

INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON MATOS MASAI - 5760

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RABBI MICHAEL ROSENSWEIG

The Significance of Nedarim

Parshat Matot begins with a discussion of certain aspects of nedarim-shavuah, including the prohibition of "lo yahel devaro" which is engendered when an individual fails to adhere to his verbal commitment. The Torah's presentation of these laws is unusual and noteworthy. Only in this context does Moshe Rabbenu dramatically depart from his usual protocol. Instead of teaching these laws to the entire Jewish people, he addresses these halakhot specifically to its leadership! Moreover, one senses a measure of urgency in Moshe's introductory remarks--" this is the matter which God has commanded (zeh ha-davar asher zivah Hashem)". This rare formulation (which appears again only regarding the prohibition of shehutei huz), directed to an extremely elite audience, seems to convey the special import and broader significance of the message. The term "lo yahel" itself demands clarification and is subject to much speculation among the commentators. [See also Rashbam ad loc.; Haggigah 10a; Nedarim 81b etc.] Rashi renders it as the secularization or profanation of one's word, implying that the norm entails a standard of kedushah-sanctity, though nedarim might relate to matters with little or no obvious connection to the sacred realm. The term "neder la-Hashem" in this context is similarly problematic. While each of these anomalies has invited discussion and has inspired explanations and insights in their own right, perhaps one can pursue a more holistic approach to these various phenomena. A brief analysis of some elements of nedarim may illuminate the Torah's presentation.

The core concept underlying the very institution of nedarim is that the religious world of the halakhah constitutes its own independent and compelling spiritual reality. By establishing neder as an "issur hefza" (a status that inheres in and transforms the said object itself, though often only vis a vis the individual who commits himself to this status), the Talmud (Nedarim 2b) makes a powerful statement about the broader scope and nature of the halakhic world view. The fact that this "halakhic reality" extends beyond nidrei heqdash or even nidrei mizvah into neutral realms, that an artificially-generated issur hefza can be used to generate further such status through media like "hatfasah", and that neder comes about simply as a function of serious personal commitment increases the significance of this institution within the broader framework of the halakhic world-view. Man's capacity to impact upon his own (and in some cases even affect others-mudar hana'ah) spiritual reality and the blurring of lines between secular, neutral, and religious spheres are just a few of the implications that follow from a proper appreciation of hilkhot nedarim. The fact that one can occasionally apply the singular concept of neder to spiritual initiatives (kum ve-aseh) [nidrei heqdash (see Ramban, beg. of Matot), perhaps nidrei zedakah, possibly even nidrei mizvah (see commentators Nedarim 8a, including R. Avraham of Montpellier, and commentaries on the verse "va-yidar Yaakov neder")] strongly suggests that, beyond obligation, such halakhic initiatives are perceived as a Jew's natural spiritual destiny to which he

B'S'D has a particular proclivity (see Rambam hil' Gittin 2:20; Niddah 30b).

The individual obligates himself by associating with that destiny merely by invoking neder in these contexts!

Perhaps the Torah's urgent tone and unusual formulation of "zeh ha-davar etc." can be understood against this background. Moreover, nedarim are depicted in this context as "neder la-Hashem" because, even more than the parallel institution of shavuah (issur gavra), the singular transformative nature of nedarim reflects much not only about the great importance of personal commitment and integrity, but about the role of individual initiative and the wide scope and inherently transcendent quality of halakhic life. [Some of these concepts are also reflected in hil. shvuot as well, but with a different emphasis. See also Rambam hil. Shvuot 5:4] Violation of such commitments ("Lo Yahel") is viewed not merely as a breach of integrity, but as a desecration precisely because it reflects a neutral approach toward halakhic reality, always a matter of spirituality [hillul, which results from an approach of hullin].

Properly conceived, the concept reflected by the institution of nedarim-- of a halakhic reality that is, in part, shaped by individual commitment--, enhances the prestige and authority of the entire halakhic system by accenting its self-sufficiency and centrality. At the same time, this ambitious principle may also be easily misconstrued as undermining the objective status of existing norms and obligations. In addition, if not properly understood and seriously implemented, the abuse of nedarim may generate significant hillul Hashem given its broader significance. Hence, Moshe Rabbenu initially entrusted this crucial, yet subtle theme exclusively to the elite spiritual leadership.

Moreover, Rashi notes that the spiritual elite played a special role in exempting or neutralizing nedarim (hattarat nedarim by yahid mumhah). It should be noted that the license of a hakham to neutralize vows is itself quite innovative. The Mishneh in Haggigah 10a characterizes it as "porhin ba-avir ve-ein lahem al mahshe-yismokhu" (hanging in the air without a clear source in the Torah). It is the system of halakah, by means of its oral tradition, that justifies this innovation. Furthermore, exemptions, based on petah, haratah etc., reflect the kind of qualitative commitment necessary to generate the status (or commitment, in case of shavuah) at the outset. The mechanism employed to neutralize commitment may also project the theme of halakhic reality", as true intent and past commitment are reassessed in quintessentially halakhic terms. The scholar's discerning role entails both halakhic expertise and human empathy and sensitivity. It should also be noted that while the sacrificial commitments of non-Jews are binding (Menahot 73b), hattarat nedarim is apparently reserved exclusively for Jews (Yerushalmi Nazir 9:1), as it represents a uniquely halakhic concept. It is, thus, entirely appropriate that the roshei ha-matot were assigned such a prominent place in the initial transmission of these laws.

Several pesukim indicate that one should ideally avoid nedarim (Devarim 23:23, Nedarim 77b ;Kohelet 5:4). Hazal register great ambivalence with respect to nedarim. Some statements unequivocally discourage nedarim (Nedarim 9a). Others strongly castigate those who involve themselves in this sphere (Nedarim 22a). In one context (Nedarim 9a), committing to action or inaction by means of a neder is equated with the building of a bamah, while implementing one's promise is tantamount to bringing a proper sacrifice. At the same time, we also encounter praise for one who intensifies, or even reinforces his commitment to perform mizvot by invoking nedarim (and often these are formulated as nedarim!- Nedarim 8a). Given the various implications inherent in the institution of Nedarim, one can more fully appreciate this ambivalence. Unrestricted or unqualified use of nedarim may lead to an abuse of the very principle that, applied judiciously, enhances the prestige of personal commitment and halakhic reality. Frequent use is certainly unlikely to enhance these themes. The comparison to building a bamah or bringing a sacrifice is particularly apt if broader religious sensibilities are reflected by one's approach to nedarim.

As noted, positive appraisal is generally reserved for one who buttresses his commitment to existing obligations by means of a neder. Indeed, it is particularly appropriate to engage in nedarim in a time of religious crisis, based on the paradigm of Yaakov Avinu (Midrash Rabbah on Bereshit 28:20) While some halakhists (Ran, Nedarim 8a) believe that one incurs the additional violation of "Lo Yahel" if one fails to implement a mizvah-neder thereby increasing the stakes and motivation to comply, Ramban's view (commentary on Matot) is that no further prohibition applies. In what sense, then, has one enhanced his commitment to the mizvah, such that he is praised? It is possible, however, that by identifying the neder theme with his obligation or prohibition, the individual underscores the extent to which he perceives these obligations as real and concrete, and therefore even more compelling. Such a judicious use of nedarim is indeed praiseworthy.

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YESHIVAT SHA'ALVIM PARASHAT HASHAVUAH
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Parashat Matot: Nidrei Isur
Translated by Rachel Azriel

Parshat Nidrei Isur, binding vows, and Shvuot Isur, binding oaths, were said at the end of Bnei Israel's 40 years in the wilderness. Few mitzvot were told to Israel at this time: Mussafim, Nedarim, the inheritance of the land and its division, the Levite cities and the Arei Miklat, cities of refuge. The proper time to learn about all of these mitzvot is before the entry into the land. Mussafim were not performed in the desert and the other mitzvot relate directly to living in the land. The exception is Parshat Nedarim. Why was it put off until now?

The Sfat Emet says relating to the midrash on the verse, "And you will swear in the name of G-d with truth, justice, and righteousness" that Nedarim and Shvuot are relevant only when Bnei Yisrael have already reached a high level of yirat shamaim. Therefore this parsha was pushed off for the 40 years that they dwelled under the wing of G-d and only then this mitzvah was given to them. The Sfat Emet did not explain what is unique about this parsha as opposed to others.

It seems that the issue is that Nedarim and Shvuot are mitzvot that emanate from the person himself. He determines his own path in the service of G-d, and the Torah makes his choice an official halachic obligation. The known, accepted rule, that we learned from the ideology of Rabbi Yehuda Halevi in the Kuzari, is that the way to come close to G-d is through the ways that G-d himself determined. Even so, there are mitzvot that have a different character. G-d created these mitzvot also - they are written here in the parsha. However, they are different because the decision to make a Neder or not, is given entirely to the consideration of man. There is in this mitzvah an important addition to the Torah. Here the Torah gives a significant place to individual expression. Although in Chazal there is criticism on Nedarim, we know that this does not pertain to all the Nedarim and there are Nedarim of prishut - separation. These positive Nedarim give the person the opportunity to express his own personal and private relationship to G-d, complementing the Torah which is incumbent upon him from high.

