

With our prayers to HKB"H for your health, the health of all of Klal Yisrael,
and for all the good people on Earth, wherever they may be...



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father, grandfather, father

ואת זמנך שבת נחמו

פרק ד' (בחול: פרק ג') 1381

לה"ו



OU ישראל
י"א מנחם אב ה'תש"פ
July 31 - Aug 1 '20



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JERUSALEM in/out for **Va'etchanan-Nachamu** See Z'manim

 **7:01PM** Earliest (Plag)  **6:11PM** •  **8:16PM** Rabbeinu Tam  **8:53PM**

Word of the month

Towards better understanding the timing of Kiddush L'vana • Most follow opinions of saying KL after 3 full days following the molad, or 7 days. Also common is the waiting for Motza'ei Shabbat (when feasible and not too close to the last op), since then there is usually a large group and also a better mood and feeling brought on by Shabbat. And, also common is holding off during Tishrei until after Yom Kippur - better mood than Aseret Y'mei T'shuva, large assembly, an additional mitzva right Yom Kippur. In Sivan, most wait until Motza'ei Yom Tov; same reasoning. In Av, most wait until after 9Av - again, mood and crowd. **Minhag Yeru. (based on the GR"A) is to take first op (except not Leil Shabbat).**

Weekly Inspiration

“I ask myself if it is possible that our national rebirth will be only a secular one, if holiness will remain in exile, lifeless, not renewed by the redemption? Is such a thing possible? Definitely not!! All of Israel will return. We all know that our life force is sanctity, and this sanctity will reveal its original power, and eventually all will realize this.”

HaRav Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook zt"l, Ma'amrei HaRiyah, p. 336

Candles	Earliest	Havdala	VA'ETCHANAN - Shabbat NACHAMU	Eikev
7:01	6:11	8:16	Yerushalayim / Maale Adumim	6:55 6:06 8:09
7:18	6:13	8:17	Aza area (Netivot, S'derot, et al)	7:12 6:08 8:10
7:17	6:12	8:16	Beit Shemesh / RBS	7:11 6:07 8:10
7:16	6:11	8:15	Gush Etzion	7:10 6:06 8:09
7:18	6:13	8:18	Raanana / Tel Mond / Herzliya / Kfar Saba	7:12 6:08 8:11
7:17	6:12	8:17	Mod'in / Chashmona'im	7:11 6:07 8:10
7:18	6:13	8:18	Netanya	7:12 6:08 8:11
7:14	6:12	8:16	Be'er Sheva	7:09 6:07 8:09
7:18	6:13	8:17	Rehovot	7:12 6:09 8:11
7:01	6:13	8:18	Petach Tikva	6:55 6:08 8:11
7:17	6:12	8:17	Ginot Shomron	7:11 6:07 8:10
7:09	6:14	8:19	Haifa / Zichron	7:02 6:09 8:12
7:16	6:11	8:16	Gush Shiloh	7:10 6:06 8:09
7:16	6:13	8:18	Tel Aviv / Giv'at Sh'muel	7:10 6:08 8:11
7:16	6:11	8:16	Giv'at Ze'ev	7:10 6:07 8:09
7:16	6:11	8:15	Chevron / Kiryat Arba	7:10 6:06 8:09
7:18	6:14	8:18	Ashkelon	7:12 6:09 8:11
7:17	6:13	8:17	Yad Binyamin	7:17 6:08 8:10
7:07	6:12	8:17	Tzfat / Bik'at HaYarden	7:01 6:07 8:10
7:16	6:10	8:16	Golan	7:09 6:05 8:09

R' Tam (J'lem) - Va'etchanan - Nachamu 8:53pm • Eikev 8:47pm

Other Zmanim

Ranges are 11 days, Wed-Shabbat
8-18 Menachem Av 5780 (July 29 - Aug 8, '20)

Earliest Talit & T'filin	4:57-5:05am
Sunrise	5:53-5:59½am
Sof Z'man K' Sh'ma (Magen Avraham: 8:38-8:42am)	9:19-9:22am
Sof Z'man T'fila (Magen Avraham: 9:53-9:56am)	10:27-10:29am
Chatzot (Halachic noon)	12:45½-12:44¼pm
Mincha Gedola (Earliest Mincha)	1:20-1:19pm
Plag Mincha	6:12-6:05pm
Sunset (counting elevation) (based on sea level: 7:37¼-7:29½pm)	7:43-7:34½pm



PARSHA PIX EXPLANATIONS

Plus and minus in a negation circle is for the prohibitions of adding to the Torah or detracting from it 🌹 Mitzva to designate cities of refuge - 3 on the east side of the Jordan (and 3 on the west side) 🌹 LUCHOT in the TORAH on the mountain stands for the repetition of the Aseret HaDibrot and reminds us that the whole Torah was given by G-d at Sinai, not just the Big Ten 🌹 Mezuzah is one of the mitzvot from Va'etchanan, from the first parsha of the SH'MA 🌹 Shabbat candles for SHAMOR and ZACHOR. They are contained B'DIBUR ECHAD, in one speech-bubble 🌹 Hearing ear represents SH'MA, not just the famous one, but the many times the Torah commands us to listen (and understand - this is an important aspect of SH'MA) 🌹 Warning lights for Moshe's warnings to us to remain faithful to HaShem and not to be confused by what we witnessed but cannot

totally comprehend 🌹 Big number one is for HaShem Echad, as well as the other pasuk that emphasizes G-d's Unity, 4:35, ...there is none besides Him 🌹 The reminder-finger is for the command to never forget the Sinai experience and to pass on the memory to future generations 🌹 Seder plate for the Chacham's question and the answer of We were slaves to Par'o in Egypt... both of which are found in Va'etchanan 🌹 Simchat Torah scene is for the pasuk ATA HOR-EITA LADA'AT... 🌹 speaker and an Xed out video monitor: On that great day of Revelation at Sinai, we HEARD what was said, but we did NOT SEE any image. Mentioned more than once, and is a reason for Moshe's deep concern and warnings to the people 🌹 clock face in the face is for the term PANIM BIFANIM 🌹 space telescope is for Yeshayahu's words at the end of the Haftara: Lift your eyes heavenward and see Who created these... 🌹 pen is for the 5 PENS in the sedra and another two U'FENS. 🌹 Grasshopper. K'CHAGAVIM, like grasshoppers, appears only twice in Tanach - in Parshat Shlach and the haftara of Va'etchanan 🌹 Extended pinky is for V'ZOT HATORAH... The words are from Va'etchanan 🌹 The palm is for the way Ashkenazim cover their eyes for the first pasuk of Sh'ma 🌹 The three fingers form the letter SHIN and is the way S'faradim cover their eyes for Sh'ma 🌹 Towards the upper-right corner, with the hands, is a grain of OAT, representing the T'filin, which are/is an OT which we bind upon our arms 🌹 Three works of Edgar Allan Poe: The Raven, The Black Cat, and The Pit and the Pendulum - for the word PO. not a rare word in the Torah, but its two occurrences in Va'etchanan are significant.

🌹 Compass directions are numbered in the order in which they occur in the pasuk. It's a different order from p'sukim elsewhere 🌹 building in the lower-right is LEV YERUSHALAYIM - from the haftara 🌹 Unexplained note on one of the Pix 🌹 and an Unexplained equation

~~TTTTDDLES~~ 1380FTP - 1st 6 words of D'varim have a gimatriya of 1380. So do the 4th thru 9th words of the haftara. Un-explained element is a photo of Har Chermon, mentioned only 3 times in the Torah, twice in D'varim (and once in Va'etchanan) a.k.a. SNIR, means snow.

Va'etchanan

Shabbat Nachamu

45th of 54 sedras; 2nd of 11 in D'varim

Written on 249 lines in a Torah, rank: 7

21 parshiyot; 5 open, 16 closed,
7th (tied with Ki Tavo)

122 p'sukim - rank: 17 (2nd in D'varim)
same as Vayak'hel & Ki Tavo - but larger

1878 words; rank: 10th (2nd in D'varim)

7343 letters; rank: 10th (2nd in D'varim)

Va'etchanan's p'sukim are longer than average, hence the jump in rank from 17th for p'sukim to 10th for words

MITZVOT

12 of 613 mitzvot: 8 pos., 4 prohibitions and many more that are counted elsewhere - this is so for several sedras, but

it really shows for Va'etchanan (e.g. Aseret HaDibrot in Yitro has 14 mitzvot, repeated here but not counted here)



[P> X:Y (Z)] and [S> X:Y (Z)] indicate start of a parsha p'tucha or s'tuma. X:Y is Perek:Pasuk of the Parsha's beginning; (Z) is the number of p'sukim in the parsha.

Numbers in [brackets] are the Mitzva- count of Sefer HaChinuch AND Rambam's Sefer HaMitzvot. A=ASEI (positive mitzva); L=LAV (prohibition). X:Y is the perek and pasuk from which the mitzva comes.

Kohen - First Aliya

11 p'sukim - 3:23-4:4

[S> 3:23 (7)] Moshe Rabeinu continues his farewell words to the People. He tells them that he had asked G-d to rescind His decree banning Moshe from entry into the Land of Israel.

SDT The Baal Shem Tov commented that Moshe, who had learned the entire Torah, Written Word and Oral Law, from G-d Himself, used the term "You have begun to show me Your greatness..." The more one learns Torah, the more one learns about G-d, the more one will realize that he has just begun to understand Who G-d is.

G-d refused this request and forbade Moshe to ask again. Moshe ascended a mountain from where he saw the

Land. G-d then told him to transfer the leadership to Yehoshua.

[P> 4:1 (24)] He (Moshe) proceeds to review the laws and statutes (Torah and mitzvot) by which the people are now to live... in Eretz Yisrael.

Neither should the Torah be added to nor detracted from.

[These mitzvot are counted in R'ei. Strange that they are counted the second time they occur and not the first, which would be expected].

Another warning against idolatry follows. Then, "And you who cling to G-d are all alive today". (This is one of many allusions to T'CHIYAT HAMEITIM in the Torah.)

MitzvaWatch

The twin prohibitions of neither adding nor subtracting from the Torah, are mentioned in Va'etchanan and again in R'ei (where they are counted among the 613). The Vilna Gaon points out that the plural form is used one time and the singular form is used in the other case. This, he says, alludes to two different aspects of these prohibitions. It is forbidden to add to or subtract from a particular mitzva - for example, one may not take 5 species or 3 species on Sukkot for the fulfillment of the mitzva of "Lulav & Etrog". (If you add something to the Arbaa Minim to beautify then - it's not done - it would not be BAL TOSIF.) Nor may one add or subtract to the total of the mitzvot. To

treat a Rabbinic mitzva as a Torah law, or vice versa, would be an example of the other aspect of these prohibitions.

The spirit of these prohibitions (if not the actual definitions) would include treating (or teaching) a CHUMRA as if it were required, or vice versa (claiming that something that is prohibited is "only" a chumra or custom, when it is a halacha). Aside from people who intentionally do this, it is more common to find people doing it one way or the other inadvertently, either because of ignorance or because of a sincere (but slightly misguided) desire to enhance the observance of mitzvot. This is especially important for parents and teachers of young children. Don't say ASUR if you mean, strictly speaking it isn't actually forbidden, but it is considered a proper thing to abstain from doing such and such. It sounds more complicated, but it is more "honest" and therefore it is the more proper way to transmit Torah to your children and students. (Obviously, when a child is very young, you have to simplify matters. But don't forget to upgrade the child's level of understanding as he or she grows older.)

Levi - Second Aliya **36 p'sukim - 4:5-40**

Once again, Moshe emphasizes that mitzvot are meant to be kept in Eretz Yisrael. (This not only applies to Land-related mitzvot, but to the entire range of mitzvot.)

There is repeated reference in the book of D'varim, and especially in Parshat Va'etchanan, to Eretz Yisrael being THE reason for our having been taken out of Egypt, formed into a Nation, and given the Torah and mitzvot.

Prolonged exile has taught us that the Torah can be kept, must be kept, no matter where a Jew finds himself. This was one of the reasons that the Torah was given at Sinai, prior to entry into the Land. On the other hand, one should not lose sight of the fact, repeated often by Moshe Rabeinu in D'varim, that G-d has always intended us to observe His mitzvot IN THE LAND OF ISRAEL. Are there more mitzvot to keep in Israel than outside? YES. But maybe more significantly, every mitzva - even those that are performed all over the world, can reach their full potential ONLY in Israel. This is a message that each of us has to realize, understand, and internalize. Then we must spread this message to family and friends abroad who feel that they "have everything we need to be fully Jewish" in their respective religious communities around the world. AND the vital significance of Torah AND Israel to our lives as Jews must be taught to those less committed Jews here in Israel and abroad.

On the other hand, we must not forget that Israel today is not the realization of The Dream, but rather a step on the road to the Complete Redemption, the

restoration of Zion and Jerusalem, the rebuilding of the Beit HaMikdash, and the coming of Mashiach. This idea helps us refocus after the mourning period that ends with the 10th of Av, and is an appropriate theme to usher in the periods of consolation and T'shuva.

We must be careful to preserve and perform the mitzvot because (among other reasons) it is the mitzvot that project Judaism as an intelligent religion to the nations of the world. This in turn, sanctifies G-d's Name. We must be extremely careful to remember and transmit to our children, the "Sinai Experience".

Moshe Rabeinu describes for the new generation the details of Matan Torah. He includes a specific warning against the potentially idolatrous thoughts caused by the combination of the magnificent, tangible universe in which we live, and the invisible, intangible G-d.

A primary cause of idolatry is the natural human tendency to relate better to the concrete, visible, tangible rather than something abstract and intangible. The Sun is in the sky. It's hot, full of energy, gives us light, and sustains life as we know it. People found Sun-worship easier to accept than the worship of He Who created the Sun and everything else, but cannot be seen. True worship of the One G-d was what Avraham and Sara taught many people. And, as OR LAGOYIM, a light unto the nations, it is what we are supposed to

teach and show the world.

G-d had taken us out of Egypt in order to make us His Nation. He got angry at me, says Moshe, and forbade me to enter the Land. Again, Moshe warns the People against abandoning the covenant with G-d after his (Moshe's) passing.

[P> 4:25 (16)] The next portion is read on Tish'a b'Av morning (in addition to Shabbat Nachamu)... In spite of the many warnings against idolatry, Moshe prophesies (predicts) that there will come a time when the People will turn from G-d and be exiled from their Land. It will then come to pass that the People will seek out G-d and return to Him. Moshe emphasizes the uniqueness of the People of Israel and their special relationship with G-d and beseeches the People to remain faithful to Torah and mitzvot. One can hear a pleading in his voice, as if he is begging the people not to go in the direction of his prophecy.

