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date Fri, Aug 6, 2010
subject The Timeless Rav Hirsch - Parshas Reeh

The Timeless Rav Hirsch by Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein

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Parshas Reeh

Of Men and Mice I

Think of this passage as a Manufacturer's warning label. Institutions crucial to the progress of a Torah nation become dangerous to the spiritual health of individuals and communities when their powers are abused.

The Torah begins with two examples of power gone awry: the false prophet, and the city that is seduced into worshipping false gods. Having established the importance of the navi as a conduit of Divine guidance, the Torah warns of spiritual personalities who misuse their gifts of persuasiveness and charisma, and lead people away from their devotion to Hashem. It then turns to webs of associations with neighbors, friends and family. This binding of people to people that creates thriving Torah communities can also become a seductive or coercive means to pursue false gods and ersatz values.

The Torah then turns to seemingly unrelated issues, which actually flow quite elegantly from the topics that precede them. The Torah revisits a number of areas with which it dealt in Vayikra. The repetition should not bother us at all. Vayikra in general deals with ethical and spiritual norms for a community that houses the mishkan and the Shechinah in its immediate midst. Moshe now speaks to a different generation, which will live out its life in very different circumstances. After a period of conquest and division, they will disperse to different parts of the country, far from the reach of any centralized authority. The Torah cautions here that some of the mitzvos of Vayikra will have new and pressing urgency. A new challenge emerges - remaining focused on the presence of the Divine even when physically removed from it, and when the guidance of a strong leader and role model like Moshe is

nothing but a fond memory. Mitzvos that had been important to live on a plane of holiness befitting the Shechinah in their midst, will now become crucial to create that holiness within them.

The first of these is prohibit two forms of bodily mutilation. We are prohibited from cutting the flesh, or creating patches of baldness, both as signs of overwhelming grief over the loss of a loved one. The connection between these and the prohibitions discussed above is clear and direct. Great people, and great numbers of people, have enormous impact upon us. They can mislead, if they choose to, as easily as they can lead. Ordinary people, on the other hand, without any malice or intent, can become the reason for us to falter and stumble. They can become so beloved, so central to our being, that we cannot imagine life without them. Mutilating the body is a symbolic statement that our existence has become devalued or even worthless with the death of a loved one. Without quite taking our lives, we signify that its breath has been sucked out of it. This futility is improper, and forbidden by law. After the worst of losses, we remain Hashem's children. Our connection with Him should prevent us from being overcome by feelings of complete abandonment and hopelessness. His presence in our lives, his assurance that each of us has purpose so long as we remain alive, belies the suggestion that we have no recourse, and nothing worth the while of continuing on.

While our passage first instructs us not to lose ourselves in grief because we are to remember that we are His children, it develops the argument beyond our feelings as individuals. We are to remember that we are an am kadosh, a holy nation, chosen to be special to Him. We dare not abandon our feelings of self-worth, and hence our contributory positions within society. We are not free to walk away from our posts as steadfast contributors to the Torah nation.

The gemara[2] sees in lo sigodedu a variation on this theme of maintaining the integrity of a Torah society. It finds a prohibition against dividing the Torah nation into different groups and communities, based on conflicting interpretations of the law. One community should not have two courts, each one ruling differently on any matter, and attracting adherents to its approach. (The word gedud refers to a troop of soldiers, abstracted from the main body of the army. This second meaning of lo sigodedu might very well be connected to this idea of a group of Jews split off from their neighbors.) Strange as this sounds today in a community riven by such difference, Klal Yisrael succeeded in maintaining a single standard for over twelve hundred years, up until the time of Hillel and Shammai!

The Torah very precisely uses the word am here, rather than goy. The latter has the connotation of the external face that a people show the rest of the world. It is not, however, this outward-facing projection of unity that the Torah deals with here. Am connotes the internal mechanics of many people – even many subgroups – coming together as a large entity. Our am belongs in holiness entirely to Hashem. Splitting that nation into separate units disfigures its body as surely as does an individual cutting into his flesh.

The two halachic applications of lo sigodedu are much closely related in yet another way. They can both come from placing people on too high a pedestal. Cutting the flesh in mourning stems from attaching too much importance to the role that individuals play in our lives. Dividing ourselves into factions and subgroups often results from becoming too enamored of the personalities of the leaders of those factions-in-formation. We imagine them to be so important to us that we feel compelled to reject anyone or anything that differs with them. How are we to avoid the perfectly understandable tendency of over-promotion of people who lead us? The Torah's next topic – its treatment of kosher and non-kosher animals – may well provide the answer.

Once again, we have a topic that was introduced earlier. Here, too, the newer treatment reflects the realities of the moment: a nation about to

enter the Land, and fan out across its geography. Vayikra offered a definition of kosher animals (i.e. possessing cloven hooves and a ruminant stomach); Devarim offers a list of names. The Vayikra-definition led to deeper understanding about the nature of the difference between kosher and non-kosher. The people gathered in front of Moshe needed unmistakable clarity about what they could and could not eat. Vayikra's definition provided material to ponder the theoretical meaning of kashrus. This generation needed something more immediate before going in that direction.

Remarkably, one entire subsection of the kosher laws disappears here in Devarim. While animals are explicitly named here, and birds as well, the names of forbidden small animals are not. The Yerushalmi[3] says that the forbidden rodents are all subsumed by the instruction here that introduces the entire section of kashrus laws: "You shall not eat anything that is disgusting." [4]

For large parts of humanity, no law is needed to ban eating mice and lizards. They find such animals unpalatable to some internal compass – disgusting, in other words. The Torah therefore does not need to supply the detail about which crawling things to avoid. Bnei Yisrael would avoid them anyway. At the same time, however, the pasuk clearly means to include all forbidden foods. It is telling us to regard perfectly desirable food items in the same manner as we would decline a main course of rat! We are to understand that the Torah forbids things to us because they would detract from our spiritual and ethical growth as Torah Jews. We are to regard any inner imperfection that could distance us from our Father with the same revulsion as the prospect of dining on rodents.