However, the personal expression of one's relationship to G-d can be dangerous. A person is liable to see the subjective-personal dimension as the major part of his service to G-d and his feeling of obligation towards the mitzvot that were commanded may weaken. He may, G-d forbid, weigh the doing of mitzvot according to whether they "speak to him" or whether he can "get into it," as they say in our generation, instead of knowing that G-d's word obligates him in an unconditional manner, and that the service of G-d is an objective obligation.

It seems that the Rambam relates to this in Moreh Nevuchim. He wrote that there are reasons given only for mitzvot in general, but not for the specific details. The Chachamim said that these details were given in order to better the people. From the words of the Rambam, it seems that elevating the people is done by obligating them to observe these inexplicable details of the mitzvot. Observing these details strengthens our recognition that we are standing before G-d with reverence and awe, and we accept upon ourselves everything He decreed because He decreed!

This friction between the important value of self-expression, and the danger of obscuring the objective importance G-d's word, is curtailed if a person is educated properly. The person who has learned the centrality of G-d's commandments in his life, who is G-d fearing, and who observes the Torah truthfully is able to receive the mitzvah of Nedarim and to benefit from its value without harming the objective side of worshipping G-d. Therefore Bnei Yisrael were told Parshat Nedarim only at the end of 40 years.

The Shem Mishmuel wrote on this parsha that there is an issue here of "bal tosef," because one is adding to the mitzvot of G-d. This is resolved, he explains, because of the law of Hatarat Nedarim; the halacha allows one to be released from a vow by a Chacham. This possibility marks the essential difference between G-d's word and that which a person takes upon himself. G-d's word is absolute and cannot be nullified. The vow is different. Since it is the doing of person, a Chacham can nullify it. Although the Torah gave this vow validity, it is not equal to the validity of a mitzvah whose source is in the heavens. This difference removes the prohibition of "Bal Tosif" from Nedarim.

The same conclusion arises from the Shem Mishmuel. In order to allow Parshat Nedarim to exist, it is necessary to determine the correct relationship between the mitzvah whose source is in G-d's word and between a vow, whose source is in the decision of a person, flesh and blood. The first is absolute and cannot be nullified; the second is conditional and a Chacham can nullify it. This difference clarifies the centrality of accepting the yoke of G-d, and dismisses the possibility that Nedarim be considered "Bal Tosif."

Shabbat Shalom

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Parshat Matot-Maasei RABBI SETH BINUS

A verse in Parshat Matot refers to the Israelite soldiers returning from war against the Midyanites as "those who were coming to the war." The Netziv, Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin, points out that the text should read, "those who were coming from the war." After all, the war was over at that point.

This peculiar phrasing brings to mind a story related in the ethical work, Orchot Tzaddikim, The Ways of the Righteous, about a pious man who saw soldiers returning victorious from war, bearing much booty. "You have returned from the minor war," he warned them. "But you have yet to fight the greater war."

"What war is that?" they asked.

"The war of one's nature and its legions," he answered.

The struggle that one has with his own yetzer hara, his inclination to

do evil, is considered a great battle, an ongoing war that is waged within one's self.

It is significant that this story is about people coming from war. This advice could just as easily be given to warriors on their way to battle. They could be advised that the coming war is not the real war. That there is a much greater battle to fear and to face—the battle one fights against his untamed passions and nature. Nevertheless, they are told of this even greater challenge only after the physical war.

The greatest battle one has with his yetzer hara occurs after an initial success. When somebody is victorious in some endeavor, he finds himself immediately challenged to keep that success in perspective. He must subdue his arrogance, which arises as a result of his success. In this way, one war follows directly on the heels of another.

It therefore makes sense that the Torah refers to the Israelites as "those who were coming to the war." Consequently, one of the mitzvot they are given at this time is to immerse the utensils of the Midyanites, whom they conquered, in the waters of a mikveh to purify them.

I once heard, in the name of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, zt"l, that the letters of the Hebrew word, taval, to immerse, can be re-arranged to spell batal, to nullify. One who immerses his body in the waters of a mikveh nullifies his ego. Immersion in a mikveh becomes an expression of humility, a particularly appropriate gesture from the soldier coming home to go to war with his yetzer hara.

If we become aware that our successes must be carefully evaluated and placed in perspective, we will avoid many of the problems we encounter in their aftermath. Success is important, but it can be dangerous if not viewed in the proper light.

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From: Torah and Science torahandscience@avoda.jct.ac.il To: pr@avoda.jct.ac.il Subject: D'var Torah U'mada - Mini Summer Series - Avot 2 - Torah Im Derech Eretz

Avot 2 Torah Im Derech Eretz

[BY RABBI ARYEH CARMELL]

We have been led to believe that there are only two possible approaches to the question of Torah im derech eretz.

The yeshiva world is said to believe that the lekhatzila [ideal] of Torah life—the optimum course to be adopted in all cases—is to devote oneself to full-time Torah learning for as long as humanly possible. To go out into the world and earn one's living in a normal way is a course to be adopted only *bedi'eavad*—when there is no other alternative. The Hirschian principle of Torah im derech eretz, which seems to encourage early entry into commerce or the professions, is seen as *horaat sha'Eah*, a temporary decision intended to meet special circumstances.

The Hirschians [followers of Rav S.R. Hirsch], on the other hand, see the situation in precisely opposite terms. According to them, entry into commerce or the professions is a lekhatzila of Torah life. An intensive education in both Torah and secular studies would enable young people to succeed in their chosen occupation and become independent financially, while at the same time maintain the highest standards of halakhic behavior and a regular schedule of Torah study. This is seen as the norm. The modern model that directs young people to devote their lives to Torah to the exclusion of all economic activity is seen by Hirschians as *horaat sha'Eah*.

A Contradiction by Rambam?

In reality, both modes coexist in Torah. The Hirschian approach can be soundly based on the famous dictum of Rabban Gamliel in the Mishnah from which the slogan "Torah im derech eretz" is taken: "The study of Torah goes well with earning a livelihood, for the effort required to do both together puts sin out of one's mind" (Avos 2:2).

It is also firmly based in halakhah. Rambam writes that every sensible person should provide himself with a livelihood before marriage (Hilkhot Dei'ot 5:11), and he gives advice on how to arrange one's business affairs on a sound economic basis (ibid., 13). He should also eat properly and dress properly according to his means (ibid., 10) and sleep eight hours every night (ibid. 4:4). Rambam's severe strictures on one who prefers to learn all day and live on charity are well known (Hilkhot Talmud Torah 3:10). On the whole, it would seem a sensible, sound lifestyle is recommended, in which Torah, mitzvot and derekh eretz are all given due attention. Side by side with this balanced, normal view, we find a completely different ideal. In the same Hilkhot Talmud Torah, Rambam writes: "The words of the Torah are to be found only in one who removes all desire for worldly pleasures from his mind, doing a little work each day, just sufficient for his needs if he has nothing to eat, and learning Torah for the rest of the day and night" (ibid., 9).

And a little later he writes: "He who wants to acquire the crown of Torah must be careful not to lose any one of his nights in sleep or in eating and drinking and conversation" (ibid., 13).

Gone is the prescription for the normal eight-hour sleep a night. Gone is the balanced lifestyle. Single-minded pursuit of Torah is now the order of the day. Absent-mindedness for the normal concerns of life is considered praiseworthy. On the verse "In her love [of Torah] you shall be ravished always" (Proverbs 5:19), Rashi comments, "For the love [of Torah] you shall make yourself absent-minded and foolish, forsaking your own affairs and running to [hear] a word of halacha" (Eiruvin 54b).

In order to learn Torah, Rabbi Yochanan sold property that could have supported him in his old age (Shemos Rabba 47:5). Rabbi Eliezer the Great, at the age of twenty-six, gave up a large inheritance and ran away from home to study Torah in Jerusalem at the yeshiva of Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai, where he rose to unprecedented greatness.

The following ringing declaration comes from Rambam at the end of Hilkhot Shemitta Veyovel:

"Not only the tribe of Levi, but any person in the world whose spirit prompts him and whose mind convinces him to separate himself to stand before G-d in order to serve Him and who casts off the yoke of the many calculations pursued by other people—is sanctified, considered holy of holies, and G-d will be his portion for all eternity and will provide for him his sufficient needs in this world."

This Rambam is quoted by the Chofetz Chaim in *Biur Halacha* (ch. 156) as an option for the individual to choose.

(This does not mean that one who opts for "Torah first" lives a monastic existence, oblivious of the affairs of this world. This would not be Torah Judaism. When Rambam writes, "to separate himself to serve G-d," he does not mean "separate himself from the world," but "separate himself from his selfish interests." The mitzvot by which he serves his Creator include looking after the needy and oppressed and taking up the cause of justice wherever necessary. They also include disseminating Torah and sanctifying G-d's name in all his human contacts. The calculations referred to are, for example, those which people normally make when they are thinking about their careers, such as, "If I study for so many years I will get a certain salary.")

A Matter of Conviction

Here we have in the sources, side by side, the Hirschian way and the way of the yeshivot and kollelim of the present day. "These and those are the words of the living G-d." But how does one decide which way to adopt? In my opinion, the decision must be made on a deep level. What did Rambam say? Let us read it again: "Whoever wants to acquire the crown of Torah, anyone whose spirit prompts him and whose mind convinces him... It must be an individual, personal decision, arrived at after much soul-searching and clarification."

