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The Prophetic Voice Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

During the three weeks between 17 Tammuz and Tisha b' Av, as we recall the destruction of the Temples, we read three of the most searing passages in the prophetic literature, the first two from the opening of the book of Jeremiah, the third, next week, from the first chapter of Isaiah.

At perhaps no other time of the year are we so acutely aware of the enduring force of ancient Israel's great visionaries. The prophets had no power. They were not kings or members of the royal court. They were (usually) not priests or members of the religious establishment. They held no office. They were not elected. Often they were deeply unpopular, none more so than the author of this week's haftara, Jeremiah, who was arrested, flogged, abused, put on trial and only narrowly escaped with his life. Only rarely were the prophets heeded in their lifetimes: the one clear exception was Jonah, and he spoke to non-Jews, the citizens of Nineveh. Yet their words were recorded for posterity and became a major feature of Tanakh, the Hebrew Bible. They were the world's first social critics and their message continues through the centuries. As Kierkegaard almost said: when

a king dies, his power ends; when a prophet dies his influence begins. (Kierkegaard actually said: "The tyrant dies and his rule is over; the martyr dies and his rule begins." Kierkegaard, Papers and Journals, 352.)

What was distinctive about the prophet was not that he foretold the future. The ancient world was full of such people: soothsayers, oracles, readers of runes, shamans and other diviners, each of whom claimed inside track with the forces that govern fate and "shape our ends, rough-hew them how we will." Judaism has no time for such people. The Torah bans one "who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead" (Deut. 18: 10-11). It disbelieves such practices because it believes in human freedom. The future is not pre-scripted. It depends on us and the choices we make. If a prediction comes true it has succeeded; if a prophecy comes true it has failed. The prophet tells of the future that will happen if we do not heed the danger and mend our ways. He (or she – there were seven biblical prophetesses) does not predict; he warns.

Nor was the prophet distinctive in blessing or cursing the people. That was Bilaam's gift, not Isaiah's or Jeremiah's. In Judaism, blessing comes through priests not prophets.

Several things made the prophets unique. The first was his or her sense of history. The prophets were the first people to see God in history. We tend to take our sense of time for granted. Time happens. Time flows. As the saying goes, time is God's way of keeping everything from happening at once. But actually there are several ways of relating to time and different civilizations have perceived it differently.

There is cyclical time: time as the slow turning of the seasons, or the cycle of birth, growth, decline and death. Cyclical time is time as it occurs in nature. Some trees have long lives; most fruit flies have short ones; but all that lives, dies. The species endures, individual members 'do not. Kohelet contains the most famous expression of cyclical time in Judaism: "The sun rises and the sun sets, and hurries back to where it rises. The wind blows to the south and turns to the north; round and round it goes, ever returning on its course ... What has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun."

Then there is linear time: time as an inexorable sequence of cause and effect. The French astronomer Pierre-Simon Laplace gave this idea its most famous expression in 1814 when he said that if you "know all forces that set nature in motion, and all positions of all items of which nature is composed," together with all the laws of physics and chemistry, then "nothing would be uncertain and the future just like the past would be present" before your eyes. Karl Marx applied this idea to society and history. It is known as historical inevitability, and when transferred to the affairs of humankind it amounts to a massive denial of personal freedom.

Finally there is time as a mere sequence of events with no underlying plot or theme. This leads to the kind of historical writing pioneered by the scholars of ancient Greece, Herodotus and Thucydides.

Each of these has its place, the first in biology, the second in physics, the third in secular history, but none was time as the prophets understood it. The prophets saw time as the arena in which the great drama between God and humanity was played out, especially in the history of Israel. If Israel was faithful to its mission, its covenant, then it would flourish. If it was unfaithful it would fail. It would suffer defeat and exile. That is what Jeremiah never tired of telling his contemporaries.

The second prophetic insight was the unbreakable connection between monotheism and morality. Somehow the prophets sensed – it is implicit in all their words, though they do not explain it explicitly – that idolatry was not just false. It was also corrupting. It saw the universe as a multiplicity of powers that often clashed. The battle went to the strong. Might defeated right. The fittest survived while the weak perished. Nietzsche believed this, as did the social Darwinists.

The prophets opposed this with all their force. For them the power of God was secondary; what mattered was the righteousness of God. Precisely because God loved and had redeemed Israel, Israel owed Him loyalty as

their sole ultimate sovereign, and if they were unfaithful to God they would also be unfaithful to their fellow humans. They would lie, rob, cheat: Jeremiah doubts whether there was one honest person in the whole of Jerusalem (Jer. 5: 1). They would become sexually adulterous and promiscuous: "I supplied all their needs, yet they committed adultery and thronged to the houses of prostitutes. They are well-fed, lusty stallions, each neighing for another man's wife" (Jer. 5: 7-8).