This sense of pride in the value of self takes reflection and personal focus. Prophets, community, and great leaders teach us and help us in many ways. In the end, however, each individual must develop his or her understanding of what it means to be sons and daughters of our Father. As important as our relationships are with others, be they the great people we encounter in our lifetimes, or the ordinary ones we learn to love the most, there is no stepping back from the importance of individual self-worth, confidence and integrity.

1. Based on the Hirsch Chumash, Devarim 14:1-3

2. Yevamos 13B-14A

3. Yerushalmi Shabbos 9:1

4. Devarim 14:3

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from Shabbat Shalom <postmaster@ou.2dialog.com>
reply-to shabbatshalom@ou.org
to internetparshasheet@gmail.com
date Fri, Aug 6, 2010 at 1:04 AM
subject Coming Full Circle - Parshat Re'eh - Shabbat Shalom from the OU!

Rabbi Weinreb's Torah Column, Parshas Re'eh

The Thief of Blessing

I am sure that you, dear reader, have had the occasion to come across a book which you simply could not put down. Something so fascinating,

so gripping, that you were compelled to read it cover to cover in as short a time as you could manage.

I came across such a book several weeks ago. It is a Hebrew book, the biography of a rabbi named Dov Cohen. Rabbi Cohen passed away several years ago at the advanced age of 94. He was one of the last, if not the last, of the students of the yeshiva in Hebron which experienced the horrible massacre there in the summer of 1929, almost exactly 81 years ago.

The book is entitled *Vayelchu Shnayhem Yachdav* (And the Two of Them Walked Together). Much of Rabbi Cohen's story is encapsulated in that title. For, you see, he was born in Seattle, WA into a family of Lithuanian Jewish immigrants. The family faced all of the challenges of Americanization in the early decades of the last century.

Rabbi Cohen's mother witnessed the inexorable process of assimilation with which her older children were involved. She was determined that her youngest child, Dov, would receive a Jewish education as intensive as the one she witnessed back in the old country.

So, in 1926, she took her then 14-year-old son from Seattle eastward across the United States, across the Atlantic Ocean, through the straits of Gibraltar, and ultimately to the then totally primitive and isolated village of Hebron. She committed him there to the tutelage of the famed Rabbi Nosson Tzvi Finkel of Slobodka. Indeed, "the two of them walked together."

I cannot possibly share with you, in the context of this column, all of the ensuing adventures in Rabbi Cohen's life. But there is one episode that I must relate.

Dov visited the United States several times during the eighty years that followed his first days in the land of Israel. And each time he experienced a sort of "culture shock".

Once, on a Sunday morning, he found himself in a taxicab with the radio on. He soon realized that the radio was playing a sermon being delivered by a Christian minister in his church. He was unable to have the taxi driver change the radio station. And so, quite uncomfortably, he listened to the preacher's sermon. And this is what he heard:

"The group in charge of increasing the enrollment in gehenna, or hell, was discussing ways to get more people to sin. One suggested encouraging them to steal. But the others all protested that the laws against theft were too strict and not enough people would sin by stealing. Another suggested encouraging people to lie. Again, the others protested that lying would make people feel too guilty. Finally came the suggestion with which everyone agreed:

"Let's encourage people to do good deeds, acts of loving kindness, acts of charity, acts of courage and justice. But let's tell them not to do those things today. But rather, tomorrow!"

Rabbi Cohen was moved to the core by that story and was inspired by it. Indeed, he shared it with Jewish audiences whenever he could. The lesson he learned and shared was one that Judaism also teaches, albeit not with that particular story. It is the lesson of the dangers of procrastination, of the importance of doing things as soon as possible and not putting them off for tomorrow.

This lesson is conveyed in the opening verse of this week's Torah portion, Re'eh. "See, I set before you today blessing and curse."

Homiletically, the stress is upon "today," this day and this moment. Do the right thing today and it will be a blessing. Put it off until tomorrow and the result is cursed.

We have all heard the advice, "Never put off until tomorrow what you can do today." This advice is useful in all aspects of life, but it is especially useful in the context of religious behavior and spiritual service. Postponing until a tomorrow which may never come can be, as the Gentile preacher's story suggests, nothing less than sinful.

You may also have heard the adage, which originates with the 18th century poet Edward Young, "Procrastination is the thief of time." The

opening words of the Torah portion suggest that procrastination is not only the thief of time but it is the thief of life and of blessing. "See, I have given you today, this day, now and not later, to perform the good deed, and if you do it now it will be a blessing. If you procrastinate you may never do it at all, and the result may be quite different from a blessing." This is the lesson of the opening verse of Re'eh. And how ironic it is that the subject of the engrossing biography that I just finished reading, Rabbi Dov Cohen, a yeshiva boy and eventually a well-known Jewish rabbi, learned this lesson from a Protestant preacher on a Sunday morning long ago!

The following divrei torah through the end of the parsha sheet were selected by Hamelaket@gmail.com :

From Destiny Foundation/Rabbi Berel Wein
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Subject Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein

**Jerusalem Post :: Friday, August 6, 2010
GRATITUDE :: Rabbi Berel Wein**

One of the basic values of Judaism is hakarat hatov – the gratitude to others for favors and help extended to one. This concept is even embodied in the relationship of a Jew with one's Creator. Ingratitude towards the Creator Who has granted us life and all of its attendant benefits is reckoned as being a primary sin of attitudes and bad values in Jewish ethical thought.

We find in the Torah that our father Avraham and his descendants were and are held to account for Avraham having said to God: "What are you giving me?" when Avraham entreated God for a child. Part of the rationale for the principle in Jewish life, as articulated in the Ten Commandments itself, of honoring one's parents is really only an extension of this concept of appreciation and gratitude – again to those who have given us life and in most instances raised us and protected us from misfortune.

And, furthermore, Judaism does not view this debt of gratitude owed as being a one-time event. There is an ever-continuing debt of gratitude owed that does not automatically expire because of changing times and circumstances. And in the eyes of Jewish thought this is even a value and concept that transcends generations.