The Gemara relates an episode in the lives of two Amoraim, Ilfa and Rabbi Yochanan, in their student days in Eretz Yisrael. They were suffering such deprivation that they made up their minds to leave the yeshiva and go out to earn a living. After all, they said, earning a living is also a mitzva. They sat down to eat lunch in a field, in the shade of a rickety wall. While they ate, Rabbi Yochanan heard two angels conversing. One said, "Look at these two. They are leaving Eternal Life for the life of the moment. Let us push the wall over and do away with them." The other replied, "No, leave them alone. One is destined for greatness."

Rabbi Yochanan said to himself, "Since I heard this and Ilfa didn't, it must be meant for me." Rabbi Yochanan returned to the yeshiva, suffered and eventually became Rosh Yeshiva and the spiritual leader of his generation. Ilfa went on to become a shipping merchant but retained his greatness in Torah. His words are frequently quoted in both the Talmud Yerushalmi and the Bavli (Taanis 21a).

Here we have the essence of the problem. Rabbi Yochanan listened to the inner voice of his spirit and chose to suffer in order to realize his full Torah potential. Ilfa did not blindly follow his colleague, but followed the mitzvah as he saw it. It is certainly a kiddush Hashem when the world sees that a successful businessman or professional can still be a fully observant Jew and a talmid chacham.

On the other hand, along this road, one has reason to believe that one's livelihood will be more secure. One may even hope to achieve a degree of affluence, which will of course be used to support Torah and one's needier brethren. The road of "Torah only" is likely to involve a good deal of insecurity and financial difficulty. The rewards may be great, but they will be of a purely spiritual nature. Which road to follow must be the person's own genuine, inner choice.

It is also possible to guide a son to opt for this lifestyle, but only if he shows natural propensities for this kind of life. This emerges from a discussion of a difficulty in the last mishnah of Kiddushin.

First Rabbi Meir states that a father is obligated to teach his son a trade; otherwise it is as if he taught him banditry. Later in the mishna, Rabbi Nehorai (who according to Rambam is Rabbi Meir by another name), declares, "I will leave all trades and teach my son only Torah."

What about the obligation to teach one's son a trade? Some commentaries answer that Rabbi Meir's statement refers to ordinary people, while the son referred to in the second statement is one who shows unusual alertness, intelligence and desire for Torah learning, so he would certainly merit having his physical needs looked after by others (Pnei Yehoshua). Alternatively, at an early age such a child shows the exceptional faith and trust in G-d needed to carry him through this type of life successfully (Sefer Hamakneh). Here we have a clear statement of the nature of the two options.

However, to adopt the "Torah only" lifestyle just to "follow the crowd," without strong inner motivation, will not be a success. We must remember that Abaye begged his students "not to inherit two Gehinnoms" (Yoma 72b). If they were not sincere they would have one Gehinnom in this world, since learning Torah involves much effort and deprivation, and still face another Gehinnom in the other world, because they failed to reach the spiritual goal that beckoned them here.

There are other pitfalls for the unwary. The Mishna on Torah im derech erez quoted above continues, "All Torah study without work will not last and will lead to sin" (Avos 2:2). Rabbeinu Yona Girondi, in his commentary on this Mishna, is not slow to point out the sins that are likely to result. Poverty, he says, will lead one to accept gifts from all and sundry (itself fatal), and this will lead to attempts to manipulate the donors. When gifts dry up, the person, in his destitution, will be compelled to resort to dishonesty, and this opens the floodgates to all the crimes against the Torah.

According to the view presented here, all this applies to the person

who chooses the path of Torah only due to peer pressure or some other external motivation. But happy is the one who possesses all the love of Torah, abundant faith and inner toughness needed to triumph over the trials and difficulties this path involves.

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From: Yated USA[SMTP:yated-usa@ttec.com] PENINIM AHL
HATORAH: Parshiyos Mattos Masei by RABBI A. LEIB
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And Moshe became angry at the officers of the army and Elazar the Kohen told the soldiers going to war, "This is the statute of the Torah that Hashem told Moshe. (31:14)

Anger is not simply a character deficit. Chazal teach us that one who becomes angry demonstrates a lack of respect for the Shechinah. Simply, the consequences of anger can be devastating. One who becomes angry is possessed by Gehinom, purgatory. Horav Chaim Shmulevitz, zl, posits that there is a more striking effect which, regrettably, applies even when the anger is justified. In the Talmud Pesachim Chazal say that one who becomes angry loses all his wisdom and compromises his spirituality. They cite a number of examples to prove this point, incidentally one from our parsha. Subsequent to Klal Yisrael's victory over Midian, Moshe Rabbeinu became angry. As a result, he forgot the law. We note the fact that it was Elazar who related the law to the soldiers.

One should do everything possible to contain his anger. Perhaps, if one seriously considers the devastating effect of anger, he would exert more effort to control himself. This seems to apply only in the event the anger is unfounded. What about situations in which one feels his anger is justified-or if it really is justified?

Rav Chaim claims that the detrimental results of anger, the loss of one's wisdom and stature, apparently occur regardless of the nature of the anger. Indeed, by taking into account the tragic effects of anger, one might quite possibly deter the anger from developing. Why does anger produce such a damaging effect upon a person? First, we must understand that this effect is not a punishment for a sin, but rather a natural consequence. Moshe was certainly appropriate in his response to the soldiers, but this did not preclude the loss of some of his wisdom as a consequence of his anger.

We still may wonder why wisdom which had already been acquired and stored in a person's mind should also have disappeared? We can understand how anger transforms a person's character, decreasing his stature, but how does it effect wisdom which he already possesses?

We may understand this anomaly once we take into consideration that all forms of wisdom are not equal. There is secular wisdom, and there is a higher form of wisdom-Torah wisdom. Secular knowledge does not assimilate into one's psyche. It does not relate to the personality or character of its possessor. Hence, one may be uncouth or obnoxious and yet be a scholar. Torah is spiritual knowledge. This means its source is Hashem, Who has imbued it with a special essence. Torah knowledge establishes itself only in a person who can be a proper vessel for it. One must maintain a refined character in order to be a true talmid chacham, a student of wisdom, inclined to absorb the Torah into every aspect of his personality. One who lacks spiritual integrity is no longer qualified to retain Torah. One who becomes unfit to retain Torah loses even that

knowledge that he has already acquired. It no longer has a "home" in this individual. The knowledge that he already had did not become contaminated, rather the person has changed. He ceases to be an appropriate vessel for containing Torah.

Rav Chaim's thesis sheds light on why we find individuals who at one time had been talmidei chachamim. As they steered their Torah hashkafah, perspective/ philosophy, to the left, their seichel ha'yashar, ability to think correctly, seems to have been affected. Individuals who had been capable of expounding Torah and were proficient in its profundities suddenly seem to have lost their ability to analyze the logic of Torah. They conjure up svaros, logical deductions, that make sense only to themselves and their misguided followers. Why? It is because their spiritual character has been sullied. They no longer reflect the Torah that they expound in their spiritual demeanor. Torah shapes a person's moral and spiritual character. When a change transpires in one's character it indicates that he is not ascribing to the Torah with the same intensity he had previously.

They journeyed from the wilderness of Sinai and they camped in Kivroth HaTaavah. (33:16)

Kivros HaTaavah, "the graves of craving," alludes to a place where many Jews died as a result of their craving for meat. Horav Tzvi Pesach Frank, zl, suggests that this pasuk relates more than Klal Yisrael's geographical journey. The pasuk implies that one who distances himself from Torah will ultimately end up in the clutches of taavah, lust. The only safeguard to keep an individual from being swallowed up by his physical desires is his immersion in the sea of Torah. Without Torah, one is subject to the whims and fancies of his yetzer hora.

Horav Frank bases his thesis upon the Talmud in Bava Metzia 85b where Chazal question, "Why was the land destroyed?" This is a reference to the destruction of the first Bais Hamikdash and Klal Yisrael's ensuing exile. The response comes from Hashem, Who replies, "Because they abandoned My Torah." Why does the Talmud seek a reason for the churban? Do not Chazal in the Talmud Yoma clearly state that it was the three sins of robbery, murder and adultery that catalyzed the destruction of the Bais Hamikdash? Why seek additional reasons? This question leads us to believe that Chazal mean something else when they ask this question. They wonder what it was that caused Klal Yisrael to fall to such a nadir of sin. What instigated their moral and spiritual breakdown to the point that they resorted to robbery, murder, and adultery? The answer, says Hashem, is their abandonment of the Torah. This is the primary source of sin. Once the protective shield of Torah is removed, one is exposed to the harsh elements. Torah is much more than a source of knowledge; it is our lifeblood through which lives are sustained.

From: RABBI LIPMAN PODOLSKY
[SMTP:podolsky@hakotel.edu]

LLIP: Lo Lishma Incentive Program

"Who am I to learn Torah? I'd probably do it for the wrong reasons anyway... and I certainly wouldn't want to be a hypocrite!" How many times have I heard those words!

Sometimes, as a result of such "logic", the person ceases keeping Torah and mitzvos altogether, often gradually and unwittingly succumbing to a slow spiritual deterioration. Had he clarified the Torah view regarding "the right reasons" he might have averted catastrophe.

Our Parsha opens with the laws of Nedarim (Vows) and Shavuos (Oaths). One who vows not to eat meat actually creates a Torah prohibition on par with pork and lobster. It never ceases to amaze me the power vested in us by the Torah. We virtually become partners with Hashem in creation.

