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subject Rabbi Hershel Schachter - The Basic Principles

Rabbi Hershel Schachter

The Basic Principles

The aseres ha'dibros were engraved by Hakodosh Boruch Hu on two tablets of stone. These two tablets are referred to as the shnei luchos ha'bris - the two stones of the covenant. The reference to a bris has a double connotation:

1) The Vilna Gaon is quoted as having said that the stones themselves represented a gift given by Hakodosh Boruch Hu to the Jewish people, similar to a love bracelet or an engagement ring. When a boy will not be in the presence of the girl he loves, he wants her to have something tangible that should represent his affection towards her.

2) The mitzvos singled out to appear on the luchos are considered, in a certain sense, more important than all the other 613 mitzvos. The mitzvah of milah is considered by the Talmud to be more important than most other mitzvos because it has a bris connected to it (Yevomos 5b). Similarly, all of the mitzvos that appear on the aseres hadibros are more important because they all have a special bris over and above the general bris that is connected with all mitzvos.

In the Shacharis shemoneh esrei of Shabbos, we highlight the significance of the mitzvah of Shabbos by mentioning its appearance in the aseres ha'dibros and then we add, "v'chein kosuv b'sorosecha", i.e. that the mitzvah of Shabbos appears in another place in the chumash, "v'shomru Bnei Yisroel es haShabbos". Given that the mitzvah of Shabbos appears so many times in the chumash, why did the composers of this brocho select these two sources above all of the others? The explanation given by Rav Chaim Soloveitchick is that all of the mitzvos that are singled out in the aseres ha'dibros had a special bris connected with them, and in the psukim of "v'shomru Bnei Yisroel es haShabbos..." we mention "bris olam", i.e. that Shabbos is different from most other mitzvos in that it was singled out to have its own bris.

The Ramban (in his commentary on the chumash) accepts the opinion of the tannaim which states that the aseres ha'dibros were proclaimed prior to the conversion of the Jewish people, and that they are merely a random sampling of the 613 mitzvos. The presentation of a sampling of mitzvos to the Jewish people before they converted is consistent with the halacha which requires (Yevomos 47b) that before a non-Jew converts, the beis din presiding over his conversion should make him aware of a sampling of the more difficult mitzvos as well as a sampling of the easier mitzvos. Rashi (in his commentary on the chumash) has adopted the opposing position of the tannaim which states that the proclamation of the aseres ha'dibros took place only after the Jewish people had already completed their conversion. Accordingly, Rashi sheds light on the significance of the aseres ha'dibros by quoting Rav Sa'adya Gaon's understanding that the aseres ha'dibros are the ten basic categories of mitzvos under which all of the other 613 mitzvos can be subsumed.

Reb Chaim Soloveitchick's point, that the mitzvos singled out in the aseres ha'dibros have a special status of bris similar to the mitzvah of milah, is obviously in accordance with Rashi's view as opposed to that of the Ramban.

Following Rav Sa'adya Gaon, the basic principles of the Torah are contained in the aseres ha'dibros, and the ten basic principles of nature are the asoroh ma'amoros shebohem nivra ha'olam (Avos 5:1). In olam hazeh we witness contradictions between the moral, ethical, and religious realities on the one hand and the laws of nature on the other hand; we often witness tzaddik v'rah lo and rosha v'tov lo. Le'asid lavoh we will all understand that in fact there was and is no contradiction, rather Hakodosh Boruch Hu always did and does what is really l'tova - for the ultimate best. In this world we often recite the brocho of Dayan ha'emes when a tragedy occurs because while our perception is that we witness a tragedy, we are expected to have emunah that all was really l'tova (see Rabbeinu Yona to Brochos 44b in the pages of the Rif). But the Talmud says (Pesachim 50a) that le'asid lavoh we will never recite Dayan ha'emes because even our perception will be that everything was really l'tova.

One of the great chassidish rebbes once explained that in the chapter in Tehillim (92) that we recite on Shabbos, "mizmor shir l'yom ha'Shabbos", which according to tradition is a mizmor shir l'osid lovo, we speak about praising Hakodosh Boruch Hu accompanied with music from a ten string harp. Those ten strings represent the idea that le'asid lavoh there will be a harmonious blend between the asorah ma'amoros of the laws of nature and the aseres ha'dibros. Le'asid lavoh we will all realize that there never really was any contradiction.

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Covenant & Conversation

Thoughts on the Weekly Parsha from

Lord Jonathan Sacks

Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Commonwealth

Covenant and Conversation - Vaetchanan 5767 Vaetchanan 5767 - Listen O' Israel

R. Jacob Leiner (1814-1878), leader of the Hassidic community in Radzyn, was the son of the Ishbitzer Rebbe, R. Mordechai Joseph Leiner, whose Torah commentary *Mei ha-Shiloach* has become popular in recent years. R. Jacob wrote a commentary of his own, called *Bet Yaakov*, and in the course of a sermon on the month of Av, made a profound point about the differences between the senses:

From a human perspective it often seems as if seeing is a more precise form of knowledge than hearing. In fact, however, hearing has a greater power than seeing. Sight discloses the external aspect of things, but hearing reveals their inwardness. The aspect of G-d which prevails [in the month of Av, during which we sense the 'hiddenness' of G-d] is *haskes u-shema Yisrael hayom*, 'Be silent, O Israel, and listen' [Deut. 27:9 – the initial letters of these words spell out the four-letter name of G-d]. The idea of *haskes* ['being silent, paying focussed attention'] is that the person practices a self-imposed limitation on his senses, no longer looking at the events in this [external] world and he is then able clearly to understand that 'You have now become the people of the Lord your G-d' [the concluding part of Deut. 27:9] – something one can hear during this month [more than at other times of the year].

When G-d cannot be seen, argues the *Bet Yaakov*, He can still be heard, and hearing represents a depth-encounter more intimate and transformational than seeing. Perhaps without intending to, the *Bet Yaakov* has provided us with a point of entry into one of the most important and least understood differences between the two great civilizations of the West. Matthew Arnold, in his *Culture and Anarchy*, called them Hellenism and Hebraism. The political philosopher Leo Strauss spoke of Athens and Jerusalem. We know them best as ancient Greece and ancient Israel. Greece of the fifth to third centuries b.c.e. was in many respects the greatest culture of antiquity. It excelled in art, architecture, sculpture and the theatre – the visual arts. In these it achieved a greatness never surpassed. The most glittering subsequent artistic flowering of Europe, in Renaissance Italy, was essentially a rediscovery of the world and skills of ancient Greece. Jews excelled at none of these things, yet their contribution to the West was no less great. The reason is that their interest lay altogether elsewhere, not in sight but in sound, not in seeing but hearing. Judaism is the supreme example of a culture not of the eye but of the ear. A great nineteenth century historian explained the difference: The pagan perceives the Divine in nature through the medium of the eye, and he becomes conscious of it as something to be looked at. On the other hand, to the Jew who conceives G-d as being outside of nature and prior to it, the Divine manifests itself through the will and through the medium of the ear. He becomes conscious of it as something to be heeded and listened to. The pagan beholds his G-d, the Jew hears Him, that is, apprehends His will.

Jewish and Greek ideas came together in the religion we know as Christianity. It began as a sect within Judaism, but early on, having failed to make headway among Jews, Paul took its message to Rome and the world of Hellenistic culture. That gave rise to a fact fateful to the course of Western civilization. The first Christian texts were written and published in Greek. The result was that, though Christianity brought many Jewish ideas to the non-Jewish world (as Maimonides states in a passage in the *Mishneh Torah* censored during the Middle Ages), it did so in translation, and the deepest Jewish concepts are untranslatable into Greek. For almost two thousand years, Judaism has been known to the West through the filter of languages and cultures, Hellenistic in inspiration, which simply could not express its message in its pristine form.