My children, if they are aware of others' past favors to me, are also bidden to acknowledge that goodness and to attempt to repay it in kind. There are numerous incidents in the Talmud that point out this intergenerational obligation and attitude of gratitude.

Last week an Arab Israeli here in Israel was arrested for plotting and almost executing a mass murder of Jewish Israelis – civilians whom he did not know and had done him no personal harm. It was revealed that the young daughter of this would-be terrorist and potential murderer had, only three weeks earlier, undergone life saving surgery at Hadassah Hospital in Jerusalem. This surgery was performed gratis of the State of Israel and by an expert group of Jewish medical personnel.

One would have thought that a shred of decency, a whiff of gratitude, would have swayed this admitted plotter to kill innocents, to refrain from his nefarious intents. But, hatred warps all correct logical and emotional response to situations such as this one.

Proud to be a martyr for his understanding of his faith and devoted to his hatred of Jews, there is no room left in his psyche and soul to consider, in the light of gratitude, what his attitude and behavior towards Israeli Jews should be.

American Jews, well meaning and naïve in the extreme, raised fifteen million dollars to purchase from the UN relief organizations the green houses and hothouses of the great Israeli agricultural achievement of

Gush Katif on the borders of Hamas' Gaza. The Hamas-led rioters destroyed this infrastructure completely and willfully on the specious claim that they did not want to be beholden to Jewish generosity. Needless to say, none of the hothouses or greenhouses has ever been rebuilt five years later. Only complaints and false weeping about being under siege and remaining impoverished emanates from official Gaza. It is difficult to make peace with people who do not have within themselves any sense whatever of the necessary proprietary emotion of gratitude towards others for help rendered to them.

The prophets of Israel long ago lamented the lack of gratitude that Jews exhibited towards their Creator. God says to them in a manner of speaking: "You took the gifts of wealth and life that I granted you and used them to fashion idols and promote evil." It is not only the idols and evil that God complains about, so to speak. It is the sheer audacious cold hearted ingratitude that drives that behavior and brings down God's wrath against the people.

The prophet Yeshayahu points out that even in the animal world the domesticated animal recognizes its owner and provider of food and care. But "my people knew not" and thus that ingratitude led to the destruction of the Temple and Jewish exile and dispersion. There is an element of ingratitude involved in the relationship of certain segments of our current society to the temporal State of Israel.

Is it not unseemly to take sustenance and benefits galore from the State and yet curse and revile it at the very same moment? How does that square up with Jewish values and true Torah behavior? A person with a sense of gratitude can feel contented and full with one's lot in life. The ungrateful ones always feel deprived, frustrated and angry at the world and everyone else. We should all learn to say a proper thank you at correct occasions and to really mean it.

Shabat shalom.

From Destiny Foundation/Rabbi Berel Wein
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Subject Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein

Weekly Parsha :: RE'EH :: Rabbi Berel Wein

In this week's parsha, the Torah presents the ultimate challenge to any minority group living in a society where the majority culture, mores and lifestyle differ radically from those of that particular minority group.

Human nature abhors outsiders, aliens, those who are obviously different. And therefore within all of us lies a deep seated drive to conform, to belong, to become part of the perceived whole and not to remain so isolated and strange.

The Torah phrases it succinctly; "How is it that the many nations of the world all worship pagan gods?" Is everybody wrong and only I am correct? Can fifty million Frenchmen be wrong? And therefore "I will also do so," I will join the crowd and bow down before gods of wood and stone handcrafted by humans themselves.

In spite of the absurdity of this logic, it truly reflects human nature. The Talmud teaches us that a great scholar once saw Menashe, the king of Judah, the son of the righteous king Chizkiyah, in a dream. Menashe, at the beginning of his long fifty-five year reign as king, installed paganism as the state religion of Judah.

He later repented but the damage was already done. The scholar asked Menashe how he could have, even for a moment, fallen victim to paganism as a serious belief. Menashe answered him that had the scholar lived in his time and social environment he would have "lifted the hem of the robe he wore to run faster to worship that idol!" Menashe and his society were influenced by the majority culture against all realistic evidence and Divine fiat to the contrary.

Jewish history, over the last three centuries especially, is littered with the debris of majority cultures that have bankrupted and proven to be disastrous. From being “Germans of the Mosaic persuasion” to Marxists of the first order, disastrous results have emanated from Jews following majority cultures.

Today’s majority culture of not only tolerating but encouraging sexual hedonism, the pursuit of wealth and gain at any cost, phony universalism and distorted concepts of intellectual and academic rights, is slowly leading to disaster for many unsuspecting Jews. Part of the problem lies in the fact that most Jews, unaware and ignorant of any Jewish history or tradition, simply cannot recognize the trap that they are falling into.

They “pick up the hem of their robes” to run faster to worship the currently fashionable gods of the majority culture. Their attitude is a danger to the very survival of the Jewish people. And yet, blissfully, no one is allowed to speak against these current majority norms lest one be branded as an obstructionist and old-fashioned.

In this week’s parsha, the Torah’s warning against blindly following majority cultures certainly should resonate in our current “Jewish democratic” world. We should be careful to choose wisely, listen to our tradition and history and be content to be a Godly minority, unwavering in our principles, ideals and Jewish way of life.

Shabat shalom.

