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<http://www.jewishpress.com/judaism/parsha/its-your-choice/2014/09/18/0/>  
**It's Your Choice**

**By: Rabbi Joshua Rapps**

Published: September 18th, 2014

The articles in this column are transcriptions and adaptations of shiurim by **Rav Joseph Ber Soloveitchik, zt"l**. The Rav's unique perspective on Chumash permeated many of the shiurim and lectures he presented at various venues over a 40-plus-year period. His words add an important perspective that makes the Chumash in particular, and our tradition in general, vibrant and relevant to our generation.

The first verse in Parshas Re'eh (Devarim 11:26) says: Behold I place before you today blessing and curse. The Torah continues and tells us that blessing will come if we observe the mitzvos of Hashem and curse will follow if we do not observe them. The Torah then relates the procedure of the ceremony that was to take place at Har Grizim and Har Eyval when they would enter the Promised Land.

Rashi comments on the first verse that the blessing and curse that is placed before them are those stated in reference to the ceremony that will take place at Har Grizim and Har Eyval. This should be obvious, as the Torah tells us about the ceremony within the next few verses. What prompted Rashi to add this comment on the first verse of the parsha?

In the introduction to the teffila zakka that we recite on the evening before Yom Kippur, the author says that Hashem has placed before us today life and good, death and evil. The author used this phrase to convey the concept that Hashem granted man bechira (freedom of choice). This phrase is taken from Parshas Nitzavim (30:15).

The author did not choose the verse from Parshas Re'eh to demonstrate this concept of bechira. According to the author, the principle of bechira is not formulated in Parshas Re'eh, but in Parshas Nitzavim. We now understand why Rashi added the comment about the ceremony at Har Grizim and Har Eyval in Parshas Re'eh, so we should not interpret the verse in Parshas Re'eh as relating to the concept of bechira. According to Rashi, the concept of bechira is not introduced, until Parshas Nitzavim.

Ramban rejects this approach of Rashi and says that the concept of bechira is mentioned in both Parshas Re'eh and Parshas Nitzavim. The Rav noted that Parshas Re'eh usually coincides with Shabbos Mevarchim of the month of Elul. According to Ramban this coincidence is appropriate because Parshas Re'eh introduces the concept of bechira which is the focal point around which teshuva (repentance) and Y'mei HaDin (Days of Awe and Judgment) revolve.

The Haamek Davar quotes the following Midrash on the first verse in Parshas Re'eh: when Moshe told the people that he is placing before them this day blessing and curse, the people responded with the verse from Lamentations (3:38-39): From the one on high does not come forth evil and good; why should man complain over his fate. Man is responsible for his actions; his problems are the result of his sins. This Midrash interprets the first verse in Parshas Re'eh in accordance with Ramban that it refers to the concept of bechira.

Ramban says that both verses, in Parshas Re'eh and Parshas Nitzavim, refer to bechira. Rashi rejected this approach because it would mean duplication of the verses. The Rav presented two interpretations in order to explain why these verses relating to bechira were not redundant according to Ramban.

In Parshas Re'eh the Torah refers to bechira prior to sin. Moshe tells the people that blessing will come to you if you keep the commandments of Hashem. Be careful to hearken immediately to what I say and never involve yourself with sin. However, once someone has embraced sin, he must put

forth a heroic effort to become a baal teshuva, to repent completely. There is a heroic aspect to teshuva. To repent, to change a way of life and to achieve a rebirth requires not only a strong personality, but it is the hallmark of a giant of character and restraint. The flow of the narrative in Parshas Nitzavim stresses this: And Hashem will circumcise your heart. Teshuva requires a change of personality, a circumcision of the heart. An insensitive, stubborn heart must be transformed to a sensitive one. This requires great character and fortitude. The Torah continues saying that this mitzvah (according to Ramban, the mitzvah of teshuva) is not distant from you, nor is it in the Heavens. No matter how steeped in sin, no matter how great the temptation to perpetuate your successful and sinful life, you can return to Hashem by taking advantage of the miraculous opportunity provided by teshuva. The Torah continues: Behold I have placed before you, life and death: choose life. It is your decision. If you decide on life you can attain life, through repentance.

These are the two types of bechira mentioned in Parshas Re'eh and in Parshas Nitzavim. In Parshas Re'eh the Torah tells us about the bechira to adhere to the commandments of Hashem and refrain from sin. In Parshas Nitzavim, the Torah tells us that we have the choice to repent after we have sinned.

The second interpretation, according to the Rav, was alluded to by the Haamek Davar. In Parshas Re'eh, Moshe demands that the people comply with the obligation to perform mitzvos. They must observe Shabbos, kashrus, etc. Some people will give in to their passions and transgress, but most reasonable people would come to the conclusion that it is preferable to live a righteous life than a sinful life, and they would therefore comply with the mitzvos. Thus, in Parshas Re'eh, the Torah is not demanding anything superhuman from the individual.

In Parshas Nitzavim, the Torah requires the people to listen to what Moshe is commanding them, and to love Hashem. According to Rambam (Moreh Nevuchim), ahavas Hashem, love of Hashem, requires total dedication to Hashem. Everything I do and say must be dedicated to Hashem. I may not relinquish this dedication for even an infinitesimal fraction of a second. This is a very lofty and demanding standard. People may despair of ever attaining such a level.

In Parshas Re'eh Moshe told them not to despair, they can attain it. Not only is bechira effective in accepting the performance of mitzvos and refraining from sin, it can also help man attain the highest levels of religious life, d'veykus b'Hashem, clinging to Hashem, and ahavas Hashem, love of Hashem, if man desires it.

Rambam says (Teshuva 5:2): Every man has the potential to be a righteous individual, on the level of Moshe our teacher. One might think that Moshe's level of righteousness, the greatest of all men, would be unattainable. However through bechira and dedication, Moshe's level of righteousness is indeed reachable.

Chassidim say in the name of Reb Zusha Anapoler that when he passes on and appears before the heavenly court he will not be asked why he did not attain the level of Moshe Rabbeinu. Rather, he will be asked why did he not attain the level of Zusha, to fulfill his potential.

The Rav said that this disagrees with the above-mentioned Rambam. According to Rambam, since man has the ability to attain the level of Moshe, he will be judged by that standard. He will be judged by the degree to which he is davuk b'Hashem, how close he clings to and loves Hashem. This is up to man to decide, based on the concept of bechira in Parshas Nitzavim.

About the Author: Rabbi Joshua Rapps attended the Rav's shiur at RIETS from 1977 through 1981 and is a musmach of Yeshivas Rabbeinu Yitzchak Elchanan. He and his wife Tziporah live in Edison, N.J. Rabbi Rapps can be contacted at [ravtorah1@gmail.com](mailto:ravtorah1@gmail.com).

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**Your Attitude Determines Your Altitude**

**By: Rabbi Ben Tzion Shafier**

September 18th, 2014

"It is not in the heavens for you to say, 'Who can ascend to the heaven for us and take it for us so that we can listen to it and perform it?' .... Rather the matter is very near to you, in your mouth and your heart, to perform it." – Devarim 30:12-14

After many grave warnings against leaving the ways of the Torah, Moshe Rabbeinu tells Klal Yisrael that learning and keeping the Torah is within easy grasp of each of us. "Acquiring it doesn't require wings to fly to the heavens, and studying it doesn't demand crossing oceans." Rather, Torah is well within the reach of each person.

Rashi, in commenting on the words "it is not in the heavens," adds the explanation: "For if it were in the heavens, you would be obligated to go up after it to learn it."

This is difficult to understand. Rashi's role in Chumash is to clarify what the Torah means. As an aid to understanding, he may use examples and parables, but the goal is always to explain the peshat – the straightforward meaning of the pasuk.

This comment not only fails to help us understand what the Torah is telling us – it isn't true. Since time immemorial man has dreamed of flying, but man cannot sprout wings and fly. How can the Torah expect the impossible from us? And even more, this explanation is the opposite of what the Torah is trying to tell us. The entire paragraph outlines how close the Torah is and how easy it is to attain it. What is Rashi trying to teach us with his comment, "If it were in the heavens, you would be obligated to go up after it to learn it?"

The answer to this can best be understood with a mashol.

**An Amazing Feat of Strength**

In 1997, in Tallahassee, Florida, a young boy was involved in an accident and ended up being pinned under the wheel of a car. Rescuers couldn't help him; he was trapped. An onlooker, seeing the danger, rushed over, and almost without thinking, reached for the fender of the car, lifted it off the ground, and freed the boy.

The unusual part of the story is that the hero, the one who lifted the car, was not a trained emergency professional or some big burly fireman, but rather the boy's 63-year-old grandmother who had never before lifted anything heavier than a bag of dog food.

The story became a media sensation and Dr. Charles Garfield, author of a book of fantastic sports feats titled *Peak Performance*, decided he wanted to interview the woman. However, she wasn't interested in talking to him. She wouldn't return his calls and did everything she could to avoid discussing the event. Finally, Dr. Garfield, being a persuasive fellow, got her to agree to a meeting, and the reason she'd been reluctant to discuss the act turned out to be almost as amazing as the act itself.

During the discussion, the grandmother said she didn't like to talk about the incident because it challenged her beliefs about what she could and could not do: "If I was able to do this, when I didn't think it was possible, what does that say about the rest of my life? Have I wasted it?"

After further discussion, Dr. Garfield asked her what she would like to do. She explained that she had never had the opportunity to further her education after high school. So after some coaching, Mrs. Laura Shultz began college at the age of 63. She received her degree and then went on to teach science at a community college. This story is illustrative of a very human tendency. Our understanding of what is and what is not possible creates imagined ceilings of opportunity for us. If I were smarter, I would have... If I were more talented, I could have... but I just can't do it. Yet some people, who aren't any more talented, who weren't given all the breaks, just seem to plow through and make the seemingly impossible happen. It almost seems their attitude is their single greatest asset.

**Eyes on the Prize**

This seems to be the answer to this Rashi. The Torah isn't telling us we need to sprout wings and fly. Rather, this is a mashol for the drive a person

must have to succeed. If a person's attitude is, "Whatever it takes; no mountain is too high, no obstacle too difficult, and if it were up in the heavens, I would fly there," then he will reach heights. However, if that enthusiasm is lacking, no matter how close the Torah is, he will not acquire it.

You don't need to fly to the skies but you need be ready to. Once that drive is in place, nothing can stop you.

No matter what a person's natural capacity and life circumstances, if he sets his goal as the attainment of Torah, Hashem will help so that he can reach the stars. Is the journey difficult? While there are many challenges along the way, the ways of the Torah are pleasant, and a Jew has unique aptitude to absorb it. The only difficult part is setting our sights high enough and holding the course. If a person sets out with a drive to do whatever it takes, even if it means "flying to the heavens," Hashem helps – and that person can reach his personal level of greatness on par with that of the most exalted Torah giants.

