make aliyah based on his belief that mashiach's arrival is imminent, which can be premised not just on an emergency sense of leaving the Exile before it is too late but on heeding the Divine call of history, he must temper this vision with the fact that he does not dictate to G-d how He chooses to run Jewish and world history! Messianic expectation need not be an all or nothing proposal; it can provide inspiration and cause a pause from life's routine to explore fundamental values including yishuv ha'aretz, but cannot and should not be the overarching principle with the concomitant danger of leading to a "spiritual crash" if one's expectations are not fulfilled.

Although necessary caution in too much messianic speculation is certainly in order, I believe this does not exempt us from attempting, with proper humility and uncertainty, from trying to "read the map" of individual and national events in our lives. Elsewhere[13] I referenced Rav Schwab's enlightening insight on the phrase in the last blessing of the morning Shema, "ashrei ha'am sheyishma l'mitzvosecha v'toras'cha ud'var'cha yasim 'al libo" - "praiseworthy is the nation who hearkens unto your commandments and places your Torah and your Word on its heart". "Your Torah" and "Your Word" seem to be redundantly synonymous. Rav Schwab explains that "Your Word" refers to the messages Hashem sends to us indirectly through intervention in our lives. In this vein, Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld zt"l, at the beginning of the 20th century, concerning the Balfour Declaration exclaimed: "Where are the Torah Jews from the lands of exile? Don't they see G-d's finger in all of this? Now I understand what it says in the musaf prayer for Yom Tov. 'And because of our sins we were exiled from our country and were distanced from our Land.' 'We were exiled from our country' by G-d, and then 'we were distanced from our Land' by ourselves! Have we ceased our anticipation? Imagine it hadn't rained for 2,000 years, and then suddenly one day a tiny cloud appeared. Wouldn't everyone become excited, and say, trembling, 'Perhaps this is it? Maybe, after all...?' Isn't the (British) Mandate at least comparable to this little cloud?'"

We can only guess what Rav Sonnenfeld would have proclaimed in an era where over six million Jews live in Eretz Yisrael, the economy is flourishing and yeshivos and kollelim, attended by thousands of students, abound.

Mori v'Rabi Rav Hershel Schachter shlit"a has often described the dual mitzvos of yishuv ha'aretz, building up of the land, and yeshivas ha'aretz, actually dwelling in the land. One who financially supports the yishuv from chutz la'aretz fulfills the former but not the latter. One who lives in Eretz Yisrael but is supported from chutz la'aretz fulfills the latter but possibly not the former. The outlook some convey that living in Eretz Yisrael is the only important mitzvah in the Torah and especially the attitude of those not leading proper Torah lifestyles living in Israel who point an accusing finger at those who are more dedicated to Torah values than they are or even at those who are spiritually guiding hundreds if not thousands of Jews who live in chutz la'aretz - because the latter live in chutz la'aretz and the former live in Eretz Yisrael - are grossly misguided. But the dual truisms that leading meaningful Torah-filled lives in chutz la'aretz is also fundamental avodas Hashem and that supporting the yishuv also partakes of one part of the mitzvah should not, to my mind, serve as a sufficient reason to ignore the possibility of actual yeshivas ha'aretz. An analogy may be drawn to the relationship between supporters of Torah and learners of Torah. This partnership is a crucial one with the former sometimes even being awarded primacy due to the fact that without them the Torah would not be studied; but no one would claim that being a tomech Torah exempts one who can from learning Torah! Certainly, as Rav Y. D. Solovetichik zt"l, mori v'Rabi Rav Hershel Schachter shlit"a and mori v'Rabi Rav Mordechai Willig shlit"a (and earlier Maharam Schick) have often stated and advised, irreplaceable Rabbinic leadership and Torah teachers must fill the important role of serving klal Yisrael in chutz la'aretz, but this, to my humble mind, does not exempt those not filling this crucial role from seriously considering aliyah.

How does one who does not feel sufficient motivation to practically consider this central aspect of avodas Hashem become inspired? Telling is an insight of the Abarbanel (Rosh Amana) in his defense of the Rambam's view that there is a normative mitzvah to believe in Hashem - counted among the 613 mitzvos - against the critique of some thinkers that one cannot command belief.[14] He answers that belief is not a direct commandment, but rather an indirect one. The commandment is to act in a way that fosters that belief, primarily through study. He gives an analogy of falling in love. (Even the English phrase is very telling.) One cannot command or instantly feel love, but one can act in ways which will foster that strong emotional bond. In the beautiful phraseology of the Abarbanel, "It comes in an instant, seeming inexplicably, fostered by the person's initial activities." The same is true concerning inspiration toward aliyah - one has to foster an emotional and intellectual bond through study and experience. The footnote makes some recommendations of inspiring works.[15]

Many articles have been written and crucial, informative Rabbinic input has been presented about various difficulties new olim can encounter especially concerning education of children. These issues cannot be ignored in one's pursuit of this noble dream. But I firmly believe that the correct path is to seek out solutions to these issues, not just to dismiss aliyah as an option because of them. Indeed, much has been done in the past 20 years in Israel to address these issues. Job networks abound, many new schools have been created catering largely, if not exclusively, to the Anglo, Torah-observant crowd presenting all kinds of different combinations of Torah and general subjects and varied across the hashkafic spectrum. Additionally, professional support groups especially for tweens and teens have been formed and provide crucial assistance and safety nets. Living in Israel, although certainly having its unique challenges - as it simultaneously presents even greater, unique opportunities - has gotten more and more feasible for families of all types in just the past decade. Telecommuting, once the province of the few, has become much more of a norm in the "COVID-19 era" enabling additional employment opportunities once not feasible. A world-renowned Yeshiva has even founded a group to study the feasibility of the aliyah of tens, perhaps hundreds, of families to establish their own community. Families who have explored options some time ago should re-explore based on the current situation which keeps changing for the better. Whereas due research is certainly in order, too much hesitancy in this area to make sure every single detail is in place might be counterproductive. Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt"l often would quote the popular saying that "before entering Eretz Yisrael one has to kill the king of Cheshbon (calculation)!" [A playful reference to Sichon, the king of Cheshbon.] (See Halichos Shlomo, Tefilah 23:fn 16.)

Every day, three times a day, we pray to Hashem: "Blow the great shofar for our freedom; lift up the banner to gather our exiles!" Perhaps it would not be too presumptuous to say that this banner has been lifted up by the Great Actor of History higher and higher especially with recent events.

The Rambam, in disagreement with others, states that the mashiach will prove his messianic mission not with miracles but by doing what the Messiah is supposed to do - bringing the Jewish people back to Torah, gathering the Exiles, fighting against the enemies of Israel and defeating them and building the Mikdash. Perhaps the best way we as a people can partner with Hakadosh Baruch Hu in the great messianic drama - a drama to whose exact scenes and denouement we are not privy - but one whose initial steps certainly include kibbutz galuyos (see Megilla 17b) is by actively participating in this stage.[16] Even if the final redemption is chas v'shalom still far away, one who chooses to uproot and replant his family back in the primary place of the Jewish people, will be a beneficiary of the great spiritual value - and mitzvah according to many Rishonim - of living in the Land which is present even during the darkest period of exile.

How fortunate we are to live in an era where living in Eretz Yisrael is orders of magnitude easier than it had been for so many centuries! How fortunate we are to live in an era to be able to choose a career in Eretz Yisrael and an appropriate school for our children instead of dealing with practically no employment or

schooling opportunities! How fortunate we are to live to see the yishuv in Eretz Yisrael blossom at such a rapid pace so that in a short period of time, even in the natural course of events, a majority of the Jewish people will be living in the Holy Land!

If we beseech HaKadosh Baruch Hu אתה תקום תרחם ציון כי עת לחננה כי בא מועד - "May you arise, have mercy on Zion for the time has come to favor it, for the designated time as arrived", it certainly behooves us to seriously consider dwelling in the Eretz Hashem.

I heard an informative vignette from my father,z"l concerning a Chassidic Rebbe who wished to embark on a massive spiritual project to benefit the Jewish people. His detractors chided him, "Rebbe, du bizt a chalomer!" ("Rebbe, you are a dreamer!"), to which he responded, "Ken zein az ich bin a chalomer, ubber ich shluft nisht!" ("It could be that I'm a dreamer, but I am not sleeping!") If we view aliyah as a desirable goal or even if we do not yet but we are convinced that it should be a goal of ours, we must keep the dream alive by constantly learning, experiencing and inquiring so that the dream can become a reality for thousands, and hopefully even hundreds of thousands, of more Jews, faithful to Torah values, who have the ability to elevate themselves along with their families, greatly affect the yishuv in the Holy Land, and b'ezras Hashem bring the day of our final redemption closer!

[1] Mitzvot and Eretz Yisrael

[2] Also see Yadav Emunah by Rav C. D. Sapirstein (Sha'ar 7) where these themes are presented in an organized, thought-provoking manner. See there also for an important treatment of the deeper meaning of the seemingly incomprehensible statement of Chazal, as popularized by Ramban, that mitzvos in Eretz Yisrael are fundamentally significant, whereas in chutz la'aretz they are performed in order that we "keep in practice" for when we return. Can it be that the mitzvos performed by klal Yisrael in exile together with its exalted leaders for almost 2000 years are just "practice"?! Whereas some might be satisfied with the simple reading of this statement of Chazal, one would be hard pressed to envision the water-carrier in Eretz Yisrael receiving a higher reward in Gan Eden than the Ba'al Shem Tov or the GR"A! Rav Sapirstein formulates the difficulty and presents a very cogent, profound answer to this conundrum.

[3] See Encyclopedia Talmudit, Eretz Yisrael: 2: Kedushasa U'Mitzvoseha for a thorough treatment of these two sanctities.

[4] It would appear that the debate between Tosfos and Ramban (beginning of Gittin) whether one fulfills the mitzvah of living in Eretz Yisrael in land conquered by the olei Mitzrayim but not resettled by the olei Bavel revolves around the following point: Is the mitzvah of living in the Land based on the goal of living under direct Divine providence (dependent on the first, Divinely- bestowed sanctity) or is it based on enabling oneself to fulfill all of the mitzvos hateluyos ba'aretz (dependent on the second, humanly-endowed sanctity)? See also Avnei Nezer (Y. D. 454:14 ff.).

[5] See Meshech Chachma (on beginning of Behar, s.v. "כ"ובתו") who compares Shabbos vs. Yom Tov and shemitta vs. yovel. Also see Midrash Tanchuma (Tazri'a 5) which records the famous conversation between R. Akiva and the Roman general, Turnusrufus, concerning mila.

[6] Also see Fleeing From; Running To.

[7] See a thorough treatment of the various views in the RJJ Journal of Halacha and Contemporary Society, Vol. 5, "The Mitzva of Yishuv Eretz Yisrael", by mori v'Rabi, Rav H. Schachter shlit"a and Contemporary Halakhic Problems, Vols. I-II, by mori v'Rabi Rav J. D. Bleich shlit"a and Encyclopedia Talmudit, Yeshivas Eretz Yisrael.

[8] Available here

[9] See Hastening Redemption: Messianism and the Resettlement of the Land of Israel by Dr. Arie Morgenstern.

[10] See the eye-opening work, Acharis K'Reishis by Rav Aryeh Shapira shlit"a based on the teachings of Ramchal and GR"A that all redemptions have occurred and will occur with these two steps.

[11] When I recently asked a prominent doctor in Ramat Beit Shemesh what motivated him to make aliyah 20 years ago, he responded, somewhat surprised at my question, "Have you seen Tanach or the Kuzari?"

[12] Heard from Rav Noach Isaach Oelbaum shlit"a based on the language of "l'olam".

[13] Divine Communication: Two Different Types

[14] Even those Rishonim (see Or Hashem) who maintain that belief is not formally a mitzvah certainly agree that is it obligatory since it is a reasonable Divine expectation. They claim that for technical reasons it cannot be counted in the list of mitzvos since mitzvos are only relevant to those activities that are subject to free will.

