

BS"D



From: RABBI YISSOCHER FRAND
[ryfrand@torah.org] Sent: Sept 09, 2004 To:
ravfrand@torah.org Subject: Rabbi Frand on
Parshas Nitzavim - Vayelech
"RavFrand" List - Rabbi Frand on Parshas

Nitzavim - Vayelech



To: Parsha@YahooGroups.com
From: crshulman@aol.com

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Rav Chaim Saw In The Pasuk What We See With Our Eyes

There is a pasuk [verse] in Parshas Netzavim that warns us of a destruction in the Land of Israel, one that will cause amazement among the people who will witness its aftermath: "The later generation will say- your children who will arise after you, and the foreigner who will come from a distant land, -when they will see the plagues of that land and its illnesses with which Hashem afflicted it..." [Devorim 29:21]

Rav Chaim Soloveitchik noted a connection in this verse that contains a very bitter prediction about the "last generation." The pasuk mentions two categories of people who will be amazed by the destruction: (1) the foreigner who comes from a distant land and (2) your children who will arise after you. The children are connected to the foreigners, the nations of the world). Why does the verse make this connection?

Rav Chaim stated that this foretells a frightening time in the "last generation," when the children of Israel will know as much about Judaism and Jewish history as foreigners from distant lands. Rav Chaim Soloveitchik died in 1918 (at age 65). Even though he witnessed the Haskalah ("Enlightenment") and the beginning of the disintegration of European Jewry in his lifetime, he rarely saw people who did not know the shape of the letter Aleph or who never heard of Moshe Rabbeinu.

Even the non-Religious people of his time were very knowledgeable regarding the basics of Judaism. Some of the expressions of the early "Yiddish poets" (who saw Judaism as a culture rather than a religion) are so saturated with religious expression and symbolism that we might mistakenly think that a Rosh Yeshiva [Dean of a Rabbinical Seminary] wrote them. Their "secular conversation" was so permeated with Jewish thought and values that even without them being religious people, it is evident that they at least knew what they were leaving.

Rav Chaim could hardly contemplate a generation that would not know "Shema Yisrael," would not know of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, and would not recognize the letters of the Aleph-Bais. Rav Chaim never personally witnessed a Jew who knew as little about Judaism as the "foreigner from a distant land." But he did see that the above quoted verse alludes to this phenomenon.

Unfortunately, we are all too familiar with the realization of this verse.

It Is Easy To Re-Unite With A Long Lost Parent

Parshas Netzavim is always read the last Shabbos before Rosh HaShannah. There is a famous set of pasukim in this parsha: "For this commandment that I command you today is not hidden from you and is not distant. It is not in the heavens for you to say 'Who can ascend to the heavens for us and take it for us and let us hear it, so that we can perform it?' Nor is it across the sea for you to say, 'Who can cross to the other side of the sea for us and take it for us, and let us hear it, so that we can perform it?' Rather, the matter is very near to you, in your mouth and in your heart to achieve it. [Devorim 30:11-14]

The Rambam states that the mitzvah referred to in this section ("This commandment") is the mitzvah of Teshuvah [Repentance].

The Netziv [Rav Naftali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin 1817-1893] says that the mitzvah refers specifically to "Repentance out of love" (Teshuvah m'ahavah). However, the Netziv asks how the Torah could be describing the Mitzvah of Teshuvah as an "easy" mitzvah. Achieving "Repentance out of love" would appear to be one of man's most difficult spiritual tasks. How can the Torah suggest that a person may accomplish this with ease?

To buttress his question, the Netziv says that the way one comes to love a person is to get to know them. This is implicit in the expression "to know him is to love him." When a person loves another person, it is because the first person knows what the second person is all about. People appreciate and understand each other to the point that they develop a strong attachment.

Understanding the Almighty is beyond our ability. So how do we come to love Him? How can we come back to him out of "love?" What does it mean, "it is very easy" to achieve this kind of return to Him?

The Netziv answers by referring to the mystical idea that Israel and the Holy One, Blessed Be He, are one. A father can love a son even if he does not know him and even if he never sees him. The first time that they meet, they will be immediately drawn to one another, after even the slightest introduction. The natural connection between parent and child bridges any gap that may exist.

There was a 49-year-old adopted woman in California, whose adoptive parents told her that she originally came from Israel. The woman had always noticed she looked different than her parents. It was obvious that they were not her natural parents. She began to investigate her background. At about the same time, an Israeli journalist was doing an investigative article on a scandal involving Moroccan Jews who first arrived in Israel in the early 1950s. Many Moroccan mothers, who could not speak the language well and did not have any connections in the country, were told that their children died during childbirth. In actuality, these children were stolen and sold for adoption, both in Israel and overseas.

The woman from California traveled to Israel and met with the investigative reporter. They uncovered certain documents, and went back to the hospital where she was born. To make a very long story short, DNA testing enabled the woman to find her Moroccan mother -- who had been told that her child had died shortly after delivery, 49 years earlier.

These were two women who came from completely different cultures. They had nothing to do with each other for nearly five decades, for almost the entire lifetime of the daughter. When they met for the first time, they fell into each other's arms and began kissing each other and crying uncontrollably.

The mother did not know the daughter, and the daughter did not know the mother. They did not know each other's language and could not even communicate except through their tears and their kisses and their hugs. Why did they react this way? They reacted this way because this was a mother and her daughter.

Listen again to the words of the Netziv: A father and son -- even if they never met one another -- nevertheless, when they do meet, are drawn to one another after the slightest introduction, because nature helps out.

The Netziv then adds that what we observe among a flesh and blood parent and child is also true of the reunion (Teshuvah) between our Father in Heaven and His wayward children. The matter is not distant from us. Despite the fact that I am human and He is Eternal. Despite the fact that I haven't had anything to do with Him for decades, He is our Father and we are His children. Therefore it is "within the power of your mouth and the power of your heart to achieve it."

The matter is readily accomplished. The bond between parent and child is easily repaired and can never be permanently broken.

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These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 517, What Exactly Is The Mitzva of Shofar. Tapes or a complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail

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Covenant & Conversation

Thoughts on the Weekly Parsha from

RABBI DR. JONATHAN SACKS

Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Commonwealth

[From last year]

Nitzavim-Vayelech

THE SEDRA OF NITZAVIM IS ALWAYS READ ON THE SHABBAT BEFORE ROSH HASHANAH, when our thoughts are directed toward teshuvah - the great mitzvah of the ten days that begin with Rosh Hashanah and culminate on Yom Kippur. Where, though, in the Torah itself do we find the mitzvah of teshuvah? On this, two of the greatest sages of the Middle Ages, Maimonides and Nachmanides, differed fundamentally.

Here is Maimonides' account:

With regard to all the precepts of the Torah, positive and negative, if a person transgressed any one of them, either wilfully or in error, and repents and turns away from his sin, he is under a duty to confess before G-d, blessed be he, as it is said, "When a man or a woman shall commit any sin that men commit, to do a trespass against the Lord, and that person be guilty, then they shall confess their sin which they have done" (Numbers 5: 6-7). This means confess in words, and this confession is a positive command. How does one confess? The penitent says, "I beseech you, O Lord, I have sinned, I have acted perversely, I have transgressed before you and have done such and such, and I repent and am ashamed of my deeds, and I will never do this again." This constitutes the essence of confession. The fuller and more detailed the confession one makes, the more praiseworthy he is.

According to Maimonides, teshuvah has its origin in the Temple and its sacrifices, specifically those brought for transgressions (sin offering, guilt offering etc.). Part of the rite for such offerings was a verbal confession - vidui - on the part of the wrongdoer. The conditions for the sincerity of such confessions were [a] an acknowledgement that one did wrong; [b] remorse or shame; and [c] a determination not to repeat the offence in future. These are the fundamental elements of teshuvah.