About the Author: Rabbi Shafier is the founder of the Shmuz.com – The Shmuz is an engaging, motivating shiur that deals with real life issues. All of the Shmuzin are available free of charge at the [www.theShmuz.com](http://www.theShmuz.com) or on the Shmuz App for iPhone or Android

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from: Rabbi Yissocher Frand <[ryfrand@torah.org](mailto:ryfrand@torah.org)> to: [ravfrand@torah.org](mailto:ravfrand@torah.org) date Fri, Aug 30, 2013

**Rabbi Yissocher Frand**  
**Parshas Nitzavim-Vayeilech**

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: CD # 913, The Tefilah of Aleinu. Good Shabbos! Never Miss Subscription Series

**The Need To Be Warned Against Idolatry**

In Moshe's final admonition to the Jewish people he reminds them of their familiarity with the abominations of Avodah Zarah (idolatry): "For you know how we lived in the land of Egypt; and how we came through the midst of the nations through which you passed. You have seen their detestable things and their idols (giluleihem), wood and stone, silver and gold, which were with them. Lest there be among you a man or woman or family or tribe whose heart turns away this day from the L-rd our G-d to go to serve the gods of those nations; lest there should be among you a root that bears gall and wormwood...saying 'I shall have peace, though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart...' The L-rd will not be willing to pardon him, but then the anger of the L-rd and His jealousy shall be kindled against that man and all the curse that is written in this book shall lie upon him and the L-rd shall blot out his name from under heaven..." [Devorim 29:15-19].

There is something counter intuitive here. Moshe describes the absolutely disgusting nature of idolatry. The term he uses is giluleihem which is related to the word galal, meaning human excrement. One must ask if indeed Avodah Zarah is so repulsive, why was it necessary for Moshe to spend so much time and verbiage warning the Jewish people against it. Should they not recoil from it just because of its despicable nature? Why would they even be tempted by it?

Dr. Abraham Twerski raises this question and gives an interesting explanation for this phenomenon. I have a bit of a different take on this issue, but his comments are instructive:

He writes that a certain television network once did a two hour documentary on the evils of cocaine addiction and how cocaine is such a powerful addictive substance and if a person gets entrapped in a cocaine addiction he will literally destroy his life. Such a person will be so driven to feed his habit that nothing else in the world will matter -- not his wife, not his children, not his job, not his career. Nothing. The only thing that matters to him is getting his "fix".

Researchers found that the teenagers and young adults who watched this program were more likely to get into cocaine addiction than someone who

didn't watch it. How can that be? They had two hours of graphic evidence showing them what would happen if they got into cocaine and they turned around and did it anyway. It doesn't make any sense!

His take on it was that when you show people the pleasure of something and the subsequent pain that will result if one gets involved in the pleasure the message of the pleasure overwhelms the message of the pain. The take away from the TV documentary was "Hey this stuff must be really great because look at what people are willing to do for it."

I am very hesitant to argue with someone like Dr. Twerski on human psychology, but I have a different take on the results of this research. In my humble opinion I believe the lesson to be learned is the following: When one views someone doing something that for the viewer was originally out of the question, the matter becomes somehow less "off limits" for the viewer and he now has a greater chance of trying it out himself.

This is why there are some Jews in Eretz Yisrael who when they see violation of the Sabbath (e.g. -- cars driven in the street on Shabbos by non-observant Israelis) say to themselves 'Shabbos! Shabbos!'" I've seen this myself. Nobody hears them, certainly not the cars driving by. Why are they doing this? The answer is that they are doing it to inoculate themselves from Chillul Shabbos. They don't want to lose the outrage and horror of seeing the Sabbath being desecrated lest somehow the possibility of violating the Shabbos becomes more tangible and realistic in their mental thought process.

This is analogous to what Chazal tell us that if one sees a suspected adulteress (Sotah) in her shame, he should (on the spot) take a vow to abstain from wine (which may lead to a loosening of one's moral inhibitions). One might have asked: "Just seeing the embarrassment of the Sotah should itself be enough to discourage such loose behavior". Why does one need the vow? The answer is: One does need the vow! Intellectual awareness of the despicableness of the behavior will not by itself keep one away from it.

Whether one accepts Dr Twerski's explanation, or they prefer my explanation, or they have another explanation of their own we see from here that when we see someone do something which should be unimaginable and totally off limits then it is necessary to take preventive action of some sort so that one does not become influenced by having witnessed this.

This is precisely when the passage in Nitzavim is teaching us: Even though you have seen the despicableness and primitiveness of these gods of wood and stone, nevertheless one must take great heed to avoid them and be aware of the dire consequences of one who follows after them.

A Three-twined Thread Teaching Bitachon: Shmitah, Succah, Aliyah L'Regel

In Parshas Vayeilech the Torah gives us the mitzvah of Hakhel: "At the end of every seven years, in the set time of the year of release in the Festival of Succot, when all Israel is come to appear before the L-rd thy G-d in the place which He shall choose, you shall read this law before all Israel in their hearing. Assemble the people, the men and the women and the little ones, and the stranger that is within your gates that they may hear, and that they may learn and fear the L-rd your G-d and observe to do all the words of this law..." [Devorim 31:10-13]

The King gets up in the midst of the entire congregation at the conclusion of the holiday of Succoth following the Shmitah year and reads the Torah to the gathered assembly. It is interesting: We have the confluence of three events: Motzai Shmitah; Motzai Succoth; and Aliyah L'Regel. [The Sabbatical year has just ended; Succoth has just ended; and all the Jews are together because they traveled to Jerusalem for the Festival pilgrimage].

The Rosh Yeshiva of the Gateshead Yeshiva, Rav Avraham Gurwitz makes the beautiful point that these three events have a common denominator. All three associated mitzvos (Shmitah, Aliyah l'regel, Succah) bring home to the Jew the attribute of Faith (Bitachon) in G-d.

When one just finished Shmitah, he hasn't worked for a year but has been relying on the Being Who provides sustenance. The farmer thereby gains a new perspective on life. When he sees a year later that he still has sustenance

this brings home the concept that "He is the One who gives you strength to carry on with valor" [Devarim 8:18].

Aliyah l'regel is also a lesson in Faith. Everyone leaves home and comes to the Temple in Jerusalem. Who will guard their property? Who is watching the farm? The answer is that no human being is watching the farm but Someone is watching the farm. This too is a lesson in faith in the One Who is the Guardian of Israel. The Almighty y guarantees "And no man will covet your land" No one will steal. The neighbors are not going to attack. Your property will be safe. We see real live Bitachon in practice.

Finally Succos is also a lesson in faith. What is Succos? Succos is "walking after Me in the wilderness in an unsown land". [Yirmiyah 2:2] The Master of the Universe took us out of Egypt into the shadow of death. We found ourselves in a wilderness with no water and no protection from the elements -- but the Master of the Universe protected us. We sit in the Succoth to commemorate this event. "For in Succoth I caused the Children of Israel to dwell." [Vayikra 23:43]

Here then we have the confluence of three events, three periods of time that shout out to us the truth that at the end of the day it is the Almighty who takes care of us, who provides us with sustenance. That is why this is the appropriate time to read the Torah in the presence of all Israel (I.e. -- the mitzvah of Hakhel).

There are normally so many things going on in our lives that prevent us from devoting ourselves to Ruchniyos and spirituality. We are in general so hassled with the need to make a living that we have no time for learning or for devoting proper time for prayer and contemplation of spiritual matters. Here we are on the eve of Rosh HaShannah and we always say to ourselves, "We'd like to learn more, we'd like to daven slower, we'd like to be better Jews, but we can't because of the hassle of making a living" (Tirdas haParnassah).

We blame our lack of spirituality on our lack of serenity due to the pressures of earning a living. The lesson of Hakhel is that we really should be serene because at the end of the day it is really the Ribono shel Olam who will provide the parnassah. We pay lip service to this and we say it, but we don't really believe it.

This is not to say that everyone should resign their jobs tomorrow, join a Kollel, and somehow their families will exist. One has to make a legitimate effort to do what it takes to earn a livelihood (hishtadlus). But he has to realize that at the end of the day the Ribono shel Olam will give him what he is supposed to get and working the extra hours or staying later is really not going to make the difference.

What Hakhel provides is the lesson in Bitachon, which is a lesson in serenity. If there is one bracha we should all daven for it is not only that it should be a year of peace (shalom) for our brethren the Children of Israel in all places they find themselves, but it should be also a year of serenity (shalvah) that we realize the Ribono shel Olam takes care of us. The longer we live the more we see the Hand of the Almighty in our lives. We see that ultimately He takes care of us, He is going to provide for us. This belief gives a person a certain serenity with which he can face life.

When we have that sense of confidence (Bitachon) and that sense of serenity, then we can do those things we want to do -- be it learning or davening or spending more time with our children and with our families, growing with them spiritually. At the end of the day we recognize that "it is He who gives you strength to act with valor."

May the Ribono shel Olam bless us with a year of Redemption and Salvation, a year of Peace and Serenity for us and for all the House of Israel.

This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion. The halachic topics dealt with in the portion of Nitzavim-Vayelech in the... 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 tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit <http://www.yadyechiel.org/> for further information. To Support Project Genesis-Torah.org Transcribed by David Twersky Seattle, WA; Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman, Baltimore, MD RavFrand, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Yissocher

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<http://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation-5769-nitzavim-vayelech-the-torah-as-g-ds-song/>

### **Nitzavim-Vayelech (5769) – The Torah as G-d's Song Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks**

At the end of his life, having given the Israelites at G-d's behest 612 commands, Moses is instructed to give them the last; command 613:

Now therefore write down for yourselves this song, and teach it to the people of Israel; put it in their mouths, that this song may be my witness within the people of Israel. (Deut. 31: 19)

According to the plain sense of the verse, G-d is speaking to Moses and Joshua and is referring to the song in the following chapter, "Listen, O heavens, and I will speak; Hear, O earth, the words of My mouth." Oral tradition, however, gave it a different and much wider interpretation, understanding it as a command for every Jew to write - or at least take some part in writing - a Sefer Torah, a scroll of the law:

Said Rabbah: even though our ancestors have left us a scroll of the Torah, it is our religious duty to write one for ourselves, as it is said: "Now therefore write this song, and teach it to the people of Israel; put it in their mouths, that this song may be a witness for me against the people of Israel." (Sanhedrin 21b).

The logic of the interpretation seems to be, first, that the phrase "write down for yourselves" could be construed as referring to every Israelite (Ibn Ezra), not just Moses and Joshua. Secondly, the passage goes on to say (31: 24): "Moses finished writing in the book the words of this law from beginning to end." The Talmud (Nedarim 38a) offers a third reason. The verse goes on to say: "that this song may be My witness within the people" - implying the Torah as a whole, not just the song in chapter 32.

There is something poetic about this being the last of the commands. It is as if God were saying to the Israelites: "It is not enough that you have received the Torah from Moses. You must make it new again in every generation." The covenant was not to grow old. It had to be periodically renewed.

