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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) at www.PotomacTorah.org. Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah archives.

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

From the saddest day of the year, Tisha B'Av, date of numerous disasters in Jewish history, we go only six days later to Tu B'Av, the most joyous day of the year. We read Devarim just prior to Tisha B'Av, so Tu B'Av always comes very close to or on Shabbat Vaetchanan.

After God decreed that the generation of the Exodus would die out over a period of forty years, the dying ended on the 40th year on Tu B'Av 2487, or 1274 BCE. The end of the dying indicated that all the Jews who were still alive would merit entering the land of Canaan and that all of their families would receive permanent land holdings. A tradition developed that on Tu B'Av, unmarried Jewish women would wear white clothes and dance in the fields surrounding Jerusalem. Unmarried Jewish men would go and select their brides from the available women. There is an amusing (not quite accurate) description that Tu B'Av is a Jewish version of Sadie Hawkins Day. Tu B'Av is the most joyous day of the Jewish calendar, even more joyous than Yom Kippur (the day when Hashem forgives our sins). Tu B'Av is a special day for an engagement or wedding. I am dedicating my remarks this week to our son Evan and his wife Heather, on the 15th anniversary of their engagement, which took place at the reception of a wedding that they attended together on Tu B'Av.

Jewish engagement traditions are different from those of most of the population. A theme of a Jewish engagement and wedding is that the heart follows the mind. A couple meet and engage in shidduch dating. They see each other only in public places to talk and get to know each other to decide whether they are compatible and choose to spend the rest of their lives together. In the secular community, it is common for passion to come first and then the wedding. The traditional Jewish approach and view is that a couple should meet, learn enough about each other to determine that their interests coincide, and then love will grow as they live and face the joys and challenges of life together.

Many unmarried young Jewish women and men work with a shadchan, an Orthodox community member who specializes in coming to know young men and women and seeks to introduce couples whom she or he believes will be compatible. During a period of shidduch dating, the young people meet only in public places. For example, they would not be alone in a home or building with the door closed. If one travels and must stay over, the two young people stay in different homes. Many of these couples are Shomer Negiah – they do not have any physical contact, not even shaking hands, until they are under the chuppah at their wedding. The main reason for these restrictions is that neither person should feel embarrassed if one of them decides not to move forward from shidduch dating to engagement and marriage. A couple

who practice Shomer Negiah would have had no physical contact, so they have no reason to be embarrassed should they end the shidduch dating by deciding not to become engaged.

In traditional Jewish communities, several children in a family may all use the services of a shadchan to find their spouses. My wife and I, whom our Rabbi introduced to each other, have been to numerous weddings of couples who met through a shadchan, and all I can think of led to happy marriages. As we celebrate Tu B'Av this Shabbat, may many young men and women meet their Beshert (soulmates or heaven-designated spouses) and go on the happy and fulfilling marriages.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah and Alan

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

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Velvel David ben Sarah Rachel; Moshe Aaron ben Leah Beilah (badly wounded in battle in Gaza but slowly recovering), Daniel Yitzchak Meir HaLevy ben Ruth; Ariah Ben Sarah, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Miriam Bat Leah; Yehudit Leah bas Hannah Feiga; Miriam bat Esha, Chana bat Sarah; Raizel bat Rut; Rena bat Ilsa, Riva Golda bat Leah, Sharon bat Sarah, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, and all our fellow Jews in danger in and near Israel. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah & Alan

Parshat Va'etchanan: Are We Meeting the Challenge of Inspiring Our Children?

By Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander * © 5781 / 2021
President and Rosh HaYeshiva, Ohr Torah Stone

Dedicated in memory of Israel's murdered and fallen, for the return of our hostages still in Gaza, for the refuah shlayma of our wounded in body or spirit, and for the safety of our brave IDF soldiers.

[Ed.: Rabbi Brander is on vacation this week, so his Associate Director, Yishai Hughes, has provided a special Dvar Torah from Rabbi Brander's archives.]

Raising a Jewish family is a tremendous privilege, and with it comes an enormous responsibility to pass Jewish traditions to the next generation.

It is easier said than done.

We are all aware, whether in our own family, or even among Torah scholars, of children who have grown up and chosen a path that differs from that of their parents.

How do we do our absolute best to give our children the kinds of experiences and emotional support that we hope will lead them to remaining on the path of Jewish tradition?

I'd like to share an insight into this issue from the most famous and often-recited paragraph in the Torah, the first paragraph of Shema which begins with **"Shema Yisrael, Hashem Elokeinu, Hashem Echad"** and which is introduced to us in this week's parsha, Va'etchanan.
In the Shema, the Torah speaks about our love, awareness and commitment to a relationship with God.

There it states in part:]Hebrew omitted because of software problems on my computer[

> *Repeat these things to your children*
>
> *when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you wake up.)Devarim 6:7(*

This is the basis for our twice-daily obligation to recite the Shema: in the darkness of night, representing times in our lives when things are challenging, when because – or perhaps despite – the fact that we don't have clarity, we wish to connect with God. And also in the light of day, when things are going well, when we are prone to feel that we are responsible for our successes; reciting the Shema is a *"pledge of allegiance";* a recognition of the role that God plays in our lives.

"Shema Yisrael" is also the utterance of those who have performed the ultimate act of sacrifice – martyrdom – for the sake of ensuring the eternality of the Jewish people.

So important, in fact, is the recitation of the Shema that the first Mishnah in the first tractate in the oral tradition, Berachot, begins with the Shema:

> *When can one recite the evening-time Shema?*)Berachot 1a(

And after offering several opinions regarding the question of *"until when can the evening Shema be recited?"*

The final opinion comes from Rabban Gamliel, who states that one may recite the Shema until dawn.

The Mishna then continues with an anecdote involving Rabban Gamliel's sons returning very late from a party.

The sons told Rabban Gamliel that they were preoccupied at a party and had not yet recited the evening Shema.

Could they still recite it?

His response to them was – since the dawn had not yet arrived, they were still obligated and permitted to recite the evening Shema.

Why does the Mishna need this anecdote involving Rabban Gamliel's sons? It seems extraneous.

Rav Shlomo Vilk, Rosh Yeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone's Robert M. Beren Machanaim Hesder Yeshiva, points out the Mishna is focusing on the challenge and ideal of Jewish spiritual continuity and finding it in the everyday. To be able to speak about the challenges of being out at a late-night party engaged in activity which may seem antithetical to a transcendent life, yet it is the job of the parent to find ways to help the next generation to connect with the ideals of the Shema.

The fact that this story is inserted in the first Mishnah of our Oral tradition highlights the need to promote dialogue regarding spirituality between parent and child. For such dialogue helps to ensure that spirituality is found in our children's and grandchildren's lives.

What an important message this first Mishna of the oral tradition teaches us: the responsibility, indeed the mandate, that an essential component of our relationship with God of our Judaism is to find God while engaging in the everyday and even in the joys of the everyday.

This is our opportunity and our challenge!

Inserting this story into the Mishnaic conversation implores us to work to create an environment of spirituality that is meaningful and relevant to our children and grandchildren as they engage in the wondrous opportunities and challenges of everyday life experiences.

The first Mishna of our oral tradition reminds us that if we are to guarantee our Jewish future, we must create a religious language that speaks to the everyday experiences of our children and grandchildren.

Shabbat Shalom.

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

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

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

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

]Ed.: Ohr Torah Stone sent Rabbi Brander's 2024 column for this week during his absence. I am repeating it here[

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

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

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

It's no accident that Va'etchanan directs our attention to the societal element of Shabbat observance. As Professor Yoni Grossman persuasively argues in his commentary on Sefer Devarim, the final book of the Torah is focused primarily on

readying the Jewish people for their entry to the land, where they will shift from a nomadic lifestyle to a position of self-governance in the society they will build. And when building a just society, protecting labor rights for everyone, even the non-Jews among us, is critical. It is tantamount to remembering the very creation of the world.

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

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

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

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

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

Dvar Torah: Parshas Vaeschanan: Step ONE (5781)

By Rabbi Label Lam

> *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.**

https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5781-vaeschanan/

Vaetchanan: To Believe or to Have Faith

By Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2018

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

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

The word *emunah* can refer to either of these two meanings, and this is reflected by two parallel words: amen and o-men (spelled אֹמֵן-ו-מ-א). "Amen" is a word uttered to indicated agreement and concurrence with a statement or sentiment. It is to assert something as true. O-men is to nurture and raise, and an omanet is a nursemaid. The emunah that is connected to

amen is a belief that; the emunah that is connected to o-manet is a belief in. The first form of belief is intellectual and connects to the mind, the second is emotional and relational and connects to the heart.

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

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

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

Just as the divergent meanings of belief in and belief that are marked in English by the use of different prepositions, so is the case in Hebrew. *Li'ha'amin* or *li'ha'amin li*… is to believe that, *li'ha'amin b*…is to believe in. When, in Parshat Shemot, God tells Moshe to do signs so that the people will believe that God has sent him, the Torah says, *"v'ya'aminu ki"* – and they will believe that [God has appeared to you], and *"im lo ya'aminu lakh,"* if they don't believe you (that what you are saying is true), then *"v'he'eminu li'kol ha'ot ha'acharon"* – they will believe the evidence of the last sign (Shemot 4:5, 8). These are all to prove that something is true, that God has sent Moshe to redeem the Children of Israel. This is the specific concern at the beginning of the Exodus. This, however, is not the abiding concern of the Torah.

The abiding concern of the Torah is a belief in: *"V'he'eminu ba'Hashem"* – and they believed in God. The experience at the Splitting of the Sea imbued in them a faith in God. They knew that God would always be there for them, they knew that God was there to care for them. They knew that they were protected by God. It was the faith of a relationship, not the belief in a fact. Let us not forget that when they lose faith, it is often a questioning of God's (or Moshe's) trustworthiness – *"And they said to Moshe, 'Are there not enough graves in Egypt that you took us out to die in the Wilderness."* What they lacked was a full placing of trust in God. This is what they achieved at the Splitting of the Sea.

This helps us understand how the People's faith readily faltered. As opposed to belief that a fact is true, which should persists once proven, belief in a person, or in God*,* **trust in a relationship, even trusting God, is something that is built over time.** Although God had shown God's might in Egypt, could the People really believe in God in the future? Would God be there for them at all times? This type of belief, this trust, is something that gets cemented only when it is validated time and again. That is how relationships work, and that is how the People's belief in God worked. [emphasis added]

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

According to Ramban, we may not be commanded to believe that God exists (he notes that the first of the Ten Commandments is phrased as a statement, not an imperative), but we are commanded to remember and not to forget the giving of the Torah at Har Sinai. To remember the events – drawing on our collective, not individual memory – is quite different from Rambam's approach, to believe in the faith principles that we learned from these events. To remember the events is to relive them, is to draw on the experiences, is to strengthen our relationship with God, to strengthen our trust in God.

Let us – as individuals, as parents, and as a community – work to cultivate and nurture our relationship with God, work to develop our belief in God. Let us try to connect to those past experiences, our collective memory of the Giving of the Torah, of God's protective presence throughout history, that will nurture this belief. And let us work to identify, to notice, those moments in our own lives which allow us to feel God's presence, and go back to them again and again, so that we may truly be able to trust in God, to believe in God.

Shabbat shalom!

From my archives.

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, and rabbi emeritus of the historic Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue of New York City.

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

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Nahamu, Nahamu: Thoughts on Consolation and Commitment

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Isaac becomes identified with the consolation of Israel because he speaks out strongly for his people. He does not simply bow his head and ask for mercy. Rather, he stands tall and shows his willingness to shoulder responsibility for his people. Because of that spiritual courage, Isaac is also identified with the quality of *"gevurah,"* heroism. He is a lion in defense of the people of Israel.

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

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

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

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

Parshas Va'eschanan – Do You Glow?

By Rabbi Mordechai Rhine * © 2017

Do you glow?

The fifth of the "Ten Commandments" is to honor one's parents. It is a mitzvah that brings to the fore an unlikely hero: Esav.

The Zohar tells us that there was no one in the world who honored a parent the way Esav did. This gave him the merit to be powerful in this world.

The Medrash describes how Esav had royal garments that he would put on when he would serve his father, Yitzchak. And so, when Yakov prepared to return to the land of Israel, he said, *"I am afraid of Esav,"* which Targum Yonason takes to mean, *"I am afraid of Esav because of the mitzvah of honoring parents which he has been doing so devotedly."* In fact, the Pardeis Yosef explains, that is why Yitzchak liked Esav so much. Yitzchak saw Esav when Esav was doing the mitzvah of honoring his father, a mitzvah to which he was so devoted. Although Esav had so many shortcomings, this one mitzvah was one he excelled in, and when he did it, his Nishama (soul) was glowing.

When we examine mitzvos we find that this principle repeats itself. A person may or may not excel in many areas, but if he or she picks one mitzvah to excel at, the ramifications are remarkable.

Consider, for example, the mitzvah of Shabbos (the fourth of the "Ten Commandments"). The Talmud (Shabbos 119) tells us of a person who was known as *"Yosef, the one who honors Shabbos."* One Friday, fishermen caught a fish that was so large that they suggested that only this Yosef would be willing to pay for it. Indeed, they brought it to him, and Yosef was so excited that he purchased the fish in honor of Shabbos. When he opened it, he found a gem worth a fortune, a blessing that is viewed as an endorsement of the way Yosef honored Shabbos with such devotion.

Indeed, the Torah when the Torah tells us to do mitzvos, it does not dictate exactly with what level of devotion we will do each mitzvah. You can buy Tefilin for $500 or you can buy them $1,500. And so on for all the mitzvos. It is up to us to decide what level of devotion we will pour in to each particular mitzva. G-d doesn't need perfect people. But, when you pick a particular mitzvah to excel in, that mitzva will give you great self-satisfaction. More importantly, it will cause you to glow and achieve great heights in relationship with Hashem.

I recall that in yeshiva there was a particular local man who would come to collect for the needy in Israel. He hawked his offer every Friday with the cry, *"Oif Shabbos,"* appealing for money to provide chicken for the needy for the Shabbos meal. Although he did many wonderful things throughout the week, this was *"his mitzvah."* He loved it dearly, knowing as he did, the impact that it made for families. Over two decades later, the joy he felt, and the shine on his face, remain with me as an example of how a person can glow if they exert and excel in a particular mitzva.

Another example: The last of the "Ten Commandments" is not to be jealous. The commentaries wonder how the Torah can dictate how we feel. They explain that a sensible person realizes that Hashem runs the world in a way that gives each person what they need. Yearning for someone else's lot, is foolish. Imagine an elephant who sees the birds flying gracefully and wishes for wings. If his wish were granted he wouldn't be able to lift off anyway (children's fantasies notwithstanding); it would be considered a deformity. So it is with jealousy. Certainly, we can be inspired by someone's success. But, to be jealous of someone else, is to distract us from our own mission. Focusing on our individual missions allows us to be happy with our lot.

Picture a person who decides to truly rejoice in other people's successes. If a person is celebrating, (s)he wishes them well. If a person is going through a tough time, (s)he calls or emails just to give them a lift. Spreading good cheer becomes their mitzvah and makes them glow.

That is why it is so beautiful for people to choose a mitzva. Take heart from Esav, from Yosef who honored Shabbos, from people who rejoice in other people's successes. Keep a notebook with source material. Record events and stories, like a sports fan collecting memorabilia of a favorite team. We may not excel at everything. But when we excel at something it gives us the opportunity to truly glow.

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

Rabbi Rhine is on vacation, so I am reprinting a Dvar Torah from his archives:

https://www.teach613.org/devorim-reconciliation-walk/

Parshas Va'eschanan, Shabbos Nachamu

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer * © 2020

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

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

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

This Ramba"n, though powerful and inspiring, is also quite difficult. While there were many in our history, who did rise to the challenge, this was not always the case. Moreover, even those who did rise to the challenge did not always live their lives in line with that commitment. When we think of ourselves, there are many times when we fall short in our commitment and do not extend ourselves for Hashem as feel we should. How can the Ramba"n say that Hashem's love for us is because we are committed to Hashem no matter the situation when there are so many times and so many ways in which we falter under pressure and do not seem to maintain that commitment?
Perhaps this Ramba"n can be understood based on the Sforno's commentary. The Sforno explains that Hashem's love for us is because we think of His name more than other nations. In other words, Hashem's love for us is because we are concerned with Hashem, think of Hashem, and contemplate what He means in our lives. Perhaps this is what the Ramba"n means as well. We all have limits to what we can bear, whether for ourselves or for the sake of another. The real measure of a person's commitment is the effort one puts in to overcome challenges when they arise. Perhaps particularly after one falters is when one shows the greatest commitment. Do they simply walk away or do they continue to rehash their error and try to see how they could repair the damage? In short, do they or do they not continue to think of Hashem.

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

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

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

The Love of Torah, the Torah of Love, Part II

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia *

]I hope to include part III of this long essay by Rabbi Ovadia next week[

How much and what kinds of love should be applied in our religious life? The laws and philosophy of the Torah, and as a matter of fact, of any religion and any set of rules, can take innumerable forms as they are interpreted and practiced by diverse individuals and cultures over centuries. In Halakha, this phenomenon is known primarily as Minhag, and it is sometimes the reason for so many different communities, prayer and Halakha books. In a broader sense, the various interpretations to a set core of laws, values and teachings are responsible for the recurring splitting of religions into factions. The fragmentation of Judaism into many shades of orthodoxy and the proliferation of Hassidic groups named after obscure Polish and Hungarian towns are not unique to Judaism. In the United States alone, for example, there are more than 41,000 Christian denominations. The right way to serve God was subject for centuries to interpretations influenced by the personal, intellectual and cultural backgrounds individual interpreters or the religious leaders. Our rabbis were aware of this as is manifest in their statements: *"The Torah has seventy facets"* and *"just as people differ in their external appearance they also differ in their personalities and thought processes."* The great scholar William James laid the foundations to the study of both religion and psychology in his groundbreaking book, *The Varieties of Religious Experiences.*

This introduction will hopefully prompt the readers to contemplate and examine their religious lives, to better understand what they have learned from their parents, mentors and books, and to live a life of greater personal and religious fulfillment. It is also meant to lead us to the next step – to try and identify a process in the development of Jewish thought, especially in regards to love and happiness, which might have taken place between the Biblical and rabbinical periods. But before we proceed to analyze the biblical passages and their rabbinic interpretation, let me make another brief introduction, this time on the topic of love.

Rutgers researcher Helen Fisher, who has put people in love into MRI machines to look at their brain activities, has identified three separate brain systems involved in sexually oriented love: erotic love)what is called "lust"(, romantic love, and attachment.

The first is a result of the sex drive. It is immediate and intense, but not infused with cognitive, seasoned wisdom. Romantic love is much more specific. Those in romantic love are intensely drawn to one person and can feel a tremendous amount of energy, as if they were on amphetamines, staying up all night or performing huge amounts of work. When romantic love is mutual, lovers may feel that the world has changed, that colors are brighter and food tastier. Or they may have eyes and ears for nothing but the sights and sounds of the beloved.

The third stage of love is attachment: the companionate comfort and connection that we feel with someone after the fusion-frenzy of lust, the idealization, and intensity of romantics love has faded.

If we apply the rubrics Fisher created to love at all situations and settings, we could speak of physical, emotional and logical-pragmatic love. Armed with this knowledge, let us examine the passages I asked you to read last week.

The first was the story of the encounter and the subsequent falling in love and starting a family, of Jacob and Rachel. There is no doubt, according to the Peshat)the literal and contextual meaning(that romantic love, and not lust or attachment, are here at play. Jacob bursts into tears upon seeing Rachel, he runs towards her and kisses her, and then removes the heavy boulder covering the water well, a feat of incredible strength typical for people who are intensely in love. He then agrees to work seven years for the right to marry his beloved, years that for him are merely days. After

getting married, and tricked by his uncle to first marrying Leah, the emotions running in the family between him and his two wives are very intense, with the two sisters vying for his true love.

The next passage, about the encounter between Jacob and his long lost son Joseph, is a loaded and tense moment shared by two emotional and powerful protagonists of Genesis, a father and son. Jacob cries several times in Genesis, but Joseph is the record holder in all of Tanakh, as we find him crying seven times, usually in family encounters. King David also cries seven times, but most of the time it is at funerals. What is most amazing and perplexing in that particular encounter, however, is that only one of the two participants is crying, and it is not the father. The Peshat suggests that Jacob was either overwhelmed by reuniting with his son, has already depleted his emotional resources after 22 years of mourning, or wanted to show Joseph his disapproval for not being contacted all these years and relieved of his misery. As we delve into the scene, we want to share in the joy but feel that something is missing – and something missing makes the narrative painful and tantalizing, yet extremely applicable.