Although we are already sworn to uphold the Torah, one may -- in

principle -- take an oath to fulfill a mitzva to invigorate himself to carry out the mitzva (Nedarim 8a). As Rav Dessler zt"l explains: When a person finds his grip on a certain mitzva loosening, he may take an oath to fulfill it, thereby effectively forcing himself to do it (Michtav Me'Eliyau IV:237). (Of course, this would work only for a Jew who is afraid of transgressing an oath.)

Rav Dessler goes on to extol the virtue of putting ourselves into situations in which we are forced to do mitzvos. Thus, we fulfill in ourselves the Talmudic dictum: "Said Rav Yehuda in the name of Rav, A person should ALWAYS involve himself with Torah and mitzvos, even for the wrong reasons (Lo Lishma), for via the wrong reasons he will come to the right reasons (Lishma) (Sanhedrin 105b)."

The message is clear: The Torah wants action. True, the ultimate goal is the heart (Sanhedrin 106b), but without action, the heart is inaccessible. Physical action is the tool given to us to arouse the heart (See Sefer HaChinuch mitzva 16). Waiting for the heart to arouse itself is like waiting for the food on our plate to enter our digestive tract without wielding a fork and knife.

It must begin with "Lo Lishma." "Lishma" is possible EXCLUSIVELY through "Lo Lishma".

For example. I have an annoying policy regarding my Gemara shiur (class). For the first few months, I insist on giving weekly tests (I prefer "challenges") to my students. At first they complain: "What is this, high school?" My reply never varies: "No, this is university!" After all, why should the study of Torah have less significance than "Intro. to the Sociology of Ancient Occult Practices of Outer Mongolia 101," or "Analytical Studies on the Influence of Drama and Comedy in the Life of the Tazmanian Devil 203?"

After the first couple of tests, the complaints normally die down. Eventually my students come to appreciate them, as they begin to realize that the tests force them to study harder than they would have without them (When faced with the choice of reviewing the Gemara or going out for a good, juicy steak, which do you think typically wins out?). Slowly, gradually, their study skills improve, along with their Hasmada (diligence). After several months I find that I can cut back on the tests as the boys have learned to study for the love of Torah, and not only for the grade. Some of these boys are now on their way to becoming bona fide Torah scholars!

Similarly, he who finds his learning falling by the wayside -- consistently preempted by other "matters of consequence" -- must arrange his life so that he is forced to learn. Let him volunteer to give a daily or weekly shiur so that he will be forced to prepare.

A Jew whose minyan attendance resembles Swiss-cheese should volunteer to be the Gabbai, or should arrange a Chavrusa (study partner) session before Davening so that he is compelled to show up.

One who finds it difficult to give Tzedaka regularly should become a volunteer for a Tzedaka organization, or even establish his own, so that he is forced to give of his time and money. And the list of possibilities goes on...

As for appearing hypocritical, in truth we really want to do mitzvos. But the Yetzer Hara tends to be stronger than we are. The Lo Lishma incentive only serves to weaken the Yetzer Hara so that the real "us" can shine through (See Rambam Hilchos Gerushin 2:20). I fail to appreciate the hypocrisy in that.

Ultimately, after many years, we will become so attuned to doing mitzvos enthusiastically that we will no longer need incentives. We will do them eagerly, for the right reasons.

The way to get there is via the LLIP.

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From: RABBI YISROEL CINER [SMTP:ciner@torah.org] Subject: Parsha-Insights - Parshas Mattos-Ma'say

This week we read the double parsha of Mattos-Mos'ay and thus conclude the Sefer {Book} of Bamidbar. Mattos begins with the issue of vows and oaths. "When a man makes a vow to Hashem or swears an oath to make something forbidden, he shall not break his word; all that was pronounced from his mouth must be fulfilled. [30:3]"

There are different types of nedarim {oaths}. One can sanctify one's own object by designating it for hekdesch {holy usage in the Temple}. This utterance transforms the status of the object from having been available for mundane usage to a state where if one gains any personal benefit, a sacrifice must be brought for atonement. Another type of oath can transform the status of any object--even one that doesn't belong to the person pronouncing the oath--vis-" -vis himself. One can pronounce, "all apples are forbidden like a sacrifice." If he was to derive benefit from any apple after having pronounced such an oath, he will have gone against the injunction stated above ("He shall not break his word") and would bear the consequence of transgressing a commandment.

Transformations from mundane to holy, from permitted to forbidden. The power that our mouths yield is actually frightening. Let's try to gain an understanding of this power.

In the Mishna [Avos 1:17], Shimon the son of Rabban Gamliel said: All of my days I was raised amongst the sages and I didn't find anything better for the body than silence.

On that, Rabbeinu Yonah writes that chachamim kedoshim {wise and holy individuals} become like a kli sharais {holy vessel of the Temple used in the divine service}, not involving themselves in any mundane dealings.

The Nesivos Sholom explains this concept further. Man was created to recognize Hashem and to express that recognition. This is done predominantly through our mouths. As such, our mouths become the kli sharais with which we perform that divine service. Just as we find that when the ingredients of a flour offering are placed in a kli sharais, these ingredients undergo a transformation and become sanctified. So too, mundane objects, upon coming in contact with the kli sharais known as our mouths, have the capacity to become transformed and sanctified.

Our mouths have a profound effect on others. We have the capability to channel the power we wield in a constructive manner, building up the esteem of others and thereby sanctifying our mouths and those who are touched by it. And, as with all forces in this world, the potential for good is accompanied by the potential for evil. We can also cut others down, taking from them the feeling that they were created in the image of Hashem, thereby transforming the holy into mundane.

Sometimes, our mouths, unbeknownst to us, can be the holy vessel through which Hashem sends vital life-messages to others.

The story is told that when the Baal Shem Tov was getting ready to leave this world, he summoned his close disciples, revealing to each one the mission they were meant to fulfill. One student by the name of Rav Chaim was told that he would earn his livelihood by passing from town to town and relating stories of the Baal Shem Tov.

A bit taken aback, he nervously asked how long he'd need to travel around telling stories. "You will be shown a sign from heaven and you will know that the time has arrived that you may stop," the Baal Shem Tov responded.

And so it was. After the Baal Shem Tov passed away, Rav Chaim packed his bags and began to travel, spreading the stories of his Rebbe {master teacher} wherever he went.

It came about that Rav Chaim heard of a very wealthy man named Reuven who was willing to pay handsomely to hear any stories about the Baal Shem Tov. Rav Chaim went to his home and told him that he knew

a wealth of stories that he'd be happy to share with him. Filled with anticipation, Reuven invited many guests for a beautiful, warm Shabbos filled with inspiring stories about the Baal Shem Tov.

After a lavish meal, Reuven and all his guests turned excitedly to Rav Chaim, waiting to hear some of his stories. Rav Chaim was about to begin when, to his horror, he realized that his mind had seemingly gone blank. He could not remember a single episode involving his Rebbe. With his face a bright red color, he explained that he was exhausted from traveling and assured the guests that after a good night's sleep he would entertain them with stories the next day.

At the Shabbos afternoon meal however, the same thing occurred. Rav Chaim was stupefied, unable to understand or believe what was happening. Once again, he apologized and asked to be given another chance at the third meal.

The third meal came and went with Rav Chaim still drawing blanks. After Shabbos, the disappointed guests left and Rav Chaim apologized to his crestfallen host. He had already ascended onto his wagon to leave when suddenly, as with a flash of lightning, one story returned to his mind. He excitedly ran to Reuven to tell him that he had just remembered a story.

"One day I accompanied the Baal Shem Tov to a town for Shabbos. We arrived on Thursday and were surprised to find the town market empty and desolate. We knocked on the first door that we found with a mezuzah on it and were frantically pulled inside. "Don't you know what day it is today? Don't you know it's Greena Dorneshtag (Green Thursday)? The anti-Semitic priest riles up his congregants and then sends them out on a pogrom!"

"My Rebbe turned to me," Rav Chaim continued, "and sent me to tell the priest that Rav Yisroel Baal Shem Tov wanted to see him. The people begged him not to send me to what they saw as certain death, but he insisted that I do as he had said. Trembling, I approached the priest as he was delivering his fiery speech to a large mob and gave him the message. He appeared frightened and told me to tell the Baal Shem Tov that he'll come after his speech."

"Happy to be alive, I delivered his message back to the Baal Shem Tov. 'Tell him he must come immediately,' the Baal Shem Tov told me, sending me back a second time. This time the priest excused himself, explaining that he'd return in a few minutes and accompanied me back to the Baal Shem Tov."

"The two were together in a room for a while. My story ends here because I don't know what they discussed or what happened to the priest afterwards."

Looking shaken, Reuven told Rav Chaim, "I now have a story to tell you. You don't recognize me? I am that priest! The church kidnapped me when I was young and they succeeded in purging any memories of my life as a Jew."

"I grew older and became a member of the clergy and eventually became priest of the entire area. However, I was disturbed by a recurring dream where the Baal Shem Tov would appear, tell me that I'm Jewish and warn me to return to my true religion."

"I ignored those crazy dreams and continued with my 'holy' work. However, on that Greena Dorneshtag when you appeared with the Baal Shem Tov's message, I felt that I must comply."

"When the Baal Shem Tov spoke to me and told me who I really was and where my responsibilities lied I decided to leave the Church and return to my religion. The Baal Shem Tov told me that when someone would come and tell me this story, that would be the sign that my t'shuvah {repentance} was accepted."