So it is to this day, that Torah scrolls are still written as in ancient times, by hand, on parchment, using a quill - as were the Dead Sea Scrolls two thousand years ago. In a religion almost devoid of sacred objects (icons, relics), the Torah scroll is the nearest Judaism comes to endowing a physical entity with sanctity - and this is an understatement. The Torah is less like an object than a person. In its presence we stand as if it were a king. On Simchat Torah we dance with it as if it were a bride. If one is, G-d forbid, damaged or destroyed we bury it as if it were a human; we mourn as if we had lost a relative. Judaism is the story of a love affair between a people and a book, the Book of Books.

What though - if we take the command to refer to the whole Torah and not just one chapter - is the significance of the word "song" [shirah]: "Now therefore write down for yourselves this song"? The word shirah appears five times in this passage. It is clearly a key-word. Why? On this, two nineteenth century scholars offered striking explanations.

Netziv (R. Naftali Zvi Yehudah Berlin) interprets it to mean that the whole Torah should be read as poetry, not prose (the word shirah in Hebrew means both a song and a poem). To be sure, most of the Torah is written in prose, but it has, argues Netziv, two characteristics of poetry. First, it is allusive rather than explicit. It leaves unsaid more than is said. Secondly, like poetry, it hints at deeper reservoirs of meaning, sometimes by the use of an unusual

word or sentence construction. Descriptive prose carries its meaning on the surface. The Torah, like poetry, does not. (Kidmat Davar, preface to Ha'amek Davar, 3).

In this brilliant insight, Netziv anticipates one of the great twentieth century essays on biblical prose, Erich Auerbach's 'Odysseus' Scar'. Auerbach contrasts the narrative style of Genesis with that of Homer. Homer uses dazzlingly detailed descriptions so that each scene is set out pictorially as if bathed in sunlight. By contrast, biblical narrative is spare and understated. In the example Auerbach cites - the story of the binding of Isaac - we do not know what the main characters look like, what they are feeling, what they are wearing, what landscapes they are passing through:

The decisive points of the narrative alone are emphasized, what lies between is non-existent; time and place are undefined and call for interpretation; thoughts and feelings remain unexpressed, are only suggested by the silence and the fragmentary speeches; the whole, permeated with the most unrelieved suspense and directed toward a single goal . . . remains mysterious and "fraught with background".

A completely different aspect is alluded to by R. Yechezkel Michał Epstein, author of the halakhic code Arukh ha-Shulchan (Choshen Mishpat, introduction). Epstein points out that the rabbinic literature is full of arguments, about which the sages said: "These and those are the words of the living G-d." This, says Epstein, is one of the reasons the Torah is called "a song" - because a song becomes more beautiful when scored for many voices interwoven in complex harmonies.

I would suggest a third dimension. The 613th command is not simply about the Torah, but about the duty to make the Torah new in each generation. To make the Torah live anew, it is not enough to hand it on cognitively - as mere history and law. It must speak to us affectively, emotionally.

Judaism is a religion of words, and yet whenever the language of Judaism aspires to the spiritual it breaks into song, as if the words themselves sought escape from the gravitational pull of finite meanings. There is something about melody that intimates a reality beyond our grasp, what William Wordsworth called the "sense sublime / Of something far more deeply interfused / Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns / And the round ocean and the living air." Words are the language of the mind. Music is the language of the soul.

Music is central to the Judaic experience. We do not pray; we davven, meaning we sing the words we direct toward heaven. Nor do we read the Torah; instead we chant the weekly portion, each word with its own cantillation. Even rabbinical texts are never merely studied; we chant them with the particular sing-song known to all students of Talmud. Each time and text has its specific melodies. The same prayer may be sung to half-a-dozen different tunes depending on whether it is part of the morning, afternoon or evening service, and whether the day is a weekday, a Sabbath, a festival or one of the High Holy Days. There are different cantillations for biblical readings, depending on whether the text comes from the Mosaic books, the prophetic literature, or the Ketuvim, 'the writings.' Music is the map of the Jewish spirit, and each spiritual experience has its own distinctive melodic tonality.

The 613th command - to make the Torah new in every generation - symbolizes the fact that though the Torah was given once, it must be received many times, as each of us, through our study and practice, strives to recapture the pristine voice heard at Mount Sinai. That requires emotion, not just intellect. It means treating Torah not just as words read, but also as a melody sung. The Torah is G-d's libretto, and we, the Jewish people, are His choir, the performers of His choral symphony. And though, when Jews speak they often argue, when they sing, they sing in harmony, as the Israelites did at the Red Sea, because music is the language of the soul, and at the level of the soul Jews enter the unity of the Divine which transcends the oppositions of lower worlds. The Torah is G-d's song, and we collectively are its singers.

London Jewish News & Jewish Telegraph - September 1999

The sociologist Peter Berger called them "signals of transcendence" - moments when you feel lifted beyond yourself and infinity seems almost within reach. That, for me, was the mood in the Edgware Synagogue for choral Selichot this year.

The shul was packed. I've rarely seen so many people gathered in a single building to pray. It was lovely to see so many people from different communities, spanning the religious spectrum, coming together in harmony. The music was magnificent. We've come to expect nothing less from Rev. Lionel Rosenfeld and the Shabbaton choir. This year, though, there were two newcomers - Rev. Shimon Cramer, a star of the future who, at the age of twenty-one already has a voice of rare sweetness and power, and thirteen year old Stuart Morell, whose poise on what must have been for him a nerve-racking occasion was impeccable. Together they created a moment of artistic and spiritual perfection.

There was a time, not so long ago, when chazanut and choral synagogue music were in decline. I remember having to close the chazanut department of Jews' College for sheer lack of interest by congregations. In the past few years, though, they've made an unexpected recovery, because of the pioneering work of many of our chazanim and choirs. Collectively they have brought a new idiom to the music of prayer, a delightful blend of the new and the traditional with special emphasis on the use melody to mirror the meaning of the words. The result has been that this year there were a record number of choral selichot services. We are in the midst of a Jewish musical renaissance.

I'm delighted. Judaism has long recognised the close connection between spirituality and song. Az Yashir - the Song at the Sea - was the first great collective tribute of the Israelites to God. Many of the Psalms were written to be sung, and the Levites used to provide choral accompaniment to the Temple service. To this day, music is the pulse of Jewish spirituality. We don't read the Torah; we sing it. We don't say our prayers; we chant them. We don't even read the Mishnah and Gemarrah; they too have their special tune. Each text, and each period of the year, has its own melody. Song charts the biorhythms of the Jewish soul. There's a reason for this. When language is invested with deep emotion it aspires to the condition of music. As I put it once: Words are the language of the mind. But song is the language of the soul. That is why melody moves us in a way mere speech cannot. Judaism is a dialogue between earth and heaven, and when words become holy, they become song.

The supreme example of this is Kol Nidrei. The words of Kol Nidrei are dry and unemotional. Indeed they are not even a prayer. They are a legal formula for the annulment of vows between us and God. But the tune of Kol Nidrei is something else. Few compositions have ever caught so powerfully and poignantly the mood of the Jewish soul as it comes before God in search of forgiveness. It instantly establishes the solemnity of the day - the drama of human finitude in the presence of eternity. The music transcends the words. It communicates what words cannot say.

I used to regret the fact that, in the modern era, Jews had contributed so much to the music of other cultures and so little to their own. Mahler's Eighth Symphony is a Catholic mass. Irving Berlin wrote, "I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas." George Gershwin wrote some of the finest negro spirituals. Hopefully, though, the tide is turning. It should. Judaism is an intellectual faith. But it must also be emotionally compelling if it is to speak to both hemispheres of the brain. Besides which, music is the closest we come to expressing the inexpressible. As Joseph Addison wrote: "Music, the greatest good that mortals know / And all of heaven we have below."

At the end of his life, Moses gave the Jewish people the last of the 613 commands - that in every generation each of us must write (or at least have a share in writing) a Sefer Torah. Unusually, though, on this occasion he described it not as Torah but as shirah, 'song'. My explanation is that if we are to make the Torah new in every generation, it must speak to our hearts as well as to our minds. It must become our "song of songs". The Torah is the libretto of the Jewish people and we are its choir. The revival of Jewish

music is essential to a renewal of the Jewish spirit. So I hope we have a musical, as well as a sweet, New Year.

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**Thanks to hamelaket@gmail.com for collecting the following items:**

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**Weekly Blog :: Rabbi Berel Wein**

***A Return To The Sabbath***

During this period of reflective thought, there is one issue that, in my opinion, stands out. And that is the issue of Sabbath observance within the Jewish world. The rabbis of the Talmud placed the Sabbath at the forefront of all the commandments, and essentially as the lodestone of Jewish identity. Sabbath observance brought with it personal trust and cooperation in all social and religious matters in Jewish life.

During the last two centuries of Jewish history, first in Eastern Europe and later in the United States and the West, the Sabbath slipped away from the grasp of millions of Jews. There were many reasons for this occurrence – financial, the dislocation of immigration and new countries of residence, ignorance of the Jewish story, the allure of a militantly secular society that apparently was the wave of the future, etc.

But the bottom line was that the absence of the Sabbath led inexorably to assimilation, intermarriage and the loss of Jewish identity, self-worth and family structure. Saturday became Tuesday for most American and Western Jews. Instead of a day of rest, family bonding and physical, mental and spiritual renewal, it became a day of shopping and carpools. The Sabbath disappeared completely from the lives and schedules of most American Jews. The great synagogues, especially of the non-Orthodox, remained largely empty on the Sabbath as Jews preferred the golf course to prayer and study. Even the desperate measure of officially allowing Jews to drive to the synagogue on the Sabbath failed to save the synagogue and certainly contributed to the death knell of the Sabbath. The disappearance of the Sabbath, as the single most unifying feature of Jewish society, resulted in a fractured, confused and spiritually empty Jewish community.

In Israel, though Sabbath observance is certainly not universal, Sabbath recognition is. Saturday is the official day of rest in the country, most commercial enterprises do not operate on that day, and Friday night family dinners remain a custom embedded in Israeli life. A noticeable return to Jewish observance and values has occurred in Israeli life over the last number of decades. The trend towards tradition is noticeable almost everywhere in the country.

There are various reasons for this change in attitude but one of the main, driving forces for this societal trend is the realization that in order for Israel to survive and continue to prosper it must have a unifying basis to hold it together. Throughout Jewish history, the Sabbath has served as that unifier for Jewish society. As the often-quoted aphorism has it: “More than the Jews kept the Sabbath, the Sabbath kept and preserved the Jews.”

Scattered throughout the world, subject to prejudice and persecution, the universal observance of the Sabbath united Jews the world over and gave them the physical and spiritual strength to survive and prevail. Here in Israel, this realization of the power of the Sabbath and of its value in protecting and promoting a message of positive Judaism and of a better world has sparked a revival. More and more Israelis are keeping the Sabbath and making it an integral part of general Jewish society here. We still have a long way to go in restoring the Sabbath to its proper place of honor and observance, but the trend to do so is clear and unmistakable.