There are obvious questions. If teshuvah is linked to the sacrificial order, what happened to it once the Temple was destroyed and the sacrificial system came to an end? What of teshuvah outside Israel and outside the confines of the Temple? Maimonides answers these questions in his Sefer Hamitzvot (positive command 73) by reference to the Mekhilta. The Mekhilta uses various textual warrants to show that confession is in fact a separate command in its own right, and applies with or without a sacrifice, in and outside the land of Israel. Verbal confession, vidui, is the outer act, teshuvah its internal correlate.

Nachmanides locates Teshuvah in a completely different source, namely in today's sedra. Moses, having set out the terms of the covenant and its attendant blessings and curses, then says this:

When all these blessings and curses I have set before you come upon you and you take them to heart wherever the Lord your G-d disperses you among the nations, and when you and your children return to the Lord your G-d and obey him with all your heart and with all your soul according to everything I command you today, then the Lord your G-d will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you and gather you again from all the nations where He scattered you. Even if you have been

banished to the most distant land under the heavens, from there the Lord your G-d will gather you and bring you back. He will bring you to the land that belonged to your fathers, and you will take possession of it. He will make you more prosperous and numerous than your fathers . . . You will again obey the Lord and follow all His commands I am giving you today. Then the Lord your G-d will make you prosperous in all work of your hands and in the fruit of your womb, the young of your livestock and crops of your land. The Lord will again delight in you and make you prosperous, just as He delighted in your fathers, if you obey the Lord your G-d and keep His commands and decrees that are written in this book of the law and turn to the Lord your G-d with all your heart and with all your soul.

The next verse continues, "For this command which I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach." Which command? Nachmanides says: the command of teshuvah. Why so?

The most striking feature of the passage above is that it is a set of variations on the Hebrew verb *lashuv*, the root of the noun *teshuvah*. This is almost entirely lost in English translation. All the underlined phrases - "take to heart", "restore your fortunes", "again" and "turn" - are, in the Hebrew text, forms of this verb. The Torah often repeats a word several times to emphasise its significance as a key-word: sometimes three or five times, but usually seven, as in the present instance (taking "restore your fortunes," *ve-shav et shevutekha*, as one composite phrase). Thus Nachmanides is quite right to see the subject of the passage as *teshuvah*. What, though, is *teshuvah* in this context?

In the Torah, sin is something more than a transaction in the soul, or even an act of wrongdoing narrowly conceived. It is an act in the wrong place. It disturbs the moral order of the world. The words for sin - *chet* and *averah* - both have this significance. *Chet* comes from the same verb as "to miss a target." *Averah*, like the English word "transgression," means "to cross a boundary, to enter forbidden territory, to be in a place one should not be." Only when we understand this does it become clear why the deepest punishment for sin in the Torah is exile. Adam and Eve were exiled from Eden. Cain was condemned to be an eternal wanderer. We say in our prayers, "Because of our sins we were exiled from our land." Because a sin is an act in the wrong place, its consequence is that the one who performs it finds himself in the wrong place - in exile, meaning, not at home. Sin alienates; it distances us from G-d, and the result is that we are distanced from where we ought to be, where we belong. We become aliens, strangers.

Hence the double meaning of *teshuvah*, most clearly expressed in our *sedra*, but found throughout the entire prophetic literature. It has both a physical and spiritual dimension, and the two are inseparable as if bonded by superglue: it means the physical return to the land and the spiritual return to G-d. *Teshuvah* is a double homecoming.

We can now see how deeply different are the approaches of Maimonides and Nachmanides. For Maimonides sin-and-repentance are part of the world of the priest (*torat cohanim*). They belong initially to the Temple and its service. When an individual or group sinned in biblical times, they brought a sacrifice and, as a token of their contrition, confessed their wrong. The supreme example of this was the service of the High Priest on Yom Kippur, when he made atonement "for himself, his household and the whole community of Israel" (Lev. 16).

For Nachmanides, sin-and-repentance are part of the broader sweep of Jewish history. They belong to the world, not of the priest but of the prophet (*torat nevi'im*), the figure who heard the voice of G-d in history, warned the people that public wrongdoing would lead to defeat and exile and who, when the exile eventually occurred, summoned the people back to their vocation as a prelude to their return to the land. Every individual act of *teshuvah* recapitulates, in some way, this larger pattern of return. *Teshuvah* in this sense is less atonement than homecoming - a subtle difference, but a difference none the less. It has nothing to do with the Temple and everything to do with a sense of the divine call ("Where are

you?") within the events that happen to us, whether individually as personal fate or collectively as Jewish history.

The primary feeling of sin in priestly consciousness is guilt; in prophetic consciousness it is a sense of alienation ("alienation" became a key word in both Marxism and existentialism: for the former as a symptom of the capitalist system in the industrial age, for the latter as the mark of "inauthentic" existence; Judaism, more ethically, links it with bad conscience, the knowledge that we have not acted as we should). For the priest, *teshuvah* is integrally linked with the idea of sacrifice and leads to atonement (*kapparah*). For the prophet, it is associated with behavioural change (*teshuvah* as "returning" to the right way) and leads to healing, mercy, forgiveness and restoration. For the priest, atonement relates primarily to individuals, whereas for the prophet (as in the words of Moses above) the reference is often to the people as a whole. It is individuals who sin and repent; it is the nation that undergoes exile and return.

How does Maimonides interpret the passage in this week's *sedra* that Nachmanides takes as the source for the *mitzvah* of *teshuvah*? He reads it, simply, not as a command but as a prophecy and promise:

All the prophets charged the people concerning *teshuvah*. Only through *teshuvah* will Israel be redeemed, and the Torah has already given the assurance that Israel will, at the end of its exile, finally repent and then be immediately redeemed, as it is said, "When all these blessings and curses I have set before you come upon you and you take them to heart wherever the Lord your G-d disperses you among the nations, and when you and your children return to the Lord your G-d and obey him with all your heart and with all your soul according to everything I command you today, then the Lord your G-d will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you and gather you again from all the nations where He scattered you . . ."

This difference of interpretation goes back to the Geonic period, three centuries earlier, when R. Hefetz read the passage as did Nachmanides, and R. Shmuel Gaon like Maimonides (*Otzar haGeonim*, Sanhedrin, 514).

There is no doubt whatsoever that Maimonides and Nachmanides were both right. Priest and prophet were not in conflict: they were two voices in a single conversation, two perspectives on a complex reality. When the Second Temple was destroyed and both the priesthood and prophecy came to an end as functioning institutions, both traditions merged into the institution of *teshuvah* as we have it today.

On the one hand Yom Kippur retains strong links with the service of the High Priest in Temple times. We read the details of that service during *Musaf*; we perform *vidui*, confession, in various ways; we make a point of giving *tzedakah* (financial sacrifice substituting for animal sacrifice). On the other, during the morning we read one of the greatest of all prophetic calls to repentance (Isaiah 57-58), with its insistence that fasting is nothing - a mere ritual - without ethical conduct:

Is this not the kind of fasting I have chosen [says G-d]: To loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, To set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter? We read another great example of a prophetic call to *teshuvah*, that of Jonah, just before *Neilah*. *Neilah* itself ends with the words, repeated seven times, "The Lord He is G-d" 7 - the climax of one of the great prophetic confrontations, between Elijah and the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, when the people publicly abandoned idolatry and proclaimed the kingship of G-d. It is wondrous how these two strands, priestly and prophetic, have been woven together so seamlessly in our liturgy.