This theme is oft-repeated in the Torah. Do what G-d asks of you. Don't turn away from Him. If you remain faithful to Him, wonderful things will happen to and for you. If you turn away from Him, terrible things will happen. You will turn away from Him; terrible things will happen; and then you will turn back to Him... We have the ability to skip the bad stuff - LET'S.

Shlishi - Third Aliya
9 p'sukim - 4:41-49

[P> 4:41 (9)] Although the cities of refuge will not function as such until conquest and settlement of Eretz Yisrael, Moshe (with enthusiasm to do G-d's bidding, even though he knows what's coming soon thereafter) designates the 3 cities on the East Bank of the Jordan - Betzer in the Mishor Wilderness area for Reuven, Ramot in the Gil'ad area for Gad, and Golan in the Bashan area for Menashe.

These (the mitzvot about to be presented) were taught by Moshe to the People following the Exodus in the lands on the East Bank of the Jordan.

(Note the detail in the description of the location of the people, the repetition of their successes in conquering the "east bank" lands. It seems meant to be encouraging to the people for what lies ahead.)

V'zot HaTorah... said when the Torah is lifted, comes from D'varim 4:44. In the Siddur, the words AL PI HASHEM B'YAD MOSHE are added. That phrase appears four times in Bamidbar, but 9:23 seems to be the one from which it is taken. (Some say V'zot HaTorah without the added words in order not to recite partial p'sukim. And some say the whole pasuk 9:23, which ends with AL PI HASHEM B'YAD MOSHE.

R'VI'I - Fourth Aliya
18 p'sukim - 5:1-18

[P> 5:1 (5)] Moshe begins the review of mitzvot with a restatement of the

Aseret HaDibrot. He emphasizes that the Covenant at Sinai was not just between G-d and the previous generation, but between G-d and all generations of Jews to come.

MitzvaWatch

The most well-known difference between the two presentations of the Aseret HaDibrot is the "Shamor v'Zachor" of Shabbat. Generally, "Zachor" is interpreted as referring to the positive mitzvot and aspects of Shabbat, whereas "Shamor" is a command to preserve Shabbat by not violating the prohibitions. The traditional minimum of two candles for Shabbat (although one candle satisfies the halacha), are said to represent these two facets of Shabbat. It is this intertwined nature of the positive aspects of Shabbat and its prohibitions that is "responsible" for Kiddush on Friday night being obligatory upon women. Rather than treat Kiddush as a pure "time-related positive mitzva" which would (probably) mean that women would be exempt (as they are from the mitzva of Sukka, for example), we view Kiddush as part of the whole Shabbat package, which means full and equal obligation for men and women. The two sides of Shabbat were commanded B'DIBUR ECHAD and are inseparable.

On a hashkafa level, we can see the prohibitions of Shabbat as more than a

restrictive list of DON'Ts. Abstention from Melacha can be seen as Dayan Grunfeld z"l puts it in The Sabbath -- as laying G-d's gifts of creative activity to us at His feet (so to speak) in homage to the Creator and Master of All. This, on a weekly basis, so that we will not take these gifts for granted nor assume that our abilities and talents are self-produced. There is a subtle difference between not doing Melacha and abstaining from Melacha. If we understand and appreciate the distinction, our Shabbat observance and enjoyment can be greatly enhanced. Shabbat is more than just "don't do this; don't do that!"

MitzvaWatch

The Aseret HaDibrot in Yitro contains 14 of the 613 mitzvot. (The 2nd commandment has four prohibitions related to idolatry, the 4th has two mitzvot related to Shabbat, and one each from the other 8.) The first 9 commandments in Va'etchanan contain the same 13 mitzvot as their counterparts in Yitro. Those mitzvot are counted from Yitro. The 10th is worded differently here and is counted separately (in addition to "Thou shalt not covet") as the prohibition of "lust and unhealthy desire" [416, L266 5:18]. Although the first part of the tenth commandment uses the term V'LO TACHMOD (covet), the second part introduces a new term which deals exclusively with thoughts and feelings;

its counterpart in Yitro involves acting on those feelings. V'LO TIT'AVEH in a way, completes a set of prohibitions, that starts with obviously sinful acts - murder, stealing, etc. to a feeling in the heart (LO TACHMOD) which can, and often does, lead to acts which are "milder", but nonetheless "problematic". For example, if a person is jealous of a friend's cellphone - the iPhone 20+, and comments about it often enough, the friend might just feel uncomfortable enough to give it to the jealous friend. Nothing wrong, per se, in complimenting someone's phone, but in this case it is part of the prohibition of LO TACHMOD. And V'LO TIT'AVEH is the feelings even without anything else happening as a result of the envy.

The Aseret HaDibrot lay out in the following manner:

[S>5:6 (5)] Anochi and Lo Yih-yeh, which we consider the first two "dibrot" are contained within a single parsha s'tuma. [S>5:11 (1)] The prohibition against taking G-d's name in vain (vain oaths) is its own parsha s'tuma. [S> 5:12 (4)] The Shabbat commandment is its own parsha s'tuma. Shabbat's commandment is a P'tucha in Yitro. [S> 5:16 (1)] Honoring parents is a s'tuma. [S> 5:17 (¼)] Do not murder, [S> 5:17 (¼)] And do not commit adultery, [S> 5:17 (¼)] And do not steal (kidnap), [S> 5:17 (¼)] And do not bear false witness. These four dibrot are each a separate parsha s'tuma, all in the same pasuk! [S> 5:18 (½)] And do not covet another man's

wife and [S>5:18 (½)] and do not lust after anything that another person possesses are each a s'tuma, from the same pasuk, and counting as a single (the 10th) dibra (or dibur) [416, L266 5:18].

Chamishi - 5th Aliya 15 p'sukim - 5:19-6:3

[S> 5:19 (15)] Moshe next reminds the People that those who were present at Matan Torah were afraid to continue hearing G-d's Voice and agreed to listen to the words of a true prophet speaking in G-d's Name in lieu of direct communication. (Actually, take a look at the pasuk right before the Aseret HaDibrot and you'll see that Moshe Rabeinu was saying the same thing "right up front".)

This episode is crucial to our understanding of the Chain of Tradition and the method of transmission of the Oral Law. It made not only Moshe Rabeinu vital to our hearing and understanding of G-d's Word, but so too the Moshe Rabeinus of every generation. This is so for prophets, during the period of prophecy, and by the Sages throughout the generations.

Moshe emphasizes that G-d agreed to the People's request.

And yet again, Moshe links observance of mitzvot with the only proper environment for Jewish life - Eretz Yisrael. (This idea is actually expressed in THREE different ways in the final

p'sukim of this Aliya.)

Shishi - Sixth Aliya 22 p'sukim - 6:4-25

[P> 6:4 (6)] The first portion of this Aliya is the first parsha of SH'MA. "...HaShem is One." This statement of Jewish faith is also considered the mitzva to believe in the unity and uniqueness of G-d [417, A2 6:4].

Note that G-d's unity is also part of the mitzva to believe in Him [25, A1 Sh'mot 20:2], but warrants its own mitzva to emphasize this essential element of belief, in contrast to many other religions.

"Love" G-d with your entire being [418, A3 6:5]. (Many mitzvot, Jewish practices and the attitude with which we do mitzvot are all considered manifestations of Love of G-d.) We must study and teach Torah [419, A11 6:7] (for practical purposes AND purely for the sake of learning). We are to recite the Sh'ma twice daily [420, A10 6:7], wear T'filin on the arm [421, A13 6:8] and front-center on the head [422, A12 6:8], and put a Mezuzah on our doorposts [423, A15 6:9].

SDT The mitzva of learning and teaching Torah can be fulfilled with one's head, one's intellect. Tell someone a Dvar Torah and you both have fulfilled V'SHINANTAM L'VA- NECHA. But, tell that same Dvar Torah in an animated way that shows love of Torah and that ignites the emotion of the listener, so

that he not only adds to his knowledge of Torah, but his excitement and enthusiasm for Torah and Mitzvot has increased, then you have fulfilled an additional mitzva, V'AHAVTA ET HASHEM ELOKECHA, to love G-d with all your heart (based on Sefer HaChareidim).

We can generalize this aspect of AHAVAT HASHEM to include all mitzvot. Shabbat, for example. Someone can go through all the motions and not violate the Shabbat; but do it with love and that fulfills V'AHAVTA, in addition to Shabbat.

[S> 6:10 (6)] Now, another warning. You'll go into Eretz Yisrael, have big homes filled with all good things, that you did not work for... Still remember that G-d took you out of Egypt... don't turn away from Him...

It is said that a wealthy person has a harder time with faith in G-d than a poor person. A poor person tends to turn to G-d, to complain, but also to express his faith that his lot will improve. The wealthy tend to pat themselves on the back and take credit for that which he should be thanking G-d. Generalizations, of course, but something to think about, nonetheless.

[S> 6:16 (40)] Do not test G-d... (as you did repeatedly in the Midbar). Understood as the prohibition of overly challenging a true prophet and demanding signs from him (beyond what is reasonable to determine his

claim as a true prophet) [424,L64 6:16]. Keep the mitzvot... be straight with G-d... so that things will be good for you in Eretz Yisrael... (there it is again!)

[S> 6:20 (6)] When your child will ask you tomorrow... tell him “we were slaves to Par’o in Egypt and G-d took us out... and He com- manded us... and it will do us good to listen...

Sh'VII Seventh Aliya 11 p'sukim - 7:1-11

[S>7:1 (11)] Finally, Moshe tells the People that the nations in Eretz Yisrael whom we will encounter are mightier than Israel. But G-d will give them over into Israel’s hands. We are required to destroy the “Seven Nations” [425, A187 7:2], not to show mercy to idolaters in the Land [426, L50 7:2], and certainly not to intermarry with them [427, L52 7:3] or any other non-Jews.

Regardless of how secure one is in one's belief, intermarriage and other close contact with other cultures will have an adverse effect upon the Jew and on the Jewish People. In addition to the Torah-prohibition of intermarriage, there are many Rabbinic prohibitions geared to restrict social contact with non-Jews.

We must destroy the idolatry in the Land. We must always keep in mind the basis upon which G-d has built His relationship with us.

It is because of G-d’s love for us and His promises to our ancestors that He

has taken us out of Egypt.

Know that G-d is trustworthy to keep His promises and reward those who properly follow His ways, as well as punish those who do not. The sedra ends with a ‘command’ to keep the Torah.

The final 3 p’sukim of the sedra are reread for the Maftir.

Haftara 26 p'sukim Yeshayahu 40:1-26

First of the 7 Haftarot of Consolation, (all of which come from Yeshayahu). Yeshayahu as a prophet of destruction and Divine punishment for faithlessness, can be seen in ch.1 which was the haftara last Shabbat, and in subsequent chapters through 39. With our haftara this week, ch. 40, we see another side of the prophet. G-d commands the prophets (through Yeshayahu) to bring the message of comfort and the end of Babylonian captivity. How appropriate a choice for the post-9Av haftara.

PROBING the PROPHETS

Rabbi Neil (Nachman) Winkler

The three weeks of mourning have passed, the nine days of more intense grief are over, and, as a result, our haftarot change the theme from condemnation and warning to the seven haftarot “d’nechemta”, of

consolation. And, indeed, we need the solace and comfort that the words of the nevi'im offer us. Surely, therefore, if we, two-thousand years after the tragedy, thirst for some message of hope, certainly the generation of the churban, the people who suffered through the destruction of the Batei Mikdash and the painful exiles, yearned for a consoling message of hope even more than we. How fitting, then, are the opening words of this fortieth perek in Sefer Yeshayahu, "Nachamu, nachamu, ami", words that Hashem issues to the prophets, urging them to comfort His people after the tragedy. Additionally, these words (and, of course, the perek itself) open up a new section of Sefer Yeshayahu which, until now, included his prophecies of warning. In the first part of his book, the navi told the Judean population that the punishment just meted out to their brothers in the North would befall them as well, unless they changed their ways. It was not a section filled with warming messages of comfort but of cautionary counsel to change their ways.

Curiously, however, after opening His message with these words of hope and comfort, the prophet apparently shifts focus and opens an oft-repeated theme of the prophetic era, that of comparing G-d with Man,

comparing the Immortal to the mortal, the Infinite to the finite and the Limitless to the limited. This theme is often used to warn the nation against idolatry, impressing the people with the foolishness of worshipping man-made gods and copying the pagan worship. Given that, we would be correct in wondering why Yeshayahu would find this message to be a comforting or consoling one. It certainly is an important message to leave with the people.... but why now?? Why at this terribly difficult time?? And why is it THE primary message of this reading, continuing for fifteen of the twenty-six verses in the haftarah?

The answer can be found some psukim later. The promise of redemption was not simply a guarantee that Israel would return to her land after the exile but that the return would be a miraculous one. The navi describes the great wonders that would accompany the geula and charges the people to publicly proclaim the arrival of the redeemer. "Hashem Elokim b'chazak yavo", G-d will arrive with great strength and His power will rule. In fact, the final chapters of Sefer Yeshayahu are replete with the descriptions of the great wonders that all the world will see when the redemption arrives.

Now, would we not imagine that a people just exiled from her land, a

nation that witnessed the Bet Mikdash of her G-d destroyed, that saw her cities in ruin and thousands of her children slaughtered - that such a generation would almost scoff at the prophet's prediction of great miracles and wonders from a G-d that had just been 'defeated" by another power??

Yeshayahu imagined that too.

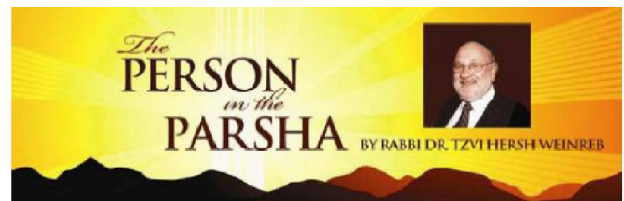
And so, he fills his prophetic message with imagery of what Hashem does that is unequalled in the universe. The comparison of G-d's power to those of false entities was not used here as an argument against idolatry - although it could be. Rather it is used as comforting words to convince suffering people that the promises of wonders and miracles are NOT unbelievable but are, given the marvels He performs every day and the wonders He is capable of, quite believable.

And this was one of the goals that Yeshayahu hoped to accomplish for future generations: to see that they not simply believe in the geula but they would confidently trust that the seemingly impossible and unrealistic are, for G-d, possible and realistic.