The third section describes the interaction between Ruth and her mother-in-law Naomi as the latter tries to convince her daughter-in-law to leave and return to Moab. The intensity in which the distraught Ruth clings to Naomi makes it clear that she deeply loves the bereft mother. She is not remaining with her because she wants to start a new life in Israel or because she is afraid to go back to her family, but rather because she sees a greatness and strength in Naomi and feels emotionally committed to her. This approach to the dialog is supported by the story of the selfless actions of Ruth later on, all meant to elevate Naomi and pull her out of depression and lost hope, as well as by the last verses of the book, in which Ruth's baby is referred to by the neighbors as Naomi's child. The women tell Naomi that the child is her comfort and consolation since he was delivered to her by the one who loves her most, her daughter-in-law. The scene in which Ruth tries to convince Naomi to take her along is finally decided by Ruth's emotional proclamation that she will go wherever Naomi goes and will share with the older woman her life, her people, her beliefs and destiny. I once ran a Bibliodrama workshop in which participants were asked to play out this scene. The students/actors identified so deeply with the characters and the emotional power of the narrative that the director had to intervene and cut it short to protect the students' privacy.

As to the last section I have asked you to read – The Song of Songs, the outburst of love, emotion, longing, joy and praise to the beauty of creation in this short book makes it one of the most powerful love songs in the bible, if not in all of ancient and modern literature.

We have seen so far that there in the Bible there is no dearth of emotional, romantic love stories. They are not all happy, real or dealing with the love of a husband and wife, but they can affect us deeply.

Let us now examine what has happened to all these sections in Rabbinic literature, starting with the Song of Songs. It was greatly appreciated and hailed as the Holy of Holies, but it was also greatly feared. The fear of misinterpretation and misrepresentation of the book as a simple, human love song was so strong that there is a prohibition against putting music to its lyrics, and the Artscroll publishing company made it the only book in its Bible which is not translated but rather interpreted allegorically. According to the translation, the book has nothing to do with physical or romantic love and deals only with the covenant, the Torah, Antisemitism and the future redemption. As I have mentioned when quoting Maimonides, there is an allegorical dimension here, but it is forbidden to ignore the author’s original choice of themes and words.)By contrast, see Malbim’s commentary, which anchors the allegory in a real love triangle between the King, his beloved, and her true love, a simple shepherd, or the brilliant interpretation of Prof. Harold Fisch in his book *Biblical Poetry.(*

But the Song of Songs is not the only case where love and emotions were pushed aside and replaced by pragmatic or platonic love. In the story of Jacob and Rachel, the attraction between the two and the added strife with Leah is explained as a fight over the right to be the parents for the future twelve tribes and the nation of Israel. The love displayed here is purpose driven and projected far into the future with no room left for personal involvement and emotion. The same thing happens at the encounter between Joseph and his father, where the reason the Midrash gives for Jacob's silence is that he was reading the Shema. At this moment of surging emotions and infinite love for his son, the rabbis explain, he had to

show that his love to God comes first. Was he not able to read the Shema a minute earlier or later and thus maintain his love to God but also show his son how much he missed and loved him? Not only that, but this Midrash has influenced a minhag which forbids a father from showing affection to his children in the synagogue.)Has anyone ever thought of what happens in a child's mind when he notices that every time he enters the synagogue with his father, their emotional ties are severed?(
And what about Ruth and Naomi? Their emotional encounter was not spared the everturning sword of interpretation and was understood as a logical negotiation adhering to the strict guidelines of Halakha, with Naomi trying to dissuade Ruth from converting, no emotions involved.

So far we have seen the tip of the iceberg, but a clear pattern emerges. The Midrash has an agenda of emptying the Biblical narrative from romantic, emotional love and making it into a pragmatic, calculated one.

I will leave you with that statement and will ask you to answer the following questions:

Do you agree that Rabbinical interpretation has changed the understanding of love in the Biblical narrative?

If so, what could have been the motives of this shift?

Did you have an experience with teachers, parents or friends who practiced religion without personal, emotional connection and if so how did it affect you?

For next week, please also consider the following Midrashic statement on the verse in Tehillim)Ps. 126:2(*"then our mouths will fill with laughter and out tongues with joy"*: it is then, when Mashiach comes, that we will laugh, but in this world one is not allowed to laugh!Shabbat Shalom

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

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

Vaetchanan: Farewell and a New Journey

by Rabbi Moshe Rube*

When Moshe takes his leave of the Jewish people, he gives his 33 day long farewell speech in the Book of Deuteronomy.

I promise I will not speak that long this Shabbat.
Also, unlike Moses, I will not be speaking about the finer points of Jewish civil law.

But although my situation is different than the first Moshe, thus necessitating different words, our missions bear a striking similarity. When the community first brought me in, I was told that just like Moses, I had been given the responsibility of leading the AHC from Greys Avenue to Remuera. Our very own splitting of the sea.

In that way, I had the opportunity to be Moses, and I am so grateful for it.

Thank you so much to the organisers of this week's kiddush and I look forward to officially and unofficially saying farewell to you, as your Rabbi.

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Rube

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

Increased Hate Mail: **The NZ Jewish community has experienced a significant uptick in targeted hate mail. This is being sent to the homes and offices of Jewish and non-Jewish)but Israeli-supporting(people and organisations.**

Rav Kook Torah
Va'Etchanan: The Double Shema

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

Yet one might wonder: why isn't once a day sufficient?

Public and Private Domains

When we contemplate and reflect on a concept, we deepen its impact on the soul.

The day can be divided into two distinct parts: the daytime hours, when we engage with the outside world, and the evening hours, when we retire to the quiet sanctuary of our homes. By reciting the Shema both in the morning and evening, we affirm our acceptance of God's rein and dominion throughout both parts of the day. In other words, our affirmation of the Shema serves as a guiding force in our public activities during the daytime as well as in our private lives at night.

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

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

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

The Private Service of the Kohen

This insight enables us to understand a peculiar statement of the Sages. The Mishnah teaches that the evening Shema is to be recited *"after the hour when the kohanim return]from the mikveh[to eat their terumah offerings"*)Berachot 1:1(. In the case of a kohen who becomes ritually impure, he must immerse himself in a mikveh and await nightfall before partaking of terumah. When in fact did the kohanim become pure and could once again eat terumah? When the first stars appear in the night sky.

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

In fact, this serves as a beautiful metaphor for the evening Shema. The primary service of the kohanim unfolds takes place the day; however, their evening meal of terumah also constitutes a form of Divine service)see Pesachim 73a(. The inspiring image of a kohen entering his home to partake of terumah corresponds to our own recitation of the evening Shema, wherein we affirm God's dominion in our private lives. Through the recital of the evening Shema, we demonstrate that we belong to a *"kingdom of priests"* also in the privacy of our own homes.

The Shema of the Nation

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

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

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

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

https://ravkooktorah.org/VAETCHANAN-68.htm

Vaetchanan: The Meanings of Shema (5770)

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

"Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one." These words are the supreme testimony of Jewish faith. Each word is worthy of careful study, but it is the first – the verb Shema – that deserves special attention.

There was a profound difference between the two civilisations of antiquity that between them shaped the culture of the West: ancient Greece and ancient Israel. The Greeks were the supreme masters of the visual arts: art, sculpture, architecture and the theatre.

Jews, as a matter of profound religious principle, were not. God, the sole object of worship, is invisible. He transcends nature. He created the universe and is therefore beyond the universe. He cannot be seen. He reveals Himself only in speech. Therefore the supreme religious act in Judaism is to listen. Ancient Greece was a culture of the eye; ancient Israel a culture of the ear. The Greeks worshipped what they saw; Israel worshipped what they heard.

This is how Hans Kohn put it in his *The Idea of Nationalism:*

> The ancient Greeks were *"the people of sight, of the spatial and plastic sense . . . as if they thought to transpose the flowing, fleeting, ever related elements of life into rest, space, limitation . . . The Jew did not see so much as he heard . . . His organ was the ear . . . When Elijah perceived God, he heard only a still, small voice. For that reason the Jew never made an image of his God."*

That is why the keyword of Judaism is Shema. God is not something we see, but a voice we hear. This is how Moses put it elsewhere in this week's sedra, describing the supreme revelation at Mount Sinai:

> *Then the Lord spoke to you out of the fire. You heard the sound of words but saw no form; there was only a voice.* Deut. 4:12

This has systemic implications for the whole of Judaism. Its way of understanding the world, and of relating to it, is fundamentally different from that of the Greeks, and of the philosophical tradition)Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and others(of which they were the founders. A listening culture is not the same as a seeing culture. In this week's study, I want to explore one of the many aspects of this difference.

The Mosaic books are, among other things, a set of commandments, 613 of them. That is the primary meaning of the word Torah – namely law. It would seem to follow that a book of commands must have a verb that means *"to obey,"* for that is the whole purpose of an imperative. Obedience stands in relation to command as truth does to statement. Yet there is no verb in biblical Hebrew that means to obey. This is an utterly astonishing fact.

So glaring is the lacuna that when Hebrew was revived in modern times a verb had to be found that meant *"to obey."* This was an obvious necessity – especially in the case of Israel's defence forces. An army depends on obedience to the command of a superior officer. The word chosen was *letsayet,* an Aramaic term that does not appear in this sense anywhere in the Hebrew Bible. The word the Torah uses is quite different, namely *lishmo'a, Shema, "hear."*

The verb *lishmo'a* is a key term of the book of Deuteronomy, where it appears in one or other forms some 92 times)by way of comparison, it appears only 6 times in the whole of Leviticus(. It conveys a wide range of meanings, clustered around five primary senses:

>]1[to listen, to pay focused attention, as *in "Be silent, O Israel, and listen]u-shema["*)Deut. 27: 9(
>
>]2[to hear, as in *"I heard]shamati[Your voice in the garden and I was afraid"*)Gen. 3: 10(
>
>]3[to understand, as in *"Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand]yishme'u[each other"*)Gen. 11: 7(
>
>]4[to internalize, register, take to heart, as in "And as for Ishmael I have heard you")Gen. 17: 20(, meaning, *"I have taken into account what you have said; I will bear it in mind; it is a consideration that weighs with Me."*
>
>]5[to respond in action, as in *"Abraham did]vayishma[what Sarah said"*)Gen. 16: 2(. This last sense is the closest shema comes to meaning *"to obey."*

It has yet other meanings in rabbinic Hebrew, such as *"to infer," "to accept," "to take into account as evidence"* and *"to receive as part of the Oral tradition."* No English word has this range of meanings. Perhaps the closest are *"to hearken"* and *"to heed"* – neither of them terms in common use today. Psychotherapists nowadays sometimes speak of *"active listening,"* and this is part of what is meant by Shema.

The best way to discover what is unique about a civilization is to search for words it contains that are untranslatable into other languages. It is said that the Bedouin have many words for sand and the Inuit many terms for snow. The Greek word

megalopsuchos – literally the *"great-souled"* person, one blessed with wealth, status and effortless superiority – has no equivalent in either Judaism or Christianity, two cultures that valued, as Greece did not, humility. Shema is untranslatable – understandably so since it belongs to biblical Hebrew, the world's supreme example of a culture of the ear.

This is a fact of great consequence and should affect our entire understanding of Judaism. The existence of the verb *lishmo'a* and the absence of the verb *letsayet* tells us that biblical Israel, despite its intense focus on Divine commandments, is not a faith that values blind, unthinking, unquestioning obedience.

There is a reason for the commands. In some cases they are rooted in the fact that God created the universe and the laws that govern it: therefore we must respect the integrity of nature. In other cases they are grounded in history. Our ancestors were slaves in Egypt; they knew from indelible personal experience what it is to live in an unjust, tyrannical society. Therefore a society based on Torah will be just, compassionate, generous. Slaves must rest one day in seven. One year in seven, debts should be cancelled. The landless poor should not go without food at harvest time – and so on.

The God of revelation is also the God of creation and redemption. Therefore when God commands us to do certain things and refrain from others, it is not because His will is arbitrary but because He cares for the integrity of the world as His work, and for the dignity of the human person as His image. There is a profound congruence between the commandments and the laws that govern nature and history. An arbitrary ruler demands blind obedience. God is not an arbitrary ruler; therefore He does not demand blind obedience. Instead, He wishes us as far as possible to understand why He has commanded what He has commanded.

Hence the emphasis, in Exodus and Deuteronomy, on children asking questions. In an authoritarian culture, questions are discouraged: *"Ours not to reason why, ours but to do and die"* as Tennyson put it. Had this been the case in Judaism, the Torah would have had a verb that meant the same *asletsayet*, not one with the meanings of *lishmoa.*

On Pesach the least mature child, not the most, is *"one who does not know how to ask."* Indeed we are commanded to teach him or her to ask. Even the verb three lines after *"Hear O Israel"* – usually translated as *"You shall teach these things diligently to your children,"* means according to Rashi, *"you shall sharpen your children"* — meaning, teach them the full depth of their meaning, rather than superficially)see Rashi to Kiddushin 30a(.

To be sure – this should go without saying – obedience to the commandments should never be conditional on understanding them. It is a contradiction in terms to say that one who does not understand or agree with a law is free to break it. Anyone who thinks this has not understood what a law is. But it does mean that ours is a searching, questioning, rational, intellectual faith, one that calls for the full exercise of the mind.

Shema Yisrael does not mean "Hear, O Israel." It means something like:

> *"Listen. Concentrate. Give the word of God your most focused attention. Strive to understand. Engage all your faculties, intellectual and emotional. Make His will your own. For what He commands you to do is not irrational or arbitrary but for your welfare, the welfare of your people, and ultimately for the benefit of all humanity."*

In Judaism faith is a form of listening: to the song creation sings to its Creator, and to the message history delivers to those who strive to understand it. That is what Moses says, time and again in Deuteronomy. Stop looking: listen. Stop speaking: listen. Create a silence in the soul. Still the clamour of instinct, desire, fear, anger.

Strive to listen to the still, small voice beneath the noise. Then you will know that the universe is the work of the One beyond the furthest star yet closer to you than you are to yourself – and then you will love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul and all your might. In God's unity you will find unity – within yourself and between yourself and the world – and you will no longer fear the unknown.

https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/vaetchanan/the-meanings-of-shema/ Note: because Likutei Torah and the

Internet Parsha Sheet, both attached by E-mail, normally include the two most recent Devrei Torah by Rabbi Sacks, I have selected an earlier Devar. There are no footnotes or other questions available for this Dvar Torah.

In Good Times and Bad

By Yossy Goldman *

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.

* Life Rabbi Ereritus of the iconic Sydenham Shul in Johannesburg, South Africa and president of the South African Rabbinical Association**.**

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

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Va'etchanan: Bodily and Spiritual Health

by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky

> *You must guard yourselves carefully, for you did not see any image on the day that G-d spoke to you at Horeb from the midst of the fire.*)Deut. 4:15(

The word for *"yourselves"*)נפשותיכם(in the opening phrase of this verse literally means *"your life."* We are therefore taught that this phrase also means that we must guard our safety and our health.

Thus, Maimonides writes that ensuring that the body remain healthy and strong is an integral part of the service of G-d, since *"someone who is unhealthy cannot understand or have any knowledge of the Creator."* Jewish law thus requires us to follow the instructions of qualified health professionals.

The Maggid of Mezeritch stated further that *"a small hole in the body produces a large hole in the soul,"* meaning that our physical health affects our spiritual health. Thus, our physical health, safety and wellness is an inseparable part and parcel

of our ongoing spiritual health.

– From *Daily Wisdom* #3

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

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

Gut Shabbos,

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
Kehot Publication Society

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Likutei Divrei Torah

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Shabbat Shalom

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Covenant and Conversation
Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

The Idea that Changed the World

It is one of the great stories of all time, and Moses foresaw it three thousand years before it happened. Here he is speaking in this week's parsha: See, I have taught you decrees and laws as the Lord my God commanded me, so that you may follow them in the land you are about to entering and possess. Take care to keep them, for this will be your wisdom and understanding in the eyes of the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people!" For what other nation has decrees and laws as just as this Torah that I am setting before you today? Deut. 4:5-8

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

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

In his Inaugural in 1989, George Bush prayed: "There is but one just use of power, and it is to serve people. Help us to remember it, Lord. Amen."

In 1997, Bill Clinton said: "The promise we sought in a new land we will find again in a land of new promise."

George W. Bush in 2001 said: "We are guided by a power larger than ourselves who creates us equal in His image."

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

In 2009 Barack Obama ended his speech with these words: "Let it be said by our children's children that when we were tested we refused to let this journey end, that we did not turn back nor did we falter; and with eyes fixed on the horizon and God's grace upon us, we carried forth that great gift of freedom and delivered it safely to future generations."

This is explicitly religious language, without parallel in any other democratic society in the world, and it reads like a sustained Midrash on Deuteronomy.

How did it happen? It began with the invention of printing by Johannes Gutenbergin Mainzin 1439, followed in England in 1476 by William Caxton. Books became less expensive and more accessible. Literacy spread. Then in 1517 came the Reformation, with its emphasis on the individual rather than the Church, and on sola Scriptura, the authority of "Scripture alone."

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

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

The Geneva Bible contained a commentary in the margin. Its comments were brief but sometimes explosive. This applied in particular to the story of the Hebrew midwives, Shifra and Puah (Exodus chapter 1) - the first recorded instance of civil disobedience, the refusal to obey an immoral order. Pharaoh had instructed them to kill every male Israelite child, but they did not. Commenting on this, the Geneva Bible says "their disobedience in this was lawful." When Pharaoh then commands the Egyptians to drown male Israelite children, the Geneva Bible comments: "When tyrants cannot prevail by deceit, they burst into open rage." This was nothing short of a justification for rebellion against a tyrannical and unjust king.

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

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

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

What Does Judaism Say About … Podcast with Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel. The week's topic is: **How Judaism Views Secular Names and Dates**
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Third, they used the Hebrew Bible – especially the separation of powers between the king and the High Priest – to argue for the principle of religious toleration.

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

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

Appreciating the contribution of the Hebrew Bible to liberty, John Adams, second President of the United States, wrote: "I will insist that the Hebrews have done more to civilize men than any other nation. If I were an atheist, and believed in blind eternal fate, I should still believe that fate had ordained the Jews to be the most essential instrument for civilising the nations." John Adams' letter to François Adriaan van der Kemp (16 February 1809)

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

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

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

How ironic that the political culture of the United States should be more Judaic than that of the Jewish state. But Moses warned that it would be so. Keep the Torah's laws carefully, Moses said, "for this is your wisdom and understanding in the eyes of the nations." Moses knew that Gentiles would see what Jews sometimes do not see: the wisdom of God's law when it comes to sustaining a free society.

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

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

For the Sake of the Life of an Egyptian

"But God was wroth with me because of you, and He would not listen to me. God said to me, 'Enough! Do not speak to me anymore about this.'" (Deuteronomy 3:25–26)

Why does the Almighty reject Moses 'heartfelt plea? And why does Moses blame the Hebrews? A startling midrash gives a totally unexpected and very different response. But allow me first an important introduction.

Judaism is not a religion of pacifism; our Bible provides for the contingency of warfare, especially if we are attacked by an enemy poised to destroy us. Had we not justified wars fought in self-defense, we could never have maintained our State of Israel during these many decades. However, unlike the Greco-Roman culture which gloried in military victories – witness the opening line of Virgil's Aeneid, "Of arms and military courage do I sing" (Arma virumquo cano) – the Jewish tradition admits of the necessity of war, even calling such wars milchamot mitzva, obligatory mitzva wars. But the Bible never idealizes the enterprise of warfare. Our end goal has always been peace, and our vision of the millennium is a period when "nation will not lift up sword against nation and humanity will not learn warfare anymore" (Isaiah 2:4).

Indeed, the Mishna records a most revealing dispute concerning weaponry on the Shabbat: is a weapon considered an adornment, which one wears (and is therefore permissible to wear on the Sabbath), or a burden, which one carries (and is therefore prohibited on the Sabbath – unless a human life is at stake)?

R. Eliezer declares, "It [the weapon] is an adornment for him"; but the sages maintain: "It is only an object to be reviled (genai), as Scripture states, 'And they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks'" (Shabbat 6:4). And normative Jewish law decides in accordance with the sages.

A startling illustration of the profound reverence for life maintained by our Jewish tradition, and hence the ambiguity associated even with "obligatory" wars of self-defense, concerns the status of a priest who has been to the battlefront and killed an enemy in the line of duty. Under ordinary circumstances the halakha forbids a priest with blood on his hands from participating in the priestly blessings which the priests bestow during the repetition of the Amida – each morning in Israel, and each festival in the Diaspora. If a particular priest was responsible for the death of another – even an accidental death – it affects the priest's status in terms of his ability to bless the congregation.

And the logic is persuasive. If these hands, raised now in the shape of the letter "shin" (the first letter of Sha-ddai, Almighty God), had once been used to bring an end to a human life, how can they now be used to bless life? "The accuser dare not become the defender (ein kateigor na'aseh saneigor)" is a well-known Talmudic adage (Berakhot 59a)! And it was precisely for this reason that King David, albeit involved in obligatory wars to conquer the Land of Israel, was disqualified by God from building the Holy Temple (I Chr. 2:8).