So *teshuvah* is two things: a religious-metaphysical experience of sin and atonement (Maimonides), and an ethical-historical drama of exile and return (Nachmanides). For nearly two thousand years, the former predominated while the latter was no more than a distant memory and a pious hope. The Temple was gone, and so too were the prophets. But

whereas there was a substitute for the Temple (the synagogue as mikdash me'at, "a temple-in-microcosm") there was no real substitute for Israel as a nation-among-nations in the arena of history.

In the course of the twentieth century, that changed. Jews returned. The state of Israel was reborn. The promise of the prophets, millennia ago, came true. Yet the word teshuvah - in the sense meant by Moses in this week's sedra, and by Nachmanides in his construal of the command - has not yet been fully realised. There has been a physical homecoming to the land, but not yet a spiritual homecoming to the faith. Among a section of the population, yes; among the people as a whole, no. That challenge rests with us, our contemporaries and our children. The words of the prophets, never less than inspiring, have acquired a new salience. How it will happen, we do not know, but that it will happen, we do know, for we have G-d's promise: that the faith of Israel will be reborn just as its land and state have been. May we live to see it, and work to be part of it.



From: Yeshivat Har Etzion Office [office@etzion.org.il] Sent: September 08, 2004 3:15 AM To: yhe-sichot@etzion.org.il Subject: SICHOT64 -38: Parashat Nitzavim-Vayeilekh
Yeshivat Har Etzion Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash (Vbm) Student Summaries Of Sichot Of The Roshei Yeshiva Parashot Nitzavim-Vayeilekh

SICHA OF HARAV YEHUDA AMITAL SHLIT" A

Dedicated in honor of the engagement of Ira Karoll and Shoshi Butler. May they be zokheh livnot bayit ne'eman be-Yisrael.

Learning from Experience – One Lesson at a Time

Adapted by Dov Karoll And Moshe walked out, and he spoke these words to the Jewish people: I am a hundred and twenty years old today; I cannot go out and come in any more, [for] G-d has said to me, "You shall not go over this Jordan [River]." (Devarim 31:1-2) What is the Torah teaching us by saying that Moshe walked? Ibn Ezra (s.v. va-yelekh) explains that Moshe walked over to each tribe, to reassure the people, instilling confidence in their continued success after his passing. The Ramban (s.v. va-yelekh) explains that at the conclusion of the covenantal ceremony (chapter 30), the people returned to their tents, and the Torah now tells us that he walked over to them, moving from the Levite encampment over to the Israelite encampment, to honor the people, as if asking their permission to take leave of them. The Midrash Tanchuma (Vayeilekh 1) states that the opening word, "va-yelekh, and he walked," is a term that implies rebuke. But what rebuke is accomplished by Moshe's walking here? Rashi (verse 2, s.v. lo ukhal) explains that Moshe's message at the beginning of the parasha is that he can no longer continue, because he is not permitted to cross over into the land of Israel. According to this interpretation, it would seem that the message lies in the Moshe's acceptance of G-d's judgment, and the rebuke lies in the implicit difficulty of accepting Divine judgment. The Ramban (verse 2, s.v. va-yomer) cites Rashi's explanation and rejects it, but he does not offer an alternative on this particular point. Perhaps one could suggest, based on the explanation of the Ramban cited above on verse 1, that Moshe's very walking over to them provides the rebuke. The devotion and caring that Moshe Rabbeinu exhibits to the people may itself be the lasting impression he wants to leave. Sometimes just one sentence or even one action by a person can make all the difference. There was a student in the Yeshiva a number of years ago who told me, before leaving the Yeshiva, what made the greatest impression on him of all the things I did. He told me that one time he did something wrong for which he expected me to reprimand him.

For the rest of the year, every time he came to shake my hand for Shabbat Shalom, and every time he saw me, he was afraid I would scold him for his action. This impacted on his relationship with me for the entire year. Here is an example of where even silence can have a great impact. One student told me that a single sentence he heard from a professor of his had a great influence on him. The professor said that what's important is not what you do, but who you are. Just one sentence, out of all the lectures he heard, had that impact. Every year I speak about lessons that can be learned from the Gemara's discussion of Elazar ben Dordaya (Avoda Zara 17a), and I will do so again this year. But for now I just want to point out that it was just one sentence that the harlot said to him, "Ben Dordaya's repentance will not be accepted," that served as the impetus for the process of repentance that followed. I have read many books. I do not remember everything in all of them. There are some books from which I remember just one thing. There is a book written by Rabbi Chaim Vital, great student of the Ari z"l, from which I remember just one thing. I quoted that one thing to someone once, and that person asked me if I remember the entire book. I told him that I read it once, but I do not remember a single thing from the entire book, other than the idea I had just quoted. I once attended a Sheva Berachot about fifty years ago, where an old Yemenite rabbi got up to speak. All he did was quote a single rabbinic dictum, verbatim, without adding a single word, and then he sat down. I was so jealous of him. Rabbis and teachers expend so much energy in preparing what they will say, just in order for there to be that one line which people will remember. I do not expect you to remember two things from what I said. If you remember two things, that is too much. The same goes for musar books, ethical treatises. You do not need to remember every line in the book. But make sure that you take at least one thing from it. May we merit to take the lessons from our experiences, books and sermons, and merit a ketiva va-chatima tova, for us and the entire Jewish people. [This sicha was delivered on leil Shabbat, Parashat Nitzavim-Vayeilekh, 5762 (2002).]

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From: Yeshivat Har Etzion Office [mailto:office@etzion.org.il] Sent: Thursday, September 09, 2004 To: yhe-central@etzion.org.il Subject: YHE Announcement
B"H 16 Elul 5764 Sometime ago, HaRav Amital shlit" a, although not planning to retire as yet, as Rosh HaYeshiva, expressed interest in initiating steps to choose his eventual replacement. To this end, a committee was established, consisting of representatives of the Ramim, alumni of the Yeshiva in Israel and abroad, and the administration. The committee dealt with the matter for several months and presented its recommendations to the Roshei Yeshiva and the administration. The recommendations were accepted by them and they chose HaRav Yaakov Medan and HaRav Baruch Gigi as designated Roshei Yeshiva. The actual appointment will become effective during the 5766 academic year, at which time the two new Roshei Yeshiva will serve alongside the two current Roshei Yeshiva. When HaRav Amital shlit" a retires, the Yeshiva will be headed by three Roshei Yeshiva. At some future date with an eye to HaRav Lichtenstein's eventual retirement, another Rosh Yeshiva will be designated to serve in due time jointly with HaRav Medan and HaRav Gigi as co-Roshei Yeshiva.

We trust that these present and future steps will ensure the orderly transfer of leadership and provide, with BS"D, the proper balance of continuity and innovation. A video of the sicha given by HaRav Amital making this announcement to the yeshiva can be found on the Har Etzion website.

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We trust that these present and future steps will ensure the orderly transfer of leadership and provide, with BS"D, the proper balance of continuity and innovation. A video of the sicha given by HaRav Amital making this announcement to the yeshiva can be found on the Har Etzion website.

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For high speed download: <http://www.haretzion.org/videos/RYA-announcement.wmv>
Ketiva ve-chatima tova



From: Aish.com [mailto:newsletterserver@aish.com] Sent: August 15, 2004

**WRITING THE TORAH
BY RABBI ARYEH KAPLAN**

From "The Handbook of Jewish Thought" (Vol. 2, Maznaim

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Who composed the original Torah? How is a scroll written today? Is our current text accurate?

An excerpt from Rabbi Kaplan's Handbook of Jewish Thought.

The Torah is the foundation of Judaism. Without it Judaism cannot exist.