Their third great insight was the primacy of ethics over politics. The prophets have surprisingly little to say about politics. Yes, Samuel was wary of monarchy but we find almost nothing in Isaiah or Jeremiah about the way Israel/Judah should be governed. Instead we hear a constant insistence that the strength of a nation – certainly of Israel/Judah – is not military or demographic but moral and spiritual. If the people keep faith with God and one another, no force on earth can defeat them. If they do not, no force can save them. As Jeremiah says in this week's haftara, they will discover too late that their false gods offered false comfort:

They say to wood, 'You are my father,' and to stone, 'You gave me birth.' They have turned their backs to me and not their faces; yet when they are in trouble, they say, 'Come and save us!' Where then are the gods you made for yourselves? Let them come if they can save you when you are in trouble! For you have as many gods as you have towns, O Judah. (Jer. 2: 27-28)

Jeremiah, the most passionate and tormented of all the prophets, has gone down in history as the prophet of doom. Yet this is unfair. He was also supremely a prophet of hope. He is the man who said that the people of Israel will be as eternal as the sun, moon and stars (Jer. 31). He is the man who, while the Babylonians were laying siege to Jerusalem, bought a field as a public gesture of faith that Jews would return from exile: "For this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Houses, fields and vineyards will again be bought in this land" (Jer. 32).

Jeremiah's feelings of doom and hope were not in conflict: there were two sides of the same coin. The God who sentenced His people to exile would be the God who brought them back, for though His people might forsake Him, He would never forsake them. Jeremiah may have lost faith in people; he never lost faith in God.

Prophecy ceased in Israel with Haggai, Zekharia and Malachi in the Second Temple era. But the prophetic truths have not ceased to be true. Only by being faithful to God do people stay faithful to one another. Only by being open to a power greater than themselves do people become greater than themselves. Only by understanding the deep forces that shape history can a people defeat the ravages of history. It took a long time for biblical Israel to learn these truths, and a very long time indeed before they returned to their land, re-entering the arena of history. We must never forget them again.

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Rabbi Frand on Parshas Mattos - Masei Inboxx
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Rabbi Yissocher Frand
Parshas Mattos - Masei

Parshas Mattos: Where Firstborn Rush In.?.?.
Tisha B'av is Motzoei Shabbos July 29 - See our website:
www.yadychiel.org to download Rabbi Frand's shiur on Tisha B'av on Motzoei Shabbos.

"The children of Reuven and Gad had abundant livestock - very great. They saw the land of Yaazer and the land of Gilad, and behold! - the place was a place for livestock." (32:1)

The people of Reuven, Gad, and half of shevet Menashe made a special request to Moshe: They wanted to live east of the Jordan River (Eiver HaYarden), not in Eretz Yisrael proper (Canaan at that point). Moshe initially is upset with them, because he assumes that they are trying to back out of fighting to conquer the Land with the rest of the tribes. They then explain that they want that land only because it is good for their livestock. They would go along with the rest of Bnei Yisrael to conquer Eretz Yisrael, and only once the Land is settled will they return to their inheritance on the other side of the Jordan.

Moshe Rabbeinu accepts their offer. Chazal, however, find fault with these shevatim for choosing to live on the other side of the Jordan River. They teach that these tribes were the first to go into exile because they chose not to live in Eretz Yisrael proper.

The sefer Shivtei Yisrael finds an interesting common denominator between the three shevatim who chose to live east of the Jordan River: They were all firstborn. Reuven was firstborn to both his father and his mother, Gad was firstborn to Bilhah, and Menashe was firstborn to Yosef.

We know that the Torah affords firstborn sons certain privileges that others do not get. They inherit a double portion, and they command the respect of their siblings (Kesubos 103a). On a more practical level, firstborn children tend to be leaders by nature, and they are often infused with loads of energy.

The problem is that that energy can sometimes be used impetuously. Yaakov Avinu, when blessing the shevatim, rebukes Reuven for being pachaz kamayim - "in a rush like water." Reuven, by his very nature, was like a torrent, and in his rush to do what he considered right, he made errors in judgment. This was not only Reuven's shortcoming, it is something that tends to exist among firstborns.

In general, firstborns tend not to fare well in the Torah: think Kayin, Yishmael, and Eisav; Reuven who lost his bechorah, and Menashe who was surpassed by Ephraim. Perhaps being pachaz, impetuous, unbridled, and unwilling to let things play themselves out has some part in this lack of success.

A case in point might be the reaction of these tribes when they saw the eastern side of Eretz Yisrael. The rest of the shevatim were willing to wait and see the wonderful land that awaited them on the other side of the Jordan River. But Reuven, Gad, and half of Menashe saw good grazing land and said, "Let's grab it!"

Chazal disliked this attitude.

Shivtei Yisrael suggests that the impetuosity of these two-and-a-half tribes cost them a yearly mitzvah. The Mishnah teaches that one may not bring bikkurim from Eiver HaYarden. The Mei Shiloach teaches that the significance of bikkurim is that a farmer spends his entire year working his field, waiting for his fruit to start growing. When they finally do start to appear on the trees, the farmer might be tempted to rush out to the field and grab them. The Torah tells him, "No, this is not for you. This is for the Kohen."