Last year, under the initiative of Chief Rabbi Warren Goldstein, South African Jewry observed and commemorated a Sabbath that embraced all of South African Jewry. The experience was electrifying. It rekindled a long dormant spark of Jewish memory, tradition and spirituality within tens of thousands of Jews. It gave them a sense of unity and belonging. By restoring

the Sabbath in their lives – even just one Sabbath – it served as a recommitment to Jewish identity and community.

This South African Sabbath project is now being replicated in many communities throughout the United States, Western and Eastern Europe and even here in Israel. All Jews should participate in one fashion or another in this noble and historic endeavor. Hosts and guests, Jews from all walks of life and differing value systems, have the opportunity to join together to unite the Jewish people. It is an opportunity to bring much-needed serenity, hope, optimism, a sense of history, tradition and family bonding to our generation – a generation that so needs these blessings on a regular basis. The Sabbath is recognized in Jewish tradition as being a gift from God Himself, so to speak, to Israel and through Israel to the world at large. Our greatest accomplishment in this coming new year of goodness and blessing will be the strengthening of the Sabbath commitment amongst all Jews. Shabbat shalom - Ktiva v'chatima tova

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from: Destiny Foundation/Rabbi Berel Wein <info@jewishdestiny.com>  
reply-to: info@jewishdestiny.com  
subject: Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein

**Weekly Parsha Blog:: Rabbi Berel Wein**

***Nitzavim – Vayelech***

The Torah reading for this week is a fitting conclusion to the year that is about to depart from us. At the end of his long life and after decades of service to the Jewish people, Moshe renews the covenant between God and the people of Israel. He makes clear to the new generation of Jews standing before him, a generation that was not part of the experience of Egypt, nor present at the moment of revelation at Sinai, that the original covenant between God and the Jewish people remains in force. And he states that it will continue to be so throughout the Jewish future.

The covenant cannot be repealed, altered or ignored. It is the basis for all Jewish life and it is the leitmotif of all of Jewish history. Moshe admits that there will be events and occurrences in the story of the Jewish people that will be cruel, inexplicable and irrational. As he phrases it, there will be many “hidden, mysterious” events that the Jewish people will have to experience. He offers no easy explanation to those events except to say that somehow they are related to the attempts of sections of the Jewish people to annul the covenant and its resultant consequences. The “hidden” part of the covenant belongs to God. The revealed part of the covenant – the obligations of Torah commandments and Jewish life – belong to the Jewish people and are relevant in all of their generations and locales. The Jewish people and the Jewish State will always be judged through its relationship to this eternal covenant.

The existence of the covenant has caused us much pain and angst throughout the centuries. The other nations of the world harbor resentment against us because of the uniqueness of our relationship to the Creator of all, as exemplified by this covenant. Many Jewish thinkers have attributed anti-Semitism, in all of its virulent and even more benign forms, to a jealousy over the existence of God’s covenant with the Jewish people.

The covenant has, nevertheless, remained the rock of Jewish identity over all of the ages. Just the knowledge of its existence has created a stubborn Jewish people – with a resolve to maintain its faith and lifestyle though a very small minority in a world of many billions. The Torah itself is the very essence of this covenant. It details its terms and conditions, and its study helps formulate the life that Jews are expected to live.

That is why the Torah demands that we study and are aware of this covenant morning and night, traveling, at home, in all times and places. There were, and unfortunately still are, those amongst us who wish to discard the covenant and its obligations and merely to blend in with the surrounding general society.

The Lord, so to speak, has warned us many times that He would not allow this to occur. All of Jewish history teaches us regarding the strength and eternity of this great covenant. In the year that is now dawning upon us, we

should all resolutely renew the covenant in our hearts, minds and actions, in order to be blessed with a year of health, success and serenity.  
Shabbat shalom - Ktiva v'chatima tova

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from: Shema Yisrael Torah Network <shemalist@shemayisrael.com>  
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subject: Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

**Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum**  
*Parshas Nitzavim*

***See - I Have Placed Before You Today The Life And The Good, And The Death And The Evil. (30:15)***

The Torah informs us that the choice between a life devoted to Torah principles versus one that is not is tantamount to the choice between life and death. Two lessons are to be derived from this pasuk. First, Torah is the path to life; a life without Torah is the path to death. It is as simple as that. Torah is equated with good and life. No Torah is compared to evil and death. Second, the choices are equal. Torah is pure life; no Torah is pure death. They are commensurate. No grey areas exist. It is all black and white.

In his early years, Horav Sholom Schwadron, zl, would gather the young boys of the neighborhood and learn with them. He would warm their spirits with his captivating stories, and his inspiring talks would infuse them with faith. It was a small group, which met on a regular basis. One day, one of the boys did not appear for class. Naturally, the next day, Rav Sholom asked the boy, "Where were you yesterday?" The boy replied, "Rebbe, the truth of the matter is that I love to learn, and I greatly enjoy attending the shiur. There is one thing, however, which I love and enjoy even more than the shiur; this is the sport of soccer. Yesterday, there was a soccer game. I gave it precedence over the shiur."

The boy was straightforward. He told the truth, hiding nothing. He enjoyed his sports more than he did his Torah study. This did not mean that he did not enjoy his Torah lessons. It is just that they were second to soccer. Rav Sholom listened to the boy and replied, "I always thought that there was nothing sweeter than Torah. Now, you tell me that soccer is even sweeter. This is incredible. Tell me about this soccer game. I would like to understand it."

The boy began to explain the objective of a football game. He was quite knowledgeable, explaining that the objective of each team was to get the ball across the goal of the other team. Rav Sholom asked about the score and the length of time played. The boy explained that the home team had won with a score of two to one and that the game had lasted ninety minutes. Rav Sholom began to think out loud, "Hmm, three points; ninety minutes. I have a thought. Is there a field nearby?" "Yes," answered the boy. "Good," said Rav Sholom. "Tomorrow, after the shiur, you and I will go out to the field. Now, let us learn."

They came to the field, where Rav Sholom announced, "Torah gives a person the ability to think more astutely. I have been able to conceive a way to score thirty points in half an hour, ninety points in an entire game." The boy, of course, did not believe what his rebbe was saying. Such a score was practically impossible. Rav Sholom was adamant. He said that he would show him that it was possible.

Rav Sholom told the boy to kick the ball toward the goal. Since it would take about one minute to kick the ball and retrieve it, in the space of ninety minutes, the score would reach ninety points. "But, rebbe," the boy countered, "such points do not count. First, there is no opposing team to block the ball from reaching the goal, and, even if the ball gets past the members of the team, there is a goalie that will block the ball from reaching the goal."

"Oh," said Rav Sholom. "Now I understand, but now, I would like you also to understand. Learning is sweeter than honey. To experience the precious nature of Torah, one must study when there is a challenge - like when there is a soccer game that competes with one's time. The sweetness of such study becomes intrinsically more valuable. When one must give something up for

Torah, its study becomes more meaningful. Furthermore, similar to soccer, in which the playing field must be even, with each team requiring eleven players, likewise, we find that the greater one is, so, too, the stronger is his yetzer hora, evil-inclination. The challenge must be equal."

Everyone is confronted with the challenge, a challenge in which each side has equal power. The winner receives nothing less than life - the loser nothing less than death. When the stakes are so high and the opposing team is so strong, one must work hard to win, but his first priority is u'bacharta ba'chayim, choose life. One must know wherein lie his goals. He could be a great player, but if he hits the wrong goal post, he has, sadly, lost the game. The yetzer hora knows that our time is a limited gift from Hashem. If it can convince us to waste this precious time, it has won a good part of the battle. When the Telshe Rosh Yeshivah, Horav Mordechai Gifter, zl, would see yeshivah students engaged in mere talk, he would remark to them, "You are not killing time, you are killing yourself!"

The Gaon, zl, m'Vilna, was meticulous concerning every moment of his life. Once, prior to Rosh Hashanah, he calculated that, for six minutes during the past year, he had not been actively engaged in Torah study. He understood that each minute lost was a minute lost for eternity. He would never retrieve that minute. This is how the Gaon lived. This is why he was the Gaon. Rav Gifter would often quote Horav Zalman Sorotzkin, zl, who offers a brilliant insight into the action Chizkiyahu Hamelech took in order to promote Torah study among his constituents. The Talmud Sanhedrin 94b teaches that "Chizkiyahu naatz cherev al pesach bais hamedrash - "He stuck a sword by the entrance of the bais hamedrash and declared, 'Sancheirev is here with a powerful army with which he has been able to conquer the rest of the world. We are the last bastion, the last nation which he has not yet attacked. He has a cherev, sword, and we must be fearful of that sword.'" The king then unsheathed his own sword and put it into the door of the bais hamedrash, and said, "Whoever leaves the bais hamedrash and halts his study of Torah shall be killed with this sword". As a result of this powerful motivation, Klal Yisrael's collective level of Torah erudition was unsurpassed. Indeed, when a census was taken of Klal Yisrael, it was discovered that nary a man, woman, or child was found that was not proficient in the laws of ritual purity - which is a very complex topic. Chizkiyahu's action, although commendable for its zeal, comes across as lacking on a realistic basis. Does someone deserve to be killed because he does not study Torah? Clearly, Torah study is most important. It is what keeps our people going. It is the lifeblood of the Jew, but to be killed for not studying seems to be much too demanding, almost irrational. No law imposes the death penalty for not learning. Since when is not carrying out a positive mitzvah grounds for the death penalty?

The Lutzker Rav explains that Chazal are conveying a penetrating lesson to us. We know that when we actually feel something with our senses, it leaves a greater impact upon us. While we know that Torah study is our life, "knowing" is not the same as having someone stand in front of us brandishing a sword in his hand, implying that it is either "learn or die"! Thus, we realize that not learning is committing an act of murder - our murder!

Chizkiyahu was intimidating, "You see, Torah is your lifeblood. With that, you will succeed against Sancheirev and his army". The people listened, abandoning their fields and vineyards, and other areas of livelihood. When they arrived at the bais hamedrash, they were greeted by the sword. This was a reminder to them, 'If you leave the bais hamedrash, you are actively killing yourself. If you stay in the bais hamedrash, there is no sword that can harm you.'

The Rosh Yeshivah would add his own thought, "During war, if a soldier abandons his post, he is AWOL, a deserter! Likewise, one who does not enter the bais hamedrash in a time of war is a deserter!"

The Ramchal writes in his classis Mesillas Yesharim what has become for many - and really should become for all of us - the catchphrase of our life: Adam doeig al ibud damav, v'eino doeig al ibud yamav; "Man worries about

the loss of his money, but does not concern himself with the loss of his days." (Sadly) damav einam ozrim, v'yamav einam chozrim. "Man's material possessions do not help him, and his days do not return."

Next week, we will entreat Hashem for renewed life, longer life, healthier life. Do we know what life means? Do we understand the inestimable value of life? Do we understand that time is the most precious commodity there is - and, thus, Hashem's greatest gift? If we are going to ask, we should at least know what we are asking for.