To this day, when we speak about knowledge, we use metaphors overwhelmingly drawn from the world of the eye. We talk of insight, foresight and hindsight; of making an observation; of people of vision. When we understand something we say, "I see". The very word "idea"

comes from the same Latin root as the word "video". These are linguistic vestiges of a culture essentially Greek. In the Hebrew Bible, by contrast, instead of saying that someone thinks, the verse will say that he "said in his or her heart." Thought is not a form of sight but of speech. In rabbinic Hebrew, when we say that a certain conclusion can be drawn, we say *mashma* or *shema mina* or *ta shema*. When we want to say that we understand, we use the phrase *shomea ani*, and when someone did not accept an idea, we say *lo shemia leh*. Tradition is called *mipi hashemua*. All of these are verbs of hearing. For the Greeks, truth is what we see. For Jews, it is what we hear.

The reason could not be more profound. Pagan cultures saw G-d – or rather, the gods – in the visible: the sun, the storm, the earth, the sea, the great forces that surround us and reduce us to a sense of insignificance. The gods have changed in the twenty-first century. Today, when we think of the fate that lies in store for us, we are more likely to talk about the environment, the march of technology, the global market and the international political arena. But today's secular city is as polytheistic as its predecessors.

The polytheistic imagination, ancient or modern, sees reality as the clash of powerful forces, each of which is fundamentally indifferent to the fate of mankind. A tidal wave does not stop to think whom it will drown. The free market makes no moral distinctions. Global warming affects the innocent and guilty alike. A world confined to the visible is an impersonal world, deaf to our prayers, blind to our hopes, a world without overarching meaning, in which we are temporary interlopers who must protect ourselves as best we can against the random cruelties of fate. Today's secular culture – dominated by television, video, the Internet and the computer screen – is a visual culture, a world of images and icons.

Judaism, by contrast, is the supreme example of a person-centred civilization – and persons communicate by words, language, speech, what we hear rather than see. It is so because the patriarchs and prophets of ancient Israel were the first to understand that G-d is not part of the visible world but beyond. Hence its prohibition against graven images, visual representations and icons. Nowhere is this more profoundly spelled out than in the great encounter between G-d and the prophet Elijah at Mount Horeb:

The Lord said, 'Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.' Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper [*kol demamah dakah*, 'a still small voice']. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.

God reveals himself in speech, from the reverberating echoes of Sinai to the still small voice heard by Elijah. That is why the central doctrine of Judaism is *Torah min hashamayim*, 'Torah from heaven', meaning that what is ultimately holy are not sacred sites or the wonders of nature but words. God created the world with words ('And G-d said . . . and there was') and His greatest gift is Torah, His word to mankind.

This fact had huge consequences for Judaism, the greatest of which is that, at the heart of reality is a personal presence, not a concept, power or theoretical construct, the prime mover, necessary being, the first cause -- the God of the philosophers -- but a person, one to whom we can say Thou, who speaks to us in revelation, and to whom we speak in prayer. Hence the unique intimacy Jews feel with G-d. In terms of power, there is no comparison, no possible relationship, between an infinite Creator and his finite creations. But in terms of speech, there is. G-d asks us, as He asked Adam and Eve in the Garden, *ayeka*, 'Where are you?' and at times we ask Him, 'Where are you'. Because there is speech, there is relationship. Between two beings who can communicate with one

another, there is connection, communion, even if the One is infinitely great and the other infinitely small. Words bridge the metaphysical abyss between soul and soul.

There is much to be said about the non-visual character of the biblical imagination, more than can be mentioned here. To take just three examples: the Torah tells us many things about Abraham, Moses, Aaron and Samuel, but we have not the slightest idea of what they looked like. Unlike the prose of Homer (as Erich Auerbach pointed out in a famous essay, 'Odysseus' Scar'), the Torah gives us almost no visual descriptions. When it does so, it is always for a moral purpose. So, for example, we hear that Sarah is a beautiful woman only when she and Abraham go down to Egypt, and for the first time Abraham looks at his wife through Egyptian eyes. We read that Saul, Israel's first king, was a tall man, head and shoulders above his contemporaries. But this physical description is meant ironically, for Saul turns out to be an essentially small man, more led by the people than leading them.

Similarly when it comes to the description of the mishkan, the sanctuary. This is given in immense detail in the second half of the book of Shemot. However it is almost impossible to visualise it. The description is written as a series of instructions as to how to make the various components. It is more a construction manual than a pictorial description. Even here the emphasis is not on seeing but on hearing and doing.

Perhaps the most remarkable phenomenon is that the Bible, though it contains 613 commands, does not have a word that means obey. Instead, it uses the word shema, which means, 'to hear, to listen, to contemplate, to understand, to internalise and to respond.' The King James Bible, published in 1611, was able to use an English word that conveyed some of this rich range of senses, namely to hearken. Now that the word 'hearken' has passed out of everyday usage, there is no way of adequately translating the complex word shema into English.

Once we understand this, the significance of many biblical passages becomes clear. G-d's greatness is that He hears the unheard. As Ishmael lay dying of thirst, "G-d heard the boy crying, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, 'What is the matter, Hagar? Do not be afraid; God has heard the boy crying, there where he lies.'" The very name, Ishmael, means "G-d hears." One of the tasks of a leader, according to Moses, is to "hear between your brothers" 6 (to this day, a court case is called "a hearing"). The great social legislation in Shemot states that "If you take your neighbour's cloak as a pledge, return it to him by sunset, because his cloak is the only covering he has for his body. What else will he sleep in? When he cries out to me, I will hear, for I am compassionate." Hearing is the basis of both justice and compassion.

When Joseph's brothers are accused of being spies, they say -- not knowing that Joseph is there and can understand them -- "Surely we are being punished because of our brother. We saw how distressed he was when he pleaded with us for his life, but we did not listen; that is why this distress has come upon us." They saw but did not hear -- and not to be able to hear someone's distress is a deep moral failure. When the Torah wants to convey the degradation suffered by the Israelites in Egypt, it says, "They did not listen to him [Moses] because of their broken spirit and cruel bondage." They could no longer hear the good news of their impending liberation. When Solomon asked God for the greatest gift He can bestow on him, he says, "Grant your servant a listening heart [lev shomea] to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong."

We can now also understand one of the strangest sayings of the rabbis: "If a person is taking a walk while reciting Mishnaic teachings, and interrupts his studies to say, How beautiful is that tree, or How fine is that field, it is as if he had committed a mortal sin." It is not that Judaism does not wish us to enjoy the beauties of nature. In fact, in the prayer-book there is a special blessing to be said on seeing trees in blossom.

The sin is that such a person abandons the world of sound (Mishnah, i.e. "oral Torah") in favour of the world of sight.

Listening is an art, a skill, a religious discipline, the deepest reflex of the human spirit. One who truly listens can sometimes hear, beneath the noise of the world, the deep speech of the universe, the song creation sings to its Creator:

The heavens declare the glory of G-d, The skies proclaim the work of His hands. Day pours forth speech to day, Night communicates knowledge to night. There is no speech or language Where their voice is not heard.

In the silence of the desert (midbar) the Israelites were able to hear the word (davar). And one trained in the art of listening can hear not only the voice of G-d but also the silent cry of the lonely, the distressed, the afflicted, the poor, the needy, the neglected, the unheard. For speech is the most personal of all gestures, and listening the most human -- and at the same time, the most divine -- of all gifts. G-d listens, and asks us to listen.

That is why the greatest of all commands -- the one we read in this week's sedra, the first Jewish words we learned as children, the last words spoken by Jewish martyrs as they went to their deaths, words engraved on the Jewish soul, are Shema Yisrael, "Listen, O Israel." And now too we understand why, as we say those words, we cover our eyes -- to shut out, if only for a moment, the world of sight, so that we can more fully enter the world of sound, the world not of Creation but of Revelation, not of G-d's work but of His word -- the world we cannot see but which, if we create an open, attentive silence in the soul, we can hear.

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subject **Rabbi Frand on Parshas Va'eschanan**

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Who Serves "I'dols?