[15] To Dwell in the Palace: Perspectives on Eretz Yisroel by Tzvia Ehrlich-Klein, A Drop in the Ocean - A Daily Dose of Eretz Yisrael by Rabbi Moshe Lichtman and Michael Freund, Yadav Emunah (Hebrew) (Sha'ar 7) by Rabbi C. D. Sapirstein, and Sefer Eretz Yisrael (Hebrew) by Rav Y. M. Tikutchinsky (chapters 25 & 27). The following websites also contain many inspiring and informative articles: www.nachliel.org and see there under "Resources" for additional websites and http://www.qdushat-zion.022.co.il/, a gateway to a relatively new Israeli organization and publication promoting aliyah and a Torah society in Eretz Yisrael, Kedushas Tzion.

[16] As mori v'Rabi Rav Dovid Miller shlit"a often states, "One living in Israel is living in the front seat of Jewish history, not the bleachers!"

Torah.Org Dvar Torah
by Rabbi Label Lam

Step ONE - Hear, Israel: HASHEM is our G-d; HASHEM is one. And you shall love HASHEM, your G-d, with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your might. (your means). (Devarim 6:4-5)

Here is a very simple and obvious question about something that we say multiple times a day for our entire life. I would never have thought of the question myself had I not seen it in the Siddur HaGra, in a small print commentary from one of the students of the Vilna Gaon, Siach Yitzchok.

The question goes like this; "In this first line, of what is the mission statement, the rallying cry of our nation, we declare that HASHEM is ONE! In the second verse that immediately follows it we are mandated to love HASHEM with our entire being! Now, is there a connection between these two ideas or are they separate subjects? If they are connected and one naturally leads to or feeds the other, how does it work? What is the dynamic at play here? If it is just two separate notions then we can end here and wish each other a Good Shabbos!

The good news is that there is a connection. The Torah is not jumping randomly from subject to subject. It's not just a tangential connection though. It is a profoundly powerful and essential connection between the declaration of HASHEM's ONENESS and our ability to tap into fountains of endless love for HASHEM. Please don't feel bad if the answer is not so obvious at first. I have presented this question to scholarly audiences and only the head scratching was audible, but no answers. The Siach Yitzchok offers a genius answer. You don't have to be a genius to understand the answer. Once it's understood, though, it is really quite obvious and we will be left wondering, "Where have I been all my life!? Why didn't I think of that!?" It takes true genius to find the clear and apparent answer while it is still obscure.

We all have differing degrees of appreciation and even love for those who play a supporting role in our life. On a scale of 1 to 10 it could be that lesser players serving basic functions might get a 1 or a 2 or a 3, like for a letter carrier or a grocery store clerk. A close friend might climb to a 6 or 7, as well as a good teacher. A parent or grandparent or a Rebbe might reach an 8 or more and a spouse is already approaching 10. This diffused light of love is spread out all over to the people we meet throughout our life.

Now when we close our eyes and recite "SHEMA YISRAEL HASHEM ELOCHEINU HASHEM ECHOD" we come to understand that all these different personalities are all agents and angels that have been sent our way by one primary source, by HASHEM.

I remember as a child playing in the backyard on a sunny summer day and using a generic magnifying glass to focus a narrow beam of light on a leaf to start a fire. When all of that diffused light and love is directed to HASHEM it awakens a giant fire of love in our hearts. In that way declaring HASHEM's ONENESS is directly linked to the motivation to love HASHEM with all of our resources.

Now this all leads us to a great point. There is a profound implication here. There are two sides to the Tablets on which were scribed the Ten Commandments. One side emphasized Mitzvos between man and G-d while the other side stresses Mitzvos between man and his fellow man. Now which is more important? Is there a competition between these to arenas?

The answer is absolutely "NO!" Not only are they not in conflict but they feed and fuel one another. Every Mitzvah between man and man enhances and energizes our devotion to HASHEM. The reverse is true too. Not only do I love my neighbor because I feel like it today. It's a heavenly mandate, a Commandment from the Creator to overcome my petty nature and dignify my neighbor. The "between man and G-d" side of those Tablets empowers the "between man and man" side, which in turn fires up our relationship with HASHEM again, and so it spirals and cycles forever upward when we start with step ONE.

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Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

This week's parsha begins the seven-week period of consolation and condolence that bridges the time space between Tisha b'Av and Rosh Hashana. In order to properly prepare for the oncoming year and its challenges one must first be comforted by the vision of better times ahead and the belief in one's ability to somehow overcome those omnipresent challenges. Healing occurs when one believes that there is yet a future ahead. All medical doctors agree that hope and optimism on the part of the patient are great aids in the process of recovering from illness or injury. If we would not have time and vision to recover from the sadness before the advent of the High Holy Days then those most meaningful days of our year would clearly be diminished measurably in our minds and hearts.

Throughout the book of Dvarim, Moshe's pain at not being allowed to enter the Land of Israel is manifestably present. But Moshe is strengthened, and even somewhat consoled, by his vision of his student and loyal disciple, Yehoushua, succeeding him in the leadership of Israel, and in his firm conviction that the people of Israel will successfully conquer and settle the Land of Israel.

Comfort and consolation come in varying forms. What comforts one individual may not be effective for another. But again, all agree that such consolation is a necessary ingredient in the restoration and rehabilitation of those who were depressed and saddened. There is no substitute for consolation and healing. Otherwise, it is impossible to continue in life.

The parsha also deals with the Ten Commandments of Sinai. I have often thought that the repetition of this subject, which seemed to be adequately covered once in the Book of Shemot, teaches us an important lesson, which again may serve to be a source of consolation to us.

The "first" Ten Commandments was given at the beginning of the Jewish sojourn in the desert of Sinai. There was no Golden calf, no complaints about the manna, no spies, no Korach, no plagues of snakes – nothing had yet occurred to diminish the light and aura of Sinai. In such a perfect society, there is no reason not to recognize the values and laws of the commandments as being valid and even necessary in practice.

But now Moshe stands forty years later, after all the disappointments and rebellions, the backsliding and the pettiness, the death of an entire generation, and reassures us in the "second" Ten Commandments, that all those values and rules have not changed at all. The lesson of the immutability of Torah and Halacha is engraved upon the Jewish heart and mind.

Many things have happened to the Jewish people since Moshe's speech before his death. Many have mistakenly thought that all the changes in technology, economies, world orders, etc. have made the Ten Commandments, Torah and Halacha somehow less relevant.

Moshe stands and speaks to us to remind us that the basic anchor of Jewish life, and in fact of all world civilization, lies in those words of Sinai. Everything has changed but human beings have not changed. And neither has God's instructions for us.

Shabat shalom.

Rabbi Berel Wein

Shabbat Shalom: Parshat Vaetchanan (Deuteronomy 3:23-7:11)
By Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Efrat, Israel – "And we dwelt in the valley, opposite the Temple of Peor" (Deuteronomy 3:29)

The contents of the final book of the Pentateuch, Deuteronomy, are almost sandwiched between two curious references to a detestable idol: Baal Peor. At the conclusion of the first part of Moses' farewell speech to the Israelites, the text informs us that when Moses relinquished the baton of Jewish leadership to Joshua, "the Israelites had settled in the valley, opposite the Temple of Peor" (Deuteronomy 3:29). Then at the closing of the book, in a poignant passage summarizing Moses's life, the text reads: "And He [God] buried [Moses] in the valley in the Land of Moab opposite the Temple of Peor; no human being knows his burial place until this day" (Deut. 34:6).

Is it not strange that the only real landmark by which to identify Moses's grave is "opposite the Temple of Peor"? What makes these references especially startling is the disgusting manner in which this idol was served: by defecating in front of it! What kind of idolatry is this? And what type of repulsive individuals would it be likely to attract?

Furthermore, the Sages of the Talmud (B.T. Sanhedrin 106a) suggest that when Balaam advised the Moabites on how to vanquish the Israelites, he suggested that they bring Moabite women to entice the Israelites and then assimilate them into their culture. In effect, Balaam was explaining that, although no external soothsayer or prophet could get the Almighty to curse Israel, the Israelites could in fact curse themselves out of existence through sexual licentiousness with gentile women. And so, "the Israelites dwelt in Shittim, and began to engage in harlotry with the daughters of Moab" – but God was not angry at them. It was only when "they became attached to Baal Peor that the wrath of God flared up against them" (Numbers 25:1-3). Sexual immorality led to idolatrous worship of Peor – and it was this idolatry that would ultimately ruin Israel.

What is it about Peor that is not only abominable but also so dangerous? Balaam's advice causes the Israelites to degenerate to lower and lower depths and the sexual debauchery becomes interchanged and intermingled with the worship and joining "together" with Peor. At this point, God tells Moses to take all the leaders of the nation and to slay them under the rays of the sun; but no sooner does Moses give this command than an Israelite (Zimri ben Salou, a prince of the tribe of Simeon) cohabits (joins together with) the Midianite princess Cosbi bat Zur – a flagrant and disgustingly public act of rebellion against Moses, his teaching and his authority. It appears as though Jewish history was about to conclude even before it had a chance to begin – when Phinehas steps in and saves the day.

Phinehas seems to have been the antidote to Balaam, who, as we know from our text, was the son of Beor, strikingly similar to Peor (and in Semitic languages "b" and "p" can be interchangeable). It clearly emerges from the Talmudic discussion (B.T. Sanhedrin 64a) that Peor is the nadir – the lowest

depth – of idolatrous practice. Is defecating before an idol the worst expression of idolatrous behavior?
The first two chapters of the Book of Genesis begin with two stories of the creation of the human being. Rav Soloveitchik describes these as two ways of looking at human personality: the first he calls homo natura, natural man, the human being as an inextricable part of the physical and animal world. This is mechanistic man, scientifically predetermined and pre-programmed, devoid of freedom and so (ironically) freed from responsibility.
The second aspect of the human personality is introduced in the second chapter of Genesis with God's breathing the breath of life, a portion of His very essential self (as it were), His soul, into the clay body He has just formed. This results in homo persona, a vitalistic and free human being, responsible for his actions and charged with the obligation to perfect, or complete, God's imperfect and incomplete world.
And God created homo persona! Homo persona is given the command to refrain from eating the forbidden fruit, to control his physical drives and impulses, to recreate himself as well as the world around him.
Peor says that man must give back to God his animal and physical excretions, that man cannot be expected to rise above his nature and become God's partner. Moses taught, on the other hand, that man can and must enable, uplift and sanctify his material being until he can truly see himself as "only a little lower than God, crowned with honor and glory."
Moses and Phinehas are the antithesis of Balaam and Peor, and so Moses is buried opposite Peor.
Shabbat Shalom!