### **Parshas Vayeilech**

***So now, write this song for yourselves, and teach it to Bnei Yisrael. (31:19)***

Every ben Yisrael, Jew, is enjoined to write a Sefer Torah. The source of this mitzvah is the above pasuk. Mitzvas Kesivas Sefer Torah, the commandment to write a Sefer Torah, has the distinction of being the last, 613th, mitzvah of the Torah. It is the culmination of the Torah's commandments. When one writes something down on paper, he concretizes it. I remember visiting my Rosh Yeshivah, Horav Mordechai Gifter, zl, with a request for his approbation on one of my volumes. He began to weep. He said that part of his learning process was to put to immediately paper the chiddushim, original thoughts, which he innovated during his learning. Due to his illness, his hand had begun to tremble, making writing most difficult and hardly legible. For this, he wept. His learning was (to him) incomplete.

In his commentary to this pasuk, the Torah Temimah wonders where in this pasuk is the indication that one is required to write an entire Torah scroll. The pasuk says, "Write this song," which is a reference to Shiras Ha'azinu, the song of Ha'azinu, which is in the following parsha. It does not state that an entire Torah be written. He quotes the Rambam, Hilchos Sefer Torah 7:2, who interprets the commandment that every Jew write a Sefer Torah, which includes Shiras Ha'azinu. Since one may not write the Torah piecemeal, parshiyos, parshiyos, chapters, chapters, it is prohibited to only write Shiras Ha'azinu. The song must be part of an all-inclusive edition of the entire Torah.

The Rambam begs elucidation. To say that it is prohibited to write individual parshiyos impugns the allowability of writing the parshiyos of Tefillin and Mezuzah. Only small segment of the Torah is included in the Tefillin - even less goes into the Mezuzah. What does the Rambam mean? In his A Vort from Rav Pam, Rabbi Sholom Smith quotes the Rosh Yeshivah, zl, who explains this matter in his usual manner - with simple, poignant profundity that goes to the crux of the issue.

The purpose of Kesivas Sefer Torah is not to store it in one's bookcase. It is for V'lamadah es Bnei Yisrael, "To teach Bnei Yisrael." For the purpose of teaching Klal Yisrael Torah, one may not write chapters, chapters. The two parshiyos of Tefillin and Mezuzah are not written for the purpose of studying them. They are placed into the boxes and remain there for all time.

Therefore, there is no issue concerning writing their parshiyos, parshiyos. What is the problem with writing chapters, chapters, if the Torah is written for the purpose of teaching? Rav Pam explains that, when one learns Torah, he must focus on the entire Torah as one whole, one unit. He must see before him the entire Torah. When one views the Torah piecemeal, it undermines his drive and passion to become knowledgeable in the entire Torah.

Rav Pam relates that Horav Elazar M. Shach, zl, was once shown an innovative printing of a Gemorah. It was printed on individual loose-leaf pages to be later placed in a loose-leaf binder and placed together. He became upset, exclaiming, "Is this what the Torah is, a sheet of paper? A talmid, student, must see the entire hefek, broad scope, of Torah, thereby realizing the all-encompassing profundity of Hashem's wisdom. Only when one sees the whole Gemorah in its entirety, does he develop a desire to master it all. If, however, he views Torah as a piece of paper, how can he be inspired to become fluent in all of Shas?"

It is not this author's place to remark concerning the importance of covering ground in Torah study. Historically, however, in Europe, the baal ha'bais, learned layman, was well-versed in all of Shas. He did not only cover the first few blatt, pages, of a Meseches. He studied and became proficient in the

entire Meseches. Rav Pam decries the fact that we have not mastered Shas and that only Orach Chaim and parts of Yoreh Deah are the areas of Shulchan Aruch in which we are accomplished. We are, in essence, neglecting the entirety of the Torah.

Rav Pam suggests that this is what the Rambam is teaching us. Do not write Torah, parshiyos, parshiyos, do not settle for mediocrity in Torah study. Torah is our life blood. Why would anybody want to shortchange his life? Perhaps we might supplement the shortsightedness of learning Torah parshiyos, parshiyos, with an analogy which I feel applies with regard to all self-guided perceptions. We see what we want to see. We also see only what is within our ability to see. Thus, if the big picture is either beyond us or above us, we might think that we are seeing something, but it is nothing in comparison to one whose vision is more perceptive than ours.

Let me explain. In his Michtav MeiEliyahu, Horav Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler, zl, describes two approaches to Torah. There is the individual who is able to absorb the inner essence of Torah, because his level of purity is quite lofty. His closeness with Hashem, his deveikus, clinging to the Almighty, is so close that it precludes any personal need to probe the inner reason for specific mitzvos intellectually. He does not find it necessary to know why Hashem wants him to perform a certain mitzvah. It is enough for him simply to know that Hashem wants it. His closeness to Hashem is his all-encompassing interest. Nothing else matters. He is neither guided by need or expediency. Reason does not play a role in his relationship vis-à-vis Hashem. The second Jew has not yet achieved this pinnacle of faith, this intense closeness with Hashem. He will apply his intellect to understand and give reason for those mitzvos which are cogently perceptible. He will, however, execute those mitzvos which are above him, because this is a Jew's obligation. He needs a reason, but he understands that some things are beyond his realm of perception, although he does feel that something is inordinately missing. His relationship with Hashem is that of yiraah, fear/awe - not of deveikus, closeness/clinging.

Having delineated between these two individuals, Rav Dessler offers the following analogy to explain this distinction: A child who is learning the Aleph Bais, compared to an adult who is proficient in Talmud. The child sits on the adult's lap and gazes into the same Gemorah as the adult. The child sees the familiar alef, bais, gimmel, while the adult, of course, sees and understands the profundities of the Tannaim and Amoraim which are recorded in the Talmud. They both see the truth, but what the child sees is far from the whole truth. The adult is hardly aware of the letters or of their combination into words; his mind is absorbed with the underlying ideas behind the words. The child has absolutely no inkling concerning the concepts. Likewise, all intellectual achievements fade into oblivion when compared with the inner truth of deveikus.

This is the problem of learning parshiyos, parshiyos. One thinks that he "knows," but, in reality, he is merely focusing on the structure of the letters. He is clueless about their connection and the depth of their meaning. There are those whose level of proficiency in Torah is, at best, limited. Yet, they have no problem expounding their beliefs and postulating what they feel is the correct manner of religious observance. They refuse to concede their apparent lack of knowledge, because they think that, if they can recognize the letters, they have license to connect them any way they want to fit their personal interpretation.

As we stand here on the last Shabbos of the year, in preparation for a period when our prayers must be meaningful, sincere and reflect our true emotions, it is especially important that we not delude ourselves into just staring at the letters. It behooves us all, for our sakes and for the sakes of our families, to open our eyes to the truth and connect the letters in the way Hashem would like us to - rather than in a way that suits our fancy.

In memory of a dear friend on the occasion of his yahrtzeit Hachaver Harav Tzvi ben Hachaver R' Moshe z"l nifter 4 Tishrei 5773 Mr. Bjorn Bamberger



### **Ohr Torah on the Parsha: Returning**

#### **Torah light from Efrat, Gush Etzion, in the Judean Hills.**

**Rabbi Shlomo Riskin**

**Elul 23, 5774, 18/09/14**

“And it shall be when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse, which I have presented before you... that I shall cause you to return to your heart amongst all of the Gentile nations to which the Lord your God has dispersed you. And you shall return to the Lord your God”(Deuteronomy 30:1-2)

With the tragically bitter prophetic curses of exile and persecution still ringing in our ears from last week’s portion of Ki Tavo, this week- just several days before Rosh Hashanah, the first of the Ten Days of Return (Teshuvah)- we read this magnificent Biblical promise of return. It is a two pronged “return”, both a return to our God and our Torah (“You shall hearken to His voice according to everything that I command you this day”(ibid.)), and it is a return to our homeland Israel (“If your dispersal will be at the ends of the heavens, from there will the Lord your God gather you and from there, He will take you. And the Lord your God shall bring you to the land which your forefathers inherited, and you shall inherit it” (ibid 4-5).

I have a number of questions about this passage, which seems to be addressing our generation, the generation of return. First of all, is God exhorting us to fulfill the commandment of teshuvah, or is this a promise which God will eventually effectuate for us?

Second, is the term teshuvah- “return” – the most apt description for our experience in these times?

If an individual has been religious, but, left his religious commitments (a datlash in current Israeli jargon, one of the “formerly religious”), and then “returns” to religion, he may properly be called a baal teshuvah, a returnee. But if an individual who has never been religious, and is now becoming “born-again” religious, how we can refer to him as a “returnee”? He is not “returning” to anything; he is initiating a new experience!

And finally, the opening verses of our Biblical portion which also serve as a segue between the covenant with the curses and our optimistic passage of “return”, begins: “You are standing today, all of you, before the Lord your God, in order to pass into the Covenant of the Lord your God and into His imprecation, which the Lord your God seals with you today... Not with you alone do I seal this Covenant and this imprecation, but with whoever is here standing with us today before the Lord our God and with whoever is not here with us today” (Deut. 30:9-14).

To whom is the Bible referring when it speaks of “whoever is not here with us today”? It is usually explained as the future generations as yet unborn; but how can a Covenant-Contract obligate people who were not present to agree to assume the obligation? And if it refers to the Gentiles, who are responsible to keep at least the universal moral laws, they too cannot be bound by a Covenant-Contract for which they were not present.

To understand this passage, we must invoke the interpretation of Maimonides, who insists that our Biblical verses are “promising” that ultimately Israel will do teshuvah at the conclusion of their exile and will then be redeemed. (Laws of Repentance 7,5).

Indeed, the Prophet Ezekiel states that the later generations will never be able to completely reject God and His Covenant: “As for what enters your mind, it shall not be. That which you say, ‘we will be like the (Gentile) nations, like the families of the land, to worship wood and stone,...I swear that I will rule over you... I will cause you to pass under the rod and I will bring you into the tradition of the Covenant”. (Ezekiel 20:32-37)

We can understand the phrase “under the rod” to refer to the whip of the gentiles, whose persecution of us prevents us from assimilating (witness Nazi Germany and Stalinist Soviet Union and see the words of R. Yehoshua Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 97b.). Alternatively, “under the rod” may refer to the rod of tithes, with which the owner assigned the sheep which would be chosen for God. We, Israel, are God’s chosen people, created in His image and destined to be His light and witnesses to the nations of the world. That “portion from God on High” will never leave us; and so of necessity we eventually “return” to our truest nature and be the holy nations and Kingdom of Priest-teachers we were slated to be.

Thus, the prayer we recite each morning makes the truest statement: “My Lord, the soul which You gave me is pure; You created it, You formed it, and You planted it within me.” That is our truest essence; and it is the Divine of every human being, created in God’s image. As the greatest rule of the Torah states: “You shall love your friend, because he is like you; I am the Lord” (Lev. 19:18) – and so you and your Gentile friend are also like Me, who formed both of you from My womb, as it were. The indelible essence of every human being is the Godliness within him from which humankind can never ultimately escape. Hence God promises that in historic times (Zikhronot) the descendants of the people of the Covenant – endowed with their forbears’ and with God’s DNA- will accomplish their vocation of bringing the world into the Covenant.