G-d revealed the Torah through Moses. It is thus written, "Moses commanded us the Torah, an inheritance to the congregation of Jacob" (Deut. 33:4).

It is a foundation of our faith to believe that Moses was the greatest of all prophets, both past and future. It is thus written, "There has not arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom G-d knew face to face" (Deut. 34:10).

The revelation of Moses was unique. It differed from all other prophecy both quantitatively and qualitatively. Moreover, Moses was the first prophet with a message for others.

Moses was therefore born with the capacity for great spiritual accomplishment. Regarding his birth, it is written, "[His mother] saw that he was good" (Exodus 2:2).

Moses made use of his inherent spiritual gifts to negate himself completely before G-d. It is thus written, "The man Moses was very humble, more so than any man on the face of the earth." (Numbers 12:3).

All prophets saw through a dull glass, but Moses saw through a clear brilliant glass. Since Moses' personality was completely nonexistent before G-d, his physical nature no longer acted as a barrier between him and G-d. Moses' revelation was therefore of a direct nature, as it is taught, "All prophets saw through a dull glass, but Moses saw through a clear brilliant glass."

Therefore, unlike other prophets, Moses received his revelation clearly, not masked by symbolism. G-d thus said, "I speak to [Moses] mouth to mouth, manifestly, and not in allegory" (Numbers 12:8).

Unlike other prophets, Moses would receive his revelation while wide awake and in full command of his senses. G-d thus said, "When [I] G-d speak through one of you... I will speak with him in a dream. Not so My servant Moses..." (Numbers 12:6).

Unlike other prophets, Moses did not experience G-d's revelation as an overwhelming occurrence. It is thus written, "G-d spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend" (Exodus 33:11).

Unlike other prophets, Moses was always in a potential state of prophecy. He could therefore receive G-d's revelation at will. It is thus written, "When Moses went into the Tent of Meeting (Ohel Moed), he heard the Voice speaking to him..." (Numbers 7:89).

When asked an opinion, Moses was able to answer, "Stand by, and let me hear what instructions G-d gives regarding you" (Numbers 8:9). Moses was able to receive revelation from G-d at any time and in any place.

Unlike other prophets, whose revelation was limited, Moses had access to all the gates of wisdom. G-d had thus promised him, "I will make all My benefits pass before you" (Exodus 34:19). G-d likewise said, "[Moses] is trusted in all My house" (Numbers 12:7).

Moses was therefore the master of all the prophets. All other prophecies are alluded to in the Torah. G-d even revealed to Moses many future speculations and discussions surrounding the Torah.

It is a foundation of our faith that the entire Torah, both written and oral, was revealed to Moses by G-d.

Moses performed greater miracles than any other prophet. Still, it is not because of miracles that we believe his revelation, but because G-d Himself bore witness that Moses was the bearer of His word. G-d thus told Moses, "I will come to you in a thick cloud, so that the people will hear when I speak with you, and they will believe in you forever" (Exodus 19:9). The authority of the Torah does not come from any miracle, but from G-d Himself.

Eternal Torah

It is a foundation of our faith to believe in the eternal authority of the Torah. It is thus written, "Things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever" (Deut. 29:38).

Just as G-d Himself does not change, so the Torah which is His eternal testimony to Israel, cannot be changed. Moses thus said, "You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor shall you subtract from it; you must keep the commandments of G-d your Lord, which I command you" (Deut. 4:2). Therefore, no commandment of the Torah can ever be abrogated or changed.

The Torah scrolls that we have today are exactly the same as the Torah given to Moses by god.

The Torah consists of five books:

Genesis - Bereshit Exodus - Shemot Leviticus - VaYikra Numbers - BaMidbar Deuteronomy - Devarim

It is a foundation of our faith that every word of the Torah was dictated to Moses by G-d.

A person who denies the divine origin of even a single word or variant spelling or reading in the Torah is considered a nonbeliever who has no portion in the World to Come. Concerning such a person, it is written, "Because he has despised G-d's word... his soul shall be utterly cut off; his sin shall remain upon him" (Numbers 15:31).

Dictation by G-d

The entire Torah was therefore written by Moses as dictated by G-d. This included all the happenings recorded in it from the time of creation.

Balaam was a prophet, and his prophecies are contained in the Torah. Nevertheless, they were written by Moses as dictated by G-d.

Although the Book of Deuteronomy is written as the testimony of Moses, every word in it was written at the express commandment of G-d. G-d dictated the book as if Moses himself were addressing the people.

There is a controversy regarding the last eight verses of Deuteronomy (34:5-12) which deal with Moses' death. Some authorities maintain that they were written by Moses himself at G-d's dictation. Others maintain that these verses were written by Joshua.

Just before the revelation at Sinai, Moses wrote everything that had transpired up until that point. It is thus written, "Moses wrote all of G-d's words" (Exodus 24:4). Before completing the covenant, he read this part of the Torah. It is written, "[Moses] took the Book of the covenant, and read it so that the people would hear. They said, 'All that G-d has spoken, we will do and we will listen'" (Exodus 24:7). After this, G-d would call Moses to the Tent of Meeting (Ohel Moed) to dictate the Torah to him. G-d would call Moses, and Moses would acknowledge that he was ready.

G-d would dictate each passage, and Moses would repeat it aloud. G-d would dictate each passage of the Torah to Moses, and Moses would repeat it aloud. He would then write it down.

G-d would dictate a paragraph to Moses, and then give him a break in order to consider it. These breaks are preserved in the Torah in the form of spacings, dividing the text into paragraphs (parshiot).

Moses would transcribe each of these portions as a small scroll. Shortly before his death, he combined all these portions to form the Torah that we have today. According to another opinion, however, with the exception of certain portions that were needed earlier, the entire Torah was preserved orally until just before Moses' death when he wrote it all down at once.

Since parts of the Torah were not assembled until many years after they were given, they are not always in chronological order. However, wherever chronological order is ignored, there is something to be learned from the ordering in the Torah. According to some authorities, laws can even be derived from the ordering of the paragraphs in the Torah. With regard to the book of Deuteronomy, which was written all at once, there is a unanimous opinion.

The entire Torah was given to Moses during two intervals. The first part was given during the year after the Exodus. The rest was given shortly before Israel crossed the Jordan at the end of the 40 years in the desert. Between these two periods, there was a hiatus of 38 years, during which no portion of the Torah was given.

G-d always dictated the Torah, as well as other books of the Bible, in the language used by the people at the time.

Standard Text

Before his death, Moses wrote 13 Torah scrolls. Twelve of these were given to the 12 tribes. The thirteenth was placed in the Ark of the Covenant. This was eventually deposited in the Holy of Holies in the Temple.

This last Torah was the standard by which all other scrolls were judged. It was occasionally removed from the ark for this purpose.

There were times that this Torah was almost lost. A number of Israelite kings had attempted to uproot or change the teachings of the Torah. Thus, during the reign of Achaz (3183-3199; 578-562 BCE) many Torah scrolls were destroyed. Because of this, the Kohen-priests hid the Torah written by Moses in order to safeguard it.

Later during the reign of Manasseh (3228-3283; 533-478 BCE), efforts to destroy the Torah were so successful that the existence of the Torah written by Moses had to be concealed from all but a dedicated few. It was only later, during the reign of YOSHIAH (in 3303; 458 BCE) that this Torah was found hidden in the Temple. It is thus written, "Chilkiah the Kohen-priest found the book of G-d's Torah, [written] in Moses' hand" (2 Chronicles 34:14). King YOSHIAH used this as an occasion to rededicate the people to the observance of the Torah.