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Drasha

By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Parshas Vaeschanan

Living Proof

When relating the greatness of Jewish revelation, Moshe tells us something unique about our heritage. In fact, it is a powerful detail that separates us from any other civilization on the face of this earth.
He says: "For inquire now regarding the early days that preceded you, from the day when Hashem created man on the earth, and from one end of heaven to the other end of heaven: has there ever been anything like this great thing, or has anything like it been heard? Has a people ever heard the voice of God speaking from the midst of the fire, as you have heard, and survived?" (Deuteronomy 4:34)
What strikes me as odd is the latter part of the verse the words "and survived." Isn't the great claim that Jews heard Hashem speak not through an intermediary but rather directly to them at Sinai?
Why then does Moshe add the words, "and survived?" Isn't our direct conversation with the Almighty absolute proof of undeniable Divinity? And though the commentaries point out that survival after such revelation is surely miraculous, survival after revelation surely does not sound as powerful as the revelation itself.
Moshe could have just as well stated, "Has there ever been anything like this great thing or has anything like it been heard? Has a people ever heard the voice of God speaking from the midst of the fire as you have heard?"
That alone should prove our unique qualities to any skeptic. Obviously, the addendum, "and survived!" adds a unique Jewish perspective.
The prospective employee walked in to the president's office seeking a job. After an extensive interview, the fellow was offered a job with a decent salary.
"Are there health benefits?" he asked.
"No, young man," the president responded, "we do not offer health benefits."
"Oh," the young man countered, "in my last job we had a full medical and dental package! Tell me," he added, "is there sick pay?" "I'm sorry son," responded the boss, "in this company, you get only paid for the days you work!"
"Well," protested the eager want-to-be worker, "in my last job they gave me two weeks sick pay! But tell me," he offered, "are there paid vacations?"
"I'm sorry," the boss responded once again, "there are no paid vacations, but you can have a week off in August without pay!"
"What?" retorted the astonished young man. "In my last job we each had one-month paid vacation! Well, are there year-end bonuses at least?"
"NOOO!" the prospective boss bellowed, tired of the young man's questions.
"Do you give us a car?" the prospective employee pursued.
Again, this time quite emphatically, the boss responded, "No!" At this point, the president of the company did not let his prospective continue his inquisition; instead, he asked one simple question of his own.
"I don't understand," he said. "If your last employer gave you full health benefits, sick days, paid vacations, cars, and end-of-year bonuses, why in the world would you want to switch to this company?"
The young man shrugged. "My old company went bankrupt two weeks after it started!"
Moshe Rabbeinu asks Klal Yisrael the 4,000 year-old question. While many nations tell stories about great miracles that occurred to the founders, never is there an entire race who can say "my grandfathers and grandmothers witnessed the miracles!"
Judaism is the only religion that proudly declares that 600,000 adult men, and an equal or greater number of women and children, stood at Mount Sinai and saw God speak to them directly. They passed on that great vision to their children, and their children to their children, until this very day. "It is not an esoteric fable," says Moshe, "They lived!" The vision of Sinai is not ancient history. The vision is alive!
Others tell tales of miraculous events witnessed by a handful of disciples who left no descendants. Maimonides traces history from the foot of Sinai to the footstools of the Talmud!
Thus Moshe declares to his people a message that as relevant to us as it was them in the arid desert some 3,312 years ago.
There is no nation on the face of this earth, which claims to have experienced multitudes of miracles occur to masses of people — all of whom lived to pass the revelation to their children's ears.
Yes, in other cultures, there may be tales of a few miraculous events attributed to a few people. But when you dig for the roots and the original protagonists, you won't find them they went bankrupt.

Dedicated by Mr. and Mrs. Larry Atlas in memory of David Atlas

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Mezuzah Mysteries

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question #1: The Pantry Predicament

Several frum families have recently moved to an apartment complex where the residences are virtually identical. Each apartment has a small pantry off the kitchen, and we need to know whether the pantry doorway requires a mezuzah, and if so, where to place it. Each family has asked this question from its posek, and collectively there have been four completely different answers.

A. Sarah was told that she should place a mezuzah on the righthand side of the door as one enters the pantry from the kitchen.

B. Rivkah was told to place the mezuzah on the opposite side – on the righthand side as one leaves the pantry to reenter the kitchen.

C. Rachel was told that she does not need a mezuzah at all.

D. Leah was told to place two mezuzos, one on each side.

How can there be four different opinions how to place the mezuzah? Furthermore, since we know that one always places the mezuzah on the righthand side entering the room (Yoma 11b), why were Rivkah and Leah told to put mezuzos on the left side?

Question #2: Kitchens and Living Rooms

Reuven just moved into a new house where the entrances to several rooms are really openings in the walls, rather than full doorways, as is not uncommon in modern houses. Do these entrances require a mezuzah?

The "Ten Commandments" of Mezuzah

The laws governing where one places a mezuzah are indeed complicated, and we remind our readers to ask his or her posek what to do in each specific situation. The Rambam (Hilchos Mezuzah 6:1) codifies ten necessary requirements that must be fulfilled for a house or room to be obligated to have a mezuzah.

1. The room must have a minimum area of four amos by four amos (which is about fifty square feet). In the Rambam's opinion, it is not necessary that each side be at least four amos wide – if the room or building's area is at least sixteen square amos one must place a mezuzah on its entrance. Thus, according to the Rambam's opinion, a room that is three amos wide but six amos long requires a mezuzah.

However, the Rosh and others disagree, contending that a room three amos wide and six amos long does not require a mezuzah since it does not have four amos in each dimension. In other words, the Rosh contends that a normal living area must be at least four amos per side.

The authorities accept the Rambam's position as the primary halachic opinion, and therefore one is required to place a mezuzah at the doorway to a room that is sixteen square amos even if it is narrower than four amos (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 286:13). Nevertheless, one does not recite a beracha when placing only this mezuzah. Instead, one should recite a beracha prior to placing a different mezuzah on a doorway that all authorities require a mezuzah, and after installing that mezuzah, put up a mezuzah on the door of the room that is narrower than four amos (Shach). (This general rule applies in any case when there is a safek whether to install a mezuzah. Do not recite a beracha, but, optimally, place this mezuzah immediately after putting up a different mezuzah that requires a beracha, thereby including the safek situation.)

Let us now return to the rest of the Rambam's Ten Mezuzah Rules – that is, the ten necessary conditions that require a house or room to have a mezuzah.

2. The entrance must have sideposts on both sides. I will soon explain what this means.
3. The entrance must have a mashkof, that is, something that comes down vertically, similar to the way a lintel functions as the top of a doorway.
4. The room or house must be roofed. An enclosed yard or porch without a roof does not require a mezuzah, although sometimes the doorway to an unroofed yard or porch functions as an entrance to the house and requires a mezuzah for this reason. However, a doorway of an unroofed room or building that is not an entranceway to a house does not need a mezuzah.
5. In the Rambam's opinion, a mezuzah is required only when the entrance has a door. This is a minority opinion; most Rishonim contend that the lack of a door does not absolve the requirement of a mezuzah. The accepted conclusion is to install a mezuzah in a doorway that has no door, but not to recite a beracha when doing so (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 286:15). (Again, the best option here is to place this mezuzah immediately after putting up a mezuzah in a place that all opinions require one, recite a beracha on that mezuzah and then immediately install the mezuzah on the doorway that lacks a door.)
6. The sideposts of the entrance are at least ten tefachim tall, which is between about 32 and 38 inches.
7. The house or room does not have the sanctity of a shul or beis medrash. The Rambam contends that a beis medrash is exempt from mezuzah. Nevertheless, most authorities rule that a beis medrash should have a mezuzah; accepted practice is to place a mezuzah on a beis medrash without a beracha. Common practice today is to treat a shul as a beis medrash and, therefore, to place a mezuzah on its door without a beracha.
8. The house or room is intended for human habitation. For example, stables and barns are absolved of the requirement of mezuzah.
9. The house or room is meant for an honorable use, as opposed to a bathroom or similar rooms, where we do not install a mezuzah.
10. The room or house is intended for permanent use. For example, do not install a mezuzah on a sukkah.

Having covered the basic rules of mezuzah, we can discuss these rules in more depth and resolve the pantry predicament mentioned above. The Gemara (Sukkah 3a) rules that a house smaller than four amos squared is too small to be considered a house, which affects many laws, including that it is exempt from mezuzah (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 286:13). Such a house is too small for habitation.

However, there are several important discussion points:

What if the "house" is not meant for general habitation, but is intended for a specific use, for which it is indeed suited, notwithstanding that it is smaller than four amos squared? Some authorities contend that an area smaller than four amos, but suitable for its intended purpose, requires a mezuzah (Chamudei Daniel, quoted by Pischei Teshuvah). Those who accept this position require a mezuzah on a pantry smaller than fifty square feet, since it is suitable for its specific use. This explains why Sarah was told that she should place a mezuzah on the righthand side entering the pantry. The rav she asked follows the approach of the Chamudei Daniel (Chovas Hadar, page 38, cites many authorities who rule this way).

Are you Coming or Going?

At this point, I want to explain the answer Rivkah received, to place a mezuzah on the right entranceway reentering the kitchen from the pantry. Many authorities do not accept the approach of the Chamudei Daniel, contending that since Chazal ruled that a house smaller than four amos squared does not require a mezuzah, this is without exceptions. However, some authorities maintain that, this room never requires a mezuzah in its own right, when it connects to a larger room, the doorway between them requires a mezuzah as an entrance to the larger room (Rabbi Akiva Eiger). If the pantry were to disappear, that doorway would serve exclusively as an entrance to the kitchen, and, as such, it requires a mezuzah already. In this case, the mezuzah should be placed on the righthand side entering the kitchen, and not the righthand side entering the pantry.

No Mezuzah Need Apply

At this point, we will explore a third approach to the above question. Rachel's rav ruled that her pantry doorway requires no mezuzah on either side. This is because he agrees that there is no requirement to place a mezuzah entering the pantry, notwithstanding that it is suitable to its purpose, since it is smaller than four amos squared. He also holds that there is no requirement to place a mezuzah entering the kitchen. Whereas Rabbi Akiva Eiger contends that we remove the pantry from the picture and require a mezuzah, this approach understands that it is viewed exclusively as an entrance to the pantry, not to the kitchen. If the pantry is too small to necessitate a mezuzah, then this doorway does not require a mezuzah at all (Daas Kedoshim 286:13).

Double Duty

What remains is to explain the answer that Leah received that one must place a mezuzah on both sides. This rabbi holds that perhaps the Chamudei Daniel is correct to install a mezuzah on the right side entering the pantry, and perhaps Rabbi Akiva Eiger is correct to install a mezuzah on the right side entering the kitchen. Although many authorities object to having mezuzos on both sides (Shu"t Maharam Shik, Yoreh Deah 287, see also Chovas Hadar), there are authorities who see no problem with having mezuzos on both sides when it is uncertain which side should have the mezuzah (Shu"t Binyan Tzion 1:100).

What Type of Sidepost is this?

At this point, let us discuss Reuven's question. In contemporary residences, the entrance of many of the rooms is often not via a door, but through an entranceway. Does such an entrance require a mezuzah? These doorways take many different forms. Sometimes there is a full doorway without a door, the entrance way being structured simply by having an opening in a wall.