From Ohr Somayach <ohr@ohr.edu>
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TORAH WEEKLY :: Parshat Re’eh
For the week ending 7 August 2010 / 26 Av 5770
from Ohr Somayach | www.ohr.edu
by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com
OVERVIEW

Moshe presents to the nation the blessing of a spiritually oriented life, and the curse of becoming disconnected from Hashem. When the nation enters Eretz Yisrael they must burn down any trees that had been used for idol-worship, and destroy all idolatrous statues. Hashem will choose only one place where the Divine Presence will dwell. Offerings may be brought only there; not to a private altar. Moshe repeatedly warns against eating animal blood. In the desert, all meat was slaughtered in the Mishkan, but in Eretz Yisrael meat may be shechted anywhere. Moshe lists the categories of food that may only be eaten in Jerusalem. He warns the nation against copying ways of the other nations. Since the Torah is complete and perfect, nothing may be added or subtracted from it. If a “prophet” tells the people to permanently abandon a Torah law or indulge in idol worship, he is to be put to death. One who entices others to worship idols is to be put to death. A city of idolatry must be razed. It is prohibited to show excessive signs of mourning, such as marking the skin or making a bald spot. Moshe reiterates the classifications of kosher and non-kosher food and the prohibition of cooking meat and milk. Produce of the second tithe must be eaten in Jerusalem, and if the amount is too large to carry, it may be exchanged for money with which food is bought in Jerusalem. In certain years this tithe is given to the poor. Bnei Yisrael are instructed to always be open-hearted, and in the seventh year any loans must be relinquished - Hashem will bless the person in all ways. A Jewish bondsman is released after six years, and must be sent away with generous provisions. If he refuses to leave, his ear is pierced with an awl at the door post and he remains a bondsman until the Jubilee year. The Parsha ends with a description of the three pilgrimage festivals of Pesach, Shavuot and Succot.

INSIGHTS

“See! I am putting in front of you today a blessing and curse...” (11:26)

When one hears a rabbi exhorting his flock to lead more spiritual lives and spurn the “flesh-pots”, the thought might cross one’s mind: “What does he know about flesh-pots that he can tell me how much better a spiritual life is? Maybe if he had a Rolls Royce he wouldn’t be so quick to reject materialism!” That’s what Moshe is hinting to here: “See! Look at me! I was a prince in Egypt; I’m one of the richest men in the world! I know what material wealth is. On the other hand, I’ve ascended to spiritual realms to which no other mortal has reached. I spent 120 days speaking to G-d ‘face-to-face’. As a result I now wear a veil over my face except when I teach Torah, because my face radiates a light that you can’t look at! Look at me! I know both worlds and I’m telling you: Choose the spiritual path!”

Source: Adapted from the Ohr HaChaim.

“See! I am putting in front of you today a blessing and curse...”(11:26)

Wealth and poverty do not always have the same effect on a person. There are those whose wealth influences them for the good, that through the blessing of their wealth they come to a greater appreciation of G-d. However, had they been poor, they would have been so preoccupied trying to find food, that they would have forgotten their Creator, as we see was the case in Egypt, that the Bnei Yisrael were so exhausted by the hard labor that they didn’t listen to Moshe. On the other hand, there are those whom wealth removes from the path of righteousness, as we see so often in our history, that the Jewish People became successful and self-satisfied and forgot Who gave them what they have. However, when a person is poor and broken, G-d never ignores his supplications. That’s what the verse is saying here: “See — I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse. And don’t think that the blessing is wealth and the curse is poverty. Rather, everything depends on how a person deals with his riches or poverty. And whether he be rich or poor, if he turns his focus to the Torah and mitzvot, then whatever his status is in life — that is the blessing.”

Written and compiled by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair
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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 Rabb A. Leib Scheinbaum
Parshas Reeh

When Hashem, your G-d, broadens your boundary... and you say, "I would eat meat," for you will have desire to eat meat, to your hearts' desire may you eat meat. (12:20)

One of the great ills which plague society is the disease of "keeping up with the Jones'." While envy has been around for some time, its effect on people varies. It drives some people to act irrationally, causing them to spend outrageous amounts of money, so that they purchase items which they do not need and which they certainly cannot afford. One would think that this is a personal, social problem, but one not necessarily an issue addressed by halachah. Well, think again! In his commentary to the above pasuk, Rashi writes, "The Torah is teaching us derech erez, proper conduct: that one does not desire to eat unless he has been enabled by Hashem to afford it." This interpretation seems quite unambiguous. Apparently, eating meat is considered an inappropriate luxury unless one has the requisite meat in his own flocks and herds. Rashi's commentary is based on the Talmud Chullin 84a, which states that a person should eat meat only when he has the desire. One might think that he should purchase meat in the market and eat. In response to this, the Torah writes, "You shall slaughter some of your cattle and sheep" (ibid 12:21). Rashi explains that a person who

possesses only one cow and one sheep shall not eat meat, since the definition of one with "appropriate means" is a person who has sufficient flocks and herds, so that when he slaughters part of them, he still has some remaining.

Chazal continue with the statement, "Whoever has one maneh (a coin worth 100 silver zuz) should take a pound of vegetables for his pot; one who has ten maneh should take a pound of fish for his pot; one who has fifty maneh should take a pound of meat for his pot."

Horav Meir Bergman, Shlita, notes a powerful lesson to be derived from Rashi's choice of words. Rashi writes: "A person should only desire to eat meat when Hashem has enabled him to afford it." He is very precise with his parlance. He does not say, "A person should only eat when he can afford it." Rather, he says, "A person should only desire to eat..." The single word desire adds a new dimension to this halachah. The Torah demands that one be of such emotional refinement that he does not even desire meat as long as Hashem has yet not "broadened the boundaries of his material abundance."

One must train himself to be content with what he has. If this means eating vegetables - so be it. The quality of sameach b'chelko, being happy with one's lot, must be intrinsically inscribed in the depths of our being. It should be a part of our thought process, so that we naturally and effortlessly understand that Hashem wants only what is best for us, and He determines what we need. Thus, if He has not yet "broadened our boundaries," it is His way of saying, "You do not need it." If such is the case, then we have no reason to crave it. With one word, Rashi has encapsulated the underlying principle of the Talmud's statement. If we do not need it, then we should not want it. The Jones's may have it, but that is not a reason for us to have it. Our "haves" and "have nots" are determined by the Almighty.

In order to realize the full measure of his humanity, man must learn to curb his desires and reign over his emotions. One can control his thought patterns. Our desires should coincide with Hashem's determination of our needs. If He would have wanted us to have luxuries, He would have provided us with the wherewithal to procure such items. Apparently, He gave them to the Jones's instead.