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#### **Remembering Merkaz Harav Yeshiva on the Days of Awe**

**Praying with Torah luminaries leaves a powerful memory, carried through to yearly shofar blowing and Selikhot in Elul.**

**From Rabbi Eliezer Melamed**

**Elul 20, 5774, 15/09/14**

*A New Book for the High Holidays*

*With the help of God, a new book on the High Holidays has been published in the series of books ‘Peninei Halakha’, and thus, I merited finishing the laws of Shabbat and the Festivals (seven volumes). In the introduction to the book I wrote a few memories and thoughts that accompanied me in my study and writings.*

Memories

“I remember the days when my father and teacher escorted me from the neighborhood of Givat Mordechai in Jerusalem to Yeshiva Merkaz Harav in Kiryat Moshe for the High Holiday prayers. Although I was a little boy, the great and awesome prayers left a deep impression in my heart. For as long as I could, I would pray there. Every year it becomes clearer to me how much the lofty spirit that pervaded the Yeshiva deepens its impact on me.

The walls of the beit midrash (study hall) were permeated with the eminent soul of the founder of the Yeshiva, the great light of recent generations, Maran Harav Kook ztz”l, and the spirit of his son and heir, the Rosh Yeshiva at the time, our teacher and guide, Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Hakohen Kook ztz”l. Although, Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda would pray in the old building of the Yeshiva, because, how could he not pray in the place where his father prayed? Nevertheless, his impact on those praying in the new building in Kiryat Moshe was huge.

Vaguely, I remember the prayers of the righteous Rabbi Aryeh Levin ztz”l, who would lead the Mussaf prayers on the first day of Rosh Hashana, and in addition, the evening, Mussaf, and Ne’ilah prayers on Yom Kippur. The Mussaf prayers on the second day of Rosh Hashana were led by Rabbi Mordechai Frum ztz”l, a teacher in the Yeshiva and the son-in-law of Rabbi Kook’s son-in-law.

Rabbi Aryeh Levin testified that Rabbi Frum’s prayers were similar to those he had heard in the Volozhin Yeshiva, a nusach (version) that was passed down from the Mahariil. After he passed away, Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Hakohen Kook asked my father to be the shaliach tzibbur in his place. I heard from Rabbi Mordechai Sternberg shlita, that indeed, my father’s prayers were very similar to those of Rabbi Aryeh Levin, both in tone and nusach, to the point where when he closed his eyes, it seemed to him that Rabbi Aryeh Levin was standing in prayer at the moment. His prayers were uttered with supplication and humility, like a son reconciling his father.

In the mizrach (the wall of the synagogue that faces east, where seats are reserved for the rabbis and other dignitaries) on the right side of the chazzan (cantor), sat Rabbi Shapira, Rabbi Israeli, Rabbi Frum, and behind them, my father. Opposite, prayed the grandson Rav Kook, Rabbi Shlomo Raanan hy’d. I’ll never forget how he hastened me to emphatically say together with him: “Achat, achat v’achat, etc.” In my childhood years, I wondered about the meaning of this counting which apparently, according to the nusach of the prayer, carries great importance. As a result of this, while growing, up I continued thinking about the meaning. The explanation for this counting (Chapter 10:11) is dedicated to his memory.

I also remember Rabbi Shabbtai Shmueli z”l, the secretary of the Yeshiva and one of its first students, exclaim in a trembling voice from his seat “Ha Melech” (the King), and approach the pulpit to lead the morning prayers. Afterwards, he would blow the shofar. Later, when he got older, my uncle, Rabbi Eitan Eisman shlita, who also accompanied us from Givat Mordechai, replaced him, and became the permanent shofar blower. He also taught me to blow the shofar, thereby fulfilling the words of our Sages: “Children need not be stopped from blowing; on the contrary, they may be helped until they learn how to blow” (Rosh Hashana 33a; R’ma 596:1).

I remember the Kiddush the rabbis made in the classrooms with Rabbi Mordechai Frum before Mussaf, and his state of tension prior to the holy service. On our way back, we would go through the Hebrew University, and in its pond, we would do tashlich (the custom of praying at a source of running water to “wash away one’s sins”). After the passing of Rabbi Aryeh Levin, our teacher and guide, Rabbi Avraham Shapira ztz”l became the shaliach tzibbur for Ne’ilah, and later, after Rabbi Mordechai Frum passed away, also for one mussaf prayer of Rosh Hashana. And when my father moved to Beit El, Rabbi Shapira served as chazzan for both Mussaf prayers, and his voice, which would emanate from the core of his soul, filled with great emotion, would tremble and stir the hearts.

Kol Nidrei, and usually Ne’ilah, we prayed in Givat Mordechai, and there I got to pray with baalei batim (laymen), some of whom were Holocaust survivors, and hear Rabbi Yehuda Amital ztz”l serve as chazzan. His tunes, which were also steeped in warmth and yearning, had an influence on me. Later, after he began to pray in his yeshiva in Har

Etzion, my father replaced him in the Ne'ilah prayer. This also happened when the Yom Kippur War broke out, when synagogue worshippers were recruited to the front.

When I try to decipher the unique atmosphere in Yeshiva Mercatz Harav, it seems to me that in addition to the excitement that accompanies all yeshivas, a unique spirit of sincerity, honest fear of Heaven, tremendous love for Israel, and idealism permeated the Yeshiva. There were Torah scholars and yeshiva students who were connected with all their hearts to the soldiers in the army, to the settlers making our land bloom, to all inhabitants of the land, and the Jews of the Diaspora. And above all, they yearned for the revelation Torat Eretz Yisrael, to bring Ge'ulah (redemption) to the world, as our teacher and guide, Rabbi Zvi Yehuda would always teach his classes, which I was privileged to hear later on in my studies at the Yeshiva.

In the book "Peninei Halakha: Yamim Nora'im", I tried to impart some of the inspiration I merited receiving from the High Holiday prayers within the Yeshiva of Maran Harav Kook.

Clal Yisrael

The idea of 'clal Yisrael' (the congregation of Israel) is very prominent in the halakhot of the High Holidays, and based on God's choosing us from all of the nations to be His chosen people in order to reveal His Divine Presence in the world and achieve tikkun olam. This is the foundation for teshuva (repentance) and kapara (atonement). Despite this, many people engaged in Torah tend to emphasize the individual side stemming from man, and as a result remain in their small-mindedness, in spite of all their theoretical and emotional efforts.

And there are some who even dare to argue against Maran Harav Kook as if he supposedly over-stressed the yisod ha'clali (the general, overall foundation of Israel). Yet the truth is that the idea of the 'clal' is the main uniqueness and sanctity of Israel, and one who pays attention to what he says in prayers and Selikhot will immediately notice this. Rav Kook "returned the crown to its former glory", explaining in depth the meaning of kedushat clal Yisrael (the sanctity of all of Israel).

Apparently, the impurity of galut (exile) caused many Jews to forget the general foundation, and consequently, we are required to learn Torah straightforwardly and understand that the foundation of emunah (faith), teshuva (repentance), and ge'ulah (redemption) lies in kedushat Yisrael (the holiness of Israel). This is the most important aspect of the prayers of the High Holy Days, whose roots stem from the service of the Kohen Gadol (High Priest) who atoned for all of Israel.

Accentuating the Clal Strengthens the Individual

An individual should not worry about rising to the level of the clal, because only in a superficial understanding does the concept of the clal harm the individual's status; but in truth, the concept of the clal empowers and uplifts the individual, giving sacred and eternal meaning to all of one's inclinations. As our Sages said "one hundred is included in two hundred" – dealing with the clal also embraces within it dealing with all the details, because the clal is made up of all the details. However, dealing with the details does not encompass the clal.

The time for the individual to do teshuva is throughout the entire year, and the teshuva of the Days of Awe is meant for the clal because during these days the entire year is renewed, and consequently, it is the time for all of Israel to return and remember its faith, and awaken to adherence to Torah and mitzvot. And since it is a repentance of the clal, these days also include great joy, and this is reflected in the mitzvah to hold a festive meal on Rosh Hashanah and before Yom Kippur, and wear festive clothes.

Emphasis on Common Rules

There are books on halakha which place heavy emphasis on the differences between the ethnic customs, and this creates great distress and difficulty in remembering the learning. For example, children are taught that Ashkenazi Jews blow the shofar during Elul and the Sephardic Jews do not. However, the correct way is to learn the fundamental rules common to all, and thus the halakha is explained well, and the differences in customs seem as differing tones in a harmonious orchestra.

Blowing the Shofar during the Month of Elul

This is what I wrote on the matter of blowing the shofar (Chapter 2:1):

"Our Sages said: "On Rosh Chodesh Elul, God said to Moshe, 'Come up to Me on the mountain' (Deuteronomy 10:1, to atone for the sin of the Golden Calf), and pass the shofar throughout the camp, for Moshe was about to ascend the mountain so they would not error once again in idol worship. And God was lifted up on that day by means of that shofar, as it is written: 'Elohim is ascended with a shout of joy, Hashem with the sound of a shofar' (Tehillim 47:6).

Thus, our Sages decreed the shofar be blown every year on Rosh Chodesh Elul (Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer 46). And they chose to arouse the nation by the sound of the shofar because of its ability to warn the people from sinning, and stir the masses to repent (Tur and B.Y., O.C. 581:1).

And it is the Jewish custom to blow the shofar during the month of Elul. The custom of Ashkenazi Jews is to blow the shofar at the end of morning prayers. And custom of Sephardic Jews is to recite Selikhot during Elul and blow the shofar when saying the

Kaddish at the end of the Selikhot, and many also blow the shofar while reciting the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy. The custom of blowing the shofar is not compulsory, but nevertheless, it is worthy of the public to try fulfill the custom, but one who did not hear the shofar does not need to seek out someone to blow it for him".

The Custom of Selikhot

This is also the appropriate way to explain the basis of the custom of Selikhot, which was initiated during the period of the Gaonim, and whose goal is to request the redemption of Israel, as appears from the text of the Selikhot (ibid, 2:2-4), and only afterwards to continue to the differences of customs. And so I wrote:

"During the times of the Gaonim, the custom was to say Selikhot during the Ten Days of Repentance, and this was the custom in the large yeshivas in Babylon, and there were a few places where they used to say Selikhot also during the entire month of Elul.

At the end of the period of the Rishonim, the custom of reciting Selikhot during all of Elul and the Ten Days of Repentance was accepted (S.A. 581:1). And the closer Rosh Hashana gets, the more people are careful to awaken for Selikhot, and in particular, during the Ten Days of Repentance.

Ashkenazi custom is to begin reciting Selikhot on Motzei Shabbat before Rosh Hashanah, provided they are able to say Selikhot four days before Rosh Hashana. In addition, the Ashkenazi custom is to add the psalm from Tehillim, "Mizmor l'David, Hashem is my light and salvation" for the month of Elul, as well as adding Torah study and teshuva, which have the same goal."