This type of entrance is exceedingly common as the opening between a living room and a dining room.
In a second option, the entranceway is formed by having a wall separate the room on one side, whereas the other side of the entrance is a straight wall with no distinguishing =feature[K1] .
To determine whether these entrances require a mezuzah we need to discuss three of the above-mentioned rules categorized by the Rambam.
The first point is that since these entrances do not have doors, we do not recite a beracha even in a situation when we decide that we should place a mezuzah on the doorway. As I mentioned above, most authorities require a mezuzah in this case, but out of deference to the Rambam (rule #5) who rules that such a doorway does not require a mezuzah, we do not recite a beracha.
Our next germane question is whether the entrance has a mashkof (rule #3), meaning something similar to a lintel that makes the entrance appear like a doorway. As I mentioned above, an entrance must have a mashkof, a type of lintel at its top, to require a mezuzah.
What is a mashkof?
When building a house, one must be certain that the part of the building above a door or a window is properly supported so that it does not tumble down on its inhabitants, something that will ruin the contractor's reputation and potentially could hurt someone. A lintel is the architectural piece that provides this support. The lintel itself usually rests its own weight and that which it supports on sideposts.
The laws of mezuzah do not require that the sideposts or the lintel actually carry the weight of the area above the door. It is adequate if the sideposts and the mashkof, or lintel, only accomplish an aesthetic function of giving the entrance the appearance of a doorway. However, when there is no mashkof at all, that is, nothing comes down vertically to give the appearance of a lintel, there is no requirement to install a mezuzah, even when there are two proper sideposts and even when there is a door.
In modern construction, most doorways to kitchens, living rooms, dining rooms, and dens have a piece of wall that protrudes down from the ceiling to give the appearance of a mashkof. This is for aesthetic reasons – to provide more of a sense that this is a separate room. However, when the ceiling above the room's entrance is a horizontal plane without anything protruding downward to form a mashkof, there is no requirement to install a mezuzah even when the entrance has all the other appurtenances of a door.
Reuven ended up showing his new house to his rav, so that he could get a clear psak.
His rav pointed out that the entrance to Reuven's kitchen has no mashkof, and therefore there is no requirement to place a mezuzah there. However, both the entrance to his living room and the opening between his living room and dining room do have a section like a wall coming down from the ceiling to form the appearance of an entranceway. This qualifies halachically as a mashkof.
Is this considered a sidepost?
The rav then examined the other room entrances to see if they required mezuzos. At this point, we need to examine the situation, quite common in modern construction, when there is no sidepost that supports a lintel, but there is an end of a wall that provides some of the asthetic appearance that there is an entrance to the room. To understand whether this is considered a sidepost for the purposes of requiring a mezuzah, I will quote a passage of the Gemara:
"Ameimar said: An entranceway formed by a corner (in Aramaic de'ikarna) requires a mezuzah. Rav Ashi said to Ameimar: 'But it has no sidepost!' To which Ameimar retorted, 'these [that is, the corners of the wall] are its sideposts'" (Menachos 34a).
What is meant by "an entranceway formed by a corner"?
A Sidepost Created by the End of a Wall
The Rosh (Hilchos Mezuzah #14) explains that the case is where one entire wall of the room or house is missing, and thus the entranceway is created by the wall ending, rather than the existence of an actual door. This is exactly what we find in modern construction, where the entrances to kitchens, dining rooms, living rooms, dens, and hallways are often created without a proper entranceway, but simply by a wall. Rav Ashi rules that since these rooms have no sideposts on that side, there is no requirement to place a mezuzah. Ameimar disagreed, contending that the "ends" of the walls qualify as sideposts. Both scholars agree that if one side of the entrance does not have the end of a wall, but is a continuing wall, that there is no sidepost on that side. Does this automatically remove the requirement of mezuzah? For this we need to examine a different passage of Gemara.
Later in its discussion, the Gemara notes that this is a matter disputed by Tannayim, the Sages contending that there is obligation of mezuzah unless the entrance has both sideposts, and Rabbi Meir requiring a mezuzah when the solitary sidepost is on the right side, but not when there is only a sidepost on the left side.
Do we rule like the Sages or like Rabbi Meir?
The Rambam (rule #2) concludes like the Sages, and, therefore, in his opinion, one needs a mezuzah only when there are two sideposts. This is also the conclusion of the Shulchan Aruch. This approach exempts both the entrance to Reuven's kitchen and the entrance to his dining room from the mitzvah of mezuzah. (We noted above that his kitchen did not require a mezuzah anyway because of the lack of a mashkof.)
However, most authorities rule that if there is a right sidepost one should place a mezuzah there, albeit without a beracha.
So now Reuven has his answer: The rooms where there is a right sidepost upon entering require a mezuzah without a beracha, whereas those where there is no right sidepost do not.
Mezuzah Rewards
Aside from fulfilling a mitzvah commanded by Hashem, the mezuzah reminds us of Hashem's presence, every time we enter and exit our houses. We touch the mezuzah whenever we enter or exit a building to remind ourselves of Hashem's constant presence and protection. The mezuzah is thus a physical and spiritual protective shield. In addition, the Gemara teaches that someone who is meticulous in his observance of the laws of mezuzah will merit acquiring a nice home (Shabbos 23b). We thus see that care in observing this mitzvah not only protects one's family against any calamity, but also rewards one with a beautiful domicile. May we all be zocheh to always be careful in our observance of the laws of mezuzah and the other mitzvos, and reap all the rewards, both material and spiritual, for doing so!

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COVENANT & CONVERSATION

The Right and the Good - VA'ETCHANAN

Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks ZT"L

Vaetchanan image wrong way right way signpost ethics morality good bad direction signs
Buried among the epic passages in Va'etchanan – among them the Shema and the Ten Commandments – is a brief passage with large implications for the moral life in Judaism. Here it is together with the preceding verse:
Be very vigilant to keep the commandments of the Lord your God, and the testimonies and decrees with which He has charged you. Do what is right and what is good in the Lord's eyes, so that it may go well with you, and you may go in and take possession of the good land that the Lord swore to your ancestors to give you.
Deut. 6:17-18
The difficulty is obvious. The preceding verse makes reference to commandments, testimonies, and decrees. This, on the face of it, is the whole of Judaism as far as conduct is concerned. What then is meant by the phrase "the right and the good" that is not already included within the previous verse?
Rashi says it refers to "compromise (that is, not strictly insisting on your rights) and action within or beyond the letter of the law (lifnim mi-shurat ha-din)." The law, as it were, lays down a minimum threshold: this we must do.

But the moral life aspires to more than simply doing what we must.[1] The people who most impress us with their goodness and rightness are not merely people who keep the law. The saints and heroes of the moral life go beyond. They do more than they are commanded. They go the extra mile. That, according to Rashi, is what the Torah means by "the right and the good." Ramban, while citing Rashi and agreeing with him, goes on to say something slightly different:

At first Moses said that you are to keep His statutes and his testimonies which He commanded you, and now he is stating that even where He has not commanded you, give thought as well to do what is good and right in his eyes, for He loves the good and the right.

Now this is a great principle, for it is impossible to mention in the Torah all aspects of man's conduct with his neighbours and friends, all his various transactions and the ordinances of all societies and countries. But since He mentioned many of them, such as, "You shall not go around as a talebearer," "You shall not take vengeance nor bear a grudge," "You shall not stand idly by the blood of your neighbour," "You shall not curse the deaf," "You shall rise before the hoary head," and the like, He went on to state in a general way that in all matters one should do what is good and right, including even compromise and going beyond the strict requirement of the law… Thus one should behave in every sphere of activity, until he is worthy of being called "good and upright."

Ramban is going beyond Rashi's point, that the right and the good refer to a higher standard than the law strictly requires. It seems as if Ramban is telling us that there are aspects of the moral life that are not caught by the concept of law at all. That is what he means by saying "It is impossible to mention in the Torah all aspects of man's conduct with his neighbours and friends." Law is about universals, principles that apply in all places and times: Do not murder. Do not rob. Do not steal. Do not lie. Yet there are important features of the moral life that are not universal at all. They have to do with specific circumstances and the way we respond to them. What is it to be a good husband or wife, a good parent, a good teacher, a good friend? What is it to be a great leader, or follower, or member of a team? When is it right to praise, and when is it appropriate to say, "You could have done better"? There are aspects of the moral life that cannot be reduced to rules of conduct, because what matters is not only what we do, but the way in which we do it: with humility or gentleness or sensitivity or tact.

Morality is about persons, and no two persons are alike. When Moses asked God to appoint his successor, he began his request with the words, "Lord, God of the spirit of all flesh." (Num. 27:16) On this the Rabbis commented: what Moses was saying was that each person is different, so he asked God to appoint a leader who would relate to each individual as an individual, knowing that what is helpful to one person may be harmful to another.[2] This ability to judge the right response to the right person at the right time is a feature not only of leadership, but of human goodness in general.

Rashi begins his commentary to Bereishit with the question: If the Torah is a book of law, why does it not start with the first law given to the people of Israel as a whole, which does not appear until Exodus 12? Why does it include the narratives about Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, the patriarchs and matriarchs and their children? Rashi gives an answer that has nothing to do with morality – he says it has to do with the Jewish people's right to their land. But the Netziv (R. Naftali Zvi Yehudah Berlin; 1816-1893) writes that the stories of Genesis are there to teach us how the patriarchs were upright in their dealings, even with people who were strangers and idolaters. That, he says, is why Genesis is called by the Sages "the book of the upright."[3] Morality is not just a set of rules, even a code as elaborate as the 613 commands and their rabbinic extensions. It is also about the way we respond to people as individuals. The story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden is at least in part about what went wrong in their relationship when the man referred to his wife as Ishah, 'woman,' a generic description, a type. Only when he gave her a proper name, Chavah, Eve, did he relate to her as an individual in her individuality, and only then did God make "garments of skins for Adam and his wife, and clothed them." (Gen. 3:21)

This too is the difference between the God of Aristotle and the God of Abraham. Aristotle thought that God knew only universals not particulars. This is the God of science, of the Enlightenment, of Spinoza. The God of Abraham is the God who relates to us in our singularity, in what makes us different from others as well as what makes us the same.

This ultimately is the difference between the two great principles of Judaic ethics: justice and love. Justice is universal. It treats all people alike, rich and poor, powerful and powerless, making no distinctions on the basis of colour or class. But love is particular. A parent loves their children for what makes them each unique. The moral life is a combination of both. That is why it cannot be reduced solely to universal laws. That is what the Torah means when it speaks of "the right and the good" over and above the commandments, statutes, and testimonies.

A good teacher knows what to say to a struggling student who, through great effort, has done better than expected, and to a gifted student who has come top of the class but is still performing below their potential. A good employer knows when to praise and when to challenge. We all need to know when to insist on justice and when to exercise forgiveness. The people who have had a decisive influence on our lives are almost always those we feel understood us in our singularity. We were not, for them, a mere face in the crowd. That is why, though morality involves universal rules and cannot exist without them, it also involves interactions that cannot be reduced to rules.

Rabbi Israel of Rizhin (1796-1850) once asked a student how many sections there were in the Shulchan Aruch. The student replied, "Four." "What," asked the Rizhiner, "do you know about the fifth section?" "But there is no fifth section," said the student. "There is," said the Rizhiner. "It says: always treat a person like a mensch."

The fifth section of the code of law is the conduct that cannot be reduced to law. That is what it takes to do the right and the good.

[1] See Lon Fuller, The Morality of Law (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1969), and Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein's much reprinted article, "Does Jewish Tradition Recognize an Ethic Independent of the Halakhah?" in Modern Jewish Ethics, ed. Marvin Fox (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1975), pp. 62–88.

[2] Sifre Zuta, Midrash Tanhuma and Rashi to Numbers ad loc.

[3] Ha-amek Davar to Genesis, Introduction.

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Rabbi Yochanan Zweig

This week's Insights is dedicated to the memory of an individual who was instrumental to the development of the Yeshiva's campus: Mr. Sami Rohr of blessed memory.

An Eternal Present

I beseeched Hashem at that time […] (3:23).

This week's parsha opens with Moshe recalling when he implored Hashem to allow him to enter Eretz Yisroel, and how Hashem became angry with him and rejected his request. Rashi (ad loc) points out that the word for implore in Hebrew is a derivation of the word "chinun," which means to ask for a gift. Rashi goes on to explain that, while the righteous could ask Hashem to give them what they deserve based on their good deeds, the righteous request that Hashem give them "gifts for free" instead. However, this notion requires further clarification.

Shlomo Hamelech writes, "he that abhors a gift will live" (Mishlei 15:27). This principle is further clarified by Chazal who deride receiving gifts by saying, "When those who receive gifts became numerous, the days became few and years short, as it is written, 'He who hates gifts shall live'" (Sotah 47b). Several Talmudic sources likewise indicate that one must be careful not to receive gifts. Therefore, asking for a gift seems to go against the very nature of what Judaism stands for! So why does Rashi say that the righteous ask Hashem for a gift?

In truth, Shlomo Hamelech's principal of abhorring gifts needs to be more fully understood. Are we to believe that a person shouldn't accept a gift from his parents or spouse? Should he really abhor the pen holder that his child

will inevitably bring home from kindergarten and proudly present to him as a gift?

Like every part of the Torah, the explanation lies in a close reading of the verse. Shlomo Hamelech says that abhorring a present will enable a person to "live." What did he mean?