Part of the message of the bikkurim, then, is to learn to be patient.

Perhaps, suggests Shivtei Yisrael, those on the eastern bank of the Jordan River were not allowed to bring bikkurim because the trait that placed them there was the impatience that bikkurim is meant to counteract.

Parshas Masei: Selfish, But Potent Nonetheless

"For he must dwell in his city of refuge until the death of the Kohen Gadol, and after the death of the Kohen Gadol the killer shall return to the land of his possession." (35:28)

The Torah makes the length of an unintentional killer's sentence in an ir miklat (city of refuge) contingent upon a most peculiar condition: the death of the Kohen Gadol. The Talmud (Makkos 11a) relates that mothers of Kohanim Gedolim were concerned that those killers might pray that their sons should die, and they would therefore bring food and clothing to the arei miklat in an effort to make its residents happy so they should not wish death upon the Kohen Gadol.

The Talmud wonders why they had to undertake such action. A verse in Mishlei (26:2) states clearly, "A gratuitous curse will not come upon him"; one need not fear a curse issued for no reason. Why, then, should the Kohen Gadol's mother be concerned that her son would die as the rest of a killer's curse?

Talmud Yerushalmi explains that there is a difference between a curse and a tefillah (prayer). An unprovoked curse will not come to pass, but there is no guarantee that an unjustified and unprovoked tefillah will not be answered.

There is another halachah involving a Kohen Gadol that points to this very same teaching.

We read during the avodah of Yom Kippur Mussaf that in the times of the Beis HaMikdash, as the Kohen Gadol exited the Kodesh HaKodashim, he would utter a short tefillah. What was he davening for at that exalted time?

One of the things he said was, "Please ignore the prayers of wayfarers."

The Kohen Gadol was concerned that someone would be in the middle of a road trip and he would feel a couple of drops. In fear of getting caught in a downpour, he might pray, "Please, Hashem, let it stop raining." Since that selfish prayer would be detrimental for farmers and society at large, the Kohen Gadol had to expend some of the uplifted moments as he exited the Kodesh HaKodashim to pray that Hashem ignore that tefillah, because he realized that Hashem might just listen to this single wayfarer!

To understand how and why it is so, we must analyze a story in the Gemara.

The Talmud relates that a demon was injuring members of the yeshivah of Rav Acha bar Yaakov, and all attempts to rid themselves of the demon failed.

One day, Rav Acha bar Yaakov heard that Abaye would be visiting their town, and he came up with a plan. He issued orders that no one should invite Abaye to stay with them in their homes, which would compel him to sleep in the shul (where the yeshivah learned) that night. Acha figured that Abaye would meet the demon and daven to have it removed once and for all.

Indeed, that is exactly what happened.

The Maharsha poses a question on this story. How could Rav Acha bar Yaakov endanger Abaye's life under the assumption that he would somehow emerge alive and well? How did he know that a miracle would save not only Abaye, but the entire city from danger? Even assuming that one is allowed to rely on miracles — which we are not allowed to do - a person who has enough merit to warrant a miracle may not want to waste his merits on having a miracle performed for him.

How did Rav Acha have the right to make Abaye lose some of his merit in heaven?

The Maharsha answers that Rav Acha bar Yaakov felt that Abaye would be able to stop this demon through tefillah, not through a miracle. Prayer, he explains, is part of the natural order of the world, and since it is a law of nature, one does not lose merit when using it.

The same applies to the prayers of unintentional killers in an ir miklat or of a wayfarer.

True, there is no reason for Hashem to grant their wish that a Kohen Gadol die or that there be no rain because one person will get home with wet clothing. But prayer is a natural part of the system this world was built on, and it can be accepted even without a reason.

When we see how potent prayer is even when the person davens for outrageous things (that the High Priest should die; there should be no rainfall), we realize how much more potent our prayers are when we daven that we should be able to learn better, to be better parents, better spouses, and better members of our community!

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Shaare Tefilla Dallas

Rabbi Ari Perl

Laws of the Three Weeks, Nine Days & Tisha B'Av

The three week period beginning with the fast of Shiva Assar B'Tamuz (Sunday, July 8th, 2012) and ending with the fast of Tisha B'Av (Sunday, July 29th, 2012) is a time of mourning in the Jewish calendar.

Historically, this period commemorates the sequence of events that began with the breaching of the walls of Jerusalem and concluded with the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash (Holy Temple). Though all three weeks are considered a period of mourning, the intensity of the mourning increases in stages as we approach Tisha B'Av.

THE THREE WEEKS During this entire 3-week period (July 8th - July 29th): ?Haircuts are not taken ?Festive gatherings and parties are avoided ?Festive music and dancing are avoided ?New clothing (e.g. new slacks/suit, skirt/dress) is not worn: new foods are not eaten

THE NINE DAYS From Rosh Chodesh Av (Friday, July 20th) through Tisha B'Av: ?meat and wine are not consumed ?pleasurable bathing (including recreational swimming) is prohibited ?objects that bring joy (including clothing) are not purchased ?construction and home decorating projects are not initiated ?outer garments are not laundered or pressed.