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By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

**Double Parshiyos, and the Leap Year**

**By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff**

Question #1: When is it a good idea to have doubles?

Question #2: Disproportionate readings

Why are the last four parshiyos of the Torah so short? Would it not make sense that the weekly readings be more evenly divided?

Question #3: Why does it take them so long to catch up?

Sometimes the weekly reading in Eretz Yisrael and chutz la'aretz are a week apart for months on end. Why don't we coordinate things better?

Answer

Most doctors and other health professionals agree with the Rambam's assessment that taking a double portion is not good for our health. Nevertheless, in most calendar years, our policy is to have several weeks of the year when we read a double parsha, and this is definitely good policy; otherwise, we would have difficulty completing the Torah every year and making a Siyum HaTorah on Simchas Torah. This year 5774 adds an unusual feature, in that there is only one parsha doubled the entire year, and that is not until the very last week of the year – almost as if we need to break the no-hitter in the ninth inning. Although this happened exactly three years ago, the time before that this happened was almost thirty years ago -- back in 5744/1983/4, and we will not see this phenomenon again for another 21 years. Those who deplore long Shabbos davenings, and those curious to find out why this year was so singular – stay aboard.

There are a total of seven potential "double parshiyos," meaning parshiyos that can sometimes be read as one reading on a Shabbos, but we rarely double them all in the same year. The reason for the doubling of most parshiyos is to accommodate the extra Shabbos that are missing in a common (non-leap) year, which is a month shorter than a leap year; but, this is not the only reason for doubled parshiyos. Since the doubling of most parshiyos is to accommodate the four extra weeks of the leap year (or the four missing Shabbos of the common year, depending on whether you look at the year as half-full or half-empty), four of the doubled parshiyos are at the end of Sefer Shemos or in Sefer Vayikra (Vayakheil-Pekudei; Tazria-Metzora; Acharei-Kedoshim and Behar-Bechukosei) – all of them falling between Adar, the new month added because of a leap year, and Shavuos.

Why do we want to "catch up" in time for Shavuos? This is so that we can fulfill a decree of Ezra, as presented in the Gemara:

Ezra decreed that the Jews read the curses of the Tochacha in Vayikra before Shavuos and those of Devarim before Rosh Hashanah. [The Gemara then queries:] Why? In order to end the year together with its curses! [The Gemara then comments:] We well understand why we read the Tochacha of Devarim before Rosh Hashanah because the year is ending, but why is that of Vayikra read before Shavuos? Is Shavuos the beginning of a year? Yes, Shavuos is the beginning of a new year, as the Mishnah explains that the world is judged on Shavuos for fruit." Tosafos (ad loc.) explains the Gemara to mean that the tochacha should be completed two weeks before each "New Year," to allow there to be one Shabbos as a buffer between the Tochacha and the beginning of the year. Therefore, the parsha of Bechukosei, which includes the

tochacha, should be read at least two weeks before Shavuot, thus necessitating combining the parshiyos in a way that we complete them and are able to read Bamidbar before Shavuot. As a result, in most years there is one Shabbos between the tochacha of Bechukosei and Shavuot, when we read Parshas Bamidbar. In some leap years, there are two Shabbosos between Bechukosei and Shavuot; in those years, Naso is also read before Shavuot.

There are three other "double parshiyos" that do not come out during this part of the year, and each has its own reason for doubling the parshiyos, a reason that is unrelated to whether it is a leap year.

The "Double Parsha of the Exile"

Chukas-Balak is a double parsha that exists only outside Eretz Yisrael. I once heard it jokingly referred to as "Parsha Sheniya shel Galiyus," The Double Parsha of the Exile, a takeoff on the halachic term "Yom Tov Sheini shel Galiyus," the second day of Yom Tov that is observed outside Eretz Yisrael. Indeed, the two days of Yom Tov in chutz la'aretz is the reason for combining Chukas and Balak into one parsha. When Shavuot falls on Friday, its second day is on Shabbos, and, therefore, the communities of the exile read Aseir te'aseir in Parshas Re'ei, because it discusses the Yom Tov, whereas in Eretz Yisrael the next week's parsha, Naso, is read, since it is no longer Shavuot. When this phenomenon occurs, the Jewish communities of Eretz Yisrael and of the Golah are reading different parshiyos for four weeks, from Parshas Naso through Parshas Chukas, with Eretz Yisrael always reading the parsha a week earlier, until the Golah "catches up" on the Shabbos that falls on the 12th of Tamuz, by reading both Chukas and Balak on one Shabbos, while in Eretz Yisrael they read only Parshas Balak. Thus, the following week, both communities read Parshas Pinchas.

The doubling of Matos and Masei

There are two other parshiyos, Matos and Masei, which are almost always read together, and are separated only when the year requires an extra Shabbos reading, as it did this year. Although we treat Matos and Masei as separate parshiyos, we should really view them as one long parsha (making the combination the largest parsha in the Torah), that occasionally needs to be divided to accommodate the need for an extra Torah reading. In the occasional years when Matos and Masei are read separately, Parshas Pinchas falls before the Three Weeks -- and we actually get to read the haftarah that is printed in the chumashim for Parshas Pinchas, Ve'yad Hashem, from the book of Melachim. In all other years, Parshas Pinchas is the first Shabbos of the three weeks, and the haftarah read is Divrei Yirmiyahu, the opening words of the book of Yirmiyahu, which is appropriate to the season. The printers of chumashim usually elect to print Divrei Yirmiyahu as if it is the haftarah for Parshas Matos, and then instruct you to read it on most years, instead, as the haftarah for Pinchas. What is more logical is to label this haftarah as the one appropriate for the first of the three weeks, and to print both after Pinchas; one for the occasional year when Pinchas falls before the 17th of Tamuz, and one for the far more frequent year when it falls after, and instruct people that when there is a haftarah to be read just for Parshas Matos, that they should read the second haftarah printed after Parshas Pinchas. But, alas, the printers do not usually consult with me, but look at what other printers have already done.

When do they go alone?

In what years are Matos and Masei separated? Only in leap years and only when there are no parshiyos doubled together from Simchas Torah until the week before Rosh Hashanah. (I will explain shortly why Parshas Netzavim is treated differently.) There are two types of leap years that require Matos and Masei to be separated:

(1) A leap year that begins on a Thursday.

A leap year adds an extra month, which is thirty days, not 28. Thus, a leap year sometimes adds five extra Shabbosos, not just four, and there is a need to add an extra reading. This occurs when a leap year begins on a Thursday. In calendar jargon, these years are called ??? and ???, which both mean that Rosh Hashanah falls on Thursday. In these years, to accommodate the extra Shabbos, the parshiyos of Matos and Masei are separated. As we can imagine, this is not a very common occurrence -- a leap year that begins with Rosh Hashanah on Thursday. However, not only did this happen this year, but it also continued an interesting and quirky streak: This was the fourth leap year in a row to begin on a Thursday. Leap years 5765 (the eighth year of the current cycle), 5768 (the eleventh year of the current cycle), and 5771 (the fourteenth year of the current cycle) all began on Thursday. Thus, Matos was separated from Masei this year for the fourth time in ten years. This streak is broken, finally, in the next leap year, 5776, when Rosh Hashanah occurs on a Monday, and Matos and Masei are again combined. At this point, one will have to get used to long davenings in the middle of the summer, since the next time that Matos and Masei are separate is not until 5795, the secular year 2034, which means that 21 years will pass before Matos and Masei are again read on separate Shabbosos.

(2) What I have said until now is accurate only if you are outside Eretz Yisrael. There is one other situation in Eretz Yisrael in which the parshiyos of Matos and Masei are read on separate weeks, because, otherwise, there are simply not enough readings for every

Shabbos of the year. When Rosh Hashanah of a leap year falls on a Tuesday, or in some leap years, even when it falls on a Monday, Eretz Yisrael has to read every possible separate parsha from Rosh Hashanah until the next Rosh Hashanah to accommodate all the Shabbosos of the year. In these years, in Eretz Yisrael, there are no doubled parshiyos, and, therefore, Matos and Masei are separated.

Why is this dependent on being in Eretz Yisrael? The year is the same length no matter where you are, and there seem to be just as many Shabbosos in Eretz Yisrael as there are outside?

The difference is that in these years, the Eighth Day of Pesach, Acharon shel Pesach, falls on Shabbos. On this Yom Tov day, observed only outside Eretz Yisrael, the special Yom Tov reading in chutz la'aretz is Aseir te'aseir, whereas in Eretz Yisrael this Shabbos is after Pesach (although the house is still chometz-free!), and the reading is Parshas Acharei. Thus, in chutz la'aretz there is a need to double a parsha, and, according to what is today common practice, that parsha is Matos and Masei.

The practice I just mentioned however creates a very unusual phenomenon:

The subsequent Shabbos, the Jews of Eretz Yisrael are already reading Parshas Kedoshim, whereas outside Eretz Yisrael the reading is Parshas Acharei. The communities outside Eretz Yisrael ignore the opportunity of doubling up parshiyos Acharei and Kedoshim, Behar and Becholosai and Chukas and Balak, all of which are doubled together upon other occasions, and wait until the very last parsha of Bamidbar to combine Matos with Masei. Thus, the disparity between Eretz Yisrael and chutz la'aretz lasts for over three months, until Parshas Masei, which, as I mentioned above, outside Eretz Yisrael is doubled into Matos-Masei. By the way, this phenomenon is fast approaching. Hebrew year 5776, to be here in two years, follows this pattern, so those who return to chutz la'aretz after spending Pesach in Eretz Yisrael will find that they have missed a parsha. Unless, of course, they decide to stay in Eretz Yisrael until the Nine Days.

The Long Wait to Double

This leads to a very interesting question: Why is the disparity between Eretz Yisrael and chutz la'aretz allowed to last for such a long period of time? There are three potential doubled parshiyos that are passed before one gets to Parshas Matos -- all weeks in which those in chutz la'aretz could combine two parshiyos in order to catch up.

As you can imagine, we are not the first to raise this question, which is indeed raised by one of the great sixteenth-century poskim, the Maharit (Shu't Volume II # 4). He answers that Shavuot should ideally fall between Bamidbar and Naso, and that combining either Acharei with Kedoshim, or Behar with Becholosai would push Shavuot until after Parshas Naso. Indeed, in these years, this is what happens in Eretz Yisrael, but there is no option there, since there are simply not enough Shabbosos for all the parshiyos. In chutz la'aretz, since one can have the readings occur on the preferred weeks, we delay the combined parshiyos until after Shavuot.

However, the Maharit notes that this does not explain why the parshiyos of Chukas and Balak are not combined, although he notes that the Syrian communities indeed follow this practice -- that is, on leap years when Acharon shel Pesach falls on Shabbos, they combine parshiyos Chukas and Balak, but read Matos and Masei on separate weeks, as is done in Eretz Yisrael.