As Ramchal explains in the beginning of the Derech Hashem, the Almighty created the world in order to give man the ultimate "good." The very essence of this structure requires us to earn this "good" through a system of making decisions that will result in reward or punishment. Ramchal goes on to explain that the reason Hashem didn't just bestow this "good" on mankind is because that would be akin to receiving charity. Therefore, Hashem gives the opportunity to earn this reward, so that we feel it is truly ours and a product of our efforts. This "product of our efforts" is what gives our existence meaning; thus, it allows us to feel that we exist.

When a person receives a gift it takes away from his feeling of existence, and this is why it is embarrassing; it is as if we are not able to provide for ourselves. This is why Shlomo Hamelech said, "he who abhors a gift will live." Providing for oneself is what affirms that our existence is justified.

The only exception to this is receiving gifts based on a relationship. There is no issue when receiving gifts from one's parents, spouse, or children because those gifts are an expression of love. In fact, receiving this expression of love is an incredible validation of oneself. This is what the righteous are asking for; "Hashem please give me a gift as an expression of our close relationship, not merely because I have earned it like a paycheck." Receiving a gift from Hashem is an incredible affirmation of the relationship, which is what every tzaddik desires – a close relationship with Hashem.

Wholly-ness

Hear, O Israel: Hashem our God, Hashem is One (6:4).

Toward the end of this week's parsha, we have perhaps the most famous possuk in the entire Torah: "Shema Yisrael Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Echad" (6:4). This verse constitutes what amounts to the Jewish pledge of allegiance, as it were, and is recited (at least) twice daily.

Rashi (ad loc) interprets this possuk in a novel way; "today Hashem is our God and not the God of the other nations of the world, but in the future He will be recognized by all the nations of the world. This is in accordance with the possuk 'On that day, Hashem will be One and His Name One'" (Zecharia 14:9). Seeing as the shema is a Jewish affirmation of faith it seems a little odd that we place such an emphasis on what the rest of the world does or does not believe.

Meaning, declaring that Hashem is our king fulfills the requirements of a pledge of allegiance. But why should "our" shema focus on the prophetic vision regarding the future religious beliefs of the rest of the world?

Ramchal, in his introduction to what is probably his most famous work, the Messilas Yesharim (Path of the Just), makes a remarkable statement: "The essence of all this (i.e. cultivation and correction of character traits) is that a person conforms all his actions and traits to what is just and ethical. Our sages have summarized this idea: 'All that is praiseworthy to the doer and brings him praise from others' (Avos 2:1). That is to say – all that leads to the essence of the true good, namely strengthening of Torah and repairing the brotherhood of nations."

We see from here a very fundamental element of Jewish philosophy, and one that people often overlook. One of the major reasons that we have to instill in ourselves proper character traits and conduct ourselves in an ethical and just manner is to impress upon the rest of the world the value of Hashem's way of life as proscribed to us through the Torah.

The reason for this, as explained by Ramchal in the Messilas Yesharim, is to bring unity to the world. In other words, when there is a recognition that "our" God's way of living is the proper way to live, we bring recognition to the world of the One True God. Recognizing that we (i.e. the entire world) are all children of Hashem will bring unity to the world. That is, all the nations will then know that the entire world is really just one large "family." This is why the shema contains the prophetic vision of the future. We must certify daily that we accept this responsibility to make Hashem known to the rest of the world. We cannot merely focus on ourselves; we have to undertake the mission of unifying the world with the recognition of the One True God. This will herald in the time of the ultimate redemption and this is why this parsha is read following Tisha B'Av. May we be zocheh to achieve this redemption speedily in our days.

Parashat Va'etchanan **5756** - "The double motif of Shema"

The Weekly Internet

P A R A S H A - P A G E

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This week's Parasha-Page has been dedicated by Rabbi Dr. Eli Turkel, to the memory of his father, Israel (Reb Yisroel Shimon) Turkel, O.B.M.

Parashat Va'etchanan 5756

__THE DOUBLE MOTIF OF "SHEMA"__

Hear O Israel ("Shema Yisroel"), Hashem is our L-rd, Hashem is One! Love Hashem with all your heart, all your soul and all your wealth...Teach the words of the Torah to your children; speak them while sitting at home and while on the road, when you go to sleep and when you rise. (Devarim 6:4,5,7)

The above verses from this week's Parasha begin the prayer known as "Keriyat Shema". Reading the Keriyat Shema twice daily constitutes a biblical injunction. The Gemara tells us why this particular selection is read as the first of the three selections that comprise the Keriyat Shema:

Said Rabbi Yehoshua ben Korchah: Why is Shema Yisrael read before V'haya Im Shamoa? Because it is necessary to first accept upon ourselves Hashem's sovereignty [by saying "Hear O Israel...] before we accept upon ourselves to fulfill His commandments [in V'haya Im Shamoa]. (Mishnah, Berachot 13a)

The Mishnah makes it clear that the primary emphasis of the verses of Shema Yisrael is that we are accepting upon ourselves Hashem as our King.

II

However, the Gemara later in Berachot points out what would appear to be an entirely different theme in Shema Yisroel:

Said Rebbi Shimon Bar Yochai: It is appropriate to read Shema Yisrael before V'haya Im Shamoa because Shema Yisrael instructs us to learn the Torah ourselves, while V'haya tells us to teach it to others [and one cannot teach the Torah before learning it one's self - Rashi]. (Berachot 14b)

From this it would appear that the keynote of Shema Yisrael is that we must learn the Torah. As the Gemara (ibid.) continues, the two sources do not disagree; Shema Yisrael underscores *both* the theme of accepting Hashem's sovereignty and of learning His Torah.

The Torah-learning theme that Rebbi Shimon bar Yochai attested to is again evident in a statement he himself made elsewhere.

Said Rav Yochanan in the name of R' Shimon bar Yochai: One who reads Shema Yisrael morning and evening has fulfilled the injunction thatt "the words of this Torah shall not move from your mouth (Yehoshua 1:3)". (Menachot 99b)

Rebbi Shimon bar Yochai is telling us that Shema Yisrael not only *bids* us to learn the Torah -- it is a self-fulfilling lesson! The biblical requirement to recite Shema twice daily is not only meant to remind ourselves of our obligation to learn Torah. It is actually starting us on our way, providing us with a minimal amount of Torah study through reading Shema itself. Similarly:

When a child begins to speak, it is incumbent on his father to teach him two verses [in order to begin him in the study of Torah -- Shenot Eliyahu to Berachot 3:3]: "Moshe gave us the Torah, it is the legacy of the Jewish People (Devarim 33:4)": and "Hear O Israel...." (Sukkah 42a)

Shema Yisrael is the archetypal Torah-learning.

III

The two motifs encapsulated in Shema Yisrael are reflected in the

blessings we recite before saying Shema Yisrael in our daily prayers. In the morning, Shema is preceded by two blessings: The first ("Yotzer Or") describes the grandness of the celestial bodies which constantly bear witness to the exalted nature of their Creator. This is a proper blessing for the aspect in Shema Yisrael that emphasizes accepting Hashem's sovereignty -- a lesson that may be learned through reflecting on the heavenly bodies (see Tehillim 19:2; Parasha-Pages for Sukkot and Vayishlach 5756).

In the second blessing ("Ahava Rabba") we beseech Hashem to teach us His Torah. This corresponds to the second aspect of Shema. (The Gemara in fact tells us that this prayer serves not only as a blessing upon the recital of Shema, it serves as a blessing upon Torah learning in general as well (Berachot 11b)). The same two themes repeat themselves in the blessings that precede the evening recital of Shema ("HaMa'ariv Aravim" and "Ahavat Olam").

It may be shown that these two themes are actually one and the same. As the Midrash tells us:

We are told to love Hashem (Devarim 6:5)-- but how does one bring himself to love Him? The verse provides the answer: "The words of the Torah which I command you today shall remain in your hearts...(ibid 6:6)" -- through this, you will come to recognize the Creator and cleave to His ways. (Sifri, Devarim #33, quoted in part by Rashi to Devarim 6:6)

Learning Hashem's Torah is a direct path towards developing a love for Hashem and accepting His sovereignty. When we see the beauty of the Torah's laws and its outlook on life, we appreciate the love that Hashem has bestowed upon us by giving us His Torah and we show our love for Him in return. This is why the pre-Shema blessings on the Torah (Ahava Rabba in the morning and Ahavat Olam at night) both begin with an emphasis on the love that Hashem has shown us.

IV

The Torah learning involved in reciting Shema is poignantly described by the Maharal (16th century Prague):

Pronouncing the words of the Torah alone is not the desired goal. The main goal of learning Torah is understanding what is learnt, and it is normally impossible to *fully* understand any part of the Torah.

Reading the Shema however, is different. Although, Shema too, is a selection from the Torah, it is meant to be *read* although it ought to be understood as well, nevertheless, reading it alone is the most important part of the Mitzvah -- which is why we refer to it as "the *recital* of Shema ("Keriyat Shema"). When one enunciates the Shema properly, it is therefore Torah learning of the highest level [i.e., it is comparable to learning any other portion of Torah with the highest level of understanding]! (Maharal in "Netivot Olam", Netiv Ha'Avodah Ch. 9)

One source for Maharal's words is undoubtedly the Gemara's statement (Berachot 10b) that one who reads Shema as required by the Torah is performing a greater Mitzvah than learning Torah. Aren't we told that learning Torah is the greatest of Mitzvot (Pe'ah 1:1) -- how can the Mitzvah of reading the Shema surpass it? It must be that reading the Shema is a higher level of *Torah-learning*!

But why is the reading of Shema unique in this respect? Aren't there other portions of the Torah that must be read on various occasions (such as Viduy Bikkurim, Viduy Ma'asrot, Parashat Zachor, Parashat Sotah and Birchat Kohanim)? Why is it not said about them as well that reading them is reater than Torah-learning, according to the Maharal?

The answer to this question is that each of these selections are read only because the message contained in its text is appropriate to the situation during which it is read -- whether that message is a declaration, reminder, curse or blessing. We are not reading them as "portions of the Torah," but as statements specific to the circumstances with which they are dealing.

The reading of Shema, however, is different. Since the nature of its message is, as we have explained, "Learn Torah!" its very *reading* is meant as a Torah-learning experience as well. This is why simply *reading* the words of Shema can be considered a fulfillment of the biblical injunction to *learn* Torah!

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HALACHA FOR **5756** SELECTED HALACHOS RELATING TO PARSHAS VA'ESCHANAN **By Rabbi Doniel Neustadt**

For final rulings, consult your Rav.

Safeguard the Sabbath day... you shall not do any work... (5:12-14).

Crockpots on Shabbos

QUESTION: Is it permitted to place food in a crockpot on Friday afternoon in order for it to be cooked and warm for Shabbos?

DISCUSSION: There are basically two kinds of crockpots on the market. One(1) is designed as a free-standing pot which is filled with food and then placed on top of the heating element. The heating element does not encircle the pot at all. This type of crockpot may be used on Shabbos as long as the food in the pot is half-cooked(2) by the time Shabbos arrives(3).

The other type of crockpot(4) consists of a pot holding food which is inserted into another, bigger pot. The outer pot completely surrounds the inner pot (insert) on three sides. The heating element is built into the walls and base of the outer pot. The Halachic concern pertaining to this type of crockpot is the rabbinic prohibition of Hatmana, insulation. The Rabbis forbade the insulation of all foods, even prior to Shabbos, if the insulation will add heat to the food(5). Contemporary Poskim debate whether inserting the inner pot into the outer pot is considered "insulating" it, which is forbidden by the Rabbis, or not. There are three areas of dispute which we will attempt to describe briefly :

There are Rishonim who hold that it is forbidden to place a pot - even on Friday - in burning coals. It is considered as if the coals are insulating the pot. In their view, the only permissible way for a pot to be left on a fire is to place the pot on a grate, over the fire, not "in it"(6). Other Rishonim argue and hold that as long as the top of the pot is uncovered "and air can get to it," the pot is not considered to be insulated. Although the Rama(7) rules according to this view, it is not clear if he considers it sufficient that the top is uncovered so that "air can get to the pot," or if he would require that the sides be exposed as well. Thus, some Poskim(8) understand the Rama to hold that when a pot is surrounded on three sides ?as is a crockpotX, even if the top is not covered, it is still considered insulated, since no air can reach the sides of the pot.