The Tablets of the Ten Commandments were concealed in a catacomb prepared by King Solomon in the Temple. When Jerusalem was in danger of invasion, King YOSHIAH hid the Ark containing the original Torah and the Tablets of the Ten Commandments. It was concealed in a catacomb that had been prepared by King Solomon when he had first built the Temple. It is still there today.

During the Babylonian exile (3338-3408; 423-353 BCE), there was a decline in knowledge of the Torah. Inter-marriage made headway, and many people forgot the Torah and its commandments. When Ezra and Nehemiah returned to the Holy Land, they restored the Torah to its original place. Ezra also wrote a letter perfect Torah scroll to be used as a standard.

Write Your Own Torah

It is a positive commandment for every Jew to write a Torah or have one written for him. It is thus written, "Now write this song for yourselves" (Deut. 31:9). Since it is forbidden to write portions of the Torah separately, this commandment is an injunction to write the entire Torah.

In order to fulfill this commandment, one must write a letter perfect Torah. If the Torah contains the slightest error, even in a variant spelling, it is not valid for the fulfillment of this commandment, although in some cases it may still be publicly read in the synagogue. Therefore, the most scrupulous care was taken to copy the Torah, letter for letter.

Moreover, every Israelite king was also commanded to write a second Torah, which was always to accompany him. It is thus written, "When [the king] sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write a copy of this Torah... It shall be with him, and he shall read from it, all the days of his life" (Deut. 17:18-19).

During the time of the first Temple, it was the practice of the Sanhedrin to correct the king's Torah from the Torah written by Moses which was kept in the Temple. After the death of the king, these highly accurate Torah scrolls were kept by the Sanhedrin.

A Torah was likewise kept in the Second Temple which was read at the great assembly on Yom Kippur and at the Public Reading every seven years. This Torah was also used as a standard to correct all other Torah scrolls. Some say that this was the Torah written by Ezra.

Preserving the Accuracy

Throughout all generations, great care was taken to preserve the Torah exactly as it was given by Moses. The scribe is thus given the advice, "Be careful with your task, for it is sacred work -- if you add or subtract a single letter, you will destroy everything." (Talmud)

Since every Torah must be letter perfect, it must be carefully copied from another scroll. It is forbidden to write a single letter without copying it from another Torah. Moreover, the scribe must repeat every word out loud before writing it down, so as to insure accuracy in copying. This was the custom among the prophets, as we find, "He pronounced all these words for me with his mouth, and I wrote them with ink in the book" (Jeremiah 36:18).

If a Torah or other sacred writings are incorrectly written, it is forbidden to keep them for more than 30 days, lest they be used or copied. After this period, they must be either corrected or hidden. It is thus written, "Do not let wrong remain in your tents" (Job 11:14).

Originally, the Torah and other scripture were so carefully preserved that every letter, word, and sentence was counted. Traditions still exist based on this knowledge.

However, after the Babylonian exile, it became impossible to find precise Torah scrolls, and several questions arose regarding the exact reading of the Torah and other scripture. Therefore, when the Great Assembly fixed the Bible canon under the leadership of Ezra, they also restored the exact readings of the scriptures...

Script and Vowelization

Although the "Old Hebrew" script was commonly used in ancient Israel, the original Torah scrolls, as well as the Tablets of the Ten Commandments, were written in the same Ashurit script used for Torah scrolls today. According to other opinions, however, the Ashurit script was forgotten during the Babylonian exile, and the common Old Hebrew script was used for Torah scrolls, until the Ashurit script was restored by Ezra. A third opinion is that the Torah and Tablets were originally given in the Old Hebrew script, and the Ashurit script was introduced by Ezra.

The original Torah scrolls were written without vowels, just as they are written today. However, just as the exact text of the Torah was given to Moses, so were the precise readings. These were preserved orally until they were finally put in writing. It is for this reason that every word must be correctly pronounced when the Torah is read. There is a great deal of significance in the vowel signs used in the Torah.

Nevertheless, the written word is pre-eminent. When it contradicts the traditional pronunciation, we always interpret according to the written word.

Similarly, the Torah was never written with punctuation, although its sentence structure was revealed to Moses and transmitted orally. Since there is a reason for the Torah's sentence structure, when reading scripture, one should complete an entire sentence, and not just read part of it.

Likewise, the notes used in chanting the Torah were originally taught to Moses. Similar notes were also used by the prophets, but they were chanted with a somewhat different melody. One should therefore be extremely careful to use the correct chant when reading the Torah. Although we do not always follow the accents in interpreting scripture, the notes have a very deep significance.

There are passages which are traditionally counted as "rectifications of the scribes (tikun sofrim). In the Torah, these can only be interpreted as interpretations of the scribes, since even a prophet cannot add a single letter to the Torah. However, in other books of the Bible, where the majority of these emendations occur, they may actually be changes introduced by the Great Assembly when they fixed the Bible canon.

Similarly, Moses was taught that certain words in the Torah should be written and not read, read but not written, or read differently than they are written. Since they understood the reasons for this, the Great Assembly occasionally used similar devices when they had to change or correct a reading in the other books of the Bible.

Layers of Meaning

Because the Torah reveals G-d's will to man, it was given letter by letter to avoid any misinterpretation. Therefore, even the most seemingly trivial passages and variations in the Torah can teach many lessons to the person who is willing to explore its depths.

Although the Torah can be read by the simplest individual, one must delve beneath its surface meaning if one is to discover its true treasures. We thus find that "Ezra set his heart to delve into G-d's Torah" (Ezra 7:10). It is similarly taught, "If you seek it as silver, and search for it as for hidden treasures, then you shall... find the knowledge of G-d" (Proverbs 2:4).

Since the Torah is a finite book expressing the will of an infinite G-d, many lessons must be derivable from each passage.

Many allusions and mysteries can be found when probing beneath its surface. The Torah can be understood according to its simple meaning, or according to more complex exegesis. Besides this, many allusions and mysteries can be found when one probes beneath its surface.

Even the seemingly simple narratives in the Torah contain many secret meanings and lessons. If they were mere stories, they could have been written by the hand of man, rather than through the highest forms of inspiration.

Therefore, a person who seeks to explore the true depths of the Torah finds himself on a road that has no end. It is thus written, "Its measure is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea" (Job 11:9).

The key to understanding the Torah is the oral tradition handed down from the time of Moses and embodied in the Talmud and Midrash. However, even these traditions must be carefully studied, since they were often handed down word for word.

There are, however, many cases where even the original meaning and wisdom behind these traditions have been forgotten. This was predicted by the prophet: "The wisdom of the wise shall perish" (Isaiah 29:14). Since these traditions may be as difficult to understand as scripture itself, one may occasionally depart from them in interpreting the Torah, as long as no question of law is involved. However, where questions of Torah law is involved, the Talmudic traditions must be followed at all times.

Non-Literal Meaning

The Torah must be studied as a whole, since one ambiguous passage may be clarified by another. One must be careful to take an overall view, and not interpret any scripture out of context.

There are times when the Torah speaks in allegory and metaphor. There are four conditions under which there is a tradition that the Torah is not to be taken according to its literal meaning:

Where the plain meaning is rejected by common experience. Where it is repudiated by obvious logic. Where it is contradicted by obvious scripture. Where it is opposed by clear Talmudic tradition.

Where none of these conditions hold, the scripture must be taken literally, and not rejected on the basis of mere prejudice. In such a case, even when a passage is also interpreted allegorically, the literal meaning must still be retained.

The Torah always speaks in the language of man. G-d worded the Torah so that it would be accessible to all people for all times.

Names of G-d

The most frequently used names in the Bible are the Tetragrammaton (YHVH), and Elohim. Each of these has special significance.