Only a nation that carries with them in their collective memories the words of her prophets can march to their deaths singing "Ani Ma'amin", and watch from heaven as their

beliefs are proven true, seeing their children and grandchildren return to live in, and build up, the land in which Yeshayahu delivered the divine message.

Probing the Prophets, weekly insights into the Haftara, is written by Rabbi Nachman (Neil) Winkler, author of Bringing the Prophets to Life (Gefen Publ.)



Answering Unanswered Prayers

Did you ever really pray for something you wanted? I mean, really fervently, desperately, pray hard for something that was vitally important to you?

If you did, and I think we all pray this way at moments of urgency, you violated an anonymous piece of wisdom:

“Be careful what you pray for, because you just might get it.”

I have not been able to determine who said that. But I know clearly what he meant. In my own life, I have had more than one occasion to look back at answered prayers, which achieved what turned out to be very trivial objectives. And I have certainly

been disappointed in prayer, only to learn that in the long run, I was much better off without the benefits of whatever I prayed for so earnestly.

We think we know what is good for us, we think we know what we need, but we really don't. Often, we are much the better for having certain prayers rebuffed, and we frequently discover that the things we thought were important are not important at all.

In the Torah portion that we read this week, Parshat Va'etchanan, Moshe confides to us how he powerfully beseeched the Almighty, begging Him to reverse His decision to frustrate Moshe's greatest dream, that he be permitted to enter the Promised Land. Moshe uses a synonym for prayer, chanan, which connotes imploring, pleading for the undeserved favor, matnat chinam.

But Moshe is denied his dream. His petition is torn up in his face. His is the archetypal unanswered prayer.

Joel Cohen, in his book *Moses, a Memoir*, puts these poignant words in the mouth of Moshe:

"I lowered my knees and begged Him once again. I could muster no tears this time... I needed badly to reach and walk about the land He promised to Abraham for us, so long ago... My

work is incomplete. My prophecy has achieved no reality for me in my lifetime... There will be no future for me. My staff, the instrumentality of miracles against His enemies, is powerless against His will."

Beautifully put, by the author of a book I recommend to you all.

What are we to learn from the story of the unanswered prayer of the humblest, but greatest, of men? Many things, in my opinion.

We learn that the gates of prayer are not always open. In the words of the Midrash, they are sometimes open but sometimes closed. And we are not to rely upon them exclusively. Rather, we are to do our own part to achieve our objectives in mundane ways.

Judaism insists upon a balance between faith in the divine and the exercise of practical human effort. It acknowledges that while there must be "bitachon", trust in the Lord, there must also be "hishtadlut", old-fashioned hard work on our part. As the rabbis have it, never rely upon miracles.

We can never allow prayer to become a substitute for doing all we can do. We must not simply expect the Almighty to achieve Jewish sovereignty for us, but must do our

parts politically and militarily. We cannot expect manna from heaven, but we must earn our livelihoods by dint of the sweat of our brow. And when we are ill, yes, we must pray, but we must also diligently seek out competent medical assistance.

There are other lessons, to be sure, to be learned from the unanswered prayer of Moshe. His grave remains a secret, so that it will not become a shrine and that he not be idolized or heaven forbid, deified. For another important lesson about prayer from the Jewish perspective is that we pray to the One Above only, and not to saints and holy men, be they alive or be they dead. Cemeteries are not synagogues.

By not granting Moshe his request, the Master of the Universe was in effect telling him that he did all that he could, and that no more is expected of him. Humans are expected to do all they can, and not necessarily to accomplish everything.

"It is not necessary for you to complete the task, but neither are you exempt from doing all that you can."

Moshe is being told, "You did all you could, even if you did not achieve all of your personal ambitions." No human is complete, no man is

perfect.

And then there is a final lesson, one that we learn from the very fact that Moshe persisted in his prayer, although he knew well that his request would be spurned. He modeled the importance of hope, even in the face of impossible odds.

Jewish history contains a long list of Moshe-like figures, whose vision was to enter the Holy Land. They include men like the Gaon Elijah of Vilna, who longed to spend the last years of his life in Eretz Yisrael. And closer to our time, the great sage Yisrael Meir Kagan, the Chofetz Chaim, prayed and carefully planned to live out his life in Israel.

Ironically, they, like Moshe, had their dreams frustrated by the Hand of Providence. Like Moshe, they were ready to try almost anything to realize their ambitions. And like Moshe, who was told that he would not enter the land but his disciple Yehoshua would. Various leaders of Jewish history, however reluctantly, took comfort in the fact that their disciples realized their dream in their stead.

This is possibly the most important lesson of all. When our prayers go unanswered for ourselves, they may yet be answered for our children and

grandchildren.

Unanswered prayers are mysteriously answered, in inscrutable and unpredictable ways.



לעילוי נשמות
פנחס בן יעקב אשר וגולה בת ישראל דוד אידי ע"ה
עוראל בן אריה לייב ומעניה בת יצחק שרטר ע"ה

The Infinite Game

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

But there are also infinite games. These have no starting point or finishing line, no clear winners and losers, no agreed rules or boundaries. Art is like this. So are music and literature. Beethoven didn't win.

Bach didn't lose. Great artists change the rules. That is what Beethoven, Schoenberg and Stravinsky did; so too did Van Gogh, Cézanne and Picasso. Politics can be like this when it rises above opinion polls and sets its vision on larger issues of justice, equality and the moral health of society. Education is a finite game when it focuses on exam results and qualifications, or it can be an infinite game when it is about breadth and depth of understanding and character development.

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

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

activity is inherently creative, demanding, uplifting and ennobling.

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

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

These reflections are prompted by two verses in today's parsha:

Be sure to keep the commandments, decrees, and laws that the Lord your God has enjoined upon you. Do what is right and good in the sight of the Lord... (Deut. 6:17-18)

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

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

This law is not about land ownership as such. In general, a landowner has

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

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

And the intention of this is that from the beginning God said to keep God's commandments, testimonies, and laws as God has commanded them. And now, it says: even regarding what God did not command, pay attention to do what is good and right in God's eyes, because God loves goodness and righteousness. This is important because it is impossible to mention in the Torah all the details of people’s behaviour with neighbours

and friends, or business conduct or local ordinances. The Torah mentions many such laws, such as: "Do not gossip", "You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge", "You shall not stand idly by the blood of your neighbour", “You shall not insult the deaf”, "You shall rise before the aged", and so on. Now it states generally that one should do what is good and right regarding everything, including compromise and acting beyond the strict demands of the law.

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

In the terms we encountered at the beginning of this essay: not all the Torah is a finite game. Much of it is. There are rules, commands, decrees and laws. There is the *halachah*. There are boundaries: milk, meat, public domain, private domain. There are beginnings and endings: the

earliest time to say the morning Shema and the latest time. There are successes and defeats: either one does or doesn't complete the counting of the Omer. All of this is finite even though it is dedicated to the One-who-is-Infinite.

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

There is a fine account of such a person in Psalm 15: "One whose walk is blameless, who does what is righteous, who speaks the truth from their heart... who does no wrong to a neighbour, and casts no slur on others;... who keeps an oath even when it hurts, and does not change

their mind... Whoever does these things will never be shaken."

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

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Tevel: Benefit and Sale

Tevel refers to produce and grain which has not had terumot and maasrot separated from it. Our Sages were extremely stringent regarding its use and therefore added various other prohibitions in addition to the Torah prohibition of consumption. Rabbinic prohibitions include not feeding tevel to one's animal (Rambam Maaser 13:15) and not giving tevel to a non-Jew for consumption, even though the non-Jew has no obligation regarding this mitzvah (Tosfot Eruvin 17:B). In addition, it is prohibited to fulfill any mitzvah using

tevel, such as using an etrog for the four species or eating matzah on Pesach from which terumot and maasrot were not taken (see Kedushat Haaretz 4:17 and Rambam Chametz Umatzah 6:6).

What is the law regarding the sale of tevel? The Mishna (earliest Talmudic literature) in Demai (5:8) states:

"...one may not sell non-tithed produce except in the case of necessity."

Based on the Mishna, the sale of tevel is prohibited other than in a case of necessity. The Talmud Yerushalmi (Demai 5:7) explains that a situation of "necessity" refers to the case of someone who has a mixture of mostly tithed and some non-tithed produce. In such a situation, it is impossible to distinguish between the non-tithed produce and the tithed. Due to the tevel found in the mixture, one is still obligated to separate terumot and maasrot. However, one unknowingly may separate from the produce that was previously tithed, leaving the issue of tevel unresolved. Due to this complex situation, our Sages allowed for the sale of (other) tevel to the person with the problematic mixture in order to enable him to clearly separate terumot and maasrot, thereby permitting the use of the entire quantity of produce. (This is

accomplished by joining the bought tevel with the problematic mixture to make them one entity, and then separate terumot and maasrot from the bought-tevel produce.)

Aside from the specific exception above, the sale of tevel is prohibited. Moreover, if tevel is sold to a buyer who will definitely not separate terumot and maasrot, the seller is directly causing the buyer to sin (see Kedushat Haretz 4:22). A practical application is regarding a kashrut certification for a supermarket that plans to sell certain tevel products. Certification should not be given to such an establishment. According to later authorities (Chazon Ish Demai 6:10 Derech Emuna, Maaser 66), even if the seller were to inform potential purchasers that the produce being sold is tevel, the sale would still be prohibited. Halachic authorities go as far as to say that even giving tevel as a gift and informing the receiver that the fruit is tevel is prohibited (see Shulchan Aruch YD 331:117 and Kedushat Haaretz 4:26) .

There are two different reasons given against the sale of tevel. According to some opinions (Tosfot Yom Tov Demai 5:8, Torat Ha'aretz 2:36), the basis for this ruling is out of concern that the buyer will in fact not take terumot and maasrot. Even in a case

where there is no such concern, our Sages did not differentiate between various situations, but rather, they made a blanket decree. According to other halachic authorities (Chalat Lechem 2:21), the prohibition of selling tevel is because of the seller's wrongdoing. A farmer who grows produce has an obligation to separate tithes as determined by the Torah. However, if the farmer sells his non-tithed produce, he has undermined the Torah obligation of terumot and maasrot. When the buyer takes ownership of the tevel, it becomes his obligation to separate terumot and maasrot, but only on a rabbinic level. Thus, by selling tevel, the farmer has negated the Torah obligation that was only his to fulfill (see Baba Metzia 88:B).

Is there also a prohibition to buy tevel? According to the Chalat Lechem, by purchasing tevel, the buyer is enabling the seller to cast away his Torah obligation of separating terumot and maasrot.

However, if the prohibition of selling tevel is because of the potential sin of the buyer who will not separate tithes, then based on this logic, a buyer who does separate terumot and maasrot should be permitted to purchase tevel.

Rav Chaim Kanievsky (Derech Emuna,

p.236) writes and brings proof that the prohibition is only on the seller, not the buyer. He seems to conclude that one is allowed to buy tevel. Rav Dov Lior also rules that there is no prohibition to buy tevel, based on many sources from Talmudic times which show that one may purchase from a person who is known not to separate terumot and maasrot (see also Mevo Leterumot Umaasrot 11:13).

According to these poskim one is allowed to purchase from a market that is known to sell tevel. However, perhaps one should still refrain in order to avoid supporting establishments that sell non-tithed produce. The issue should be discussed with one's local orthodox rabbi.

In conclusion, the sale of tevel is prohibited. However, the purchase of tevel is permissible as long as it can be ensured that the buyer will indeed separate terumot and maasrot.

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Touching Torah Scrolls

Question: I know that people are careful not to touch the parchment of a sefer Torah. Does this apply to other scrolls, like haftara scrolls and Megillat Esther?

Answer: The gemara cites R. Parnach's statement in two places: "Whoever holds a sefer Torah naked (i.e., with an uncovered hand (according to almost all)) will be buried ... without the mitzva [he was involved in]." In Megilla (32a) it is a free-standing statement in a sugya about the rules of layning and gelila. In Shabbat (14a-b) it comes up in the context of a Rabbinical decree to treat several objects, including "a book" as tameh, so that if they touch teruma, they make it tameh and disqualified. The gemara explains that people used to keep teruma and holy scrolls together because both are holy, but this attracted mice, which nibble on the scrolls, so they enacted that such scrolls disqualify the teruma. The gemara also explains that hands before netilat yadayim are metameh teruma because they are often dirty. The gemara also mentions such a decree on hands that touched a sefer, since this

violated R. Parnach's idea, and Tosafot (ad loc.) posits that this is true even if one did netilat yadayim soon before touching the sefer. The gemara discusses why there was a need for two different decrees regarding hands.

There are different approaches in the Rishonim (see Rambam, She'ar Avot Hatumah 9:5 & Sefer Torah 10:6; Mordechai, cited by the Beit Yosef, Orach Chayim 147) as to whether, nowadays (when we don't eat teruma), the issue of touching a sefer Torah is still connected to tumah, proximity to teruma, or dirtiness of the hands. (The analysis is too complicated for this forum - see the Aruch Hashulchan's, OC 147:1-7 overview). If it is an independent matter, the problem is that touching directly reflects insufficient honor for the sefer Torah (Levush, OC 147:1). The different approaches can impact on the question of whether it applies only to a sefer Torah or to all holy scrolls, which also create tumah and affect teruma. It also can impact the question of whether netilat yadayim before touching the scrolls helps. If it is related to needing clean or not tameh hands (see Shabbat ibid.), then netilat yadayim should help as it does for hands that need to touch teruma (Aruch Hashulchan ibid. 2).

As far as halacha is concerned, the Shulchan Aruch (OC 147:1) mentions the prohibition to touch only in regard to a sefer Torah, but even if one did netilat yadayim. However, the Rama (ad loc.) cites and prefers the opinion that it applies to all of Tanach, if it is written with the basics (letter formation, parchment, ink) of a sefer Torah (Mishna Berura 147:3). The Rama compromises, in that he permits handling when the two reasons to be lenient are present, i.e., it is not a sefer Torah and one did netilat yadayim. (The Bi'ur Halacha explains this as being because there are two reasons for leniency, not that the two leniencies remove all doubt). In an interesting application, R. Akiva Eiger (I:58) forbids kissing a mezuzah scroll when passing by if it is not in a mezuzah case.

Since the standard assumption is that touching is a matter of disrespect, context plays a role. Ashkenazim attach atzei chayim to the sefer Torah to facilitate rolling the klaf without touching (see Sha'arei Teshuva 691:3), but Sephardim usually use an attached scarf to roll by hand, and many allow touching after netilat yadayim when a lot of rolling is needed (Yalkut Yosef, OC 147:1). Sofrim touch the klaf directly when writing and even

when handling, for various reasons, a completed sefer Torah klaf. There is a machloket whether it is better to have or not have atzei Chayim for navi scrolls, and this is connected (likely in both directions) to whether one rolls with his hands (see Dirshu 147:6). The Sha'arei Teshuva (ibid.) writes that the minhag is not to have atzei chayim and not to be careful about touching a Megillat Esther because it is called an iggeret rather than a sefer. He says it is a nice but uncommonly followed chumra to do netilat yadayim before handling it.