"That is why I was always eager to hear stories about the Baal Shem Tov. When you came and couldn't remember any stories I was destroyed--my t'shuvah had not yet been accepted. Now your words have told me the decision made in heaven--my atrocities have been forgiven."

A few, select people such as Rav Chaim, have the merit of delivering

the words from heaven down to this earth. Every one of us has the opportunity to, with their words, lift the earth up to the heavens.

Good Shabbos, Yisroel Ciner

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From: RABBI PINCHAS WINSTON [SMTP:winston@torah.org]
Subject: Perceptions - Parashas Mattos - Massey
Parashas Mattos: A Matter of Providence

II However, if her husband annuls them on the day he hears them, then whatever she verbally vows to bind herself will become null and void. Since her husband has voided them, G-d will not hold her responsible. (Bamidbar 30:13)

Parashas Mattos begins with a discussion about nedarim (oaths), a fitting way to end a book that emphasizes the power of the mouth to create and direct reality. As we mentioned at the beginning of this sefer, the word for "desert" (midbar) itself, with only a slight vowel change, spells the word "medabehr," which means "speaking being." It is the Kabbalistic term for man, since, as Onkeles points out, it was speech that man gained when G-d breathed a soul into him (Bereishis 2:7).

The word for "oath" itself -- neder -- says a tremendous amount. Neder is spelled: nun-dalet-raish, which can be read: nun-dar, which means "nun lives there." Of course, whenever we see a nun, we see a reference to the "Nun Sha'arei Binah," the "Fifty Gates of Understanding," the ultimate goal of man with which he can view creation through the eyes of G-d, and become a full partner with the Creator in bringing creation to fruition.

One of the halachos of nedarim has to do with the annulment by a husband of vows made by his wife, as the posuk above explains. The Talmud explains this verse as follows:

To what does this verse refer? To a woman whose husband annulled them for her without her knowing. The verse is teaching that she needs atonement and forgiveness [from Heaven] II (Nazir 23a)

In other words, in such a case when a woman breaks a vow that she believes is still in effect, even though her husband has already annulled it, she requires forgiveness from G-d. Why? Because she thought that she was sinning by committing the act she previously vowed not to do, and for that lack of self-control and perhaps, for her rebelliousness, she requires atonement.

The Talmud follows this up by adding:

When Rebi Akiva reached this verse, he would cry: If one who thought to pick up treif meat instead lifted up kosher meat still needs atonement and forgiveness, how much more so one who intends to take treif meat and indeed, takes treif meat!

In other words, if G-d is so "strict" about an intended sin that ends up not being a sin, how much more so must He take notice and punish intended sins that actually do result in sin! Or, perhaps, maybe Rebi Akiva cried because we can assume from the posuk that, if G-d punishes only for the intention to sin, then, how much more so must He punish for an intended sin that is actually carried out as planned.

However, is this really true? Elsewhere, the Talmud seems to say just the opposite, namely that G-d does not punish a Jew for intending to sin until it becomes reality (Kiddushin 39b). So, why does Rebi Akiva make this inference and cry as a result?

Then again, the question is not for Rebi Akiva, but for the Talmud. After all, Rebi Akiva is only speaking out what is implied by the posuk in this week's parshah, regarding the wife who thinks her vow is still operative. The Torah is implying that intention to sin is enough to require atonement and forgiveness, so, then, how can the Talmud say

otherwise?

According to some, G-d does count the intention to sin as reality, even for a Jew, if it is inevitable that the Jew will commit the sin when not prevented. Hence, to use Rebi Akiva's analogy, the very fact that we see the person pick up meat he thinks is treif to consume proves that he would have done the sin, had not circumstances prevented him. Hence, from G-d's point of view, it is as if the sin was done, even if, in reality, it was not.

Thus, for the woman who breaks a vow that her husband annulled, all along thinking that it is still in effect proves to us that she intended to do the sin. Therefore, from G-d's perspective, it is as if she has in fact committed the act, and she requires atonement for this. Rebi Akiva cried because he saw how intention alone can count as a separate sin, apart from the act itself -- a double whammy, as they say.

However, there might be an added dimension to this discussion. Perhaps the distinction to be made is between two concepts: Hashgochah Klallis, and, Hashgochah Pratis -- General Divine Providence and, Specific Divine Providence. According to tradition, the former applies to all of creation, whereas the latter, only to the Jewish people.

Therefore, when something happens in the life of a Jew, it is called "Hashgochah Pratis." It is not merely his destiny playing out, making what has happened to him more random. It is G-d "personally" acting within this person's life, based upon merits and demerits of the person himself, or, his ancestors. This is a fundamental of Torah philosophy (Avodah Zarah 3a).

Hence, the reason why the person did not pick up the treif meat was not simply "good luck," as in the case with other nations the Talmud is implying, but, Hashgochah Pratis. There was a merit involved in this mini-redemption, and therefore, the person is not held responsible for what could have been a sin, but wasn't.

However, the attitude and intention behind the act is a here-and-now reality, a blemish in the person's relationship with G-d. Something like that previous merits can't simply cause G-d to look the "other way"; for THAT a person is going to need atonement and forgiveness -- not for an act that wasn't done, but, for the lack of concern for closeness to G-d that the would-be sinner exhibited by contemplating transgression.

That is something that we ALL suffer from at some point in time, on some level, and for that it is worth crying about, at least a little. ... Have a great Shabbos, Pinchas Winston

Rabbi Winston has authored fourteen books on Jewish philosophy (hashkofa). Project Genesis: Torah on the Information Superhighway learn@torah.org 17 Warren Road, Suite 2B <http://www.torah.org/> Baltimore, MD 21208 (410) 602-1350 FAX: 510-1053

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ASK AISH #26-2000

HARRY POTTER & THE JEWS

> From: Connie Rittenhouse of Columbus, Ohio - crittenhouse@hotmail.com

What about the Harry Potter series. Is it witchcraft? Should children be allowed/encouraged/discouraged in its reading?

THE AISH RABBI REPLIES:

Well, no one can deny that the Harry Potter stories are riveting entertainment and fine literature. But I suppose the question for a rabbi would be: Do they teach Jewish values?

Judaism teaches that the chief purpose of life in this Muggle world is to improve negative character traits. The struggle against venality and small-mindedness is also a struggle against evil. The answer to overcoming meanness and stupidity is not to escape into a fascinating magic environment, but to help change the world in which one finds

oneself.

However, in Harry Potter's world of Hogwarts, there are no ambiguous characters, nor people who undergo moral character development. From the moment of entry into Hogwarts, every one is fixed in place (with the possible exception of Professor Snape).

In Harry Potter's world, this lack of ability to alter one's character and to freely choose sides transforms the epic moral struggle between good and evil into a pure power struggle with no moral implications. Victory hangs on who can come up with stronger magic.

Moreover, there is no attempt at redeeming the evil or transforming it. The good is merely maintaining the status quo, and keeping the evil -- in the guise of Lord Voldemort -- from gaining a foothold. The evil wants to dominate just because it is evil and hates the good, and vice versa. They are not contending for some prize, either tangible or spiritual, that would accrue to the victor. Their only goal is to destroy each other.

In contrast, the essence of Jewish belief is that the struggle between good and evil is a moral struggle. It takes place in the heart, not in the outside world. The contestants are an individual's conscience against his own urges -- i.e. spirituality against the physical life force.

According to Jewish perspective, evil is not repulsive. On the contrary, to insure that it has an even chance to present us with free will choices, God made evil attractive. That appeal levels the playing field and gives evil a fighting chance.

Another significant difference between Judaism and Harry Potter is the ability to reclaim the lost human soul.

Judaism says that just as a person can invest his life force in the wrong place through free will, he can also redeem his investment and pull it back again. In a Jewish fairy tale, the hero would battle for the soul of Lord Voldemort and attempt to reclaim it for the good. No human being with the power of free will is unredeemable.

Jews recite the following verse twice daily: "You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your hearts, with all your soul, and with all your resources." (Deut. 6:5) The Talmud interprets the phrase "with all your hearts" (plural) as a reference to the good and evil impulse within us. We are commanded to serve God with our inclination toward evil, as well as our inclination toward good.

No impulse in man is irreclaimable; nothing human is doomed to destruction. The mark of the Jewish hero is that he transforms the evil into good and brings all back to God.

In Harry Potter, without a moral battle between good and evil, there is, ironically, no magic in the world. All things are limited to being what they are, and the world becomes a boring and colorless place. The characters in the book have to escape to the realm of magic to make things interesting and discover the potential for transforming existence.

In a Jewish world, where evil can be transformed and reclaimed into good, our ordinary Muggle world is full of magic. Ordinary life becomes a heroic saga.

As far as your question about witchcraft, witchcraft is explicitly forbidden in the Torah (Exodus 22:17). Harry Potter depicts witchcraft, but is not witchcraft itself. Rabbi Moshe Feinstein writes that if the child reading the story is aware that these are fairy tales and not reality, then the stories may be read for its literary value. ("Igrof Moshe" Y.D. 4:13)

For more on the Jewish perspective of "Harry Potter," see an excellent article by Rabbi Noson Weisz at http://aish.com/issues/arts/Harry_Potter_and_the_War_Between_Good_and_Evil.asp (C) 2000 Aish HaTorah International
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Aish.com SHRAGA'S WEEKLY

BY RABBI SHRAGA SIMMONS

Parshat Matot-Masay - Numbers 30:2 - 36:13

"PRIORITIES"

In this week's parsha, the Jewish people are in final preparations for entering the Land of Israel. Two of the tribes, Reuven and Gad have been blessed with such an abundance of flocks and herds, that they anticipate not having enough grazing land in Israel. So they propose the following: Instead of taking our regular portion of land within Israel proper, we'll instead stay here on the Eastern side of the Jordan River.