The name Elohim represents G-d as Ruler of creation, and thus, the same word is used for judges and angels. The name Elohim is therefore interpreted to indicate that G-d is the "master of all power." This also indicates that G-d's primary relationship with the universe is to oversee all the forces of creation and providence. When the name Elohim is used in G-d's relationships with man, it indicates that He is acting in justice, according to laws as strict as those of nature.

The Tetragrammaton (YHVH) is used as a proper name of G-d, denoting Him as the ultimate Source of all existence, high above the universe and its laws. The Tetragrammaton is therefore interpreted to mean that G-d "was, is and will be," indicating that He is outside the realm of space, time and all other attributes of nature. Therefore, when the Tetragrammaton is used in relation to man, it indicates that G-d is acting in mercy, transcending all the rules of providence.

Source of Inspiration and Study

Since The Torah was dictated by G-d, there are many instances where it speaks about things that took place after it was written. The Torah likewise contains other information that could only have been obtained prophetically.

There are instances where the Torah appears to contain self-contradictions. However, with careful study, one can always find another passage or an oral tradition that reconciles all contradictions.

G-d wrote the Torah in a complex manner so that it would be a never ending source of inspiration and study. Just as new scientific concepts are derived from apparent contradictions in nature, so can knowledge of G-d's purpose and law be derived from the apparent self-contradictions in the Torah. If the Torah were written as simply as other literature, it would hardly be the object of intensive study, much less lifelong devotion.

The values of the Torah occasionally may not correspond to those of contemporary society, or they may seem irrelevant to our times. However, while contemporary values are of human origin and transient, those of the Torah are divine and eternal. It is taught that when King Solomon, the greatest genius of all time, considered certain commandments irrelevant, G-d said, "A thousand like Solomon will pass away, but not a single jot of the Torah will be changed."

Every glory and wonder, and all deep mysteries are hidden in the Torah and sealed in its treasures. There is no branch of wisdom, natural or divine, that is not contained in its depths. The Psalmist therefore prayed, "Open my eyes, so that I may behold wondrous things out of Your Torah" (Psalms 119:18).

The divine origin of the Torah is manifest by its incongruity with the age of its birth, its original, unborrowed, solitary greatness, and the suddenness with which it burst forth in an age of violence and superstition, shining forth on the world like a beacon of truth.

For over 3,000 years, the Torah has been kept by the Jewish people, not so much because of the miracles which accompanied its revelation, but because it embraces the depths and heights of human nature, fulfilling a need that G-d knows to exist in man. The Torah is therefore intrinsically perfect, and requires no further external evidence for the truths it teaches. The Psalmist thus said, "G-d's Torah is perfect, it restores the soul" (Psalms 19:8).

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From: Shema Yisrael Torah Network [shemalist@shemayisrael.com]

Sent: September 09, 2004 6:52 PM To: Peninim Parsha

PENINIM ON THE TORAH

BY RABBI A. LEIB SCHEINBAUM

Nitzavim

You are standing today, all of you, before Hashem, your G-d. (29:9) The Midrash explains the word nitzavim, standing. When the people heard the frightening curses enumerated in Parashas Ki Savo, they were overwhelmed with fear at what seemed to be a hopeless future. Hence, Moshe Rabbeinu comforted them, saying that despite their previous

sinful behavior, they were still standing before Hashem. He had not eliminated them in the past, and He will continue to sustain them in the future. The Tochachah, Admonition, was there to inspire fear, as well as to indicate the punishments which would atone for their evil deeds. The commentators wonder why Klal Yisrael reacted so negatively to the curses in Parashas Ki Savo and not to the forty-nine curses enumerated in Parashas Bechukosai.

Horav Shmuel David Walkin, zl, suggests that there is one curse in the litany of ninety-eight curses that inspired the Jewish People with overwhelming fear: "He will bring upon you all the sufferings of Egypt, of which you were terrified, and they will cleave to you." (Devarim 28:60) He cites the Alter, zl, m'Kelm who explains the significance of machalas Mitzrayim, the illnesses of Egypt, and relates why they are referred to with the unique term, makah, plague. He explains that the makas Mitzrayim did not accomplish anything in terms of atonement. Pharaoh continued along his sinful way, ignoring the punishment. If the illness does not effect a change, it is a machalah b'li refuah, an illness for which there is neither cure nor therapeutic effect. The makos that Klal Yisrael undergo bring about teshuvah, repentance, inspiring them to rise up from the depths of sin to correct their ways. This is the underlying meaning of the pasuk in Shemos 15:26, "If you hearken diligently to the voice of Hashem...then any of the diseases that I placed upon Egypt, I will not bring upon you, for I am Hashem, your Healer." In the Talmud Sanhedrin, 101, Chazal ask, "If He does not send illness, why is healing necessary?" They explain that if Klal Yisrael listens, then Hashem will not send illness. If they do not listen, He will send illness, but He will heal them, because the purpose of His punishment is not punitive, but restorative, to purge them of sin and influence them to repent. Hashem will never send against us an Egyptian form of distress, the focus of which is purely to punish. Whatever emanates from Hashem is to inspire us to return to Him.

We now understand why Klal Yisrael became so disconcerted when they heard the curse that Hashem would bring upon them the sufferings of Egypt. They could handle the punishment if it would stimulate teshuvah. The thought that they would have pain for the purpose of pain, punishment that was punitive -- and not conducive to repentance -- was frightening.

Incidentally, there is a powerful lesson to be derived herein, especially as we prepare to usher in a new year with its challenges, its opportunities for success, its trials and travails, and its symbol of hope. What Hashem does to us is really for us, to make us better people, to serve Him better, that we can ultimately earn the true reward that is awaiting each one of us.

You are standing today, all of you...the heads of your tribes, your elders, and your officers - all the men of Yisrael. (29:9)

On the last day of Moshe Rabbeinu's life, he assembled all of Klal Yisrael and inducted them into Hashem's Covenant for the last time. In the Yerushalmi at the end of Meseches Horayos, Chazal make the following intriguing statement: "Why did Moshe Rabbeinu precede the roshim, heads of the tribes, before the zekeinim, the Torah scholars and elders, while Yehoshua, upon speaking to the people, preceded the elders before the leaders of the tribes? Moshe did not exert himself in the study of Torah. Hashem gave it to him as a gift, thus ensuring that he would never forget it. Yehoshua, in contrast, had to toil in order to retain the Torah that he had learned from Moshe. Thus, Yehoshua had a more profound appreciation of the zekeinim than did Moshe."

What an incredible statement! Horav Moshe Shapiro, shlita, adds that only Chazal could issue such a compelling declaration. Moshe Rabbeinu, our greatest teacher, the quintessential leader of Klal Yisrael, the Adon v'Avi haNeviim, master and father of all prophets, did not know how to value the toil expended by Torah scholars as well as Yehoshua did. He was the greatest scholar, but since his scholarship was not the result of

yegia, toil and exertion, he was missing a vital component in his ability to hold the talmid chacham, Torah scholar, in the proper esteem.

Chazal are clearly asserting that in order to appreciate ameilus ba'Torah, toil in Torah, one must himself have had to participate in Torah study b'ameilus. Just as one does not reach the summit of Torah knowledge without prior exertion in studying Torah, so, too, is he not qualified to value and appreciate those who have achieved proficiency in Torah knowledge. To be ameil ba'Torah is to never interrupt one's learning. To paraphrase Horav Elchonon Wasserman, zl, "Vihigisa" means one must tracht, think, in learning. There should not be any cessation in one's relationship with Torah learning.