MEAT AND WINE Included in this prohibition are all foods containing meat or chicken. This restriction is suspended on Shabbat or at any other Seudat Mitzvah (such as a Brit Milah, etc.). At Havdala, the person reciting the blessings should drink a small sip of grape juice and the rest of the cup should, preferably, be given to a minor; if a minor is not available, then the person who recited Havdala should drink the wine as usual.

PLEASURABLE BATHING/SWIMMING Swimming, bathing and showering for pleasure are prohibited. Instructional swim and bathing/showering purely for cleanliness purposes are permitted. Because such bathing/showering should be done for cleanliness only, the coolest water tolerable should be used. Before going to the mikvah, women may bathe/shower in the normal manner. One may bathe/shower with hot water in preparation for, and in honor of, Shabbat. **PURCHASING NEW ITEMS** This restriction applies only to 'special' items that bring the purchaser a certain measure of joy. If, during this period, such an item becomes available for a limited time at a substantially reduced cost, it may be purchased and used after Tisha B'Av.

CONSTRUCTION/HOME DECORATING Because of the excitement associated with such projects, construction, renovation or home decorating

may not begin during the 'nine days.' If a hired contractor has already begun such a project, one should request that the work be suspended until after Tisha B'Av. If the contractor refuses or demands significant compensation for the idle days, the work may continue. If possible, one should attempt to suspend the project during the actual week of Tisha B'Av, and certainly on Tisha B'Av itself. Home repairs are permitted during the 'nine days.'

LAUNDERING AND PRESSING During the 'nine days' one may not wear freshly laundered or pressed outer garments (i.e.- items that are not normally cleaned and/or pressed after every use), nor may one launder, press or send such clothes to the dry cleaners for use after Tisha B'Av. Garments that are worn directly against the skin and, therefore, normally washed after every use may be laundered and worn during this period. Because this restriction is based upon the pleasure that stems from a garment's 'freshly cleaned/pressed' feel, clothing that has been worn for even a short time prior to the 'nine days' may be worn during the 'nine days.' One should make every effort to have available for the 'nine days' a wardrobe of outer garments that are clean and presentable, though not freshly laundered or pressed. If, despite one's best efforts, these garments become soiled and other 'slightly worn' garments are not available, freshly laundered ones may be worn. Freshly laundered and pressed garments may be worn on Shabbat. Undergarments, recreational clothing (tshirts, etc.) and children's clothing may be laundered during the 'nine days.'

TISHA B'AV The prohibitions of Tisha B'Av become effective at sundown (8:28 PM, before Shabbat is over) on Saturday Night, July 28th and include the following: ?Eating and drinking (medication is permitted). Women who are pregnant or nursing should fast as well; if you have concerns about the potential medical ramifications, in Rabbi Perl's absence please contact Rabbi Friedman for further discussion. ?Washing any part of the body with water (except upon arising in the morning, after using the facilities or if one's hands become otherwise soiled). ?Application of all cosmetics, lotions or ointments (except for medicinal purposes). ?Wearing footwear made (even partially) of leather (Note: this prohibition takes effect only once Shabbat is over). ?Marital relations. ?Torah learning (except those areas appropriate to the mood of Tisha B'Av: i.e.- the books of Iyov (Job) and Eikha (Lamentations), sections of the Bible and Talmud that discuss the destruction of the Temple, the laws of mourning, the laws of Tisha B'Av, etc.). ?Greeting a fellow (a nod of the head is most appropriate, similar to the 'greeting' extended in a house of mourning). ?Engaging in any pleasurable/recreational activity that might divert one's mind from the tragic nature of the day. Preferably, one should refrain altogether from going to work on Tisha B'Av. Where this is impossible, one should make every effort to refrain from business or professional activities until at least midday (1:38 PM).

CHILDREN With the exception of not getting haircuts, the laws of the Three Weeks, Nine Days & Tisha B'Av are applicable only to children mature enough to understand the concept of mourning for the loss of the Temple (usually around age 7-8, depending on the child). Because the pleasure of a small child's haircut belongs primarily to the parents, haircuts are prohibited for children of any age.

TISHA B'AV ON SATURDAY NIGHT Because Tisha B'Av falls out on Saturday Night/Sunday this year, there are a number of important things to keep in mind: ?The fast begins at sunset (8:28 PM), before Shabbat is over. ?There is no Seudah Mafseket (final meal of bread, egg and ashes normally eaten on the floor before the fast). ?Seudah Shlishit should be eaten at home before coming to shul for Mincha. ?Following Mincha on Shabbat there will be a class related to Tisha B'Av. ?At the conclusion of shabbat, we say Barukh Hamavdil bein Kodesh L'chol (Blessed is He who distinguishes between sacred and mundane), return home, put on our non-leather shoes and return to shul for Maariv and the reading of Eikha (Lamentations). Alternatively, Tisha B'Av footwear may be brought to shul before Shabbat and donned once Shabbat is over. ?Havdalah is not recited until after the fast on Sunday evening. ?Normally,

the restrictions of the 'nine days' remain in place until midday of the day following Tisha B'Av. However, because Tisha B'Av actually falls out on Shabbat this year, and is observed on Sunday (the 10th of Av), all restrictions are lifted immediately at the conclusion of the fast on Sunday evening.