You are children to Hashem, your G-d; you shall not cut yourselves. (14:1)

The Navi sheker, false prophet... the meisis, enticer, who leads people astray... the ir ha'nidachas, wayward city, a community so spiritually corrupt that all its inhabitants were persuaded to worship idols. All of these are followed by the prohibition of Lo sisgodedu, the prohibition against cutting oneself in mourning over the passing of someone close. What is the area of commonality between these prohibitions? After some thought, we observe that the navi, meisis and ir ha'nidachas are all the results of an adverse influence imposed upon us by someone who has attained a position of eminence through his intellectual gifts or social status; whether it be: a brilliant leader whose false visions control our lives; a close, trusted friend who takes advantage of our relationship with him to lead us astray. The result is an entire city worshipping idols because they have succumbed to the sedition of their leadership. This does not mean that we should not follow the direction of our charismatic leadership. We should - but all relationships, regardless of how close, should cease to exist if they provide a means to lead us away from Hashem.

Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl, sees a continuation in the prohibition against making a wound in one's flesh as a sign of mourning. The motivation for making a wound in our flesh might give the appearance of being similar to the motivation for rending one's garments as a sign of mourning - something which is expressly commanded upon the death of a close relative. Appearances can be deceiving. A basic difference exists. The tear made in one's clothes symbolizes the "tear" that the passing of the departed has rendered in the intimate world of the survivor. Something has been destroyed in his world. It is no longer the same. A

wound made in the survivor's flesh, however, implies that the death has created a breakdown in the survivor's physical self. This can never be allowed. To paraphrase Rav Hirsch, "No matter how dear and precious the departed was to us, no matter how much he meant to us, the end of his existence must not be permitted to end - or even diminish - the value and meaning of our lives."

The value of our lives has a significance of its own, based upon our direct relationship with the Almighty. Every fiber of our being, every spark of energy, every minute of our lives, belongs to Hashem. As long as He permits our existence on this world, we belong to Him. Hence, we have no right to impair our continued well-being. We must persevere in our service to Him, regardless of the challenges which we encounter. On the contrary, the loss of one whom we held in great esteem, who means so much to us, must spur us on to even greater energy, to redouble our vitality in service to Hashem, to fill the void which the death of a loved one has created.

This is the reason that the Torah places the prohibition against cutting oneself in a display of excessive mourning following the incidences of navi sheker, meisis and ir ha'nidachas. In each of these cases, our relationship with Hashem is impugned due to the stronghold that another human being has on our lives. No person may have such a stronghold upon us, or permit us to become so identified with him, that the cessation of his life compels us to discard our own personality after him. We are banim la'Makom, children of Hashem. The bond that we have with Him supersedes all other spiritual and emotional ties.

The Alshich HaKadosh offers an alternative explanation of this pasuk. He compares the experience of death in a family to a mother and son whose husband and father has lived in a distant city for an extended period of time. During the father's stay there, he was fortunate to amass a large fortune. One day, the son, who has longed so much for his father, decides to join him. It does not take much to understand the mother's sadness to see her son leave. Yet, the happiness she anticipates with the knowledge that her child is joining his father in a rich household filled with all of the wonderful things that he presently lacks gives her great joy, limiting her present sadness.

Moshe Rabbeinu says to Klal Yisrael, "You are children of Hashem," and, as such, you should not be disconcerted over being separated from the deceased, because the child has gone to his "wealthy" Father. The World to Come will be a much better place for him, where he will bask in Hashem's Presence and have pleasure beyond anything imaginable in this world. The soul is eternal. Therefore, a person never really dies. Its earthly container, which is all we can perceive, is what ceases to exist. Excessive weeping indicates a lack of belief in the eternity of the soul. It is natural to cry - over our personal loss, our friendship, our relationship - but not for the deceased, who is much happier in his eternal rest. May the Almighty once and for all bring an end to the challenges which we confront as a result of illness and death, so that we may serve Him amid greater freedom and joy.

If there shall be a destitute person among you, any of your brethren... you shall not harden your heart or close your hand... rather, you shall open your hand to him; you shall lend him his requirement, whatever is lacking to him... beware lest there be a base thought in your heart. (15:7, 8, 9)

What a wonderful mitzvah! The ability to be able to share one's good fortune with someone less fortunate is truly a G-d-given opportunity. For some reason, however, it does not always work that way. One would think the "haves" would be happy to share with the "have nots," but, for some reason, this phenomenon does not materialize all of the time. Clearly, the "have nots" are willing to participate! People always have excuses to refrain from being charitable. Some excuses are creative, while others are simply cover-ups for the real reason: a lack of empathy with the plight of others. It is always about "me."