We may add that this concept applies to all endeavors. Unless one has "been there," he is not qualified to judge one who has. All too often, we make judgment calls and establish opinions based upon how we perceive an issue or a person. Yet, we forget to take into consideration how this issue or person evolved to this point. If there are reservations about Moshe Rabbeinu's capacity for evaluating, yegias ha'Torah, what should we say?

When a person is ameil ba'Torah, genuinely toils in Torah, he can reach unlimited heights, regardless of his ability. Furthermore, the rewards in store for those who toil in Torah -- and the esteem in which they are held -- are incredible. Toil is not just a lofty way of studying Torah; rather, it is an absolute requirement! Horav Yisrael Gustman, zl, was a gaon who exemplified ameilus ba'Torah. When he was only twenty years old, he was appointed as a dayan, judge, on the bais din of Harav Chaim Ozer Grodzenski, zl, the venerable rav of pre-World War II Vilna, and the leader of world Jewry. Rav Yisrael served as dayan for twenty-five years. When he came to Eretz Yisrael, he was granted an audience with the Steipler Rav. The Steipler Rav could not hear well. Thus, he had his visitors write down their requests. Rav Yisrael wrote his request and signed his note, Yisrael Gustman. Upon reading the note, the Steipler queried, "Was your father the dayan in Rav Chaim Ozer's bais din?" Rav Yisrael replied, "That is I."

"That is you?!" the Steipler asked incredulously. The Steipler was not well and hardly left his house. Yet, he stood up and ran to Rav Yisrael, hugging and kissing him. "You have no idea the esteem in which you were held by Rav Chaim Ozer!"

A similar incident occurred when Rav Gustman went to visit the Tchebiner Rav, zl, who donned his hat, stood up, and recited the special brachah one makes upon seeing an outstanding talmid chacham. One who toils in Torah achieves the greatest respect and reaches the zenith in Torah knowledge.

Horav Moshe Aharon Stern, zl, gives a practical analogy about toil in Torah. He asserts that one who is ameil, toils, is assured of gadlus ba'Torah, noble achievement in Torah. Hashem gives the Torah to each and every Jew but only if the person prepares vessels for containing it. Someone who comes with a "shnapps-glass," shot glass, will have his small cup filled. One who comes with a large barrel will have his container filled to the top. Every one of us should maximize the time we dedicate to Torah study. Those that do will reap rewards commensurate with their toil.

PARSHAS VAYEILECH Gather together the people, the men, women and the small children. (31:12)

The mitzvah of Hakhel took place once every seven years on the first day of Chol Hamoed Succos following a Shemittah year. Everyone was included in this mitzvah: men, women and even the small children. As Chazal state, "The men came to learn; the women came to listen; the children came to give reward to those who brought them." The Malbim explains the benefit the children had in attending the Hakhel experience. Although they could not understand the proceedings, their eyes would be glued to the awesome sight of millions of Jews gathered together for the sole purpose of hearing the Dvar Hashem, Word of G-d. This would

leave an indelible impression on them, inspiring them to lead lives of kedushah v'taharah, holiness and purity.

While the mitzvah of Hakhel is not in effect today, Horav Avraham Pam, zl, suggests that its message is eternal and certainly worth contemplating. A child develops a love for what he sees his parents cherish. When a child sees his father learning, he develops a love of learning. When a child notices his father is not at home and, after asking where he is, he hears that his father is in the bais hamedrash learning, he, in turn, also wants to learn. On the other hand, if he notices his father spending his time doing everything else but learning, the message he will derive is, regrettably, clearly negative. Parents have an enormous responsibility in raising their children in the Torah way. Rav Pam cites the Viddui, confession prayer, that we recite on Yom Kippur, "Al cheit she'chatanu le'fanecha b'prikas ol. "For the sin that we have sinned against You in throwing off the yoke." The simple meaning is that this is a reference to the yoke of Heaven. Rav Pam understands this also as a confession for reneging the yoke of parenthood. The responsibility is awesome; the challenge is formidable, but that is the essence of parenting. Nachas does not just happen. One has to work and work for it. At times, we allow our guard to slip, as we defer to the many pressures of life and child-rearing. Our children are our most precious possessions. It is up to us to make the correct decisions for them, not necessarily based upon what is easiest and best for us. All too often, our decisions are mired by the "What are others going to say?" syndrome. If we care for our children, we will do what is best for them and not what enhances our image. Parenting is an endeavor which does not allow much room for error, so it would be best that we make the correct and proper decisions the first time around.

Gather to me all the elders of your tribes and your officers. (31:28)

Rashi comments that the chatzotzros, trumpets, were used that day to assemble the people. These trumpets were made exclusively for Moshe Rabbeinu's use and Yehoshua did not have authority over them. Indeed, they were hidden by Hashem during Moshe's lifetime in fulfillment of Shlomo HaMelech's dictum in Koheles 5:6, "And there is no rulership on the day of death." The Midrash in the end of Sefer Bereishis emphasizes that Hashem hid Moshe's trumpets to ensure that no one else would use them. Horav Mordechai Ilan, zl, explains that every leader is endowed with specific qualities, abilities and talents that will assist him in leading his generation. What works for his generation will not necessarily succeed in the next generation. His trumpets are for his use during his tenure as leader. With his passing, the baton is passed to the next leader who has his own trumpets which are suitable for use in his specific generation. Every generation has its Moshe Rabbeinu, and every Moshe has his singular trumpet.

And I will conceal My face from them... But I will have surely concealed My face on that day. (31:17,18)

Klal Yisrael acknowledges that its troubles are the result of Hashem removing His Presence from their midst. Their acknowledgement does not suffice to effect Hashem's return. It is only through sincere teshuvah, repentance, preceded by Viddui, confession, that Hashem's concealment will end. How does one bring Hashem into his life? How does one make the Shechinah, Divine Presence, a factor in his daily life? Horav Moshe Swift, zl, cites a fascinating Chazal in the end of Meseches Makkos 24A, which sheds light on our query. David HaMelech in Tehillim 15 describes the ideal Jewish personality. "Who shall sojourn in Your tent, who shall dwell upon Your holy mountain?" David HaMelech goes on to detail the quintessential Jewish character; "Walking uprightly, working righteousness, speaking truth in his heart, having no slander on his tongue, nor doing any evil to his fellow." He concludes, "He who does these things shall never be moved." Chazal relate that when Rabban Gamliel would approach this chapter in Tehillim, he would weep, saying, "Is it only he that does all these things that shall not be moved? Does this imply that he who does only one of these, that he is moved?"

The reply was, "No, No, David HaMelech does not say that he must do all these things. Even if a man observes only one thing, if he demonstrates one quality, but he does it wholeheartedly -- because it is Hashem's command -- then he shall not be moved for eternity." In his Peirush HaMishnayos, the Rambam adds, "If a person fulfills any one of the Taryag Mitzvos, 613 commandments, as it should be fulfilled, without any ulterior motive or improper intention of any possible kind, but purely for the sake of the mitzvah and for the love of G-d's commands, he thereby becomes worthy of eternal life."

The Rambam asserts that Rav Chanania ben Teradyon, one of the Asarah Harugei Malchus, Ten Martyrs, earned his portion in Olam Habah, not because of his martyrdom, but, rather, because of one mitzvah that he performed completely lishmah, for the sake of Heaven, without any vestige of personal interest, only for the love of Hashem and fulfillment of His command!

What a powerful thought. If we want to bring the Shechinah into our midst, we just have to perform one mitzvah l'shem Shomayim. This brings G-d into our daily lives. It touches our homes and makes them a veritable Mishkan, Sanctuary. It permeates our lives as we cling to the Almighty. The Jew who acts l'shem Shomayim forges an unbreakable link between Heaven and earth.