Rabbi Aaron Goldscheider

Glatt Yosher

The fundamental principles of Judaism - love and fear of God, the Ten Commandments and the obligation to study Torah - are all addressed in Parshat Va'etchanan. This being the case, how then do we understand a verse which follows these directives:

“You shall do that which is right (yashar) and good (tov) in the eyes of the Lord” (Devarim 6:18).

We are confronted with a simple query: In what way does “right and good” differ from all the commandments previously stated.

The great Torah teacher Nechama Leibowitz a”h posed the question this way: “Surely one who fulfills all the positive and negative commandments in the Torah ipso facto fulfills the admonition to do what is ‘right and good in the eyes of the Lord!’” What new obligation then does this admonition imply? (Studies in Devarim, p. 58).

Both Rashi and Ramban share a related approach. Rashi says that there are times that we are to go above the letter of law; ‘doing the right and the good’ prods us to disclose and exercise the deeper meaning of the law. Additionally, posits the Ramban, there are many scenarios in which the Torah or even halachah does not directly address an issue, therefore it is here that one applies the spirit and essence of the law. Often in everyday life there are cases to which no direct or explicit mitzvah in the Torah applies.

K'DOSHIM TIHYU, “You shall be holy” (Vayikra 19:2). It is well known that the Ramban makes the case that it is quite possible to observe the letter of the law of the Torah and yet be far from living a good and holy way of life. One can sin by overindulging in eating and drinking or in sexual relations, to cite two examples.

The Ramban thus shows how it is

possible for a man to keep to the letter of the Torah and yet violate its spirit. This then is the implication of the two directives “You shall be holy” and “You shall do that which is right and good.” The importance of Yashrut is that it is not only a positive character trait, but the defining attribute for one who wants to act in accordance with the will of God.

This all encompassing perspective regarding the notion of yashrut was captured beautifully by Rav Avraham Yizchak HaKohen Kook zt”l based on the verse from Tehillim:

OR ZARU'A... “Light is sown for the righteous (tzaddik), and joy for the upright (yashar) of heart.” (Psalms 97:11)

We generally assume that the term tzaddik describes a person who attains the highest place in religious devotion and yet the verse suggests that the yashar attains an even higher level. The Talmud (Taanit 15a) confirms that this verse teaches that the yashar is more elevated. Who then is the tzaddik and who is the yashar? Rav Kook answers that the tzaddik is identified as one who overcomes his inclinations and subdues his yetzer hara to do God’s will. The yashar, on the other hand, aligns his will with God’s will. The yashar does not feel tension. He

cleaves to God. His inner world harmonizes with the will of the Divine. (Siddur Olat Re'iyah Vol. 2, 17)

The Netziv, Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin (1816-1893) who headed the famed yeshiva of Volozhin, spotlighted precisely this point in his introduction to Sefer Bereshit: A person could be a tzaddik and a chassid immersed in Torah and still not be yashar. Yashar means dealing with others in a straight honest way with mercy and compassion. The forefathers, he argues, were yesharim, this being their highest accolade. They always treated others, even idolaters, and those of different habits, respectfully and lovingly, and were concerned with their welfare. They acknowledged that, after all, every human being constitutes a part of the Almighty's creation.

Noteworthy in this context is a parallel lesson the Netziv conveys in his introduction to the final book of the Torah. Once again he emphasizes that the purpose of Torah and the book of Devarim in particular is to provide the guidelines and inspiration needed for a Jew to achieve yashrut.

Perhaps the Netziv bases his thesis on a Talmudic passage which asks, "Which book of the Torah is entitled Sefer Hayashar?" The answer is

debated; one opinion claims it is the book of Bereshit, based on the fact that it contains the story of the 'Yesharim': Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov. The second opinion claims that it must be the last book of the Torah, Devarim, where the verse, "You shall do that which is right (yashar) and good" is found (Talmud Avodah Zara 25b).

Possibly, these two positions are not at odds. Rather, both books articulate a unified ideal: the pursuit of yashrut. Moreover, the fact that this theme animates the opening and closing of the Torah suggests that the books in the center, which contain the abundance of mitzvot, are meant to offer multiple pathways to achieving this esteemed goal.

Rabbi Isaac Breuer (1882-1980) was the illustrious rabbi of the German Jewish community in Washington Heights, New York. He was famed for his Torah learning as well as for his ethical teachings. He argued that it is not enough for a Jew to be concerned that he eats glatt kosher but he is to be as stringent to live by the standards of 'glatt yosher.' He explains that the word 'kosher' is strongly connected to 'yashar' or 'yosher', upright. The Torah not only demands that we keep kosher, it also insists that we need to aspire to treat

others with respect. This means that Jews must practice justice and righteousness and avoid even the faintest trace of dishonesty in their business dealings and personal lives. As much as one strives for excellence in observance of the rituals, like being glatt kosher, we should be as uncompromising when it comes to our ethical and interpersonal matters; this is what it means to be 'glatt yosher.' ('Rav Breuer, His Life and Legacy' p.238)

Defining what constitutes a life of yashrut includes a very wide range of ethical and noble conduct. Consider the following three examples found in the Torah and Talmud that help concretize for us this lofty notion:

Rabbi Yeshaya Shapiro zt"l, belovedly known as the Admor HaChalutz (d. 1942) was a brother of the famed Rebbe of Piaseczna. The Admor heroically made aliyah in 1920 before the onset of the Holocaust and remarkably became an important leader and thinker in the Religious Zionist world. In his writings he addressed the issue of the injunction "to do that which is just and good." Like others he explains that "we must penetrate deeper in order to arrive at the ultimate aim of the Torah rulings." (Quoted by Nechama Leibowitz, Parshat Ve'etchanan).

The Rebbe proudly added that now that we as a people are returning to the Land of Israel we have the opportunity to see the way of yashrut observed more fully and we can endeavor to design a society that adheres to these lofty standards. "In the Diaspora, many of our people did not pay close attention to these warnings because of our bitter exile, but now we must renew our vigilance in Eretz Yisrael, where we desire to create a new life for our people." ("Netiva" published 1929, as quoted on the Mizrahi World Movement website)

A) The Admor cites the following Talmudic case as a model: When one rightfully seizes the property for a debt that has not been paid, the law states that one no longer, by law, needs to return the property to the owner. However, Jewish law, in accordance with the principle "to do that which is just and good" says that if the individual who was unable to pay the credit now brings the money to pay his debt, the land should now be returned to the original owner. (Bava Metzia 16b)

Noteworthy in this example is that the principle "to do that which is just and good" is actually integrated into the very fabric of the halacha. Rebbe Yeshaya Shapiro taught that this

halacha demonstrates that not only is the Torah concerned with helping a fellow person and animal but also aspires to “eradicate potential evil from the soul of man.” In this case, when the person now returns long after to pay back his debt, it would be merciless to refuse the funds and hold on to the property which was so precious and important to the original owner. (See Rambam, *Loveh U'Malveh* 22:16)

B) The middah of yashrut is essential in the following case as well. The Torah states, “If you see your enemy’s donkey struggling under its load... help him, even many times (Shemot 23:5). The purpose of this mitzvah is to cultivate the trait of compassion within us. It is very surprising that the pasuk presents the case of ‘your enemy’s donkey’. Indeed, this is the point. The Talmud tells us that if we have the opportunity to assist either a friend of an enemy in such a case, we must assist the enemy first in order to overcome our natural inclinations (Bava Metzia 32b). The great Baal Mussar, Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler, emphasized that by choosing to assist the enemy, the bystander “wages war” against his natural impulse to feel hatred towards him (Michtav MeEliyahu, *Kuntres Hacheshed* Chap. 4).

C) Nechama Leibowitz, in her analysis of this subject on Parshat Va'etchanan, cites a third example where yashrut plays a central role in business practices. The Talmud says that one who is selling his land is obligated to give his neighbor who has an adjoining field the first opportunity to make the purchase. Why, one may ask, does the seller not have the right to sell it to anyone he pleases? Is there any verse in the Torah that demands this practice? The answer is yes: “You shall do that which is just and good.” The Sages said that since the payment the owner receives is the same, it is only right and good that the adjacent land owner be able to purchase a field close to home that will be helpful to him.

All three cases advance the concept of “doing that which is just and good”. The Torah wants us to take the high road, which makes us better and more noble people.

Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein zt”l (1933-2015), one of the great Talmudic minds of the twenty-first century, wrote about an incident that encapsulates in many ways the notion of yashrut and its place in our religious practice.

“I was once walking with my family in

the Beit Yisrael neighborhood, where R. Isser Zalman Meltzer used to live. For the most part, it consists of narrow alleys. We came to a corner, and found a merchant stuck there with his car. The question came up as to how to help him; it was a clear case of perika u-te'ina (helping one load or unload his burden). There were some youngsters there from the neighborhood, who judging by their looks were probably ten or eleven years old. They saw that this merchant was not wearing a kippa. So they began a whole pilpul, based on the gemara in Pesachim (113b), about whether they should help him or not. They said, "If he walks about bareheaded, presumably he doesn't separate terumot u-ma'asrot, so he is suspect of eating and selling untithed produce...." I wrote Rabbi Soloveitchik a letter at that time, and told him of the incident. I ended with the comment, "Children of the age from our camp would not have known the gemara, but they would have helped him." My feeling then was: Why, Ribbon Shel Olam, must this be our choice? Can't we find children who would have helped him and still know the gemara? Do we have to choose? I hope not; I believe not. If forced to choose, however, I would have no doubts where my loyalties lie: I prefer that they know less

gemara but help him. (Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein, *By His Light*, p. 249)

This remains a memorable conclusion for this Torah giant. His life was dedicated to the beit midrash and Jewish learning, yet, he always felt that moral responsibility, yashrut, is the underlying principle that must absolutely animate and guide our perspective and behavior.

One of the earliest conceptualizations of this mitzvah was offered by Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi, who codified the Mishnah, known as 'Rebbe', the rabbi par excellence. He asks, "Which is the course of yashrut, that a person should choose for himself?" He answers: "A way of life which reflects glory on the Almighty - and brings honor to him from all those who surround him" (Pirkei Avot 2:1).

THE NEW OLD PATH

Rabbi Benji Levy

CEO of Mosaic United

Sometimes Less is More

Despite the fact that God has informed him that he will not be the one to bring the Jewish People home, Moshe continues to teach them Torah ahead of their entry into the Land of Israel. Amidst his preamble to the Ten Commandments, Moshe

states: 'You shall not add onto the matter that I command you and neither shall you detract from it' (D;varim 4:2).

Two laws are included in this statement. The first is the prohibition against adding in any way to the commandments of the Torah. This means that it is forbidden, for example, to extend the festival of Sukkot by an extra day, to put a fifth set of strings on one's tzitzit or to add an extra compartment inside one's tefillin box. The second law is the prohibition against detracting in any way from the commandments of the Torah.

Both of these elements are perplexing. The first seems to be somewhat counterintuitive, whereas the second seems obvious. A desire to add to the commandments may stem from a person's alacrity towards religious life and depth of connection to the Creator. Why would such a seemingly praiseworthy act be prohibited? And regarding the second proscription, given that the Torah states on many occasions that its laws are eternal, it is inconceivable that it would be permitted to detract from its commandments in any way. So, what is the meaning behind this verse?

Sforno explains that the second

element is indeed necessary, in order to prevent people from wrongly assuming that there are commandments that apply only in certain situations or to particular people. This was the case with King Solomon, who believed that contrary to the Torah's explicit command, many wives and many horses would not cause him to go astray (BT, Tractate Sanhedrin 21b). This tendency to believe that sometimes we are beyond the scope of a law occurs in our day-to-day lives. How many of us have driven slightly above the speed limit on a quiet deserted road, 'safe' in the knowledge that it is not really dangerous since we are in control? Even King Solomon, the wisest man to ever lived (Melachim I 5:10), was not immune to the pitfall of assumed immunity when he knew the reasoning behind the commandment. Sforno explains that the verse teaches that there are no exceptions, and no one is 'above the law'.

An explanation of the prohibition against adding to the Torah's commands may be understood by way of an analogy that my father often recounts. A great architect designs an exquisite structure. He hands the plan to his foreman, who in turn instructs the labourers as to its implementation. Amidst construction, one of the labourers decides

that if he increases the height of a certain fence slightly, the beautiful structure will be better protected. What results, to the dismay of the original architect, is that the wall now conceals some of the edifice's tremendous beauty. The architect may consider every minor detail and intend, 'to know what I was walling in or walling out, and to whom I was like to give offence' (Robert Frost, *Mending the Wall*), but without this knowledge, by adding a little to the original design, the labourer detracted from the beauty.

Rabbenu Bachya explains that one should be careful not to presume that one's addition is the will of God, 'for the perfect Torah does not need addition or detraction, and whoever adds, [really] detracts.' The Talmud derives this idea from an episode at the beginning of the Book of B'reishit (BT, Tractate Sanhedrin 29a). Soon after man is created, God permits free reign over the Garden of Eden, with one exception, 'from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, do not eat from it' (B'reishit 2:17). In the first-ever addition to a divine commandment, Chava relays to the snake, 'God said do not eat and do not touch' (3:3). Rashi notes that her being more stringent than God's command was what led to man's ultimate downfall.

The rabbis, like an architect's foreman, are entrusted with the delicate methods of safeguarding the commandments, and a person can indeed choose to take upon oneself a specific stringency, within rabbinic guidelines. Nevertheless, there are individuals who press to universalise personal stringencies, thus hindering an appreciation of the true essence of the beautiful Torah that they seek to preserve. Through erecting supplementary 'fences' from within, they fence off much of what the Torah has to offer. Earlier on, Moshe states explicitly that extra fortification and walls are a sign of weakness, as they reflect a lack of intrinsic strength and assurance (Rashi on Bamidbar 13:18). And here, Moshe warns the original Torah 'labourers', prior to their entry into the land, not to append anything to the perfect blueprint.

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Avoiding Destruction by Doing Good

As Tisha B'Av passed us by, we no doubt reflected on the reasons for the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash and the consequent exile. Several reasons have been explicated, especially with regard to Bayit Sheni, the Second Temple.