One of the more common justifications for veiling one's stinginess is to present the petitioner in a dubious light, casting aspersion on him, the organization he represents, or both. One of the oldest, reputable tzedakos, charities, is the Kollel Shomrei HaChomos, a charitable organization dedicated to distributing money to families in Yerushalayim. The system for distribution was established a century ago by its founders, under the guidance of the gedolei hador, pre-eminent Torah leaders of the generation. It was not an arbitrary system, but rather, meticulously designed to support the neediest families. As with all good things, however, there are always those malcontents who must find fault with every system, regardless of its merit. In 1923, a group of beneficiaries expressed their disapproval over the Kollel's distribution of funds, claiming that it was giving money to everyone without confirming individual need. They felt that some of the recipients should not be supported. At one point, this group communicated with the Kollel directorate in America, seeking the chairman of the board's intervention in the matter. To add to their insolence, they took the liberty of including the names of the entire Kollel membership, going so far as to intimate that they had the support of its president, Horav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld, zl. This could not have been further from the truth. Rav Yosef Chaim was in total disagreement with the goals of this group. Thus, he penned his own letter to America. He wrote the following: "I state my unequivocal opposition to any change in the distribution of funds of the Kollel. The great rabbis who founded the Kollel did so with integrity and prophetic vision, seeing that it was specifically in this manner that the settlement of the Holy Land would be established. "By the grace of G-d, I have had the privilege to live in Yerushalayim for fifty years, and I have never seen any one of the members of our Kollel who, upon his death, had any wealth to bequeath. Almost all those who were considered by others to be well-to-do, left behind them nothing but debts. "Chazal have already established the punishment for one who undeservingly takes charity. 'Whoever is not entitled to take (charity) and does so anyway shall not pass from this world before he indeed becomes dependent upon others' (Peah 8:9). Let us leave such individuals to the fate determined for them by our sages, and not implement a new system of distribution." The protestors were relentless. They claimed that donors who contributed to the Kollel did so with the specific intent that their money be given only to those in dire need - a request which they felt was not being granted. Rav Yosef Chaim responded with a novel interpretation of the above pasuk. When the Torah writes, "Beware, lest there be a base thought in your heart," it does not mean that the contributor has a base thought. Rather, he portrays the petitioner who stands before him asking for money as a base person "Perhaps, he is not as poor as he claims.' This is the thought of baseness about which the Torah warns us." While we are justified in exercising caution concerning to whom we give our money, it does not grant us license to portray everyone who wants to relieve us of our hard-earned money as a crook. We might make the mistake of turning our back on someone who is really in need, but for some reason did not measure up to our standards of "poverty." The cry of the poor never goes unheeded, and, when they cry, we will be called to task. Charity means giving more than money. It means giving a part of our self. A wealthy Holocaust survivor relates the following incident which gives meaning to this idea. The Jews in the concentration camps received the bare minimum of food. It was just enough to subsist. Without it, one's suffering might come to an early end. One day, the bread ration of one of the inmates was stolen. This was literally a death sentence for him. Without that slice of hard - sometimes moldy - bread, he simply would not survive. It was that crust of bread that spelled the difference between life and starvation.

The man was hysterical. His despair was heartbreaking; his anxiety was palpable. Everybody in the barrack felt his pain, but the storyteller and two other inmates did something about it. They each broke off a piece of their own bread and gave it to the victim. The survivor concluded his story with the following statement. "You know, since the end of the war, I have been blessed by G-d and have done quite well financially. I have been very generous with my gifts, both to individuals and organizations. If I were to add up the hundreds of thousands of dollars I have given away in the past years, however, it would not even come close to that crust of bread that I gave away in Auschwitz. You know why? Because all of the money I gave away, I could spare. I always had plenty of money, but, I could not spare that piece of bread. Even though I needed it to live, I gave it up to help another Jew. That is why it is worth more than anything else I have ever done in my life!" It is not about how much money we give. It is all about how much of ourselves we give. This brings us to another aspect of tzedakah. In the Talmud Sukkah 49b, Chazal teach us that gemillas chassadim, acts of loving-kindness, are more valued than charity. They explain: charity is connected to one's money, while gemillas chesed does not differentiate between one who is poor or one who is wealthy; charity is for the living, while chesed is both for the living and for the deceased. Many of the halachos that apply to tzedakah, apply equally to chesed. Horav Shimshon Pincus, zl, selects one halachah which I feel is especially pertinent at this time of year, as we are rapidly approaching the Yamim Noraim, High Holy Days, when every z'chus, merit, counts. At the end of Hilchos Matnas Aniyim, the Rambam writes: "Whoever gives charity to a poor man, (but expresses himself) with a bad countenance, with his face turned down to the ground (demonstrating that he really has no desire to give the poor man anything), even if he gives him one thousand gold coins, he has (nevertheless) lost his merit. (Rather) one should give (charity) with a good and cheerful countenance, empathize with the poor man's plight, and (attempt to) soothe him with words of encouragement and comfort. If the poor man asks to borrow (money or possession) from you, and you are unable to give him what he needs, then you should appease him with words. One should never be cross, speak down, or raise his voice at a poor man, because he has a broken heart, and, when he cries out Hashem listens. Woe is to anyone who humiliates a poor man. Hashem is the Heavenly Father of the poor and He listens." This halachah applies equally to acts of loving-kindness. One who asks for a favor - regardless of the petitioner's financial status, if he is in need of a certain chesed - is considered as an ani, poor man, with regard to his present need. Therefore, it is incumbent that we comfort the person as if he is a poor man. Rav Pincus notes that this halachah applies especially to those who are involved b'tzarchei tzibbur, in the needs of the community. This is extremely pertinent to rebbeim, teachers, administrators, - even a store keeper. When an individual is in constant contact with people, he plays a role in their lives. Therefore, when he asks for a favor which might be difficult to carry out, one must remember that with regard to this specific need, he is like an ani. This is what the Rambam refers to when he writes, "Woe is to him that humiliates a poor person." Rav Pincus adds, that while this halachah applies even when the petitioner is not in great need, such as he has to borrow a car or needs a ride - nothing life-threatening or earth-shattering, just a simple favor - still, the respondent must be compassionate; how much more so when it actually affects the individual's life. He gives practical examples to which we can all relate. A neighbor, friend, acquaintance, or even someone off the street asks us to learn with him; a parent comes to a school administrator and asks to have his or her child admitted to the school. These are just two cases which occur more often than we care to divulge. At times, we do not have the time to learn with another

person, or the individual is just not our type, and we say no. Our school accepts students based upon a narrow-minded profile adopted by our governing body of parents and administrators. Once again, the answer is no. This is not the forum to discuss the hypocrisy behind many of these decisions or the devastation that they wreak on innocent lives - both parents and children. The manner in which we say no does make a difference. We neither have to string the person along, nor do we have to humiliate him and treat him like a second-class citizen. Part of giving tzedakah is to preserve the dignity of the petitioner. The individual seeking a chavrusa, study partner; the parent looking for a school for his child, whose only failing is his lack of pedigree or weak financial portfolio, should be treated with dignity and respect. Otherwise, when he cries out, Hashem will listen.