"Lest you act corruptly and make for yourselves a carved image." (4:16)

Sefer Devarim is replete with warnings against idolatry, but perhaps the parashah in which the repetitiveness is most obvious is Parshas Va'eschanan. Dozens of pesukim -- including nearly one third of the pesukim in the second rendering of the Ten Commandments -- contain numerous admonitions not to serve idols.

Nowadays, these stern exhortations seem entirely superfluous. Almost no sane human being today has any interest in worshipping a graven image of any sort. In fact, it seems strange to us that anyone ever had such a passion.

Truthfully, our utter disinterest in idol worship is not a credit to our advanced, developed intelligence or our purer faith in God. The Anshei Knesses HaGedolah, a group of 120 sages, some of the greatest Torah scholars ever, convened during the era of the second Beis HaMikdash and determined that the inclination to serve avodah zara was too strong for mankind to withstand. The Talmud (Yoma 69b) relates how the Anshei Knesses HaGedolah captured the yetzer hara for idolatry and destroyed it.

We can still have an idea of how strong the inclination for idolatry was before they conquered it. The Talmud tells us that the Anshei Knesses HaGedolah were encouraged by their success in conquering one of the

two major passions of mankind, so they decided to turn their sights on the other major passion: the inclination for promiscuity.

When the sages succeeded in capturing the passion for promiscuity, however, they came to the realization that if they destroyed this passion people would no longer procreate, so they released it.

We are all aware of how difficult it is to control the inclination for licentiousness. Chazal teach us that people once had an equal passion to serve idols.

Nevertheless, we are left wondering, did Chazal do such a good job of abolishing idolatry that the countless warnings in the Torah not to worship idols no longer apply at all?

Actually, some of us come close to serving idols on a regular basis, says the Radziner Rav.

The Talmud (Shabbos 105b) teaches us that a person who becomes angry and loses control of himself is considered to be serving avodah zara.

Dovid HaMelech wrote, "There shall be no foreign god within you" (Tehillim 81:10). The Talmud asks, "Which foreign god is within a person? This is referring to the yetzer hara."

To understand this passage, we have to dissect the anatomy of a temper tantrum.

Consider this not uncommon scenario. Mr. Baal HaBayis comes home from shul on Shabbos morning and finds that the table is not set and the food is not ready. He turns to his wife and asks, "Why can't you have everything prepared on time?"

His wife realizes that he is in no mood for explanations, so she silently speeds up the preparations. Then the meal starts, and the children are a little too overactive. "Why are you making so much noise?" Mr. Baal HaBayis shouts.

The children quiet down for a short while, but soon enough, the rowdiness starts once again. This time, Mr. Baal HaBayis decides that enough is enough. "I WANT SILENCE!" he shouts, his face taking on a deep crimson hue. "THE NEXT ONE WHO MAKES NOISE IN HERE IS GOING TO GET IT!" he adds for good measure.

What happened? All the children did was act their age. Why did Mr. Baal HaBayis lose control?

The problem is that Mr. Baal HaBayis considers his will to be the final word, so he cannot handle the impudence of those who don't defer to his supremacy. In other words, he considers himself god.

Mr. Baal HaBayis does not stop to consider that perhaps Hashem willed that he wait a few minutes for his Shabbos seudah to be ready, or that Hashem ordained that his children should be noisy and boisterous, like all other normal children. HE wants quiet; HE wants his meal on time. HE was probably already insulted when he came home because the gabbai gave him chamishi instead of shishi, and because the guy sitting next to him in shul didn't greet him with the respect that HE deserves. Who is god in Mr. Baal HaBayis's mind? HE, himself.

This parable may be exaggerated; not all of us become upset over these sorts of things. But most of us have our own little pet peeves that vex us and cause us to lose control.

We may no longer have any passion to serve little graven images of hand-constructed gods, but many of us still engage in "idolatry.

If "I" am so absolutely important that anyone who challenges my overblown image of myself makes me lose control, then I am serving an "I"dol, not Hashem.

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http://www.ou.org/jewish_action/article/whats_the_truth_about...rashis_daughters

What's the Truth About...Rashi's Daughters?

By Ari Z. Zivotofsky

MISCONCEPTION: Rashi's daughters wore tefillin.

FACT: There is no evidence that Rashi's daughters wore tefillin.

BACKGROUND: Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki, known colloquially as "Rashi," is the commentator par excellence on both the Torah and Talmud. Born in Troyes in northern France in 4801 (1040 CE), he descended on both sides from influential families. He studied in Worms, Germany, under some of the leading rabbinic authorities of his time and established a yeshiva in Troyes that was destined to become one of the principal disseminators of Ashkenazic tradition. In the wake of the destruction of the German Jewish centers by the Crusaders, Rashi established France as the Torah capital of Ashkenazic Jewry. He died in Troyes in 4865 (1105 CE).

Rashi had four daughters and no sons. The two daughters about whom some information is known are Miriam and Yocheved. Both of them married great Torah scholars and bore and raised the undisputed leaders of Ashkenazic Jewry. Yocheved married Rabbi Meir ben Shmuel, one of Rashi's star pupils, and they had four famous sons: Yitzchak ("Rivam"), Shmuel ("Rashbam"), Shlomo the grammarian, and the youngest and most famous, Yaakov ("Rabbeinu Tam"). Miriam married Yehudah ben Nathan ("Rivan") who finished Rashi's commentary to Makkot. Rashi appears to have had another daughter, Rachel, and a fourth daughter who died young.

While there is no evidence that any of Rashi's daughters wore tefillin, this myth persists and is found in various printed sources. In her book, *Life on the Fringes: A Feminist Journey Toward Traditional Rabbinic Ordination*, Dr. Haviva Ner-David² cites Rashi's daughters' "tradition" of wearing tefillin as setting a precedent. Similarly, an article that appeared in the *Journal of Jewish Music and Liturgy*³ mentions that Rashi's daughters wore tefillin.

The halachah makes it clear that women are exempt from wearing tefillin (Mishnah Berachot 3:3; Kiddushin 33b-34a; SA, OC 38:3). Whether women are allowed to don tefillin is the subject of great debate. The Rema (OC 38:3) rules that it should be discouraged, and the Gra (comments to OC 38:3) contends that women are prohibited from wearing them.

Ironically, some scholars argue that during the early medieval period there was actually a general laxity among men or even outright neglect of the mitzvah of donning tefillin. Rabbi Moshe Couchi, in the introduction to *Halachot Gedolot*, states that he preached in France about the

importance of putting on tefillin daily and that, as a result, people were more conscientious about putting on tefillin.⁴

The question of women wearing tefillin is particularly interesting because in general, Ashkenazim, based on the opinion of Rashi's grandson Rabbeinu Tam, maintain that women may take upon themselves time-bound mitzvot from which they are exempt and recite a berachah. Ashkenazic women make a berachah, for example, upon hearing the shofar on Rosh Hashanah, and shaking a lulav and sitting in a sukkah on Sukkot. There is no problem with women performing these mitzvot, and they are actually encouraged to do so. The mitzvah of donning tefillin appears to be a notable exception. A variety of reasons has been suggested.⁵

The earliest source on the topic of women donning tefillin is found in Targum Yonatan to Devarim 22:5. When discussing the prohibition of a woman wearing male garments, the commentary mentions that women are not permitted to don tzitzit and tefillin.

Dr. Aliza Berger, who carried out an exhaustive study of the topic, notes that "Until the current generation, there have been only isolated instances attested of women wearing tefillin."⁶ In a footnote (2), she concludes: "There is no proof for the popular legend that Rashi's daughters wore tefillin. However, it is interesting to speculate on why this association arose; it probably has to do with the fact that Rashi's daughters were known to be exceptional in that they were educated."⁷

A similar baseless claim developed around the first wife of the Ohr HaChaim. She was the daughter of a famous rabbi, and some claim that she wore tallit and tefillin. There is no historic evidence of that.

The Talmud⁸ reports that Michal bat King Saul, wife of King David, wore tefillin, though there are conflicting reports in the Talmud Bavli and Yerushalmi about how her contemporaries viewed this. There is documentation indicating that Hannah Rachel Webermacher, the famed "Maiden of Ludmir," who was a nineteenth-century Polish Chassidic leader, wore tefillin.