Obviously for much of our diaspora history, the question of a priest with blood-stained hands from a mitzva war never came up. But since in the last seven decades Israelis have been to battle in defense of our state, what is the ruling regarding priests in our wars of self-defense in Israel?

Rabbi Ben Zion Uziel (1880–1953), one of the early chief rabbis of Israel, rules (Mishpetei Uziel, part 3, Orach CHayyim, section 10) that a priest who has shed blood, even the blood of a gentile, cannot perform the priestly blessing. Apparently, he based his opinion on an earlier similar decision of the Tzeida Laderekh, Rabbi Yissakhar Ellenberg (p. 69).

My own Rebbe, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik (in Nefesh HaRav, section 132, par. 5) goes one step further, maintaining that "any priest with blood on his hands, even if it comes from one of the obligatory wars of self-defense, shall not bless the people."

To be sure, the opinions cited above are not the only ones. It would certainly be difficult to tell a young soldier who happens to be a priest, defending his country and his people, that his commitment unto death on the army front will disallow him from bestowing the priestly benediction in his local synagogue. And so, in a halakhic inquiry regarding a priest who fought in Israel's wars against Egypt, Jordan, and Syria, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef (1920–2013), one of the leading decisors in modern Israel,

argued forcefully that such soldiers must be allowed to rise to bless the congregation: "There is no doubt they are fit and worthy, and they must participate in the priestly benediction" (Yechaveh Da'at 2:14). After all, the soldier was obligated by God's law to fight in the battle, and he took the lives of enemies who were out to murder innocent Jews!

The parameters involved in this halakhic debate may very well be what is behind the startling midrash to which we referred in the beginning of this commentary (Otzar Midrashim, Eisenstein, Midrash Moshe, p. 363). (This midrash is cited by Prof. Y. Leibowitz in his work, He'arot al Parashat Hashavua, p. 115.) Moses supplicates with all his heart and soul to be al-lowed to enter the Promised Land, but God is adamant in His refusal: "Get you up into the top of Pisga, and lift up your eyes westward, and north-ward, and southward, and eastward, and behold these places only with your eyes, for you yourself shall not cross over this Jordan" (Deut. 3:27).

Clearly Moses finds it very difficult to accept the punishment prohibiting his entry into Israel, the very goal of his leadership. Moses now asks, according to the Midrash: "Now if it is pleasing in your eyes, do not cause me to die; allow me to live so that I may declare the acts of the Lord." The Holy One, blessed be He attempts to explain to him why he must die, no different than the righteous patriarchs, who nevertheless died. Moses continues to remonstrate with God, arguing that Abraham bore the wicked Ishmael, and Isaac bore the wicked Esau. Teaches the Midrash:

God says to Moses, "You seek [an extension on your] life? As for you yourself, [you took the life of an Egyptian]. Did I ever com-mand you to kill the Egyptian [taskmaster]?" Moses attempts a defense: "But you, God, killed all the first-born of Egypt!" God argues in return, "You dare to compare yourself to Me? I am the Giver of Life. I may slay, but I also revive. Do you then have the power to give life?"

This dialogue between the Almighty and Moses is strange, to say the least. Are we to assume that Moses committed a transgression by slaying the Egyptian taskmaster? It was precisely that action – an act of selfless commitment which meant abdicating his position in Pharaoh's palace as prince of Egypt and identifying with a beleaguered slave people – that propelled this greatest of all prophets onto center stage of Jewish history. Moreover, the Egyptian was smiting an innocent Hebrew slave. Had Moses done nothing, he would have violated the prohibition: "neither shall you stand idly by the [shedding of the] blood of your brother" (Lev. 19:16). How can he be punished for having acted in accordance with Torah morality even before God revealed His will at Sinai?

Apparently, the Midrash is teaching that although Moses did the proper act in killing the Egyptian, the blood on his hands nevertheless creates a blemish in his spiritual, prophetic person which defiles him from entry into the Holy Land. Despite the opinions to the contrary, this mid-rash would most probably support the position that a priest who killed in a necessary obligatory war cannot rise to bestow the priestly benediction of peace upon the congregation. And so, in Moses ' remonstration with God, he says it was "because of you," because of his commitment to the Hebrews in slaying the Egyptian, that his exalted soul became stained to the extent that he could not enter Israel.

I was once taking a walk with a beloved friend of mine, Yehuda Noiman, of Kibbutz Ein Tzurim, who was one of the original founders of the kibbutz when it was in Gush Etzion, and who fought valiantly in the early wars of Israel. Suddenly, a few yards from the outskirts of the kibbutz, he stopped dead in his tracks with a pained expression on his face. "It was after the War of Independence, when I was freed from Jordanian captivity," he began to reminisce, apparently now reliving an event which had taken place many years before. "We were just settling this area, and I had guard duty. Suddenly, about 4:00 AM, I heard a strange noise coming from the trees, right at the spot on which we are presently standing. I sensed strange footsteps and ordered the individual to reveal himself with raised hands. Instead, I could hear the concealed footsteps running towards me, the stranger taking pains to remain hidden from view. I had no choice but to shoot. He was a weapon-bearing Arab, and he is buried underneath us. But whenever I pass this spot, I can hear his final 'aiyee 'and death throttle, which even three decades later, still causes my heart to constrict and the tears to well up in my eyes."

Dvar Torah: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

Hashem's reputation is in our hands. The source for this is a passage of the Torah we all know by heart, it's in the first paragraph of the Shema, which we read in Parshat Vaetchanan.

'Veahavta et Hashem, Elohekha, bekhol levavkha, ouvkhol nafshekha, ouvkhol meodekha' – You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your might.

How is it possible for the Torah to command us to love anyone or anything?

I can't just decide to love, surely love is the culmination of my knowledge and my experience, either it's there or it's not there.

The Rambam in his list of the 613 commandments of the Torah tells us that the commandment of 'veahavta' is 'ahaveihu al Habriot' – not you must love the Lord your God, but rather, you must cause the Lord your God to be loved by everybody.

It's in the causative! And as a result, the Torah here is encouraging us to guarantee that through our actions and deeds, Hashem will always be loved.

So, let's never forget, what I do doesn't just have a bearing on my reputation, on the reputation of family, community and nation – it has the bearing on the reputation of Hashem and let's always be the finest ambassadors of the Almighty.

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

The Sorrow of Nevo – On Moshe Rabbeinu's Hidden Humanity - Ayelet Ho

And I besought the Lord at that time, saying…Let me go over, I pray Thee, and see the good land that is beyond the Jordan, that goodly hill-country, and Levanon" (Devarim 3:23, 25)

Moshe pleads. He longs to reach the Land of Israel. For forty years, he has led the people of Israel through thick and thin, and he yearns with all his heart to enter the good land. Even if only briefly, just to cross over and see it.

These verses ignited the imagination and the emotions of our Sages, leading to a myriad of midrashim. One midrash I particularly like is found in Midrash Tanchuma (Warsaw edition) on Parshat Va'etchanan [6][1]. This extensive midrash describes Moshe's prolonged pleading to enter the land, until he finally gives up.

Initially, Moshe engages in a dialogue with the Almighty. This is how the midrash describes it:

"…He said before Him: 'If it is Your will, let me enter the land and live there for two or three years, and then I will die.'

He [God] said to him: 'And you shall not come there.'

He said before Him: 'If I do not enter in my lifetime, let me enter after my death.'

He said to him: 'Neither in your lifetime nor after your death.'

He said before Him: 'Why such anger towards me?'

…He [Moshe] said before Him: 'Master of the Universe, arise from the Seat of Judgment and sit on the Seat of Mercy when I stand before

you, so that I may not die; rather, let my sins be forgiven through suffering.'"

Despite Moshe's entreaties, God refuses him. Undeterred, Moshe, much like Rabbi Elazar ben Dordia, seeks help from other entities:

"When Moshe saw that no attention was paid him, he went to the heavens and the earth and said unto them, 'Seek mercy for me. 'They said to him, 'Before we seek mercy for you, we will seek mercy for ourselves.'"

Thus, he turns to the stars and constellations, the mountains and hills, the great sea, and even the angelic ministers, but they all respond negatively. God remains steadfast that Moshe is destined to die. Moshe continues to beseech, to plead, and to argue until Hashem poses a fundamental question:

"And thus said the Almighty unto him: 'Why do you upset yourself so much for this?'

He [Moshe] replied: 'Master of the Universe, I fear the pangs of the Angel of Death…'

The Almighty said unto him: 'This is the way of the world: each generation and its leader; each generation and its sages. Until now, it was your time to serve before Me, and now your time has ended, and it is time for Yehoshua, your disciple, to serve.'

He said before Him: 'Master, if I must die because of Yehoshua, let me go and become his disciple.'

He said to him: 'If you wish to do so, go and do so.'"

Seemingly, a compromise has been reached. Moshe will go and become Yehoshua's disciple. However, the experiment is doomed to failure. Moshe relinquishes his honor and his status as the teacher of Torah to the people of Israel, and joins the others in the study Torah under the instruction of Yehoshua. From being the leader and the instructor of all, Moshe is suddenly rendered a mere student. And as the midrash describes Moshe's Torah study under Yehoshua, the description becomes heart-wrenching:

"And Moshe did not understand what Yehoshua was teaching. After the Israelites left the study session, they asked Moshe to clarify the Torah for them. He replied that he did not know how to answer them. And Moshe Rabbeinu stumbled and fell. At that moment, Moshe said: 'Master of the Universe, until now I sought life, but now my soul is given to You.'"

Moshe understands that in order to enter the Land of Israel, he must give up the two central aspects of his life: prophecy and leadership, both of which will be entirely taken from him. This is too great a sacrifice for him, an annulment of his identity, as it were; too immense a price to pay. So instead, he gives up and is ready to die. The continuation of the midrash describes Moshe's long, painful, and touching farewell from the people of Israel. He relinquishes the dream of reaching the Land of Israel in order to remain the person that he is and always was.

To me, this midrash is simply astounding. We are used to thinking of the prophets as "conduits" for God's word. In other words, God speaks through them, and they merely convey His message to the people. The Rambam goes further, describing the prophet as a type of philosopher: "It is among the foundations of the religion to know that God imparts prophecy to humans. Prophecy is only bestowed upon great wise men, strong in character, not influenced by earthly desires in any matter, but only on individuals who overcome their desires through the intellect at all times…" (Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah 7)

The Rambam portrays the prophet as almost superhuman, possessing perfect traits and broad philosophical wisdom. One who speaks with God face to face, is the humblest of men, the giver of the Torah, and its interpreter. Therefore, it is surprising to find a midrash depicting Moshe's fears, his moments of jealousy, failures, and weaknesses.

We often speak of "Moshe the leader", the one who ran after the lost sheep; rescued Yitro's daughters; delegated responsibility to officers and judges who rendered judgement; sent out spies; gave rulings of Halacha; led wars, and suppressed rebellions.

However, upon closer examination, we can discern Moshe's human character between the verses and commandments. For instance, when Moshe defends the people of Israel after the sin of the Golden Calf, he does so like a protective mother bear, demanding: "But now, if You will forgive their sin, but if not, please blot me out of Your book that You have written." (Shemot 32:32). Or the reverse reaction, when the Israelites 'constant complaints nearly drive him to despair: "Did I conceive all these people? Did I give birth to them?" (Bemidbar 11:12).

Another wonderful moment when Moshe's character emerges is in his seemingly "dry" description of the Israelites 'journeys in the desert: "And they journeyed from Eilim and camped by the Red Sea… And they journeyed from Rephidim and camped in the Sinai Desert." Moshe recounts significant stops: the receiving of the Torah, the crossing of the Red Sea, and more. Yet, he says nothing about these. However, at the end of this entire 'dry ' list of journeys, Moshe elaborates only on the last leg of the journey: "And they journeyed from Kadesh and camped in Hor HaHar, at the edge of the land of Edom. And Aharon the priest ascended Hor HaHar at the command of God and died there… And Aharon was 123 years old when he died on Hor HaHar." Suddenly, we understand Aharon's profound influence on Moshe. He was his elder brother, his partner in leadership, a figure of kindness and love. Moshe experienced a great loss upon Aharon's death—not just the people. Here, too, Moshe's human side is revealed to us.

Oftentimes, both as educators and as simple human beings in this world, we tend to view those around us with practicality. What task does this person need to complete? What does this student need to correct? I believe the touching midrash mentioned earlier, stemming from Moshe's plea—"Va'etchanan"—calls us to see the humanness and sensitivity in each person. That includes our students, friends, and even our leaders, who, before anything else, are people who experience, feel, dream, and hope.

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Michael Rosensweig

Cultivating an Intimate Bond with Hashem Through Tefillah

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

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

It is noteworthy, that Ramban (4:6-8, see also Kli Yakar) strikingly perceives both verses as a testament to the inherent and profound impact of Torah law - "ve-amar ki be-chukim u-be-mishpatim toalot gedolot...ve-od she-heim toelet gedolah she-ein kemotah she-Hashem yihiyeh karov lahem be-kol keraam eilav...". However, most of the parshanim

projected distinctive themes for these two pesukim. While there were commentators (Rashbam, Ibn Ezra, Chizkuni, see also Rav Hirsch) who emphasized Hashem's general responsiveness to the laments, requests, needs, and wants of Am Yisrael, Chazal (Rosh Hashana 18a, Yerushalmi Berachot 9:1), Unkelos, Yonaton ben Uziel (Devarim 4:7), and Rambam (Introduction to Mishneh Torah, after the minyan ha-katzar) focused specifically on the vehicle and institution of tefillah.

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

Targum Unkeles and Targum Yonaton ben Uziel explicate the focus on tefillah. The typically terse Unkeles is exceedingly expansive in this context. He doubles his reference to prayer. Not only do the words "bekol kareinu eilav", a testament to the singular relationship, signify tefillah - "bekol idan de-anachnu metzalyan kadmohi", but the very methodology and manifestation of bonding with Hashem- "kerovim eilav" - is itself identified as through the medium and vehicle of crisis prayer - "le-kebala tzelotei be-idan akteih"! [The emphasis on tefillah be-eit tzarah is reminiscent of Rambam's comments in Hilchos Ta'anit 1:1-2 and Ramban's view in Sefer Hamitzvos (aseh no. 5) that only crisis prayer is biblically obligated.] [On Unkeles's view, see also his comments on Bereishit 48:22 - "be-charbi ubekashti" - which he renders "be-tzeloti u-be-vaoti". Meshech Chochmah op. cit. posits that these represent routine and crisis prayer respectively. Based upon the paradigms of cherev and keshet, he speculates that greater intention and focus is required for crisis prayer! See also Unekelos' perspective on tefillah referred to in my TorahWeb article on Beshalach 2024. I hope to broaden my presentation on Unkelos' position elsewhere.]

Rambam's view of the prominence of this verse and the eternal promise of prayer is particularly significant and expansive. [One may speculate whether the polar opposite presentations of Rambam and Ramban regarding the connection of prayer to this pasuk is related to their debate in Sefer Hamitzvos, aseh no. 5.] In his introduction to the Yad (post minyan mitzvot ha-katzar), he asserts, based upon our pasuk, that Hashem's intimate presence and particularly Divine salvation is always accessible to Am Yisrael ("vehayah karov le-shavateinu"). [This assertion is linked to and exemplified by a brief analysis of the rabbinic mitzvah of keriat ha-megilah. I think it is conceivable that Rambam may also have been inspired to link these themes by the comment in Megilah 11a- "Rav Masna patach pitcha le-parshata de-megillah mikra 'ki mi goy gadol..."] He meaningfully adds that this receptivity to our urgent needs, embodied by the imperative to publicly read Megillat Esther, tasks us with thanking, blessing, and praising Him ("kedai le-varcho, u-lehalelo"), but also further demands that we publicize and educate future generations regarding this authentic tenet rooted in our verse in Vaetchanan ("u-kedai lehodia le-dorot habaim she-emet mah she-hivtachtanu ha-Torah 'ki mi goy gadol...be-kol kareinu eilav'"). [See Chidushei ha-Grim, Devarim 4:7 for a similar assessment of Rambam's view.]. It is unsurprising that Rambam both codifies the passage in Rosh Hashana 18a (Hilchos Teshuvah 2:6) and praises Uneklos' interpretation of "kerovim eilav" ("beur sheimot kodesh ve-chol", see Torat ha-Rambam on Devarim 4:7, p. 92).

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

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

of our personal and national identity, a source of inspiration and an effective program for spiritual success.

Torah.Org Dvar Torah
by Rabbi Label Lam

Get the Messages

Hear, Israel: HASHEM is our G-d; HASHEM is one. (Devarim 6:4) This should be a very familiar verse. We have been saying it twice daily for the last 3,336 years and those same words are affixed to each door post in our homes for just as long. What is the message that we are meant to HEAR? What is Israel supposed to understand? What is the practical message behind declaring that HASHEM is ONE?

We can analyze the nature of HASHEM's unique quality of ONENESS, as the Ramchal describes in Derech HASHEM. Perhaps the message is that there is only one HASHEM and there is no other. That is certainly important to know. There are no competing authorities or possible dual loyalties. That could easily devolve into a world of idolatry, where man makes gods in his feeble image and permission is given to all human foible, and every insanity is thereby legalized and rationalized. That makes knowing HASHEM's ONENESS very important.

There might just be a message closer to the hearts of decent and devoted servants of HASHEM that would never dream of swerving so far off the reservation. Let us consider an alternative explanation which is not a contradiction to either of the first two mentioned so far. HASHEM is the ONLY ONE AND HASHEM is NUMBER ONE. HASHEM desires an EXCLUSIVE relationship with KLAL YISRAEL. HASHEM cannot be number two or less in our lives. HASHEM is not an afterthought but the primary thought in our lives. For HASHEM your G-d, He is a consuming fire, a jealous G-d! (Devarim 4:24)

No wife appreciates being number two in her house or in her relationship with her husband. She rightfully expects exclusivity and to be number one. Nobody or thing can compete with that bond of devotion. There was a fellow who was so deep into sports that he spent all Sunday, watching every game with rapture. After a while his wife announced, "I am out of here! I cannot get your attention!" Suddenly, he looked up, momentarily, and responded, "What are you talking about!? We've been together for eight seasons!" Can you blame her?!

What if a good wife reminds her dutiful husband to come home with four different items from the store and he arrives home with just three out of the four. When confronted, he admits he forgot about the fourth. When he sees her look of deep disappointment, he right away pivots and declares that he will go back to the store and get it. Tears are already flowing. She waves off the "noble" offer. It's too late. The damage is done. She states, "You don't listen to me! You don't love me?"

WOA! What just happened here. To a man it's a small practical problem but to a wife it's a cosmic ordeal. With his slight neglect he has demonstrated that she is not number one, perhaps number two or less, who knows. The proof is that if his friend Chaim would have asked him to pick up four specific items, he never would have failed to deliver less. He would make certain that he did it with precision. She must be number two and that's a personal tragedy.

This can work in either direction. A husband, for example, calls his wife in the middle of the day multiple times. He texts her over and over again with zero response. Who could she be talking to or what could she be doing that is more important than me?! Finally, when he gets through, whatever the reason, besides a medical emergency, it feels like a betrayal or abandonment. We have all had that feeling of frustration and when it happens it makes us wonder about the real strength of the relationship.

When HASHEM is sending us messages through the Torah and the world and He is calling us. If we fail to pick up or answer or notice, then the seriousness of the relationship is on trial. Look at these words from the first chapter of Mishlei: "How long will you naive ones love naivete, and the scoffers covet scoffing, and the fools hate knowledge?…Since I called you and you refused, I stretched out my hand and no one listened, and you have made nothing of all my advice, and you did not desire my reproof, I too, will laugh at your calamity…" (Mishlei 1:22-26)

HASHEM wants to be NUMBER ONE in our lives! Hear this Israel, when we learn His Torah, we start to get the messages.

Mizrachi Dvar Torah

Rav Doron Perez

Shema – Do We Know How to Listen?

In many ways, Judaism is about one word – arguably, the most famous word and verse in the Torah " –SHEMA Yisrael Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Echad – HEAR, O Israel, the L-rd our G-d, the L-rd is One."

It is the first thing we say on a daily basis – about listening to what G-d wants from us – and the last thing we say at night. It is the first pasuk we teach to a young child, and, G-d forbid, the last thing a person says before they pass away.

The first word of this most important pasuk is "Shema", and this word is one of the most difficult to translate. It can mean 5 or 6 things in English – it can mean to listen, to physically hear, to concentrate more, to understand, to internalize, and to empathize. All of these English words and ideas are encapsulated in one Hebrew word " –Shema."

The first thing G-d wants us to do is truly listen. To listen in a way that we are, at the same time, hearing what is being asked of us, internalizing it, and deeply empathizing with it. It is all about connection – the most important relationships, including that with G-d, are those we are deeply connected with, making another person feeling truly heard. Not that you just physically heard them, but that you have put yourself in their place and that that have been truly heard.