The second issue to consider concerns the proximity between the outer and the inner pots. There is usually a small air pocket which separates the two pots. It is questionable whether this small space is sufficient to consider the insert as being physically separate from the outer pot and thus not being insulated by it, or if the outer pot is so close to the insert that it is insulating it(9).

The third issue to consider is whether Chazal prohibited insulation when its purpose is not to warm the food but to cook it. Since a crockpot is used for cooking, not for warming, it has been suggested that the rabbinic decree would not apply.

What do contemporary Poskim rule? Harav S.Z. Auerbach and Harav S.Y. Elyashiv rule stringently on all of the points listed above and do not allow the use of this type of crockpot on Shabbos. Harav S. Wosner and Harav C.P. Scheinberg rule leniently and permit this type of crock pot to be used(10). There are reliable sources who report that Harav M. Feinstein had also ruled leniently concerning this type of crockpot.

Harav Elyashiv, though, suggests a simple solution for those that want to use this type of crockpot. He suggests placing several stones(11) between the insert and the outer pot. This way, the insert will rest on the stones and not on the floor of the outer pot. Since the stones will raise the insert above the rim of the outer pot, the sides of the insert will be exposed to the air. In this fashion, no violation of Hatmana will occur.

Simply putting silver foil between the insert and the outer pot does not resolve the problem of Hatmana.

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FOOTNOTES:

1 Produced by Westbend, Inc. and others. 2 In time of urgent need, if it is cooked a third of the way through it is also permissible. 3 Note that we are not discussing removing and then returning the pot on Shabbos, nor are we discussing stirring or removing food from this pot on Shabbos. 4 Produced by Hamilton Beach, Rival and others. 5 For the reasons behind this rabbinic decree, see Shabbos 34a and Mishnah Berurah 257:1. 6 The Mechaber 253:1 rules like this opinion. According to the Chazon Ish 37:19, the Halacha is like this view. 7 OC 253:1. This is the Halachah according to the Mishnah Berurah. 8 This is clearly the understanding of the Pri Megadim 259:3 in explanation of the view of the Rashaba and the Taz. There is some uncertainty as to the view of the Chayei Adam and the Mishnah Berurah on this issue, see Otzros Hashabbos pg. 256 for a lengthy analysis. 9 See Shaar Hatzion 257:43. 10 Responsa from all of the quoted Poskim are published in Otzros Hashabbos pg. 514-522. 11 A more practical choice - in lieu of stones - would be to crumple large piece of silver foil into balls.

NCYI Divrei Torah 5756 VaEtchanan Parshat VaEtchanan Shabbat Nachamu

Guest Rabbi: **Rabbi Yaakov Feitman**

Young Israel of Beachwood, Ohio

Parshat Vaetchanan and Shabbat Nachamu are forever intertwined.

In our Chumashim. On our calendars. In our hearts. What is the inner meaning of this eternal bond? There are six opinions in the commentaries about the relationship between the two sets of Luchot the stone tablets of Torah and the two versions of the Ten Commandments printed in the Chumash:

1) The Ibn Ezra cites several of these opinions. The first is that the words on the original Luchot were the ones we find in Parshat Yitro and those on the second Luchot were those we read in our Parsha, Vaetchanan. This is also the opinion of the Maharal (Tiferes Yisrael, 44) and the Netziv.

2) The second is that one of the Luchot had the first set (Yitro) engraved into two columns and the second of the luchot had the second set (Va'etchanan) engraved in two columns as well.

3) The third is that the first set was on one of the luchot and the second set was on the other.

4) The Ramban and the Alshich HaKodesh hold that both of the Luchot were identical, using the text we find in Yitro, but Moshe Rabbeinu explained the Ten Commandments using the changes we find in this week's Sedra. For instance, when he told Klal Yisrael about Shabbat, he added the word Shamor from Va'etchanan to teach them about the prohibitions of Shabbat in addition to Zachor which conveys the positive commandment to make Kiddush.

5) Rashi (according to one version) holds that both sets contained composite of Yitro and Va'etchanan, using combination words such as zachorshamor.

6) Rabbi Yaakov Kaminetzky is of the original opinion that Shamor was written in both sets (for a more in depth review of these various opinions, see Shaarei Aharon, pages 157 159).

According to all opinions, however, even those who hold that the text of the Luchot was identical, the physical Tablets were different. Of the first Luchot, the Torah testifies that they were "the work of G d" but the second Luchot were the work of man and only the writing was G dly. The Malbim and the Netziv explain that the reason for this change from the first to the second Luchot related to the reduction of Klal Yisrael's spiritual level after the sin of the golden calf. Before the sin, spirituality triumphed over the material world and the Luchot untainted by sin would have constituted an eternal unforgettable reservoir of knowledge, understanding and inspiration. In the presence, however, of a sin as momentous as that of the golden calf, this lofty Madregah could not be maintained and the Luchot produced exclusively by G d had to be destroyed. It would seem, therefore, that the second Luchot, when compared with the first, constitute and ongoing indictment of the people of Israel. Their very existence, apparently inferior to their predecessors, cry out that we have sinned and fallen from the noble place our Creator planned for us. But there is another side to this story. One of the sources commonly cited to prove that the first Luchot exhibited the words in Parshat Yitro and the second the words in Va'etchanan is the following extraordinary Gemara (Bava Kamma 55a): Rav Chanina Ben Agul asked Rav Chiya bar Abba: why does it not say Tov ("good") in the first of the Ten Commandments but it does in the second? Rav Chiya bar Abba answered, before you ask me why it says Tov ask me if it says Tov, for I do not know if it says Tov or not. Go to Rav Tanchum ben Rav Chanilai who studied under Rav Yehoshua ben Levi who was an expert in Aggadah. He went to him and he answered "because they were destined to be broken. . . And if they were destined to be broken, what effect would that have on the word Tov? Rav Ashi answered "G d forbid that goodness should end for the people of Israel." Major commentaries (see Pnai Yehoshua and Maharatz Chayos to Bava Basra 113a) struggle with this Talmudic riddle. Could it be that major rabbis of the Talmud would be unfamiliar with simple verses in the Torah? Indeed, some Rishonim (see Tosfot ibid) come to that conclusion. Another approach, however, reinterprets Rav Chanina's question as dealing with the issue we discussed above. Are the Asarat HaDibrot we read in our Parsha the ones which were carved on the second Luchot or not? If that was the question, then one indeed requires an "expert in Aggadah" not just one who knows Chumash (see Pachad Yitzchak to Shavuot 12:2 and 18:18; Rabbi Reuven Margolios, HaMikra VeHaMesorah, pages 7 9). In any case, one conclusion which may clearly be drawn from this discussion is that, while the second Luchot were clearly on a lower Madregah than the first, they were able to include the word Tov (in the Mitzvah of honoring parents it says "LeMaan Yetev Lach" it will be good for you) while the first Luchot, which were destined to be broken, could not

. The Maharal, in his commentary on the Talmud, explains that Bnai Yisrael, before the sin of the golden calf, paralleled the level of Adam HaRishon the First Man in that their level was more angelic than human. The Madregah known as Tov, however, relates to human beings, with all their frailties, who live in this world, sin, repent and achieve goodness in the Next World where their sins are ultimately forgiven. In the words of the Maharal: "For all of Israel has a share in the World to Come. Even those who sin receive their punishment in this world but they have a share in the World to Come." Thus we see that there is something about the second Luchot which, while reflecting imperfection, allows through its human element for repentance and renewal.

Rabbi Gedalya Schorr, ZT"L, refers to this as this great power, the power to push aside the darkness and concealment and to reveal the light was not in the first Luchot. So what is the special Nechama the consolation which the prophet offers us this Shabbat? The Yalkut notes the double consolation and tells us it corresponds to the double sin and the suffering which resulted. But what is this dual consolation? One of the interpretations is given by the B'nei Yissachar (page 116b) in the form of a parable. A patient suffers from a near fatal fever and all medicines and therapies have failed. The doctors have given up hope and called for vidui (confession) and for the family to gather round. Despite the physicians having given up, the patient rallies, the fever breaks and his life is spared. But he is extremely weak, drained by the experience, unbelieving that he is actually cured. The less experienced physicians are alarmed at the patient's weak condition and wish to medicate him further but the more seasoned ones know better. They know that at the moment of near death, there is no fever and no disease, no illness and no malady. It is the near death experience which leaves the person weak indeed; but it is the weakness of the newborn baby, a frailty which brings with it the blessing of rejuvenation and new life. The prophet is told to console the people with the knowledge that G d knows that their remorse has been so great, their anguish over the loss of their holy places and even holy self has been so profound that they were considered nearly dead from the experience. That itself is their cure and salvation. But when they are told the good news, they cannot believe their ears. They deny the possibility,

they reject the happy tidings. Then they are told that it was the depth of their punishment, the torment of their pain itself which has saved them.
Programs such as the twelve steps of Alcoholics Anonymous have discovered only recently what the Torah has always taught us that usually someone cannot be motivated to pick himself up until he has hit rock bottom. Although at the moment of impact, that moment is the nadir the worst second in a life replete with failure in retrospect it will be viewed as the turning point toward salvation. It is thus the bottom and the most important of steps to the top. The loss of the first Luchot was a devastating blow to the people who had left Egypt, walked through the Red Sea and stood under the mountain to receive the Torah. But it was also the moment they were assured of an enduring Tov in their eternal lives. As they hit the rock bottom of idolatry and other sins, they saw the potential for an eternal Tov which would come to them in the form of Luchot formed by a human hand, a hand extended to them in love and willingness to accept their repentance. The bond between Va'etchanan and Nachamu is that which makes us most human and Jewish. It is the ability to triumph over sin and death, loss and destruction. And to be consoled that our suffering has not been in vain. Goodness has been preserved forever. And it will be ours.

B"H Torah Studies**Adaptation of Likutei Sichos** by **Rabbi Dr. Jonathan Sacks** Chief Rabbi of Great Britain 5756

Based on the teachings and talks of the Lubavitcher Rebbe Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson on the weekly Torah Portion - VAESCHANAN

The 9th of Av is the date on which both Temples were destroyed. Each year, on the subsequent Shabbat, we read as our Haftorah the famous passage of consolation from Isaiah "Comfort ye, comfort ye My people."
The Midrash tells us that this is, literally, a two fold consolation for the loss of the two Temples. And yet, would not one have been sufficient?
For the First Temple saw a greater revelation of the Divine Presence than the Second, so that our grief and our consolation for its loss encompasses our feelings for the Second Temple.
The Sicha, however, argues that there was something unique about the Second Temple, and that this has repercussions for our daily religious life. At the heart of its analysis is the distinction between two different approaches to G d: Through righteousness and through repentance.

ONE CONSOLATION OR TWO?