You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and Hashem, your G-d, redeemed you; therefore I command you regarding this matter today (15:15)

What is the chiddush, novelty, of yetzias Mitzrayim, the exodus from Egypt? Although a slave never escaped from the stronghold that was Egypt, that was because Pharaoh did not allow it. He had security throughout the land, and the threat of being caught was sufficient reason to discourage the most foolhardy from making an attempt at freedom. We are talking, however, about Hashem! He created the world and everything in it. He created Pharaoh. There is nothing that He cannot do. So what is so special about the liberation? Is it that important that it is mentioned so many times in the Torah?

Simply, one could say that this is actually the lesson of yetzias Mitzrayim. The exodus teaches us that regardless of Pharaoh's supreme powers, they were no match for Hashem. A deeper lesson can be derived from here that goes to the crux of the meaning of freedom. Horav Shalom Schwadron, zl, suggests that the word, Mitzrayim, is related to metzorim, which means constraints. A person who leads a life dominated by physicality and materialism - who is not bound by purpose, goals, religion; who just does whatever he wants - might think that he is a free man. After all, why not? He answers to no one but himself; he acts freely, going anywhere he pleases, whenever he pleases, with whomever he pleases. He watches whatever strikes his fancy, hangs out with all types of unsavory people whose goals and objectives in life are equally without direction. He is free!

Well, he might think that he is free, but, actually, he is subject to serious constraints. He is bound to his physical desires, which control his every movement. He thinks that he can do what he pleases, but, in reality, he is an epic slave, subjugated to his habits, enslaved to his base desires, constrained by his inability to release the compelling hold they have on him.

Egypt was the land of debauchery, home to moral perversion and all forms of self-indulgence. Some misguided individuals might consider such self-gratification to be a symbol of freedom. The thinking person understands, however, that this "freedom" is a seriously debilitating form of slavery. It creates a stronghold on the person whereby he is not free to do what he wants or what he needs, but rather, what his passion and addiction dictate. It is the land of metzorim, constraints, a land which affects body and soul.

It was from this land of confinement and circumscription that the Jewish nation was redeemed. Hashem shattered the metzorim of Mitzrayim. They were no longer constrained, since now they were dedicated to the Torah. Everyday, whenever possible, we must remember what Mitzrayim represents and how our cultured allegiance to Hashem and His Torah delivered us from the grasp of its muck.

Va'ani Tefillah

U'matzasa es levavo ne'eman lefanecha.

You found his heart faithful before You.

Levavo implies two hearts, in contrast to libo, which is singular, one heart. At the end of Meseches Berachos, the Yerushalmi teaches us that

Avraham Avinu served Hashem with both inclinations - his yetzer tov, good-inclination, and yetzer hora, evil-inclination. Horav Mordechai Ilan, zl, explains this to mean that Avraham was able to transform the koach ho'ra, forces of evil, to do good. This is essentially man's purpose in life: to take the forces of evil and employ them for good. In the Neilah prayer, conclusion of the Yom Kippur service, we quote Hashem, Ki lo echpotz b'mos ha'meis, ki im b'shuvo m'darko v'chayah, "For I do not desire the death of he who deserves death, but only that the wicked return from their (evil) path and live." Homiletically, this can be interpreted as, "I do not want you to destroy the harmful forces within man, since they can be used as a medium for catalyzing blessing." It is up to man to place these destructive forces on the correct path, so that they can generate positive results.

David Hamelech was unable to transform his yetzer hora. He, therefore, destroyed it, as he says in Sefer Tehillim 109:22, v'libi chahal b'kirbi, "And my heart has died within me." The Meshech Chochmah distinguishes between the challenges inflicted upon Avraham by his evil-inclination and that which was imposed upon David through his evil-inclination. Avraham was compelled to deal with heresy, philosophical dialect concerning idol worship which was prevalent in his day and age. The approach to mastery over such a yetzer hora is to deal with it intellectually, think things out afterwards in order to develop a stronger belief in Hashem. David, however, was compelled to deal with the yetzer of taavah, base desire. There is no room for dialectic, discussion, or compromise with this form of evil. One either destroys it, or he becomes its slave. This is why concerning Avraham it says, U'motzasa es levavo, in the plural. He was able to subjugate the evil-inclination to good. David was forced to destroy his yetzer hora. Thus, he says libi - in the singular. There is no other way to deal with such evil.

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Return to the Land and Return to G-d Rabbi Yakov Haber (The TorahWeb Foundation)

This week we read the third of the haftorot of consolation, "Aniya so'ara lo nuchama", "Agitated pauper who is not consoled" (Isaiah 54:1 ff.). In this reading, G-d comforts his beloved nation, personified as a forlorn woman, assuring her that the land of Israel and Jerusalem will be rebuilt with dazzling splendor. All the children will be learned; the nation, being re-founded on charity and honesty will not have to fear their enemies (both internal and external - Malbim). It continues with beseeching all who are thirsty to imbibe the waters of Torah and all who are hungry to partake of the bread, wine, and milk all representing Torah and mitzvos (based on Malbim). The haftora ends with an assurance of the restoration of the Davidic dynasty with the arrival of Mashiach whose commands all nations will heed.

Interestingly, the first half of this chapter from the prophet Yeshayahu - "Rani akara lo yalada" (Isaiah 54:1 ff.) - is read two weeks later as the haftora for parshat Ki Teitsei. Avudarham (quoted by Levush 428) quotes a Midrash that this order was chosen in order to convey a dramatic sequence of events. The order of the seven haftorot of consolation is: "Console, console my nation", "And Zion said G-d has abandoned me", "Agitated pauper who is not consoled" (our haftora), "I am the one who consoles you", "Sing out barren one who has not given birth", "Arise, shine, for your light as come", concluding with "I will rejoice in my G-d". The logical sequence being conveyed is that G-d

calls his prophets to console his nation but she refuses to be consoled claiming that G-d has abandoned her. The prophets report back likening her to a pauper who refuses to be comforted. But then G-d Himself consoles her calling to her to sing and shine. Zion is finally comforted and proclaims she will rejoice in G-d who has consoled her.