Stephen Covey, in his famous book The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People, has a powerful paragraph called "Seek first to understand, and then to be understood." In life we have to be empathetic people. He writes how the single-most difficult quality there is in interpersonal relationships is knowing how to truly listen. When we listen, we often have autobiographical responses – we are not really listening, we are reading ourselves into the conversation, trying to advise people, trying to evaluate and judge – but they are not the basis of empathic listening, where you cancel your own autobiography and truly make yourself into a person able to take on what the other person is saying.

May we always be able to listen in an empathic way, so we are really listening to the other person, connecting with them, making them feel that they are truly heard.

Yeshivat Har Etzion: Virtual Bet Midrash

"Just One Shabbat" - Rav Zvi Shimon

The ten commandments are recounted twice in the Torah; once, 'live,' in the book of Exodus (chapter 20) at the revelation at Mount Sinai, and a second time, in retrospect, in the book of Deuteronomy as Moses recounts to the young generation the important events which took place during the sojourn in the desert. These two accounts are, for the most part, identical. The differences between them are minor with the exception of the fourth commandment, that of keeping the Sabbath. As you read the two accounts, note the differences between them.

"Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of the Lord your God: you shall not do any work - you, your son or daughter, your male or female slave, or your cattle, or the stranger who is

within your settlements. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth and sea, and all that is in them, and He rested on the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it" (Exodus 20:8-11).

"Observe the Sabbath day to keep it holy as the Lord your God has commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of the Lord your God: you shall not do any work - you, your son or daughter, your male or female slave, your ox or your ass or any of your cattle, or the stranger in your settlements, so that your male and female slave may rest as you do. Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt and the Lord your God freed you from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day" (Deuteronomy 5:12-15).

The major differences between the two accounts are:

1) In Exodus the commandment begins "REMEMBER the Sabbath day to keep it holy" while Deuteronomy begins "OBSERVE the Sabbath day to keep it holy."

2) In Deuteronomy there is greater elaboration of the prohibition of making animals work on the Sabbath. As opposed to Exodus which states only that it is forbidden to toil your cattle, Deuteronomy further specifies "YOUR OX OR YOUR ASS or any of your cattle."

3) The reason given for keeping the Sabbath differs in the two accounts. In Exodus, the basis for the Sabbath is the creation while in Deuteronomy it is the Exodus from Egypt.

The differences between the two accounts of the commandment to keep the Sabbath are substantial - not an additional letter or word, but, rather, a different terminology and a completely different explanation for the commandment! How are we to understand these discrepancies? What really happened at Mount Sinai? What did God actually say?

Our Sages resolve these discrepancies as follows:

"'Remember [the Sabbath day]' (Exodus 20:8) and 'Observe [the Sabbath day]' (Deuteronomy 5:12) were pronounced in a single utterance - an utterance which the mouth cannot utter, nor the ear hear" (Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Shevu'ot, 20b)

The two accounts of the commandment to keep the Sabbath are conflicting. This poses a problem from a human perspective. However, we are dealing here with the words of the divine. Normal communication involves the pronunciation of one word at a time. Not so with God. He can simultaneously communicate different words. God miraculously uttered 'remember' as found in the book Exodus and 'observe' as found in Deuteronomy concurrently!

The Ibn Ezra (Rabbi Avraham ben Ezra, Spain, 1092-1167) did not consider this to be the correct understanding of the words of our Sages:

"God forbid that I should claim that they [our Sages] were mistaken for they were greater than us. It is simply that the majority of the people of this generation take their words literally, even though they should not be ... For it is untenable to claim that 'observe' and 'remember' were pronounced simultaneously by way of a miracle. For, were it so, we should ask why observe and remember were not written both in the first account of the ten commandments as well as in the second. Moreover, what shall we do with the other verses [in the two accounts which do not concur]; if they were also pronounced simultaneously, why did our Sages not mention this ... For this interpretation implies a great wonder, that God pronounced 'observe' and 'remember' simultaneously, and it would be expected that such a great wonder would be explicitly stated in the Torah, more so than any of the other miracles recounted in the Torah. Moreover, if we claim that God's communication differs from human communication, how did the Israelites comprehend the words of God?" (Ibn Ezra, long commentary to Exodus 20:1)

According to the Ibn Ezra it is a mistake to ascribe to our Sages the notion that 'observe' and 'remember' were miraculously pronounced simultaneously. Were this interpretation of simultaneous utterance correct, then both renditions, 'remember' and 'observe,' should have appeared in both accounts. Moreover, this miracle is not explicitly stated in the text. In addition, the Ibn Ezra questions whether such an approach is applicable to all the differences between the accounts. Finally, the Ibn Ezra asks how human beings were capable of understanding this miraculous communication. Can the human ear hear two words simultaneously?

If our Sages did not intend to state that God's communication was miraculous, then what was their real intention?

"You should know that words are like bodies and their meanings are like the soul, and the body is a tool for the soul. Consequently, the wise express themselves in any language that preserves their original intent, and do not hesitate to change words, provided they are similar in meaning ...

Now, the ten commandments in this section [in Exodus] are God's unmodified words with no addition or deletion, and they alone were written on the tablets ... and the ten commandments in the section of 'vaetchanan' (Deuteronomy) are Moses' words. The ultimate proof for this is that [in the Ten Commandments in Deuteronomy] we find the clause "as the Lord your God has commanded you" [relating to God in the third person] twice (Deuteronomy 5:12,16).

Now remembering includes observing. Remembering requires that one always recall what day of the week it is, in order to observe the seventh day and not perform any work on it. Thus, the purpose of remembering is to observe. When God commanded 'remember,' all who heard [the commandment] knew that this meant 'observe,' AS IF they were pronounced simultaneously.

Moses did not need to reiterate the rationale "For in six days the Lord made [heaven and earth]" because, in the beginning [of the commandment], Moses states "as the Lord your God has commanded you" (Deuteronomy 5:12), [alluding to the commandment in Exodus] ... .Although God commanded that male and female slave refrain from work, He did not reveal [in the ten commandments in Exodus] the reason for this prohibition. Moses, himself, revealed the motive, [in Deuteronomy] stating that the reason for God's commandment that slaves rest, is in order that we remember that we were also slaves in Egypt and God redeemed us" (Ibn Ezra, Exodus 20:1)

According to the Ibn Ezra, there is a fundamental difference between the two accounts of the ten commandments. The account in Exodus is the 'original,' God's own words. The account in Deuteronomy is Moses' personal account spiced up with his own elaboration. Moses elucidates God's command to remember the Sabbath as an obligation to observe its laws. This is the ultimate purpose of remembering the Sabbath. According to the Ibn Ezra, the rationale of the exodus from Egypt is Moses' elucidation of the prohibition against slaves working on the day of rest. Moses did not change the essence of God's commandment, he only elaborated upon them. Exodus is the original version and Deuteronomy includes Moses' commentary. Any differences between the accounts may be attributed to Moses' explanatory additions.

A somewhat similar approach is advanced by the Ramban (Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman, Spain, 1194-1274):

"He [Moses] began to EXPOSIT to them, saying 'observe' instead of 'remember' this being in line with the plain meaning of Scripture [i.e., that 'observe' is the EXPLANATION of 'remember'] ... He ADDED here [in Deuteronomy] stating [the prohibition of working] your ox and ass to explain that He [God] prohibits working the earth [on the Sabbath] even though it involves the livelihood of man" (Deuteronomy 5:12)

It is clear from the Ramban's usage of the words "exposit" and "added" that he accepts the Ibn Ezra's approach that the Decalogue in Deuteronomy is not a direct recitation but rather a personal 'reconstruction.' The Ramban offers an identical interpretation to that of the Ibn Ezra for the difference between the words 'remember' and 'observe;' Moses simply reveals the meaning behind God's command to remember the Sabbath. The Ramban also relates to the second discrepancy between the

two accounts, the additional specification of the ox and ass in the prohibition of working animals on the Sabbath. The Ramban explains that Moses wishes to emphasize the extent of the prohibition of performing work. This prohibition applies even to agricultural work in the fields such as plowing with oxen and donkeys. One may not even perform basic work aimed at food production.

So far, we have seen the Ramban's solutions to the first two incongruities. What about the most notable discrepancy, the different rationales offered for the Sabbath? The Ramban expounds:

"The exodus from Egypt is evidence of the existence of an eternal God who caused everything to come into existence through His will and who has supreme power ... therefore he stated here that if there ever arises a doubt in your heart concerning the Sabbath that evidences the creation of the world by the will and power of God, you should remember what your eyes saw at the exodus from Egypt which is, to you, the evidence [of His infinite power] and the remembrance [of His deeds]. Thus the Sabbath is a remembrance of the exodus from Egypt, and the exodus is a remembrance of the Sabbath, for on it [the Sabbath] they remember and say that it is God who ... created everything at the beginning of creation ... Now he did not explain here [in Deuteronomy] that the reason for the rest [on the Sabbath] is that in six days the Eternal made heaven since this has already been mentioned many times in the Torah. Instead...he explained to them that from the Exodus from Egypt they will know that it was He who spoke and the world came into existence, and He ceased from work thereon" (Ramban Deuteronomy 5:15).

In contrast to the Ibn Ezra who suggested that the rationale of the exodus from Egypt explains only the prohibition of working slaves on the Sabbath, the Ramban connects the two rationales. The exodus from Egypt serves as further evidence of the creation of the world by God. God's awesome display of power in his intervention in the exodus annuls any doubts regarding God as creator. Only the creator can possess such total control over the elements. Thus, the rationale of the Exodus is totally subservient to the rationale of creation. The Ibn Ezra acknowledges an independent, albeit, minor standing for the exodus rationale. The Ramban offers no independent status to the exodus. It only buttresses the real rationale of creation.

Both the Ibn Ezra and the Ramban regard the Deuteronomy Decalogue to be a personal reconstruction by Moses. A novel and totally different approach is advanced by the Rasag (Rabbi Sa'adia Gaon, Persia, 892-942), as cited in the Ibn Ezra (Long commentary to Exodus 20:1). The Rasag suggests that the different accounts of the ten commandments reveal the differences between the first and second set of tablets. The first tablets were broken by Moses upon witnessing the perpetration of the sin of the golden calf (Exodus 32:19). The second tablets were given after God forgave the Israelites for their sin (Exodus 34). According to the Rasag, the tablets were not the same! Sin caused a change in the content of the ten commandments. The Rasag does not elaborate on the reasons for these specific changes. Perhaps, the sin of the Israelites led to a shift away from an emphasis on philosophical tenets to a more concrete and immediate manifestation of God's dominion over Israel. The people of Israel are indebted to God for freeing them from Egyptian bondage ... Worship of God is no longer only a matter of faith; it is an obligation.

The Ibn Ezra and the Ramban diminished or totally eclipsed the role of the rationale of the exodus from Egypt with regard to the Sabbath. The Rasag resolved the discrepancy in rationales from a historical perspective by distinguishing between the first and second set of stone tablets. The Rambam (Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon, Egypt, 1138-1204) adopts a different approach:

"God commanded us to abstain from work on the Sabbath, and to rest, for two purposes; namely, (1) That we might confirm the true theory, that of the Creation, which at once and clearly leads to the theory of the existence of God. (2) That we might remember how kind God had been in freeing us from the burden of the Egyptians - The Sabbath is therefore a double blessing: it gives us correct notions, and also promotes the well-being of our bodies." (Guide for the Perplexed, Part 2, chapter 31)

The Rambam gives each of the rationales for the Sabbath equal footing. He does not present any hierarchy in rationales. They are both independent and equal reasons for the Sabbath. The Rambam does not attempt to solve the contradiction. He does not explain what actually happened; what God really said? However, it is clear that he views both rationales as equally necessary and central components of the Sabbath.

Why do we need two rationales? Is one not enough? Apparently, we, or more correctly, the Sabbath is in need of both. This interdependence may be explained in several ways. We will begin with an interpretation cited by the Ramban:

"It is also true that the attribute of 'remembering' is alluded to in a positive commandment and issues forth from the attribute of love to that of mercy, for he who does his master's command is beloved of him and his master shows him mercy. But the attribute of 'observing' is alluded to in a negative commandment, which goes to the attribute of justice and issues forth from that of fear, for he who guards himself from doing anything which does not please his master does so out of fear for him" (Ramban Exodus 20:7).

The different accounts of the commandment to keep the Sabbath reflect different manners of relating to God. We are commanded to love God but also to fear him. This double emotional attitude applies not only to our relationship with God, but also to the commandments, and, in this instance, to the keeping of the Sabbath. 'Zakhor' - remember, introduces positive commandments. According to our Sages, remembering involves positive action towards sanctifying the Sabbath. This includes setting aside our finest commodities for the sake of the Sabbath (see Rashi, Exodus 20:8), or counting all days with reference to the Sabbath. In the Ramban's words:

"Other nations count the days of the week in such a manner that each is independent of the other. Thus they call each day by a separate name or by a name of the ministers [in heaven, such as Sunday, which means 'sun's day,' Monday which means 'moon's day'] or by any other names which they call them. But Israel counts all days with reference to the Sabbath: 'one day after the Sabbath,' 'two days after the Sabbath.' This is of the essence of the commandment which we have been obligated always to remember the Sabbath every day of the week."

In addition we learn from the word 'remember' to sanctify the Sabbath by making 'kiddush,' the utterance of blessing over wine, proclaiming the sanctity of the Sabbath. All these are examples of positive commandments, of active involvement in sanctifying the Sabbath. They are a product of religious enthusiasm, creativity, and a love of God.

Conversely, 'OBSERVE' preempts prohibitions. Observing the Sabbath involves passivity, refraining from doing work on the Sabbath, from perpetrating sin. It is usually accompanied by fear of the awesome power of the Almighty. We confine ourselves and acquiesce to the will of the Lord. We stand before God as a slave before his master, subjugating ourselves to His will.

Our sense of love of God stems from the act of creation, an act of total love and kindness. We stand before the creator appreciating the marvels of His works, and sense a love for Him, a desire to give in return, to commit ourselves to His worship. By contrast, our redemption from Egypt obliges us and serves as the foundation for the relationship between man and God as servant before his master. Both perspectives are necessary. Awe without love or love without awe are lacking. Both are necessary in relating to God, and both are required for the Sabbath. Sabbath without beauty and sanctity becomes oppressive and does not come close to realizing the inherent splendor of the Sabbath. Likewise, the beauty of Shabbat is rooted in the prohibitions of the day.

The interdependence between the two accounts of the commandment to keep the

Sabbath may also be understood from a religious philosophical perspective. The creation theme highlights God's transcendence. He created the world and stands above it. By contrast, the exodus narrative exemplifies immanence. God's active intervention in the process of history implies an affinity and a concern for the future of Israel and the world. He saves the Israelites from their Egyptian oppressors, thereby saving the just and punishing the wicked. God is both transcendent and immanent. He is beyond the world but, at the same time, immersed in it. Judaism rejects both a totally immanent view of God, of the likes of pantheism, and a totally transcendental view found in certain philosophic traditions. The two accounts of the Sabbath reflect the complexity of God's connection to the world. If this is true with regard to God, it is also the desirable approach that religious man should adopt. Man can not abandon the world in his quest for God. The Sabbath is sanctified to God. We refrain from work and strive to spiritually grow beyond our mundane temporal concerns. Yet, at the very same time, we emphasize the equality of all men and insure that stranger, slave, and even animal rest. The religious essence and the moral essence in man merge together. The establishment of the kingdom of heaven is also the establishment of the kingdom of justice.

Our Sages solve the contradictions between the two accounts of the commandment to keep the Sabbath by stating that 'Remember the Sabbath day' (Exodus 20:8) and 'Observe the Sabbath day' (Deuteronomy) were pronounced in a single utterance. This may be viewed as a technical solution to discrepancies between different accounts. However, we agree with the Ibn Ezra, that there is a more profound idea behind this statement of our Sages. The message behind the single utterance of conflicting statements is that the two accounts of the commandment to keep the Sabbath are interconnected and interdependent. They are different sides of the same coin. Only if we combine the two accounts of the commandment to keep the Sabbath, of remembering and observing, of God as creator and God as deliverer from Egyptian bondage, do we truly grasp the complete glory of the Sabbath.

BS"D

To: parsha@groups.io
From: Chaim Shulman
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INTERNET PARSHA SHEET
ON **VAESCHANAN** - 5785

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Tidbits • Parashas Va'eschanan - Nachamu 5785Ira Zlotowitz <Iraz@klalgovoah.org> UnsubscribeParashas Va'eschanan - Nachamu • August 9th • 15 Av 5785 **In memory of Rabbi Meir Zlotowitz ZT"L**
This Shabbos, August 9th, is Tu B'Av. Av Harachamim and Tzidkascha are omitted.Several notable events took place on Tu B'Av:The decree that the generation of the Midbar would die and not enter Eretz Yisrael was not carried out on those still alive in the 40th year.The prohibition against women marrying outside of their shevet was lifted.The prohibition enacted against Shevet Binyamin after the tragic episode of Pilegesh b'Givah was lifted.Hoshea removed the guards that Yeravam had placed to prevent Bnei Yisrael from Aliyah Leregel to Yerushalayim.During the beginning of the Second Beis HaMikdash, the annual wood quota needed for that winter's korbanos was filled.The Roman occupiers permitted burial of the victims of the massacre at Beitar during the Bar Kochba rebellion. Miraculously, the bodies had not decomposed, despite exposure to the elements for possibly a year.The single women of Yerushalayim would dress in white and dance in the vineyards seeking to attract appropriate shidduchim.
The minhag of most Ashkenazi congregations is to stand when the Aseres HaDibros are read during Kerias HaTorah of Parashas Va'eschanan. Most Sephardic congregations are particular not to follow this practice.
The haftarah of "Nachamu Nachamu Ami" is leined. This is the first in a series of seven haftaros known as the Shivasa D'nechemta, the seven haftaros of consolation.
The final opportunity for Kiddush Levana is at 10:43 PM on Friday night, August 8th.
Pirkei Avos: Perek 3
Daf Yomi - Shabbos: Bavli: Avodah Zara 52 • Yerushalmi: Pesachim 72 • Mishnah Yomis: Zevachim 8:6-7 • Oraysa (coming week): Moed Katan 16a-18a • Kitzur Shulchan Aruch: 194:1-11
Make sure to call your parents, in-laws, grandparents and Rebbi to wish them a good Shabbos. If you didn't speak to your kids today, make sure to connect with them as well!
Shabbos Nachamu is Shabbos Parasha Va'eschanan, August 9th and is also Tu B'Av.Shabbos Mevorchim Chodesh Elul is in two weeks Shabbos Parashas Re'eh.
Rosh Chodesh Elul is on Sunday & Monday, August 24th-25th.
Va'eschanan: Hashem denies Moshe's (515!) pleas to be allowed to enter Eretz Yisrael • Do not add to or subtract from the commandments • Torah wisdom will make you great in the eyes of the nations • No nation is as close to Hashem as you are • Remember how the nation stood at Har Sinai • Hashem took you out of Mitzrayim to be His special people and to serve no one but Him • Hashem will not forsake you in exile because of His covenant • Never has any nation been shown miracles like those you have witnessed nor survived being addressed by Hashem • Hashem is supreme and there is nothing besides Him • Moshe sets aside three cities of refuge east of the Yarden • The Aseres HaDibros • Shema Yisrael • The mitzvah of Ahavas Hashem • Tefillin and Mezuzah • Do not forget Hashem amidst plenty • Transmit the story of the Exodus to your children • Destroy the nations of the land; don't mingle with them or learn from them • You are a holy nation to Hashem • Hashem is generous to those who love Him and keep His mitzvos • Hashem punishes His enemies
Haftarah: The haftarah of Nachamu (Yeshaya 40:1–26) relays not only the consolation over the churban, but also foretells the consolation the nation will experience in the future, following instances of pain and destruction. Despite endless persecution, "Netzach Yisrael lo yishaker", our nation continues to survive, constantly rejuvenated through solace ordained from Above.
Parashas Va'eschanan: 118 Pesukim • 8 Obligations • 4 Prohibitions
1) Do not covet another's possessions. 2) Accept the yoke of Heaven. 3) Love Hashem. 4) Set aside time to study Torah. 5) Recite Krias Shema twice daily. 6-7) Wear tefillin on the arm and head. 8) Affix mezuzos to your doorposts. 9) Do not suspect an accepted Navi of falsifying a prophecy. 10) Conquer and destroy the Seven Nations that inhabit Canaan. 11) Do not be overly gracious or grant gifts to idol worshipers. 12) Do not intermarry with the Seven Nations.
Mitzvah Highlight: The Chinuch says that it is within the power of man to quash thoughts and pangs of jealousy that come to him, as one's heart and mind are, in fact, under a person's control.
"נַחֲמוּ נַחֲמוּ עַמִּי"Be comforted, be comforted My people (Haftarah of Shabbos Nachamu - Yeshaya 40:1)
The Yalkut Shimoni (Yeshaya 443) relates that the greatest Nevi'im attempted to console Klal Yisrael after the churban, as did the Avos and Moshe Rabbeinu, to no avail. Only once Hashem joined personally in comforting them were they comforted. נחמוה נחמוה עמי - Comfort them together with Me.
Surely, the nation was trusting of the words of the great Nevi'im; why then was it necessary for Hashem personally to comfort them?
Rav Yeruchem Olshin shlit"a quotes the Maharal (Netzach Yisrael 9) that explains that the churban and resulting exile are a result of the breakdown in the relationship between Hashem and His chosen nation. The various sins only resulted in galus once it reached a point where the covenant and connection were considered broken. According to this approach, Rav Shneur Kotler zt"l explains, that in essence, the devastation of galus felt by the nation was the separation from the Almighty. Therefore, for the words of consolation to be appreciated, they needed to hear from Hashem Himself that the relationship and closeness will be attained once again.
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from: YUTorah <yutorah@comms.yu.edu>date: Aug 7, 2025, 6:02 PM
Sometimes More is Less
Rabbi Daniel Z. Feldman
Inthis week's Torah reading, which describes Moses'repeated entreaties to

God that he be permitted toenter the Land of Israel, there are a striking number ofallusions to excess, even in a single verse: God responds(Deut. 3:26) “Rav lakh – enough!” or literally, “this is toomuch from you”. “Al tosef daber Elai – do not speak tome anymore (lit., do not add to your talking”). The versebegins by stating God’s anger, but the word that is usedis vayitabber, which comes from the same word used forpregnancy and for a leap year, conveying “fullness”. Then,seemingly unrelatedly, we read of the prohibition of baltosif, of adding on to the mitzvot of the Torah (4:2).