Ari Zivotovsky reminds us that the reasons expounded by the rabbis are scattered throughout rabbinic literature, referring to the First Temple, sometimes to the Second, and also to the destruction of Yerushalayim. Moreover, it is not always clear whether a specific sin was attributed to the destruction, per se, or whether the particular wrongdoing was the “last straw” that sealed the fate of the Beit Hamikdash and the people.

The cardinal sins, worthy of such a punishment, are the prominent trio – idol worship, prohibited sexual relations, and bloodshed – while the neglect of the sabbatical year has also been cited as a cause of exile (Mishnah Avot, 5:8-9). The Tosefta

(Menachot) refers to the three former misdeeds as sufficient cause for the downfall of the First Temple and adds that the Second Temple was destroyed because of love of money and hate of one’s neighbor. Two other sources describe this “hate” as “Sinat Chinam,” unnecessary hatred (Yerushalmi: Yoma 1:1 and Bavli: Yoma 9a-b, among others), best described by the famous incident involving Kamtza and Bar Kamtza.

Notably, Tosafot suggests that Jerusalem was (also) destroyed because judges ruled by the strict letter of the law, rather than ruling beyond the letter of the law. Other reasons played out in the Talmud include: Desecration of the Shabbat, neglect of reciting Shema, and neglect of school children (Shabbat 119b). Several other sources cite the neglect of Torah study and even the neglect of uttering the Berachah Birkat Hatorah.

Rambam combines two novel reasons for the destruction, namely, the sin of idolatry (reading astrology) and the natural consequence of not studying self-defense. The Netziv cites excessive “righteousness,” that is, “righteous” individuals who treat others who do not exactly conform to their beliefs as heretics (apikorsim) – a form of Sinat Chinam. So too, the

Chofetz Chaim views Sinat Chinam as the starting point for the destruction; the consequent Lashon Hara (gossip) that followed was the direct cause of the destruction.

Today, in our uncertain times, we could pick and choose from all these causes. And as we reflect on hard times, we might want to concentrate on one or more of these. At least we might internalize what is written in this week's Parsha: "And you shall do what is right and good in the sight of Hashem" (Devarim 6:18).

Rabbi Shalom Rosner

Transmitting the Mesora

But beware and watch yourself very well, lest you forget the things that your eyes saw, and lest these things depart from your heart, all the days of your life; and you shall make them known to your children and to your children's children. The day you stood before Hashem your God at Horeb.... (Devarim 4:9-10)

Based on the proximity of these two pesukim, Rav Yehoshua ben Levi says (Kiddushin 30a):

Whoever teaches his grandson Torah, it is as if he had received the Torah at Har Sinai, as it states: "And you shall make them known to your children

and to your children's children," adjacent to, "the day you stood before Hashem your God at Horeb."

Rav Yosef Soloveitchik (M'penine HaRav) notes that R. Yehoshua ben Levi emphasizes the significance of teaching a "grandson." If the Gemara wanted us to assume that this statement related to a son as well, it would have used the terminology of "grandson as well". Yet, there is no such inference! Apparently, there is something unique about transmitting Torah to a grandchild.

Rav Soloveitchik distinguishes between two concepts: teaching Torah and transmitting Torah. With respect to one's children there is a primary obligation to teach them Torah. With respect to a grandchild, however, this obligation is secondary, as it is to spread Torah in general. Anyone who teaches another Torah is viewed as if he is his child (See Rashi Bamidbar 3:1). Rav Yehoshua is informing us that Har Sinai wasn't only about limud haTorah, it was about the transmission of Torah. "Moshe kibel Torah MiSinai, umesarah l'Yehoshua" (Avot 1:1). There was a kabblalah – a receipt of the Torah – and a mesirah – a transmission to every generation. Perhaps there is a greater mesiras haTorah when it skips a generation to

a grandchild. When I teach my son, I am ensuring the transmission of Torah to the next generation, but there is no assurance that it will be further transmitted. When I teach my grandson Torah, I am ensuring the transmission of Torah to yet a second generation. That sort of transmission is what strengthens the future of our people and connects us to our source at Har Sinai.

In Reflections of the Rav, Rav Soloveitchik writes:

Grandfathers and grandchildren, though members of different generations, are part of one fraternity – the Mesorah community (those who preserve the integrity of the transmitted tradition)... As the child is born, he is absorbed into the Mesorah community. He will hopefully, speak our language, study our texts, share our solemnities, dream our dreams, and adopt our ideals.

We are referred to as Bnei Yisrael or Beit Yaakov. Why are we not identified as Bnei Avraham or Yitzhak? What was unique about Yaakov was his direct connection with his grandchildren. Nowhere in Tanach do we witness any direct interaction between Avraham and his grandson Yaakov, or between Yitzhak and his grandchildren. Yaakov,

however, directly blesses his grandchildren, the sons of Yosef, Efraim and Menashe. Yaacov overcomes a generation gap and is able to transmit the mesora to a second generation. Yaakov was the first to underscore that Torah transcends time. That is why he merited to have his name attached to all future generations.

Especially during this challenging time when our children are lacking an organized framework, as camps and summer programs are closed, we must make time to learn with our children. In addition, we should transmit our love and appreciation of the Torah. Set a personal example by portraying to our children how we set aside time to study Torah daily, under all circumstances. It is our duty to ensure that the love and appreciation of Torah permeates throughout future generations.

May we merit the proper transmission of Torah to our children and grandchildren and fulfil the statement in Kohelet (4:12): the threefold cord (three generations) will not easily be disconnected (from Torah).

Simchat Shmuel **Rabbi Sam Shor**

Parshat Va'etchanan, of course, contains within it the Aseret haDibrot. The first of the Aseret HaDibrot instructs each of us:

Anochi HaShem Elokecha Asher Hotzeiticha M'Eretz Mitzrayim, M'Bet Avadaim - I am Hashem your God, who took you forth from the Land of Egypt and the House of Servitude...

Many of our meforshim have asked why is it that HaKadosh Baruch Hu chose to emphasize and describe Himself as the one who has redeemed the Jewish People from Egyptian servitude, and not as the Creator of all existence? Why specifically is the redemption from slavery in Egypt, the aspect of Hashem's hashgacha which is emphasized in the opening verse of the Aseret HaDibrot?

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev, zy'a, explains that Hakadosh Baruch Hu chooses to emphasize that the bestowance of the Torah HaKedosha to Am Yisrael is taking place specifically after they have been redeemed from Egypt. Hashem chose to reiterate that had Am Yisrael been offered the Torah while still enslaved in Egypt, their acceptance of the Torah might have been from a sense of feeling compelled to do so, that

perhaps their departure from Egypt was somehow pre-conditioned upon their acceptance of the Torah. By bestowing the Torah now, after our departure from Egypt, and by emphasizing this fact in the first of the Aseret HaDibrot, Hashem intended to empower Am Yisrael to accept the Torah with love, as a sign of the love that Hashem feels toward Am Yisrael, and that we in turn feel toward HaKadosh Baruch Hu.

Hashem first took us forth from Egypt, explains Reb Levi Yitzchak, so that we could leave behind the mentality of the House of Servitude, in order to receive the Torah as a sign of the loving dynamic between the Ribono Shel Olam and the Jewish People. It is precisely this fundamental idea, explains the Kedushat Levi, that is introduced here in the first of the Aseret HaDibrot, to serve as an eternal reminder that indeed Hashem has given Am Yisrael the gift of the Torah HaKedosha, like a parent lovingly bestows gifts to each of their children.

Yehi Ratzon, may each of us internalize this beautiful message encrypted in the first of the Aseret HaDibrot.

Towards Meaningful Tefilla

by **Zemira Ozarowski**

Birchot HaShachar

After starting off our davening with thanking Hashem for our Neshamot (Modeh Ani, Elokai Neshama) and our bodies (Asher Yatzar) and then focusing ourselves properly for the day ahead (Birchot HaTorah), it is now time for Birchot HaShachar.

Birchot HaShachar is a series of 16 brachot in which we praise and thank Hashem for many of the basic workings of the world – for giving us clothing, sight, strength, freedom, and much more. The Mishna Berura explains that the reason why we say these brachot is because of the famous statement in Gemara Brachot 35a that one is not permitted to benefit from this world without first making a bracha. Just as this is true for every food we eat, it is also true for every pleasure we have in this world. We need to stop and appreciate what Hashem has given us on a daily basis.

The Gemara in Brachot tells us that as one prepares for the upcoming day, he should make a bracha every step along the way – when you open your eyes, make the bracha POKEI'ACH IVRIM (He opens the eyes of the blind), when you get dressed, make the bracha MALBISH ARUMIM

(He dresses the naked). This helps us to really visualize all of the blessing Hashem has put into our lives and to appreciate it. Nowadays, we say the whole list all at once as part of our set Tefilla but the idea is the same, to take note of all we are blessed with.

In this article, we will focus on the first three brachot.

... ASHER NATAN LASECHVI VINA L'HAVCHIN BEIT YOM UVEIN LAYLA.

We praise and thank Hashem for giving the SECHVI the ability to distinguish between day and night. SECHVI means both rooster and heart. As we listen to the “cockadoodledoo” of the rooster, announcing the new day to all, we are reminded that we too (like the rooster) were granted a special ability to distinguish. From a young age, we are able to differentiate between good and evil, safe and dangerous, hot and cold. This innate capability is something we all take for granted but it is vital in our daily functioning. The specific ability to differentiate between day and night and to be able to measure time, creates a life of meaning. When days begin to blur, and time is of no meaning (which some of us perhaps have experienced during this corona time period), life becomes less meaningful and consequential. We thank Hashem for giving us time,

allowing us to wake up each morning with new goals and ambitions, and to tune into the uniqueness of each day.

...SHELO ASANI GOY.

We thank Hashem for having created us as Jews. The Midrash relates that Moshe Rabbeinu was so overcome with emotion at Matan Torah, as he received the Torah and mitzvot, that he cried out with this bracha (Midrash Abachir). When we make this bracha, we need to take a moment to focus on how lucky we are to have been granted this amazing gift of belonging to Klal Yisrael, of recognizing and serving HaKadosh Baruch Hu, and of being able to learn His Torah and keep the mitzvot. Try picturing for a minute what our lives would be like if we did not have the Torah guiding it. If one really takes a moment to think about this, he will be so overcome with happiness that his heart will be on fire! (Y'SOD V'SHORESH HAAVODA)

... SHELO ASANI AVED.

We thank Hashem for having created us as free people. Rabbi Ephraim Oshry (who compiled Halachic shailot during the Holocaust in his book MIMAAMAKIM, was asked the following question - how can we continue to say the bracha of SHELO ASANI AVED when we are being enslaved in the most brutal of ways?!

He answers, based on the Avudraham, that the bracha must be recited even if one is in fact a slave. The bracha is referring not to physical freedom but to spiritual freedom. We may be physically enslaved, but we can still continue to serve Hashem, and even if that ability is taken away from us by our oppressors, we know that this status is only temporary. We are given the B'CHIRA CHOFSHIT, free choice, to continue to serve Him in our hearts. It is important for us to remember, that no matter what difficult circumstances we go through, we always have the inner freedom to choose how we react, how we behave, and how we feel.

... SHELO ASANI ISHA. (men)

... SHE-ASANI KIRTZONO. (women)

Men thank Hashem for having given them the ability to focus on their Avodat Hashem, to be able to spend hours studying Torah and to be devoted to all of the Mitzvot, without some of the “distractions” that were granted to women, and to be therefore fully obligated in all of the Mitzvot. This bracha should be a reminder every day to commit oneself to this special responsibility and privilege.

Women here proclaim that they were created as Hashem willed. Hashem

created man and woman together as one being and then separated them into two separate beings, with separate roles and entities. (Bnei Yissaschar). This was Hashem's will and we thank Him for giving us this special role, which charges us to balance raising a family with our Avodat Hashem.

Next week, we will continue with our analysis of Birchot HaShachar.

Rebbetzin Shira Smiles

Shemirat Shabbat

“Shamor vezachor b'dibur echad”. These two expressions said in one breath, direct us to experience the holiness of Shabbat in the most exalted way. Shamor relates to the positive mitzvot associated with keeping Shabbat, zachor relates to the negative ones.

From a halachic perspective the interconnectedness of the two is what obligates women in the positive mitzvot of Shabbat, albeit they are time-bound. Hence, women are obligated in kiddush, eating lechem mishneh and three seudot on Shabbat.

Shamor is guarding Shabbat; ensuring that one does not transgress any laws specific to Shabbat entails tremendous effort.

The Chafetz Chayim in his introduction to the laws of Shabbat states emphatically that one who does not learn the laws of Shabbat will inadvertently come to transgress multiple laws each week. To strengthen Shemirat Shabbat many people have a custom to learn at least two Shabbat laws at each Shabbat meal; this creates a sensitivity to and awareness of the complexity and intricacies of Hilchot Shabbat.

The Netivot Shalom likens Shabbat to the experience of entering a king's palace. When a person is in his own home, he has the right to touch, look and move things around without a second thought. However, when one is in someone else's home, he must respect the implicit boundaries and rules of that home. If the rule of the home is to take off one's shoes upon entering so as not to dirty the carpet, one must follow suit. If a person were to spend Shabbat in the home of a great person, she would obviously be careful to display the proper behavior and speech throughout Shabbat as well. On Shabbat it is as if we enter the Kingdom of Hashem. Our demeanor, speech and conduct must reflect this special reality. Shamor therefore, is not seen as limiting us as what we cannot do, rather it gives us the

parameters of what is acceptable in such a holy environment.

Rav Matitayhu Salamon in Matnat Chayim notes that shamor is related to the idea of anticipation, as in “veaviv shamar et hadavar” (Bereishit 37;11). One should feel a sense of anticipation and excitement for Shabbat the entire week, in particular on Friday. This translates into the special preparation that we do as we shop, cook and preparing the house. It also entails introspection and setting the proper attitude to appreciate the magnitude that the gift of Shabbat presents us. Indeed, we begin Kiddush on Friday night with the words “Yom hashishi”; Shabbat takes on its fullness only with our preparation on “yom hashishi”. To the extent we anticipate and desire, we can appreciate and experience.

Rabbi Judah Mischel

Beyond

Rav Moshe Feinstein zt'l, Rosh Yeshiva of Mesivta Tiferet Yerushalayim on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, was the Poseik haDor, the leading Halachic authority of the generation. He was adored for his compassion, sensitivity and midos tovos, and respected for his

unmatched genius and hasmada, constant engagement in Talmud Torah.

Once, when he was no longer a young man, Reb Moshe made the long trip to the West Coast to fundraise for the Yeshivah. Upon arriving in Los Angeles, he spent the entire rest of the day on his feet going from meeting to meeting. The organizers were shocked when after such an exhausting day, he proposed that they then go visit an elderly rav who lived some distance away.