Moses' reaction to this request? He lambastes them! Why? Moses wasn't upset that they were choosing to stay outside Israel -- actually they were helping to gather sparks of kabbalistic holiness from around the world. Rather, Moses was upset because when making their request, Reuven and Gad blatantly disregard the needs of their children -- and mention their cattle only. (Numbers 32:4)

The leaders of Reuven and Gad get the hint. Somewhat. In 32:16, they approach Moses again and restate their request. This time they mention their children -- but only after first speaking of their cattle. Moses again is not happy at their lack of priority for putting business ahead of family.

Finally, they seem get the idea. In 32:26, they put everything in the proper order -- family first, business second.

OVERWORKED

We've all met people who are working overtime to "give their kids something extra" -- while ruining that very relationship by not spending enough time with the kids!

Imagine the case of Mr. Schwartz, an investment banker in a major Wall Street financial firm. He spends most of his days trying to reach his lifelong goal of earning \$10 million. He and his wife have three children.

One day, a wealthy philanthropist named Mr. Cohen, who unfortunately has no children, decides to make Schwartz a very generous offer. Cohen says, "You're spending your whole life to make \$10 million dollars, right? But your kids are growing up without a father. You're off to work before they get up, and home long after they've gone to sleep. On weekends, you're at the club entertaining business clients. So I'll give you the biggest shortcut of your financial career. I'm willing to offer you \$10 million dollars in exchange for the rights to adopt one of your children. He will have the best of everything. The only condition is that you will never be able to see or hear from him again."

What does Schwartz say? Ten million dollars certainly gets his attention! But even he realizes that there are things in life you can't put a price tag on. Schwartz stares Cohen right between the eyes and announces: "No deal."

Ten million dollars. "Money can't buy you love." (Somebody should write a song about that.)

FAMILY VACATION

Now imagine the scene. Schwartz has just shut the door on a cool 10 million. He rushes home where his kids are playing on the living room floor. What do you think he does when he sees them?

With tears in his eyes, he runs over and gives them each a big hug and kiss. "You darling creatures are worth more than all the money in the universe!"

Then he stops and realizes: "Where have I been all their lives? I have something at home that's worth more to me than all the money in the world -- and I'm working so hard I barely spend one hour a week with them!"

So what does Schwartz do? He calls the office, announces he's taking a two-week vacation, and sends the maids, nannies and babysitters away. He's going to spend two blissful weeks with his kids.

From: [Aish.com\[SMTP:aishlist@aish.com\]](mailto:Aish.com[SMTP:aishlist@aish.com]) Subject: Shraga's Weekly - Matot-Masay

After struggling for an hour to get the stroller open, Schwartz finally makes it to the park. He and the kids are having a grand time. But then comes dinner, bath and story time. After enduring food fights, floods in the bathtub and endless readings of "Babar Goes to the Circus," Schwartz flops down on the couch, turns to his wife and says, "Perhaps I was a bit hasty about that vacation. You know I have a lot of responsibilities at work..."

Schwartz is making a big mistake. More than presents, children need your presence.

YOUR MONEY OR YOUR LIFE

The Torah tells us to recite the "Shema" prayer twice each day. It says: "And you shall love the Lord your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your resources."

Typically the Torah presents a series as a progression from easiest to hardest: Love God emotionally ("heart"), and even be willing to give up your life if necessary ("soul"), and even be willing to spend your money, too!

Yet if this is a progression, are there really people who consider money more important than life itself?!

And the answer is yes. The Talmud speaks about someone who walks across a thorny field, and picks up his pants in order to avoid getting them ripped. Of course, the person's legs get all cut up and scratched -- but at least the pants are saved!

One time I had to stay overnight in Nevada, where gambling is legal and every hotel has a casino. I went up to my hotel room and wanted to open the window to get some fresh air. But the window wouldn't open more than a crack. I thought it was stuck. So I pushed harder and harder. Finally I asked: "What is the problem with this window?"

I was told that the windows in this hotel are specially designed not to open more than a crack. This way, people who have lost money gambling won't be tempted to jump out the window and kill themselves. Priorities.

THE LESSON IS CLEAR

In our parsha, after travelling through the desert for 40 years and enduring countless trials and tribulations, the Jewish people are now standing across the Jordan, ready to enter the Promised Land. It is one of the defining moments in all of Jewish history.

But Reuven and Gad say they'd rather take good grazing land than enter Israel!

They had come so far, but they only went halfway. They were distracted by material goals when it really counted.

The Talmud says that when Reuven and Gad later saw the rich life in the Land of Israel, they regretted their decision. But the story has an even sadder ending: When Assyrian King Sanchereb exiled the Jewish people during the time of the First Temple, the first tribes to be conquered and sent away were, you guessed it, Reuven and Gad.

It happens to all of us from time to time. Objectively, we can know our priorities. But sometimes we get distracted.

May we have the strength and clarity to connect our heart to our mind -- and to act upon that which we intellectually know to be right.

SHABBAT SHALOM, RABBI SHRAGA SIMMONS

Rabbi Shraga Simmons spent his childhood trekking through snow in Buffalo, New York. He has worked in the fields of journalism and public relations, and now manages the Aish HaTorah website in Jerusalem. You can contact him directly at: simmons@aish.com

SHOPPING DURING THE NINE DAYS

QUESTION: Is it permitted to go shopping during the Nine Days?

DISCUSSION: It is forbidden to make a major purchase, such as a car, silver items, or furniture during the Nine Days. There are two possible prohibitions involved in such a purchase: Purchasing a substantial (chashuv) item -even if used- obligates one to recite a shehecheyanu(1), and it is improper to recite it throughout the Three Weeks(2) and especially during the Nine Days(3). If the car or furniture is for the use and enjoyment of the entire family, in which case ha-Tov v'ha-Meitiv is recited instead of shehecheyanu(4), one would be allowed to buy it during the Three Weeks but not during the Nine Days. This is prohibited since it is similar to building or buying a binyan shel simchah (loosely translated as building or buying an item for pleasure or joy), which the Shulchan Aruch(5) clearly forbids(6).

Shopping for clothing or shoes, even if they are intended for use after the Nine Days(7), is prohibited(8). Both expensive and inexpensive items (such as socks) are included(9). [If one has no clean shirt for Shabbos, he may wear a new shirt(10).]

Shopping for items which a) do not require a shehecheyanu; b) are not purchases which could be classified as a binyan shel simchah; and c) are not apparel, is permitted. Even when shopping is prohibited, the following leniencies apply:

Only actual buying is prohibited. It is permitted to shop without buying. Window or comparison shopping is permitted. Returns are permitted. Exchanges may be prohibited(11).

An item which is forbidden to be bought during the Nine Days because of the shehecheyanu restriction may be bought during the Nine Days if it requires assembly and if the assembly will be done after the Nine Days. The same rule applies to a utensil that requires immersion. If the immersion will not take place until after the Nine Days, no shehecheyanu is said at the time of purchase(12).

It is permitted to buy a car or furniture for business purposes. The shehecheyanu should be said after Tishah b'Av(13). People in the clothing business may purchase stock during the Nine Days(14). If delaying the purchase will cause one a substantial loss(15), or if the item will not be available after Tishah b'Av(16), it is permitted to buy the item during the Nine Days(17).

A bachelor who is getting married after Tishah b'Av may buy anything he needs during the Nine Days(18).

One who does not have appropriate shoes to wear on Tishah b'Av may buy them during the Nine Days(19).

If one will run out of clothing for small children, one may either wash the clothes or buy new clothes(20).

FOOTNOTES: 1 O.C. 223:3. 2 O.C. 551:17. 3 Aruch ha-Shulchan 551:38. 4 O.C. 223:5. 5 O.C. 551:2. Mishnah Berurah 11 and Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 13. 6 Mishnah Berurah, ibid. and Aruch ha-Shulchan 20 prohibit buying silver items as binyan shel simchah. Igros Moshe O.C. 3:80 prohibits car buying for the same reason. See also Nitei Gavriel, pg. 51, who quotes the Pappa Rav as including furniture as well. 7 Mishnah Berurah 551:49. 8 Rama O.C. 551:7. See also Mishnah Berurah 45. 9 Mishnah Berurah 551:45-46. 10 Beir Halachah 551:6, according to the explanation of Igros Moshe O.C. 8:80. The poskim do not mention specifically if one would also be allowed to buy the shirt during the Nine Days. 11 Since the shopper is getting a new item in exchange for the old one, it may be considered as if he is buying the item anew. A rav should be consulted. If the new item requires a shehecheyanu, the exchange may definitely not take place during the Nine Days; see Moadei Yeshurun, pg. 152, note 31. 12 Mishnah Berurah 223:17 and Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 21 quoting R' Akiva Eiger. See also Vezos ha-Berachah, pg. 167 quoting Harav C.P. Scheinberg. 13 Igros Moshe O.C. 3:80. 14 Mishnah Berurah 551: 11. 15 See Zichron Shelomo, Hilchos Chol ha-Moed, pg. 94, who quotes Harav M. Feinstein and Harav Y. Kamenetsky who rule that when an item is offered on sale at a substantial reduction and the sale is not likely to occur again in the near future, it is considered a davar ha-aveid in regard to hilchos Chol ha-Moed. See, however, Emes le-Yaakov O.C. 551:7. 16 Ben Ish Chai (Devarim 2). 17 Based on Mishnah Berurah 551:11 and 13 that permit even a binyan shel simchah in order to avoid a loss. There are other poskim who prohibit a binyan shel simchah even in a case of loss; see Kaf ha-Chayim 551:29. 18 Mishnah Berurah 551:14 and 46. Other poskim disagree with this leniency; see Kaf ha-Chayim 551:30, 33 and 101. 19 Igros Moshe O.C. 3:80. 20 O.C. 551:14 and Mishnas Yaakov (quoted in Piskei Teshuvos, pg. 83).