If you have any questions or concerns in Rabbi Perl's absence, please contact Rabbi Friedman at (972) 661- 0127 or rabbimikfriedman@gmail.com.

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Parshios Matos & Masei
A Winning Strategy1 Avenge the Bnei Yisrael against the Midianites.
Afterwards, you will be gathered unto your people.

Why are we told that Moshe's death hinged on the military campaign against Midian? More importantly, why was Moshe told this in advance?

A midrash[2] sees the battle against Midian as a kind of granting a last wish to Moshe. It is a rare treat to witness – in this world – Hashem evening the score against one of His enemies. Hashem wished to give Moshe the pleasure of witnessing it.

We could explain differently. We might be looking at a principle that shows itself elsewhere.

As a consequence of Achan's trespass, Yehoshua's forces were initially rebuffed at Ai. After dealing with this tragic defeat, Yehoshua came to terms with HKBH, Who reassured him that victory was at hand in the next attempt against Ai. Nonetheless, Hashem instructed Yehoshua to set an ambush to the rear of the city.

With Hashem guaranteeing victory, why would an ambush be necessary? G-d has no need for any of the tactics of conventional warfare. His Will that the Bnei Yisrael prevail should have been the necessary and sufficient condition for a resounding victory.

The point is that danger lurks in dangerous places – and any place in which people commit a grave sin becomes a dangerous location. Because the nation sinned at Ai, it would remain a place where individuals might succumb to harm, even if the nation as a whole was assured victory. The ambush was necessary to address that danger. The Bnei Yisrael were instructed to wage their war with greater precautions and with the greater concern for the ordinary rules of engagement. They needed to pay just a bit more attention to what the world of teva demands, reacting in ways that would not be necessary if they could rely on Hashem's miraculous intervention alone.

The impending war against Midian was precipitated by the failure of the Jewish people with Ba'al Pe'or. That aveirah would continue to be a thorn in their side, inviting retribution by Hashem's attribute of Judgment. This made the war a much riskier affair than other wars. Even a Divine guarantee of victory would not eliminate the risk of death to individual soldiers.

Something had to counter the elevated risk level. That element was the personal merit of Moshe. This is the reason for linking the war with Moshe's death. Moshe was told that the war could not wait. It had to be conducted in his lifetime, so that his davening and his merit would counter the riskiness of the enterprise.

Moshe takes a cue from Hashem, and finds his own ways to additionally link the upcoming battle with merits. He commands the putting together of an armed force "against Midian to inflict Hashem's vengeance against Midian[3]." The repetition of the word "Midian" is striking, but easy to account for. Moshe wished to underscore the purpose of raising the army. He wanted every step on the road to war to focus on Hashem's plan, i.e., to

make it more lishmah. By doing so, he hoped to increase the zechus of the mitzvah.

Moshe continues: "A thousand from a shevet; a thousand from a shevet[4]." Every shevet has its own character, its own contribution – and its own zechus. By drawing soldiers from every shevet, Moshe hoped to multiply the merit in his army.

Finally, "Moshe sent them – a thousand from each shevet[5]." Sending them forth in his name made them all his agents. By associating himself with their mission, by turning each soldier into a surrogate for himself, he wished to send his own merits into the battle with them.

Who's On Forth?6

These are the journeys of the Bnei Yisrael who went forth from the land of Egypt according to their legions, at the hand of Moshe and Aharon. Moshe wrote their goings forth according to their journeys, at the instruction of Hashem. These were their journeys according to their goings forth.

Journeys according to goings forth, and goings forth according to journeys. What is going on?

We can account for all the repetitions, and the inversions within the repetitions, through one simple observation. The forty years they spent in the wilderness can be divided into three distinct periods. Each one is alluded to in these psukim.

From the time the Bnei Yisrael left Egypt until the sending of the spies from Kadesh Barnea, the single goal of their travel was to approach the land of Israel. Having gone forth/escaped from Egypt, their sole purpose in travelling was to draw closer to their destination. The "going forth" was behind them; what now animated them was the expectation of entering and taking possession of our holy land.

The sin of the meraglim changed all that, of course. From then until almost the very end of the forty years, they would wander without apparent purpose. We too easily suppose that this somehow was a punishment that perfectly fit the crime. But upon further thought, is hard to see it that way. The old generation was to be punished; a new one needed to dissociate itself from the sins of their fathers. The older generation of sinners could have been removed from the scene in short order, allowing a younger generation to march into the land, untainted by the sins of their predecessors. Why wait?