Hashem conceals His Presence from us because we are not willing to repent. If we begin performing mitzvos in the correct and proper manner, however, we will merit His return, to bring Him back into our lives. Of course, we must observe all of the mitzvos, not just pick and choose what is most palatable. It is understood that we cannot maintain the correct kavanah, attitude, towards all mitzvos. If we take one mitzvah and perform it correctly, l'shem Shomayim, we will be privileged to bring Hashem into our lives, so that we can continue performing the rest of the mitzvos properly - for Hashem.

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Written and compiled by RABBI YAAKOV ASHER SINCLAIR

OVERVIEW

Netzavim On the last day of his life, Moshe gathers together all the people, both young and old, lowly and exalted, men and women in a final initiation. The covenant includes not only those who are present, but even those generations yet unborn. Moshe admonishes the people again to be extremely vigilant against idol worship, because in spite of having witnessed the abominations of Egypt, there will always be the temptation to experiment with foreign philosophies as a pretext for immorality. Moshe describes the desolation of the Land of Israel which will be a result of the failure to heed Hashem's mitzvos. Both their descendants and foreigners alike will remark on the singular desolation of the Land and its apparent inability to be sown or to produce crops. The conclusion will be apparent to all - the Jewish People have forsaken the One who protects them, in favor of idols which can do nothing. Moshe promises, however, that the people will eventually repent after both the blessings and the curses have been fulfilled. However assimilated they will have become among the nations, eventually

Hashem will bring them back to Eretz Yisrael. Moshe tells the people to remember that the Torah is not a remote impossibility; rather its fulfillment is within the grasp of every Jew. The Parsha concludes with a dramatic choice between life and death. Moshe exhorts the people to choose life.

Vayelech On this, the last day of his life, Moshe goes from tent to tent throughout the camp, bidding farewell to his beloved people, encouraging them to "keep the faith." Moshe tells them that whether he is among them or not, Hashem is with them, and will vanquish their enemies. Then he summons Yehoshua, and in front of all the people, exhorts him to be strong and courageous as the leader of the Jewish People. In this manner, he strengthens Yehoshua's status as the new leader. Moshe teaches them the mitzvah of Hakhel: That every seven years on the first day of the intermediate days of Succos, the entire nation, including small children, is to gather together at the Temple to hear the King read from the Book of Devarim. The sections that he reads deal with faithfulness to Hashem, the covenant, and reward and punishment. Hashem tells Moshe that his end is near, and he should therefore summon Yehoshua to stand with him in the Mishkan, where Hashem will teach Yehoshua. Hashem then tells Moshe and Yehoshua that after entering the Land, the people will be unfaithful to Him, and begin to worship other gods. Hashem will then completely "hide his face," so that it will seem that the Jewish People are at the mercy of fate, and that they will be hunted by all. Hashem instructs Moshe and Yehoshua to write down a song - Ha'azinu - which will serve as a "witness" against the Jewish People when they sin. Moshe records the song in writing and teaches it to Bnei Yisrael. Moshe completes his transcription of the Torah, and instructs the Levi'im to place it to the side of the Aron (Holy Ark), so that no one will ever write a new Torah Scroll that is different from the original - for there will always be a reference copy.

INSIGHTS

The Speed Of Thought

"For this commandment that I command you today, it is not hidden from you... it is not in Heaven... nor is it over the sea... for it is very near to you, in your mouth and your heart to do it." (30:11-14)

The Torah tells us that this commandment is not over the sea; it is in your mouth and your heart to do it. In other words, one might have thought that it is over the sea. How is it possible that something as close as the mouth and the heart could ever be confused with being as distant as the heavens or over the sea?

Man consists of two opposing elements, body and soul. If we put our neshama, our soul, in charge of our body, we can reach a level greater than the angels. If, on the other hand, we allow our body to dominate our spiritual side we become like animals. For just as an animal has no taste for wisdom and intellectual discernment, preferring hay, straw and the like, so too a person who centers himself on physicality finds things of the spirit without taste. Thus, man is an amalgam of two elements as disparate as heaven and earth.

This is what the Torah is teaching us here. When a person turns his back on the great worth of the spiritual world, that world is indeed extremely distant from him - literally "in the heavens." However the Torah tells him that really "it is very near to you." If you just give the spiritual dominion over the physical, then "it is in your mouth and your heart to do it."

These words illustrate the enormous potential of man. In one second, he can rise to the heights by bringing Torah into his mouth and his heart, by bringing the furthest thing in the world close to him: In a split second, a thought can transport him from languishing in shadow to basking in great light; to being elevated to the loftiest heights. Surely, "it is not hidden from you."

www.vbm-torah.org/salt.htm SALT!! ("Surf A Little Torah")

RABBI DAVID SILVERBERG

Yom Shelishi, the twenty-first day of the sixth month of the year [3]316 Tuesday, 21 Elul 5764 – September 7, 2004 In the first section of Parashat Nitzavim, Moshe reviews with Benei Yisrael the terms of the covenant into which they now enter with the Almighty, and he warns them of the consequences of its violation. He anticipates the possibility that one or more people among Benei Yisrael are not prepared to fully commit themselves to this covenant: "Perchance there is among you some man or woman, or some clan or tribe, whose heart is even now turning away from the Lord your G-d to go and worship the gods of those nations..." (29:17). Moshe warns (29:19), "The Lord will not agree to forgive him," but will rather punish this person very harshly and bring upon him all the devastation foretold in the tokhecha section in Parashat Ki-Tavo.

Several commentators have noted the peculiar expression employed in this verse – "The Lord will not agree to forgive him." This phraseology implies that the person or people in question will appeal to G-d for forgiveness, but He will refuse. This appeal, however, seems entirely out of character for the persona Moshe here portrays. He speaks of a person who, upon hearing Moshe's warnings, will "bless himself in his heart, thinking, 'I shall be safe, though I follow my own willful heart'" (29:18). This individual seems to pay no heed to Moshe's admonition, he appears to deny G-d's ability or willingness to punish him for his wrongdoing and breach of the covenant. Why, then, would he appeal to the Almighty for forgiveness? According to his theological position, he has no need to seek forgiveness!

Rav Eliyahu Lopian, in "Lev Eliyahu," suggests two possible explanations. First, he takes note of the emphasis Moshe places here on the individual's "heart": "whose heart is even now turning away"; "bless himself in his heart." This person feels this way inside, but outwardly he expresses himself much differently. Rav Lopian describes a person who attends prayer services and recites the prayers along with everyone else. In his heart, however, he is unmoved and indifferent. The words he recites has no impact on how he behaves, on his commitments and priorities. Inside, he "blesses himself" and feels confident in who he is, without any need to repent, change or improve. Moshe warns that G-d will not "agree to forgive" such a person. The fact that he recites the words and hits his chest cannot substitute for the change of heart that G-d demands. Even if his lips utter the words, "Forgive me," G-d will refuse.

Secondly, Rav Lopian suggests, Moshe here perhaps addresses the all-too-common phenomenon of "echeta ve-ashuv" ("I will sin and then repent"). The person described here is not a heretic, nor is he entirely indifferent to Torah and mitzvot. Rather, he feels that in the meantime "I shall be safe, though I follow my own willful heart," because afterwards, at some point, I will perform teshuva. When this person ultimately does make an attempt at teshuva, "the Lord will not agree to forgive him." Teshuva earns one atonement only when the sin resulted from some misguided notion, momentary lapse or loss of control. A calculated decision to sin and then repent disqualifies the given violation from teshuva. Moshe thus urges Benei Yisrael to not only wholeheartedly accept the terms of this covenant with G-d, but to accept them immediately, rather than violate them in the meantime in the hope that G-d will later accept their repentance.