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RELATING TO PARSHAS MATOS
BY RABBI DONIEL NEUSTADT

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Kesuvos 111 1) LIVING SINLESS IN ERETZ YISRAEL QUESTION: Rabbi Elazar states that one who lives in Eretz Yisrael "dwells without sin" ("Nesu Avon"), as the verse says, "One who lives there will not say, 'I am sick;' the nation that dwells there will be forgiven of sin" (Yeshayah 33:24).

How is it possible that everyone in Eretz Yisrael lives there without sin? How can this be true if we find that the Jewish people were punished and exiled from Eretz Yisrael for their sins? On the contrary, the RAMBAN (end of Acharei Mos) says that only when the Jewish people are in Eretz Yisrael are they punished with exile for sinning, because sins committed in Eretz Yisrael are punished much more severely than sins committed in Chutz la'Aretz! (PNEI YEHOSHUA)

ANSWERS: (a) RAV YAKOV EMDEN (in Hagahos Ya'avetz) and the IYUN YAKOV explain that living in Eretz Yisrael only atones for less serious sins, and not for serious ones (like Avodah Zarah, Giluy Arayos, and Shefichus Damim, or like rebellious sins, "Pesha'im"). Iyun Yakov also suggests that living in Eretz Yisrael only forgives the sins of individuals who sin in private, but not the sins committed collectively by an entire community. The Iyun Yakov adds (in the name of his father) that living in Eretz Yisrael only lessens the sin, making an intentional sin like an unintentional one. This explains why the verse says that they are "Nesu Avon*" -- "forgiven of *sin*," which is the word that refers to intentional sin (as opposed to "Chet" which refers to unintentional sin, which they do have).

(b) The PNEI YEHOSHUA and ETZ YOSEF (in the Ein Yakov) explain that Eretz Yisrael alone does not grant pardon for sins. Rather, one's Teshuvah is accepted more readily in Eretz Yisrael, or it is easier to do Teshuvah in Eretz Yisrael because of the Kedushah there.

We may add that the Gemara in Berachos (7a) explains that a person is punished for the sins of his fathers when he commits the same acts. The reason for this might be that when a person sins, his acts become so much a part of the person that he is able to pass the trait on to his children, who either learn it from him or inherit it from him (see Insights to Shabbos 55). A person who lives in Eretz Yisrael, though, is so often awakened to do Teshuvah that any evil traits of his father are not transmitted to him. He is influenced more by the Kedushah of the land than by those evil traits of his father. Therefore he is free of the "Avon" of his father. When the verse says "Nesu Avon" -- "forgiven of sin;" it is referring to the "Avon" in the verse, "Poked Avon Avos Al Banim" -- "He remembers (and punishes) the sin of the fathers upon the children" (Shemos 34:7)! (M. Kornfeld; the Iyun Yakov also hints to this on 110 DH Kol, and 111b DH v'Ken Amru)

In what way does living in Eretz Yisrael prompt a person to do Teshuvah, more so than living in Chutz la'Aretz? Perhaps the Gemara is referring to the Sifri cited by Tosfos in Bava Basra (21a, DH Ki mi'Tzion) which says that when the people would come to Yerushalayim from all parts of Eretz Yisrael at the time of the Mikdash and see the immense Kedushah and the Kohanim performing the Avodah in the Beis ha'Mikdash, "their hearts would turn towards Yir'as Shamayim and towards learning Torah." (Even after the Churban of the Beis ha'Mikdash, Yerushalayim remained a city of holiness, where great Tzadikim dwelled in order to be near the place of the Shechinah.)

This approach answers another apparent problem with this Gemara, which the RIF on the Ein Yakov points out. The verse in Yeshayah is clearly referring to *Yerushalayim*, and not all of Eretz Yisrael, as is evident from the other verses in that chapter. How, then, can Rabbi Elazar say that the verse refers to people who live in *Eretz Yisrael*?

The simple answer is to say that Yerushalayim, which sits at the center of Eretz Yisrael, is used to refer to all of Eretz Yisrael. However, according to our explanation, the answer is that one who lives anywhere in Eretz Yisrael must come to Yerushalayim for the Shalosh Regalim, and by being in Yerushalayim and seeing the great Kedushah, one is aroused to do Teshuvah! Hence, the verse is indeed referring only to the people of Yerushalayim, but Rabbi Elazar is saying that anyone living in Eretz Yisrael would also go to Yerushalayim for the festivals and be aroused to Teshuvah.

(The Pnei Yehoshua adds if a person is not living in Eretz Yisrael because of its Kedushah but simply because he was born there or because he was attracted by its produce e, he certainly will not be aroused to Teshuvah by the Kedushah of Eretz Yisrael, which he does not even feel. The Gemara is not referring to such a person.)

(c) The RIF on the Ein Yakov explains that Rabbi Elazar's statement that those who live in Eretz Yisrael dwell without sin should be understood in the context of the Gemara that follows, in which Rava (or Ravina) says that the verse is referring to people who suffer from illnesses.

TOSFOS (110b, DH Hu Omer) says in the name of Rabeinu Cha'im ha'Kohen that it is very difficult to travel to Eretz Yisrael and to properly observe the Mitzvos of Eretz Yisrael. The Gemara in Berachos (5a) says that Eretz Yisrael is one of three things which are acquired only through Yisurim, physical affliction. The Yisurim of traveling to and living in Eretz Yisrael serve as atonement for one's sins. (The Ya'avetz and Iyun Yakov give similar explanations.)

2) PERMITTED OR PROHIBITED TO GO TO ERETZ YISRAEL? QUESTION: The

Gemara (end of 110b until the beginning of 111a) records the view of Rav Yehudah, who says that anyone who goes from Bavel to Eretz Yisrael transgresses an Isur Aseh, because the verse says, "To Bavel they will be brought, and there they will stay until the day that I remember them, says Hashem, when I shall bring them up and return them to this place" (Yirmeyahu 27:22). This verse commands us not to return from Galus until Hashem redeems us.

Later on this Daf, Rav Yehudah says in the name of Shmuel that "just as it is Asur to leave Eretz Yisrael to go to Bavel, so, too, it is Asur to leave Bavel to go to other lands." Why does Rav Yehudah now express the Isur of leaving Bavel differently? Earlier, he says that the Isur is to go only from Bavel to Eretz Yisrael, as he derives from the verse in Yirmeyahu, implying that it is permitted to go to other lands. Now, though, he says that the Isur is to go from Bavel to *any* land, and not just to Eretz Yisrael. In fact, the wording of the second statement implies that it is only Asur to go from Bavel to other lands, but it is *not* Asur to go from Bavel to Eretz Yisrael! Moreover, in the second statement he does not relate the Isur of leaving Bavel to the verse that says that Hashem wants us to stay in Galus until the time of the redemption, but rather he relates it to the high level of Torah of Bavel which makes it comparable to Eretz Yisrael (as Rashi points out!) (MAHARIT)

ANSWERS: (a) The PNEI YEHOSHUA answers that the two statements of Rav Yehudah were said with regard to two different categories of people. The verse in Yirmeyahu is referring to the time of the Churban of the first Beis ha'Mikdash. Accordingly, the Isur Aseh of going from Bavel to Eretz Yisrael applies only to the people who actually left Eretz Yisrael during the exile to Bavel, and to their descendants who still live there as a result of the exile. (Even after Korash allowed the Jews to return and build the second Temple the command not to return from Bavel still applied, since the time had not yet come for *all* of the Jews to return to Eretz Yisrael. The best proof for this is the fact that the Klei Shares did not return with the Jews who built the second Beis ha'Mikdash, the Pnei Yehoshua maintains.)

Rav Yehudah's second statement is teaching that if one happens to be living in Bavel after having moved there from another country (but not as a result of the first exile from Eretz Yisrael), then although he is permitted to go to Eretz Yisrael he is not permitted to leave Bavel to go to other lands, because Bavel is a place of Torah.

(b) The MAHARAM SHIF also explains that the first statement is only referring to one who goes from Bavel to Eretz Yisrael. He prohibits this with an Isur Aseh, because once we were exiled, Hashem does not want us to return before the designated time. That Isur, though, applies only to one who goes to Eretz Yisrael, but not to one who goes from Bavel to other places in the Diaspora.