If women are indeed forbidden to wear tefillin, how could Michal bat Saul wear tefillin? The Kaf HaChaim (OC 38:9) quotes a creative suggestion by the Yafe l'lev. He suggests that Michal knew that she possessed a reincarnated "male soul." He proposes that this also explains her barrenness.

Regarding Rashi's daughters, one can argue that absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. However because the notion of Rashi's daughters wearing tefillin appears only in late twentieth-century writings, and does not seem to appear anywhere before that, this would indicate that it is, in fact, a myth.

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Notes

1. See Shoshana Pantel Zolty, *All Your Children Shall Be Learned: Women and the Study of Torah in Jewish Law and History* (Northvale, NJ, 1993), 179.

2. (Boston, 2000), 2.

3. Leon Katz, "Halakhic Aspects of Bar-Mitzvah and Bat-Mitzvah," vol. 9 (1986-7): 27.

4. See Rabbi Dr. Ephraim Kanarfogel, "Not Just Another Contemporary Jewish Problem: A Historical Discussion of Phylacteries," *Gesher* 5:1 (1976): 106-121. See also, Kanarfogel, "Rabbinic Attitudes Toward Non-observance in the Medieval Period," edited by Jacob J. Schacter, *Jewish Tradition and the Nontraditional Jew* (Northvale, NJ, 1992), 7-14.

5. A remarkable source is Rabbi Avigdor Tzarfati, one of the ba'alei Tosafot, in his *Sefer Perushim Upesakim al haTorah leRabbeinu Avigdor Tzarfati*, where he states that some of the righteous women in his time had the practice of putting on tefillin and reciting a berachah. I thank

noted Israeli historian and Rashi expert Professor Avraham Grossman of Hebrew University for this source. Professor Grossman also stated in a personal e-mail that the legend about Rashi's daughters wearing tefillin has no historical basis.

6. "Wrapped Attention: May Women Wear Tefillin?" in *Jewish Legal Writings by Women*, edited by Micah D. Halpern and Chana Safrai (Jerusalem, 1998), 75-118. A recent book by Rabbi Aharon Feldman (*The Eye of the Storm: A Calm View of Raging Issues* [Jerusalem, 2009]), using Berger's article as a springboard, criticizes the suggestion that women may wear tefillin. Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein, in reviewing the book (*Jewish Action*, [spring 2010], 18-21), while not advocating women wear tefillin, took exception with Rabbi Feldman's tone and methodology and presented a variety of positions on the topic. Ner-David in her book also reviews much of the literature regarding women wearing tefillin but gives scant weight to those who prohibit it. For an interesting modern source that discusses women and tefillin, see Ohr Sameach, *Hilchot Talmud Torah*, near the end of the long commentary to 1:2.

7. Rabbi Aryeh Frimer, a recognized expert on women's halachic issues, reports having thoroughly studied the subject and finding no source for this myth. Professor David Golinkin ("May Women wear Tefillin?," *Conservative Judaism* [Fall 1997]: 3-18) wrote, "There is a widespread story that Rashi's daughters wore tefillin, but I have been unable to find any written proof of this assertion." Cf Idem, "Ha'im Mutar Lenashim Lehani'ach Tefillin? *Asufot* 11 (5758): 183-196.

8. *Eruvin* 96a-b; *Yerushalmi*, *Berachot* 2:3 and *Eruvin* 10:1; see *Tosafot*, *Rosh Hashanah* 33a, s.v. *haRebbi*.

<http://text.rcarabbis.org/parashat-vaetchanan-what-is-the-just-and-good-in-hashems-eyes-by-yaakov-bieler/>

Parashat VaEtchanan: **What is the "Just and Good in Hashem's Eyes?"** by Rabbi Yaakov Bieler

August 9, 2011 by **Rabbi Jack Bieler**

A verse that suggests an overall goal for the observant individual. In Parashat VaEtchanan, a key verse for us at KMS in light of what is written atop the Aron Kodesh in the Main Sanctuary,[1] is found in Devarim 6:18, "And you will do what is just and good in the Eyes of God in order that He Do good for you, and you will come and inherit the good land that HaShem Swore to your fathers."

A straightforward interpretation of the verse.

The first portion of the verse, "And you will do what is just and good in the Eyes of God is generally subject to two interpretive approaches. The contextual understanding, or the "Peshat" (simple, literal meaning), which takes into particular consideration the preceding verse (6:17) "You will surely observe the Commandments of the Lord, your God, and His Testimonies and His Statutes that He Commands you", would maintain that in order to not test HaShem (6:16) one ought to comply with His Directives, because these Commandments constitute what is "just and good in the Eyes of God", with 6:18 merely restating the contents of 6:17 in a more theological manner. We are told to recognize that rather than Commanding us in an arbitrary fashion to simply see if we are ready to conform to His Will, God Commands us in a manner that represents what He Considers just and good. Consequently, when we observe the Commandments, we are enacting God's Will and the behaviors of which He specifically Approves, a manifestation of Avot 2:4: He (R. Gamliel, son of R. Yehuda HaNasi), used to say, "Make His Will like your will, so that He Will Make His Will like your will..." Since reward and punishment according to the Tora[2] are directly linked to an individual's conformity or lack thereof with the Tora's demands, it is logical to assume that carrying out the Tora's commandments will result in positive consequences, including inheriting

the land of Israel with a minimum amount of sacrifice, as stipulated in 6:18-19.

The Talmud appears to interpret the verse in question differently. An alternate understanding, typically falling into the “Derash” (homiletic) category, of the phrase in question in 6:18, “And you will do what is just and good in the Eyes of God...”, first appearing in Bava Metzia 16b and 108a, interprets these words not as a restatement of 6:17, but rather as representing an entirely new category of behaviors that heretofore have not been mentioned in the Tora. [3] The Talmudic applications in Bava Metzia, however, do not directly explain the connotation of 6:18; the Rabbis, whose views appear in the Talmudic texts, merely cite the Biblical verse in order to justify how they wish the scenarios that have been presented in the Gemora to be resolved. Bava Metzia 16b deals with the following situation: A third party finds documents in a public place that provides for a lender to keep, or search for and confiscate property of a borrower as part of the compensation for a prior loan. There is a lengthy discussion with regard to whether such a document should be returned to the creditor by the one finding it, since it is possible that the debt has already been repaid, and the borrower may end up having to pay a second time for the loan that he incurred by losing the collateral property. Raba explains the point of view that maintains that the document ought to be returned to the creditor by the following logic—a) the borrower is negligent if he had already paid the loan but he has no proof to that effect, because if that was the case, he either should have torn up the original promissory document, or he should have asked for a receipt of his repayment which would then have constituted proof that his property was not to be transferred to the lender; b) the Tora law provides for a lender keeping any property offered to him by a borrower in order to effect a debt.[4] The only reason why such property is to be returned to the borrower is because of “And you will do what is just and good in the Eyes of God...” It would appear that the Talmud is assuming that Devarim 6:18 does not call for adherence to the letter of the law, but rather something more.

Bava Metzia 108a applies 6:18 in a similar manner. R Nachman said, “If one, by paying the estate taxes, takes possession of land lying between the fields belonging to partners or brothers, he is an impudent man, and can be removed because of the law of “Bar Matzra” (right of pre-emption),[5] based upon “And you will do what is just and good in the Eyes of God...” Once again, strict adherence to the written Tora law would provide for whoever pays for the land to be the rightful owner, regardless of the interests of the neighbors. 6:18 applies a different standard to how this economic transaction should be carried out. RaMBaN notes the two approaches to Devarim 6:18 that are discussed above, and categorizes them as “Peshat” vs. “Derash”.