One of those accompanying Reb Moshe sought to protect the aging Gadol's strength: “Rebbi, you've had such a long and demanding day, would you not prefer to rest for the night or take some time to learn?” Reb Moshe replied with absolute clarity, “The Torah commands us to love the Ribbono Shel Olam with all our heart and soul, u'vechol meodecha, ‘with all our possessions’, specifically our wealth. For most people, ‘wealth’ refers to their material belongings. I don't have much money, and for me, my Torah learning time is what is most valuable and precious to me... and I am prepared to sacrifice that to fulfil another mitzvah.”

~ Our sedra contains the Shema, the core declaration of our Emunah, our

daily affirmation of the Oneness of Hashem: “V’Ahavta, and you shall love Hashem your God, with all your heart and with all your soul, and uvchol me’odecha, with all your means.” (Devarim 6:5)

Rashi says, ‘The meaning of uvchol m’odecha is “and with all your possessions”. However, there are people whose possessions are more precious to them than their own bodies; therefore the pasuk says, “and with me’odecha, all your means”’.

Ramban interprets the word me’odecha to mean “much”. That is to say, we are obliged to love and serve Hashem with whatever is most precious to us.

~ Moshe Rabbeinu had dedicated his adult life to fulfilling Hashem’s will in the service of Bnei Yisrael. From the period of slavery in Egypt to the transmission of Torah, to the years of wandering in the Desert, Moshe was the Ro’eh Ne’eman, the Faithful Shepherd, leading Hashem’s flock. In our sedra Moshe expresses his greatest desire; he davens and pleads with G-d to allow him entry to Eretz Yisrael with the People to whom he was so dedicated. Moshe Rabbeinu doesn’t let up, beseeching Hashem 515 times to be granted the privilege of coming into the Land.

Rav Yaakov Bender shlit’a, a master educator and Rosh Yeshiva of Darchei Torah in Far Rockaway, refers to a beautiful teaching of the Ba’al haTurim regarding the way our leader mentions his merits in an attempt to awaken Divine compassion. Of all the great accomplishments Moshe Rabbeinu might have mentioned in his davening – of all the powerful moments between Moshe Rabbeinu and Am Yisrael from Yam Suf to Har Sinai, including his leading the Jews out of Egypt, enduring criticism and rebellion in the wilderness, sacrificing his home life for the sake of the Nation – what does Moshe mention? He begs G-d to remember that Chizakti es Yisrael, ulai yeracheim alai, “I have given chizuk, strength, to the Jewish People; perhaps Hashem, you can thus have mercy on me....”

Moshe’s ability to give chizuk was his me’odecha, his most precious possession.

~ Following the period of mourning and reflection on our losses, the reading of Parshas Va’eschanan, and Shabbos Nachamu itself, is an opportune time for us to consider what currency we value most, what is most important in our lives. For Reb Moshe, zt’l, Talmud Torah was his greatest pleasure and asset. The

chessed of visiting and giving chizuk to the elderly rav, another Jew, was his fulfilment of “love Hashem with all your means.”

May we be prepared to go beyond ourselves and be ready to elevate all of our inner resources and possessions to be mechazeik es Yisrael, to strengthen ourselves and each other – and may Hashem continue to show mercy and compassion to us all.

Walk through the Parsha
with **Rabbi David Walk** 

Getting to the Point

Contrapuntal music in movies is quite cool. That’s when the action and the music portray opposite moods. It can be very effective to get the viewer more deeply involved emotionally in the film’s action or concept, like hearing the soothing ballad We’ll Meet Again while A-bombs are dropping at the end of Dr. Strangelove (1964), or the Marines singing M-I-C-K-E-Y M-O-U-S-E as they march into battle in Full Metal Jacket (1987). There’s a famous verse in this week’s Torah reading which present us with a similarly jarring feeling.

Here’s the beginning of that verse: When you have children and grandchildren, and have been established in the land for a long time (Devarim 4:25). Sounds nice, pleasant, even delightful. The Jews are having families and settling blissfully into the land. Even the word ‘for a long time’ (NOSHANTEM) reminds us of the term for ‘well preserved produce’ (NOSHAN) in the blessings of parshat B’chukotai. But the continuation jars us from the idyll: then you will act destructively (HISHCHATEM, perhaps ‘corrupt’ or ‘decadent’) and fashion an idol, an image of something, which is evil in the eyes of the Lord, your God, Whom you will anger.

This very disturbing verse is also very famous, because it is the beginning of the reading for the Ninth of Av. This is unique. Of all the special Torah readings on our calendar, only Tisha B’Av has a passage which appears in that same week’s parsha. So, it behooves us to analyze this quote to help us understand this week’s special event and our parsha.

There are, the Ramban points out, two basic approaches to the quote. It is either a prediction of what will come. This makes sense because there is no conditional ‘if’ like in the TOCHACHOT (curses). Or it could be

a warning. This outcome will come to pass if your descendants stray. The warning aspect is predicated on the Jews turning from God after a long period of quiet.

The Ramban supports the prediction viewpoint based upon a Gematria. The word NESHANTEM has the numerical value 852, which is the number of years from entering the land until the destruction of the First Holy Temple minus 2, according to the Talmud (Gittin 88a).

Reb Moshe Alshich (1508-1593) sees more anomalies in our verse, and asks the following additional questions: Why does the verse specify two generations, why does it go from singular (TOLID) to plural (NESHANTEM), and isn't sculpting an image itself an act of HASHCHATA (decadent, destructive behavior)?

He suggests that we started with the singular because it refers to the generation (DOR) which survived the desert and entered Eretz Yisrael. That group will have children. The Alshich further posits that the two generations in the verse represents the two periods of loyalty to God described in the book of Shoftim, namely the period of Yehoshua and the era of the Elders whom he personally inspired.

Rav Alshich's question about the use of HASHCHATA is explained by informing us that this term is usually associated with ZIMA, sins of promiscuity. It was this reprehensible behavior which led to idolatry, and then the dissolution of society. This is a powerful description of the demise of the first Jewish state.

Then there's the Kli Yakar (1550-1619), whose second explanation truly resonates with me. 'If you can imagine that you strongly possess the land over a long period of time, then you can think that your possession of the land is absolute, and, therefore, who could possibly take it from us?' In other words, we've got it, and who's going to evict us? Now, we see clearly the problem: Complacency!

To fully understand the position of the Kli Yakar, look at the last verse in the section: Keep His statutes and His commandments, which I command you this day, that it may be well with you and your children after you, and that you may prolong your days upon the earth which the Lord your God gives you all of the days (KOL HAYAMIM, verse 40). See that last phrase? It can mean 'forever' or 'on a daily basis'. The Kli Yakar is warning us to heed the latter translation.

We love living in Eretz Yisrael, but woe to those who take this Divine boon for granted. Periodically, I hear people question the continued observance of Tisha B'av in our proto-Redeemed State. The Kli Yakar is addressing them. The commemoration of this tragic date is as critical as ever. It's just with a slightly different theme: Appreciate this gift from our God, the alternative is too horrendous to contemplate!

PIRKEI AVOT SUMMER SERIES

There is a long standing custom that during the summer Shabbatot one learns the weekly chapter of Pirkei Avot. Each week Torah Tidbits will feature a prominent personality who will share insights and inspiration from the weekly Perek. Enjoy!

Rebbetzin Pearl Borow OU Israel Faculty

Perek Dalet, chapter 4, of Pirkei Avot, in particular the first four mishnayot, presents a primer for building a holy society, a Kehila kedosha. The main point of these mishnayot is that a kehila kedosha begins with the development of individuals who are kedoshim.

How can we do this?

An answer to this question is given in

the first Mishna. Set up clear goals. Most people toil and strive for wisdom, wealth, power and honor. Ben Zoma teaches that this is correct behavior, but we must understand these goals correctly.

Who is wise? He who learns from every man. That is, a person who keeps an open mind at all times.

Who is wealthy? He who rejoices in what he has. Note: Not one who accepts what he has, but actually rejoices in it.

Who is powerful, and who is truly honorable? The truly strong man is he who conquers his yetzer hara, and the honorable one is he who honors his fellow man. Ben Zoma's guidelines place the individual on a proper path.

But this is not quite enough. As Jews, we have been given guidelines in the form of mitzvot, commandments, both positive and negative, that keep our feet firmly on that proper path. So, in Mishna two of this perek, Ben Azzai advises: Run to do what may seem to be a minor mitzva, and flee from transgression. He is following a distinguished model here, David Hamelech himself, who states in Tehillim, 119:32, "derech mishpatecha arutz", I will run on the path of Your mitzvot. Remember, says Ben Azzai, a mitzva is something HKBH Himself

bids us to do, or desist from doing. What can be of greater benefit to us than to hurry to fulfill the Divine will.

Ben Azzai adds more advice, in Mishna gimmel, “Al tehi baz lechol adam”, do not belittle, or reject any man, or any object. This may be understood as an enhancement of Ben Zoma’s question and answer, “Who is deserving of honor? He who honors his fellow man”. We add here – one must honor no matter who that person happens to be. This is a mitzva in the Torah, Vayikra, 19:17. If you see your enemy’s donkey fallen under its burden, do not pass him by, but rather help him to unload it. The Gemara Pesachim asks, who is this enemy? The answer, one who has rejected the Torah. Yet HKBH commands us to help him. You see, we may accomplish two things: by helping him with his problem, the overloaded donkey, we are showing him the values by which the man of faith lives. Hopefully, it may bring him back to Torah as well.

Another very important piece of advice follows in Mishna four. Rav Levitas of Yavneh says, “meod meod hevai shfal ruach”, a person must always be very very humble. If a person is indeed humble, he will be able to achieve all the above-mentioned positive qualities.

Rav Levitas was actually called “man of Yavneh” because he embodied the principle of humility which was strongly emphasized at that great academy of learning.

The letters of the word, “meod”, mem, alef, dalet begin the names of Moshe, Avraham and David. These three giants of our history embodied the characteristic of humility, and we have a subliminal message here. If you really want to follow the advice given in these four mishnayot of Perek Dalet in Pirke Avot, it is helpful to study the actions and accomplishments of our heroes in TaNaCh. Emulating a strong role model is one of the best ways to learn behavior that leads to kedusha.

OzTORAH

Rabbi Raymond Apple

Can Anyone Tell You Not to Covet?

It's all very well to say, "Don't covet", but how can anyone - even God - order it?

There's only a problem if we consider the Decalogue to be ten legislative commands, but the truth is that the Decalogue is not law but a set of principles (the Torah calls the

Decalogue Aseret HaD'varim, "Ten Words" or "Ten Statements") meant to govern our relationships with God and each other.

Ibn Ezra says that the reference to coveting has to be understood logically.

A peasant can be jealous of the good fortune of a second peasant because they both have the same opportunity of working hard and being successful. A peasant will, however, not be jealous of someone who marries the king's daughter because he knows that royal marriages are generally not possible for the peasantry.

Coveting is a rule about recognising the differences between people.

If the peasant does not marry the princess no-one will think badly of him, but if the same peasant is lazy and does not work towards prosperity people will be disappointed.

In religious life everyone has the same opportunity of reaching out to God. No human being can be God, but all can look towards Him and if they don't, they have wasted their opportunities.

Machon Puah

Rabbi Gideon Weitzman

A “New” Theory of Disease

Last time we examined the argument between Rabbi David ben Shlomo Ibn Avi Zimra, the Radbaz, who lived in Tzfat in the 16th century, and his contemporary Rabbi Moshe Isserlis, the Rema, who lived in Krakow. The Radbaz was of the opinion that a person cannot endanger themselves to save another person. The Rema disagreed and wrote that a landlord cannot block a tenant who has a disease from living in his quarters.

A reader, Rabbi Meir Salasnik, my Rabbi and boss when I worked in the Bushey United Synagogue, in London, wrote to me and presented a fascinating explanation. He noted that the Radbaz died in a plague that killed many in the Tzfat community, including the famous Rabbi Yitzchak Luria, the Ari. However, the Ari was only 39 years old when he died, while the Radbaz lived a long life. Some say he was 94 years old, while others claim that he was 110.

At the same time as the Rema and the Radbaz, an Italian scientist presented a new theory of how disease was spread. Girolamo Fracastoro became a professor in Padua University at the incredibly young age of 19. In 1546 he proposed that epidemic diseases are caused by transferable tiny particles or ‘spores’ that could transmit infection by direct or indirect contact, or even

without contact over long distances.

This novel approach to epidemiology, or the spread of disease in populations, stood in direct opposition to the accepted opinion of Galen. The famous Roman physician and philosopher, Aelius Galenus, or Galen, proposed the miasma theory, or the miasmatic theory. This suggested that diseases, such as cholera, chlamydia, or the Black Death, were caused by a miasma, Greek for pollution, a noxious form of "bad air", also known as night air. The theory held that epidemics were caused by miasma, emanating from rotting organic matter.

Fracastoro took issue with this and claimed that there was no bad air but spores that spread disease. While this was suggested during the lifetime of the Rema and the Radbaz, it is possible that they did not know of this new theory and still held by the previous miasmatic theory. As such it makes sense that the Rema did not allow a landlord to eject a sick tenant. He did not recognize the danger of contagion from the ill occupant. Can we propose that if the Rema did know of the 'spores' theory, he would have agreed with the Radbaz? We cannot say with any certainty but it is an interesting suggestion.

More on this next week.

The Daily Portion

- Sivan Rahav Meir

Managing Our Account

For what great nation has God so near to it, like the Lord our God is at all times, that we call upon Him? (Devarim 4:7)

Rabbi Yehuda Amital, the founder of Yeshivat Har Etzion, wrote about prayer: "Every person has been given a great merit – God allows us to pray. The human race would be different, it would be sadder and more desolate, were it not for this great merit given to man."

Throughout the Book of D'varim, Moshe repeatedly exhorts us to turn to God, to connect to Him by praying, begging, and speaking. Rabbi Amital used to tell the following story in connection with prayer:

I heard this from the director of a senior citizens' home in Miami. Many of the residents' children live far away in places such as New York, Washington, and Chicago. The director categorizes the children into three groups. The first is the children who mail a check to their parents every month, sometimes, but not always, adding a personal note. Thus, the parent knows that his child remembers him every month. The

second group is the children who mail the check directly to the office. Although the check isn't sent directly to the parent, at least the child shows that he still remembers him. The third group pay by standing order. The bank clerk sends the check and the child does not even know if his parent is alive or not. Everything works automatically.

What kind of relationship do we want to have with God? The Torah asks us to keep a near and personal relationship and not to sign on a standing order.