This week's Haftorah, the first of the "Seven Weeks of Consolation" after the 9th of Av, begins with the words "Comfort ye, comfort ye My people."
The Midrash explains that this apparent repetition refers in fact to two consolations and two tragedies: The loss of the First and Second Temples.
But this is not as simple as at first sight. The idea of consolation is that, when a calamity befalls a man, even though a second person may not be able to restore his loss, he still gives comfort by his sympathy.
And if the man has sustained not one loss but two, then he can certainly be comforted twice over.
But in the case of the Temples, the consolation lies in the fact that a Third Temple will be built to replace those that were destroyed. And since the First Temple was greater than the Second in the revelations it housed and the miracles it witnessed, replacing it would, in itself, be replacing the Second Temple as well.
The First contained all that was in the Second, and more. So it follows that the consolation for the loss of the First would in itself include consolation for the loss of the Second.
The answer is, that though the Second Temple was, in absolute terms, less exalted than the First, it still had certain unique virtues. Thus, the Talmud interprets the verse, "Greater shall be the glory of the latter house than the former," to refer to the Second Temple, which was greater than the first in its size and duration.
This is why there will be two consolations, for the Third Temple will combine the virtues of both its predecessors.

Tabernacle and Temple

To understand what the unique virtue of the Second Temple was, we must first see the way in which a Temple as such went beyond the Tabernacle that accompanied the Israelites in the wilderness. Both were "dwelling places" of G d's presence. But the Temple was a permanent dwelling, the Tabernacle a temporary one.
For, there are two elements in drawing down a high degree of holiness to this world:
(i) where the holiness is apparent in the physical, but it does not actually transform it. This is a manifestation of the power of the spirituality, in that it can even permeate so gross a being.
(ii) where the holiness actually transforms the physical; that the material becomes, as it were, a "vessel," or receptacle, to holiness. This is an even stronger revelation, whereby the "light" not merely affects, but intrinsically changes, the physical.
Similarly, the Tabernacle was holy: "And they shall make Me a Sanctuary and I will dwell in their midst."
Its sanctity extended even to the curtains, the beams, and the ground on which it rested. But these were not the source of its holiness. The source was in the revelation from Above, the infinite light of G d which shone within it. That is why, when the Tabernacle was moved, its previous resting place ceased to be holy ground. For its holiness was not from itself: It lasted only as long as the Divine Presence rested there.
But the sanctity of the Temple was vested in the physical materials from which it was built. Even after its destruction, the ground on which it rested was, and still is, sacred.
This is the inner meaning of the fact that the Temple was built by Solomon. For in his reign, "the moon reached its fullness," in the words of the Zohar. The sun gives light; and moon reflects it. And in spiritual terms, G d is the source of light, and the earth receives it. Whereas the Tabernacle had the sanctity of G d's light, the holiness of the Temple lay in the very material of which it was constructed, in the things of the earth which were dedicated to G d. It was as the "moon" which receiving G d's light and reflecting it outwards to the whole world.

REFLECTED AND GENERATED LIGHT

But there is a difference between the moon as it is now, and as it will be in the World to Come.
Now it draws its radiance from the sun. But in the future world, "the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun." It will shine, not with reflected light, but with its own.
And this is paralleled by the difference between the two ways that the world and its beings are purified and transformed.
We may be changed by a light that comes from above, as a pupil learns from his teacher. He may come to understand what he has been taught, to the extent that, through his own efforts, he reaches the very essence of the subject. But still he is a reflection of his teacher. He is like the moon, shedding a light that came to him from elsewhere.
We may, on the other hand, be changed by a light from within. When a person, for example, returns to G d after forsaking His will, he does not do so because of any revelation from Above. On the contrary, at the point of return, he is far from visions of G d. He does so because of a prompting from within. For every Jew, in the true depths of his being, seeks to do G d's will: It is merely that sometimes his inclinations get the better of him, and hide his real nature.
The essence of the Jew is that he is part of G d. And the change that he brings to his life when he returns to G d is from within, in the strictest sense. He penetrates the surface of his inclinations, and finds G dliness at the core of his self. "All flesh shall see . . . for the mouth of the L rd has spoken." He reaches the word of G d through his flesh itself, through seeing the real nature of his existence. Such a person is like the moon of the World to Come. The light he casts is from the fire that burns within him.

The Word, the Command, the Return

There are therefore three stages:

Receiving light from elsewhere, reflecting it, and generating light from within.

They are mirrored by three facets of Judaism:

Torah, the commandments (Mitzvot) and the act of return (Teshuvah).

Torah is the word of G d, the light from Above. Even though, when we learn Torah, we become united with it, Torah is always the giver of light and we are always the recipients. In our learning we add nothing to it, we merely strive to uncover what was already there.

But through the Mitzvot, we both receive and give light. By wearing tefillin or tzitzit we turn parchment and wool into holy objects. By abdicating our egos in favor of G d's will, we refine the world: "The Mitzvot were only given so that, by them, all creatures should be purified."

Whereas the Torah exists eternally in itself, the Mitzvot need the partnership of man. The Torah, although it speaks of the physical world, does not enter into it. But the commandments require physical acts and objects, and they change the fabric of the world. The Torah is like the "light of day" which illuminates but does not change that upon which it shines.

But the commandments are like the "light of a lamp" in which wick and oil are turned into flame. Nonetheless, the Mitzvot are still a reflected light. They need, first, the word of G d who commands them.

But the ba'al teshuvah the person who returns to G d has shut himself off from the word of G d, and returns because of a flame within himself that refuses to be separated from its source.

By the mitzvot a Jew sanctifies only what is permitted to him. But by teshuvah he sanctifies his whole past life, lived in the realm of forbidden acts. His past sins become his merits. And this is the unique virtue of the act of return: It sanctifies not only a part, but the whole of experience.

The Second Temple

We are now able to understand the unique significance of the Second Temple.

During the period of the First Temple, the Jewish people were in general at the level of "righteousness," living a life of obedience to G d's commandments. The light it gave to the world was a reflection of the will of G d.

But the Second Temple belonged to a time of repentance and return. The world was being sanctified from within, through Israel's own spiritual resources. Thus it is significant that its building was ordered by Cyrus, the king of Persia, a non Jew.

This is why we needed two consolations, "Comfort ye, comfort ye My people."

For the two Temples each had its own distinctive virtue. The revelations of G d's presence which belonged to the First were greater, but those of the Second were more inward. They issued from the very texture of the physical world.

Thus the Talmud says that the greatness of the Second Temple lay in its size (space) and its duration (time). For it drew its sanctity from man's own efforts to purify his finite world, not from G d as He is above space and time.

The consolation will be the Third Temple, in which the light from above and the light from within will combine.

WHAT CAN BE LOST, AND WHAT CANNOT

All inner meanings of the Torah have their reflection in Halacha (Jewish law).

We can see that the land of Israel had a greater sanctity during the First Temple than during the Second. For to take one example when Rosh Hashanah fell on Shabbat, the Shofar was blown throughout the land in the First Temple times, but in the Temple alone in the time of the Second.

On the other hand, the land lost some of its sanctity with the destruction of the First Temple, but none with the loss of the Second.

The laws attaching to the land of Israel show that the First Temple conferred a more intense holiness; the Second, a more permanent one. This can be compared to the two sets of tablets on which Moses received the Ten Commandments. The first set was the more miraculous: But they were broken. The second were not. So too the First Temple conferred greater holiness on Israel, yet when it was destroyed that sanctity was removed. But the holiness of the land in the time of the Second Temple persists for all time.

By reading this week's Haftorah, "Comfort ye, comfort ye My people," we remember not only what was lost, but what survives. The generation of righteousness may belong to the past and the future. But the generation of return is a present possibility. It is the enduring heritage of the Second Temple. And by turning possibility into fact we bring close the time of the Third Temple the twofold and final consolation.

(Source: Likkutei Sichot, Vol. IX, pp. 61 70.)

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In Memory of Rabbi Abraham Leibtag
Shiurim in Chumash & Navi by Menachem Leibtag

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for PARSHAT VA-ETCHANAN & EKEV

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

INTRODUCTION

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

1. The introductory speech (chapters 1-4);
- explaining why forty years have passed, followed by a short 'pep-talk' to prepare the nation for their conquest of the land, and the laws that they'll need to keep.

2. The main speech (chapters 5-26);
- in which Moshe reviews the actual set of laws (originally given at Har Sinai) that Bnei Yisrael must keep as they establish their nation after they conquer the Land, adding some 'rebuke' as he reviews them.

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

SETTING THE FRAMEWORK

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Even though the mitzvot should begin in the next pasuk, Moshe once again grabs this opportunity to explain their importance:
"[Keep these laws] so that you will fear the Lord your God, to keep **all** His statutes and commandments, which I command you... so that your days may be prolonged. Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe them - so that you will prosper... as God has promised you - in the land flowing with milk and honey" (see 6:2-3).

THE OPENING STATEMENT

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

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

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

Even though we all know this pasuk by heart, it's not so simple to translate - for it is not clear whether it is making two points, i.e.
(1) Hashem is OUR God [and nobody else's]
(2) Hashem is ONE - i.e. He is the ONLY God

Or, if it is making only one point, that:
(1) Hashem WHO is our God - He is the ONLY God

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

In the context of Sefer Devarim, the second understanding makes much more sense - for this opening statement of the law section is thematically linked to Moshe Rabeinu's introductory statement - at the beginning of this speech:
"**Hashem Elokeinu** karet imanu brit b'Chorev"
[Hashem, our God make a covenant with **us** at Mount Horev /=Mount Sinai] (see 5:2)

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

Recall as well that Moshe had made a similar statement - relating to this same theme - earlier in his first speech (in chapter four), when he explained their underlying purpose:
"See [comprehend] that I am teaching you [in the speech that will follow] **chukim** u-**mishpatim** that God had commanded **me to teach you** to observe on the land which you are about to inherit [compare with 6:1]

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

THE FIRST LAW

This most basic principle of faith and purpose - of "Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Echad" - is followed by one of the most important mitzvot - for it is a law that relates to one's overall attitude toward serving God and keeping His laws:
"And thou shalt love the **Lord** thy God with all your heart, and all your soul... And these words [i.e. the laws of the main speech] which I command thee this day, shall be upon thy heart. And you shall teach them repeatedly to your children, and speak about them..." (see 6:5-7).

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

From this point on, we find a complete set of laws, interspersed with many words of rebuke, which continue all the way until the end of chapter 26.
[This overall structure was discussed in last week's shiur, but it is recommended that you take a few minutes to scan through chapters 6 thru 26 to verify this point.]

THE TWO SECTIONS

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

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

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

A) the **Ha-mitzva** section - chapters 6-11
[Parshiot Va-etchanan thru Ekev]
B) the **Chukim & Mishpatim** section - chapters 12-26
[Parshiot Re'eh, Shoftim, Ki Tetzeh, & Ki Tavo]

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

'HEADERS' & 'FOOTERS'

Towards the beginning of Parshat Re'eh, we find a short introduction to a specific set of laws that is clearly referred to as '**chukim u-mishpatim**'. To verify this, review these psukim:
"For you are about to pass over the Jordan to go in to inherit the land which God is giving you... [There] you shall observe to keep all these **chukim & mishpatim** that I set before you this day" (see 11:31-32).
"**These** are the **chukim & mishpatim** that you are to keep in the land which God gave to your forefathers..." (see 12:1).

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

To 'balance' this 'header', towards the end of the speech we find another special pasuk that forms a very appropriate summary (what we refer to as a 'footer') for this entire unit:
"On this day, God is commanding you to keep these **chukim & mishpatim**, keep them with all your heart... " (see 26:16).
[Again, if you have time, scan chapters 12 thru 26, noting how there are no 'new headers' in the interim. Note also how many parshiot begin with the word 'ki' [when/if] and 'lo' [do not...], typical for a set of laws (just as we found in the set of laws in Parshat Mishpatim)!]

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

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

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

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

We posit that the Torah refers to the commandment of 'ahavat Hashem' as - **ha**-mitzva - for it is **the** [most important] mitzvah.
Note as well how the phrase that follows the mitzva of ahavat Hashem is: "ve-hayu ha-devarim ha-eileh asher anochi **metzaveh** etchem..."]