According to PESHAT, it says to observe the Commandments of HaShem and His Testimonies and His Statutes, and exclusively intend by means of carrying them out to do what is just and good in His Eyes. “In order that He Do Good for you...” is a promise. He Says that when one does what is good in His Eyes, He Will Do Good to you, because God Does Good for those who do good and justly in their hearts. And the Rabbis have for this a beautiful MIDRASH. They said: This (the first part of 6:18) is referring to compromise AND[6] going beyond the letter of the law, and the intention with regard to this, that initially (6:17) He said, “You shall observe His Statutes and Testimonies that He Commands you,” whereas now (6:18) He Says, “Even concerning those matters that I have not explicitly commanded you, pay careful attention to try to do what is just and good in His Eyes, because He Loves the good and the just...”

The dangers inherent within as well as the necessity for striving to go beyond the letter of the law.

The reason why RaMBaN may view the interpretation provided for 6:18 by the Talmud as a “Derash” rather than “Peshat” is the potential anarchical result when one suggests that laws of the Tora deal with that

which is unsaid in addition to what is explicitly articulated. While acting in accordance with the “spirit of the law” is certainly an understandable value, it is highly likely that there will be major disagreements and variations among different interpreters of the Tora as to the exact nature of the spirit of the law. Even the Talmud in Bava Metzia provides only two specific examples for its understanding of Devarim 6:18. [7] How are we to determine where else this rule is meant to be applied? However extensive Talmudic law may be as developed over the course of its approximately 60 tractates of the Babylonian and Jerusalem versions of the Talmud[8] combined with the commentaries and super commentaries that have been composed down through the ages, there are both disagreements over how old situations are to be approached in accordance with God’s Will, as well as new situations that are constantly arising that have no obvious solution explicitly stated somewhere in the codified texts of long ago. This is precisely the point of RaMBaN in the continuation of his remarks on 6:18:

...And this is an important issue. It is impossible to list in the Tora every interaction of an individual with his friends and his neighbors, and all of his business dealings, and the various things needed to assure the proper development of all societies and nations. But rather, once many of them have been mentioned, such as (VaYikra 19:16) “One should not be a talebearer”; (Ibid. 18) “You shall not take revenge or bear a grudge”; (Ibid., 16) “You shall not stand by while the blood of your friend is spilled”; (Ibid., 14) “You shall not curse the deaf”; (Ibid., 32) “You shall stand before one who is elderly”, etc., the Tora summarizes and states “And you will do what is just and good in the Eyes of God...” in all matters, to the point where you enter into compromises and legal decisions that are beyond the letter of the law...

Does pursuing Tora truths beyond the letter of the law lead to greater factionalism among Jews?

Yet although striving to go beyond the letter of the law not may have been God’s baseline intent for the system all along—see R. Yehoshua’s response to R. Eliezer in Bava Metzia 59b when he invokes Devarim 30:12, and insists that law follow majority rule rather than Divine Interventions because, “Lo BaShamayim Hih” (It [the solution for applying the Tora’s principles] does not lie in Heaven [but rather among the Rabbis entrusted with interpreting the Tora as it appears, rather than according to some amorphous “beyond the letter of the law” standard]—the various denominations of Judaism throughout the centuries as a result of these ambiguities, have been vigorously debating the definition of the parameters of the “spirit of the law” to the point where it sometimes appears to the outsider that there is more than one Jewish religion. A parallel observation was made during an even earlier historical period, when the disagreements between the schools of Hillel and Shamai regarding the manner in which the Tora proper was meant to be observed remained unresolved due to the dissolution of the Sanhedrin, and Tosefta Sota 14:9 commented that it appeared that there were two traditions rather than a single Tora. So, according to RaMBaN, how could these interpretations designed to extrapolate from the Tora new principles and applications be anything but Derash, however noble and humane such Halachic innovations may prove to be?

Comparing RaMBaN’s approach to the verse with that of RaShI. Understanding RaMBaN in this manner sharpens the difficulty posed by RaShI’s laconic comment on Devarim 6:18: “This is compromise[9] beyond the letter of the law.” On any number of occasions, RaShI will cite both “Peshat” and “Derash” as possible understandings of verses of the Tora.[10] Yet in this instance he only presents a single understanding of the first phrase under scrutiny. Can we deduce whether RaShI felt that his interpretation was either “Peshat” or “Derash”? While in his commentary on the verses where both types of interpretations are cited, he identifies which is which, can his silence with regard to the verses where he presents a single interpretation be understood to constitute one approach or the other?

Accounting for RashI's perspective vis-à-vis Midrashic interpretations. Nechama Leibowitz, ZaTzaL,[11] refers to one of RaShI's own comments for guidance in determining his approach with regard to citing interpretations of "Peshat" and "Derash".

(From RaShI on Beraishit 3:8) There are many Midrashai Aggada (Midrash that deals with the story sections of the Tora—as opposed to the Halachic/legal sections). Our Rabbis have already arranged them in their proper place in Beraishit Rabba (as well as in other Midrashic collections). And I have come for no other reason than to present the "Peshat" of the text and with such Aggadot that explain the words of the text in a manner that fits in with them.

Therefore, according to Nechama, even when RaShI identifies an approach as "Midrash", he sees it as enhancing and expanding "Peshat". While the interpretations that the commentator cites may originate from different types of primary sources, the goal in quoting them is the same, to understand the simple meaning of the text. Consequently, even a "Derash", should it be quoted by RaShI, is similarly addressing "Peshat" problems, albeit in a different manner and from a different direction. And if this is so when more than one interpretation is presented, when a single interpretation is cited by RaShI, regardless of where else it may be quoted, RaShI apparently perceives it as the only "Peshat" that makes sense for the verse in question.

If we accept such a conceptual idea, then we must presume that according to RaShI, it is unsatisfactory to claim that 6:18 is merely a restatement of 6:17. Furthermore, understanding Devarim 6:18 as a reference to exclusively "compromise going beyond the letter of the law" is not simply an alternative to "Peshat", but the very "Peshat" itself. This in turn leads to the conclusion that the variation in text regarding the presence or absence of the conjunction "Vav" (see fn. 9), becomes very significant in light of our speculations concerning why RaMBaM sees this interpretation as "Derash" rather than "Peshat." Although in his critical edition of RaShI, R. Chaim Chavell[12] argues that the absence of the "Vav" in the RaShI text should not make a difference, and that the verse should be understood to connote two separate elements, i.e., "the just"—"compromise", "the good"—"beyond the letter of the law", nevertheless, the first published critical edition of RaShI by Avraham Berliner,[13] makes no attempt to discount the absence of the "Vav". This could lead us to posit that rather than making a case for all the various forms of "beyond the letter of the law" that are possible; RaShI draws attention to only one type, i.e., compromise. Whether or not doubts can be raised regarding all sorts of interpretations that contend they are in the true spirit of Tora, compromise specifically is the most obvious and universally acceptable of what is "just and good in God's Eyes."

Could compromise be the ultimate "Just and Good in the Eyes of HaShem"?

While one could understand why striving to reach a compromise in order to reconcile feuding parties would be a desirable outcome, it is significant to note that whether or not compromise is a virtue, is a subject of strong debate in Sanhedrin 6b-7a. R. Elazar, the son of R. Yose HaGalili was fundamentally opposed to compromise in at least legal disputes, believing that it obfuscates the law, and even though a strict legal decision may result in the losing litigant being extremely unhappy and resentful, God Cares more about the proper application of the law than social tranquility. The majority of opinions in the Talmud, however, disagree with this view, and not only see compromise as an option for the resolution of a legal dispute, but even a Mitzva (a positive, Divinely Ordained prerogative). The figure of Aharon HaKohen is invoked as the champion of Peshara and pursuing peace. But this does not prevent the detractors of such an approach from blaming Aharon's inclination towards compromise for his lack of opposition and even tacit participation in the construction of the Golden Calf.

An identity between God and Peace.

Therefore, perhaps the most convincing evidence that peace is "just and good in the Eyes of HaShem" is the association of the theme of peace with HaShem Himself. Consider the following Midrash in VaYikra Rabba 9:9:

Said R. Shimon ben Yochai: Great is PEACE, because all blessings are included within it.

(Tehillim 29:11) "HaShem Gives power to His People, HaShem Blesses His People with PEACE."