NCSY ISRAEL

Shlomo Rayman

Beit Shemesh Chapter Director

Connecting To His Oneness

Going through high school in Israel, we are expected to learn a lot of Torah. We take many Torah Bagruyot, have chavrutot in our free time, and engage in peulot on NCSY Israel Shabbatonim. We spend hours of our lives delving into all the different and diverse outlooks in Judaism. One of the few things that everyone seems to agree on is that learning Torah is a very crucial part. Why is learning Torah so important?

A profound answer lies within a

special-well known text from this week's parsha. SH'MA YISRAEL... "Hear oh Israel, Hashem is our God, Hashem is one." This isn't just a statement championing monotheism over polytheism, but is also declaring our belief in the philosophical concept of the singularity of God. God is One that cannot be split, that is incomparable and unlike any other single thing in existence, which are all made up of smaller particles. God is truly one, He is infinite, and ultimately out of our ability to really comprehend.

The very next pasuk states V'AHAVTA... We must love this single God with all of our heart and soul. Isn't it fascinating that this pasuk follows the declaration of 'Hashem echad'? Shouldn't it come in a different context? Perhaps after telling us that Hashem is our father or that he took us out of Egypt? How in the world are we supposed to love this 'Hashem echad', an abstract philosophical concept that one can't even really define?

The midrash (Sifri D'varim 6) suggests that the very next pesukim answer this question.

"All of which I am commanding you today should be on your heart. And you should teach it to your children and speak it in your households, while

you travel, in the mornings and evenings...”

God gave us a way to peer into his “soul”. Through learning and internalizing God’s Torah we have a chance to understand just a bit about Him. We can start to comprehend the ways He sees and relates to the world, how He defines good and bad. This understanding leads to connection, and through this connection we can ultimately come to love this philosophical concept we call God.

By Teens, for Teens

Ami Slifkin - 12th Grade

Beit Shemesh Chapter President

Preparing For The Test

At the very beginning of this week's Parsha, Moshe recounts the story when he prayed to Hashem to let him enter Israel. Interestingly, while explaining why Hashem said no, Moshe blames Bnei Yisrael in a way that throws them under the bus. “And Hashem became angry at me because of you and he did not listen to me.” This isn’t a normal characteristic of Moshe Rabbeinu. Why is he blaming them? It was Moshe’s sin, and even if they had a part in it, is it really appropriate to

place the blame on others? Shouldn’t he be encouraging them as they are about to enter into Eretz Yisrael?

Perhaps we can suggest that we must translate L'MAANCHEM literally; that it means “for your sake”. Moshe was actually telling the people that Hashem didn’t let him in for Bnei Yisrael’s benefit.

To understand this we can use an analogy, a teacher only helps you before the test, but the actual test needs to be done alone. A true teacher prepares his students with the skills to pass the test. That is why Moshe couldn’t join Bnei Yisrael entering the land. It was their time to shine and prove to God that they can pass the test of entering Eretz Yisrael.

I also want to take this opportunity to thank NCSY for the great times and giving me the skills to make it on my own in the world - and pass my own tests!

Medina & Halacha

Rabbi Shimshon HaKohen Nadel

Can We Cancel Tisha B'Av?

The Four Fasts in Light of the Miracle of the Modern State of Israel

Following the miraculous return of the Jewish People to their ancestral

homeland, and in the wake of the miraculous birth of the State of Israel and dramatic reclamation of Jerusalem and the Temple Mt., a number of authorities discussed and debated the relevance of Tisha B'Av, along with the other fasts instituted by our sages to mourn the destruction of the Holy Temple and Jerusalem.

While the notion of nullifying Tisha B'Av along with the other fasts may sound shocking, this question was first asked 2,500 years ago!

As the Temple in Jerusalem was being rebuilt, the Jews of Babylonia sent a message to the Kohanim and the Prophets in the Land of Israel, asking them to inquire of Hashem, "Should I weep in the Fifth Month [Av], abstaining [from pleasures] as I have been doing for many years?" (Zechariah 7:3).

Zechariah answers that the Four Fasts will one day be transformed into festivals: "Thus said Hashem, Master of Legions: The Fast of the Fourth, the Fast of the Fifth, the Fast of the Seventh, and the Fast of the Tenth, shall become occasions of joy and gladness, happy festivals for the House of Judah; [Only] love truth and peace!" (Zechariah 8:19).

But the intent of this prophecy is unclear. When exactly will these days be celebrated as days of "joy and gladness"?

The Talmud (Rosh HaShanah 18b) notes

that the prophet refers to these days as both "fasts" and days of "joy and gladness." Rav Chana bar Bizna in the name of Rav Shimon Chasida explains, "At a time when there is peace, they will be for joy and gladness. But when there is no peace, [they will remain days of] fasting." According to Rav Papa, "At a time when there is peace, they will be for joy and gladness, but when there is a decree from the government [persecuting the Jewish People], [they will remain days of] fasting. If there is neither a governmental decree nor peace - if they want to they may fast, if they do not want to they do not fast." The Talmud continues and explains that Tisha B'Av, however, has a different status than the other fasts, as a number of "tragic events were repeated on it."

But just how is "peace" defined?

The Rashba explains that 'peace' means a time when the Jewish People have sovereignty over their land. With Jewish sovereignty over the State of Israel today - and in the absence of any governmental decree persecuting the Jewish People - we would meet the Talmud's criteria of transforming our fasts as festivals, according to the Rashba. However, according to most authorities - including Rashi, Tosafot, Rabbenu Chananel, Ramban, Ritva, and the Tashbetz - a 'time of peace' implies that the Holy Temple is standing. Without the Holy Temple, there is no 'peace.' But even without 'peace,' in the absence of a 'decree' against the Jewish

People, the 17th of Tammuz, Tzom Gedaliah, and the 10th of Tevet would be optional today. As the Talmud states, "if they want to they may fast, if they do not want to they do not fast."

The position of the Rambam requires analysis. At the end of Hilchot Ta'aniot (5:19), the Rambam records the prophecy of Zechariah and writes: "All of these fasts will be nullified in the future in the days of Moshiach, and not just that but in the future they will be festivals and days of joy and gladness, as it says, 'The Fast of the Fourth, the Fast of the Fifth, the Fast of the Seventh, and the Fast of the Tenth shall become occasions of joy and gladness, happy festivals for the House of Judah; [Only] love truth and peace!'"

But curiously, in his Commentary to the Mishnah (Rosh Hashanah 1:3), the Rambam records that during the Second Temple Period, the Fast of Tisha B'Av was observed, while the other fasts days were optional (But see Tashbetz 2:271, who disagrees that they fasted, and assumes this is an error in the Rambam).

While it is difficult to understand how according to the Rambam these fasts were observed while the Second Temple was standing, it would appear that the Rambam believed that 'peace' had not yet been achieved, even with a Temple. One explanation could be the Greek and Roman occupation. Another possible explanation, the spiritual state

of the Second Temple, which was just a shadow of the First. Yet another explanation, the spiritual state of the Jewish People themselves during the Second Temple. As the Maharsha (Rosh HaShanah 18b) explains, the prophecy of "joy and gladness" is predicated on "truth and peace," as that is how the verse concludes. In the absence of "truth and peace," the Maharsha writes, even in the presence of a Holy Temple, we revert back to fasting. As is known, the Second Temple period was one of corruption, strife, and baseless hatred, which could explain why according to the Rambam the fasts were observed. Rav Moshe Soloveitchik explained that this is why the Rambam himself includes the end of the verse, "[Only] love truth and peace," indicating that in the absence of truth and peace - even with a Holy Temple standing - Tisha B'Av and the other fasts are very much relevant (See the OU's Mesorah, vol. 15, p. 47).

It would appear that the observance of these fast days is subject to the changing reality.

Historically, a number of Ge'onim and Rishonim ruled that as the period they lived in was neither one of 'peace' nor 'decree' against the Jewish Nation, the 'Three Minor Fasts' are optional (See Ginzei Kedem, Vol. 3, p. 43; Rabbeinu Chananel, Rashbah, Ritva, and Ran to Rosh HaShanah 18b).

The Talmud (Megillah 5b) relates that Rebbe, Rav Yehudah HaNassi, "bathed

on the market day in Tzipori on the 17th of Tammuz and sought to abolish Tisha B'Av, but they [the sages] did not agree with him." The Talmud continues and explains that Rebbe was only interested in abolishing Tisha B'Av which fell on Shabbat, arguing that "once it is postponed, let it be postponed [altogether]." But Rav Yaakov Emden and the Vilna Ga'on explain Rebbe's behavior in light of the period in which he lived. While the Second Temple had been destroyed, and the Romans occupied the Land of Israel, Rabbi lived during a period of relative peace and prosperity, expressed by his relationship with Antoninus (See Avodah Zarah 10a). Tosafot, however, points out that while Rebbe may have bathed on the 17th of Tammuz, he did not eat, as these fasts were already accepted by the Jewish People and no longer subjective.

In fact, many Ge'onim and Rishonim ruled that once the Jewish People have accepted the Three Fasts upon themselves, the fasts become obligatory (See Sha'arei Teshuvah, 77; Shibolei HaLeket, Seder Ta'anit 278; Tur, Orach Chayim 550. See also Tashbetz 2:271). According to the Ramban, the fasts are indeed obligatory today, "all the more so in these generations where because of our many sins there is 'decree' and no 'peace'" (Torat HaAdam, Inyan Aveilut Yeshanah).

The Rambam (Hilchot Ta'anit 5:1) writes that "There are days when all of

Israel fasts..." and "All of Israel observes these days by fasting..." (Ibid., 5:5). The Maggid Mishnah (ad Loc.) comments that this implies that today the fasts are obligatory. The Shulchan Aruch too rules: "We are obligated to fast on Tisha B'Av, the 17th of Tammuz, the 3rd of Tishrei [Tzom Gedaliah], and the 10th of Tevet because of tragic events that happened on them" (Orach Chayim 549:1), and "Everyone is obligated to fast on these four fasts and it is forbidden to make a breach in the fence" (Orach Chayim 550:1).

But if the reality should change dramatically, would these fasts still be obligatory?

Even before the founding of the State of Israel, there was a sense that the nascent Jewish settlement was witness to the beginning of the process of Redemption. For some, the very appointment of Sir Herbert Samuel as High Commissioner of pre-State Palestine was a sign that redemption was imminent. After all, Samuel was the first Jew to govern the Land of Israel in 2,000 years. Some even accorded him status similar to the King of Israel! (See, for example, Chidushei HaRav Chaim Hirschensohn, vol. 2, Letters, no. 27).

In a letter written by Rav Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook, dated 19 Tammuz 5680 (July 1, 1920), Rav Kook recognized that the appointment of Herbert Samuel is "an auspicious sign for the House of Israel and its revival,"

but continued and wrote: "However, as to the fast days, I think that until Hashem will establish our destroyed Temple before our eyes, on top of the high mountain as a glory in the eyes of all the nations, it is impossible for us to cancel them" (Igrot HaRe'iyah vol. 4, p. 67; Mo'adei HaRe'iyah, p. 544; Tiferet Ya'akov, p. 5).

For Rav Kook, along with many authorities, the Holy Temple in Jerusalem is a sine qua non for turning our fasts into feasts.

Following the miraculous birth of the State of Israel, rabbis and scholars would discuss and debate if Israel's Independence makes the Four Fasts irrelevant. Even the Jewish communities of Istanbul and Algiers inquired of Israel's Chief Rabbinate whether to fast on Tisha B'Av. Chief Rabbi Yitzchak HaLevi Herzog responded in a telegram stating very clearly: "The fast of Tisha B'Av, which is founded in the destruction of the Holy Temple, is not nullified. Not it nor the other fasts" (See Techumin, Vol. 18, p. 488).

But in the wake of the dramatic events of June 1967, the question would surface once again.

Addressing the new reality of a unified Jerusalem, Rav Chaim David HaLevi, who served as Chief Rabbi of Rishon L'Tzion and later Tel Aviv, wrote that while we have merited the "'first flowering of Redemption' with national

independence, is it not clear that it is not the final Redemption until we merit the coming of the Moshiach and the building of the Temple?"

He continued, "Now, when we have conquered the Temple Mt. through a military victory, and nevertheless Halacha prohibits us from entering into the holy place and performing the the holy service there, and all the more so as we see that there remain 'foxes that trespass upon it,' what is the reason to even think of nullifying the fast [of Tisha B'Av]...?" (Aseh Lecha Rav 1:13).

Rav Tzvi Yehudah HaKohen Kook also felt that, "we cannot touch the fasts commanded by the prophets." He continued, "while we find ourselves in the historic process of the Redemption of Israel... One must understand that the fasts today are a continuation of the root of the pain of the past over the destruction of the Temple, and these things pain us until this very day" (Sichot HaRav Tzvi Yehudah, Yom Yerushalayim 5728).

Rav Ya'akov Ariel ruled that in order to make any changes "there is a need for an authoritative Beit Din over Am Yisrael and true peace. And according to the current situation it appears that today we have neither." He continues that while we have achieved sovereignty, the current security situation - as well as the spiritual state of the State of Israel - make it impossible to exempt us from these

fasts (B'Ohalah Shel Torah 2:74).

In a lecture given in 1968 (adapted by Rav Yair Kahn, translated by David Strauss, and available on Yeshivah Har Etzion's website), Rav Yosef Dov HaLevi Soloveitchik grappled with the question of Tisha B'Av in light of the State of Israel:

"Does Yom Ha-Atzmaut answer the question of 'eikha'? Only fools can think so, arrogant fools, and there are many fools of that sort. Can a Jewish government or military success be considered a substitute for all the suffering and killing of the years of Israel's exile? It is forbidden to say that this is the recompense for six million Jews who were slaughtered. This is an expression of cruelty and a total lack of sensitivity. Does the rejoicing of the Six Day War answer all the questions that arose in the period that preceded it? Are we not as puzzled and confused as we had been before it? Did this triumph lessen our sorrow and calm our spirits? Did it resolve our problems and doubts? Is it not incumbent upon us to repeat, as did Yirmeyahu, the question of 'eikha'? As long as God's will is as obscure as it was during the dark night of the hiding of His face, as long as historical events have not been clarified from a comprehensive and true perspective, as long as the world mocks us because of our faith in a merciful and gracious God, as long as the mystery of "eikha" has not found a solution – it is forbidden to abandon Tisha Be-Av. As long as a Jew

asks "eikha," one must continue to fast on Tisha Be-Av. Only after we succeed in deciphering the mystery of "eikha" will we be able to abandon the fast of the fifth month."