It is perhaps self-evident why there is a prohibition tosubtract from the Torah, as commanded in the same verse,in fact prompting the question of why it needs to be stated.The problem with adding to the Torah, in contrast, isharder to understand.

There are a number of suggestions as to why this is:one is that the Torah is a perfect balance of values, oftenrequiring one to make room for the other. In fact, this isstated explicitly a few verses later (4:6), and, notably, theweekday Torah reading from this morning dips into thesecond aliyah and includes this verse. One who thinks he isgoing “above and beyond” may actually be simultaneouslysubtracting from some crucial area.

Another suggestion is that, in actuality, it is indeedsubtracting from the principles of the Torah that isthe concern. However, one who assigns to himself theauthority to add to the Torah will also ultimately come tosubtract (see Torah Temimah).

This concern for excess and imprecision is present in allareas, even in moral judgements. One who uses extremelanguage in this area may think he is expressing elevatedsensitivity and righteousness; in reality, however, hemay be detracting from the ability of such terminologyto accomplish its stated goals. Further, he may activelyignore, or even validate, moral travesties through thisdisproportionate judgement.

This is evident on the world stage at this moment.Accusations against Israel that result in an endorsement ofan openly genocidal terror group, that turn a blind eye toundeniably starving hostages being obviously tortured, andthat encourage that group to continue and recommit tothat behavior, undermine the very idea of morality.

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from: **The Rabbi Jonathan Sacks Legacy** <info@rabbisacks.org>
date: Aug 7, 2025, 11:20 AM
subject: **A Tiny, Treasured People (Va'etchanan)**
written by Rabbi Sacks in **2012**

There is a statement made towards the end of Parshat Va'etchanan, and it is so inconspicuous that we can sometimes miss it, but it is a statement with such far reaching implications that it challenges the impression that has prevailed thus far in the Torah, giving an entirely new complexion to the biblical image of the people Israel.

The Lord did not set His affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you are the fewest of all peoples.

Deut. 7:7This is not what we have heard thus far. In Bereishit, God promises the patriarchs that their descendants will be like the stars of the heaven, the sand on the sea shore, the dust of the earth, uncountable. Abraham will be the father, not just of one nation but of many. At the beginning of Exodus we read of how the covenantal family, numbering a mere seventy when they went down to Egypt, were “fertile and prolific, and their population increased. They became so numerous that the land was filled with them” (Ex. 1:7).

Three times in the book of Deuteronomy, Moses describes the Israelites as being “as many as the stars of the sky” (Deut. 1:10, Deut. 10:22, Deut. 28:62). King Solomon speaks of himself as set among “the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number” (1 Kings 3:8). The prophet Hosea says that “the Israelites will be like the sand on the seashore, which cannot be measured or counted” (Hos. 2:1).

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

Rashbam and Chizkuni give the more straightforward explanation that Moses is contrasting the Israelites with the seven nations they would be fighting in the land of Canaan/Israel. God would lead the Israelites to victory despite the fact that they were outnumbered by the local inhabitants.

Rabbenu Bachya quotes Maimonides, who says that we would have expected God, King of the Universe, to have chosen the most numerous nation in the world as His people, since “the glory of the king is in the multitude of people” (Prov. 14:28).

God did not do so. Thus Israel should know they are a people extraordinarily blessed that God chose them, despite their smallness, to be His am segulah, His special treasure.

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

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

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

The second reason is that Jews did not seek to convert others. Had they done so they would have been closer in numbers to Christianity (2.2 billion) or Islam (1.3 billion). In fact, Malbim reads something like this into our verse. The previous verses have said that the Israelites are about to enter a land with seven nations, Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. Moses warns them against intermarriage with them, not for racial but for religious reasons: “they will turn your children away from following Me to serve other gods.” Malbim interprets our verse as Moses saying to the Israelites, ‘Don’t justify outmarriage on the grounds that it will increase the number of Jews. God is not interested in numbers.’

There was a moment when Jews might have sought to convert others (to be sure, there was one instance when they did. The Hasmonean priest-king John Hyrcanus I forcibly converted the Edomites, known as the Idumeneans. Herod was one of their number). The period in question was the Roman Empire in the first century. Jews numbered some 10 per cent of the empire, and there were many Romans who admired aspects of their faith and way of life. The pagan deities of the Hellenistic world were losing their appeal and plausibility, and throughout the centres of the Mediterranean, individuals were adopting Jewish practices. Two aspects of Judaism stood in their way: the commandments and circumcision. In the end, Jews chose not to compromise their way of life for the sake of making converts. The Hellenistic people who sympathised with Judaism mostly adopted Pauline Christianity instead. Consistently throughout history, Jews have chosen to be true to themselves and to stay small rather than make concessions for the sake of increasing numbers.

Why have Divine Providence or human choice or both, eventuated in the sheer smallness of the Jewish people? Could it be, quite simply, that through the Jewish people God is telling humankind that you do not need to be numerous to be great. Nations are not judged by their size but by their contribution to the human heritage. Of this the most compelling proof is that a nation as small as the Jews could produce an ever-renewed flow of prophets, priests, poets, philosophers, sages, saints, halachists, aggadists, codifiers, commentators, rebbes and roshei yeshivot; that they could also yield some of the world's greatest writers, artists, musicians, film-makers, academics, intellectuals, doctors, lawyers, businesspeople and technological innovators. Out of all proportion to their numbers Jews could and can be found working as lawyers fighting injustice, economists fighting poverty, doctors fighting disease, and teachers fighting ignorance. You do not need numbers to enlarge the spiritual and moral horizons of humankind. You need other things altogether: a sense of the worth and dignity of the individual, of the power of human possibility to transform the world, of the importance of giving everyone the best education they can have, of making each of us feel part of a collective responsibility to ameliorate the human condition, and a willingness to take high ideals and enact them in the real world, unswayed by disappointments and defeats. Nowhere is this more in evidence today than among the people of Israel in the state of Israel: traduced in the media and pilloried by much of the world, yet still, year after year, producing human miracles in medicine, agriculture, technology, the arts, as if the word "impossible" did not exist in the Hebrew language. When, therefore, we feel fearful and depressed about Israel's plight, it is worth returning to Moses' words:

"The Lord did not set His affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you are the fewest of all peoples."

Small? Yes. Still surrounded, as the Israelites were then, by "nations larger and stronger than you." But that small people, defying the laws of history, outlived all the world's great empires, and still has a message of hope for humanity. You don't have to be large to be great. If you are open to a power greater than yourself, you will become greater than yourself. Israel today still carries that message to the world.

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from: Aish.com Weekly Torah Portion <newsletterserver@aish.com>
date: Aug 7, 2025, 7:00 AM
subject: V'etchanan (Deuteronomy 3:23-7:11)

Shabbat Shalom Weekly
by Rabbi Yitzchak Zweig

V'etchanan (Deuteronomy 3:23-7:11)

GOOD MORNING! The Shabbat after Tisha B'Av is called "Shabbat Nachamu – Sabbath of Consolation." It is named after the first words of the haftarah (a scriptures reading in synagogue after the weekly Torah portion). This week's haftarah begins with the opening verse of Isaiah 40, and refers to the Almighty instructing his prophets to bring solace to the Jewish nation, "Comfort my people, comfort them." Shabbat Nachamu is no ordinary Shabbat; it is seen as a spiritual turning point. After three weeks of sorrow and reflection on the many tragedies that befell our people, this Shabbat offers the first rays of comfort, signaling a movement toward healing and renewal. In many communities, the atmosphere is notably joyful. Some traditions include special meals, singing, and even communal gatherings or outdoor celebrations. Some sages (see Ritva on Ta'anit 30a) say that the food we eat on this Shabbat should be extra special, like that of a chag – festival.

It is also a popular time for weddings, as the period of semi-mourning known as the Three Weeks has ended and the spirit of hope and consolation makes it an auspicious time to celebrate new beginnings. This is particularly relevant to this week's Torah reading where we find one of the consequences of straying from the Almighty: "God will scatter you among the nations, and only a small number will remain among the nations to which God will lead you" (Deuteronomy 4:27).

This, astonishingly accurate, predictive statement can be better understood with the following comparison. According to a Chinese censuses taken around 2 CE, there were about 50 million Chinese people in the world. Today, there are about 1.5 billion Chinese people. Columbia University's Professor Salo Baron, who was considered among the most important researchers and historians of Judaism of that period, estimated the number of Jews in the world at that time to be about eight million.

If the Jewish population had grown at the same rate as the Chinese, there would be close to 240 million Jews in the world today. Yet, as the Torah presciently foretold, the worldwide Jewish population hovers around 13 million. Obviously, worldwide dispersion, persecution, and outright annihilation all contribute to this rather depressing statistic. However, this week's Torah reading also closes with a message of hope:

"God did not desire you, nor choose you, because you were greater (in number) than any people. Rather, He chose you because you were the least of all peoples" (Deuteronomy 7:7).

At first blush, the presumption that any people should qualify to be chosen as "God's Nation" merely on the strength of population size seems rather odd. Why should that be a qualifying feature at all?

The great Biblical commentator known as Rashi takes a novel approach to this verse. He explains (ad loc) that the Torah is not discussing population size at all. Instead, Rashi says that the verse is telling us that the Jewish nation was specifically chosen because they do not ascribe greatness to themselves. As the verse goes on to say, "because you were the least of all peoples."

Rashi cites examples of Jewish leaders who, despite their lofty status, did not ascribe any greatness to themselves. Abraham was the founder of Judaism and, according to the Torah, took on a role in world leadership (Genesis 17:5). Nevertheless, immediately after that designation, he referred to himself as nothing more than "dust and ash" (Genesis 18:27).

Again, shortly after the great miracles of the Ten Plagues, the Splitting of the Red Sea, and the freeing of the Jewish nation from bondage, Moses and Aaron referred to themselves as "totally insignificant" (Exodus 16:7). If we examine the royal line of Jewish kings, we see a similar pattern – the first king of the Jewish people was King Saul who was chosen for his humble and modest personality. In fact, even after Samuel anointed him king he simply went home and did not even tell his family that he had been appointed king. When Samuel wanted to present him to the people Saul actually hid!

There is an extraordinary lesson here in how Judaism views leadership. The Talmud says that kingship is in reality servitude (Horayut 10a and 10b). When King Solomon died and the people came to his son (and heir to the throne) Rechovam to complain that King Solomon's tax burdens were too great, he sought advice from the elders that advised his father. They told him. "If you will be a servant to these people and speak gently to them, they will be your subjects forever" (Kings I 12:7). In other words, for a king to be successful must view himself as a servant of the people. He ignored their advice and the kingdom became divided; 10 of the 12 tribes established a separate monarchy.

Elsewhere (Kiddushin 82b) the Talmud suggests the jobs to which certain animals would be best suited, e.g. a fox who is cunning would make a good salesman. The Talmud projects that a suitable vocation for a lion would be a porter. This seems very strange, how is it possible that the king of all the animals would be a lowly porter?

The Talmud is teaching us that a king's main function is to empower others. A king, to be both effective and accepted as a leader, must ensure that his position is never solely about him; his focus must be on making everyone around him great. Regarding the Almighty Himself, the Talmud states, "Said Rabbi Yochanan, 'Everywhere you find His greatness you'll also find His humility'" (Megillah 31a). This means that God Himself ensured that creation is not about Him; it is about man fulfilling his ultimate potential. The essence of creation is for man to have a space he perceives as his own and then to use his free will to build a relationship with the Almighty and achieve the most blissful existence possible, in this world and the next.

To summarize Newton's Law of Universal Gravity, objects exert a force on one another equal to their mass. Imagine an elephant playing tug of war with a mouse; even though they both exert equal force on the rope, the mouse does all the moving. This gravitational force or "attraction" of smaller objects to larger ones is a law of physics and simply a reality of life. This concept is used all the time to get individuals to join larger groups; Apple, McDonald's, and Amazon continually urge people to join the hundreds of millions of others who enjoy their product.

Because of this tendency to want to belong to something "bigger" the Torah dispels the presumption that the Almighty chose the Jewish people because of their large population. In theory, one might think that it would make sense for the Almighty to choose the largest and most influential people as his emissaries in this world; this way everyone would "see the light" and quickly hop on the popular bandwagon. But that would be a colossal mistake.

When one simply joins a movement to belong to something larger, it also means giving up personal development and growth. Consider monolithic societies like communism where individual achievement is meaningless. Nobody in that society has any incentive to develop themselves. Because man was created to develop himself and achieve, this arrested development leads to overall misery, low morale,

and a downward spiral of the human spirit.
It is exactly for this reason that, according to Rashi, the Almighty chose the Jewish nation to be His ambassadors to the world. We are small in number; we are not seeking more adherents; in fact, Judaism wholeheartedly discourages it! Judaism is totally unique in that it has a non-threatening universal message for the world: "You do not have to change your affiliation. You can develop yourselves through the seven Noachide laws – i.e. worship the one true God (monotheism), be moral (don't kill, don't steal, etc.), don't abuse animals, and set up a just society through court systems." That's it!
Simply put, Jews believe that you do not have to be Jewish to build a relationship with the Almighty and go to heaven. As Jews, our goal should be to practice the leadership of our founding fathers Abraham and Moses whose approach to others was always about making them great and never focusing on their own personal achievements. We should focus on helping others build an awareness of the Almighty and teach how they too might live in a theocentric universe. This is the role of the Jewish nation in the world.
The superiority complex that many Jews maintain as "God's chosen people" is totally unjustified. We were chosen to help others become great; we are not "better" than others. Moses – for all his greatness – did not feel that he was "better" than anyone else. The example set by the founders of Judaism is that true leadership is about helping others achieve greatness and not focusing on your own self-aggrandizement.
Sadly, this very message is lost on many. There are whole segments of Jewish society that have chosen to live within large monolithic communities and have all but forsaken helping their brethren achieve similar personal development. There is an air of elitism about them that should be particularly alarming to anyone who is paying attention. This self-congratulatory attitude results in self-absorption, which leads to moral decline.
Unfortunately, when we forget our roots and Jewish society becomes too self-absorbed then division grows within our ranks. Subsequently, the Almighty has to remind us, painfully, that we need one another and that we should be focused on others' needs. This is the message of Shabbos Nachamu. It is a beacon of light after darkness, inviting individuals and communities to console one another and restore unity, and embrace hope as they move forward and heal as a unified nation.
Torah Portion of the week
Va'etchanan, Deuteronomy 3:23 - 7:11Moses pleads with God to enter the Holy Land, but is turned down. (Remember, God always answers your prayers – sometimes with a "yes," sometimes with a "no," and sometimes with a "not yet.") Moses commands the Children of Israel not to add or subtract from the words of the Torah and to keep all of the Commandments. He then reminds them that God has no shape or form and that we should not make or worship idols of any kind.
The cities of Bezer, Ramot, and Golan are designated as Cities of Refuge east of the Jordan river. Accidental murderers can escape there to avoid revengeful relatives. They then wait there until tried.

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from**: Rav Immanuel Bernstein** <ravbernstein@journeysintorah.com>
date: Aug 7, 2025, 10:32 AM
subject: Morals and Meanings in Va'eschanan
Shabbos Nachamu – A Double Measure of Comfort
The haftarahs for the seven weeks that follow Tisha b'Av are known as "Shiva de'Nechemta – the Seven [Haftarahs] Comfort." Normally, words of comfort can help a person forget their sorrows and look forward to better times. In these seven weeks, the matter attains a higher level, for the longing that is inspired by hearing about the comfort that awaits us in future times can itself be instrumental in bringing those times about.
The first of the seven special haftarahs begins with Hashem's call to comfort the Jewish people. Indeed, is after this opening call that the Shabbos receives its name: Shabbos Nachamu. The verse reads:
נחמו נחמו עמי יאמר אלוקיכם
Comfort, comfort, My people, says your God.[1]
Commenting on the double expression in our verse, "nachamu nachamu," the midrash says that in the future, we will be comforted in double measure.[2]
This idea seems somewhat puzzling. Presumably, there is a certain point when we will be fully comforted. What is the meaning of being comforted beyond that point? What does it add?
In truth, the matter begins earlier than this, for our verse proceeds to state:
כי לקחה מיד ה' כפליים בכל חטאותיה
For she has received from Hashem's hand a double measure for her sins.
Here too, we wonder, what does it mean to receive a "double measure" of punishment? Surely, there is a certain amount of retribution that is due for our wrongdoings, beyond which anything else is superfluous!
Rabbi Akiva's LaughterThere is a well-known episode that related in the Gemara concerning Rabbi Akiva and his colleagues.[3] They were once passing by the Temple Mount and they witnessed foxes emerging from the sight where the Holy of Holies had stood. Upon seeing this, Rabbi Akiva's colleagues started crying, while he started laughing! Upon bring asked why he was laughing, he responded by asking his friends why they were crying. They replied, "Seeing a site so holy that now lies in utter desolation and degradation, shall we not cry?" To this, Rabbi Akiva responded that there are two prophesies which are mentioned in conjunction with each other, one of the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash and other of the future redemption. He continued, "Now that I have seen the first prophecy being fulfilled, I know that the second one will be fulfilled as well."
These words themselves need explanation. Did Rabbi Akiva not believe that the future redemption would occur until he saw the prophecy of the destruction fulfilled? Additionally, even if he is now assured that the redemption will take place in future, surely the current state of destruction is still cause for mourning – and certainly not for laughter!
Present and Future BlessingsThe Gemara states:
העולם הזה, על בשורות טובות אומר "ברוך הטוב והמטיב", ועל בשורות רעות אומר "ברוך דיין האמת", לעולם הבא — כולו "הטוב והמטיב"
In this world, upon hearing good tidings, one says, "Blessed is He Who is good and does good," while upon hearing bad tidings one says, "Blessed is the true Judge." But in the World to Come all of [the blessings] will be, "Blessed He Who is good and does good."[4]
Rabbi Yechezkel Landau, in his commentary Tzlach to the Gemara, explains that when we say that in future times there will only be the blessing of Hatov v''Hameitiv, this does not mean merely to say that there will be no more bad tidings, for in that case, why focus on the absence of the blessing and not on the absence of the cause for the blessing, i.e., bad tidings themselves?
Rather, the Gemara means to say that in the future we will recite the blessing Hatov v'Hametiv even regarding things over which we recited the blessing Dayan ha'Emes in this world! As if to say, in the future we will come to understand how even things that we perceived at the time to be bad were in reality for our benefit. In this light, there will be no more room for the blessing over bad tidings for we will come to recognize that all tidings were in reality good ones.[5]
Indeed, this is the meaning of being punished in double measure, for the difficulties experienced by the Jewish people in exile are in fact twofold. Beyond the hardships themselves, there is the additional difficulty of being unable to fathom how these experiences are part of Hashem's plan and, indeed, where He is during these times. To this end, the verse states that in the future the comfort will likewise be in double measure. Not only will we be comforted in the normal sense of the word, assured that our travails are behind us and only good things are to come, but we will also come to understand how the difficult times brought all this about.
Returning to the episode with Rabbi Akiva and his colleagues mentioned above, the commentators explain that Rabbi Akiva was not talking about this faith in the future redemption occurring, but about something much deeper. His message to his colleagues was that the pairing of the two prophecies is not merely informational in nature, it is causational. The disintegration brought about by the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash is itself the means through which the future redemption will come about. In the same way that a seed disintegrates before it then develops into a plant, so too the preceding order is reduced to nothing in order to make way for the future glory of the Beis Hamikdash and the Jewish people. With his penetrating and far-reaching vision, Rabbis Akiva was able to look upon the destruction of the present and see before his eyes the assembly of the future redemption.[6]
How telling are the Gemara's concluding words concerning that episode:
אמרו לו, "עקיבא ניחמתו, עקיבא ניחמתו"
They said to him, "Akiva, you have comforted us. Akiva, you have comforted us." Why did they state this twice? For like our Haftarah, they had been privy to a glimpse of the twofold comfort of the future. Not only that good times would ultimately come, but that all their current experiences were ultimately a preparation for those times.
Knowledge of the dual nature of the comfort that awaits us in the future already affords us some measure of comfort in the present, even as we are currently only witness to the destruction described in the first prophecy. May we soon merit to see the fulfilment of the second prophecy, in all its glory!
[1] Yeshayahu 40:1.[2] See Vayikra Rabbah 10:2.[3] Makkos 24a.[4] Pesachim 50a.[5] Author of responsa Nodah b'Yehudah.[6] R' Leib Mintzberg, Ben Melech p. 235.