Chizkiya said two things concerning this topic:

1) Great is PEACE because all commandments are associated with it.

(Shemot 23:5) "When you see the donkey of someone who hates you laying under its burden... you shall surely unload it with him."

(Shemot 23:4) "If you meet your enemy's ox or donkey going astray, you will surely bring it back to him again."

(Devarim 22:6) "If a bird's nest happens to be in the way...you shall not take the mother bird together with the young, but you shall surely let the mother bird go..."

When a Mitzva presents itself to you, you are obligated to fulfill it, but if it is not readily available, you are not obligated to do it. However, in the case of promoting peace,

(Tehillim 34:15) "Seek out PEACE and pursue it." Seek it in your place and pursue it in another place.

2) Great is PEACE, because in all of the journeys, it is written, "And They traveled" "And They encamped." They traveled embroiled in disputes and they encamped embroiled in disputes. When all of them came to Mt. Sinai, they all joined in a single encampment, as it is written, (Shemot 19:2) "And Israel 'VaYichan' (singular) encamped there..." Said HaShem: This is the moment when I Will Give the Tora to My Children...

Said R. Yuden son of R. Yose: Great is PEACE because the Name of HaShem is called PEACE.

As it is said (Shoftim 6:24) "And he called Him HaShem PEACE"...

R. Yishmael taught: Great is PEACE, because the Great Name that is written in holiness, HaShem Commands that it be obliterated in water in order to create peace between husband and wife. (See BaMidbar 5:23 and Mishna Sota 1:4)...

Consequently according to RaShI, in addition to the Tora literally calling upon us to live a life of Tora and Mitzvot, we should also be pursuing those types of activities that can bring additional peace to the world, whether between individuals who are having monetary disputes as in the examples in Bava Metzia, or families, communities, and countries who may be having difficulty co-existing and maintaining mutual respect. Perhaps pursuing peace is the ultimate fulfillment of "VeHalachta BeDerachav" (And you shall go in His Ways.)[14]

Conclusion.

The Talmud in Avoda Zora 25a asks the following question: "Why is the book of Devarim referred to as Sefer HaYashar (the book of the just)?" And the response is because it contains the verse, "And you will do what is just and good in the Eyes of God". If this is considered, at least according to this source, the most important verse in Devarim, more so than even the Shema (Devarim 6) or the Ten Commandments (Devarim 5), we have our work cut out for us if we are to live up to HaShem's Expectations.

[1] See <http://www.kmsynagogue.org/tour.htm>

[2] Comprehensive examples of the cause-and-effect relationship between reward and punishment include: VaYikra 26; Devarim 11:13-21; 28.

[3] These two positions exemplify a classical dispute throughout the world of the commentators, perhaps assuming its most clear-cut form in the contradictory views of R.'s Yishmael and Akiva, as in e.g., Sanhedrin 90b. On the one hand, R. Yishmael maintains that it is an unreasonable expectation to assume that every word and phrase in the Tora must represent a unique concept in terms of itself, and therefore it

is appropriate to assume “Dibra Tora KeLashom Benai Adam” (the Tora employs language that parallels how human beings communicate with one another, i.e., they do not necessarily speak in such a laconic fashion that everything that they say should be listened to carefully and precisely understood.) R. Akiva, however, saw meaning in every word, letter and even dot atop letters, and would never attribute anything found in the Tora to a paralleling of human style, and mere redundancy and flowery literary language and expression.

[4] This property is not considered a surety against the loan; it is in exchange for the loan being even offered in the first place.

[5] “Matzra” = neighbor, borderer. An individual whose land borders on the land of another, in the event that the latter wishes to sell his property, the former has the right to demand that it be sold to him.

[6] See RaShI’s different version of this text mentioned below, as well as footnote (9). The difference between RaMBaN and RaShI in this regard will be discussed further along in the essay.

[7] The reference to Devarim 6:18 in Bava Metzia 35a deals with a principle which has already been invoked in the discussion in 16b.

[8] Not all Mishnaic tractates have both Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmud commentaries.

[9] The text of RaMBaN places a “Vav” (the conjunction for “and”) between “compromise” and “beyond the letter of the law”, whereas RaShI omits the “Vav”.

[10] See for example RaShI on Beraishit 1:27; 8:7; 9:7; 15:5; Shemot 2:6, 14; 4:22; 6:13; VaYikra 4:3; 13:52; 15:3; 16:2; BaMidbar 23:21; 24:4; Devarim 1:6; 4:32; 7:7.

[11] Nechama Leibowitz and Moshe Arend, “Matai Nizkak RaShI LeMidrash Aggada?”, in Peirush RaShI LaTora-Iyunim BeShitato, Vol. 2, Open University, Tel Aviv, 1990, p. 362.

[12] Peirush RaShI Al HaTora, Mosad HaRav Kook, Yerushalayim, 1982, p. 531, fn. 82.

[13] RaShI Al HaTora, Y. Kaufman, Frankfurt, 1903, p. 365. Nechama Leibowitz always preferred Berliner’s edition to that of Chavel

[14] Devarim 28:9. Sota 14a lists a number of ways of emulating God, but pursuing peace curiously is not one of them.

from genesis@torah.org reply-to genesis@torah.org to
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Rabbi Berel Wein

Parshas Vaeschanan

The Multilayered Torah

The Torah as we all well know is multilayered. The rabbis have taught us that there are seventy facets to every piece of the written Torah. We are also aware that no written word can adequately convey to us all of the nuances and possible meanings that lie embedded in the written word. Therefore the Torah requires elucidation, commentary and explanation in order for any proper understanding of its message to be gained.

The entire book of Dvarim is an elucidation and explanation of the first four books of Moshe. As such, by the inherent nature of explanation and commentary, different words and phrases will be employed to describe events and commandments that were previously mentioned in the Torah.

A prime example of this appears in this week’s parsha where the Torah repeats for us the Ten Commandments revealed to Israel at Sinai. The wording here in Dvarim differs slightly from the wording recorded for us in Shemot. The Talmud in its rendition of the Oral Law states that these discrepancies – such as the use of the word shamor instead of the original zachor regarding the observance of the Shabat – indicate that these words were stated simultaneously by God, so to speak, a feat that is beyond human comprehension and ability.

The Talmud means to indicate to us with this statement that all of the possible interpretations and layers of meaning in the Torah were given to

us simultaneously and at once at Sinai. Only the Oral Law and the work of the commentators to the Torah over all of the ages has revealed to us these original layers of meaning and interpretation for our study and practice.

By using different words to explain what was already written, the Torah guides our understanding of the Torah only by way of the Oral Law and the great commentators of Israel over the ages.

In the final commandment of the Ten Commandments, the Torah here in Dvarim uses the word titaveh whereas in Shemot it used the word tachmode. The Torah points out to us that there are different forms of desire and wanting something. One is an impulsive, spur of the moment desire that arises out of seemingly chance circumstance – an advertisement in the media or a chance meeting or sighting. Such a desire is not planned and stems from the inherent human weakness within all of us to want to possess what we do not yet have. But there is another type of desire. It is long planned and had been part of our lives for years and decades. It borders on being an obsession or an addiction within our makeup.

Both of these types of desire can destroy a person. The Torah cautions us against these symptoms of self-destructive behavior. And by the use of these different Hebrew verbs, the Torah indicates to us that there are different types of desires and that one must be defensive against all of them.

The Talmud tells us that the eyes see and the heart thereupon desires. Guarding one’s eyes guards one’s heart as well. This example of the Torah’s self elucidation of the matter makes the lesson clear to all and challenges us to apply it wisely in one’s own life.