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

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

At the conclusion of Parshat Ekev we find a very 'worthy candidate' for a closing pasuk for this section:
"If, then, you faithfully keep – **ha-mitzva ha-zot** - that I command you, to **love** God... to follow His laws and to attach yourselves to Him. Then I will help you conquer the Land..." (see 11:22-25, noting its context!).

Here, not only do we find our key word – **ha-mitzva**, but the same context as well in regard to ahavat Hashem - loving God. Furthermore, this section serves as an appropriate summary, for here the Torah promises should Bnei Yisrael keep the proper attitude of ahavat Hashem, then God will surely assist them with the conquest of the Land.
[As you review 11:26-30, notice how these psukim form a small 'buffer' between these two sections, as the chukim u-mishpatim clearly begin with 11:31-32 which lead right into 12:1. / Note as well how the chapter division seems to have missed this rather obvious point.]

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

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

The theme of the **ha-mitzva** section is quite easy to identify, for its opening pasuk - as the famous pasuk of 'Shma Yisrael' says it all:
"**Shma Yisrael**... and you shall **love** the Lord your God with all your heart and soul... and these laws which I "**metzaveh**" - command you this day..." (see 6:4-6).

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

For example:

* Upon conquering the land, you may inherit an entire city with houses already built and vineyards already planted, etc. Don't let this affluence cause you to forget God... (6:10-15).
* When your children (who did not go through the desert experience) will ask you **why** we have to keep all these mitzvot, remind them and teach them about all the events of Yetziat Mitzrayim... (6:20-25).
* When you conquer your enemy, don't intermarry! etc. (7:1-5).

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

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

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

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

And for a finale, the final psukim of chapter 11 (see 11:26-30) conclude this section by promising a **blessing** or a **curse** on the land, depending if Bnei Yisrael will continue to keep this "**ha'mitzvah"**, once they settle the land.
[Note how the topic of this buffer section in 11:26-30 continues in chapter 27 (after the main speech is over); iy"h, we'll deal with this structure in the shiur on Parshat Ki Tavo.]

KRIYAT SHEMA

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

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

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

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

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

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

SECTION # 2 - THE CHUKIM & MISHPATIM UNIT

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE PROPER BALANCE

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

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

The summary pasuk of Section #2 (quoted above) alludes to the proper balance between them:
"This day, God commands you to keep these c**hukim & mishpatim**, and you should keep them with **all your heart** and all your soul..." (26:16).

This 'finale' closes not only the **chukim & mishpatim** section, but also beautifully relates it back to the **ha-mitzva** section. These chukim u-mishpatim must be kept **with all your heart and soul** - 'be-chol levavcha u-vechol nafshecha'.
[Note once again the textual parallel between this closing pasuk and the opening pasuk of the first section:
"ve-ahavta et Hashem Elokecha - be-chol levavcha u-vechol nafshecha" - and you shall **love** God with all your heart and all your soul..." (see 6:5, compare with 26:16)].

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

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

shabbat shalom,
menachem

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FOR FURTHER IYUN

A. BACK TO HAR SINAI

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

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

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

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

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

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

B. SOME 'ADDITIONS'

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

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

Does the above distinction explain this?

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

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

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

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

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

We begin with the account in Sefer Devarim, when Bnei Yisrael request that Moshe Rabbeinu act as an intermediary immediately after the completion of the Ten Commandments:

"Let us not die, then, for this fearsome fire will consume us; if we hear the voice of God any longer, we shall die! For what mortal ever heard the voice of the living God speak out of the fire, as we did, and lived? You go closer and hear all that Hashem says; then you tell us everything that Hashem tells you, and we will listen and do it" (5:22-24).

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

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

Sefer Shmot records a very similar incident that took place immediately following the Ten Commandments, which according to some commentators (see Ibn Ezra) describes the same event:

"All the people saw the thunder and lightning..., and when the people saw it, they fell back and stood at a distance and asked Moshe: You speak to us and we will listen, but let not God speak to us, less we die. Moshe answered them: **Be not afraid**, for God has come only in order to test you, and in order that the fear of Him may be with you forever..." (Shmot 20:15-17).

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

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

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

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

TYPE I: Positive (or Constructive) Fear

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

TYPE II: Negative Fear

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

THE MACHLOKET

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

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

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

Because God is indeed aware of Moshe's worry that there is a danger of the distance caused by yir'at Hashem, God chooses to begin the mitzvot, which He gives via Moshe to Bnei Yisrael with the commandment of ahavat Hashem - the love of God!

"Shema Yisrael... and you must love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might" (6:4-5).

To counter this potential danger of 'too much **yir'a**', God begins with the mitzva of **ahavat Hashem**! The love of God and the

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

PARSHAT VA-ETCHANAN - shiur #2

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

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

And why do Chazal interpret all of this as Jerusalem?

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

INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A GREAT VIEW

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE SAME TOUR GUIDE

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

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

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

However, note the special preface that God adds to this promise, and its similarity to our pasuk in Sefer Devarim:

"And God said to Avram after Lot had left him: **Lift up your eyes** and **SEE** from the place where you are - to the **north** and **south**, **east** and **west**, for this land that you see I will give to you and your offspring" (see Breishit 13:14-16).

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

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

THE FIRST BET ELOKIM

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

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

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

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

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

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

VIRTUAL JERUSALEM

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

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

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

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

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

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

shabbat shalom,
menachem

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FOR FURTHER IYUN

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

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

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

Which possibility does 3:28 support?

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

Does God explain to Moshe why His answer is no?

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

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

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

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

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

[How do these two accounts complement each other?
See Rashi & Chizkuni on 27:12.]

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

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

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

Is there a geographical reason as well for this name?
See Ramban 27:12.

[Note also the use of ayin.bet.reish. in Bamidbar 27:6-11!
Note also the use of verb 'latet' - to give - both in 27:7 and 27:12! (cute?)]

Relate your answer to this question to the above shiur.

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

By Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

I. BACK TO SINAI

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

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

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

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

1) 4:9-15

1') 4:32-36

2) 5:2-29

3) 9:7-10:11

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

1) 4:1-40

2) 5:1-6:3

3) 9:7-10:11

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

II. 'AREI MIKLAT: (CITIES OF REFUGE)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

III. SH'MA YISR'AEL

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

...and one final question. Note that the beginning of each of the "Sinai-speeches" begins with a curiously similar phrase (one which shows up a number of times in D'varim - and only in D'varim):

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

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

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

SUMMARY

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

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

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

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

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

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

* What does Sh'ma Yisra'el mean?

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

IV. MOSHEH "RABBENU" IN ACTION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE FIRST LESSON: Hashem IS THE ONE TRUE GOD

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

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

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

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

The focus of this speech is about who God is, as it were, and who He is not. [Note how Rambam, in the beginning of Hilkhot Avodah Zarah (Laws of Idolatry), outlines the "history" of idolatry.]

THE SECOND LESSON: THE VALIDITY OF MOSHEH'S PROPHECY

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

[Immediately after the "review" of the Decalogue...] These words Hashem spoke with a loud voice to your whole assembly at the mountain, out of the fire, the cloud, and the thick darkness, and He added no more (or He never ceased - see Rashi). He wrote them on two stone tablets, and gave them to me. When you heard the voice out of the darkness, while the mountain was burning with fire, you approached me, all the heads of your tribes and your elders; and you said, "Look,

Hashem our God has shown us his glory and greatness, and we have heard His voice out of the fire. Today we have seen that God may speak to someone and the person may still live. So now why should we die? For this great fire will consume us; if we hear the voice of Hashem our God any longer, we shall die. For who is there of all flesh that has heard the voice of the living God speaking out of fire, as we have, and remained alive? Go near, you yourself, and hear all that Hashem our God will say. Then tell us everything that Hashem our God tells you, and we will listen and do it." Hashem heard your words when you spoke to me, and Hashem said to me: "I have heard the words of this people, which they have spoken to you; they are right in all that they have spoken. If only they had such a mind as this, to fear me and to keep all my commandments always, so that it might go well with them and with their children forever! Go say to them, 'Return to your tents.' But you, stand here by me, and I will tell you all the commandments, the statutes and the ordinances, that you shall teach them, so that they may do them in the land that I am giving them to possess." You must therefore be careful to do as Hashem your God has commanded you; you shall not turn to the right or to the left. You must follow exactly the path that Hashem your God has commanded you, so that you may live, and that it may go well with you, and that you may live long in the land that you are to possess. Now this is the commandment... (D'varim 5:22-6:1)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The one powerful exception to this is the rule of manslaughter, as outlined in Bamidbar 35 (although it is alluded to in Sh'mot 21:13 - see Rashi ad loc.). In case someone intentionally murders a fellow, he is liable for death. On the other hand, if it is an unintentional act ("manslaughter"), the killer has the benefit of the protection of the city of refuge - and the blood relative may not go there and exact vengeance for his dead relative.

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

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

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

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

And...Zot haTorah - "This is the Torah". In the middle of his lesson, Mosheh stops to perform a Mitzvah which

demonstrates, better than any other, the complementary nature of action and attitude - and this is, indeed, the Torah. To borrow from Hillel - all the rest is commentary. In other words, the lesson of 'Arei Miklat is a lesson about the entire Torah.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

- as above, each teaches a distinct lesson.

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

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

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

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

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

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

* What does Sh'ma Yisra'el mean?

- it is the introduction of a new "lesson"

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

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

VIII. POSTSCRIPT

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

I once heard a beautiful explanation of this - albeit in a slightly different context - from Mori haRav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik zt"l. The Rov compared the two statements of Hazal regarding "Imitatio Dei":

A) "Just as He is gracious, you should be gracious; just as He is compassionate, so should you be compassionate etc." (BT Shabbat 133b)

B) "Just like He comforted the bereaved, so you comfort the bereaved; just as He visited the sick, so you visit the sick etc." (BT Sotah 14a)

He noted that in the first statement we are called to imitate Divine characteristics, as it were. The second statement, on the other hand, challenges us to imitate Divine actions, so to speak.

Instead of seeing these as either contradictory or parallel (but unrelated) statements, the Rov explained that the two of them are linked in series.

Unlike the way that the "world" thinks, that we act on behalf of someone because we care about them, the Torah is teaching us how to develop that compassion - by acting on their behalf. We do not develop good character by being born with it or waiting for it to come to us - we become compassionate by behaving compassionately. The second statement, imitating Divine actions (which the Torah mandates - see MT Evel 14:1), comes first, as it were. The second mandate, imitating Divine character, is the result of fulfilling the first.

In the same way, we understand why the Torah prefaced the "emotional" connection with God with the "mechanical" one. We come to love and fear God (and desire to cleave to Him) not as a motivation for fulfilling Mitzvot - rather as the result of that fulfillment.

We can also see this in the Parashah of K'riat Sh'ma:

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

(and how do we come to this intense level of commitment and love?)

Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

(See Sifri Va'Et'hanan #8, where the command to study is seen as a method for achieving love for God)

PARASHAT VA-ET'HANAN

by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

This week's shiur will be unusually brief.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Let me just give you an idea of the kind of reading I'm referring to. You are standing with your family and friends among a crowd of hundreds of thousands. Moshe Rabbeinu stands on a makeshift platform before the crowd, his voice rising majestically above the throng. Behind him, in the distance, you can see the rising peaks beyond the Jordan, the river you are soon to cross without Moshe. You listen as he speaks passionately, reminding you of where you have been and what you and your parents have done, both good and bad. He warns you of the dangers you will face -- the lure of idolatry, the

weakness of cowardice, the arrogance of self-sufficiency -- and drives home again and again that the most important thing of all is to remain faithful to Hashem. He delivers Hashem's promises of reward, reminds you of what Hashem has done and will do for you . . . with deep pathos, he reveals his overpowering desire to enter the Land and Hashem's almost cruel refusal to entertain his request. "But you -- you are going to the Land! You will cross the Jordan and merit the one thing I desire above all else."

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

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

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

LOYALTY TO HASHEM:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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