Malbim notes an anomaly concerning the order as it appears in the text itself. First, the prophet states, "Rejoice O barren one .. for many are your children" (54:1) and then "Agitated pauper who is not comforted" (54:11). Why is Zion still compared to a pauper after her children have returned to her? He answers that at first the children of Israel will return to Eretz Yisrael. But Zion will not yet be rebuilt. Consequently, she is still referred to as a pauper who is inconsolable. She rejoices over the return of her children but mourns the absence of Hashem's openly revealed Divine presence through the rebuilding of the Beis HaMikdash. Hashem assures her that this too will occur by promising its rebuilding. The Gemara (Megilla 17b) bears out this sequence of events. Noting the order of the shemone esrei, the Gemara relates that starting from the blessing of "bareich aleinu", the tefila follows the order of the redemption of Israel. The blessing of the ingathering of the exiles (t'ka b'shofar) appears earlier on with the rebuilding of Yerushalayim and the coming of Mashiach following later.[1]

These seven haftorot are read from after Tish'a B'Av through the month of Elul culminating with two haftorot of repentance read between Rosh Hashana and Yom HaKippurim: "Shuva Yisrael" and "Dirshu Hashem b'himatzo". Apparently, the first seven also relate to the theme of repentance falling as they do in the preparatory period toward the Days of Repentance. Rav Kook zt"l as well as others often noted the connection between Israel's return to G-d and its return to its Land. Here, we would like to connect the two ideas mentioned above to repentance. The mishna at the end of Yoma, quotes the famous statement of R. Akiva: "Before whom do you purify yourselves and Who purifies you? Your Father in heaven.... Just as the mikveh purifies the t'mei'im, so too the Holy One blessed be He purifies Israel!" The comforting of Israel through her return to her Land and the rebuilding of the Beis HaMikdash and the purification of Israel following its repentance are both done directly by our Father in Heaven. Zion is not satisfied with the comfort of the prophets and insists on consolation by Hashem directly. As during the original Exodus from Egypt, G-d Himself redeems Israel[2] and rebuilds the Beis HaMikdash[3], not through emissaries.

As mentioned above, in the process of redemption there are different stages: the physical return to Eretz Yisrael and the later spiritual return of Hashem's presence. Repentance as well requires mental, verbal, and physical efforts performed by us[4] (see Ramban, Nitzavim 30:14) hopefully to be blessed with the return of Hashem's Presence to us.

Rambam (Teshuva 7:7) beautifully describes this process: How great is repentance! Before, [the penitent] was separated from Hashem, the G-d of Israel...he cries out as is not answered...and today [after repentance] he is cleaved to the Shechina... he cries out and is answered immediately, and he performs mitzvos and they are accepted with pleasure and joy, as it is written "and the offering of Yehuda and Jerusalem will be pleasing to G-d as in days of old".

The prooftexts the Rambam quotes (only one quoted above for brevity) relate to the avodas HaMikdash, perhaps further verifying our analogy. As we approach the month of Elul and the Days of Repentance, may we all merit our return to G-d and the return of the entire Jewish nation to its Land.

[1] The application to current events of the last century cannot be overlooked. B"H, as a recent oleh, I personally witness daily in our own neighborhood of Ramat Beit Shemesh the fulfillment of the first part of the chapter to be read in two weeks: "Widen the place of your tent and the curtains of your dwelling places shall be stretched out; do not stop; lengthen your ropes, and your pegs strengthen, for you shall spread out to the right and to the left." Malbim interprets

this to apply to the building of new homes as well as expansions of old ones to accommodate the constantly growing population both in Jerusalem and the other cities of Israel. Although applications of prophecies can only properly be done by Gedolei Yisrael and will only be fully understood after the final redemption, I humbly submit a personal observation.

[2] At least during the final stages of redemption.

[3] See Beit HaMikdash: Built by Whom? for further elaboration on whether the future Beis HaMikdash is to be built by G-d or Israel.

[4] These are the three steps of t'shuva: regret, confession and commitment not to return to the sin.

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From Rabbi Chanan Morrison <ravkooklist@gmail.com>
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Subject [Rav Kook List]

Rav Kook List **Rav Kook on the Torah Portion** **Re'eih - Private and Public Redemption**

When Did the Exodus Occur?

At what time of day did the Jewish people leave Egypt? The Torah appears to contradict itself regarding the hour of the Exodus. In Deut. 16:1 we read, "It was in the month of spring that the Lord your God brought you out of Egypt at night." Clearly, the verse states that the Israelites departed in the night. However, the Torah previously stated in Num. 33:3 that they left during the daytime: "On the day after the Passover sacrifice, the Israelites left triumphantly before the eyes of the Egyptians."

So when did they leave - during the night, or in broad daylight, 'before the eyes of the Egyptians'?

Two Stages of Redemption

The Talmud in Berachot 9a resolves this apparent contradiction by explaining that both verses are correct. The redemption began at night, but it was only completed the following morning.

After the plague of the first-born struck at midnight, Pharaoh went to Moses, pleading that the Israelites should immediately leave Egypt. At that point, the Hebrew slaves were free to depart. Officially, then, their servitude ended during the night.

However, God did not want His people to sneak away 'like thieves in the night.' The Israelites were commanded to wait until daybreak, before proudly quitting their Egyptian slavery. Thus, the de facto redemption occurred during the day.

Night and Day

Rav Kook explained that there is an intrinsic correlation between these two time periods - night and day - and the two stages of redemption.

The initial redemption at night was an inner freedom. Egyptian slavery was officially over, but their freedom was not yet realized in practical terms. The joy of independence, while great, was an inner joy. Their delight was not visible to others, and thus corresponded to the hidden part of the day - the night.

The second stage of redemption was the actual procession of the Jewish people out of Egypt. This was a public event, before the eyes of Egypt and the entire world. The consummation of their freedom took place at daybreak, emphasizing the public nature of their liberation from Egyptian bondage. As the sun shone, "the Israelites marched out triumphantly" (Ex. 14:18).

(Gold from the Land of Israel, pp. 316-317. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. I, pp. 43-44)

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