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from: **Rabbi Chanan Morrison** <chanan@ravkooktorah.org>

date: Aug 7, 2025, 3:55 AM
subject**: Rav Kook on Va'Etchanan**: Introducing Prayer with Praise
Va'Etchanan: Introducing Prayer with Praise
Moses' PrayerThe Torah records Moses' pleas for permission to enter the Land of Israel:
"O God, Eternal! You have begun to show me Your greatness and power. What force is there in heaven or earth that can perform deeds and mighty acts as You can? Please, let me cross over and see the good land...." (Deut. 3:24-25)
Rabbi Simlai, in the Talmud, analyzed this prayer and drew out its structure, noting two distinct parts:
Praise — "You have begun to show me Your greatness...."Petition — "Please let me cross...."This, Rabbi Simlai explained, is a model for all prayers. One should begin with praise of God, and only afterward present one's requests.
We need to understand this model. Is it simply a matter of etiquette, just as one would flatter a mortal king before making a request? Or is there a deeper significance to this protocol for prayer?
How Does Prayer Work?
Rav Kook explained that the requirement to precede prayer with God's praise relates to the very foundations of prayer and its efficacy. Following this format prevents us from grossly misinterpreting the mechanics of prayer.
One might think that prayer is some sort of magic loophole built into the framework of Divine providence, and that by pleading our case it is possible to cause God to change His mind. The notion that we have the power to change God's will, however, is untenable.
Rather, prayer is a wonderful gift that allows us to change and refine ourselves. Prayer does not effect a change in God; prayer effects a change in us. It is only by virtue of the soul's moral and spiritual elevation that prayer has the power to annul harsh decrees. We cannot change the basic universal order manifested in a particular decree. But we can change ourselves. Then, as a result of our transformation, the decree is no longer relevant.
Thus it is advisable to introduce every prayer with praise of God. Such praise affirms God's eternal nature and ensures a correct understanding of how prayer works.
Even Moses
It is striking that Rabbi Simlai's insight was gleaned from examining a prayer of Moses. One might consider himself above making such a mistake regarding the nature of prayer. Yet we find that even Moses, despite his unparalleled grasp of spiritual matters, took care to introduce his request with praise of God. Certainly we should follow Moses' lead, thereby ensuring that we correctly recognize the true nature of prayer.
(Sapphire from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. I, p. 147)

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from: **Joshua Kruger** <genesis@torah.org>
to: parsha-halacha@torah.org
date: Aug 5, 2025, 7:22 PM
subject: Parsha Halacha for the Shabbos Table - Reciting the Shema
Parshas Vaeschanan
Reciting the Shema
(Written by Josh and Tammy Kruger, in collaboration with Rabbi Yehoshua Pfeffer of the Institute for Dayanim)
The Story
In the city of Balagan, on a street named Gevalt, lived the Mevulbal family. They were very nice and funny and very very very mixed up. Today Reuven, their son, was starting third grade after a fun summer break.
"Goodbye Mom and Dad. I'm off to school." he called out as he left his home.
"Have a great day, Reuven" replied Mrs. Mevulbal. "I hope you make lots of friends in your new class."
Reuven quickly found his way to school and entered the classroom.
"Boy, these kids are really short. I'm going to be the star basketball player" he thought.
"You must be Reuven Mevulbal" said the teacher.
"Yes" he said proudly. "How did you know?"
"Because this is a kindergarden class" smiled the teacher. "It seems that you're a bit mixed up. No worries, I'll take you to your class after we finish tefila". She offered Reuven a seat, and then began to sing modeh ani with the class.
"Oh my goodness" thought Reuven "these students aren't saying the words properly. They're going to need a lot of help."
Within a few minutes it was time to say the keriyas shema. Reuven covered his eyes with his hand. As the class starting saying the words he thought to himself "I wonder if these little kids know that they're supposed to cover their eyes?" He opened up his fingers slightly and peeked through them to check. He was happy to see that everyone else also had their eyes covered.
"Thank you for your help" whispered the teacher "but were you able to have kavana on the meaning of the words you just said?"
"Oh no!" thought Reuven. "I didn't. Do I have to say it again?"
The Discussion
Q: What is the connection between our story and the parsha?
A: The first section of keriyas shema is found in our parsha (Devarim 7:2).
Q: Reuven should have had kavana when he said the shema. Now that he has made the mistake, does he have to repeat it?
A: If someone performed a mitzva without kavana, there is a machlokes regarding whether the mitzva counts. Some poskim rule that the mitzva counts and that there is no need to repeat it. Other poskim rule that it doesn't count and needs to be repeated. However, in the case of saying the first two lines of keriyas shema ("shema yisrael" and "baruch shem kevodo"), all poskim agree that kavana is needed. Therefore, Reuven must repeat these pesukim (Shulchan Aruch, 63:4).
Q: What should we concentrate on when saying the first line of the shema?
A: There are two important thoughts to have:
1- Hashem is our G-d (Elokeinu)
2- There is only ONE Hashem (Echad)
Q: Why do we cover our eyes with our right hand when we say the first line of shema?
A: In order to help our kavana we cover our eyes in order to prevent us from being distracted by what is happening around us (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim, 61:5). The first person recorded to have covered his eyes when he said keriyas shema was Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi (Berachos 13b).
Parsha Halacha for the Shabbos Table © 2023 by Torah.org.

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from: **Michal Horowitz** <michalchorowitz@gmail.com>
date: Aug 7, 2025, 8:05 AM
subject: V'Eschanan 5785: To Gaze Upon the Pleasantness of Hashem By Michal Horowitz on August 7, 2025
In Parshas V'Eschanan, the Torah delineates for us many foundations of our nation, including (but not limited to): Tefila, Eretz Yisrael, Achdus Hashem, chinuch ha'bonim, leadership and Matan Torah.
The parsha opens with Moshe's prayers to be allowed entry into the Holy Land, and the commentators explained that he asked 515 times to be allowed in, which is the gematria (numeric value) of the opening word of the parsha: ואתחנן.
Moshe beseeched Hashem and said: אֶעְבְּרָה־נָּא וְאֶרְאֶה אֶת־הָאָרֶץ הַטּוֹבָה אֲשֶׁר בְּעֵבֶר הַיַּרְדֵּן הָהָר הַטּוֹב הַזֶּה וְהַלְּבָנוֹן - please let me cross over and see the good land that is on the other side of the Yarden; this good mountain (Yerushalayim) and the Levanon (the Beis HaMikdash) (Devarim 3:25 with Rashi).
Here, in the last days of his life, Moshe requests but only one thing of Hashem: to enter into His holy abode, the place where His Shechina dwells in His holy city.
Hashem's reply to Moshe was: רַב־לָךְ אַל־תּוֹסֶף דַּבֵּר אֵלַי עוֹד בַּדָּבָר הַזֶּה - it is enough for you! Do not continue to speak with Me further about this

matter, עֲלֵה רֹאשׁ הַפִּסְגָּה וְשָׂא עֵינֶיךָ יָמָּה וְצָפֹנָה וְתֵימָנָה וּמִזְרָחָה וּרְאֵה בְעֵינֶיךָ כִּי־לֹא תַעֲבֹר אֶת־הַיַּרְדֵּן הַזֶּה, ascend to the peak and lift your eyes to the west, the north, the south and the east, and see with your eyes, for you shall not cross over this Yarden (Devarim 3:25-27).

Moshe - the greatest prophet to ever live (Devarim 34:10), the most humble man to ever live (Bamidbar 12:3), the greatest leader we have ever had and the most masterful teacher - was denied access to E"Y, both in life, and in death.

And yet, in our days and in our time, what was withheld from Moshe has been granted to us. What generations of our forefathers could only dream of - through the long, dark night of exile - in our times became a reality.

I have quoted from my grandfather's memoirs, "In Seven Camps in Three Years," many times. Originally written in Yiddish, and published in the Krasnik yizkor book, my grandfather wrote: "After that they drove us to Budzin, where there were already hundreds of Jews from Krashnik and the area. And here the true hell began. As soon as we were delivered to the murderous commandant we had at once a free morning before we went out to work, they told everyone to march single file. He removed from the line whoever did not please him. As we exited the camp, those who had been removed (from the line) were taken to a grave and shot. That day, one hundred and five Jews were killed… Reb Peretz Feder and I slept on one pallet and talked continually about the murderers that they were sent by G-d and their end is near. We suffer now so that Moshiach will come. Whoever will survive this hell will see a Jewish state…"

Regarding our millennia-long, never-ending, passionate love and yearning for the land, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, the Rav zt'l, teaches, that at the time of the Covenant Between the Pieces (Bereishis 15), it is as if Hashem said to Avraham:

"And before [your children receive the land], יָדֹעַ תֵּדַע כִּי-גֵר יִהְיֶה זַרְעֲךָ, [know you shall surely know] you wouldn't live in luxury. You wouldn't wait as a free people until the grant will be finalized, formalized. יָדֹעַ תֵּדַע כִּי-גֵר יִהְיֶה זַרְעֲךָ בְּאֶרֶץ לֹא לָהֶם, [know you shall surely know that your children will be strangers in a land that is not theirs] it means they'll be strangers, וְעִבְדוּם, slaves, וְעִנּוּ אֹתָם, tortured, ill-treated. אַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה [four hundred years]. And throughout that period, that dark night of galus, you'll have only one dream, and one vision, and one aspiration, and one hope. What will be the hope? To get back to the land. לשנה הבאה בירושלים [next year in Jerusalem]. And after you'll come to Eretz Yisrael, I assure you, that you'll be deeply in love with the land, it will be an eternal love, not just a friendship affair" (See The Rav Thinking Aloud on the Parsha, Bamidbar, p.118-122).

And yet, the tremendous gift of our nation in our homeland - the matana tova of Eretz Yisrael that Hashem bestowed upon Avraham and his children for all time - comes to us at a great cost. Chazal already taught us this truism when they said:

תַּנְיָא, רַבִּי שִׁמְעוֹן בֶּן יוֹחַאי אוֹמֵר: שָׁלֹשׁ מַתָּנוֹת טוֹבוֹת נָתַן הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא לְיִשְׂרָאֵל, וְכוּלָּן לֹא נִתְּנוּ אֶלָּא עַל יְדֵי יִסּוּרִין, אֵלּוּ הֵן: תּוֹרָה וְאֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל וְהָעוֹלָם הַבָּא

It was taught in a Braisa: Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai says: The Holy One, Blessed be He, gave Israel three precious gifts, all of which were given only by means of suffering. And they are: Torah, Eretz Yisrael, and the World-to-Come (Brachos 5a).

I heard a beautiful idea from Rabbi Zev Leff shlita on Tehillim 27:4. The psalmist tells us (we begin reciting this chapter twice daily with the start of Elul):

אַחַת שָׁאַלְתִּי מֵאֵת־ ה' אוֹתָהּ אֲבַקֵּשׁ שִׁבְתִּי בְּבֵית־ ה' כָּל־יְמֵי חַיַּי לַחֲזוֹת בְּנֹעַם־ ה' וּלְבַקֵּר בְּהֵיכָלוֹ

One [thing] I ask of Hashem, this I ask: that I may dwell in the house of Hashem all the days of my life, to see the pleasantness of Hashem and to visit His Temple (Tehillim 27:4).

The one thing that King David asks is really the three things that every Jew yearns for, and the very three things that are acquired through suffering: אחת = ארץ ישראל, חיי עולם הבא, תורה. While, b'chasdei Hashem, the matana tova of E"Y has become a miraculous reality for us, after almost 2,000 years of wandering, the yesurin that come along with it are its companion.

From the dire, horrific plight of our hostages, Hashem yerachem v'yaazor, to the fallen soldiers, to the thousands wounded and injured (both physically and emotionally), to our unceasing fight on the world-stage to maintain our G-d-given hold on this land, to the economic ramifications of this drawn-out war… Eretz Yisrael is our land and will always be our land. This Divine Promise is the absolute truth, and a non-negotiable fact.

Yet we long and hope, pray and dream, for the day when the yesurin will no longer be part and parcel of our land, and peace will be restored to the city of peace, for the time when "old men and old women will sit in the streets of the city… and young boys and girls will play in her streets" (Zecharia 8:4-5) in everlasting tranquility, unbounded joy, and revealed and open love between Hashem and Am Yisrael.

LZ"N IDF fallen ha'kadosh v'ha'tahor Noam Shemesh z'l HY"D. Noam, age 21, fell on 18 Sivan 5785 (June 14, 2025) in battle in Gaza. About Noam, his mother Efrat shetichyeh - with whom I met yesterday in her home in Yerushalayim (Tuesday August 5) for close to two hours, learning about her wonderful, committed, dedicated, courageous and heroic son - said he had an ayin tova, a lev tov and did everything in a modest, quiet fashion for his soldiers (he was a mefaked), his country and his nation.

Noam served on many borders (he fought in the Jordan Valley, the Lebanese border, Tulkarem, and other places), but when he was not sent into Gaza on milu'im after Oct.7, he requested to be sent into Gaza to fight the wicked enemy there and do his part for our land.

Any time Efrat asked Noam what he needed, or what she could get for him, he replied, "B"H, yesh li kol - I do not need anything, B"H I have everything I need."

When serving in the north a couple of months after Oct. 7, in the very cold winter, he gave away his coat to a fellow soldier who was cold, claiming the sleeves "were a bit too short" for him anyway, and his friend needed it more than he did. During the shiva, his commander told Efrat he was not surprised to hear Noam gave away his coat, for he reported that Noam was always looking to see what other soldiers needed, and giving to them was his greatest joy.

He fell on Shabbat afternoon at 5pm, a time which Efrat noted is one of great Divine chessed and rachamim (kindness and mercy). She said it was a chessed of Hashem that he fell right away and did not suffer, and went to his eternal rest during such a holy time of the week.

אַחַת שָׁאַלְתִּי מֵאֵת־ ה' אוֹתָהּ אֲבַקֵּשׁ שִׁבְתִּי בְּבֵית־ ה' כָּל־יְמֵי חַיַּי לַחֲזוֹת בְּנֹעַם ה' וּלְבַקֵּר בְּהֵיכָלוֹ

One thing (that is really three things) I ask of Hashem, this I ask: to dwell in the house of Hashem all the days of my eternal life, to gaze upon the pleasantness of Hashem - the pleasantness of Noam who is now very close to Hashem - and to visit His holy abode.

May we merit everlasting peace, comfort, geula, and simcha for our entire nation and our Land.

שנזכה לבשורות טובות, שבת שלום, וחדש מנחם אב,

Michal

From: **Daniel Keren** <keren18@juno.com>
Shabbos Stories For Parshas Va'eschanan 5785
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Printed L'illuy nishmas Nechama bas R' Noach, a"h

Having gotten his **Tefillin** from one of the most prominent scribes of his time,Reb Michel Prager was quite proud of them. He would always point out how dearthey were to him and how rewarding it was to wear them. Throughout his lifetime he had been faced with numerous challenges anddifficulties, but never did he miss the opportunity to wear his tefillin. As aChassidishe Yid, Reb Michel's davening played a major role in his life, and knowingthat his tefillin were so special made it all the more gratifying.Although he knew that there were some opinions that encouraged checkingtefillin every so often, Reb Michel was careful not to have the sealed boxes openedfor fear of exposing them to air and dust, and perhaps ruining them. And so, thetefillin were never checked.

One day, however, seventy-two years after he first put on the tefillin for hisbar mitzvah, someone inadvertently switched their tefillin with his, and this mangave what he thought were his tefillin to a sofer (scribe) for checking.The sofer (scribe) carefully checked all the words, scrutinizing them to ensuretheir validity. Suddenly, he let out a gasp. "Oy Gevalt! These tefillin are missing anentire word!" He continued to check the shel yad (hand) portion of the tefillin andfound a missing word in them as well, rendering the entire pair pasul (invalid).The man who had brought the tefillin to be checked was quite upset, but soonrealized that these were nor his tefillin at all. Upon closer examination he was ableto determine that they were Reb Michel's tefillin. It was unbelievable! Reb Michel'stefillin were posul.

How would they break the bad news to the elderly man? He was 85 years oldand the shock, horror, and disappointment of never having fulfilled a mitzvah ofwhich he had been so proud could possibly cause him enough grief to endanger hislife.

Several of the elderly members of the shul conferred and decided that theyhad no choice but to tell him. A doctor was brought along just in case Reb Michelexperienced any medical problems. "Reb Michel." one or the elder gentlemen said,"we have something important to tell you,"

Slowly they spelled out the story — how the tefillin were switched, how thetefillin were taken to a sofer, and how Reb Michel's tefillin were found to be posul -invalid. They didn't have to explain further. Reb Michel understood that he had neverproperly fulfilled the mitzvah of tefillin. Not even once.

At first Reb Michel sat there frozen. They worried. Had he heard them? Howwas he going to react? They were wondering what else they should do whensuddenly Reb Michel stood up and started smiling. At first Reb Michel began tolaugh and then he started to sing and dance, instead of joining him they watched withpity, assuming that he was "losing it,"

This was someone who look more pride in his tefillin than in any othermitzvah. Who could blame him now for losing control? He sang and danced aroundthe room, skipping with joy. To see an 85-year-old act this way was quite unusualand, under the circumstances, very sad. But, no one dared to interfere. After all, hewas entitled.

Finally, he finished dancing and singing. Suddenly he looked up and noticedeveryone staring at him. He then explained. "Do you know what this means? Hadmy tefillin never been checked, I never would have had [he opportunity to fulfill thisprecious mitzvah. But now I will. For this, I am very grateful."

And then, with tears streaming down his eyes, he began to unwrap a pair ofkosher tefillin and put them on his head and on his arm. With a smile on his face andrears running down his checks. 85-year-old Reb Michel Prager fulfilled the mitzvahof tefillin for the very first time. (Excerpted from the ArtScroll book – "Touched bya Story", p. 205, Reb Yechiel Spiro.)

From: **Daniel Keren** <keren18@juno.com>
Shabbos Stories For Parshas Va'eschanan 5785
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A Touch of Class

By Rabbi Paysach J. Krohn

Rabbi Pinchas Hirschprung, a prominentstudent in the Lubliner Yeshivah wasasked to travel to America to solicit funds for the yeshivah. He thought it would behelpful to get a letter of recommendation from Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodinsky, aleading Torah scholar of the generation. He traveled to the town of R' Grodinsky,the nature of his visit. R' Grodinsky readily agreed to write theletter on behalf of the yeshivah.

After R' Grodinsky completed the letter, the two began to discuss Torahtopics. A number of people gathered around to listen as dozens of Talmudic passageswere cited and countless commentaries were quoted verbatim - from memory! Thepeople listened with astonishment as the great sage verbally fenced with the youngstudent.

Then R' Grodinsky quoted a passage from Masechet Yoma. He cited it asbeing on page 49. The young student suggested that it was actually on page 48."No," insisted R' Grodinsky, "if I remember correctly, it's on page 49."

The young man, who was already known as an accomplished talmidhacham with a phenomenal memory, was positive it was on page 48. He asked R'Grodinsky, "Perhaps we can check it out. Is there a gemara readily available?""It's not necessary," said R' Grodinsky as he touched the student's arm gently,so as not to let him get the gemara. "I see your mind is young and sharp, and I amalready an old man. You're probably right. Why look it up? I might beembarrassed."

The young student felt bad for R' Grodinsky. The conversation continued, andeventually the student left.

Shortly after he left, the young man went to check the gemara to see who wasright. When he found the passage, he was startled. He was wrong, and R' Grodinskywas right! The passage was indeed on page 49.