The reason this did not happen is not given in Chumash. Hashem did not want to kick them when they were down by telling them the reason – which had to do with even darker days on the distant horizon. Their lives had become dark and somber through the Divine edict that turned them into walking corpses. Still trying to deal with the enormity of their crime, they were not yet ready to hear about tragedies in the future. But it was those future tragedies that determined the course of the next decades.

One way or another, full awareness of Hashem needs to permeate every nook and cranny of the world. G-d's goals for mankind can only be met with that precursor in place. Had the Bnei Yisrael not spurned the Land when they were poised at its threshold, they would have lived lives on the cutting edge of human spiritual output. Divine Providence would have accompanied them in an open and manifest manner. They would have been dealt with immediately when they strayed, just as they were in the Wilderness. Their example of the immediacy of Hashem's presence in their lives would have attracted the attention of other nations, and eventually all of Mankind would have learned from that example. In that way, they would have been the vehicles to bring knowledge of Hashem to all inhabitants of the earth.

They missed that opportunity through the aveirah of the meraglim. The goal, however, remained the same. Jews would still be the vehicle to bring knowledge of Hashem to the world, although it would now be through a circuitous and laborious process. Hashem would exile them to the far corners of the earth, where they would survive against all odds. Slowly, their core message about the absolute Oneness of G-d would take hold of those with whom they had contact.

The forty years of wandering, seemingly aimlessly, prepared the Jewish nation for its mission in history. In the post-meraglim world, that mission had been transformed into a long galus of seemingly aimless wandering with no end in sight. They did not understand the purpose of their lives, but accepted their lot as the Will of G-d. They acquired in those years the national composure and resolve to weather the long storm ahead of their offspring.

In this period, the destination, the journey to somewhere, was not important. The purpose of those decades was in surviving the disruptions, the goings forth. The Torah tells us that Moshe "Moshe wrote their goings ... at the instruction of Hashem." This did not have to be mentioned in regard to the first period, whose journeys were certainly worthy of being recorded. Here, the point is that Moshe wrote about them only at the instruction of Hashem, for reasons no one understood at the time.

Finally, arriving in Edomite territory in the Tzin Wilderness, they set their eyes once more upon their destination in Israel. Once again, as had been the case at the beginning of the forty years, their focus was the journey, which became more important than the going forth.

1. Based on Ha'mek Davar Bamidbar 31:2-6 2. Bamidbar Rabbah 22:5
3. Bamidbar 31:3 4. Bamidbar 31:4 5. Bamidbar 31:6 6. Based on Haamek Davar, Bamidbar 33:1-2; 14:21,34

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Parshat Matot - Maasei 5772

RABBI BEREL WEIN
MENACHEM AV

This week marks the beginning of the month of Av. And though we remember the many tragedies that have befallen the Jewish people this month - the destruction of both Holy Temples in Jerusalem primarily – the month has an additional name attached to it, 'Menachem' meaning a source of comfort. This word 'menachem' referring to comfort and consolation, is phrased in the present tense and not in its future tense, implying that the advent of this seemingly sad month in the Jewish calendar somehow also contains within it the seeds of restoration. Judaism is a very realistic and pragmatic faith. It does not guarantee fantastic rewards in this world or in the next. It is cautious in its commitments and sparse in its language and principles. Thus the question as to why this month of Av should also be the month of consolation is compounded and intensified. Yet the name 'Menachem' coincides nicely with the rabbinic idea that the day of Tisha B'Av, the ninth day of Av itself – the saddest day on the Jewish calendar – will yet be a holiday. Not only will it eventually be a holiday, but even now the Halacha invests the day with certain holiday overtones in the ritual prayer service of the day. Piled on to the tragedies of that particular day are many other tragedies of many other days that have bitterly visited the Jewish people over our long history. Yet the feeling of optimism and hope for a brighter future permeates the day. A strange people, this Jewish people! The month of Av needs to be viewed as not only a month of sadness and mourning, but equally as a month of commemoration. There are not many nations in history that remember and commemorate days of