The second statement is saying that since Bavel is a place of Torah, one is not allowed to leave Bavel to go to any other place in Chutz la'Aretz. This is not prohibited by the above-mentioned Isur Aseh, since by going to any other place in Chutz la'Aretz one is not returning from the exile. However, the fact that Bavel is a place of Torah does not prevent a person from going to Eretz Yisrael at all, because Eretz Yisrael is a place of Kedushah and the Shechinah, more so than Bavel. Thus the prohibition of returning to Eretz Yisrael is *only* due to the Mitzvas Aseh, and only according to Rabbi Yehudah (i.e. not necessarily according to Shmuel, his Rabbi, in whose name the second statement was quoted).

(c) The RAMBAM (Hilchos Melachim 5:12), quoting Rav Yehudah in the name of Shmuel, writes that just like it is Asur to leave Eretz Yisrael to go to Chutz la'Aretz, it is Asur to leave Bavel to go to other lands. However, he concludes, "As it says, 'To Bavel they will be brought, and there they will stay...' -- quoting the verse from Yirmeyahu!

The Rambam's words are very difficult to understand. The Gemara says that the verse from Yirmeyahu teaches that it is Asur to go from Bavel to Eretz Yisrael. How, then, can the Rambam say that this verse is teaching that it is Asur to go from Bavel to *other lands*? Moreover, the Rambam implies that it is *only* Asur to go from Bavel to other lands, but it is not Asur to go from Bavel to Eretz Yisrael! Why, then, does he quote the verse in Yirmeyahu, which teaches that it is Asur to go from Bavel to Eretz Yisrael? (The KESEF MISHNAH writes that the Rambam means to include Eretz Yisrael among the other lands to which one may not go from Bavel, and he is ruling like Rabbi Yehudah's first statement. However, this is not the straightforward meaning of the Rambam, and it is also not logical that the Rambam would rule like Rav Yehudah who seems to have been a minority opinion.)

In addition, if the verse could be interpreted to be referring to other lands and not to Eretz Yisrael, then why did Rabbi Zeira have to say that the verse is talking about the Klei Shares, the utensils used in the Beis ha'Mikdash? He could have answered that the verse "Bavelah Yuva'u..." is indeed talking about people, but is referring to going from Bavel to *other lands*! (MAHARIT)

RAV CHAIM SOLOVEITCHIK (in Chidushin on the Shas, written by Talmidim) points out that the verse in Yirmeyahu is discussing only the situation after the Churban of the first Beis ha'Mikdash. Tosfos here explains that Rav Yehudah learns from that time period that the same Isur Aseh should apply after the Churban of the second Beis ha'Mikdash. Rav Chaim points out that Rav Yehudah can only extrapolate from the first exile to the second if the status of Eretz Yisrael after the first Galus and the second Galus are identical: either in both cases the land lost its Kedushah, or in both cases the land retained its Kedushah.

The Rambam (Hilchos Terumos 1:5), however, rules that after the Churban of the first Beis ha'Mikdash, Eretz Yisrael lost its Kedushah, but after the Churban of the second Beis ha'Mikdash, it retained its Kedushah. According to this, even if we accept Rav Yehudah's explanation of the verse that there is an Isur Aseh to return to Eretz Yisrael after the Churban of the first Beis ha'Mikdash, there should be no Isur after the second Churban. After the second Churban Eretz Yisrael retained its Kedushah and there remained a Mitzvah of Yishuv ha'Aretz, of settling the land, which should override any concern about prematurely returning from Galus. The prophet would not have said not to return under such circumstances! That is why the Rambam learns from the verse in Yirmeyahu that one may not go to *other* lands, but one may go to Eretz Yisrael. (It could be that Rabbi Zeira does not explain the verse in such a manner because he wanted to avoid the Machlokes regarding whether or not Eretz Yisrael has Kedushah after the Churban of the second Beis ha'Mikdash.)

An alternate possibility is that the Rambam had a different Girsah in the second line of our

Gemara. According to his Girsu, Rabbi Zeira answered that the verse in Yirmeyahu is referring to "Kol ha'She'ar," or "all other [lands]," and not to "Kli Shares." Accordingly, the Rambam is simply quoting the Gemara and ruling like Rabbi Zeira when he writes that the verse is referring to going from Bavel to other lands!

This also answers our original contradiction between Rav Yehudah's first statement and his statement in the name of Shmuel. Shmuel holds, like Rabbi Zeira holds, that the verse is referring only to one who is leaving Bavel for other lands, but not for Eretz Yisrael. (The Maharit also concludes that Rav Yehudah argues with Shmuel.)

HALACHAH: Regarding the Mitzvah of living in Eretz Yisrael, the RAMBAM (Hilchos Melachim 5:9, 12) rules that it is prohibited to leave Eretz Yisrael for other lands. However, the Rambam never mentions that it is a Mitzvah for someone who lives outside of Eretz Yisrael to *go* to Eretz Yisrael to live there. Although the RAMBAM, in his list of Mitzvos Aseh that the Rambam omitted, counts this as a Mitzvas Aseh, the Rambam makes no mention of this Mitzvah in Mishnah Torah nor in Sefer ha'Mitzvos. The Rambam wonders why the Rambam does not count living in Eretz Yisrael in his list of Mitzvos, since, after all, we find that the Chachamim spoke so highly of the importance of living in Eretz Yisrael, as our Gemara teaches.

It appears that the Rambam learns that there is no Mitzvah at all to go to live in Eretz Yisrael. The Isur of leaving Eretz Yisrael is not counted among his list of Mitzvos because it is an Isur d'Rabanan (or perhaps mi'Divrei Kabalah) similar to the Isur to leave Bavel; if it is Asur to leave Bavel because it is a place where there is Kedushah because of the Jews who live and learn Torah there, then certainly it is Asur to leave Eretz Yisrael, where there is even more Kedushah and a higher level of Hashra'as ha'Shechinah.

However, even if it is not a Mitzvah d'Oraisa to go to live in Eretz Yisrael according to the Rambam, it is clear from our Gemara and from many other sources (which the Rambam himself cites in Mishneh Torah) that Eretz Yisrael should be very dear to our hearts. We should long to dwell in its midst because of its Kedushah and the closeness with Hashem that is attained there, making our Avodas Hashem there so much more meaningful (see Insights to 110b).

Kesuvos 112

AGADAH: THE PLENTIFUL PRODUCE OF ERETZ YISRAEL The Gemara says that Eretz Yisrael produces 500 Kur from one Se'ah (1/30th of a Kur) of seed in the areas that are not rocky and are fertile. This is when the land is blessed with the average amount of Berachah, but when it is blessed with the ultimate Berachah (in the time of the Mashiach), it will produce 50,000 Kur from each Se'ah of seed.

The BEN YEHOYADA finds an allusion in the verse that the number 500 represents the Berachah of Eretz Yisrael. The verse says, "Shabechi Yerushalayim Es Hashem..." -- "Yerushalayim, praise Hashem, exalt your G-d, o' Tzion -- for He has strengthened the bolts of your gates; He has blessed your children in your midst (b'Kirbech)" (Tehilim 147:12-13). This means that Hashem blesses the inhabitants of Eretz Yisrael with the number that is hinted to "in the midst," or within, the word "Yerushalayim." When the letters of the word "Yerushalayim" are each spelled-out (for example, the letter Yud is spelled "Yud-Vav-Dalet"), the "hidden" letters (for example, the "Vav" and "Dalet" of Yud) are considered the letters that are "in the midst" of the word "Yerushalayim." The Gematria of the letters "in the midst" of "Yerushalayim" (including the unwritten Yud before the final Mem, when Vav is spelled as "Vav-Yud-Vav" and Mem as "Mem-Yud-Mem") equals 500.

The HAFLA'AH explains that the reason Hashem sends so much blessing to Eretz Yisrael is because the Gemara (Taanis 7a) says that all of the other lands receive their flow of rain from the rain that Hashem sends to Eretz Yisrael; it is as if they receive the "leftovers," so to speak. Hence, what comes to Eretz Yisrael must suffice for all of the other lands as well.

He points out, as an allusion, that the amount of rain that passes through Eretz Yisrael is actually 225 times what Eretz Yisrael needs for itself, because the area of the rest of the world is 225 times larger than the area of Eretz Yisrael. The Chachamim teach us that the area of Eretz Yisrael is 400 Parsah (Megilah 3a), and the area of the whole world is 6000 by 6000 Parsah (Pesachim 94a). Through simple mathematical calculation we see that the area of the whole world is 225 times the area of Eretz Yisrael.

This is alluded to in the verses (Tehilim 85:12-14) that say, "Emes me'Eretz Titzmach..." -- "Truth from the earth will sprout forth, and righteousness from the heavens will gaze down. Hashem also will give what is good, and our land will give forth its produce. Righteousness will walk before Him, and he will set his footsteps on the way (v'Yasem l'Derech Pe'amav)," as follows:

"Truth from the earth will sprout forth" refers to the Torah, which will come from the "Eretz," referring to Eretz Yisrael (see Berachos 63a, Bava Basra 158b). "Righteousness from the heavens will gaze down" means that Hashem punishes evildoers from the heavenly Eretz Yisrael (Eretz Yisrael Shel Ma'aleh). The verse continues, "Hashem also will give what is good, and our land will give forth its produce; righteousness will walk before Him" -- when Hashem gives blessing to all of the nations -- "v'Yasem l'Derech Pe'amav" -- Hashem will bestow (v'Yasem) blessing upon the world which is 224 times (the Gematria of Derech being 224) that which Eretz Yisrael needs, so that the other nations should also have blessing!

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