R' Hirschprung says it was then that he understood why R' Grodinsky didn'twant him to check it out in front of those assembled in the room. For it was he, thestudent, who would have been embarrassed, and R' Grodinsky, in his kindness,wanted to save him from that humiliation. So instead of checking the source, R'Grodinsky made a disparaging comment about his own (non-existent) failing.

Reprinted from the Rabbi David Bibi's Shabbat Shalom from Cyberspace. Excerpted from the ArtScroll book – "Around the Maggid's Table by Rabbi Paysach J. Krohn.)

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Rabbi Avraham Twerski's Insights on the Torah

by Rabbi Dr. Abraham Twerski

V'etchanan (Deuteronomy 3:23-7:11)

In my work treating alcoholics, I have found that the greatest success for sustained abstinence from alcohol is through participation in the program of Alcoholics Anonymous. One of the fundamentals of this program is taking "one day at a time." The addicted alcoholic cannot conceive never again being able to drink. Inasmuch as he has relied on alcohol to feel good, he sees a lifetime of sobriety as being completely unrealistic. There is no point in even trying to do the impossible.

Therefore, he is taught a new philosophy, "Take one day at a time. There is nothing that you can do today about tomorrow's drinking, so there is no point in thinking about it. It is not impossible for you to stay sober just for today. That is certainly within your ability. So stay sober today, and when tomorrow comes, you can deal with its challenges then."

One of my friends would write down each day how many days he had been sober. When he died at age 83, it was found that the night before he had written the number 16,472. He had been sober for 46 years because he took one day at a time.

The concept of taking one day at a time was promoted by Alcoholics Anonymous, which originated in the mid 1930's. More than 150 years ago, Rabbi Moshe Sofer (Chasam Sofer) cited the above verse as teaching this concept.

The Talmud quotes ben Sira, "Do not agonize about tomorrow's problems, because you have no way of predicting tomorrow" (Sanhedrin 100b). The Chasam Sofer says that this is the way one can vanquish the yetzer hara, the lower self. If a person thinks that he must resist the yetzer hara's temptations throughout his entire lifetime, he might consider it impossible and may give up without trying. Therefore, Chasam Sofer says, think about resisting the yetzer hara only today. That is certainly within everyone's abilities.

This is what Moses told the Israelites. "You can cleave unto God and observe all His mitzvot if you think only about living this day. Don't take on tomorrow's challenges today."

I am indebted to one of my alcoholic patients who called me, citing the

verse in the Torah which says that Jacob love Rachel so intensely, that the seven years he had to wait for her seemed to him like just a few days (Genesis 29:20). He noted that some commentaries say that this is contrary to nature. Separation from someone you love makes each day seem endless, rather than the reverse.

"But if you look closely at the words in the Torah," my patient said, "the answer is obvious. The Torah says that the seven years were yamim achadim, which means single days. Jacob was able to tolerate the long separation because each day he thought, `I only have to deal with today,' and that was doable."

It is standard operating procedure for people to make "New Year resolutions," and it is common knowledge that they invariably fail. The reason is that "I will not smoke this entire year," or "I will not eat excessively this entire year" is too great an undertaking, and one fails because one cannot conceive of succeeding. The correct thing to do is, as Chasam Sofer says, to tackle only today's problem today. Breaking a resolution down to bite-size pieces makes it feasible to keep.

The Lamm Archivewww.yu.edu/drlamm

Rabbi Norman Lamm August 15, 1970The Jewish Center Shabbat Nahamu 5730

The Mechanics of Consolation

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

ישעיהו רבינו תאמר שלא באת לנחם אלא : אמרו ישראל לישעיהו, חנינא בר פפא אמר'ר ק"לאותו הדור שחרב בהמ

יאמר " אין כתיב כאן אלא "אמר אלוקיכם" . לכל הדורות באתי לנחם, אמר להם?בימיו אלוקיכם".

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

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

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

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

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

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

When Isaiah and the Prophets are told to console Jerusalem, they are told: דברו על לב
ירושלים, speak to the heart of Jerusalem, כי לקחה מיד ה' כפלים בכל חטאתיה – for Jerusalem has received punishment from God, double the amount her sins warranted.

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

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

Second, successful consolation requires confidence or faith. In order to receive *nechamah*, you must believe that it will or at least *can* come. It is not at all necessary to understand *how* it will take place – the true mourner usually believes that it can never take place through natural, rational means. Let it be so. But he must believe that it can happen, even if the means are irrational or supernatural.

Thus does Isaiah say to his disconsolate people: קול קורא במדבר, a voice cries out in the desert, כל גיא ינשא וכל הר וגבעה ישפלו, every valley will be raised and every mountain and hill will be leveled.

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

In this sense, the source of *nechamah* is in the mourner himself. The *menachem*, the one who offers his condolences, can only assist. The consoler is at most a midwife of restoration and consolation, one who presides at its emergence from the depths of the heart of the one who sits in grief.Third, where grief is the result not of accident or nature, but of defeat in a struggle, in an ideological contest or in spiritual strife, there *nechamah* derives from the sense of vindication. Ifone has gone down for the sake of an ideal, then his survivors can be consoled only when those ideals are justified in the course of time.

Thus does the Prophet say to his people, having suffered defeat not only physically and politically, but spiritually as well: כל בשר יחדו כי פי ה' דבר ונגלה כבוד ה' וראו, and the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all flesh together will see that the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it. The martyrs of Israel will have been vindicated when their pagan antagonists will bow their heads and accept the truth of the Lord God of Israel who reveals Himself to all men, justifying the martyrdom and the sacrifices of the holy ones of Israel.Today, our *nechamah* as a people will be incomplete as long as the enemies of Israel prosper, as long as anti-Semitism is rampant – even if it be disguised as anti-Zionism, whether of the right or the left, especially the New Left, whether White or Black, whether by non-Jew or by Jew.Finally, the fourth element we may detect in this Haftorah as to the mechanics of

consolation is this: *nechamah* implies the replacement of the loss to the extent that it is possible.

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

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

When our mother Sarah died, her son Isaac was grief-stricken. Not until he met and married Rebecca did the situation change. Then we read: אחרי אמו

וינחם יצחק, that Isaac wasconsoled after his mother. After the sense of desolation and loneliness and emptiness, Rebecca –as our Rabbis tell us – brought back light and a sense of family and companionship into the bereft home. Rebecca could never replace Sarah, any more than Sarah could replace anyone else. But she could fill the void in the heart and in the life of Isaac. That is consolation.

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

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

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

The current ceasefire, just begun by American initiative, is the only break in the

escalating crisis that has gripped Israel since the 1967 victory. But, as we all know, it is not an unmixed blessing. It is as much danger as it is opportunity. It is something which holds the most serious consequences for all Israel and all world Jewry.

We must hope and pray that our government will support Israel in the full measure it deserves. We should like to be proud as Americans in knowing that Israel is being helped by America in ways that the world does not know yet. But whatever may happen, American Jews must support Israel in its resistance to Egyptian trickery and Russian treachery – and what,Heaven forbid, may yet become American betrayal.[1]

American Jews must not be found wanting. For this is our particular responsibility today.

Israel is our *nechamah*. Without it, *chalilah*, we are back in the pit of anguish. I do not believe the time has come to take with any immediate urgency the words of Menachem Begin in the Knesset, that American Jews must take to the streets to demonstrate. But we may yet becalled upon to act politically and economically and socially. Then we shall have to take to the streets indeed, despite our bourgeois respectability and self-restraint, even if it means incurring[1] Israel's victory in the Six-Day War left the entirety of the Egyptian Sinai Peninsula up to the eastern bank of the Suez Canal under Israeli control. Egypt was determined to regain Sinai, and also sought to mitigate the severity of its defeat. Sporadic clashes were taking place along the cease-fire line, and Egyptian missile boats sank the Israeli destroyer INS *Eilat* on October 21 of the same year.Egypt began shelling Israeli positions along the Bar Lev Line, using heavy artillery, MiG aircraft and various other forms of Soviet assistance with the hope of forcing the Israeli government into concessions. Israel responded with aerial bombardments, airborne raids on Egyptian military positions, and aerial strikes against strategic facilities in Egypt. The strategic bombing of Egypt had mixed military and political results.The international community and both countries attempted to find a diplomatic solution to the conflict. The Jarring Mission of the United Nations was supposed to ensure that the terms of UN Security Council Resolution 242 would be observed, but by late 1970, it was clear that this mission had been a failure.Fearing the escalation of the conflict into an "East vs. West" confrontation during the tensions of the mid-Cold War, the American president, Richard Nixon, sent his Secretary of State, William Rogers, to formulate the Rogers Plan in view of obtaining a ceasefire.In August 1970, Israel, Jordan, and Egypt agreed to an "in place" ceasefire under the terms proposed by the Rogers Plan. The plan contained restrictions on missile deployment by both sides, and required the cessation of raids as a precondition for peace. The Egyptians and their Soviet allies rekindled the conflict by violating the agreement shortly thereafter, moving their missiles near to the Suez Canal, and constructing the largest anti-aircraft system yet implemented at that point in history. The Israelis responded with a policy which their Prime Minister, Golda Meir, dubbed "asymmetrical response", wherein Israeli retaliation was disproportionately large in comparison to any Egyptian attacks. the wrath of the Government and the population. We shall have to pay any price in order to stand at the side of Israel, our consolation.

In commenting on the double verb, *nachamu nachamu*, the Rabbis said: נחמוהו עליונים

נחמוהו תחתונים, let the upper world console, let the lower world console.

Permit me to give my own contemporary interpretation of that Midrashic comment. If we want Almighty God from His *Olamot Ha-elyonim* (His Upper Worlds) to offer us comfort, if we want to be able to look forward to an undisturbed life, to a peaceful existence for our childrenand children's children, to a continuation of our people and an opportunity for them to thrive

without threat and anguish and danger – then, *nachamuhu tachtonim*, we who inhabit this lower world must first offer *our* comfort to the State of Israel, we must first preserve and enhance this sole source of *nechamah* that has been given to us at this juncture of history.

Only if we aresuccessful in offering *nechamah* to the State of Israel can we look forward to *nechamah* for us from the Higher Worlds of Almighty God.

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

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

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Daf Yomi: Cornea Transplants and the Continuing Contribution of a Fallen Soldier

RIETS Kollel Elyon Aug 6

Rabbi Daniel Z. Feldman

The inspiring and uplifting story of two blind children receiving the gift of sight thanks to the corneas of a fallen soldier, Reei Biran, a"h, draws upon the intersecting of two passages recently covered in the Daf Yomi.

The issue of cadaveric organ donation is a complex and emotionally charged topic within Jewish law, presenting a profound conflict between the imperative to save a life (Pikuach Nefesh) and several fundamental prohibitions related to the deceased. One of these prohibitions is that of deriving benefit (issur hana'ah) from a cadaver, conveyed in the daf a few weeks ago (Avodah Zarah 29b). Other halakhic issues include Nivul HaMet (the prohibition against desecrating the dead body), and Kevurah (the obligation to bury the entire body). The vexing question of brain death and the determination of the time of death, a matter of enormous controversy, is outside the scope of this discussion, which will presume the unequivocal death of the donor.

The prohibition of benefiting from a cadaver is debated as to whether it is sourced in the Torah or is rabbinic (see Hil. Eivel 14:21, Kiryat Sefer and Mishneh L'Melekh); either way, one would assume, it should be suspended if a

life can be saved, as are almost all Torah prohibitions. One minority dissenting view was articulated by Rabbi Yaakov Ettlinger in his Resp.Binyan Tzion (# 170-171; see also Resp. Devar Yehoshua, III, 24:1). He argued that benefiting from a dead body, at least without prior consent from the deceased, constitutes a form of theft (gezel). According to this perspective, a person retains a form of ownership (ba′alut) over their body even after death. Most authorities, however, did not accept this view and allowed such benefit to save a life (see Resp. Lev Avraham, 72).

Cornea transplants, however, introduced an added complexity in that they are often not immediately life-saving, which complicates the direct application of Pikuach Nefesh. This led to a separate, nuanced discussion. Many authorities opined on the matter, which draws upon a number of source texts and logical arguments, and the positions were prominently represented by Rabbi Isser Yehudah Unterman, who argued to permit, and Rabbi Yechiel Yaakov Weinberg, the Sredei Eish, who contested all of the individual arguments (II, 120), while also acknowledging the many who permitted it and the validity of accepting that view.

One major argument was based on a passage from a recent daf (Avodah Zarah 28b), which implied that an eye ailment can be life-threatening because the eye is "connected to the heart." Following this, the Shulchan Arukh (OC 328:9) ruled that one may violate the Sabbath to treat an eye condition, even if life-threatening danger is not immediately apparent.

A central point of contention among halakhic authorities, particularly in the modern era, is whether to follow the Talmud's reasoning on the eye's connection to the heart, even if it does not align with modern medical science. The Tzitz Eliezer (XIV, 89), Rabbi Eliezer Yehuda Waldenberg, a leading halakhic authority on medical issues, held that the Talmud's ruling remains valid, regardless of doctor's opinions.

An innovative approach was put forth by Rabbi Shlomo Kluger (Chokhmat Shlomo, OC 328:46), who suggested that restoring a blind person's sight allows them to perform mitzvot, such as observing the Sabbath, and is thus considered a form of Pikuach Nefesh, in the sense that the latter is explained by the Talmud as justified on the Sabbath "so that many more Sabbaths can be observed". This reasoning in turn is based on a minority opinion in the Talmud that a blind person is exempt from the commandments. Even though this view was rejected by almost all authorities, R. Kluger applied to this the principle of accepting a minority position in life-saving matters. This opinion was considered too creative for many later authors (see Resp. LeHorot Natan, IX, in kuntres V'Chai Bahem; Resp. Tzitz Eliezer, VIII, 15, 10:14; Resp. Minchat Shlomo, II, 84). There were authorities who independently considered blindness to be life-threatening, without recourse to the Talmudic passage or to related interpretations, but due to the vulnerabilities inherent in navigating the world with this condition. This would be more of a statistical approach toward Pikuach Nefesh than is usually the case, and also would be applicable only to blindness in both eyes.

Other arguments for leniency were advanced as well, including analyzing the prohibition of benefitting from a cadaver to consider whether it applied equally or at all to all parts of the body, and whether it was subject to any threshold of size (see Resp. Har Tzvi, YD 277).

A groundbreaking argument that allowed many authorities to accept cadaveric organ donation is the concept of a "revived organ." This perspective suggests that once a deceased organ, such as a cornea, is successfully transplanted into a living person, it is no longer considered a dead body part subject to the prohibition of benefit.

This approach is supported by several prominent authorities, who argued that the organ, now infused with the life of the recipient, is essentially "revived" (see Resp. Torat Michael, 56, and Resp. Devar Yehoshua I, 48). This interpretation draws on discussions in the Talmud (see Niddah 70b), such as the case of the son of the Shunammite woman being brought back to life by Elisha. The analogy is that an organ, once attached to a living body, becomes an integral part of that person and is no longer subject to the prohibitions related to the dead, such as a kohen encountering impurity (see Resp. Yacheil Yisrael, 81). The Seridei Eish, however, disputed the relevance of this idea, maintaining that the organ still retains a connection to the original owner and that its use constitutes a violation.

Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau (Resp. Yacheil Yisrael, 83) suggested that their debate hinged on the nature of the prohibition of benefitting from a cadaver. If this prohibition is analogous to classical prohibitions like Chametz or Avodah Zarah, then it would seem that the rule should be responsive to a change in the object; if its status becomes different, it should no longer be prohibited. By contrast, the Seredei Eish appears to maintain that it is rooted in a concept of ba'alut(property rights) over one's body. In this framework, using an organ without prior consent is akin to theft, and even with consent, some may still object due to the sanctity of the body and the prohibition of Nivul HaMet (desecrating the dead). These concerns would not be mitigated by any revival of the organ that occurs through the implantation in the body of another. This perspective, however, which echoes that of the Binyan Tziyon mentioned above, has not been widely accepted as definitive halakhah. Further, at least some permutations within this view would allow for consent during the donor's lifetime (for further discussion see Resp. Ohr L'Tziyon, I, 28; Resp. Yabbia Omer, III, YD, 20-23; Resp. Yaskil Avdi, VI, YD 26; Resp. Even Pinah, I, 145.

The notion of a deceased donor's body part returning to life, once joined to a living person, is a fascinating and inspiring one. In particular in this evocative instance, the idea that the eyes of this fallen shomer Yisrael will continue to function to protect and to uplift others is a needed comfort at this time of anguish and confusion.

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from: Torah Musings <newsletter@torahmusings.com>
date: Aug 5, 2025, 11:01 AM
subject: Torah Musings Daily Digest for 08/05/2025

Intent and Clarity in Writing a Torah Scroll
by R. Gidon Rothstein

Aruch HaShulchan, Yoreh De'ah, Chapter 274, reviews laws governing writing a Sefer Torah, tefillin, and/or mezuzot, how the physical act, with proper intent and form, turns books into sacred objects.

The Scribe's Sacred Intent (Lishmah)

A valid sacred text must be written lishmah, for the sake of producing a holy object, such as a Torah scroll. Tur and Shulchan Aruch insist a scribe announce, before he starts to write, "I am writing this for the sake of the holiness of a Sefer Torah (Torah scroll)." The single declaration suffices for the entire scroll despite, as AH, se'if one, points out, the process taking many days, with many breaks.

It does not cover Divine Names. Each time he is about to write a Divine Name, the scribe is supposed to consecrate it individually, articulate ahead of time his intent to write a fully sanctified Divine Name.

Semag suggests the scribe include Names in his original declaration, adding a phrase to the effect of "all the Divine Names (azkarot) within this scroll will be for the sake of the holiness of the Name." For Semag, if the scribe later forgets, before writing one of the Names, this earlier declaration saves the day.

Rambam's Surprising Omission

Rambam speaks of this kind of announcement only before writing a Name, not before the scroll as a whole. He mentions only that writing a Divine Name without proper intent invalidates it. AH wonders why, especially since Gittin 45b assumes the preparation of the hides for the parchment need lishmah, wouldn't the writing itself?

He suggests Rambam thought the intent during the preparation of the hides carries over to the writing, making it automatically lishmah, no renewed declaration needed. He likens it to the slaughter of sacrifices, where the consecration of the animal lets us assume its slaughter is for the sake of the sacrifice. Rambam focuses on the Divine Name, because its holiness requires a special, explicit intent that can't be covered by a general assumption.

The bottom line? Practical halacha follows Tur and Shulchan Aruch,

an initial declaration for the whole scroll, specific ones before writing each Divine Name. AH questions without resolution why Beit Yosef didn't explicitly state that skipping this initial declaration invalidates the scroll, as the Tur does.

Copying and Verbalizing: Moses as Our Guide

SA obligates a scribe to copy from an existing Torah, no letter written from memory. It is how Moshe Rabbenu wrote the Torah, we learn in Bava Batra 15a: God spoke, and Moses wrote. More, the scribe must read each word aloud before writing it.

AH notices a potential inconsistency, SA's ruling on how to write tefillin, Orach Chayyim 32, where he does not obligate the scribe to say the words before writing them in the new tefillin. Based on the portrayal of Moshe, however, he is sure the scribe must say the words aloud. Instead of hearing them, as Moshe did from God, the scribe sees them, in the previously written document.

When a scroll was written without consulting another document, or the scribe didn't say the words out loud before writing them, Yerushalmi allowed using it only in cases of dire need. AH leans to validating the scroll if it was already written that way, because Rambam doesn't list these as disqualifying factors. Moshe himself, in fact, did not verbalize the last eight verses of the Torah when he wrote them.

The Art of the Letter: Spacing and Form

Se'if eight turns to technicalities of the writing. Each letter must be surrounded by blank parchment on all four sides. A hair's breadth should separate letters, although any separation is enough. If letters touch, the scroll is invalid.

Too big a separation might make one word look like two, also a fatal flaw for the validity of the scroll. Between words, the scribe should leave the width of a small letter. Less than that, we ask an average skilled child to read the word(s); if he sees them as one—even if it should be clear, because the first word had an ending letter, such as a mem sofit—the scroll is invalid.

For form, AH shares general comments in se'if nine, specific ones thereafter. Every letter has a specific shape, in the absence of which it is not valid, even if a child reads it correctly, even if it doesn't look like some other letter. (Should the letter look like another, a dalet like a reish, for example, the letter must be corrected before we could read from the scroll).

An example of a letter violating its form would be if either or both of the two yud-like protrusions from the central line of the letter aleph were not touching that central line. The letter isn't a valid aleph if that happens. In reverse, the heh and kof, the two letters with multiple parts, are invalid if written as a single, continuous body.

Se'if ten goes through letters easy to write incorrectly. We already noted the yuds of the aleph; so, too, the tops of the letters shin, ayin, tzadi, and mem must be connected to the body of the letter; the back of a bet must be square, lest it look like a kaf, which must be rounded to not look like a bet. Dalet and reish, a final mem and a samech, all can be confused with other letters if we are not careful. Se'if eleven has more confusable letters, a yud and a vav, if written too long or too short, and similarly with a zayin and a nun at the end of a word.