For Rav Soloveitchik, Tisha B'Av is the day when we mourn all of the calamities and tragedies throughout Jewish History. The day itself - along with Megillat Eichah - charges us with making sense of our national suffering. Until we understand the root of our suffering, Tisha B'Av is still very relevant according to Rav Soloveitchik.

In the Prayer for the Welfare of the State, we describe the State of Israel as the "first flowering of Redemption." We recognize that it is not yet Redemption, but the beginning of an ongoing process that is unfolding before our very eyes. We recognize how far we have come, but how far we still are. Indeed, Rav Tzvi Yehudah HaKohen Kook believed that "One may fast and mourn for the destruction of the Temple and the Exile, and at the same time see and recognize the light of salvation that shines forth in our day" (Sichot HaRav Tzvi Yehudah, Yom Yerushalayim 5728).

May we merit to "recognize the light of salvation that shines forth in our day", but also mourn properly, and see the fulfilment of the promise of our Sages: "All who mourn for Jerusalem will merit to witness her in her joy" (Ta'anit 30b). And may we merit to finally observe Tisha B'Av as a festival, instead of a fast.

CHIZUK AND IDUD

*Divrei Torah from the weekly sedra
with a focus on living in Eretz Yisrael -
Chizuk for Olim & Idud for not-yet-Olim*

Rabbi Yerachmiel Roness

As we read through Sefer Devorim, we listen-in to Moshe Rabbeinu's monologue as he reviews major episodes in our national history and summarizes many different Mitzvot. As we follow Moshe's words certain verses vividly stand out. One such verse appears in this week's Parasha as we hear the familiar words of a Pasuk that most every Jew knows by heart from the earliest stages of life. As Rabbi S.R. Hirsch points out it is both the first verse we choose to teach young children as they begin to speak, as well as the last verse we expect an elderly person to utter upon leaving this world in order to meet their Maker.

Sh'ma Yisrael

Hashem Elokeinu

Hashem Echad!

Continuing up until this day, Rav Hirsch adds, even when if a Jew has separated himself entirely from the rest of our people, and lives an isolated existence ['Biddud' is the word he uses...] - the Shema would remain on his lips!

What is so special about these short

words? The Vilna Gaon writes in his 'Aderet Eliyahu' that this single verse encapsulates all of the ten commandments. This suggestion may offer an opening, or a partial explanation, as to the uniqueness of this verse. However, I would like to explore the issue through the prism provided by the words of the Sifri (Devarim Piska 31) which zeroes in on one word: 'Yisrael' - Shema Yisrael.

The Sifri wishes to answer the following question: Why do we not say 'Shema Avraham', or 'Shema Yitzchak'? - If we wish to define ourselves through our lineage, and mention the ancestral link connecting us to our forefathers, why do we not mention the other Patriarchs? The Midrash answers by noting that our nation includes each and every one of Yaakov's children: "By what merit are all of Yaakov's children included when we say "Daber el Bnei Yisrael"?"

For as opposed to Avraham who was painfully forced to remove Yishmael from his home, and Yitzchak who counted Eisav amongst his progeny, Yaakov merited to have all his children surround his bed in unison.

The Sifri writes that throughout Yaakov's life this was a question which deeply troubled him. Yaakov had seen the Pesolet (-waste) which

had emanated from his fathers and feared that the same might happen to him. He was constantly on guard, and perpetually worried by the prospect that wastrels might emanate from him. [The Cambridge dictionary defines a 'wastrel' as someone who does nothing positive with their life. A person who squanders their own abilities and the opportunities offered to them].

In Bereishit 28:20 Yaakov begins his neder saying: "If Hashem is with me and guards me on my way...". The Sifri notes that Yaakov surely did not question Hashem's presence (-"if Hashem is with me"), nor did he doubt the divine Hashgacha in his life. What Yaakov meant by his words, was to acknowledge the recurring doubt he felt regarding his children's future. Yaakov was asking that the Almighty's name should always permeate his being ("She'yachul She'mo Aly"), so that all his offspring, from beginning to end, will never produce wastrels."

This was Yaakov Avinu's main wish and his primary dream. Before Yaakov passed away he assembled all of his children and pointedly quizzed them regarding their theological position: Did they harbor any negative feelings towards G-d? Would they remain steadfast to the path he had raised them to follow? To

this they answered "Shema Yisrael", meaning that he, Yaakov their father (Yisrael) should listen: "Just as you believe in one G-d, so do we (your children) believe in Hashem Elokeinu, Hashem Echad", (Rashi, Bereishit 49:1). The midrash tells us that upon hearing his children say "Shema Yisrael", Yaakov thanked G-d, and uttered praise that no 'pesolet' had emanated from him, saying the words: "Baruch Shem Kevod Malchuto L'olam Va'ed", (Yalkut Shimoni, Bereishit 833).

From here we can clearly see, that in addition to saying Shema on their own, as a person nears the end of their journey upon this world, they have a deep-seated desire to hear their own children excitedly, and earnestly, recite the "Shema". They wish to hear their children declare their own loyalty and fealty to our tradition. When this wish is fulfilled, a person can leave this world adding a hopeful postscript to the words of the Shema. Like Yaakov Avinu, they may supplement the words of the Shema with a final declaration expressing feelings of comfort and relief: "Baruch Shem Kevod Malchuto L'olam Va'ed".

Every parent shares Yaakov Avinu's desire to see Nachas from their children, and fears the tragic prospect of witnessing Pesolet (a

wastrel) emanating from them. It should be patently obvious that there is no simple and easy path which can guarantee and fully ensure this outcome (otherwise Yaakov would not have feared this prospect so much...). Some steps, though, seem like they are a wise and prudent investment yielding positive gains with little risk. By extracting one's offspring from the Galut where intermarriage rate is over 50%, and bringing them to the Land of Israel where intermarriage is negligent, and the prevailing culture itself one steeped in Jewish identity and tradition.

So come on Aliya, acquire your Yerusha in the Land, and help to guarantee that your spiritual Yrusha will be continued by your children for posterity!

Torah VeHa'aretz Institute
Rabbi Moshe Bloom

Orlah and Bay Laurel

Question: I'm growing bay laurel in my garden and want to use the bay leaves as spices. Do I need to first wait three years?

Answer: Bay laurel, *Laurus nobilis*, is an aromatic perennial evergreen that grows as a bush or tree and is used as an herb and for ornamental

purposes. Laurel wreaths expressed victory and glory in antiquity. Its dried leaves are called bay leaves and the essential oil produced from its leaves is used for medicinal purposes. The Gemara (Gittin 69b) refers to these leaves as *atrafa de'arah*, mentioned as an antidote to intestinal worms when steeped in wine.

In the past we wrote about trees whose leaves, and not fruit, are eaten and discussed the dispute about whether they are considered fruit trees (and thus subject to orlah laws). We cited Rabbi Yaakov Ariel's opinion that it is proper to be stringent.

In Israel, however, bay leaves are generally not eaten; they are used as herbs and removed before eating. For this reason, Rabbi Dov Lior (*HaTorah VeHa'aretz V*, 5760) rules with regard to lemon verbena and rose petals that these plants are not considered fruit trees and are thus exempt from orlah; bay laurel is similar to lemon verbena. Note that Rabbi Mordechai Eliahu is stringent about perennials used as herbs and maintains that one should wait for three years.

Even if a particular individual eats bay leaves, this does not change its basic definition; we follow the majority practice (even the leaf-eater need not wait for three years). Should

it one day become generally accepted to eat bay leaves, orlah laws would apply.

In conclusion: Bay leaves are not subject to orlah laws and can be used immediately.

See also Chapter 1 of Orlah for the Backyard (translated from Hilchot Ha'aretz), available on our website: <https://www.toraland.org.il/en/beit-midrash/halachic-guides/hilchot-haaretz/hilchot-orlah/orlah-chapter-1-general-laws-of-orlah/>

From the school of the Ramchal - Jacob Solomon

Hear O Israel. The Lord is our G-d.
The Lord is One!

You shall love the Lord your G-d with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might (6:4-5).

Love is an emotion. It is not a choice. It happens. All those who have personally experienced love know exactly how it electrifies and galvanizes.

Yet here, the Torah appears to ask for a feeling of emotion rather than an act of service: “You shall love the Lord your G-d with all your heart, all your soul, and all your might”.

The oft-quoted explanation is the one given by the Talmud (Berachot 62a): “You must love G-d, even if He takes your life”. As the Alshich elaborates, if facing martyrdom, it should not be the attitude of being a victim of murder, but attaining the ultimate spiritual height of surrendering one’s very soul and being to the Creator. The Talmud exemplifies with the story of Rabbi Akiva. Whilst being tortured to death by the Romans, he explained to his incredulous disciples: “All my life I prayed that I would be able to maintain my love of G-d even if it cost me my life. Now that I am succeeding in doing so, should I not be happy?”

The Ramchal (Da’at Tvunot 2:3) brings a profound insight that also sees loving G-d as, more generally, a consequence of the imperfections, evil, and unpleasantness that exist in the world. These negative forces, situations, and societies are not separate entities to G-d’s oneness, but part of G-d’s oneness, part of His scheme of things. G-d’s being One means that nothing exists outside His scope. Thus, the Ramchal explains, G-d created the world with its evil and its imperfections so that we can interact with it and become His Partners by working on addressing the evils that exist and improving

things. In short, G-d brings imperfections to the world for which He gives humanity the potential to work on positively influencing, person by person, community by community, generation by generation. It is that work that makes us partners with G-d. And by working together with G-d, we become closer to Him (and to each other). Loving G-d is thus a consequence of coming close to Him. Loving G-d is a natural consequence of interaction with G-d, and engagement with His Interests.

Indeed, the Anshei Knesset Hagedola declared that the world stands on three things: Torah, Avodah, and Gmilit Chasadim, acts of kindness. According to this explanation, we can suggest that it is the Torah values that give the directions for improvement as well connecting with G-d. The Avodah extends to all work that seeks to improve the world, at all different levels. And the Gmilit Chasadim means that it should be done happily, willingly, and with generosity of spirit and the welfare of the other in mind.

LOVE YOUR FELLOW

AS YOURSELF^[2]

- Dr. Meir Tamari

Perhaps the most appealing and attractive aspect of Judaism is the

possibility of observance by the average man or woman. Of course there is the rarefied and elevating observance by the learned and righteous but there is also value and spirituality in the hurried and seemingly irrelevant fulfillment by the ignorant and irreverent. One does not have to be at the level of a Moshe or Levi Yitschak Berdichever to realize the sanctification in the observance of mitzvoth by them. Chassidism is replete with true or perhaps imaginary such stories, but any visit to an average Shabbat mincha will support this. However, the interest free loan as adherence and fulfillment of ahavta le reiacha is common to all the centuries and throughout Eretz Yisrael but equally in all the countries of galut. Knowing full well the cost of capital and the benefits of its alternative uses, Judaism permitted payment for their use, as moral. Jews nevertheless, gave up part of those legal and permitted benefits so that the recipient could use them as capital for his own business and commerce, often in competition with the donors. It should be obvious that this could not be extended to the whole human race and had to be limited to Jews similar to a family, where lender was also sometimes borrower and vice versa. Rambam codifies this as the highest form of charity, primarily perhaps because the recipient and

the lender both do not regard this as free handouts but as a business venture.

At the outset it should be clear to all of us that, money matters, especially banking and investment, has always depended to a great extent on the character and moral standing of both parties. The lender has to have good qualities like concern for the material needs of others, the ability to save some of his income rather than instant consumption and an experienced business career which enabled him to accumulate the sums necessary to lend. This is borne out by the fact that in most societies the bankers grew out of a successful mercantile career or from religious groups who had the faith and the moral ability to postpone some consumption and save. The borrower too has to have an ethical education, one that will be careful in the use of the borrowed funds and ensure repayment. These qualities are a mainstay of those societies like orthodox Jewish communities in which interest free loans have always been part of a culture and a faith.

It is not only credit, banking and investment which depend to a great extent equally on the character and moral standing of the various parties involved. These characteristics are essential in all avenues of economic activity and distinguish them from brigandage and robbery. They

confirm safety of economic assets, mutual assistance and their transmission over the generations. Their absence condemns societies to economic stagnation and even to poverty. Perhaps the most outstanding and most singular aspect of Jewish life in a galut devoid of the foundations of political freedom and geographical borders, is this involvement in all aspects of economic life. It has been argued that Judaism's communal and national character and institutions built as it were a substitute for this freedom and these borders. One of the most intriguing questions of economic history is this involvement of a stateless nation, politically powerless, lacking tenure in any country, in all the aspects of various national economies and international trade. Some scholars have attempted to draw analogies from other minority and stateless groups but these groups have failed to persevere over long periods or simply have assimilated into the host society.



Menachem Av Agenda

Very difficult writing at the beginning of the Nine Days about post-Tish'a b'Av issues, which will hit the stands before 9 AV with most people not seeing it until after.

Keep in mind (one of) the custom to call the month Av until after noon of the 10th and then call it Menachem Av - hence, the title of this piece.

The period of Aveilut HaChurban has passed (or is about to pass) into the mode of Nechama. We said Nacheim at mincha of Tish'a b'Av and we are soon to 'celebrate' Shabbat Nachamu. This Shabbat we read the first of seven haftarot of Nechama.

What does that really mean? Are we done thinking about Churban Beit HaMikdash? No, we are not. Mourning the Destruction does not end until the Beit HaMikdash is rebuilt and everything that goes with it is in place. So what does it mean that the Aveilut transits into Nechama?

There is a psychological benefit to having a fixed period of the year to mourn the Churban. But noon on the 10th of Av is not just 'now we're done'. It is time now - if you haven't done it much during the Three Weeks and Nine Days - to ponder the future.

And that future includes the Beit HaMikdash, the loss of which we have

mourned for almost 2000 years.

Mourning is kind of hollow if there is no real longing for and anticipating of the Geula and everything that comes with it.

This is no easy task. We have been without the Beit HaMikdash for so long and we have been very successful in building Jewish communities around the world and in Israel - without it as a reality, only as a picture on the wall, and repeated prayers - that some of us don't really mean.

Do you want the Beit HaMikdash, Korbanot, Sanhedrin, punishments... korbanot to come back? You know that you should. We all pray for it every single day. But do you really want it?

That's the Menachem Av Agenda. We need to work on it.

Helpful hint (maybe): For the last hundred years or so, our homes have been lit by electric lights. They provide light far better than gas or oil lamps. Yet we still light Shabbat candles. Primitive? No. Real hands on, direct lighting.

Keep doing mitzvot, davening, etc. but Beit HaMikdash - accept no substitutes.

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