their defeats. These defeats are either expunged from the national record or they are rewritten as being the fault of others. Rarely do we see national acknowledgment of guilt or error and an acceptance of the true causes and consequences of national defeat and wrongdoing. The main stumbling block to any type of successful peace negotiation between Israel and the Arabs is the refusal of the Arabs to own up to their many past errors of policy and action. As long as they continue to believe and propagate the myth that all of their misery and troubles, problems and weaknesses are the fault of others – Israel, the United States, world Jewry, etc. – there can be little or no hope for a lasting settlement of the conflict. The month of Av commemorates the mistakes, errors of judgment and mistaken policies that the Jewish people made and, to a certain extent, continue to make. It identifies our disloyalty and stubbornness, our unwillingness to be true to ourselves and our tendency to always allow ourselves to be seduced by foreign cultures and alien faddish ideas and slogans. The month of Av reminds us, in a ritualistic and psychologically powerful way, of our faults. It provides us with an honest look in the mirror of history. As such, it does begin to bring upon us a measure of comfort, the comfort of understanding, appreciating and internalizing the truth – unpleasant as that truth may initially seem to be. The rabbis of the Talmud long ago advised us that true happiness comes with the removal of all doubts. The events of the month of Av certainly should dispel any doubts that one may possess regarding the necessity for Jewish responsibility and loyalty to God and Israel. The Talmud further states that God's wrath, so to speak, destroyed the Temples in Jerusalem, magnificent as they were, but did not destroy the people of Israel. The people of Israel have survived without the Temple, and have remained vital and productive over nineteen hundred years. That fact alone is one worthy of bringing us comfort and solace over the past, and determination and hope regarding our future. This sense of realism and honesty, of being able and willing to accept blame and recognize past faults, is itself the beginning of the process of consolation and future faith and hope. It is what places the word 'menachem' in front of the name of the month of Av. Mourning without introspection is shallow and not productive. King Solomon taught us that the purpose of mourning is that "the living will take the matter to heart." If Av can help us achieve that goal then it can truly serve its purpose of being 'menachem' all of us as well. Shabat shalom Berel Wein

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Becoming a "Learner/Earner" By Andrew J. Neff | Jul 19th, 2012
Adapted from a speech delivered at the annual dinner of the Yeshiva Gedolah of Teaneck, NJ, Tuesday, 17 July 2012.

I started out my life as an earner. That was the focus of my life—the focus of my life. Then, through a series of steps, I became an earner/learner. Then—and this was what a previous piece of mine entitled From Bear Stearns to Bava Metzria was all about—I became a learner. For those of you who read it on the Internet, I was able to extol the virtues of learning and of taking time off to learn.

But despite many positive reactions to From Bear Stearns to Bava Metzria, I heard an issue from a number of people: "It's great to talk about taking off time to learn, but that's not practical." I understand that. And now I am in my next phase: I am back at work, but I still start my day in the yeshiva with my learning seder. I am a learner/earner with the emphasis on the "learner." However, now that I am back at work, I realize that this is a more challenging phase. It is more challenging but it is also a more rewarding phase.

But first—a story. There was a town in which the rabbi lived next to the blacksmith. The blacksmith got up early every morning to start work. The rabbi, who heard the blacksmith get up, said 'If he can get up early to deal with his business, I should be able to get up even earlier to attend to my holy work.' And he did. The blacksmith heard the rabbi each morning and

saw that he was getting up before the blacksmith. The blacksmith said 'If the rabbi is able to get up early every morning and he is not doing real work, I should be able to get up even earlier.' And so he did. And this went on back and forth for a while – each one getting up earlier than the other. And they say that in this town the blacksmith made the rabbi frum and the rabbi make the blacksmith wealthy.

Here are five thoughts and recommendations on being a learner/earner:

1. Become your own cheering section. 2. It just takes two. 3. Pick your peer pressure 4. Form strong partnerships. And... 5. Use technology to your advantage.

One: Become Your Own Cheering Section.

Learning is great but it's not like work. Work has in it feedback mechanisms. You get paid. You have projects with start and stop dates. You have deals. You get praised. You get the glory.

Learning is more internal. You have good days. And you have challenging days. It's hard to measure your progress. And every day you back up and review. And each day you realize how deep the Gemara is and how much you know but – at the same time – how much you don't know.

But there are rewards and they are there for the taking. There are two types of reward, but they have to come from you: the first is internal and the second is eternal. You have to make your own reward and feedback – that's internal. But the only way to do that is by focusing on the eternal – what your real reward is.

Let me address the internal. There is a well-known mishnah in Pirkei Avot, ethics of the fathers: Ben Zoma says: "Who is wise? He who learns from every person. Who is strong? He who subdues his nature. Who is rich? He who is happy with his lot. Who is honored? He who honors others." A very powerful mishnah, but a very curious one, because that's not how the world defines wisdom, strength, wealth and honor. But there is another important aspect to each of these traits: the only way to achieve them is through your own perspective. No one else can make you rich, strong, honored, or wise. It's up to you to create your own rewards.

Similarly in learning, you have control over how to you view your progress. I will come back to this point in a few moments.

Two: It just takes two.

I have discovered something that is better than sliced bread. It's better than the iPad. It's better than Facebook. Hard to believe. It's called: learning b'chavruta, with a partner. With all due respect to learning in a shiur (Torah class) or learning by yourself, a shiur or learning on your own just doesn't cut it. When you learn in a group, there's no internal pressure to really get it. And it's usually on someone else's timetable and at someone else's speed.

When you learn by yourself, it is not enough. Read the label on your Artsroll: it is an aid to Talmud study—not a replacement.

Learning by yourself or going to a shiur—you should see them as a prelude to learning with a chavruta. For Shavuot, I used to go to shiurim and it would be a struggle to stay awake all night. Now, I learn b'chavruta and it is invigorating.