If a letter's identity is in doubt, a "neutral" child is consulted. If children disagree, the scribe makes the call. If we consult only one child, we follow what he says.

Regional Styles and Ketivah Tamah

Tur, citing his father, the Rosh, points out that letter forms differ between regions (Ashkenazic vs. Sephardic script). These variations don't invalidate the scroll, it being a problem only if it has issues explicitly mentioned in the Gemara (like a heh looking like a chet). AH confirms that current variations of scripts, such as Beit Yosef and Arizal, are all also valid, as long as they meet the basic halachic requirements.

Se'if fourteen notes tradition's understanding of the Torah's command "And you shall write them" to imply "perfect" writing. This means avoiding common confusions, aleph for an ayin, tet for a fei, and other similar, some of which we have already mentioned.

Sections of the Torah also matter. Although not punctuated, the Torah sets off its parts, sometimes with a gap to the end of the line before the next part starts, called petuchah, and others where the new section starts on the same line, called setumah, closed.

Errors in any of these, or if a song of the Torah was formatted incorrectly (the Song of the Sea is supposed to have each phrase on top of blank space underneath it, where Ha'azinu has writing on top of writing, the blank space in between), or the ink is wrong, the Torah would have to be hidden away, nignaz, rather than used.

Maintaining Tradition

A Torah scroll with vowels (nikud) is invalid, even if they're later erased! Ditto if the scribe makes ink notations of the ends of verses. Since Hashem gave the Torah without these, adding them ignores the tradition, a serious matter. Removing them doesn't help, because the letters were written with disregard for tradition, and disregard isn't erased along with the vowels.

Simpler errors, such as where the scribe spaces a verse a bit longer away than usual for a word, is fine as long as it does not look like a new section (less than nine letters' gap).

Not quite our topic, but the last se'if reports Rema's allowing a scribe to remove excess ink from a freshly written letter, if he needs the ink or wants the scroll to dry faster. Since the letter is not being diminished, it does not raise the same red flags as using a Chanukah candle for its light, disrespectful treatment of the mitzvah.

This is true even for ink on Divine Names, as long as it is truly excess. If there's just enough, removing would diminish the letter, which is forbidden. Using this removed "holy" ink for mundane writing would be like the Chanukah candle case, a denigration of the mitzvah.

Next time, our last foray into Aruch HaShulchan He-Atid (AHH), the prohibition on rebelling at the instructions of the Great Sanhedrin.

The Thundering Noise of Silence - Essay by Rabbi YY

Rabbi YY Jacobson <rabbiyy@theyeshiva.net>

The Thundering Noise of SilenceWhen Ruth Walked Alone and Reb Leivik Danced Alone

"He Has a Rich Father"

A poor beggar was soliciting a handout from Baron Rothschild. Displeased with the amount he'd been given, the beggar complained, "Your son gave me twice as much.

"Well, my son can afford to," said Baron Rothschild. "He has a rich father."

Gifts of Wood

This coming week (Thursday, August 14) is the 20th day of the Hebrew month of Av. The Talmud[1] relates a narrative that occurred on this very day, in the process of re-establishing Jewish life in the Holy Land in the fourth century BCE, following the destruction of the First Temple.

When the Jewish people returned to the Land of Israel, after seventy years of exile in Babylonia, to resettle the land and rebuild the Beit Hamikdash (Holy Temple), they faced many hardships. The community was small and poor (most Jews chose to remain in exile; only 42,000 Jews made Aliya) and threatened by many enemies. In contrast to the gold-gilded glory of the First Temple (built by King Solomon at the peak of Jewish power and prosperity), the Temple they built was made of simple stone and mortar. The Temple treasury could not even afford to pay for firewood for the altar.

Several families came forth to resolve the problem. Each donated a large quantity of firewood; when the supply brought by one family was exhausted, another family brought its donation. In this way, nine families supplied wood for the first critical year of the Beit Hamikdash's existence, till the Temple treasury could afford to obtain wood independently.

To reward their generosity, the prophets of the time instituted that the date of

when each family began to donate wood, should be fixed in the Temple calendar. Each year, when a particular family's day came along, the family was granted the privilege to again supply wood for the altar, even if the Temple coffers were full and its wood-room stocked with firewood. These donations were accompanied by a special ceremony, and the day was celebrated as a festival by the donating family.[2]

One of the wood-offering days is the 20th of Av, on which a family called "Pachas-Moab," from the tribe of Judah, brought wood to the Temple.

Debate on Genealogy

Now, the Talmud engages in a discussion regarding the identity of the family titled "Pachas-Moab." Who were they, and where did they come from? The Talmud quotes an argument between two of the greatest sages, Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Yosi, two famed Tanaaim (Talmudic scholars) living in Israel in the second century CE, one century after the Roman destruction of the Second Temple.

משנה תענית כו, א: זמן עצי כהנים והעם תשעה... בעשרים בו בני פחת מואב בן יהודה...

גמרא תענית כח, א: תנא בני פחת מואב בן יהודה הן הן בני דוד בן יהודה, דברי ר' מאיר. רבי יוסי אומר הן הן בני יואב בן צרויה.

רש"י: הן הן בני דוד בן יהודה—דוד מלך ישראל, ואהכי קרו ליה פחת מואב שבא מרות המואביה. יואב בן צרויה—שבא מרות המואביה כי צרויה אם יואב אחות דוד היתה שנאמר (דברי הימים א, ב) ואחיותיהם צרויה ואביגיל.

According to the opinion of Rabbi Meir, the family whom the Mishnah titles "Pachas-Moab" traced its lineage to King David, living some five centuries earlier. According to Rabbi Yosi's view, the family came from David's nephew—Yoav ben Tzeruyah, who served as the Commander-in-Chief of King David's armies. (Yoav's mother Tzeruyah was a sister of King David, so Yoav was David's nephew.)

Why was the family titled "Pachas-Moab?" Because according to both opinions, the members of these families were descendants of Ruth, a Moabite woman who converted to Judaism, and later became the great-grandmother of David and his sister Tzeruyah. (Ruth married Boaz, and mothered a son named Oved. He was the father of Yishai, the father of King David). "Pachas Moab" means a leader of Moab, and Ruth was a Moabite princess who became Jewish.

Who Cares?

Yet this entire discussion seems superfluous. The Talmud is addressing an event that occurred hundreds of years earlier when a particular family donated wood to the Temple. Why is it relevant to know whether they traced their lineage to David or his nephew? Do we have to argue about everything?

What is more, the argument takes place among Talmudic sages who lived one century after the destruction of the Temple, in which the entire tradition was a thing of history. To debate at such a moment the exact genealogy of the family who once contributed wood on one specific day (and their descendants carried on the tradition throughout the Second Temple era), seems irrelevant.

There is something else that is disturbing. The Torah prohibits us from reminding converts about their non-Jewish origin in a way that might make them feel uncomfortable.[3] The Torah views this as a great sin and repeats it numerous times. Why, then, does the Mishnah describe this family as "Pachas-Moab," the descendants of Moab—one of the ancient archenemies of the Jewish people? Especially in this context, when our sages are attempting to praise the family and its generosity, why would we emphasize its complicated origins?

Unless of course, this detail would shed light on the entire story.

True Giving

The cut-off time (pun intended) for wood-cutting in the land of Israel is the 15th of Av, which marks the height of summer; after this date, the heat of day diminishes, and the wood that is cut is more moist and prone to worming, and it is forbidden to use worm-infested wood for the altar.[4] Thus, the family that contributed wood on the 20th of Av brought wood to the Temple at a time when their own wood supply could no longer be replenished with wood of good quality; hence, their gifts were held in special regard.

What is more, the families who donated the wood were not giving it for their own benefit, but rather for the rest of the community and the benefit of the Holy Temple. This wood would be used also for the many individual Jews who were obligated to bring an offering to the Temple, including many sinners who, according to the Torah, had to atone for their sins by bringing an offering. These families could have said to themselves: "Why should we give up precious wood to take care of Jewish sinners? Let them bring their own wood!" Yet they gave away their wood so that every single Jew would be able to bring his or her sacrifice to the Temple's altar.

Standing in a forest in the smelting heat of an Israeli summer to cut wood (for, as mentioned, once the intensity of the heat is diminished, the wood is not "kosher" any longer for Temple use) is an arduous and grueling task. Yet this family stood in the forest for many days, weeks, and perhaps months, cutting enormous quantities of wood. And then they took all this wood and gave it away—and in a time when it cannot be replenished—so that every single Jew, even a Jew they never heard of and who has committed many a sin, would be able to enjoy a burning flame in the Temple and offer his/her sacrifices to the Almighty.

Furthermore, the multitudes of Jews who benefited from the contribution of this family would never know to whom credit is due. There was no "plaque" on the altar reminding every visitor who was responsible for the donated wood. This was a donation given without accolades.

And they did not do this begrudgingly, but with tremendous happiness, to the extent that they would mark this day each year as a day of festivities since they saw this as one of the happiest days in their lives!

Such a family, which gives in such a fashion and with such joy, professes a certain unique moral characteristic running in its "veins." This is why the Talmud engages in a discussion regarding the genealogy of this family who donated the wood on the 20th of Av. [5] What the Talmud is searching to understand is not just the factual genealogy, but from where this family inherited this type of generosity? Who educated and inspired these children?

And the answer is "Pachas-Moab:" This family came from a woman named Ruth, a Moabite princess who became Jewish. It is her story that explains their story.

The Story of Ruth

The story of Ruth is movingly transcribed in the biblical book of Ruth. It begins in the famine-stricken Land of Israel during the historical period of the Judges, approximately in the Jewish year 2787 (973 BCE). The wealthy and influential Jew, Elimelech, and his pious wife, Naomi, together with their two sons, Machlon and Kilyon, abandon their land and their people in search of a better future. In Judea, Elimelech was besieged by the burdens of Jewish communal life and the onslaught of hungry beggars seeking food and money. He relocates with his family to the pagan land Moab, situated in today's Jordan, on the Eastern Bank of the Jordan river.

In the land of Moab, the family loses its fortune, and Elimelech dies. His sons marry Moabite princesses: Machlon marries Ruth, and Kilyon marries Orpah. Ruth and Orpah were the daughters of Eglon, king of Moab. Soon after their marriages, Machlon and then Kilyon suddenly die. The once esteemed Naomi is now a penniless, childless widow, a stranger in a foreign land. Her husband and both of her sons have died. She is left alone with two young daughters-in-law who are widows too. Naomi decides to return home to the Holy Land.

When the mourning period for her sons ends, Naomi begins her arduous, painful journey back to her land and her people. Ruth and Orpah faithfully begin to accompany her. They travel together forty steps. But then Naomi stops them. She discourages them from continuing the journey, urging them instead to return to their parents' homes and to the affluent palace life of their youth.

"Return, my daughters," Naomi tells them. "Why should you go with me? I am an old, broken widow; life has been cruel to me. You girls have a bright future ahead of you. You are young and beautiful. Go back and open a new chapter in your life. "

One daughter-in-law, Orpah, is persuaded. The sober logic of her pious mother-in-law sits well with her. She exchanges her frail, elderly mother-in-law for a new and hopeful future, back with her own people and culture.

But the other daughter-in-law, Ruth, is not persuaded by her mother-in-law's plea. She is determined to share a common destiny with Naomi whatever the future may hold.

רות א, יד: וַתִּשֶּׂנָה קוֹלָן, וַתִּבְכֶּינָה עוֹד; וַתִּשַּׁק עָרְפָּה לַחֲמוֹתָהּ, וְרוּת דָּבְקָה בָּהּ.

"Orpah," the Tanach says, "kissed her mother-in-law (goodbye), but Ruth cleaved to her."

With immortal heroic words, enshrined in the majestic hearts of our people, Ruth declares:

רות א, טז: וַתֹּאמֶר רוּת אַל-תִּפְגְּעִי-בִי, לְעָזְבֵךְ לָשׁוּב מֵאַחֲרָיִךְ: כִּי אֶל-אֲשֶׁר תֵּלְכִי אֵלֵךְ, וּבַאֲשֶׁר תָּלִינִי אָלִין, עַמֵּךְ עַמִּי, וֵאלֹהַיִךְ אֱלֹהָי. יז בַּאֲשֶׁר תָּמוּתִי אָמוּת, וְשָׁם אֶקָּבֵר; כֹּה יַעֲשֶׂה יְהוָה לִי, וְכֹה יוֹסִיף, כִּי הַמָּוֶת, יַפְרִיד בֵּינִי וּבֵינָךְ.

"Wherever you will go, I will go. Where you will lodge, I will lodge. Your people are my people. Your G-d is my G-d. Where you die, I will die."

And so it was. Orpah went back to Moab, where she began a new life for herself. Ruth voluntarily remained with her mother-in-law—I think that such a thing never occurred again in Jewish history[6]—and she became a Jew, though she was now destitute and lonely. From a royal, aristocratic, and

wealthy background, Ruth was now isolated and impoverished. She was a convert from a nation that was seen as an archenemy of the Jewish people (to the extent that no male converts of that nation were ever allowed to marry ordinary Jewish women[7]), so she knew that eyebrows would rise when people heard about her origin. This former princess was forced to get on line with the beggars to collect leftover grain from field owners, so she would survive.

The Soul of Ruth

Why did Ruth make such a sacrifice? Why did she subject her life to such difficulty, when there was absolutely no obligation on her to follow her mother-in-law, and she could have easily followed her sister-in-law? What motivated her decision?

Her photo and bio were not posted on any websites. She was not a "story," a sensation, a "woman of valor." No one sang her praises and marveled at her commitment. At that point, Ruth was no more than a poor wanderer, out of the limelight. What inspired her was one cause only, expressed in her above-mentioned proclamation to Naomi: "Wherever you will go, I will go. Where you will lodge, I will lodge. Your people are my people. Your G-d is my G-d. Where you die, I will die." Her agenda was nothing but the truth. No fanfare, no accolades, no attention, no validation, no reward, no comfort, and no recognition. Ruth was a princess within—she did not need external validation; she did things for G-d, and for G-d alone, and that was enough.

Ultimately, her name was engraved in the annals of our history. Ruth married a judge named Boaz, they gave birth to a boy named Oved, the father of Yishai, who fathered King David. Ruth was David's great-grandmother. The entire royal Davidic dynasty, including the Moshiach himself, stems from a female Moabite convert to Judaism—Ruth.

Why did she, a Moabite convert, become the mother of Jewish royalty? Because in Judaism, the definition of a true leader is someone who is not in it for any purpose of fame, honor or power; his or her only agenda is serving G-d and His people. This is what Ruth was all about: Years before anyone knew her name, she was committed heart and soul to the cause. "Wherever you will go, I will go. Where you will lodge, I will lodge. Your people are my people. Your G-d is my G-d. Where you die, I will die."

Impact of a Mother

Some six centuries later, a Jewish family living at the onset of the Second Temple era, demonstrated extraordinary and selfless generosity. They would stand for weeks in a burning-hot forest, engaged in excruciating labor, in order to give a contribution which they could not replenish for the sake of people they do not know, and who will never know them, many of them of a low spiritual caliber, sinners among Israel.

Whence did they obtain this level of commitment? — The Talmud is eager to know.

The answer: They came from either the family of David or from his general, Yoav. Yet this does not cut it. David and Yoav were both great men, but at a very young age, they had become popular and influential; their praises were sung among the multitudes. Their fame reached the entire nation. This family, in contrast, possessed the unique quality of utter selfless commitment even without receiving any validation. Where did this come from?

Ah! "Pachas—Moab!" This was the gift of Ruth, the Moabite princess who left everything behind to embark on an unknown journey, one which might bring her nothing but scorn from her new people, who disliked Moab. Why? Because "Your people are my people. Your G-d is my G-d. Where you die, I will die."[8]

Here we have a classic illustration of Epigenetics. Ruth lives some six centuries before this family donates the wood. Yet in Judaism, the behavior of parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents makes a deep imprint on their children and descendants, even many centuries later. Ruth inculcated something within her family that did not depart from them even hundreds of years later.[9]

The Rebbe's Father

I found it moving that the 20th of Av—the day commemorated in the Talmud as the day when the descendants of Ruth contributed their wood to the Temple—is also the yahrzeit of the great leader, sage and Kabbalist, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak Schneerson (1878-1944), father of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, the who died in exile in Kazakhstan, after the Communists had imprisoned and exiled him due to his work in teaching and upholding Yiddishkeit in the Ukraine. Like Ruth, there were the years of his life when he was completely under the "radar," exiled by the Stalinist regime to a remote village in Kazakhstan. From his position as one of the most prominent and influential Rabbis in Ukraine, he was plunged into a town with no Jews, and with barely the necessities for life.

His wife, Rebbetzin Chanah, who voluntarily went to join him in his exile, describes her husband's behavior under those insane conditions. One image I can't get out of my mind. It is Simchas Torah. In the past, Reb Leivik would lead the festive dancing in the grand shul in Dnipropetrovsk, Ukraine, where he served as chief Rabbi. Hundreds and hundreds of Jews would come to dance with him. There was a special joyous melody he would sing each year on Simchas Torah, and it was known in the city as "The Rabbis' Song." (His son, the Lubavitcher Rebbe, would also sing this song each Simchas Torah).

Now he was in a one-bedroom apartment, infested with mice and many other rodents, filled with mud, the cold penetrated the thin walls of the hut. His landlord was not friendly to Jews and had many pigs roaming the house.

But it was Simchas Torah! Rebbetzin Chanah describes how suddenly she saw the same shine on her husband's face as in the good years. Alone in the world, without a single student or friend, Reb Leivik began to say "Atah Hareisa" in the same profoundly emotional tone he had always done it. And then he began singing. Which song? His usual Hakafos song, which he would sing each year in his own shul. For hours, he danced, his face aglow with a radiance from another world. It was an embodiment of Ruth's immortal words: "Wherever you will go, I will go. Where you will lodge, I will lodge. Your people are my people. Your G-d is my G-d. Where you die, I will die."

The Lesson to Us

This entire narrative of 20 Av contains a vital lesson for each of us. Sometimes we think to ourselves: Does it matter what I do in private? If I can get honored with a dinner, fine. If at least my mother-in-law can find out about my good deeds and praise me, wonderful. If everyone in shul gives me "yasher koach," awesome. But to do something kind for another person, and no one will ever find out? To do one mitzvah that does not have a visible impact on the world? To help one Jew come closer to G-d without him or her ever finding out that I get the credit? To forgo one's immoral temptation in the privacy of my life without anyone ever finding out what a great hero I am? Does it matter if I hold myself back from hollering or insulting my spouse or my child or my employee when no one will ever know what I have just done?

Oscar Wilde once said, "The nicest feeling in the world is to do a good deed anonymously and have somebody find out." But in Judaism, our paradigm of leadership and inspiration is a woman named Ruth. She taught us that we do not live for other people's accolades, but for G-d, for truth. G-d knows what I've done. Every good deed done anonymously is known and cherished by your Creator. G-d embraces every breath you take, every sacrifice you make, and every Mitzvah you do for His sake.[10]

(Please donate here. In honor of the Yartzeit of Reb Levi Yitzchak, watch a fascinating class by Rabbi YY about a debate between the Lubavitcher Rebbe and his father about the power of thoughts in Jewish law and spirituality. Click here to

[1] Taanis 12a; 26a; 28a[2] See Talmud ibid.[3] See Talmud Bava Metzia 58b; 59b and all biblical sources referenced there.[4] Ibid., 31a; Middot 2:5.[5] The same is true considering the donation on 20 Elul. There too there is an argument about the genealogy of the family (Talmud, Taanis 28a). Indeed, this family too came from Ruth! See Likkutei Sichos, vol. 4, pp. 1103-1107; vol. 9 pp. 86-90.[6] A similar humorous remark was made by the Lubavitcher Rebbe during the Farbrengen of 20 Av, 5732 (1972).[7] Even concerning the women of Moab, there was a fierce debate. Hence, Ruth marrying Boaz remained a controversial issue for generations, see Talmud Yevamos 76a-b.[8] Why the argument if they came from David or Yoav? Why is that relevant and what is the logic behind each opinion? See Likkutei Sichos vol. 4 pp. 1103-1107.[9] This also answers a question: How can the sages argue about facts, in which only one opinion can be correct, and the other false? Yet, in reality, both views hold that this family came from both David and Yoav. The argument is, which person in the family is most responsible for their behavior (See Likkutei Sichos ibid.)[10] This essay is partially based on talks delivered by the Lubavitcher Rebbe on the 20th of Av in the years 5711 and 5732 (August 22, 1951 and July 31, 1972). Parts of them were published in Likkutei Sichos, vol. 4, pp. 1103-1107; ibid., vol. 22 Vayikra. Cf. Likkutei Sichos vol. 9 pp. 86-90. The connection with Ruth I developed based on Sichos Kodesh 5732 Sichas Chaf Av.

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.

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)

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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.