Shabat shalom,

Rabbi Berel Wein

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Rabbi Wein 11 Av 5771 / 11 August 2011

Jerusalem Post

LACK OF COMFORT

Rabbi Berel Wein

Friday, August 12, 2011

This Shabat is Shabat Nachamu – the Shabat of comfort and consolation. Anyone who has unfortunately experienced tragedy in one’s life story knows how difficult it is to achieve even a modicum of comfort and consolation after the sad event. So when this Shabat comes around every year the degree of comfort that it brings to us is somehow somewhat limited and curtailed. The truth of the matter is that our

national history is so laden with horrific tragedy that true consolation looks to be beyond our abilities to comprehend. And the fact that the Jewish people are always occupied with truly existential problems compounds the troubled search that we have embarked on to find comfort and consolation. Promises – even Godly promises – regarding our glorious future are reassuring but not necessarily always comforting. After thousands of years of exile and tragedy we have lost a great deal of patience waiting for the bright, untroubled future. The lack of lasting and permanent comfort and consolation gnaws at our being and leaves us in a state of frustration and tension. I think that this state of mind and being in the Jewish world explains much of what is happening internally in our society. We are not sanguine or satisfied regarding our present and our future for we have never yet received a true sense of consolation for the tragedies of our past. The wounds remain open and not healed and the scars of past tragedies have never receded from our consciousness and national psyche. Part of the difficulty of attaining comfort and consolation is the fact that we have never been able to mourn the past tragedies thoroughly. Rabbi Simcha Wasserman, one of the seminal educators of the Jewish people in the past century, pointed out that in the book of Zecharia the prophet describes in detail the great times of redemption and restoration that will certainly occur in our future. In the midst of this description of greatness and times of hope and rebirth, the prophet describes that there will take place a great funeral and a time of sustained eulogies. What and why is the reason for these eulogies and weeping at the time of redemption and restoration of Jewish sovereignty and glory? Isn't the worst over already and are we not discussing, in that chapter of the book of the prophet Zecharia, the time of the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem? Rabbi Wasserman explained that in the travails of the long Jewish exile, the Jewish people never had the time or ability to truly mourn and eulogize over the tragedies that befell them. They had to keep on going, to struggle for future survival and had no ability to dwell upon the past.

Now, however, when the moment of redemption has finally arrived the prophet tells us that before there can be true consolation there has to be adequate mourning for what befell us in the past. The mourning over the past is the key to the ultimate comfort and consolation of the present.

We have yet to devise a proper and psychologically gratifying medium to mourn the Holocaust of seventy years ago. The tragedies of the First World War, of nineteenth century Czarist Russia and Ottoman Land of Israel are all but forgotten from our generations. Even the sacrifices of tens of thousands of Israelis in our struggle to maintain our independence and sovereignty in our ancient homeland have not yet found a meaningful method of spiritual and psychologically healthy mourning. We are too busy confronting the problems and challenges, the dangers and hatred that encircle us to be able to concentrate somehow upon these issues of mourning, comfort and consolation. In the necessity of getting on with our lives, personal and national, the wounds of the past remain untended and never really closed. It is of no wonder that we are always in a constant state of stress and distress. The prophet's vision of comfort and consolation, as expressed in the haftorah of this Shabat, is dependent upon our view of history and our coming to terms with its realities, tragic as they may have been. Those who are unaware of our past certainly cannot be expected to properly mourn its tragedies and learn from its events. Any feeling of true and lasting consolation is precluded from them, and sadly this group of the untaught and historically ignorant section of world Jewry numbers today in the millions. However, correcting this situation can lead eventually to the ultimate Shabat Nachamu of lasting comfort and consolation. Shabat Shalom. Berel Wein

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From: israel zwick <izzwick@gmail.com> fw from

Rabbi Moshe Hubner TU B'Av Vaeschanan

May the learning and mitzvos that result from this article be a zechus for a refuah shleima for Rafael ben Sarah; and for the neshamah of R' Moshe ben Harav Chaim Yitzchak z"l (9 Av).

Parashas Va'eschanan begins with Moshe Rabbeinu reminding us of how much he wanted to enter Eretz Yisrael and how he prayed for Hashem to annul the decree upon him. He had already conquered the eastern side of the Yarden, and since that area was in some ways a part of Eretz Yisrael and was settled by two-and-a-half tribes, he thought that he might be able to gain entrance into Eretz Yisrael proper.

The Midrash says that Moshe prayed 515 prayers – the numeric value of the word “va'eschanan” – and was told by Hashem to stop. Hashem knew that had Moshe offered one more prayer, he would have been successful, which was not the outcome Hashem desired.

We do not know each of the different 515 prayers that Moshe composed, but the Midrash quotes an explanation by Rabi Levi for at least one of the prayers. According to Rabi Levi, Moshe was pleading, “Since the bones of Yosef were going to enter into Eretz Yisrael, it is not fair that I may not.”

The background to this statement is a reference to the fact that when Yosef was about to die, he made his brothers promise that when they would leave Egypt they would take his bones along to be buried in Eretz Yisrael (Bereishis 50:25). The Torah tells us that Moshe himself took Yosef's bones with him (Shemos 13:19).

In simple terms, it appears as if Moshe's basic argument was that “since Yosef” was going to be buried in Eretz Yisrael, why shouldn't he be as well (obviously, some of his prayers were that he enter Eretz Yisrael alive so he would be able to observe the mitzvos associated with that holy land, but this specific prayer appears to have been concerning burial.) Moshe was denied even this request, as he was buried on the eastern side of the Yarden.

Rabi Levi continues to say that Hashem denied this request because “He who admits to his homeland is buried there, while one who does not admit to his homeland is not buried there.” This, Rabi Levi explains, indicates that there was a fundamental difference between Yosef and Moshe. Yosef was referred to as an “ivri” by the wife of Potifar (Breishis 39:14). This means that even in Egypt, Yosef was known as such. He “admitted” to being a Jew, and thus was rewarded with being buried in Eretz Yisrael.

On the other hand, the Torah tells us that when Moshe fled Egypt after killing an Egyptian and was a wanted man, he came upon a well, whereupon he helped the daughters of Yisro. When they returned home to report on the days events, Yisro's daughters told their father about the “Egyptian” who had rescued them (Shemos 2:19). They thought of him so because Moshe was dressed as an Egyptian. Moshe was punished for not correcting them; he should have said that he was really a Jew and not an Egyptian. According to Jewish law, when one is misidentified as a non-Jew, he is obligated to correct the mistake.

We learn from this that entering into the land of Eretz Yisrael is connected to the importance of being identified as a Jew, and that a crucial element of being identified as a Jew is in the way we dress. We as Jews are required to have a code of dress that sets us apart from the rest of the population. Even when meeting a stranger for the first time (as in the case of Moshe and Yisro's daughters), it should be obvious that one is indeed a part of the Jewish nation. The reaction invoked by Moshe Rabbeinu's dress was the opposite, and that is what separated him from Yosef. The first impression a person makes is in large part a result of the way he/she is dressed.

The Pnei Yehoshua makes a chesbon to prove that these prayers were on the 15th of Av.

The 15th of Av, which the Mishnah, at the end of Gemara Taanis, says is a holiday on par with the greatness of Yom Kippur. The Mishnah lists several reasons and occurrences that happened on the 15th of Av, which resulted in the greatness attributed to this day.

One example is that the Jews of the Dor Hamidbar that were punished because of their belief in the negative words of the meraglim against the land of Israel went to sleep in graves on 9 Av, and only some of them awoke the next day. This event occurred year after year, until that entire generation had passed away, with the exclusion of Yehoshua and Kalev. On the last year, when the last remaining members of Dor Hamidbar did not awake on 10 Av, the surviving members of Klal Yisrael sat shivah. On 15 Av, the Jews recognized that part of the decree had been fulfilled and would not reoccur the following year. Additionally, they realized that they would now be able to enter into Eretz Yisrael, and so they celebrated accordingly.

Consequently, sefarim say that 15 Av is the day when the decree against Am Yisrael will be reversed, and the geulah for the final Beis Hamikdash will begin. Approaching this day and understanding its significance in our ultimate redemption is a necessary component to finally achieving the goal we all seek.

What Parshas Va'eschanan is teaching us is that the way for us, too, to enter the land of Eretz Yisrael is to dress in a way that allows us to be identified as Jews, proving that we are proud to be a part of our nation.