When you learn with a chavruta, there is no escape. You either get it or go over it again. You can't hide in the crowd. But it's better than that because when you learn with a partner you somehow bring out insights that you would not otherwise see. It is a marvelous way of learning.

Do not get me wrong. It is great to go to a shiur. It is great to pick up a sefer (Jewish book). But I have spent my professional career as an analyst trying to understand what works – what makes great investments. Learning with a chavruta is what works.

Three: Pick your peer pressure.

Here is how you can create a cheering section: pick the right peer pressure. Peer pressure is the most powerful influence in our lives. It is the key behind marketing because they know that we care what people think about us. It is the key behind social media because we want to know what people think. You need to have the right peer pressure. But that's one of the largest challenges about returning to the work world. It's important to hang

around with your colleagues at work, but that is not the peer pressure that you need. You need to hang around with people who are learning. Teaneck is good in that respect. Hang around with people who are learning or—better yet—you need to hang around with talmidei chachamim, (Torah scholars).

Four: Form strong partnerships.

It's more than the partnership with your chavruta and choosing the right peer pressure. You have to form strong partnerships. I am talking about three types of partnerships.

First—with Hashem. This is where it all starts. Why is learning so challenging? Why can't it be easy? Because Hashem wants us to earn it.

Another story: In Israel, keeping kosher can be complex. There are so many hechsherim (kosher certifications). My initial reaction was: it should be easier. You should be able to eat everything. After all, you're in Israel. Keeping kosher should be easy there. And then I realized that when you are in Jerusalem you are closer to the center, closer to the Beit Hamikdash. When you have a minor cut, a Band-Aid suffices. When you have open heart surgery, you need the highest level of sterile environment. In Jerusalem, you need the highest level of stringency because we are closer to the center.

It's the same with learning. When you are sitting down, you are getting closer to Hashem. That shouldn't be easy because if it was easy then we wouldn't care about it.

Second—your spouse. Another story. When we have a brit (ceremony of circumcision) we don't say the bracha of yotzer ha-adam—thanking Hashem for creating man. When do we say it? We say it under the chuppah (marriage canopy) when a man gets married. Why do we say it then? Because a man is not complete until his wedding. There are 613 mitzvot but we can't do them all because some are only for men and some are only for women. But when a man is married, he gets the credit for his wife's mitzvot and she gets credit for his. It's a partnership. So when I am learning, I am learning for the home team. When a woman stays home with the kids and sends her husband off to learn, they both get credit for the learning.

Third—your Rosh Yeshiva. You have an incredible resource in the Rashei Yeshivot in this town and, specifically, in this Yeshiva. They have an insight that relates to people. It's a resource that you should use. Nancy and I have consulted with various Rashei Yeshivot over the course of our lives when we have big decisions. It's not a crutch but it's an incredible resource. They can help you when you are an earner/learner and then can also help you make the transition into becoming a learner/earner.

Five: Use technology to your advantage.

Finally, a practical insight on how to make the transition to learner/earner. Use technology to your advantage. Technology is both a blessing and a curse. If you think it's a blessing, just wait—you ain't seen nothing yet. If you think it's a curse—same thing—just wait.

With all the wonderful things that come from technology, how can I say it is a curse? Because, first, it is all-consuming. It is intrusive. However, as observant Jews, we don't realize how fortunate we are because we get a 25-hour break each week. Imagine how it is for the rest of the world that doesn't get that break.

Another story: When I got out of college, I remember that the investment theme of the day was to own theme park and sporting good stocks—Disney and Rawlings—because technology was going to change our lives and we were going to have all this free time so we would be going to Disney World and playing sports. That's not exactly the way things worked out.

And the key is that technology is going to accelerate. I work in technology. My business is to understand how things will change. The pace of change is accelerating. How are we going to be able to cope? How will be able to handle it.

We can use technology to our advantage.

Another true story: When I was at Bear Stearns we had a daily minyan (quorum of 10 men for prayer) at 1:45pm. I sometimes had meetings at that time but I wanted to carve out time for mincha, the afternoon prayer

service. So I had a pager (you may have heard of them) and I would set it at 1:40 pm. When it would go off, I would look at my pager—it was really my alarm going off—and say, “Oh, it's my Boss—I'll be back in a few minutes.” I was telling the truth. It was my Boss but with a capital “B.” And off I would go to mincha.

We have got to get control of technology. It's going to get better. Which means it's going to get worse.

But to return to my earlier point: you need to focus on the rewards which are internal and eternal. I talked about creating the internal rewards. And you can create the eternal rewards.

The eternal rewards from learning are that it ties you to your parents, your grandparents and your earlier generations. And the other eternal reward is that learning ties you to your children and grandchildren.

Andrew Neff, who is a member of the board of the Orthodox Union, is a financial analyst working with technology companies. He was a leading securities analyst on Wall Street, spending 20 years at Bear Stearns, and was recognized by Institutional Investor and the Wall Street Journal as an All-Star. He lives (and learns) in Teaneck NJ.