To explain why the parshiyos of Chukas and Balak are not combined in other communities, the Maharit concludes that once most of the summer has passed and the difference is what to read on only three Shabbosos, we combine Matos with Masei, which are usually combined, rather than Chukas and Balak, which are usually separate.

Netzavim -- Vayeilech

We have now explained the reason for every time we read a double parsha, with one important and anomalous exception -- the two tiny parshiyos of Netzavim and Vayeilech. Tosafos already asks why we often combine the two huge parshiyos of Matos and Masei, and in the very same year, read the two tiny parshiyos of Netzavim and Vayeilech on separate weeks. His answer is based on his explanation to the Gemara that we quoted earlier: Ezra decreed that the Jews read the curses of the Tochacha in Vayikra before Shavuot and those of Devarim before Rosh Hashanah. [The Gemara then queries:] Why? In order to end the year together with its curses, which Tosafos understood to mean that the tochacha should be completed two weeks before Rosh Hashanah to allow a week as a buffer between the tochacha and the beginning of the year. That buffer parsha is Netzavim, which must always be read on the last Shabbos of the year; but, ultimately, this means that only a small part of the Torah is left to be read between Rosh Hashanah and Simchas Torah. This small part left is divided into three small parshiyos, Vayeilech, Haazinu, and Vezos Haberacha. Vezos Haberacha is, of course, read on Simchas Torah, and Haazinu on the last Shabbos of the cycle, which is either Shabbos Shuva or the Shabbos between Yom Kippur and Sukkos, if there is one. Thus, whether Vayeilech merits its own Shabbos or is combined with Netzavim depends on only one factor: if there is more than one Shabbos between Rosh Hashanah and Sukkos. When there are two such Shabbosos, Vayeilech is read on Shabbos Shuva,

and Haazinu the week afterwards. When there is only one Shabbos between Rosh Hashanah and Sukkos, Vayeilech is combined with Netzavim on the week before Rosh Hashanah, and Haazinu is read the week of Shabbos Shuva.

#### Conclusion

From all of the above, we see the importance that Chazal placed on the public reading of the Torah and of completing its cycle annually. It goes without saying that we should be concerned with being attentive to the words of the Torah as they are being read, and that the baal keriah should make every effort to read them accurately.

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KOLLEL ZICHRON EPHRAIM HESCHEL'S. HALACHA HOTLINE of the Five Towns/Far Rockaway Community

#### **Enhance your Shabbos table with the Halacha Hotline: Parshas Nitzavim-Vayeilech Selichos Without a Minyan at Home and in Shul**

"כי המצוה הזאת אשר אנכי מצוה היום לא נגלאת הוא מן ה' ולא רחקה הוא" (דברים ל:יא)

For this mitzvah that I am commanding you-it is not covered (hidden) from you and it is not distant [from you].

...אבל המצוה הזאת על התשובה הנזכרת (רמב"ן שם)

In truth, "this mitzvah" is referring to repentance, which is mentioned [earlier] (Ramban ad loc.)

#### Introduction

The Selichos Service is often associated with large gatherings of people in shul who come together to beseech Hashem to have mercy on His nation and grant them forgiveness. Indeed, some sections of the Selichos Service may be recited only with a minyan (quorum of ten men thirteen years and older). However, there are times when one is not able to recite selichos with a minyan. A town with a small Jewish community might not have a minyan consistently in shul. A woman, who wishes to recite selichos but has small children at home, might not be able to leave her house to say selichos in shul. Also, not everyone who davens (prays) with a minyan is able to keep pace with the minyan, and thus risks being unable to recite certain essential sections together with the tzibbur (the public/congregation). In this article, we will present the halachos for situations in which one recites selichos (or parts thereof) without a minyan.

The Yud Gimmel Middos HaRachamim (G-d's Thirteen Attributes of Mercy)

#### The Requirement for a Minyan

The most important part of the Selichos Service is the recitation of the Yud Gimmel Middos HaRachamim, which begin "Hashem, Hashem..." (Tosafos Rosh Hashanah 17b s.v. Shelosh Esrei Middos).<sup>1</sup> The Gemara (Rosh Hashanah 17b) relates that Hashem assured Moshe Rabbeinu that whenever the Jewish People recite the Yud Gimmel Middos, they will not return empty-handed; i.e., their prayers will afford them at least partial reprieve from punishment for their sins. The Gemara relates that Hashem demonstrated this practice by "enwrapping Himself in a tallis, as a shaliach tzibbur" (the leader of the congregational prayers) and reciting the Yud Gimmel Middos before Moshe. The Rashba (cited by the Beis Yosef O.C. 565) cites this Gemara to prove that the recitation of the Yud Gimmel Middos is considered a *davar sheb'kedushah* (a holy statement) and must, therefore, be recited together with a minyan. [It is not sufficient to recite them with a minyan present; one must recite them together (at the same time) with the minyan.]

#### Saying the Yud Gimmel Middos Without a Minyan

Since the Yud Gimmel Middos may be said only together with a minyan, one saying selichos at home must skip the Yud Gimmel Middos every time they appear in the selichos. There is a dispute whether one davening (praying) without a minyan may recite the sections of selichos that only reference the Yud Gimmel Middos but do not enumerate them explicitly, such as the introductory paragraphs to the Yud Gimmel Middos (Keil Erech Apayim and Keil Melech Yoshaiv). The Taz (O.C. 565:5) and Mateh Ephraim (581:21) hold that all references to the Yud Gimmel Middos must be skipped, but the Bach (O.C. 565) holds that only the actual Yud Gimmel Middos must be skipped, but not sections that merely make reference to the Yud Gimmel Middos. The Mishnah Berurah (565:13) rules in accordance with the Bach (see Sha'ar Hatziyun 565:10).

Nevertheless, there is a way to allow one reciting selichos without a minyan to recite the Yud Gimmel Middos. The Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 565:5) writes *that one may say the Yud Gimmel Middos without a minyan if one does so in the manner of reading.*<sup>2</sup> The reason for this is that when one does so, we do not view him as reciting a prayer that requires a minyan, but as reading a portion in the Torah, which is permitted without a minyan. The Magen Avraham (based on the Trumas Hadeshen #18) explains this ruling to mean that one may say the Yud Gimmel Middos with the correct trup (cantillation melody), as done during K'rias Hatorah (reading from a Sefer Torah in shul). This explanation is recorded also in the Mateh Ephraim (ibid.) and Mishnah Berurah (565:12). Rav Moshe Feinstein (Igros Moshe Y.D. vol. 3 #21) is more lenient and posits that the Shulchan Aruch would allow one to say the Yud Gimmel Middos using any tune one generally uses when studying pesukim from the Torah, even if not the regular

trup. For by reading the Yud Gimmel Middos in a manner of Torah study, not in the manner of tefillah (prayer), he indicates that he is 'studying Torah,' not davening, and does not require a minyan. One who is saying selichos without a minyan and is unable to recite the Yud Gimmel Middos following these guidelines should skip them.

According to Rav Moshe Feinstein (ibid.), one who says the Yud Gimmel Middos without a minyan "in the manner of reading" must complete the pasuk in such a manner; that is, one must continue "reading" through the word *ribbei'im*. The Hid" a (Rav Pe'alim O.C. 1:11), however, rules that it is not necessary to do so. (See Ishei Yisrael 25:3 with note 14 for an analysis.)

#### Falling Behind the Tzibbur in Shul

In the structure of the Selichos Service, each time the Yud Gimmel Middos are recited, they are preceded by a selichah (supplication prayer) and an introductory paragraph (Keil Erech Apayim or Keil Melech Yoshaiv). Due to the centrality and importance of the Yud Gimmel Middos, if one has not yet finished the selichah when the congregation reaches the Yud Gimmel Middos, one should stop saying the selichah and join the congregation for the recitation of the Yud Gimmel Middos.<sup>3</sup> Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (Shalmei Mo'ed p. 24) writes that one need join the congregation only for the Yud Gimmel Middos, after which one may continue from the point at which one left off. Rav Chaim Kanievsky (Sefer Yemei Harachamim, cited in Mishnah Berurah Dirshu note 10), however, holds that one need join the congregation starting from the introductory paragraph of Keil Erech Apayim or Keil Melech Yoshaiv.

One who began reciting the Yud Gimmel Middos with the minyan but fell behind because one was saying the words more slowly, may complete saying the Yud Gimmel Middos even after the congregation has finished saying them (Kaf Hachayim 131:24).<sup>4</sup> Tefilos (Prayers) in Aramaic

The Mishnah Berurah (581:6), citing the Eliya Rabba (581:9), writes that one who is reciting selichos without a minyan must skip also the sections that are written in Aramaic (e.g. *Machei u'masei*; *Maran d'vishmaya*).<sup>5</sup> However, unlike the Yud Gimmel Middos, which one must say together with a minyan, one may say the Aramaic sections alone so long as a minyan is present. According to Rav Chaim Kanievsky (cited in Ishei Yisrael ch. 45 note 58), this ruling holds true even if the minyan has already completed the Selichos. Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (Shulchan Shlomo on Rosh Hashanah 1:4), however, rules that one may say the Aramaic sections alone only if the minyan is still saying selichos; but once the minyan has completed the Selichos, one may not say the Aramaic sections.

1 According to the Arizal, "Hashem, Hashem" is only an introduction to the Yud Gimmel Middos; the Middos actually begin with "Keil." See Aruch Hashulchan (end of 581:13).

2 The above is merely a suggestion of how to enable one to say the Yud Gimmel Middos without a minyan, but one is not actually halachically obligated to employ this suggestion to enable oneself to recite them (Koveitz Halachos of Rav S. Kamenetzky, Yamim Nora'im, p. 25).

3 In light of that which is written above, doing so is especially important since one may not say the Yud Gimmel Middos at a later time, without the minyan.

4 According to the Sh"ut Torah Lishmah (cited in Ishei Yisrael ch. 25 note 15), even one who began the paragraph of Keil Erech Apayim or Keil Melech Yoshaiv with the tzibbur but fell behind may finish those paragraphs and begin reciting the ensuing Yud Gimmel Middos alone. The rationale for this ruling is that the Yud Gimmel Middos are considered as beginning with Keil Erech Apayim or Keil Melech Yoshaiv. Thus, by starting to say those paragraphs together with the tzibbur, it is considered as if one began the Yud Gimmel Middos together with them. One may thus finish the Yud Gimmel Middos even on one's own, in accordance with the ruling of the Kaf Hachayim cited above (Ishei Yisrael ch. 25 note 15). [It would seem that this ruling would be in accordance only with the opinion of Rav Chaim Kanievsky, but not with the opinion of Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, both cited above.]

5 The reason for this ruling is beyond the scope of this article. See Eliya Rabba 581:9 and Y'chaveh Da'as 1:46.

DISCLAIMER: Not all details and aspects of the question and answer can be fully expressed in this limited format. Accordingly, one should not rely on the information herein for their specific case as a small change in the circumstances can change the halachic outcome.

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