With this in mind we can explain the fascinating custom that used to be kept on 15 Av. The Mishnah says that all the women would go out in borrowed clothing to look their best. The daughters of the wealthy lent their clothing to those less fortunate, and everyone appeared equal. It was part of the joyous celebration.

A remarkable thing that is easily understood from this inyan of exchanging clothing is that everyone had clothing that could be worn by others, clearly meeting all halachic standards. All of Klal Yisrael understood that this holiday was a way to bring about the geulah, and no one had the problem that some of the clothing in their possession was unfit to be worn in public. All was easily identifiable as the clothing of a Jew.

We have just concluded the fast of Tisha B'Av and we want to celebrate Shabbos Nachamu and the ensuing 15 Av properly, the way the Torah tells us to. We want to have celebrations that can bring us closer to that joyful day, when Moshiach will arrive and we will be granted permission and have the right to enter Eretz Yisrael in the time of the geulah. We do not want to be turned away – as Moshe Rabbeinu was. To do so, the Torah tells us, we must dress in an identifiable manner, so that all other nations will immediately know to whom we belong. Our ultimate goal should be that we all dress indisputably within the confines of halachah, so that no matter who we are, young, old, wealthy or poor, we can lend to each other, as was done in days of old.

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***** Description: Parashat Vaethanan-
The Office is Always Open

Moshe Rabbenu tells Beneh Yisrael in Parashat Vaethanan, "Who is a great nation that has a God close to it – the way Hashem our God is close to us whenever we call out to him!" (4:7).

The message Moshe seeks to impress upon us is a simple one: the door to God's office is always open. A Jew can turn to Hashem in prayer at any time, under any circumstances. Whether it's 3am on a cold, snowy winter night, or 3pm on a bright, balmy summer afternoon, we can speak to Hashem, and He will listen to us. "Hashem our God is close to us whenever we call out to him." His office hours are 24/7.

Of course, there are specific Halachot governing the three daily prayer services, and one is obligated to ensure that he recites these prayers at the proper times. But we must never make the mistake of thinking that the opportunity of Tefila is restricted to that timeframe. Hashem always wants to hear our prayers, around the clock. At any moment, we are welcome and encouraged to speak to Him and submit our requests. And if a person happens to miss a daily prayer, he should not despair. Hashem still wants to hear from him, no matter what. The door remains open at all times, even for those who have, unfortunately, missed an appointment.

This is not to say that our prayers are always answered precisely as we want. Parashat Vaethanan begins with Moshe's impassioned prayer for permission to enter Eretz Yisrael. The Sages teach that Moshe uttered 515 prayers, and yet, his request was denied. Nevertheless, each of those prayers was valuable. God did not stop Moshe after his first prayer, or after his first three hundred prayers, because he wanted him to continue praying. Even if a prayer is not answered precisely as the person intended, the prayer is still valuable. God stores all our prayers in a "prayer bank" in the heavens, and they are eventually pulled out and used to help us or somebody else in distress – sometimes even years, or even many generations, after the prayer was recited.

God's door is always open, and it is always worthwhile to go in. He wants to hear our prayers, and every prayer is a priceless treasure, often in ways that we will never know.

The Timeless Rav Hirsch - Parshas Vaeschanan

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The Timeless Rav Hirsch by Rabbi

Yitzchok Adlerstein

Parshas Vaeschanan Getting G-d Right1 You shall greatly beware for your souls, for you did not see any likeness on the day Hashem spoke to you at Chorev from within the fire. Lest you act corruptly and make for yourselves a carved image, a likeness of any shape...

How easy is it to believe in G-d? As easy as it is to believe in one's self!

Do not expect to find support here for the modern mantra of "if you look deeply within yourself you will find the truth." That is not what our pesukim tell us. Moreover, it is not a Torah position[2]. We do not mean that one's inner voice will lead him or her to determine what is right and what is wrong. We mean holding on to the belief that our inner voice is real and significant, more real to us than anything else.

Our pesukim exhort us not to make fatal errors about Divinity, based on our experience at Sinai. We are first tempted to think of this as yet another of the many warnings in Chumash Devarim against falling into the ways of idolatry. This does not really work in the text, however.

The object of "be greatly beware" is usually "you," either in the singular[3] or plural. In those cases, the implication is that you must

guard yourself against any false influence that you may encounter. In so doing, you guard and protect your role in staying faithful to the Torah. Our pasuk is the only one in the Torah (and one of only two in Tanach) in which the object changes to “your souls.” This subtle difference points to a danger not to our lives or activities, but to the stuff that nourishes our souls: clarity about our relationship with G-d.

The Torah warns us not to make any material representation of G-d. When we do, we endanger and distort our conception of G-d as an invisible, supernatural, intangible Being. The danger is not that we will abandon the true G-d for another power, real or imagined. The danger is that we will alter the way we look at G-d; at stake are our souls, not our selves. Getting G-d wrong affects the quality of our neshamos. Moreover, our belief in G-d is related to and intertwined with our understanding of our souls as the true locus of our individuality and existence.

An ardent materialist has no room for the soul. He has no room in his world view for anything that is not tangible, measurable and manipulable. He therefore has no tolerance and no patience for a G-d concept. Neither, for that matter, can he relate to some invisible, supernatural, intangible part of himself that others call the soul. His own consciousness and identity are phenomena that are poorly understood[4], but he is sure that they are simply by-products of brain function.

Most of the rest of us take a position completely antipodal to this. Not only do we reject the materialist point of view, but we have confidence that the most personal, real and essential part of ourselves is the soul. Despite our trust of things we can see and manipulate, nothing is more real to us than our own inner experience. We call that experience and consciousness the soul. Once we believe in it, we do not have so hard a time in accepting a Being outside of our selves Who shares many of the same properties.

The gemara[5] fleshes out this thought by finding parallels between G-d and our souls. Just as G-d fills the world, our souls fill our bodies. G-d sees but is not seen; the same holds true for the soul. G-d nourishes the world; the soul nourishes the body; both G-d and the soul are pure.

Pointing out these parallels is important, because through them, belief in Hashem becomes accessible and certain. When our pesukim tell us to “beware for our souls,” they mean that we should hold firm to our belief that in some areas, our senses cannot be the final determinants of truth for us. We know, trust and value our consciousness, despite it being a poorly understood intangible. It is the most real part of our existence, identical with our individuality. We call it the soul, and believe in it more than the sensory data with which we negotiate most other issues in life. Believing that our senses are not the end-all of knowledge and reality, we can trust our belief in a personal G-d as well.

What does this have to do with Sinai? Many others also profess belief in G-d. Moreover, they look to Sinai as the ultimate reason for that belief. They trust the Biblical record of a moment in history in which G-d reached out to Man, and Man directly apprehended Divinity. They find it impossible, however, to escape the tendency to place all knowledge on the doorstep of sensory experience. We Jews understand that it was not our eyes and ears that were important, but our souls that participated in the great event at Sinai. Others, however, cannot escape their dependence upon eyes and ears of flesh. In doing so, they shift their understanding of G-d to something that can and must be known by the senses. Thereby, they horribly change G-d into something smaller, more limited, more earthly and human.

It is not then any competing god that the Torah warns us against here, but a corruption of G-d’s Essence. If we turn ma’amad Har Sinai into something sensory and physical, we will do the same to G-d. We escape this tendency by reminding ourselves about a non-physical part of ourselves that we value above all physical existence.

We have only to look inside ourselves to find a model for belief.

1. Based on the Hirsch Chumash, Devarim, 4:15-16

2. See Rav Hirsch’s development of the exchange between the nachash and Chavah. Briefly, he argues that unlike the “truths” that Hashem made inherent in the behavior of every animal, humans are an exception. For them, looking into themselves and their natures will not uncover the truth. Humans can only discover what they need to know by listening to an external voice – the voice of Hashem’s commandments.

3. See above, 4:9

4. Blaise Pascal, the French mathematician and philosopher wrote, “There is nothing so inconceivable as that matter should be conscious of itself.”

5. Berachos 10A

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